

Title: HEART Shared Service Partnership  
Lead Officer: Nick Cadd (07976 918632)/Lisa Barker  
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jo Barker / Jan Matecki  
Wards of the District directly affected: All

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### **Summary**

This report summarises the evaluation of the Home Environment Assessment and Response Team service's delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and related services and proposes that the district council remain a partner in the service for the next 12 months with a view to establishing revised shared service arrangements, which address the performance concerns previously raised.

### **Recommendation(s)**

- (1) To approve the recommendations proposed by the HEART Board:**
    - a. That the progress to provide one, consistent service to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants and a Home Improvement Service for the whole County be noted; and**
    - b. That there is agreement that 2022/23 be used as a transitional year to allow Authorities to refresh key aspects of the Partnership, act to strengthen it and consider how full-service integration could be achieved; and**
    - c. That the strategic objectives of the HEART Board be confirmed (s2.1 Appendix 2); and**
    - d. That the Board's intention to draw on the expertise of Foundations to support it to innovate and develop HEART be welcomed; and**
    - e. That the implications of the White Paper for Social Care for arrangements to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants be acknowledged; and**
    - f. That the recommendation of the HEART Board to continue to build the partnership during 2022/23 with a view to creating a new legal agreement for a five-year Partnership from April 2023 be supported.**
  - (2) To note that a further report will be submitted later in the year with proposals for the service beyond 2022/23**
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## **1 Background/Information**

- 1.1 Since 2017 the five District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire and the County Council have delivered equipment and adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants, addressed housing conditions and provided associated financial support through the Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART). HEART is a shared service hosted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC) and leadership and oversight is secured through the

HEART Board, whose membership is formed from all of the Warwickshire District and Boroughs and Warwickshire County Council.

- 1.2 The key function of the HEART Service is to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants to fund adaptations to enable people live independently in their own homes. These are typically property adaptations, including stair lifts, level access showers and similar, that enable older or disabled individuals to live in their own homes and avoid admittance to hospital or care facilities as a result of frailty or accident.
- 1.3 The initial HEART Shared Service agreement was set to expire in early 2022, however for a variety of reasons including the disruptions experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a further 12-month extension was agreed by all authorities, a to enable some reflection on the delivery of the service by HEART and the Board's leadership.
- 1.4 All partners felt that securing the 12 month extension, afforded the opportunity to consider in detail, the two external reviews that have been undertaken, the views of each partner, the recent 2021 White Paper for Social Care and obtain specialist input from [Foundations](#) to ensure that decisions surrounding the future of this important provision were strategic, well informed and focused on the best interests of local residents.
- 1.5 This report summarises key aspects of the above to enable Members to consider the options that exist in terms of the future delivery Disabled Facilities Grants with a recommendation of the HEART partnerships preferred option.
- 1.6 **Evaluation of the HEART Service**

The delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and the service HEART offers has been heavily scrutinised since its inception. Regular reporting has been received by the HEART Board. Stratford-on-Avon DC Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet and Warwick District Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committee have received a number of reports examining the work undertaken and how effectively the host delivers the service.
- 1.7 Previous reports to committees have considered the most appropriate measures to evaluate the performance of HEART in delivering its key function – DFGs to fund adaptations.
- 1.8 Stratford-on-Avon DC agreed that the measures noted below and the performance against these stretching back more than a decade (**Appendix 1**) would represent an appropriate degree of analysis:
  - PSHT 5b (Average wait between first contact to County Council (Enquiry Date) and practical completion – Value less than £5,000 (Level Access Showers and Ramps)
  - PSHT 5c (Average wait between first contact to County Council and practical completion – Value more than £5,000)
  - PSHT 6a (Number of DFG surveys completed)
  - PSHT 7 (Number of DFG completed)

- PSHT 8 (Number of people on waiting list for DFG)

1.9 In order to gain a similar picture of performance for Warwick DC a similar set of measures has been provided by the HEART Service (**Appendix 1**). It is considered that these are sufficiently reflective of the performance of HEART to be used for the required analysis, they include:

- Average end to end time (all DFGs) – similar to PSHT 5b and 5c (above)
- Number of DFG completed
- Number of people on waiting list for DFG
- Budget v's Approvals for DFGs

1.10 Whilst these measures are not an exact mirror of one another and the Warwick DC data only exists for the period 2017 to current, they are considered sufficient to measure the direction of travel in terms of performance.

