

HOUSING LIN POLICY BRIEFING

The Future Home Improvement Agency Handyperson services report

This is a report published by Communities and Local Government and Foundations, the national body for Home Improvement Agencies, in February 2009.¹ The work undertaken is cited as one of the key actions in the government's National Strategy on Housing for an Ageing Society, *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods* published last year.

This report is the outcome of work commissioned by CLG from Foundations in Autumn 2007, when they were asked to carry out research and report on options for the future delivery of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services and specifically handyperson services.

The report considers different types of provision, funding models and examples of delivering these services. It looks beyond the HIA sector and is intended as a reference for commissioners and handyperson services.

Introduction

A handyperson service provides a range of practical support services for older and disabled people with the aim of helping them maintain independent living. A holistic service with a well trained technician should provide:

- Small building repairs
- Minor adaptations
- Odd jobs such as putting up curtains or shelves
- General home safety checks and remedial actions
- Falls and accident prevention checks and remedial actions
- Security checks – installing locks, chains and spyholes
- Small home energy efficiency measures such as installing low energy light bulbs
- Fire safety such as installation of smoke alarms and checks on electric blankets
- Signposting clients to other services

Whilst Handyperson services have grown over the last 20 years, there are still some areas with limited or no provision. *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods* included funding for handyperson and enhanced services - £33 million from 2009, with the aim of making services reach more people and to be more proactive and joined up and specifically linked into health, social care, home security and fire safety plans and services.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/hiahandypersonservices>

In addition to services requested and/or paid for by individuals, services are also funded to provide the following:

- Removing category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Undertaking works to facilitate timely discharge from hospital
- Removing trip hazards as parts of local falls prevention strategies
- Installing telecare equipment
- Improving home security within specific localities

Additionally a number of handyperson services include gardening, shopping, decorating and supplying certain types of equipment.

Key elements of the service

There are elements common to all services which need to be addressed:

- *Charging* – ranging from entirely free services, including those that charge for materials through to those that operate on full cost recovery
- *Eligibility* – some are only available to certain groups such as older people or those on low incomes, others are open access and some are limited through referrals from social care or health
- *Scope and range of services* offered – these vary greatly but should include those in the introductory paragraph
- *Methods of identifying, referring or targeting* clients – most services are targeted towards those in the highest need and self referrals is the most common route

Benefits of Handyperson services

Handyperson services are highly valued by their clients and can provide the following for commissioners

- a quick and cost effective solution to a range of housing related issues, carried out by trusted individuals
- value for money and a preventative solution which can help maintain someone to remain living in their own home
- Work tailored to the clients needs and fits with the government agenda for health and social care around personalisation, choice and control
- Services that reach very vulnerable people some of whom have little or no contact with other services and for whom they can act as a trusted referrer to other services such as home care and welfare rights

They enable commissioners to deliver against local targets based on the national indicator set (see Appendix 1 for relevant national indicators)

Current handyperson provision

In June 2008, Foundations sent an electronic survey to all 230 HIA's in England and the 69% return highlighted the following:

- 82% offer a handyperson service

- 79% use directly employed staff to deliver the service
- 14% use local builders to deliver the service

The survey showed that the majority of referrals are from individuals or relatives or friends (52%) followed by occupational therapists (47%), social workers (26%) and health (10%) with smaller numbers from the Police, housing associations, housing departments, voluntary organisations and home care.

The majority of clients are older home owners, with a small proportion under 55. They also provide services into local authority, housing association and privately rented properties.

All services offer small repairs and odd jobs, followed by home security (87%), minor adaptations (84%), Hospital discharge (67%), home safety inspection (60%) and then energy efficiency checks, gardening, telecare and fitting key safes, fire safety, child safety, decorating and domestic violence and hate crime ranging from 29% down to 3%. Types of services offered is linked to local needs and funding sources.

Operating costs of services vary according to costs of employing staff and mileage and travelling time between jobs which are higher in rural areas.

Other handy person providers

Alongside HIA's a number of other providers offer similar services, generally targeted at older people, including Age Concern, local charities, Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), Help the Aged, royal British Legion and commercial providers.

Commissioning handy person services

In order to target resources, increase coverage and avoid overlaps between services, commissioners should consider

- Mapping need and existing provision
- Linking commissioning with other services such as fire safety, social care, hospital discharge etc.
- Defining the service to be provided and referral mechanisms and linking this to procurement
- Understanding the needs of providers many of whom are small or medium sized third sector organisations
- How to measure service effectiveness, including reduced admissions to care, speedier hospital discharge etc.

