

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive – 11 November 2009

Reconsideration of decision following call-in – Proposed commissioning of a County-wide Home Improvement Agency

Report of the Democratic Services Manager

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey)

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 16 September 2009, the Executive considered a confidential report concerning proposals to commission a County-wide Home Improvement Agency.
- 1.2 The proposals had previously been considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee which had decided not to support a new Home Improvement Agency, specifically the Handyperson element of the service.
- 1.3 Despite this opposition, the Executive decided “that the proposed funding commitment to Supporting People for the County-wide Home Improvement Agency be agreed”. An extract from the Minutes of the Executive’s meeting is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.4 As a result, Councillors Mrs Court-Stenning and Hayward called in the decision and the matter was discussed at the last meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee on 13 October 2009. An extract from the minutes of this meeting is attached at Appendix B.
- 1.5 The Committee agreed to refer the decision back to the Executive for further consideration.
- 1.6 Since then, the Members of the Executive have reviewed the decision made on 16 September 2009, taking into full account the views expressed by the Community Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Executive is of the view that its previous decision should stand. However, it is committed to ensuring that the standard of the new service is at least as good as that currently provided and that the new service will therefore be reviewed after a year, with a report being brought back to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

Appendix A

Extract from the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 September 2009

82. **The Future of the Home Improvement Agency and Handyperson Services**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the impending changes to the funding and delivery of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in Somerset.

HIAs provided a service to vulnerable Client Groups, supporting applications for Disabled Facility Grants and discretionary repairs across the private and public housing stock. They provided case-workers to assess need, liaise with contractors and ensured work was undertaken and completed to the client's satisfaction. HIAs also administered Handyperson schemes to provide a basic home repair service to vulnerable clients at a subsidised cost across all housing tenures.

Supporting People had decided that the current provision of HIAs across Somerset was no longer appropriate and were working with the other Somerset commissioners (including Taunton Deane) to commission a County-wide service from June 2010, which would include a Handyperson Scheme.

Submitted full details of the proposed new arrangements and how they would affect Taunton Deane.

Reported that under the new arrangements, Supporting People would be required to provide funding for a County-wide handyperson service. This gave the Council the option to withdraw our funding and rely on the HIA provided Handyperson service, or to add our funding into the 'pot' for an enhanced Taunton Deane Handyperson service.

Noted that any additional funding we chose to provide for a Handyperson Scheme would be paid to the new Home Improvement Agency to 'top up' the standard service. It would be counterproductive to run an additional scheme with different contact details and pricing models as this would prove confusing to customers and would compete directly with the new HIA.

The proposed funding commitment to the County-wide HIA was also reported.

When this item had been considered at the Community Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2009, Members felt unable to support the

proposal on the information that had been supplied. The Committee was concerned that there could be a deterioration in the Handyperson Scheme for the people of Taunton Deane. Accordingly, it was agreed to inform the Executive that the Handyperson Scheme should remain at Taunton Deane until proven to be unnecessary.

The Strategy and Corporate Manager, Simon Lewis, reported a communication from Ms Viv Streeter of Supporting People which confirmed that a series of performance targets would be set to ensure that current levels of service received under the Handyperson Scheme were maintained.

Members of the Executive also felt that it would not be economic to continue funding Taunton Deane's own Handyperson Scheme alongside one provided by the HIA.

Resolved that the proposed funding commitment to Supporting People for the County-wide Home Improvement Agency be agreed.

Appendix B

Extract from the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 13 October 2009

48. Call-In relating to the Proposed Commissioning of a County-wide Home Improvement Agency

The Chairman asked Councillors Mrs Court-Stenning and Hayward to state their reasons as to why they had called in the decision taken by the Executive at its meeting held on 16 September 2009 (Minute No.82/2009 refers) in relation to the proposed commissioning of a County-wide Home Improvement Agency.

Councillor Mrs Court-Stenning felt it was proper that the decision had been called in for the following reasons:-

- (1) Insufficient weight had been given to the views of the Community Scrutiny Committee, despite cross-party support for those views;
- (2) The Chairman had directed the Executive to accept the advice of the Officer, despite this not being a delegated matter and therefore being the responsibility of Members and in particular the Executive; and
- (3) The report had been flawed as there was no Equalities Impact Assessment and no Service-user consultation.

Councillor Hayward expressed his support and felt that the Community Scrutiny Committee had been concerned that there could be a deterioration of the Handyperson service and this was not given consideration at the meeting of the Executive on 16 September 2009. He also felt that the Portfolio Holder for Housing had exerted pressure on the Committee and that the role of an Executive Member was to listen and comment and not sway the decision of the Scrutiny Committee.

Members re-affirmed that they had wanted evidence that the service that would be provided, would be equal to or better than the current service. They also wanted assurances that response times and charges would not change and the same work could be carried out. It was confirmed that the same areas of work would be covered, but the detail of the response times and charges would form part of the tender process.

Members also felt that monitoring of the service would be important and this would be carried out by Supporting People.

The Chairman explained that the role of the Scrutiny Committee should be respected and that as a Committee, they were not convinced that the replacement service would match or improve upon the current service. The Handyman Service could be re-considered at a later date when it could be shown that the proposed Home Improvement Agency was an improvement to the current service.

Resolved that the decision made by the Executive on 16 September 2009 be referred back for further consideration as the Community Scrutiny Committee wanted the Executive to be completely satisfied that the County-wide Home Improvement Agency was at least equal to the service currently provided.