

27 March 2014

About Cambs Home Improvement Agency

When did we start?

Officially set up from April 2013, Cambs HIA brings together 3 Home Improvement Agencies- a partnership between South Cambridgeshire, City and Huntingdonshire councils.

Our main base is at South Cambridgeshire District Council offices in Cambourne. We have satellite bases at Hobson House in the City and Pathfinder House in Huntingdon.

What do we do?

We repair, improve and adapt homes to enable people to continue to live independently, working very closely with councils, their private sector housing grants programmes, county occupational therapists and a wide range of other organisations. We work with people of all ages-including disabled children, older people, those who are terminally ill and people who are living in poor housing conditions.

Awareness about Home Improvement Agencies is generally not well developed. We are hoping to do more to raise awareness about our work in the coming year. There is more information on our website www.cambshia.org and in our publications. Hard copies of these will be available at the CLHP meeting.

Do we work in all types of housing?

We currently work mainly with people who own or privately rent their homes. However, adaptations in most of the social housing in Huntingdonshire are done via Cambs HIA and we also do some work for other Registered Social landlords throughout our area. Adaptations in council owned homes in Cambridge City and South Cambs are undertaken by council's directly.

What have we delivered?

In 2012-13, we did 266 Disabled adaptations and 59 Repairs Assistance jobs.

75% of the disabled adaptation jobs we did were for access to suitable bathing facilities or to the upstairs of a person's home. The majority of our work is with older people. Typically, there are a smaller number of major works (e.g. extensions) and these are usually for disabled adults or children.

We undertook capital works totalling nearly £2.5M in 2013/14

In the current year, by 5 January we had completed 320 grant funded Disabled Adaptations and 60 Repairs Assistance jobs. Our total available capital budget for the year is £3.65M.

National & local picture

The demand for adaptations continues to rise due to longer life expectancy, medical advance. Plus more pre-term babies, children and people with long term conditions now living independently.

There is some research evidence and plenty of personal stories to evidence the benefits of improving housing conditions and doing disabled adaptations.

In Cambridgeshire, the number of older people is forecast to rise until steadily until 2021. Most are in good health but the number of frail older people is increasing.

Currently, people in Cambridgeshire typically wait around 14 weeks for an OT assessment. The process is bureaucratic, complex and does not evidence a person centred approach. Although some of this probably cannot be

avoided there is much more we can do to improve it (especially if there is Member support at County and district level and support from CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups)).

A national review of DFGs (Disabled Facilities Grants) was shelved. However, there is widespread recognition that the current system needs fundamental review. The Local Government Network commissioned independent research by Astral Consulting that reported in June 2013. In summary the recommendations included:

(1) integrated delivery of DFG services (2) development of a local Adaptations Strategy (3) system shift towards helping people make their own choices (4) increase of funding from equity release and by registered social landlords (5) Investment by CCGs in revenue support for housing related preventative services including Handyperson schemes (NOTE: this has historically happens in Cambridgeshire & is due to be re-considered by the Health & Well-Being Board in April).

About Our Better Care Fund bid

The Cambs HIA bid is for “A suitable Home for Life” project. Proposing transformational change based on existing services.

- to proactively assist people to plan for and meet their need for safe, adapted, well maintained, warm and suitable housing (including access to a wide range of information support and services)
- to develop a much more strategic joined up, open and comprehensive approach to delivering suitable housing conditions in a shared way, including cost sharing.

Summary of key outcomes:

- Development of an approach that is focussed on the individual, personal choice and decision-making.
- Radical review of the adaptations process-quicker, more streamlined, more person centred, easier to understand
- Co-location of specialist housing OTs with the HIA (Home Improvement Agency)
- Pro-actively plan to deliver a county wide HIA operation (Cambridge City, South Cambs, Huntingdonshire, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire)
- Ensure close co-ordination between the HIA and county wide Handyperson/Healthy Homes schemes in future.
- Develop a comprehensive adaptations strategy
- Closer alignment of discretionary and top-up funding policies across statutory agencies
- Closer co-ordination of aids, equipment, telecare & medicare facilities and other additional complementary services identified
- Development of support and services for frailer older people
- The impact of a successful bid will depend on the commitment and level of active involvement of key partners

Other features:

- There is experience elsewhere in the country to draw own
- There is evidence of the benefits of our proposals, although more research is needed
- The project meets most of the BCF outcomes
- The project can be implemented quickly using an existing partnership accountability model (but expanded)

Three case studies

Disabled Facilities Grant for a child in Huntingdonshire.

Child W, aged 2, has a condition called Dandy Walker Malformation. He has significant global development delay and complex seizure activity. He lives with his parents in a privately owned 3 bedrooed terraced property.

An Occupational Therapy assessment determined that major adaptations were required to the property to provide a Through Floor Lift, changing bench, 4 hoists and building works to accommodate the lift and provide an en-suite bathroom.

The total costs were £38,000. An application for a maximum DFG was successful and the rest of the funding was sourced independently by the parents as loans from other family members.

Difficulties due to the construction of the property were identified (due to the load bearing required by the hoists). Cambs HIA employed a structural engineer to carry out a survey and make recommendations. Substantial pre-installation requirements were identified including coordination of 4 different contractors. The agency also sought to minimise disruption for the family and to keep costs down a second hand changing bench was sourced reducing the overall costs by almost £3,000.

Disabled Facilities Grant (with complications) for an older adult in Cambridge

Mr M, aged 71, lived in a 3 bedroomed house with his wife, 4 daughters and a son. Mr M suffered with severe cognitive impairment in addition to other health problems.

A feasibility study (Cambs HIA Surveyor and Occupational Therapist) was carried out identifying the need for a ground floor extension to provide a ground floor bedroom, and bathroom extension (for washing and sleeping facilities with carer assistance).

Plans were submitted and permission was received. However the plans had to be changed following an objection under the Party Wall Act by the immediate neighbour. Negotiation and amendment to the planning permission resolved this. Then the Surveyor had to liaise with Anglian Water to establish that the drainage to this property were not a Public Sewer

A start date for the work had to be cancelled when the client was admitted to intensive care and remained there for more than 6 weeks. Due to his illness Mr M's needs had changed and the Occupational Therapist was required to revisit her original assessment and make changes to accommodate these. The local authority was able to contribute discretionary funding as the total costs of work exceeded the maximum mandatory grant of £30,000

Repairs Assistance. Adult in South Cambs.

Miss R was referred to Cambs HIA by an advocate from Women's Aid. She lived in a pre-fabricated building. Miss R was on benefits and was struggling to meet the costs of her energy bills. The property was inadequately insulated and the heating was via a calor gas fired boiler that was more than 15 years old and kept cutting out. A surveyor visited the property to establish the work that should be prioritised, as the local authority could only provide a maximum grant of £5,000.

An agreement was reached with the client that a new oil fired combination boiler should be installed. The costs exceeded the maximum grant available so the CHIA Caseworker discussed this problem with the client and her mother. It was suggested that the costs could be reduced if the existing tank on the mother's property could be shared. An agreement was reached and signed to enable the works to be completed within the budget available.

How to contact us

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