

## **SUPPORT FOR HOME SECURITY CHECKS, ADVICE AND SECURITY MEASURES FOR VULNERABLE RESIDENTS**

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**Portfolio:** Safer Communities

**Ward(s) affected:** All

### **Purpose of the Report**

To outline the current services that are available to vulnerable residents from a range of partner agencies to advise and assist on home security issues. It is recognised that more can be done to promote the schemes, specifically the handy person service so that vulnerable people are aware of the support available. The report outlines why some vulnerable people may not take up the current services and proposes ways in which this may be improved with further financial investment. Ultimately the report is seeking a decision, in principle, to implement additional measures to support the most vulnerable households.

### **Recommendations**

- (a) **Do Members wish to proceed with the principle of the additional home security measures summarised in the report?**
- (b) **That subject to members decision on whether to proceed:**
- (i) **that Members note and support the advertisement of the Handypersons scheme.**
- (ii) **that officers report back with options to reduce the handyperson charging policy to make the home security material provision and / or labour charge free or 50% subsidised.**

### **Reasons**

The report raises awareness of the current services and, in particular, cites reasons why vulnerable people may choose to not proceed on the basis of the advice given. In considering this information it is appropriate that Members consider whether further subsidy should be provided to encourage more people to invest in home security measures.

#### **1. Background**

1.1 The new administration has identified that helping vulnerable people, including the elderly is a key priority. Community safety and fear of crime also remain an important theme for the council and partner agencies. In relation to home security there are two key issues: firstly the standard/condition of the property and secondly, the likelihood of the resident being targeted by a criminal. The Council seeks to address these issues by responding to resident requests for assistance and proactively targeting areas of high crime in partnership with the Police.

#### **1.2 Improving Housing Standards including security**

1.2.1 The Council is required by the Housing Act 2004 to ensure dwellings comply with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This is the mechanism by which officers assess homes to ascertain if the property may place the occupiers at risk of harm. The HHSRS includes a hazard of entry by intruders; however, it is very unlikely that many

properties in the Borough trigger this criteria. Through the current Housing Assistance Policy the Council provides grants up to £5,000 to home owners on benefits for the remediation of category 1 hazards that are likely to cause significant harm in the immediate future. The Council also regularly takes enforcement action against landlords to remediate these problems, sometimes requiring the Council to complete works in default.

1.2.2 The Council currently works with Revival Home Improvement Agency to offer a handyperson scheme. This service is commissioned by the County Council and enables vulnerable residents (over 55's) to access advice and support to:

- Undertake minor repairs such as fitting grab rails/shelves.
- Checks and installation of Yale and mortice locks and spy holes.
- Check and installation door chains, dead bolts and window locks.
- Checks to external security lighting.
- Provide a fire risk check.
- Provide a home safety check and falls assessment.

The service is subsidised in that the visit for the checks is free, however, the resident has to pay for the materials fitted and £10 per hour for labour. The service is available to owner /occupiers and tenants, including Aspire tenants.

1.2.3 Officers are currently working with a wide range of agencies to help vulnerable people before injury or potential death occurs in a new project called Let's Work Together. This project is still being developed, however a key aspect of this project will be the referral of vulnerable people to agencies who can assist. This will see an increase in referrals for home improvements which given the vulnerable nature of the clients will place additional demands on the housing capital budget for funding for home repairs.

### 1.3 Targeted area approach to reducing distraction burglary

1.3.1 The second key issue is related to the resident of the property, whereby criminals target particularly vulnerable residents to talk their way into the home. Through the Safer Community Partnership the Council supports a programme of home visits with Police Community Support Officers and partner agencies including Aspire Housing, Fire Service and Victim Support. Officers undertake a targeted approach to areas of crime to visit vulnerable people particularly the elderly to discuss the risks of cold callers and to introduce minor home security improvement measures.

1.3.2 Measures include memo minders to remind vulnerable people - particularly elderly residents with poor memory - not to open the door to strangers. Personal Attack alarms which can be used inside and outside of the home and door/window alarms for use in the home or on external buildings such as sheds. Where fitting is required this is undertaken by the Council's Neighbourhood Wardens.

## 2. Issues

### 2.1 Improving advice and home security to those wanting support

2.1.1 Whilst the targeted advice listed above is appropriate the Council needs to be able to highlight what services are available to vulnerable residents living in all areas of the Borough.

