

Title: HEART Shared Service Briefing Paper
Lead Officer: Lisa Barker, Head of Housing Services and Mark Lingard, Private Sector Housing Manager
Portfolio Holder: Jan Matecki
Public briefing note / Confidential briefing note: Public
Wards of the District directly affected: All

Contrary to the policy framework: No
 Contrary to the budgetary framework: No
 Key Decision: No
 Included within the Forward Plan: Yes
 Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: No
 Consultation & Community Engagement: No
 Final Decision: No
 Accessibility checked: Yes

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	06/04/21	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	01/04/21	Lisa Barker
CMT	08/04/21	Chris Elliott
Section 151 Officer	08/04/21	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	06/04/21	Andrew Jones
Portfolio Holder(s)	06/04/21	Councillor Jan Matecki

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council delivers its Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) function through the Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART) shared service.
- 1.2 This briefing note is the update requested following the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th February 2021, about the HEART service review and is an update on the extra-ordinary HEART Partnership Board Meeting.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny:

- 2.1 Note the consensus of the HEART service partners that further work is required to assist in making a long-term decision about the future of the partnership.
- 2.2 Note the partnership consensus that a further independent review, initially scheduled for March/April 2021 should be undertaken instead in the summer to enable Key Lines of Enquiry to be established.
- 2.3 Note the updated improvement plan for the service (Appendix A).
- 2.4 Note the temporary extension of the Heart Service Agreement to enable work to be undertaken and decisions made about the longer term partnership by March 2022.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The general view of partners was that disbanding the shared service at this stage would present considerable risks and have significant implications for partner's delivery, and as such, Warwickshire customers. While a shared service remains the preferred approach, it is accepted that improvements are required and if these do not materialize to a satisfactory level, measures such as a change of host should be considered before disbanding the shared service.
- 3.2 The consensus from the partners is that the current focus needs to be on delivering the improvement plan while continuing to manage Covid response and recovery.
- 3.3 The HEART Board have agreed an improvement plan produced by the host, based on the findings of the review, to address the concerns raised (Appendix 1).
- 3.4 The HEART Partnership Board agreed to a temporary extension of the HEART shared services agreement up to 31 March 2023 through a deed of variation, which would see each partner deciding about the long-term future of the partnership by March 2022. This would allow sufficient time should any partner wish to give (at least) 12 months' notice of intention to withdraw, as required by the partnership agreement. The rationale for this decision being:
 - It is impossible for HEART to show any progress and improvement during a pandemic particularly when certain activities such as installation of level access showers was halted.
 - Following a change in lead personnel, the host should be offered an opportunity to put in place the required service improvements.
 - Further analysis is required to fully understand supply and demand issues (Appendix B).
 - Additional support is being provided by WCC to enable detailed assessment of service dynamics, demand issues and staffing levels. To attempt to redesign the service without this crucial information would be difficult and could result in a worse position.
 - Effecting a split of the service would require a 12-month lead in period. In any event future options need to be properly explored, a direction of

travel determined by elected members in each of the partner Council’s and robust arrangements put in place for any future transition.

4. Policy Framework

4.1 Fit for the Future (FFF)

The Council’s FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several key projects.

The FFF Strategy has 3 strands – People, Services and Money and each has an external and internal element to it. The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council’s FFF Strategy.

FFF Strands		
People	Services	Money
External		
Health, Homes, Communities	Green, Clean, Safe	Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Improved health for all. Housing needs for all met. Impressive cultural and sports activities. Cohesive and active communities.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Becoming a net-zero carbon organisation by 2025 Total carbon emissions within Warwick District are as close to zero as possible by 2030 Area has well looked after public spaces. All communities have access to decent open space. Improved air quality. Low levels of crime and ASB.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Dynamic and diverse local economy. Vibrant town centres. Improved performance/ productivity of local economy. Increased employment and income levels.
Impacts of Proposal		
The HEART service enables people with physical disabilities to meet their housing needs and remain in their own homes for longer.	None	None.
Internal		

Effective Staff	Maintain or Improve Services	Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> All staff are properly trained. All staff have the appropriate tools. All staff are engaged, empowered and supported. The right people are in the right job with the right skills and right behaviours.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Focusing on our customers' needs. Continuously improve our processes. Increase the digital provision of services.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Better return/use of our assets. Full Cost accounting. Continued cost management. Maximise income earning opportunities. Seek best value for money.
Impacts of Proposal		
The improvement plan covers staffing issues	The improvement plan will be closely monitored by the Partnership Board	None

4.2 Supporting Strategies

Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies. Improving housing standards in residents' homes directly and positively contributes to the Housing and Health-and-Wellbeing priorities. It also contributes to the Housing and Homelessness Strategy objective of improving the management and maintenance of existing housing.

4.3 Changes to Existing Policies

This briefing paper does not propose changes to any existing policies.

4.4 Impact Assessments

An impact assessment has not been completed because this is a briefing paper update on a shared service.

