

Report to Cabinet
09 September 2020
Report of Head of neighbourhood housing services
Subject Home improvement team and disabled adaptations service

Item

8

KEY DECISION

Purpose

To consider the home improvements work provided by Norwich City Council and to seek approval to enhance the service for council tenants as part of a tenure neutral approach.

Recommendations

To approve:

- 1) That the current assistance for council tenants is enhanced with a suite of grants mirroring those offered for private sector residents, specifically:
 - Disabled Facilities Grants
 - DFG Top Up Grant
 - Hospital Discharge Grants
 - Preventing Hospital Admission Grants
- 2) That the operating model of the home improvement team is replicated for council tenants so that they are offered the same high level of service that residents in the private sector receive.
- 3) Immediately Create one FTE Caseworker post and one FTE Senior Caseworker post initially on a 2 year fixed term contract drawing from the existing HRA capital budget for disabled adaptations.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority People living well

Financial implications

The proposed additional staffing costs are estimated to be £25,000 in 2020/21, £100,000 in 2021/22 and £75,000 in 2022/23. These costs will be capitalised and can be met by a forecast underspend in the HRA disabled adaptation budget for 2020/21 and will be incorporated into the HRA capital programme for disabled adaptations for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Ward/s: All Wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Harris - Deputy leader and social housing

Contact officers

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Report

Background

1. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWB). They have been established to promote integrated working among local providers of health and social care. The Care Act 2014 established the Better Care Fund (BCF) which is a pooled budget to facilitate this integration with the intention to keep patients out of hospital.
2. The HWB must develop a local plan on how the BCF will be spent.
3. Local authorities have a duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants to adapt people's homes to help keep them living independently. Money that would have traditionally come into the city council as a direct grant has now been pooled into the BCF in recognition of adaptations helping to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and care home placements.
4. Adaptations in council homes are carried out separately from this integrated work.
5. In the city, the Council's home improvement team provides grants and loans to residents who own their own home, privately rent or are in housing association properties to help them to remain living independently.
6. This is a service makes use of disabled facilities grants (DFG) which are provided to adapt people's homes. Combined with other forms of help, including grants to facilitate hospital discharge and to prevent admission to hospital, smaller emergency grants and large home improvement loans all aim to allow residents to remain in their homes and live as independently as possible.
7. DFGs have been available for the past 30 years and the criteria for awarding a grant and what it can be used for are set out in statute and cover works up to £30,000.
8. DFG's are means tested and applicants may be required to make a contribution towards the cost of any works. Norwich City Council provide a separate discretionary grant that pays the first £5,000k of anyone's contribution regardless of income (£5,000k being the average cost of an adaptation).
9. The work of the home improvement team is nationally recognised as best practice for providing timely and holistic services to residents being highly commended in 2019 for the 'best adaptation service' at the national Healthy Home's awards.
10. Council tenants can request adaptations to their home from the city council when an adult social services occupational therapist has undertaken an

assessment and made a recommendation for adaptations to be provided. Adaptations are approved using the council's policy on adaptations.

11. The work is currently arranged by NPS Norwich (NPSN) and carried out by Norwich Norse Building Ltd (NNBL).
12. The independent living team which incorporates the home improvement team was established in September 2019 with the aim of offering a tenure neutral service to all residents including city council tenants and allowing tenants to access the high performing service that residents in the private sector currently experience.
13. When this team was established an occupational therapist (OT) post was created to assist with the delivery of adaptations for council tenants.

Timely delivery of adaptations

14. Delivering adaptations in a timely manner is vital as they help people retain or give back their independence, reduce the need for costly care packages and avoid unnecessary hospital admittance or care home stays.
15. Someone receiving an adaptation to their home can expect to stay out of hospital or the need to have a care home placement for five years more than if they did not have an adaptation.
16. In Norfolk, benchmarking is carried out at a county wide level on the speed that residents get the help they need in the form of adaptations. This is measured from when people first ask for help to when the help is practically completed.
17. The average timescale across the whole of Norfolk is around 240 days. The timescale for council tenants is 220 days, whereas the timescale for private sector residents in Norwich is 100 days.

The current service provision for Owner Occupiers and those renting in the private sector:

18. The city council adopted the Norfolk wide 'Integrated Housing Adaptation Team' (IHAT) model in July 2013. This co-locates adult social services staff including an occupational therapist within a single team delivering disabled adaptations for residents.
19. The Home Improvement Team comprises of City Council employed Team leader, Administrator, Technical officers and Case Workers, as well as an Occupational Therapist and OT assistant practitioner employed by Social services.
20. Caseworkers provide holistic help and support for private sector residents needing an adaptation, supporting them at a difficult time, advocating on their behalf and ensuring they fully understand the process and assistance available. They also provide support to all other officers involved in the

process of delivering an adaptation, ensuring the adaptation is delivered in a timely manner and freeing up professional officers (such as OT's and Technical Officers) time.

21. The team has access to a capital budget of £1.44m for 2020/21 and through this, applicants have access to several different grants including:

- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
- Hospital Discharge Grant (a non means tested grant of up to £10k to aid discharge from hospital)
- Preventing Admission to Hospital Grant (a non means tested grant of up to £10k to prevent admission to hospital)
- Safe at Home Grant (A £2.5k grant for vulnerable people to provide small adaptations or emergency repairs)
- DFG top up grant (A grant for any applicant of a DFG to pay up to the first £5k of a calculated contribution.

