



Mid & West Kent HIA Advisory Group Minutes
Monday 1st November 2010

1. ATTENDANCE

ACTION

1.1. Present

Cllr Jean Atkinson, TMBC (Chair)
Cllr John Balcombe, TMBC
Barbara Brown, TMBC
Linda Hibbs, TMBC
Cllr Catherine Mayhew, TWBC
Kevin Hetherington, TWBC
Janice Greenwood, TWBC
James Nicholls, SDC
Cllr Carol Clark, SDC
Stuart White, MBC
Karen Williams, KCC
Mark Hogan, KCC
Sue Thomas, KCC
Gill Crouch, KCC
John Miles, Service User
Aric Goss, In Touch
Caroline Lower, In Touch

1.2. Apologies:

David Eaton, In Touch
Helen Ryan, In Touch
James Cox, Sevenoaks District Council
Janet Walton, Tonbridge & Malling BC
Pat Smith, Sevenoaks District Council
Sue Stower, Kent County Council

2. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM CHAIR

2.1. Linda Hibbs requested individual introductions so all at the meeting were aware of names and job titles.

2.2. Cllr Jean Atkinson gave a brief history of her employment background. JA confirmed she had met with David Eaton a few days prior to the meeting. It was suggested during this meeting that the chairmanship of the group will be based on a rota and an appropriate chair and vice-chair will be appointed each year from one of the local authority areas. This was agreed by all.

3. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

3.1. JA suggested Cllr John Balcombe as Vice Chair. All agreed.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE GROUP

- 4.1. Aric Goss referred the Group to Appendix II of the HIA Management Report. AG suggested that all members review the contents for discussion at the next meeting with further detail from David Eaton.
- 4.2. It is felt that there should be a fair representation from all local authorities, including voting and non voting members. It was also felt that representation should be sought from other agencies, such as Age UK. It was confirmed by AG that Age UK had been invited.
- 4.3. The location of the Group meeting was discussed. It was agreed that TMBC offices provide a suitable and convenient venue.

5. PERFORMANCE & MONITORING REPORTS

- 5.1. AG gave an overview of the HIA Management Report.
- 5.2. The HIA have had a very positive quarter 1 & 2 with a number of new initiatives, including the Future Jobs Fund and KCC Retrofit Energy Surveys.
- 5.2.1. **Future Jobs Fund** employee now working with HIA on a permanent contract with the handypersons service.
- 5.2.2. **Retrofit Programme Tender** was won by the HIA. This was to raise awareness around energy and efficiency in 4 areas. Tunbridge Wells, Swale, Dover and Margate.
- 5.2.3. **BBC Saints and Scroungers**. This was filmed in the HIA building during June; it pushed forward all the positives around the HIA and handypersons service.
- 5.2.4. **Digital Inclusion**. The HIA is to partner a local IT company in providing IT services to our client groups.
- 5.3. **West Kent Community Health (PCT)**. The HIA are working closely with the Maidstone PCT to deliver services for hospital discharges and falls prevention. This service is going from strength to strength.
- 5.3.1. Cllr Catherine Mayhew asked whether the primary care trust provides contributions to the handypersons service and can the PCT provide funding for other areas outside of the Maidstone area. AG was unsure but believes the PCT does provide funding to the handypersons service, but currently only to the Maidstone area.
- 5.3.2. CM asked whether the other PCTs were aware of the service and asked why they weren't making use of this rather than running their own 'handyperson' service when the HIA already works in the areas. DE to confirm at the next meeting. DE
- 5.3.3. Kevin Hetherington asked that all financial contributions and income streams to the HIA are clarified. This is to be made an agenda item for the next meeting. DE

5.3.4. It was suggested that the HIA statistics on services offered to PCT should be widened to detail cost savings of preventing admissions to hospital, for example, and therefore support the role of the HIA.

5.4. Disabled Facility Grant Forum. The forum was a great success and many ideas came out of the meeting. AG suggested that it is important to work together to improve the value of the service across all areas. DE to feed back at meeting in January 2011. **DE**

5.5. Human Resources.

5.5.1. Tracy Topley, caseworker for the Maidstone Borough was seconded to the Thanet HIA and has now accepted a permanent post there.

5.5.2. Sophie Marsh, caseworker for the Tunbridge Wells Borough has accepted a position at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council within the Private Sector Housing Team.

5.5.3. The HIA is very sad to lose both, as long-standing committed members of the team, but is pleased that both will still be working with the HIA.

5.6. HIA Performance April 2010 – September 2010.

5.6.1. The HIA has consistently exceeded budget spend and fee income of previous years for both core services and handyperson services.

5.6.2. Budget spend and income are currently on target for the year. The value of works completed on the core service is +15% compared to 2009, with 160 projects completed to date. Handyperson enquiries have increased 23.4% 2008 to 2010.

5.6.3. AG advised that some of the KPI figures are known to be inaccurate. AG advised that the Foundations FEMIS database was replaced earlier in the year and there have been some problems with reporting from the new database. This situation continues to improve.

5.6.4. The Group were referred to the Management and Technical Reports for further detail.

5.7. Comprehensive Spending Review.

5.7.1. The HIA feels that the initial outcome of the CSR has been positive towards the services offered by HIAs, with DFGs and Handyperson funding protected, but remains cautious and understands that Local Authority decisions may have a significant impact on the service and the business. The HIA continues to pursue alternative business streams to ensure that it remains financially viable and able to offer important services to the elderly and vulnerable.

5.7.2. It was suggested that to ensure the provision of DFG funding remains viable and fair that charges should be placed on properties that benefit from the funding. Janice Greenwood advised that this is already being done in certain cases. CM and KH suggested that the HIA should lobby DCLG to implement this across the board.

5.7.3. It was also suggested that there should be increased recycling of equipment. Mark Hogan confirmed that KCC stores do re-use the majority of equipment. The re-use of stairlifts was discussed, as it was understood that Hastings HIA are offering this service. Storage of second-hand equipment was understood to be a logistical problem. It was suggested that second hand equipment should be the first offer to Clients.

6. PRESENTATION ON HIA SERVICES

6.1. In the absence of David Eaton, who was due to make the presentation, AG read a statement from DE. This is appended to these minutes.

7. COMMUNITY ROUND-UP FROM ALL MEMBERS

7.1. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

7.1.1. Janice informed the meeting that they will be able to fully spend discretionary budget this year. Quarter 1 & 2 were very quiet starts within the DFG budget, however there are now some large projects coming in so the budget will be spent.

7.1.2. RSL, very slow as only 1 grant completed, 10 grants now waiting approval.

7.1.3. KH enquired as to whether the handypersons service is trained in all fields. Aric informed the meeting that the handypersons service is very well trained and if unable to deal with an enquiry or situation they are well informed of where to refer the client for the best advice and assistance. Many of the issues can be dealt with by the caseworker team within the HIA.

7.2. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

7.2.1. LH reported that they remain positive but had no indication on private sector renewal funding for next financial year. However it is believed that the funds will certainly be reduced and this must be taken into account.

7.2.2. LH reported that the discretionary budget for this year has been committed or spent and predicting a possible over spend on the DFG budget for this year, so are now managing grant approvals.

7.2.3. Russet Homes are funding a large amount of adaptations themselves.

7.2.4. LH informed the group of a meeting which was being held with Foundations to discuss the proposal for the HIA to manage the budget for 'minor' DFG projects under a certain value. Stuart White, James Nicholls and Janice Greenwood requested an invite to the meeting. Linda Hibbs to provide details.

LH

7.3. Sevenoaks District Council

7.3.1. JN recognised the value of the HIA but Sevenoaks is unable to guarantee availability of funding for next financial year. At this moment redundancies are being discussed and the possibility of reducing back office staff significantly.

7.3.2. The discretionary funding is committed, along with decent homes grants. DFG – Slow and quiet first 6 months however HIA & West Kent Funding will be fully spent. May need to manage grant approvals in quarter 4.

7.3.3. JN enquired as to what the “aborted works” meant in the Technical Report. Ag explained that this where cases are cancelled, normally due to the Client deciding that they do not want to proceed or the Client passing away. KH queried whether any costs are recovered in this case. AG explained that the HIA uses it’s discretion to charge based on a scale of fees where it is the Client’s decision not to proceed.

7.4. Maidstone Borough Council

7.4.1. SW confirmed that discretionary funding is now fully spent / committed, RSL – Approvals slowing down, DFG – Approvals slowing down.

7.4.2. 70k allocated for handyperson this year, however unsure of allocation for next year.

7.4.3. SW commented that there are a huge amount of referrals for the handypersons service in Maidstone, why is it so different for all the other areas? AG suggested that this is because Maidstone fund 2 handypersons and no other authority does this at present.

7.5. KCC OT Bureau

7.5.1. Gill Crouch reported the Childrens’ waiting list for assessments is very long, but things are starting to move slowly now.

7.5.2. Sue Thomas reported that Adult services has a waiting list of 300, equating to 18 month wait.

7.5.3. Karen Williams advised that Maidstone area OT Bureau has a waiting list of 400.

7.5.4. GC explained that the number of referrals is growing every week; however there is not enough staff to cover the growing amount of referrals. GC suggested that most DFG cases for children do exceed the £30,000 grant limit which is the cause of most delays, as additional funding has to be sought.

7.5.5. Mark Hogan reported that £1 million at the moment is contributed through the Home Support Fund to DFG above the £30,000 cap; this can assist on savings within residential care. A report is being worked on and the findings due to be announced next year. A large amount of the top up funding allocated is to child DFG cases.

7.6. Service Users

7.6.1. John Miles suggested that In Touch HIA provides a most valuable service that needs to be used more around Kent. All agreed.

7.6.2. JM suggested that there needs to be an increase in publicity on the internet and increased joint working with other agencies such as Age UK.

7.6.3. It was suggested that feedback forms should be encouraged to ensure that the HIA has the information / **DE**

statistics to support the importance of the service.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1. It was queries generally when the contracts with the HIA expire. Aric advised he is unsure; however he will check with David and report back to the group in January 2011. **DE**

8.2. It was agreed by all that Claire Martin of Supporting People would be invited to the advisory group meeting in January 2011, where she could inform the group of the commitments to the HIA and best interest to the communities in the West Kent Area. **DE**

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 25th January 2011.

Tuesday 26th April 2011.

Meeting closed at 3.35pm.

Statement from the HIA Service Manager

Protecting Disabled Adaptations and Home Repairs

The DFG and repayable Decent Home grants are clearly proven as one of the most effective ways to help disabled and older people remain in their homes for longer and reduce the costs of people entering residential care homes or having to access more expensive acute health services. It is essential that when commissioners decide the outcome of their local spending reviews that DFG and Repair Grants are protected and the current funding levels are maintained in line with government intentions to protect the availability of the grants.

The links between poor health and poor housing are well known, and have been extensively documented through the development of the Housing, Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS). Unsuitable housing or a lack of housing-related support can lead to escalating care needs and an increase in the need for higher cost and more intensive residential or similar support. Preventative services such as the falls prevention, handyman schemes and hospital discharge services provided by the home improvement agency reduce the need for higher-cost acute care.

Protecting the role of the Home Improvement Agency

It is worth recording that the need for adaptations or home repairs usually occurs concurrently with other needs for housing, social welfare and health related intervention. Integrated home improvement agency services consider the place of adaptations and repairs within the wider suite of services they provide.

The HIA can help local authorities get the most from their adaptations budgets, particularly if those adaptations provide part of a wider service. A holistic approach to the assessment process can lead to an alternative solution being identified which achieves better value for the public purse, is more acceptable to the client, can include a much wider needs based assessment and signposting and is in line with the recent changes and flexibility introduced to the DFG programme and the demand from Government for better strategic links between Housing, Health and Social Care.

What is the HIA doing to bring added value to the commissioners?

- § We are going back to review whether the HIA is required to charge VAT on our fees and will be speaking again to Customs and Excise about the issue.
- § The HIA is currently looking to develop new DFG shared protocols, procedures and practices and looking to standardize processes across the four local authority areas with the aim of improving service standards and reducing costs.
- § One area with the potential to transform the DFG process is the greater use of handypersons to deliver minor adaptations. Providing a handyman service with the capability to assess need as well as carry out the work required will free up occupational therapists to concentrate on more complex cases. The HIA already has four members of staff who have achieved Trusted Technician status and accreditation.
- § Furthermore, we are developing a model for stairlift re-use and recycling and selling second hand equipment to customers who would prefer to avoid the wait using DFG.

- § The HIA's in Kent are also developing a new procurement model in partnership with Foundations trying to access much better prices for basic adaptations equipment.

The HIA can play a strategic part in transforming adaptations services from the current focus on a single grant process to one that is integrated into a range of options for independent living.

Foundations stress the importance of providing holistic housing options services in tandem with adaptations services, to ensure that all alternatives are considered before a client is consigned to the waiting list for a DFG which may not be the best solution for their needs.

The protection and development of Handyperson Services

The Handyperson Service remains a central feature of the HIA and is currently helping more than 2,500 people each year to remain living at home with greater independence, comfort and security. It is worth noting that the key benefits of the Handyperson Service include the following: -

- Accident risks - falls on stairs, falls on level, fire, electrical hazards
- Cold - energy efficiency and draught-proofing and fuel poverty
- Fear of violence and crime - entry by intruders , domestic abuse, ASB
- Fire, carbon monoxide – free detectors
- Inadequate facilities for hygiene, sanitation, food storage and preparation
- A foot in the door for other services, including state benefits, care, support and more substantial home improvements

The National Coalition have protected Handyperson Services in the CSR and we would encourage local Government to continue their invaluable support for these services.

Conclusion

The HIA has a vital role to play in the delivery of the services that have strategic relevance across the housing, health and social care agendas. In a time of greater economic pressure, rapid demographic change and increasing levels of need our existence becomes ever more important. It remains imperative however that new service delivery models are developed which make far better use of our shared limited local resources and deliver a more diverse and more flexible approach to meeting local need but without any additional cost to the commissioner. The HIA is well placed to meet this objective.

HIA Services Manager

For and on behalf of the *in touch* Mid & West Kent Home Improvement Agency

1 November 2010