

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

16 July 2007

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 REVIEW OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

Summary

This report informs Members of the need to use an external agency (In Touch) to assist clients of the Home Improvement Agency and highlights the proposed Scrutiny Committee review of the Agency.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Tonbridge and Malling Home Improvement Agency (HIA) offers advice and assistance to homeowners and tenants who are over 55 and/or disabled who wish to repair, adapt or stay in their homes.
- 1.1.2 The Agency can guide clients through the entire process of repairs, improvements and adaptations to their homes. This includes advice and help with decisions, organising finance, arranging and overseeing building works and other technical matters.
- 1.1.3 The HIA is jointly funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Kent County Council Adult Services and Kent Supporting People.
- 1.1.4 Foundations are the national co-ordinating body for Home Improvement Agencies in England.

1.2 Assistance From In Touch

- 1.2.1 Staff absence due to ill-health in May and June 2007 hindered the ability of the Agency to respond to clients effectively. A waiting list was beginning to build up for clients who required disabled facilities grants and those seeking housing assistance. Given that the clients are vulnerable households, I decided to enlist additional help to ensure minimal service disruption.
- 1.2.2 Within the private sector housing team there were no additional resources that could be directed towards the work of the Agency. In Touch, a subsidiary of Hyde Housing who operate a home improvement agency service across nine of the local authorities in Kent, were therefore contacted to see if they could assist.

- 1.2.3 Fortunately, In Touch was able to offer assistance and take over management of 20 cases that the Agency had on their waiting list. They have taken complete control of the cases including drawing up specifications of work (where needed), assisting clients with forms, obtaining estimates and monitoring the works being completed.
- 1.2.4 The transfer of these cases means a loss of fee income for the Council's Agency, however, it was felt important that we respond speedily to the needs of the clients on the waiting list. The fee that has been negotiated with In Touch for this work is 11 per cent of the net cost of the works. This is their usual fee that they charge local authorities elsewhere and is less than the 12.5 per cent fee that our in house HIA levy. I shall be reviewing the financial impact of this arrangement during the forthcoming budget review which will be reflected in revised estimates.
- 1.2.5 I am extremely grateful to In Touch for their willingness to assist our clients and their reasonable charges. They agreed to undertake this work at short notice and without additional funding from this Council (other local authorities pay an annual contribution as part of their service level agreement with In Touch) or Supporting People. Performance targets have been agreed with In Touch which mirror the ones our in-house HIA aims to meet. These include undertaking a first visit within three weeks of referral and then completing the work within 16 weeks from first contact for jobs costing less than £1,000 and 45 weeks where works costs more than £1,000. Early feedback from the cases that are now being progressed is extremely positive and your officers will continue to monitor the performance of In Touch closely.
- 1.2.6 I am pleased to say that the Agency staff are all now back and are dealing with the ongoing caseload.

1.3 Scrutiny Review of the HIA Service

- 1.3.1 At the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 12 June 2007 a report was submitted suggesting that the function of the HIA should be reviewed. It was agreed by Members that this review should form part of the forthcoming work programme for the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3.2 Officers will take a report to the 7 August 2007 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee which will outline the scope of the review of the Agency.
- 1.3.3 A further update report will be presented to a future meeting of this Board following that review.

1.4 Conclusions

- 1.4.1 The Council has had to utilise external assistance from In Touch in order to continue to meet the needs of the clients of the Agency.

1.4.2 The Scrutiny Committee will be undertaking a review of the function of the Agency as part of its future work programme.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 The services of the external HIA, In Touch, are being provided at a cost that will be borne from the Disabled Facilities Grants and Housing Assistance capital budgets. A lower than anticipated annual fee income may result as a consequence, which will be reflected in revised estimates.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 To not have taken the action reported could have had adverse consequences for the clients of the HIA and brought the Council into disrepute.

Background papers:

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Nil

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