The report contains a detailed section on setting up a successful handy person including:

- Identifying funding sources, including case studies of different models
- Service delivery models, including directly employed staff, sub-contracting and self employed and volunteer handy persons
- New markets, service models and client groups

As funding increases so will the focus on service quality. All services need a range of policies and procedures which include the following aimed at customers and commissioners:

- Describe the service
- Set out eligibility

- Waiting times and priority given to different jobs
- Charging arrangements
- How to apply for the service
- Details of how service quality is assured
- Customer satisfaction and complaints

They also need workforce, health and safety, equal opportunities, protection of vulnerable adults, data protection and core skills and experience for handypersons. The latter should include core competencies, specialist areas such as electrical and gas work, trusted assessor in order to assess as well as fit a number of minor adaptations and assistive technology equipment. They also need to recognise when a client would benefit from assistance from other agencies.

Useful case studies

Handyperson services can become an integral part of local “hub” referral systems, such as the Suffolk Home Shield service described below.

“Hub” referrals Case Study: Suffolk Home Shield

In 2004 a pilot project was launched in Suffolk involving all local authorities, the Primary Care Trust, the Pension Service, the police and the voluntary sector, to co-ordinate the support and assistance that was already available for vulnerable older people. Home Shield has grown into a Suffolk-wide service and is a valuable tool for over 50 partnership organisations from both the statutory and voluntary sector. It enables frontline workers to refer unmet needs to a central co-ordinator who holds the knowledge base of available services. One referral to Home Shield may result in several actions by various agencies. Suffolk County Council Community Safety Unit funds the post of the co-coordinator and part-funds a project management post. The system is simple, low cost and effective. When any front-line officer from an organisation signed up to the Home Shield partnership visits a customer and sees that help is needed, the officer can complete a simple referral form with the agreement of the customer. The referral form is sent to the Home Shield co-coordinator and actions are referred on to partnership agencies to deliver help. Partners agree to act on referred actions within 10 working days. A feedback system keeps the co-coordinator informed.

In 2008, Home Shield received 1,113 referrals from front-line officers resulting in 2,356 actions being taken and the partnership is constantly expanding.

Core service funded by housing department which attracts other commissioners

Rochdale HIA is an in-house managed agency based in a metropolitan authority.

It operates a large handyperson service, which was established to ensure that the authority met its Decent Homes commitments. With core funding in place, elements have been added to meet the requirements of other commissioners and a holistic handyperson service has evolved as a result. Other elements of the funding package include:

- a service level agreement (SLA) with social services for a hospital discharge project
- funding from the Fire and Rescue Service for fire risk assessments and remedial action

- funding from Supporting People and Homelessness departments for a safer homes project
- funding from a local Arms Length Management Organisation to undertake minor repairs to its housing stock.

The service is branded in different ways to meet the needs of different commissioners, but provides a holistic service to all its clients. Rochdale has 11 handypersons (including administrative support staff) and completed 11,803 jobs in 2007-08 with £250,000 of funding. As the funding is secure and fully meets the operating costs, there is no charge to clients for the service.

County partnership model – funding from several partners

Derbyshire handy van network is a countywide handyperson service where the service is delivered by a partnership of providers operating in their own areas to provide a comprehensive range of services to vulnerable households. Over £1m has been secured for the first three years from a range of partners including:

- Regional Housing Group
- Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Derbyshire County Council Adult Social Services Wellbeing budget
- Derbyshire County Council Telecare budget
- In-kind commitment from Derbyshire Constabulary
- Derbyshire PCT; and
- Local boroughs and district councils in Derbyshire.

Outputs are recorded on a common database and include set targets for:

- the number of vulnerable people visited at home
- home fire safety checks and equipment fitted
- telecare equipment fitted
- basic property maintenance checks
- referrals for Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessments
- energy efficiency tasks
- First Contact²² signposting forms completed
- home security checks; and
- practical assistance tasks, such as changing a light bulb, securing carpets and flooring, paths and door access clearance

The service operates a total of eight handypersons. The service is free of charge but is limited to two visits per household per year.

Social enterprise – full cost recovery for a sustainable service

Age Concern Warwickshire's handyperson service employs 14 handypersons who cover the county. A labour charge is made of £17.50 per hour for a minimum of one hour and material costs are also charged. This service operates as a social enterprise and not only aims to cover its costs to be totally sustainable but any surplus is used for the benefit of the client

group. This is one of the largest handyperson services in the country. Age Concern Warwickshire also manages the HIA in South Warwickshire and is therefore able to integrate the handyperson service into the rest of the work of the HIA.

Full charge plus profit – private clients

There is a growing range of handyperson services aimed at people who can afford to pay for the work themselves but who need a trusted provider who can vet the service and workforce. Anchor's At Home Services have a team of handyperson technicians to provide older people with home repairs and maintenance services. The first hour is charged at £40 (including call out charge) and it is £20 for each additional half hour. Costs of materials used will also be charged to the client. The service is available in Berkshire, Yorkshire and north London – www.athomeservices.co.uk/

B&Q has also launched its own handyperson service. A range of services are offered from basic plumbing to assembly of furniture working anything from an hour to a full eight-hour day.