#### 1.11 **Service / Performance Evaluation**

As can be seen in the reported figures in **Appendix 1**, performance has been mixed during the period HEART has existed. In addition, since March 2019 the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen. It is difficult to disentangle the impact of the pandemic from other challenges the service has faced.

1.12 On a positive note, there is some evidence of reducing waiting lists for Stratford and Warwick areas and a small reduction over the last 12 months in the time it takes for adaptations to be completed.

1.13 On a less positive note, the number of DFG's completed in Warwick DC seems to be low in comparison with historic averages. Furthermore, the figure for the value of work approved against the budget is at its lowest point for some years.

1.14 In terms of direction of travel, it would be reasonable to say in performance terms the picture is mixed, with some indications of an improving service, but at this stage it is impossible to say, with total certainty, that this will continue.

1.15 Further to the issue of performance, there is the need to consider resilience and 'reach' of the HEART service. Prior to the establishment of HEART both Stratford-on-Avon DC and Warwick DC possessed very small teams that whilst operating well, did experience issues with resilience due to the limited number of staff within the respective operations. HEART does offer resilience and over the past five years has never experienced interrupted service availability due to staff shortages, which did hamper our previous standalone provisions.

1.16 In terms of the 'reach' of the HEART service, it can definitely be regarded as a broader provision than the previous in-house services. HEART has introduced a number of additional facilities to enable people to continue to live at home including the DFG Top-Up and Hospital Discharge Grant, the Home Safety Grant and the Warm and Safer Home Grant.

1.17 HEART has achieved all of the above during a period of significant turbulence. Not only has the service been impacted by COVID-19 but it is also experiencing

increasing demand as the population ages and life expectancy increases in cases of injury / illness.

#### 1.18 **Options Appraisal Future Delivery Model of HEART Service**

The HEART Board have considered whether the delivery model still represents the most effective method of delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and related services. The Board met on the 18 November 2021 to consider the options proposed by Foundations the national body for Home Improvement Agencies. The options considered were:

- Retain HEART 'as is' – host remains the same
- Develop a segregated Partnership Model within HEART
- Move HEART service to a new Host authority
- Demobilise HEART, which had two sub-options (create two separate services covering North and South and each authority creates its own individual service)

1.19 Having reviewed all those proposed by Foundations and detailed at **Appendix 3** the unanimous view was that the option offering the most for local residents was to retain the HEART Partnership as is with the existing host and continue to drive performance improvement through the various priorities outlined in the Report of the HEART Board (**Appendix 2**).

#### 1.20 **Report of the HEART Board**

Accompanying this report at **Appendix 2** is the Report of the HEART Management Board. The report provides a detailed account of the HEART Board's recommendation in terms of the further development of the HEART project, commentary on the strategic direction and an outline of the importance of the content of the Social Care White Paper 2021.

1.21 The recommendations of the HEART Board are mirrored in the recommendations (above). The importance of the continuation of the direction of travel established through the first HEART Review (2019) is noted and reinforced with the recent Foundations work and the principal objectives being to continue progress against the previously identified priorities and heighten the focus on the HR work stream to resolve some of the staffing/management issues.

1.22 The Report of the HEART Management Board expresses a preference for the 2022/23 year to be treated as a period of transition, followed by a further five-year period of operation of the HEART Partnership.

1.23 During the transitional year the key tasks for the HEART Board to direct the strategic purpose for the partnership are to:

- Refresh the Business Plan to ensure it reflects current intent and purpose
- Ensure the service delivery model reflects the Business Plan objectives and meets all partners requirements
- Update the staff structure to provide for sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the service and act to develop HR policies which support the team to be effective and efficient

- Complete the installation of the case management and reporting software
- Reflect on the leadership and governance requirements of the HEART Board and update the Partnership Agreement with any changes. Considerations will include appointing an independent Chair to the Board.
- Consider options for reporting customer satisfaction to the Board and key partners.
- Update the Housing Assistance Policy when the Business Plan and service delivery model are signed off

1.24 The planned effect of these steps will be to liberate the service from some of the factors that are causing a degree of drag, in turn, freed of this drag the host will be held to account, by the HEART Board, for the delivery of the core activity.

