

Overview & Scrutiny  
9 February 2021

**Title: HEART Shared Service Review**  
**Lead Officer: Lisa Barker, Head of Housing Services and**  
**Mark Lingard, Private Sector Housing Manager**  
**Portfolio Holder: Jan Matecki**  
**Public report / Confidential report: 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**

| <b>Officer Approval</b>                | <b>Date</b> | <b>Name</b>            |
|--|-------------|------------------------|
| Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive | 25/01/21    | Bill Hunt              |
| Head of Service                        | 22/01/21    | Lisa Barker            |
| CMT                                    | 25/01/21    | Chris Elliott          |
| Section 151 Officer                    | 22/01/21    | Mike Snow              |
| Monitoring Officer                     | 25/01/21    | Andrew Jones           |
| Portfolio Holder(s)                    | 25/01/21    | 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. A Review of the HEART Service has been undertaken on behalf of the HEART Board. The findings have informed an improvement plan that the HEART Board are monitoring and the Host authority (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council) are implementing. This report summarises these documents.

**2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny:

- 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.

### **3. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 The HEART service is an integrated approach between social care and housing which aimed to focus on the customer and their carers, not organisations, to deliver the right practitioner at the right time with the right solution. This approach aimed to enable the customer choice and control to manage their own lives and maintain their abilities in daily activities within their home that is safe and warm and enable delivery without delay. The countywide HEART shared service is underpinned by a five-year formal Partnership Agreement which commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016 (Appendix 1 is the HEART Business Case).
- 3.2 The Partnership Agreement required a review of the service mid-way through the period of the agreement and a consultant was engaged to undertake this on behalf of the HEART Board (Appendix 2).
- 3.3 The HEART Board agreed an improvement plan produced by the host, based on the findings of the review, to address the concerns raised (Appendix 3).
- 3.4 The purpose of the follow up review is to audit and provide assurance to the Board that the actions to improve the service have been completed, and to consider further options for the service.
- 3.5 It would be prudent to consider how successfully the Host has implemented the improvement plan and whether this has led to an improvement in performance, following the outcome of the further review.

3.6 Bringing forward a further report by August 2021 will enable the Council to begin consideration of its future engagement with the HEART shared service.

**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.

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

| <b>Effective Staff</b>   | <b>Maintain or Improve Services</b>   | <b>Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <p><u>Intended outcomes:</u><br/>                     All staff are properly trained.<br/>                     All staff have the appropriate tools.<br/>                     All staff are engaged, empowered and supported.<br/>                     The right people are in the right job with the right skills and right behaviours.</p> | <p><u>Intended outcomes:</u><br/>                     Focusing on our customers’ needs.<br/>                     Continuously improve our processes.<br/>                     Increase the digital provision of services.</p> | <p><u>Intended outcomes:</u><br/>                     Better return/use of our assets.<br/>                     Full Cost accounting.<br/>                     Continued cost management.<br/>                     Maximise income earning opportunities.<br/>                     Seek best value for money.</p> |
| <p><b>Impacts of Proposal</b></p>  |   |   |
| <p>The improvement plan covers staffing issues</p>   | <p>Further independent review in March/April 2021 to provide assurance that actions to improve the service have been completed</p>  | <p>None</p>   |

#### 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

The report does not propose changes to any existing policies.

#### 4.4 Impact Assessments

An impact assessment has not been completed because this is a report on a shared service review.

### 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 report on the shared service review.

### **8. Background**

- 8.1 On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016 Executive resolved that Warwick District Council should participate in the countywide Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART) shared service for the future delivery of its home adaptation responsibilities for a period of five years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.
- 8.2 This followed a previous pilot project, the Housing Assessment Team or HAT, which had been running across the south of the county since 2014.
- 8.3 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC) hosts the HEART service and provides all of the infrastructure and administrative support. Operational management is provided by an officer from NBBC seconded to the post of Head of Home Environment Services. The "on-the-ground" service for the south of the county (Warwick District Council & Stratford on Avon District Council), until the first Covid 19 national lockdown, has been delivered locally from Warwick District Council's office at Riverside House. The service is currently being provided by staff working remotely.
- 8.4 Strategic management is provided by a Management Board consisting of the Heads of Housing (or equivalent) from each of the five district and borough councils and senior managers from relevant services within Warwickshire County Council.
- 8.5 The Partnership Agreement governing this shared service required a review of the service mid-way through the period of the agreement and an independent consultant was engaged to undertake this on behalf of the HEART Board. The information below and documents accompanying this report summarise the findings of this Review.

