

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SMALL REPAIR AND HANDYPERSON SERVICE
Meeting: HOUSING AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE
Date: 25 MAY 2010
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As Members may be aware approval was given at Policy and Resources Committee on 15 January 2008 and Housing and Social Care Committee on 2 September 2008 to introduce pilot projects for a Small Repair Service and Handyperson Service respectively.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the outcomes of the pilots and seek approval to introduce a combined Small Repair and Handyperson Service on a permanent basis.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A national framework exists within Scotland allowing each Care & Repair Project to deliver services to meet the needs of its direct communities. The framework is contained within the 2004 Care and Repair Standards and Guidance document and outlines a number of core activities which are: Advice and Information; Major Repairs and Adaptations; Small Repair Service and a Handyperson Service, as well as, standards for delivering Care & Repair Services.
- 2.2 The Scottish Government commissioned a National Review of Care and Repair Projects in October 2008. This review was largely due to the changing policy context and in particular the changes being introduced through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 promoting a culture change among home owners, enabling more people to meet their repair and maintenance obligations. The findings of the review were published in August 2009 and contain recommendations on a range of areas which include core services, core client group, funding, prioritising access as well as links to wider local priorities and Scheme of Assistance.
- 2.3 The Scottish Government have outlined that they “want to see”:
 - A service that continues to be free at the point of delivery
 - *(The review report later expands that it is more important that any charge is affordable and that services can still be accessed by clients);*
 - A personalised approach to Care through Repair;
 - Increased awareness to people who might benefit from the service;
 - Clarity of eligibility, fair and equal access;
 - Locally agreed services, stakeholder informing their design and delivery;
 - Clear and sustainable funding supplemented through fundraising and income-generating activities;

- Independence of approach;
- Care and Repair Projects able to take charge of their own future;
- Staff working to updated National Standards (which are to be reviewed);
- Updated National Monitoring Framework measuring outcomes;
- Updated Good Practice Guidance;
- An altered National Care and Repair Movement.

2.4 A number of these points will be tackled nationally, although the majority remain to be addressed by individual local authorities. The services are largely consistent with the Scottish Governments ideals listed at 2.3.

3. EVALUATION OF THE PILOTS

3.1 A satisfaction questionnaire was circulated to 300 existing clients of the Small Repair and Handyperson Services. To date, 245 responses have been received representing a very high response rate of 82%. The following responses represent the findings of the service:

- 91% rated the service as being Very Good,
- 8% rated the service as being Good;
- 100% would recommend the service to a friend;
- 95% were of pensionable age;
- 79% accessing the service were female;
- 54% found out about the service by word of mouth;
- 26% found out about the service by way of leaflets;

3.2 The results indicate that 99% of clients rate the service as Very Good or Good with 100% of them recommending these services to a friend. This is a clear indication that the services have been well received and are highly regarded. The average age of clients is 75 years of age. The services are being accessed predominantly by female pensioners, highlighting that potentially the most vulnerable residents are benefiting from being able to access these services. The majority of clients have heard about the service from either someone they know or via a leaflet which further reinforces positive public perceptions of these pilots and the initial drive to promote them.

3.3 During the pilots, 70 unsolicited 'Thank You' letters have been received, a number of extracts have been detailed within Appendix A, indicating public feelings towards the services.

3.4 Over the pilot period, requests for both services have significantly increased from an initial 3 enquiries in May 2008 for the Small Repair Service, to 199 enquiries for both services in March 2010 (see appendix B for monthly enquiries statistics).

3.5 The average cost to the Council of delivering these services to the end of March 2010 is approximately £61 per visit for the Handyperson Service and approximately £46 per visit for the Small Repair Service.

- 3.6 As the Council, Registered Social Landlords and private sector landlords are obliged to provide a repair service for tenants the Small Repair Service is only available to home owners, however the tenure split associated with the Handyperson service is: 313 Home Owners; 55 Council Tenants; 4 Private Tenants and 2 Housing Association Tenants.

4. PILOT SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 The eligibility, remit and range of work for each service have been altered slightly following the experience and knowledge gained through delivering the two pilots. Appendix C provides an overview of the main characteristics of each service. In making the service permanent it is not proposed to alter the range of work currently provided.

- 4.2 The key components of the current services are:

- **Service eligibility:**

- Consistent with Care and Repair eligibility criteria, any person aged 60 or over who has no able bodied person residing with them and is unable to do the work themselves; or
- any disabled person who has no able bodied person residing with them and is unable to do the work themselves.

