

# Scarborough and Ryedale - joint local authority 'White Rose' home improvement agency

## Good practice themes

1. Alternative ways of working in a rural area by intelligent use of technology
2. Working relationships with occupational therapists
3. Regulatory Reform Order including delivery of mandatory adaptations and Added Value works simultaneously

## Context

In 2012 the neighbouring local authorities of Scarborough Borough and Ryedale District in North Yorkshire, through a partnership agreement, established the White Rose home improvement agency to serve both of their geographical areas (combined population of c.113,000).

This largely rural area has an older, energy inefficient housing stock occupied by an ageing population. The home improvement agency (HIA), based in Scarborough town, currently has fourteen staff and, to reflect the population profile, operates with a focus on older and disabled people which requires effective working arrangements with Adult Social Care colleagues at County level.

Currently the HIA service offer includes financial assistance with major and minor adaptations (and related repairs), handyperson service, a wellbeing service, energy efficiency advice/assistance and winter warmth campaigns.

Unusually it also facilitates access to a web based list of vetted gardening contractors able to provide a wide range of gardening services for those householders willing and able to pay. This is a service that many older and disabled people are known to appreciate as it helps support their wish to remain living in the home for as long as possible.

Due to the geographically dispersed population the HIA uses a network of local/ regional contractors, operating within a framework arrangement, who have all signed up to schedules of rates and are allocated on rotation taking account of the location of the householder. Costs achieved have been very competitive and in addition the local connection is popular with service users (and indeed local politicians) due to the associated social value of recycling monies within the local economy.

## **1. Alternative ways of working using technology**

In such a predominantly rural area there is a need to make the best use of the HIA staff time as there may well have been significant traveling time for officers getting to site. Field based HIA staff have been trained to provide a wide range of services and there is a need to capture and record information as swiftly and effectively as possible. All HIA staff making home visits use mobile devices which enables them to access the Case Manager system remotely. The devices support staff to create schedules of work, record service user and supporting evidence details to complete grant applications. The same arrangement is used for wellbeing assessments which automatically generate support plans and letters to householders to confirm matters arising from the home visit.

As provision of home adaptations remains a core service for the HIA effective working with occupational therapists at county level is of critical importance to the service user's experience. The HIA utilises Scarborough council's on line secure referral system from a wide range of acceptable sources and can be updated at key stages of the end to end process.

The occupational therapists can select their specific requirements based on the HIA service they are requesting. For example this could relate to a minor adaptation carried out through the handyperson service or major adaptation to be ultimately provided through the full agency service.

The White Rose agency is very motivated to deliver adaptations as quickly as possible to maximise the effectiveness of the intervention. The use of technology has enabled some modest but urgent interventions, such as minor adaptations, to be provided quickly, sometimes within two hours from initial receipt of a request from health or care professionals. This is because the mobile devices used by HIA staff can remotely pick up the request and, if they have the equipment requested on the vehicle, they can go to site immediately without the need to come to the office and collect work orders.

## **2. Working relationships with occupational therapists**

In respect of major adaptations, whilst the HIA's internal administrative processes have been streamlined, service users have in the past reported significant waiting times for the initial occupational therapist assessment. As the culture of the HIA is to provide interventions

quickly on a right first time basis a decision was made to develop options to assist occupational therapists in North Yorkshire County Council meet demand for assessments.

The two options consisted of:

1. Key HIA staff being trained as level 2 Trusted Assessors for basic equipment and relatively uncomplicated adaptations and
2. To appoint an independent occupational therapist during periods high demand when there was likely to be an unacceptable delay in initial OT assessments being carried out.

Costs for the independent occupational therapist sourced from the Northern Adaptations Consortium, would be met from the disabled facilities grant as a relevant professional fee.

Whilst there was some initial concern at county level about this proposal, discussions took place and, with appropriate reassurances provided, a pilot scheme was implemented. This proved successful and reduced waiting times. It also complements the open and transparent approach adopted by the HIA of advising householders on their options in progressing a grant enquiry. This includes readily available access to grant application forms, the legal right to make a formal grant application directly to the local authority for assistance and the HIA's ability to suggest independent occupational therapists to enable this to be done. Whilst the HIA would prefer householders to use their services in grant assisted schemes they respect the wishes They also provide advice on self-funding options and the agency service for works not carried out with grant assistance.

