
VALUE FOR MONEY STUDY ON HANDYPERSON & GARDENING SERVICES - UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members on progress with the value for money study of the Handyman and Gardening Services currently being provided in the district.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee meeting on 19 September 2006, Members asked that a value for money study of these services be carried out to include service delivery options.
- 2.2 Members have also agreed to provide an additional £27,500 for these services, as part of the 2007/08 revenue budget setting process.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Handyman and Gardening Services are both currently provided by Springboard Housing Association who also provide the Home Improvement Agency (HIA).
- 3.2 The Handyman Service started in 2001/02 under the 'Falls Prevention' programme and is jointly funded by the Council, the South East Essex PCT and Essex County Council. The service is normally provided three days a week but as the current Handyman did not commence employment until August 2006 (vacancy since March 2006), he has been working four days a week in order to make up the shortfall.
- 3.3 The Gardening Service started as a six-month pilot project in 2003/04 and is jointly funded by the Council, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Essex County Council. Originally a part-time service it has been provided five days a week since July last year.
- 3.4 Both of the above services are targeted at the elderly, the disabled and those on a low income. Whilst there is a charge for each service, this is waived in cases of extreme hardship.
- 3.5 Whilst on a national perspective both Handyman and Gardening Services are considered to be extremely worthwhile, funding is frequently short-term and consequently it is difficult for such schemes to be developed or maintained.
- 3.6 This Council has nevertheless recognised the value of these services and has gradually increased the financial support that it provides. Unfortunately the funding partners have not been able to match this increase and their

contribution has either remained static or decreased. A summary of the funding provided and the outputs is attached at Appendix 1.

- 3.7 There are high levels of satisfaction with both services. Springboard carries out a survey on completion of work in both cases and reports that 100% of customers say they are satisfied or very satisfied.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 In order to carry out the study it was decided, for each service, to:-

- (i) Carry out a comparison with services provided in other local authorities, particularly in neighbouring areas
- (ii) Consider the option of service delivery through:-
 - (a) Private contractors
 - (b) The voluntary sector

- 4.2 Consideration was also given to the possibility of delivering the services through Rochford Housing Association (RHA). It is understood however, that there are no comparable services currently provided through Hereward/Sanctuary that can be extended or adapted by the RHA, although there is a commitment to develop such schemes for their tenants in the future.

5 HANDYPERSON SERVICE

- 5.1 A summary of schemes available in neighbouring areas, together with some examples from wider Essex, is attached at Appendix 2. From this information, it can be seen that there are considerable variations in funding, charges, and delivery mechanisms, so meaningful and direct comparison is very difficult.
- 5.2 HIAs are considered to be best placed to deliver handyman services, particularly as any funding from Social Care has been aligned with the funding they provide for HIAs. In most cases, the HIA employs its own handyman but in some areas, e.g. Braintree and Epping, they use sub-contractors.
- 5.3 Although there are numerous private contractors offering a range of handyman services at varying costs, this particular option of service provision was discounted. The use of private contractors would necessitate a competitive tendering process, but due to the inconsistency of funding and the fact that any funding is normally only certain to be available for 12 months at a time, this is not considered to be a viable option due to the uncertainty this would create for potential bidders and therefore, decrease the “value” of their bid.
- 5.4 There appears to be little evidence of provision by charities or voluntary organisations. Help the Aged does nevertheless provide home security measures for vulnerable people in certain areas, such as Southend. In the

circumstances it is not considered appropriate to pursue this further at this stage.

6 GARDENING SERVICES

- 6.1 A summary of services provided in neighbouring areas, together with examples from wider Essex, is shown at Appendix 3.
- 6.2 Compared to Handyperson services, there is clearly much less provision for Gardening services. Again, where the service is provided, there is considerable variation in funding arrangements, delivery mechanisms, and charging policies so meaningful and direct comparison is very difficult.
- 6.3 Like Handyperson services, there are numerous private contractors offering a range of gardening services at varying costs, but, again, the option of service delivery through such contractors was discounted, due to the uncertainty of funding.
- 6.4 In Southend there is no gardening service provided by, or for, the local authority and enquiries are normally referred to a private business based in Westcliff. There is however, no contractual relationship. The possibility for this service to be extended into the Rochford district was explored, but the proprietor does not wish to progress this possibility at the present time.
- 6.5 Whilst the Voluntary Services provide gardening services in some areas e.g. Epping and Braintree, the main charitable organisations for the elderly; Age Concern and Help the Aged, do not appear to do so, neither are they endorsing such schemes. Help the Aged did employ a National Gardening Programme Co-ordinator in 2002 but this post no longer exists.

7 SUMMARY

- 7.1 There is no doubt that in terms of both handyperson and gardening, Springboard delivers a very good service with high levels of customer satisfaction in both cases.
- 7.2 There does not appear to be any scope at present for alternative delivery by, or in conjunction with, agencies currently operating in neighbouring areas
- 7.3 Further investigations could be carried out into establishing the delivery of these services directly or indirectly through voluntary services but this would necessitate additional resources, to enable a thorough analysis to be undertaken.

