

To: Cabinet Member for Housing

Date: 10 March 2023

Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)

Title of Report: Approval of a bid to run the South and Vale Home Improvement Agency on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council and to provide assistance to deal with their Disabled Facilities Grant application backlog

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To approve the submission of a bid for the contract to deliver the South and Vale Home Improvement Agency and approve the provision of assistance to South and Vale to deal with a backlog of applications for Disabled Facilities Grants.(DFG)
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith – Cabinet Member for Housing.
Corporate Priority:	Foster an inclusive economy, Deliver more affordable housing, Support thriving communities & Pursue a zero carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendations: That the Cabinet Member resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the submission of the bid for a South & Vale Home Improvement Agency. 2. Delegate authority to the Director of Communities and People to submit the bid and enter into a contract up to a value of £1.8m in the event that the bid is successful. 3. Recommend to Council that the budget is amended to take into account the provision of the HIA service to deliver the contract. 4. Approve that the HIA assists South and Vale Council in reducing their backlog by carrying out 100 DFG cases and delegates approval to the Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety to enter into a contract up to a value of £200k. 	

Appendices – (all commercially sensitive not to be published)	
Appendix 1	Home Improvement Agency – ITT document
Appendix 2	Home Improvement Agency – Specification document
Appendix 3	

	Home Improvement Agency – Potential Staff Structure and draft Budget
Appendix 4	Risk register
Appendix 5	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 6	Legal and Financial Implications

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council has been running an in-house Home Improvement Agency (HIA) since the 1990's. Oxford City's HIA and our Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy are held nationally as examples of good practice. The Home Improvement Agency is regularly asked by government and Foundations (the government approved HIA national body) to present at various events. We were again recognised by winning the Foundations Contractor of the year and Sustainability Adaptation service of the year in December 2022.
2. The Home Improvement Agency service in Oxford City is funded from pooled budget arrangements between top tier local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) via the Better Care Fund (BCF). The City Council has a contract with the County Council to deliver a range of services including a caseworker for advice, a handy person for small repairs and carrying out Disabled Facilities Grants.
3. The government allocates each district council a Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) budget as they have the statutory responsibility to provide eligible applicants with a DFG. The DFG budget forms part of the BCF and our Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy reflects the BCF's aims of achieving better health and wellbeing outcomes and the reducing avoidable admissions to hospital agenda.
4. The HIA charges a 15% fee for handling DFG applications and the service is funded from the contract with the County Council and DFG fees. In 2022/23 the DFG allocation from the government is £1,421,433.

South and Vale HIA

5. South and Vale Council's HIA has been run by an external provider for many years and on the 10th February 2023 the County Council released a tender for a new three plus two year HIA contract which is due to start on 1st June 2023. Bids have to be submitted by noon on 13th March 2023. Oxford City Council previously submitted a bid in 2018 for the same contract in which we were unsuccessful, and the proposal is to put in a refreshed and renewed bid for the new contract.
6. The contract is effectively the same as our existing Oxford City's HIA, but covers the South and Vale Council area. The aims are to:
 - enable those Oxfordshire residents in need of support to maintain their independence, health, and well-being at home for the foreseeable future. This applies to individuals of any age.
 - This aim will be achieved through the repair, adaptation, and improvement of Residents' homes, so that the person is able to remain in their own home in a safe, secure, and accessible environment.
 - Activities provided under the Contract include: the facilitation of adaptation; repairs, maintenance services, preventative initiatives; providing information and

advice on accessing adaptations privately; as required including support for funding options; signpost or refer to appropriate community-based services.

7. The DFG allocations from the government are £1,550,448 to South Oxfordshire District Council and £1,638,973 to the Vale of White Horse District Council.

Backlog of DFG cases

8. Due to a number of reasons a backlog of adaptation work has built up in the South and Vale Council area over the last year, which has left disabled and vulnerable clients waiting for their adaptation. The County Council and South and Vale Council have separately requested assistance from Oxford City Council to help out with 81 high priority DFG cases over the next few months to help alleviate this. They also estimate that up to 15 urgent cases (e.g. end of life care) may also need to be allocated to the HIA to deal with.
9. The proposal is that the HIA will charge DFG fees on each job to cover the costs of taking on this additional workload.

Other implications

10. The work in South and Vale will positively support the hospitals, and health services in Oxford City as these all work with South and Vale clients. Preventing people from needing to enter the health system and enabling people to get home from hospital and stay there safely will help reduce backlogs and relieve pressure across the whole of the health system. The works carried out under this policy also often result in property improvements which contribute to the carbon reduction agenda.

Financial implications

11. Please see Appendix 6.

Legal issues

12. Please also see Appendix 6.

Level of risk

13. A risk register is attached as Appendix 4.

Equalities impact

14. An Equalities Impact assessment (EIA) has been completed and attached as Appendix 5. The impacts are positive as the policy directly relates to assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community.

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Background Papers: None