1.25 The Board acknowledge that whilst significant progress has been made, continued attention is still required to stabilise the HEART service and secure the potential that is available. After considerable debate, the preference of HEART Board is to extend the current agreement, with revisions to the Business Plan and Partnership Agreement for a period of 5 years from 2023/24 to 2027/28. This is reflected in the recommendations above.

## 1.26 **National Context and Future Contribution of DFG Interventions**

Probably the most significant factor other than performance and the review recommendations in the Boards considerations is the recent [Social Care White Paper 2021](#). The White Paper makes it clear that there will be a growing role for the DFG process in maintaining people's independence as they age. It is the Boards and Foundations view that the growing contribution of DFGs is best facilitated through a countywide delivery mechanism.

1.27 The DFG is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care as part of the Better Care Fund and it is very clearly considered a key element in tackling the challenges presented by an ageing population.

1.28 Funding for DFG's has grown slightly faster than inflation over the past decade with all Warwickshire authorities receiving approximately 45% higher allocations in 2021/22 than they received in 2016/17. This represented an increase from £3.5m (2016/17) to £5.1m (2021/22).

## **2 Alternative Options available to Cabinet**

2.1 There are three options as outlined below:

2.2 **Option 1** – To support the recommendations of the HEART Board and treat the current (2022) year as a transitional year to allow Authorities to refresh key aspects of the Partnership, act to strengthen it and consider how full-service integration could be achieved. Assuming this achieved, follow this by becoming a party to a new legal agreement for a 5-year Partnership from April 2023.

2.3 **Option 2** – To support the recommendations of the HEART Board and treat the current (2022) year as a transitional year to allow Authorities to refresh key aspects of the Partnership, act to strengthen it and consider how full service integration could be achieved. Once progress against these aspirations can be measured revisit the question of whether to remain in the HEART Partnership

by becoming a party to a new legal agreement for a 5 year period from April 2023.

- 2.4 **Option 3** – To leave the HEART Partnership and create a new platform for the delivery of DFG's and aligned services.

### **3 Consultation and Member's comments**

- 3.1 The Portfolio Holders comments have been absorbed into the body of the report.

### **4 Implications of the proposal**

#### **4.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications**

##### **4.1.1 Stratford-on-Avon & Warwick**

4.1.2 DFG is a mandatory grant and local authorities are legally required to provide help to those who meet the eligibility criteria, regardless of whether the authority has sufficient budgets to meet the requests. The Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 sets out the purposes for which a DFG can be provided and this is summarised as the works being necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the individual, whilst being reasonable and practicable given the age and condition of the property..

4.1.3 The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 added flexibility to the above as it gave local authorities the power to determine their own policy and use their DFG 'allocation' to provide other forms of assistance to support people in their homes.

4.1.4 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. However, further legal advice may be required in relation to future proposals and the form they take. This may include the governance arrangements, wider consideration of powers and it is also important that equalities implications under the Equalities Act 2010 are carefully considered (and demonstrably so).

#### **4.2 Financial**

4.2.1 Stratford-on-Avon – There is a permanent established post dedicated to this role at grade I which is currently filled. There is a revenue budget of £28,000 to meet ongoing costs of the partnership.

4.2.2 Warwick -

#### **4.3 Council Plan**

4.3.1 In respect of the Stratford-on-Avon Council Plan the recommendations above support the key theme of enhancing the quality of Stratford-on-Avon as a place by improving the health and wellbeing of all residents.

4.3.2 In respect of Warwick District Council Business Plan the recommendations above support the key themes of People in terms of Health, Homes and Communities, Service in terms of Maintain or Improve Services and Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term.