8 SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 8.1 Preliminary discussions have been held with Springboard regarding the additional funding that is being made available by the Council in the next financial year, 2007/08. They have confirmed that they have a waiting list for gardening services and that they would like to employ an extra gardener,

possibly on a part time basis. In contrast, there is not a waiting list for the handyperson although Springboard would like to expand the range of works available to include, for instance, decoration following completion of grant aided works.

- 8.2 Springboard have been asked to firm up the costs of the two options in order to decide the best way forward, although the potential for expansion will depend on the funding made available by the partner agencies.
- 8.3 As part of these negotiations, it is also intended to obtain from Springboard a detailed breakdown of the current costs of running the existing schemes, thus enabling further value for money analysis to be undertaken.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Both Handyperson and Gardening Services can contribute to reducing the risk of vulnerable people becoming the victims of crime

10 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The 2007/08 revenue budget includes £15,300 for each of the Handyperson and the Gardening Services, plus an additional £27,500 to be allocated across both schemes, with these amounts to be supplemented by funding from Essex County Council, South East Essex PCT and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) To note the content of this report and agree to continue to provide the Handyman and Gardening Services in the same manner as in the previous years of its operation.
 - (2) That a further report be made to a future meeting on the outcome of the negotiations with Springboard Housing Association, around the allocation of the additional funding for 2007/08.

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Background Papers:-

None

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APPENDIX 1

VALUE FOR MONEY STUDY - GARDENING AND HANDYMAN SERVICES**Gardening**

Year		2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Jobs done		47	269	280	350 (Target)
Funding	ECC	£3,000	£3,000	£5,000	£5,000
	CDRP	£5,000	£10,156	£5,425	£3,000
	RDC	£1,000	£10,000	£10,300	£15,000
Charge (ph)		£7.00	£7.00	£7.50	£8.00

Handyman

Year		2003/04	2004/05	2005/06*	2006/07**
People helped		47	319	204	315 (Target)
Funding	ECC	£8,000	£6,335	£6,595	£6,595
	PCT	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000
	RDC	£4,000	£10,000	£10,300	£15,300
Charge		-	-	£5.00	£5.00

* Handyman left 15 March 2006

** Replacement started mid-August 2006

APPENDIX 2

VALUE FOR MONEY STUDY – HANDYPERSON SERVICES

District	Means of Provision	Funding	Charge	Client Group	No of Jobs (target)	Notes
Rochford	HIA employs PT Handy person	£25,895 grants + income	£5.00ph	Elderly, disabled, low income	315	Includes home safety audit.
Castle Point	HIA employs PT Handy person	£22,000 grants + income	£ 7.00 + materials	Elderly, disabled	No target	
Basildon	HIA employs PT Handy person	£14,000		Elderly, disabled	No target	
Southend	HIA employs FT Handy person	Not given	£15.00 ph + materials		Approx 400	
Southend	Help the Aged	£20,000		Elderly		Home security measures only
Maldon	HIA employs PT Handy person	£8000 + donations	£7.00 ph + vat		3-400	
Chelmsford	HIA employs 1x FT and 1x PT handypersons	£24,000 + donations	Free if on benefit if not - voluntary donations		Approx 600	

Epping Forest	HIA use contractors	£23250	Free up to value of £150		No target	
Braintree	HIA use contractors		£8.00 ph	> 60, tenure neutral	No target	
Colchester	HIA employs 2x FT Handypersons	£30,000 ----- £27,000	£7.00 ph + materials	Private Sector Occupiers ----- ALMO tenants	600 ----- 500	2 schemes in operation
Thurrock	HIA employs FT Handyperson	£ 26,000 + donations	Free (£7.00 ph from 1/4/07)	Elderly, disabled	500	

APPENDIX 3

VALUE FOR MONEY STUDY - GARDENING SERVICES

District	Means of Provision	Funding	Charge	Client Group	No of Clients/Jobs	Notes
Rochford	HIA employ FT gardener	£23000 grants + income	£8.00 ph	Elderly, disabled, low income	350	Gardening service provides tools and disposes of waste.
Castle Point	No service	-	-	-	-	
Basildon	-	-	-	-	-	Ground Clearance for BDC tenants only – due to cease 1/4/07
Southend	No service provided but enquirers referred to a private business.	-	£10.30	All groups	Not given	Clients provide tools & insurance & dispose of waste

Maldon ----- Chelmsford	Joint scheme. HIA employs FT co-ordinator who utilises volunteers	£25,000 plus income. (approx) £5,000)	£10.00 ph £5.00 ph	Elderly or disabled on Income or Disability Benefit.	450 clients 4 times per year.	Proposed future charge to be £7 p.h. across both schemes. True cost of scheme estimated £50,000.
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