2.1.2 Officers have started to plan for the marketing of the handyperson scheme operated by Revival Home Improvement Agency, highlighting the scope for security measures. An article

is being prioritised in the next Reporter to highlight the benefits of the scheme from a resident's perspective. A new leaflet has been designed and improvements are being made to the website to ensure that residents know where to go to access the scheme.

- 2.1.3 The main issue with the current service is that customers have to pay for the materials and labour costs. This applies whether the works are for security measures or for home repairs. Approximately 50% of customers don't go ahead with the security measures as they don't want to spend their money until the lock breaks, similarly many people choose to spend their money on other purchases rather than investing in preventative security measures.

### 3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Considering the issues listed above Members may wish to consider if additional funding should be allocated to the handyperson scheme to assist vulnerable residents on benefits where they may find it difficult to cover the costs of the materials. The eligibility for free measures for simplicity could be that used for the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) assessment:

- Income Support
- Guaranteed Pension Credit (Not the Pension Savings Credit)
- Income-Based Jobseekers' Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit (not a reduction in Council Tax for single person or disabled person, but the Benefit which pays all or part of the Council Tax bill)
- Working Tax Credit with an income below £15,050.00 pa
- Child Tax Credit with an income below £15,050.00 pa
- Income related Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) not contributory ESA

- 3.2 The subsidised materials could be granted for free to those on benefits or could be, say, 50% funded. Subsidising the materials may encourage some vulnerable people to invest in security now rather than wait until the lock/window/door etc is broken.

### 4. **Proposal and Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 4.1 Given the expected demand, a budget of £10,000 may be considered necessary should the charging policy be altered. This could fund locks, dead bolts, spy holes, door chains and external security lighting. Community Safety Officers have also recommended that the scheme includes wireless intercoms to enable residents to talk to visitors and to check who they are prior to opening the door to let them in. Subject to Members views Revival will seek to purchase suitable devices. Officers are not recommending that the scheme funds the installation of CCTV on individual properties as this is not felt to provide the most effective support for vulnerable people.

### 5. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 5.1 Delivery of handyperson services to vulnerable people clearly contributes to these strategies, in particular to contribute to the corporate priority of Creating a Cleaner, Safer and Sustainable Borough.

### 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 The Council has a duty to assess homes for the health and safety rating system and can enforce the remediation of hazards. As outlined in this report it is very unlikely that hazard by entry of intruder would be triggered and the Council does not normally take action through

serving notice on vulnerable elderly homeowners.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed on the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy under which the handyperson scheme operates. Increasing subsidy to the handyperson scheme will enhance the support specifically to the equality group of age.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 Clearly the level of funding required to improve home security for vulnerable people is difficult to predict as the extent of security measures to be installed can vary greatly. Should the new administration wish to offer subsidised provision of minor materials officers would suggest that a guide budget of £10,000 would be necessary to pilot the scheme. This may fund free measures in approximately 100 homes or if a 50% subsidy was implemented then 200 vulnerable people could be assisted.
- 8.2 Should Members wish to subsidise the materials to the extent referred to above the budget would need to be found from within the Council's capital budget.
- 8.3 In considering if and how to subsidise the service, members may wish to consider altering the £10 per hour labour charge. This charge has been set across the County and is considered reasonable for vulnerable people. Members may however choose to subsidise this further, however it should be noted that this would reduce the number of vulnerable residents assisted. It is also worth noting that this report considers subsidising the home security element of the handyperson scheme. If Members are minded to consider reducing the labour charge then it may be appropriate to consider the labour charges for works to assist people to remain in their own home such as the installation of grab rails. If this was not considered as a whole then there would be charges for some aspects of labour but not for others, making the scheme more complex to administer and explain to elderly residents.
- 8.4 In conclusion there would be no direct implications arising from this report. Nevertheless should members resolve to proceed then it is likely that there will be a modest demand placed on the capital programme; this matter would be addressed in a future report.

9. **Major Risks**

There are no major risks.

10. **Key Decision Information**

- 10.1 The handyperson scheme is available to all vulnerable elderly residents across the Borough.

11. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 11.1 The Housing Capital Programme which includes the continued support for Revival Home Improvement Agency was approved by Cabinet in February 2012. Whilst this does not directly fund the handyperson scheme, the service is complementary to the Home Improvement Agency services.

12. **List of Appendices**

There are none.

13. **Background Papers**

There are none.