From March 2018 a part of the Better Care Fund DFG allocation is being used (in agreement with health and social care) to fund the basic cost of minor adaptations, small repairs carried out via the handyman service and the wellbeing service.

The financial impact and effect on service response times of the mandatory disabled facilities grant programme will be periodically reviewed. If it is not a viable proposal then the backstop position is that the County Council and the two local authorities will each fund a proportion of those costs from their own resources ie County council for minor adaptations and the districts for repairs and wellbeing service. This measured approach has helped to maintain the financial sustainability of key agency services in 2018-19.

### **3. Regulatory Reform Order home adaptations provision revised to combine mandatory adaptations and Added Value works simultaneously**

Since being established the HIA has developed a suite of assistance options with the councils that reflect local need and the characteristics of the housing stock. This has been made possible by top slicing the Better Care Fund DFG allocation to provide discretionary assistance (see below) some of which is provided simultaneously with the mandatory grant. The scope of such assistance is wider in Scarborough than Ryedale as the Better Care Fund allocation is significantly higher, £1.34 million and £0.54 million respectively.

Unless stated otherwise full details of discretionary options and associated terms and conditions available in Scarborough are set out in the following link [www.scarborough.gov.uk/disabledfacilitiesgrants](http://www.scarborough.gov.uk/disabledfacilitiesgrants).

In summary the main areas of provision are:

- **Fast, efficient provision of smaller adaptations** – Means testing removed for mandatory adaptations where the scheme cost was below £5,000 (also available in Ryedale)
- **Emergency adaptations for health related cases** – up to £30,000 and not means tested to help safe discharge to home from hospital, terminal illness, where the applicant cannot access hospital appointments, dialysis or day care without adaptations or the current circumstances impose considerable risk of injury for service users and their carers.(also available in Ryedale)
- **Discretionary assistance**– up to £15,000 but only in cases of households eligible for mandatory grant and where alternative funding sources are not available with assistance available for:
  1. Insulating a home or providing double glazing where a disabled facilities grant includes the provision of a new heating system to meet the assessed needs of the disabled person,
  2. Addressing category 1 hazards especially damp and excess cold,
  3. essential structural repairs,
  4. Undertaking electrical repairs to a home where a new level access shower or stair lift is being installed,
  5. Measures to improve safety and security, repairs to pathways and removal of trip hazards
  6. Top up assistance for adaptations above the grant limit
  7. Replacement of existing adaptations at the end of their lifespan

In cases which involve tenants in the private rented sector the landlord must agree to meet 50% of the cost of discretionary works.

- **Discretionary adaptations** – up to £10,000 to assist carers, adaptations for people with dementia/Alzheimers and for people with behavioural difficulties. Eligible works are not prescriptive but can include soundproofing to improve the quality of life for carers, safety features and highly specialised bathing equipment. Carers do not have to be disabled themselves but must be caring for someone who would be eligible for mandatory grant
- **Relocation Assistance** – up to £5,000 for removal expenses and disconnection or connection of services irrespective of whether the move is to a more suitable owner occupied or rented property. An application for adaptations can then be made for the new home

The recent increases in the local Better Care Fund DFG allocations, whilst modest from a national perspective, have enabled an ambitious and still evolving suite of services and forms of assistance to be developed by White Rose HIA.

Currently there is no waiting list for the HIA services but the uncertainties of demand and available funding in the future has meant that the adopted adaptations assistance policy includes a points based prioritisation system which takes account of a variety of factors. This is considered to be a fair way of administering adaptations assistance should the funding situation become less favourable.

The HIA has an outward looking approach and is keen to learn from good practice elsewhere so has recently become a member of the Northern Adaptations Group. The agency are keen to form partnerships with a range of organisations. For example they deliver the adaptations service for Yorkshire Coast Homes who contribute up to £3,400 towards adaptation costs in relevant cases. The HIA also receives contributions towards adaptations to tenant's homes on a more ad hoc basis from other social landlords.

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