The DFG is a statutory grant delivered by all local authorities in England and Wales. The other grants are discretionary grants exclusive to the residents of Norwich.

The funding for these grants comes via the county council through the Better Care Fund. The money awarded to the city council is exclusively for DFGs in the private sector however the grant can be spent on other forms of assistance (except council homes) as long as the county council is in agreement.

22. The customer journey for clients using the service is relatively straightforward particularly for DFGs. For the most part residents are supported and adaptations are delivered through the single team within the city council.

The current service provision for council tenants:

23. Contractual arrangements and historic working practices mean that that a different arrangement oversees the delivery of adaptations for tenants with a number of different organisations involved, namely:

- The city council – who may be the entry point for a tenant asking for help
- Norfolk adult social services – produce adaptation recommendations through their occupational therapists
- NPS Norwich – review requests for adaptations, oversee the budget and instruct and oversee Norwich Norse Building Ltd (NNBL)
- Norwich Norse Building Ltd – survey, design and install the required adaptation

Unlike the private sector which has a single team helping residents, a tenant may have contact from a number of different people from the

organisations listed with the risk that support is disjointed, or is not tenant focussed.

24. A case working approach is not used to support the delivery of adaptations to council tenants and although the NNBL resident liaison officer will cover some aspects of the caseworker role, this is limited to liaison around the logistics rather than supporting the tenant throughout the process.

25. The recommendations in this report seeks to resolve this.

26. The budget for adaptations in council tenancies is £750,000 in 2020/21. By developing a tenure neutral approach there is a real opportunity to increase the support and adaptations made available to tenants.

27. Council tenants have access to a variety of works which are grouped as follows:

- Major Disabled Adaptions which are not means tested and follow the process described above
- Minor adaptions (such as grab rails) which are non means tested and are very straightforward for tenants to access

Future Demand

28. With an ageing population demand for home adaptations is increasing. In Norfolk, OT recommendations have risen by 37% over the past year

29. Demand for adaptations for council tenants appears to be higher than in the private sector. For example, for the first 3 quarters of 2019/20 OT assessments have recommended an adaptation for 146 private sector residents compared to 187 for council tenants. This is summarised below, with a comparison with the service to private residents.

30. The chart below highlights the differences between adaptations carried out by the council in our own properties and the private sector

	Private Sector	Council Tenants
Demand for adaptations*	146	187
Budget	£1.44m	£750k
Timescale**	Circa 100 days	Circa 220 days
Awaiting installation pre Covid-19	0	Approximately 40
Awaiting installation now	13	Approximately 80
<p>* When comparing like for like period of first 3 quarters of 2019/20</p> <p>** From someone asking for assistance to practical completion of an adaptation</p> <p>*** Based on Pre Covid figures</p>		

Conclusions.

31. Although the adaptations service for council tenants compares favourably with the rest of the county, there is an opportunity to bring it on par with the service we provide to people in the private sector.

Timely adaptations improve people's independence. A tenure neutral service employing case workers and adopting the model currently used in the private sector will help ensure that the speed of adaptations is improved, our approach is more person centred and easier for people to access.

Recommendations for council adaptations

It is recommended that:

32. The current assistance for council tenants is enhanced with a suite of grants mirroring those offered for private sector residents, specifically:

- a. Disabled Facilities Grants
- b. DFG Top Up Grant
- c. Hospital Discharge Grants
- d. Preventing Hospital Admission Grants

33. The operating model of the home improvement team is replicated for council tenants so that they are offered the same high level of service that residents in the private sector receive.

34. To enable this change to the service, it is recommended to increase the HRA capital budget for disabled adaptations from £750k to £1.5m for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. This will be included within the budget proposals to be submitted later in the year, for approval by Council in February 2022.
35. Immediately Create one FTE Caseworker post and one FTE Senior Caseworker post initially on a 2 year fixed term contract drawing from the existing HRA capital budget for disabled adaptations.

Integrated impact assessment



NORWICH
City Council

The IIA should assess **the impact of the recommendation** being made by the report

Detailed guidance to help with the completion of the assessment can be found [here](#). Delete this row after completion

Report author to complete

Committee:	cabinet
Committee date:	09 September 2020
Director / Head of service	Bob Cronk/ Lee Robson
Report subject:	Home improvement team and disabled adaptations service
Date assessed:	16/06/2020

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Finance (value for money)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Means testing tenants will be tenure neutral and ensure the most vulnerable are helped while those who can contribute will do so. This will ensure the council offers a tenure neutral service
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	There will be minor changes to existing call scripts and processes
ICT services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Minor changes to Civica processes will be required
Economic development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Financial inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The means test ensures this however all tenants will be able to access up to £5k of discretionary grant to pay towards any calculated contribution
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Safeguarding children and adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Caseworkers work closely with vulnerable residents and are trained to be aware and alert to any safeguarding concerns.
<u>S17 crime and disorder act 1998</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Human Rights Act 1998	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Health and well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It will help to increase the numbers of people who are able to continue to live healthy, independent, lives in their own homes

	Impact			
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Relations between groups (cohesion)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Advancing equality of opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Natural and built environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Waste minimisation & resource use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pollution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy and climate change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments

	Impact			
Risk management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Recommendations from impact assessment

Positive

The recommendations set out in this report should positively ensure tenants contribute when appropriate to their adaptations while ensuring the most vulnerable are helped. It will ensure more people are able to continue to live independently in their own home and increase the potential of identifying safeguarding concerns.

Negative

There are no negative impacts

Neutral

Issues