#### **4.4 Environmental/Climate Change Implications**

4.4.1 There are limited environmental considerations, although the work around housing standards and general health and wellbeing does have regard for a warm and safe home which could include measures such as efficient central heating and appropriate insulation.

#### **4.5 Analysis of the effects on Equality**

4.5.1 There are no equality implications to be considered as part of this report although the provision of DFG's enables the quality of life of vulnerable and disabled people to be improved.

#### 4.6 **Data Protection**

4.6.1 There are no data protection implications to be considered as part of this report although the subject will be considered in any future extension to the Partnership Agreement that governs the shared service arrangements.

#### 4.7 **Health and Wellbeing**

4.7.1 The provision of a holistic and speedy DFG installation is critical to the dignity and independence of those needing this type of adaptation to their home. A good example would be the benefits in terms of reductions in falls by the provision of a stair lift. The DFG programme is considered to be a contributor to improved health and wellbeing as a result of this and the faster an appropriate adaptation is delivered the better in terms of the health and wellbeing of the recipient and their family/carers.

### 5 **Risk Assessment**

5.1 There are risks associated with the range of options that currently exist. If we work within HEART to build the Partnership with a view to renewing the agreement from 2023 (recommendation 6), there is the risk that whilst being a resilient service with a broad 'reach' it does not continue to improve in terms of performance. If we leave the service and establish an alternative provision for the South Warwickshire geography, this comes with the types of risk associated with delivering a new service from conception including the potential for additional cost.

In terms of the questions of likelihood of failure to address the performance challenges and impact should this be the case, there are some mitigations to be considered.

Firstly, a great deal of work has been undertaken over the last 12 months to establish the primary causes of the performance issues. A new service improvement plan seeks to address significant issues around HR, performance measurement, learning processes, IT and several other factors. This is a significant mitigation against continuing performance challenges. In addition, the Board is now operating in a more supportive capacity to the host, and has commissioned support in the form of a new independent chair (Paul Smith – Director, Foundations - National Body for Home Improvement Agencies) and funded expert support on the development of the service from Foundations.

These resources and the understanding we have developed over the last five years, need to be balanced against the limited resources and budget envelope that exists, particularly as it is considered that the resource requirements for developing a district only or south Warwickshire service would exceed current budgetary provision.

Balanced against this there are four other Warwickshire authorities within the HEART Partnership and expert input/resources. The operational and strategic risks contingent with the continuation of the HEART service, will be managed by the host and board.

### 6 **Conclusion/Reasons for the Recommendation**

6.1 The HEART Board are making a number of recommendations for their respective governing bodies to consider including the substantive

recommendation that we continue to work to improve the service offered by the existing HEART countywide shared service and, subject to ongoing good progress, in 12 months' time create a new five-year legal agreement to continue the HEART Partnership.

- 6.2 It is considered that given the limited and risky alternatives, current financial challenges within the Housing Service, early signs of improving HEART performance, clear plans for improvement, service resilience and breadth of the HEART offer that this is a viable option with more merits and fewer risks than the alternatives.

**Background papers:**

Appendix 1 – Performance Analysis

Appendix 2 - Report of the HEART Management Board

**Supporting documents:**



### Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

<b>Committee/Date</b>	20 April 2022	
<b>Title of report</b>	HEART Shared Service Partnership	
<b>Consultations undertaken</b>		
<b>Consultee *required</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of consultation /comments received</b>
<b>Ward Member(s)</b>	N/a	
<b>Portfolio Holder WDC &amp; SDC *</b>	27.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Financial Services *</b>	23.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Legal Services *</b>	23.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Other Services</b>	14.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Chief Executive(s)</b>	14.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Head of Service(s)</b>	14.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Section 151 Officer</b>	14.3.221	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	14.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>CMT (WDC)</b>	14.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)</b>	29.3.22	All comments absorbed into the body of the report.
<b>Other organisations</b>	N/a	
<b>Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?</b>		Recommendation to :Cabinet / Council .....Committee
<b>Contrary to Policy/Budget framework</b>		No/Yes
<b>Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?</b>		No/Yes, Paragraphs :
<b>Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?</b>		No/Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for ..... (date)
<b>Accessibility Checked?</b>		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility