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**PART B: RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 23 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**REPORT OF THE: PROGRAMME DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUSINESS AND PARTNERSHIPS  
PHILLIP SPURR**

**TITLE OF REPORT: REVIEW OF WHITE ROSE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY**

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Home Improvement agency partnership with Scarborough Borough Council and its key priorities and agree an extension to the partnership until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council
- i. Notes the outcomes of the service update;
  - ii. Agrees continuation of the partnership agreement with Scarborough Borough Council in respect of the White Rose Home Improvement Agency (WRHIA) for the period to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023;
  - iii. Agrees the key priorities for the agency.

### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 These recommendations are being made in order to support the future work of the White Rose Home Improvement Agency and ensure it provides the best services for the Ryedale community.
- 3.2 In order to ensure sustainability, the ability to apply for external funding and to ensure ongoing investment in the agency it is recommended to extend the agreement to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This is an in house service for Ryedale through a Joint Committee arrangement with Scarborough BC as the employer and not a procurement exercise.

- 3.3 Ryedale Council is a representative partner in the agency both with members and officers, and as such influences the direction of travel of the agency. Together with Scarborough BC we will agree key priorities for the service going forward.
- 3.4 Ryedale monitors the budget spend through the Joint Committee with officer and member representation and on a quarterly basis with other external stakeholders.
- 3.5 The current partnership arrangements will be looked at again as part of Local Government Review.

#### **4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS**

- 4.1 If the Council does not agree to extend the partnership agreement both Councils would need to revert to providing their own arrangements for the statutory provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
- 4.2 Other ancillary projects including the Handyperson Service, Wellbeing Service and Choices for Energy may become unviable and the Councils may have a reduced ability to bid for external funding sources.
- 4.3 There is a risk that the partnership does not deliver the outcomes needed or underspends/ overspends on its budgets. In order to address this, the HIA is subject to additional monitoring scrutiny through advisory group meetings and the current Joint Committee in terms of its operation.

#### **5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 How the agency meets the Council's Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024.

The agency meets the following Council priorities.

***Our Communities: Strong, Inclusive and attractive***

- Help for those in need
- Healthy and happy communities

***Our Economy: harnessing Ryedale's unique economy to deliver growth, homes and jobs***

- Quality homes local people can afford

***Our environment: a sustainable, safe and clean place to live***

- Sustainability into the future

***Our Organisation: an innovative, enterprising council***

- Value for money
- Accessible for all

#### **5.2 Consultation**

Consultation around future options for the HIA has been undertaken via the Advisory Group, Scarborough BC and NYCC as well as the voluntary sector providers

supporting the client base from across Ryedale. Overwhelming the Group is in support of the partnership and the work that has been achieved collectively over the past 9 years.

## **REPORT**

### **6.0 REPORT DETAILS**

- 6.1 The White Rose Home Improvement Agency (HIA) is a not for profit organisation, shared with Scarborough Borough Council (SBC), that has been delivering services across both Council areas since April 2012. Prior to this date both Councils operated separate services. RDC needed to improve the outcomes associated with the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants. The Council was delivering about 50 DFGs each year, but had no resilience and capacity within the team.
- 6.2 The Council did not have a handy person or wellbeing service to offer the community. By creating a partnership between the Councils we could harness the strengths and abilities of each other as the most strategic way to improve our innovation. A "do-it-alone" approach was not seen as the best strategy for growth.
- 6.3 It is felt that a collaboration and a strategic partnership is fundamental to improving our outcomes for the Ryedale community.
- 6.4 The aim of the HIA is to assist older, disabled and vulnerable people to repair, maintain and adapt their homes and live independently.
- 6.5 Agreement was secured through Emergency Powers on the 24th April 2020 to amend the work of the Agency during lockdown to focus on supporting the Community support organisation with the work it was doing with the community. The day to day work of the Agency was affected from March 2020 due to the pandemic therefore the outcomes for 2020/21 are significantly lower than previous years. The agency was unable to fulfil a lot of the work due to the lockdowns that occurred during the year. However, it is now working hard to fulfil the outstanding work during this financial year.

### **6.6 Service Review of the Agency**

The shared HIA has been operating since April 2012 and to date has had excellent outcomes and has continued to develop and expand. A core element of the work undertaken by the HIA is to undertake major adaptations, such as walk in showers, extensions, ramps etc. via Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGs) funding on behalf of both Councils. Ryedale receives an allocation from the Better Care Fund. Key points to note are:

#### **6.7 Disabled Facilities Grants**

- 6.7.1 The demand for statutory Disabled Facilities Grants has significantly increased in recent years. The grant has been in existence for 25 years but in 2014 it became part of the Better Care Fund, a pooled health and social care budget. The aim of the fund is to provide more joined-up and customer focussed services to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return home from hospital more quickly. In recognition of the rising need for adaptations central government funding for DFGs has been increased considerably. In 2019/20 107 DFGs were delivered. This declined last year 2020/21 to 50 due to around 4/5 months where the agency was affected by the

pandemic. Taking out last year as an exception since 2015/16 the number of DFGs delivered on an annual basis has ranged from 72 to 107.

6.7.2 Funding to meet this demand (via the Better Care Fund) has also significantly increased. In 2020/21 Ryedale had a funding allocation of £583,807 and then an additional allocation from Government of £78,612, making the overall allocation for the service of £662,419. This represents a significant increase in funding since 2015/16. £245,000 was received from central government in 2015/16 for Ryedale, and the remainder of the budget was made up with a capital contribution from RDC. Ryedale utilises some of the Better Care allocation to fund the handyperson's service and it is top sliced for the fee income to run the service. Through the HIA the Council now does not need to make contributions toward the cost of meeting this statutory duty from its own capital resources. The Better Care funding allocation for 2021/22 is £662,418.

6.7.3 The functions of the HIA are provided at a low cost to the authority due to the ability to top slice 15% funding from the Better Care allocation for revenue costs, after we have funded the handyperson service. This will provide Ryedale with a revenue contribution of £80,190 in 2021/22.

## 6.8 Handyperson and Well-Being Service

6.8.1 The handyperson service installs minor adaptations such as grab rails, key safes and galvanised rails on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC). The service also carries out a range of small repair work to enable people to remain independent within their homes.

6.8.2 In 2019/20 2,197 households utilised the handyperson service, 642 within the Ryedale area. This reduced to 441 in the Ryedale area in 2020/21 due to the pandemic.

6.8.3 The Wellbeing Service provides advice and information on a wide range of housing related issues and delivers interventions aimed at preventing unnecessary hospital admissions and enabling a smooth transition when vulnerable residents leave hospital.

6.8.4 The service is funded via a combination of Better Care Fund monies and external income derived from various projects. In 2019/20 851 households utilised this service (164 Ryedale). This has remained similar throughout the years, and the service is meeting demand. Last year again this reduced to 109 assessments in Ryedale due to the inability to visit and undertake wellbeing assessments within homes due to the pandemic.

6.8.5 However increased marketing of both services needs to continue to promote them across the district as our figures are lower than you would expect in comparison to Scarborough.

## 6.9 Choices for Energy

6.9.1 The HIA continues to provide an Energy Advice Service (Choices4Energy) and provides a wide range of interventions to help tackle fuel poverty. This work includes an energy switching scheme and a bulk oil buying service for residents. In 2019/20 over 200,000 litres of oil was purchased by residents of Ryedale and Scarborough through the HIA's oil cooperative scheme and 177 households within the Ryedale area switched energy providers to a cheaper tariff through our collective switch scheme. This generated an income to the Agency of £4,751.10, this increased to £6,415.80 in 2020/21.

6.9.2 In 2020/21, 182,609 litres were ordered through the oil buying service and following increased marketing within Ryedale, 766 households within Ryedale switched energy suppliers.

6.9.3 The energy suppliers have supplied the following information,

Registrants	3962
Switchers	1154
Total Realised savings	£181,075
Tonnes of CO2 saved	848

These number of registrants are the running totals from when Ryedale joined the scheme and the total realised savings are from those who have switched. From 2014 to 2019 this was calculated compared to people's current tariff. From Oct 2019 the energy suppliers improved the customer journey on their platform, and the majority of the realised savings from then are calculated against people's current supplier's standard variable rate. The cumulative carbon savings are from February 2020, and take into account the changing UK carbon emission factor.

6.9.4 In 2020/21 the agency also supported the delivery of first time gas central heating systems. Funding was secured from the Warm Homes Fund (WHF) via a partnership bid between the two councils and Hambleton District Council. The project was delivered by Yorkshire Energy Solutions (YES). The project delivered 108 new installations across the three areas. The scheme was operational until March 2021. There were 21 delivered in Ryedale.

6.9.5 This project was well received and a further bid was made to the WHF. This bid has been successful and funding has been awarded to support a further 26 first time gas central heating installations for Ryedale and 50 air source heat pump installations across Ryedale. The estimated value of this work of the whole scheme is in the region of £1.2m. The project is still working to improve access to installers across all areas as there is lack of installers in the YO area, NYCC are working with Communitas to obtain the installers required, there are enquiries in the pipeline but none completed to date.

## **6.10 Why we operate joint governance arrangements for the HIA**

6.10.1 In September 2011 a report was presented to the Commissioning Board, the previous committee name prior to the renaming of Policy and Resources, with a recommendation to Council on the 3rd November 2011 (Minute 68) and it was agreed to establish a joint Home Improvement Agency. The report explained the benefits of creating a single Home Improvement Agency with Scarborough Borough Council, with Scarborough as the host authority.

6.10.2 Council agreed to enter into a partnership agreement with Scarborough for the creation of a shared HIA. The original agreement was for 2 years and this was further extended in 2014. We have continued to extend year on year since then. As the HIA has been operating for many years Ryedale needs to review the service on offer and ensure it performs effectively and has some stability until March 2023.

6.10.3 The reason for a Joint Committee was to ensure that members remained engaged with the agency and were involved in the budget setting and reviewing of services, this ensured transparency of the agency for both authorities.

## **6.11 Partnership Approach**

- 6.11.1 A partnership approach brings a range of strategic advantages, including efficiencies around procurement of works, economies of scale and resilience for the services provided. It also has the ability to strengthen the Council's approach to securing the funding it needs in the form of bidding, especially around energy efficiency. Given the strong and ongoing success of the partnership, it is recommended the partnership continues until March 2023 to avoid annual renewals which do not provide sustainability for the agency with regards investment and bidding opportunities.
- 6.11.2 The terms of the agreement remain broadly unchanged and that Ryedale would continue to make a revenue funding contribution into the partnership at 33.3% of the total revenue cost.
- 6.11.3 Given the population profiles for both Council areas and the way that demand for the provision of DFGs has been split (e.g. around one third of the total demand comes from the Ryedale area) the existing funding arrangements are both proportionate and equitable. Should this vary during the term of the agreement then the funding split would be reviewed via the joint governance arrangements. The Governance arrangement consists of a Joint Committee with representative members from each LA with the delegated powers to make decisions relating to the partnership.
- 6.11.4 Certain strategic and financial decisions, including annual budget setting are made via the Joint Committee.
- 6.12 By partnering with Scarborough the agency has developed innovative solutions to service delivery, these include:
- i. The agency now incorporates telephone assessments by Occupational Therapists, OT (NYCC), this will reduce the timescale to progress grants as it was previously taking 3 to 4 months to see an OT
  - ii. Joint framework agreements with contractors for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants. This reduces the average cost of a grant, so the Authority can do more for less. The average cost of a DFG across Scarborough and Ryedale is £1,900 less than the rest of NY. On the completion of 107 grants in 2019/20, this equates to an additional capital cost of over £200,000
  - iii. Paperless referral (DASH) system
  - iv. Accepting referrals direct from the health service - the only HIA in North Yorkshire to do this
  - v. Full performance management dashboard available

## **6.13 Operating Costs and Budgets**

- 6.13.1 Through the Home Improvement Agency the Council delivers a high level of service, the costs of providing this service are part funded through the receipt of fee income this means that the amount of council funding remains consistent, at around £50k? to £55K for the last couple of years, as there has been an increase in the DFG allocation.
- 6.13.2 The cost of providing the Home Improvement Agency has increased over the past 2 years due to long term sickness and additional resources have been brought in for 2021/22 to ensure that the agency can keep waiting lists are kept to a minimum following the effect of the pandemic on the services of the agency.
- 6.13.3 The confirmed Better Care allocation for 2021/22 is £662,419.

6.13.4 With a budget of £662,419 RDC would, as it stands, generate a fee income of £80,190. This assists to fund the cost of operating the agency for Ryedale. Salary Inflation and changes to the employer's pension contribution rate following updated triennial actuarial assumptions from 18.2% to 20.9% have also impacted on staffing budgets. These additional costs have been offset by the increase in the capital allocation for DFGs and the resulting 15% taken off as fee income. Costs need to be assessed again the benefits of a partnership agreement as discussed and the added value to the Ryedale community.

This is calculated as follows:

<b>Ryedale</b>	
DFG base allocation 2021/22	662,419
Handyperson Service Funding	(47,632)
HIA Fee Top-sliced 15%	80,190
Subtotal	534,597
Carry Over 2020/21	161,897
Total available DFG budget	696,494
RDC Revenue Contribution for 2021/22	135,538
<b>(Net cost to Ryedale)</b>	<b>Revenue Contribution £55,348</b>

The general fee rate on DFGs across the Country is 10-15%.

#### 6.13.5 *Added cost value of the Agency*

- In 2020/21 collective switching generated £6,415.80 across Scarborough and Ryedale, (a small allocation comes direct from the company when an individual joins). This goes into the combined revenue pot, Ryedale individually generated £1,732.20 of this
- Beyond Housing (Housing Association) in Scarborough pay for adaptations up to a certain level for properties within Scarborough. The income generated goes into the combined pot, this generated £7,526 in 2020/21 for the partnership
- Currently 93% satisfaction rate from customers
- The cost to provide this as a single Council would be substantially higher and provide a lower level of service provision for the community.

#### 6.13.6 *Partnership agreement with NYCC*

Ryedale could choose not to fund the handyperson's service from the Better Care allocation and use this for additional DFG spend. An agreement was made between NYCC and both authorities, following a signed memorandum of understanding that we would top slice the Better Care Fund to pay for the handypersons service. This costs Ryedale in 2021/22 £47,632 from the funding allocation. The service assists NYCC with its duties around fitting small adaptations and grab rails.

## **6.14 Additional achievements**

- 6.14.1 Despite the high levels of demand on the Agency's services over the years, the Agency continues to improve its services and strives to develop regional and national good practice.
- 6.14.2 The HIA has national recognition for the work it does. It is included within the National Good Practice Guide for the innovative way that technology is used to speed up DFG processes. The HIA also has the highest possible level of accreditation following external review via its regulatory body Foundations. The Councils' adopted policies and approach toward the delivery of DFGs are shared by Foundations (HIA's national Governing Body) as a 'good practice template'.
- 6.14.3 The Agency recently delivered a successful pilot with NYCC which enables Occupational Therapists to carry out basic assessments for wet floor showers over the phone. The pilot was so successful that the agency was asked to present the pilot at a regional conference delivered by its governing body, Foundations. This pilot has now been rolled out across the county.

## **6.15 Setting Key priorities for the agency**

- 6.15.1 However there is work that can be done on the back of the partnership, especially around the promotion of the services on offer to the Ryedale community. The recommendation is for the following key priorities.
- i. Continued growth and sustainment of the agency
  - ii. Key delivery agent around the climate change agenda (domestic)
  - iii. Delivery agent to enable people to live independently
  - iv. Funding attracted from external partners to add value to the agency
  - v. Timely delivery of DFGs to facilitate independent living
  - vi. Improve the marketing of the handyperson's and wellbeing services
  - vii. Climate change- push the switching scheme and oil buying
  - viii. Partnership working with NYCC
  - ix. Key performance indicators
  - x. Meet statutory requirements around delivery
  - xi. Innovative and nationally recognized
  - xii. Ongoing customer feedback

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1 Policy** - no implications

**7.2 Financial**

Ryedale make a proportionate funding contribution of 33.3%. In 2021/22 this will be £135,538. Fee income of 15% is used to offset this amount. Net cost £55,348

Capital budgets remain separate and Ryedale gives delegated authority to the Borough Council in respect of their capital spending on DFGs. In 2021/22 Ryedale allocation is £662,419, also carry over from 2020/21 of £161, 897. Overall budget £696,494.

**7.3 Legal**

If committee agree the extension of the agreement up until March 2023 this will be under all the same terms and conditions as the current arrangements.



#### **7.4 Equality and Diversity**

The provision of services for elderly and vulnerable people through the HIA has a positive impact in terms of equality and diversity issues.

#### **7.5 Sustainability**

The work of the HIA is leveraging in funding to improve the energy efficiency of stock within the district and will make a key contribution going forward in helping the Council meet its ambitious carbon reduction targets for the district.

#### **7.6 Crime and Disorder**

The handyman's service assists with the provision of key safes, locks etc. This assists the vulnerable members of the community to remain safe within their homes.

#### **7.7 Climate Change**

In recent years the key strategic focus within the HIA has been to build on existing work to promote energy efficiency in residential accommodation. The HIA acts as the Council's delivery agent in partnership with Yorkshire Energy Solutions in respect of various initiatives including accessing ECO Funding (to fund energy efficiency improvements).

Together with the partnership with Yorkshire Energy Solutions the agency is our delivery model for assisting the Council with meeting the council's priorities around climate change. The agency runs collective switching and oil buying initiatives as well as bringing in energy efficiency funding and products to assist the Ryedale community.

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