- **Tenure Remit:**

As outlined earlier within 3.6, the tenure remit of each service is:

- Small Repairs Service: Home owners only;
- Handyperson: Home owners, Council Tenants and Private Sector Tenants.

- **Range of works covered:**

The range of works outlined is not intended to be exhaustive but gives an indication of the range of jobs typically covered. The type of work carried out includes changing light bulbs, repairing and replacing locks etc. See Appendix C for details.

- **Joint Working:**

A joint working relationship has been established with Building Maintenance Division in relation to sourcing materials needed to carryout works. Cost savings generated through joint working in this manner are passed directly onto clients.

- **Funding Arrangements**

The Small Repair service has been in operation for 24 months, since May 2008 and the Handyperson service for 17 months, since December 2008. The cost incurred for both pilots, to the end of March 2010 is estimated at £115,000. The running costs of the projects has been funded from existing Private Sector Housing Grant.

5. FUTURE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 Key issues to be addressed in making the services permanent will be to ensure that there is scope to expand to meet demand without a significant financial implication for the Council nor a reduction in the quality of service provided. To achieve this it is important to have sufficient flexibility and capacity to allow the services to adapt. This can be achieved through restricting the age criteria for the scheme, limiting the number of times residents can use the service each year and the introduction of a charging arrangement.

Service Eligibility

- 5.2 As noted in paragraph 3.2, the average age of clients during the pilot period was 75 years of age. To allow the service to continue to provide for the most vulnerable residents it is proposed that the eligibility criteria be increased to persons aged 70 years or over who have no able bodied person residing with them. It is acknowledged that this introduces a degree of inconsistency with care and repair eligibility (60 years of age) but it will help give the service flexibility to expand and target resources to the most vulnerable clients. It is proposed that the criteria covering any disabled person who has no able bodied person residing with them and is unable to do the work themselves remains. Service requests will be monitored to ensure the criteria are in keeping with the wider Care and Repair ethos.

Flexible Management

- 5.3 Given the increasingly ageing population profile across Scotland and the potential future demand which is likely to be placed on the services, particularly as a result of any publicity, it is proposed to restrict the number of times the services be provided to a resident in any one year to 5 visits. Particularly during busy periods this will allow the length of time taken to respond to and carry out requests to be managed effectively and the quality of service protected. In addition, it will allow more customers to benefit from the service

Service Delivery

- 5.4 Both pilots currently operate separately, however it is proposed that they be combined, with the two post holders becoming Small Repairs/ Handypersons. This would streamline the Services offered, with each post holder able to cover a wider range of trade works. This ensures that a consistent approach is adopted for both projects and offers flexibility to react to user's wider needs.

Handyperson Element

- 5.5 The handyperson element of the service will assist clients to carryout small day-to-day jobs which address potential health and safety hazards in and around their home. As noted in paragraph 4.1 it is not proposed to change the range of work currently delivered (see appendix C for examples).

Small Repair Element

- 5.6 The small repairs element of the service will continue to assist home owners to carryout small scale repairs in their home, preventing small jobs from developing into more serious repairs. It is the responsibility of home owners to carry out these tasks, however, evidence shows that existing Care and Repair clients experience difficulty locating contractors willing to carryout small repairs. Again as noted in paragraph 4.1 it is not proposed to change the range of work currently delivered (See appendix C for examples).

- 5.7 The eligibility for both services would be as outlined in paragraph 5.2 above

Charging Arrangements

- 5.8 A sample survey of Small Repairs projects in 2008 indicated that some projects allocate a budget (labour and materials) for each client using the service, some provide labour free and charge for materials and others charge for both labour and materials. Charges for labour ranged from £1.50 up to £13 per hour, however these were not intended to cover the delivery costs of the service but to reduce the project's overheads. Advice received at the time of survey suggested that if a charge is to be made for the service this should be introduced at the start of the project rather than at a later date.
- 5.9 To help offset the Council's costs, a charge for both services could be introduced based on an hourly rate for each job (and continuing to charge for materials at cost price). Where costs of labour and materials came to under £10 no charge would be made. However, cumulative costs where there are multiple jobs will be charged to the client when the £10 threshold is reached. It is not proposed to charge a minimum call out fee.
- 5.10 If a charge of £12.50 per hour for labour was introduced it is estimated the Council would be able to recoup approximately 30% (c£25k) of the running costs of delivering the service. Such a charge would allow increased flexibility for the Service to expand with demand. Taking into account the income from charges, in conjunction with service efficiencies since the commencement of the pilot, it is envisaged that around 600 – 700 additional jobs could be carried out per annum. The balance of costs would continue to be absorbed within Private Sector Housing Grant.
- 5.11 The Power of Wellbeing within the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 would allow the Council to introduce charging arrangements.

6. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 In the event that the services are continued, costs of delivery for 2010/11 are estimated as c£90k. On the basis of income of approximately c£25k (paragraph 5.10) the balance of costs can be met within the 2010/11 PSHG allocation of £1.036m. Members approved the principles for the range of services within the Scheme of Assistance which covers this expenditure on 2nd February 2010. The interim Statement of Assistance will be reviewed in line with the development of the 2011/16, Local Housing Strategy.
- 6.2 These services fit within this Statement of Assistance, playing a key role in the delivery of Information, Advice and Practical Assistance elements to vulnerable residents across the Falkirk area.
- 6.3 If Members agree to the introduction of the service on a permanent basis and the new charging arrangements are introduced, it is proposed that clients would utilise the pre-payment arrangement which is currently available in One Stop Shops and through the Contact Centre, where appropriate.

7. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

- 7.1 The Small Repair / Handyperson service would continue to be evaluated and monitored to ensure that the quality of work is controlled and it continues to meet the needs of the users.
- 7.2 Further updates would be provided to this committee as required.

8. WIDER BENEFITS/ SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

- 8.1 There are a number of benefits generated through these services, including an increased awareness of the requirement of owners to maintain their homes to a satisfactory standard, an increase in the number of repairs and maintenance jobs carried out to homes, within this client group, across the Falkirk Council area. This helps keep properties habitable, with clear linkages to Community Care and Independent Living priorities which allow older people to stay at home for longer, as well as, reducing possible accidents which result in potential NHS and Social Work budgets savings. The changing age profile across Scotland, as touched upon in paragraph 5.3, these benefits are likely to become even more important.
- 8.2 In addition, the provision of this service by the Council ensures that elderly and vulnerable people are guaranteed quality work carried out by qualified tradespersons at a value for money charge.
- 8.3 Development opportunities for this service could include: exploring the future potential to expand the service to a pre-defined client group directly to Social Work services; progressing preliminary discussions with Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) operating within the Falkirk area, to determine whether there would be interest in supporting an extension to the Handyperson element of the service to their tenants; as well as, exploring possible service extension arrangements with partner agencies including, NHS Forth Valley.
- 8.4 Any service extensions would require to be developed in line with the proposed eligibility criteria and be presented to Members for consideration.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This report provides an update to members on the outcomes of the Small Repair Service and Handyperson Service pilots. Findings from the recent User Questionnaire, confirm that these services are rated as Very Good by 91% of users and Good by approximately 8 % of users, with 100% of respondents advising that they would recommend the service to a friend.

- 9.2 The service proposals sit within the Scheme of Assistance, and are largely consistent with the wider Care and Repair ethos and Scottish Government aims.
- 9.3 The funding to allow the continuation of the project on a permanent basis, should members agree to the proposal, can be accommodated within approved budgets.
- 9.4 A number of future service development opportunities may exist, extending the potential benefits to other Council Services and Partners as well as potential cross-funding opportunities.
- 9.5 Member's approval is being sought to introduce a combined Small Repair and Handyperson Service on a permanent basis which will continue to provide a vulnerable element of the community with a service which is safety and security conscious and delivered by qualified tradesmen.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee are invited to:

- 10.1 Note the findings of the Pilot Evaluation;**
- 10.2 Agree to the introduction of a Small Repair and Handyperson Service on a permanent basis as outlined in Section 5;**
- 10.3 Agree the outlined options for delivery which will be met within the existing PSHG budget;**
- 10.4 Agree the principle of charging and proposal to introduce a charge of £12.50 per hour for the Small Repairs and Handyperson Service, as set out in paragraphs 5.9 and 5.10.**
- 10.5 Refer the report to Policy and Resources Committee for approval.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- **Proposed Extension to the Care and Repair Service**, Policy and Resources Committee, 15/1/08
- **Introduction of a Small Repair Service**, Housing and Social Services Committee, 27/5/08
- **Proposal for the Introduction of a Handyperson Service**, Housing and Social Services Committee 2/9/08
- **Care and Repair: Standards and Guidance**, Scottish Government, 2004
- **Reviewing Care and Repair in Scotland 2009**: Report of the findings of the review of Care and Repair, Scottish Government, August 2009

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 590833 and ask for David Dunbar.