### **9 The Review**

- 9.1 The Review considered five key lines of enquiry agreed by the HEART Board, these were:

- Leadership and governance and operational management is effective - To include partnership arrangements, governance, the Board and reporting.
- Data is recorded and counted accurately (operational and strategic level) - To include operational data, trends, understanding systems and highlighting pressure points.
- Processes are optimised - To include the flow through the system and testing process when under pressure and working with partners.
- Demand is actively managed - To include performance against priority outcomes, benchmark comparisons, capacity and productivity.
- Service offer and capacity is appropriate - To include expenditure and how we compare nationally, capacity in the system and cost benefit analysis of services as well as consistency across the teams. Leadership and governance and operational management.

### **10. The Review Findings**

10.1 The principle findings of the Review were:

- A lack of staff capacity is a contributory factor in the increasing waiting times customers are experiencing for the service.
- The absence of appropriate IT systems is 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 Management 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.

10.2 It is clear that there were a number of opportunities for the host (NBBC) to improve service delivery and for the Board to improve their role in securing that the host delivered this.

10.3 The above is a summary of the Review findings and the HEART Board have prepared a single agreed more detailed report on the Review (Appendix 2). As with this report, Appendix 2 will be presented to an appropriate committee at each partner authority.

### **11. Service Improvement Priorities**

11.1 In response to the Review findings the Board requested that a service improvement plan was developed, the plan includes the following:

- Specifying and procuring an IT system to support the HEART service and work effectively with the County Council's preferred IT software. Agree a revised privacy statement which will enable all staff to fully utilise both IT systems which are used by the service.
- Review the performance data provided to the Board to ensure the information can be used to give strategic direction for the service.
- Updating and revising the staff structure, management structure, how HR policies support the team, where the team is based and how budget provision can support recruitment of additional staff.
- Use budget reserves to increase the staff establishment and recruit dedicated duty officers to support customer assessments and release other staff to undertake home visits.
- Review the level of fee charges in order to revise the staff structure and meet current demand.
- Appoint an experienced consultant to review and recommend efficiencies in systems of work and in accordance with recommendations update procedures.
- Revise procedures to enable the team to assess the need for urgent action and fast track interventions for customers at an early stage.
- Reflecting on the requirements of the shared service agreement and recommend changes where they are needed to enhance governance, leadership and service performance.
- Refresh the Business Case (Appendix 1) in order to give clear direction for the shared service.

11.2 Subsequent to the Review this work has been the focus of the Board and good progress is being made. Details of the Improvement Plan and progress made are in Appendix 3.

## **12. Remaining in the HEART Partnership at the end of the current Partnership Agreement**

12.1 Since the Disabled Facilities Grant responsibilities were absorbed into the HEART shared service, performance has been generally poorer than our experience whilst delivering the service ourselves. The principle challenge is that whilst the process is now more streamlined, fewer grants are generally approved and therefore a considerable waiting list has developed. This has been compounded over recent months by the impact of the pandemic.

12.2 The current Partnership Agreement ends in March 2022 so before then we have an opportunity to formally evaluate the project, in light of the Review, and consider whether we want to continue delivering DFG's through HEART or seek to deliver our DFG responsibilities in a different manner.

- 12.3 As an improvement plan is now in place and the pandemic is still impacting on services, a review of how the DFG's are delivered would be inappropriate at present.

**13. Options Appraisal – Warwick District Council's future engagement with the HEART Partnership**

- 13.1 There is potential for the performance to improve, as the Improvement Plan is implemented. However, given the outcome of the Review it would remain prudent to appraise future options and for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider these in August 2021. This will enable an agreed position to be established in good time for the end of the current partnership agreement.
- 13.2 An options appraisal will enable an informed decision to be made on the preferred delivery mechanism for DFG's. It would identify the system wide benefits of different models of delivery, an optimal model in terms of customer experience, compare value for money and service resilience and whether the initial objectives of the HEART project have been achieved.