5. Budgetary Framework

5.1 The HEART project has been set up as a countywide shared service and has its own revenue budgets. The capital funding previously provided to Warwick District Council from central government to provide DFG's is passed directly across to the HEART service for the same purpose.

5.2 Whilst HEART undertakes the assessment for adaptations in all tenures, DFG's fund private sector adaptations with the Housing Revenue Account covering the costs of adaptations for council tenants.

6. Risks

- 6.1 That the improvement plan is not fully implemented and that performance does not improve.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1 Not applicable at this stage as this is a briefing paper update on the HEART shared service.

8. Background

- 8.1 In 2011 an ambitious and challenging collaborative project was proposed for Warwickshire with the aim of creating a new way of delivering grant assisted home improvements and housing adaptations for disabled and older people across Warwickshire.
- 8.2 The project was agreed following a fundamental system review which had shown that the traditional way of delivering services to provide Disabled Facility Grant adaptations was inefficient. This included delays of over 395 days from a customer enquiry to providing an adaptation. Whilst not satisfactory this level of performance was in line with the national picture. In Warwickshire there was a 35% drop out rate as teams struggled to deliver across the organisational barriers of up to 3 organisations in each district and borough locality. Until the review was undertaken there was no comprehensive information which showed how the system was performing.
- 8.3 The aim of the project was to create a new customer focused service delivery model. This would bring together different professions from the many organisations providing the services in Warwickshire, create a new job role and link together existing service within a service model that involved working together to deliver holistic housing assessment and appropriate solutions.
- 8.4 A Business Case was drafted in 2012 which set out a comprehensive proposal to improve and explore the future delivery of housing adaptations and the range of services provided by Home Improvement Agencies across Warwickshire. Stage 1 was to develop the experimental service in Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire involving the Borough and County Councils. Stage 2 was to roll in Rugby Borough Council area which required the involvement of Orbit Housing Group. Stage 3 was to establish a similar service to south Warwickshire involving the District and Borough Councils as well as Age UK and Warwickshire County Council.
- 8.5 The proposal was ambitious and challenging because it involved many partners. Staff from all organisations were to be brought together in one service, new systems of work needed to be forged from disparate methods of service provision, it had to deal with a variety of organisational cultures and policies and provide data for two separate IT systems.
- 8.6 A report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th February 2021 in respect of the HEART service review with the following recommendations:

- 2.1 Note the progress to provide one, consistent service to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants for the whole County.
- 2.2 Consider the findings of the independent review of the service.
- 2.3 Note the improvement plan for the service.
- 2.4 Note that a further independent review is to be undertaken in March/April 2021.
- 2.5 Note the necessity to consider the position of the Host in advance of the end of the five-year contractual term of the shared service partnership in March 2022.
- 2.6 Agree that a further report is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by August 2021, to consider the options for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants from April 2022 onwards and to make a recommendation to Executive.

- 8.7 Members requested that an interim report be brought to Overview and Scrutiny.

9. Partnership

- 9.1 The Business Case promoted the development of one organisation - HEART - the new Home Environment Assessment and Response Team. This organisation would create a streamlined, customer focused service delivery model across Warwickshire which would bring different professions together.
- 9.2 To do this, a new role of 'Housing Assessment Officer' was created to combine case work skills of an Occupational Therapy Assistant and Housing Case Worker. This role, and the necessity for its development, encapsulated the need for the service to have a holistic and tailored approach to meet the needs of customers to enable them to live independently.
- 9.3 The Business Case gave a firm basis and clear direction for the new service. It is underpinned by a legal contract. The shared service contractual agreement was signed by Warwickshire County Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth, North Warwickshire, and Rugby in October 2016. On 1 April 2017 Warwick and Stratford joined the legal partnership. The contract is for 5 years and set out the terms for the host authority (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council) and for the other partners. It includes terms for financial arrangements, a combined staff structure, employment arrangements, use of IT, dealing with complaints and the role of the management board- with the Chair of the board being decided annually.
- 9.4 It makes provision for any partner to leave the partnership if they give 12 months' notice. Given its ambition and challenges it also set out a requirement for the Partnership Board to conduct a formal review when the arrangements had been in place for 2 years.

10. Review

- 10.1 In accordance with the HEART shared services agreement an independent review has been undertaken after two years of its implementation. Key findings from the review include:

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- A lack of staff capacity as a contributory factor in the increasing waiting times customers are experiencing for the service.
- The absence of appropriate IT systems being a factor in demand not being met more efficiently.
- A more flexible system of assessing customer needs and prioritising interventions should be introduced.
- The systems of work in HEART could be more efficient and should be reviewed to provide for better service pathways which are fully implemented by staff and meet customer needs.
- In line with the findings of the Foundations report data collection methods and performance reporting should be improved.
- The Partnership Board reflect on its own role in delivering the HEART service and to ensure that the leadership, governance, and operational management is provided in a manner which allows HEART to thrive and meet customer expectations.