Subscription-based service

Help and Care is a Bournemouth-based charity that has a diverse range of services for older people and their carers, including HIA services. The organisation operates a handyperson service called Handiworks which is a low-cost home repairs service for people over 60 and their carers who live in Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset and Purbeck. For a small annual membership fee and a low hourly rate the scheme provides Dorset residents with reliable help with minor DIY jobs around the home. There are three tiers of membership, depending on income and benefits entitlement, and the charges are as follows:

- Handiworks 100 subscription costs £7 per year and work is charged at £10 per hour.
- Handiworks 200 subscription costs £12 per year and work is charged at £15 per hour.
- Handiworks 300 subscription costs £20 per year and work is charged at £25 per hour.

Case Study: Bristol Care & Repair Assistive Technology Pilot Project

Bristol City Council received Preventative Technologies Grant (PTG) funding from central government, and used it to develop a range of pilot projects. A central aim of the pilots was to develop partnership working between organisations in the private, public and third sectors, to develop good practice by establishing appropriate referral routes for targeted client groups, some of whom might not normally come into contact with Adult Community Care. Bristol Care & Repair was involved both by running their own pilot project and by installing equipment (and carrying out baseline assessments) for some of the other pilot projects. There are four handypersons at Bristol trained in assistive technology, and all have installed the equipment. The handyperson service has been an integral and vital part of assistive technology provision at Bristol Care & Repair. A significant part of their assistive technology work is installing equipment for other assistive technology projects in Bristol. Typical tasks include:

- programming equipment
- completing paperwork
- liaising with clients about installation times
- installing equipment including drilling fixing where necessary and undertaking some extra-low voltage wiring work

- liaising with carers
- liaising with care professionals
- checking and querying inappropriate or incomplete referrals
- replacing faulty equipment
- replacing batteries
- instructing clients and carers on how to use the equipment
- testing equipment to check it has been installed correctly; and
- liaising with caseworkers.

The intention is that assistive technology will be mainstreamed by Bristol City Council from March 2009. The handyperson service will continue with its present role and will also be called upon to adapt as the mainstreaming in Bristol takes shape.

Case Study: St Vincent's Homecare & Repair HIA

St Vincent's Homecare & Repair HIA has worked with the Action on Children's Accidents Project (ACAP) to expand its handyperson service provision to families with pre-school children. ACAP was set up in Pendle in 2001, funded by the Primary Care Trust and Sure Start. The project aims to cut down on the number of accidents children have at home by offering the family a range of safety measures. Partners in the project soon realised that to be successful, they needed a good fitting and advice service. ACAP approached St Vincent's Homecare & Repair to develop the service. Since then, St Vincent's Homecare & Repair has twice submitted successful competitive tenders for the work and has maintained an excellent working relationship with ACAP. They have now completed work on over 5,000 homes. The scheme has been so successful that it has been extended into three other boroughs in East Lancashire.

How does the scheme work?

Families are referred to the scheme by their health visitors, and pay a joining fee of £5. The project's team of health practitioners visit the family at home to discuss home safety and agree a list of items to be supplied (for example, fire guards, safety gates, laminate to cover glass panels, and smoke detectors). Orders are then prioritised and passed to St Vincent's Homecare & Repair. The HIA fits the equipment and gives guidance to the families who will be using it.

What are the benefits?

Extending its handyperson service to young families has helped to ensure that more homes are safe to live in – Accident & Emergency admission records show that the scheme has greatly reduced accident rates for young children. The agency charges a fixed fee for each job request. Any profit is used by the HIA to subsidise its other services.

What you could be thinking about?

Health and social care occupational therapist are one of the main referral groups to handyperson services and increasing numbers of HIA's and handyperson services provide some form of hospital discharge service. Where these services are not provided there is now plenty of evidence to use to inform discussions with commissioners, specifically the contribution they can make to improved outcomes for individuals and health and social care performance against key indicators.

Other useful literature

Care and Repairs England, Help the Aged, Age Concern England and Foundations September 2007 publication *the Missing Link* promotes the value of handyman services

Care and Repair England – *Small Things Matter*: the key role of handyman services March 2006 which examines the current provision of small repairs and minor adaptations provided by the voluntary and community sector in England

The Report of the Older People's Inquiry into 'that Bit of Help' published in 2006 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Useful contacts

Help the Aged operates its own range of Home Support Services including Handy Vans, contact 01255 473999 www.helptheaged.org.uk

Some Age Concern branches operate handyman services; basic information is available on the Age Concern England website www.ageconcern.org.uk

Foundations website: www.foundations.uk.com

Care and Repair England: www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: www.jrf.org.uk