

**PAPER NO.2**

**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF 14<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2011**

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**Status:** For resolution  
**Title:** Transfer of the Home Improvement Agency to Mears Home Improvement Ltd  
**Originator:** Elaine Bird – Health & Enforcement Service  
**Where from:** Management Board.  
**Where to next:** Implementation

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1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the transfer of the Home Improvement Agency Anchor Staying Put to Mears Home Improvement Ltd, to authorise the Council to a 12 month contract with Mears Home Improvement Ltd and to approve an options analysis to be carried out during 2011-12 to ensure the sustained delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants and Private Sector Housing Renewal Programme.

2 Recommendations:

2.1 **It is recommended that Members:-**

**i) Approve the renewal of the contract with Mears Home Improvement Ltd for a further 12 months, and**

**ii) Approve that an options analysis to be undertaken during 2011-12 to identify a more sustainable delivery model for the provision of the Disabled Facilities Grants and Private Sector Housing Renewal Programme.**

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1 In 2010 Anchor Trust announced that it was moving away from the provision of Home Improvement Agencies as part of its core function and in September 2010 Anchor Trust confirmed their intention to transfer existing agencies to Mears Group.

3.2 The Home Improvement Agency – Anchor Staying Put – Harborough and Melton was transferred to Mears Group in January 2011.

3.3 The new agency maintained all of the core functions of Anchor Staying Put with the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants and Private Sector Housing Renewal Programme for the Council and in addition the new agency, Mears Home Improvement Ltd, has been awarded a three year contract to deliver a Countywide Handyman service throughout Leicestershire.

- 3.4 The current contract with the agency expires at the end of March 2011.
- 3.5 The Business Planning process has reduced the core funding to the agency, however there is sufficient funding for 2011-12 to enable the existing contract to be renewed for a 12 month period to allow for a more sustainable delivery model to be developed.

#### 4 Impact on Communities

- 4.1 The role of the Home Improvement Agency is to work with the most vulnerable households in the community to assist them in arranging for repairs and adaptations to be carried out to their properties and to enable them to live as independent lives as possible. The removal of this service will have an impact on this sector of the community as the grant process can be lengthy and complicated with different agencies involved with the process.

#### 5 Key Facts

- 5.1 Since 1999 Anchor Staying Put has been administering the Home Improvement and Disabled Facilities Grant programme for Harborough District Council. The Agency provides technical and case worker support to vulnerable people to enable them to remain in their own homes by either improving their living accommodation or carrying out essential adaptations for disabled occupants.
- 5.2 In April 2010 the Council's revised Housing Renewal Policy came in to operation which introduced a range of financial assistance to enable vulnerable home owners who are unable to access commercial funding to carry out essential repairs and improvements to their property. Whilst there is some grant aid available, the majority of funding for home repairs is now repayable either in the form of a loan or equity release.
- 5.3 The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) is a mandatory service and grant aid is available to carry out essential adaptations to a disabled occupant's property to enable them to remain within their own homes. The grants are means tested for all applicants with the exception of those on income related benefits and where works are required for a disabled child. The maximum grant available is £30,000.
- 5.4 In 2010 Anchor Trust, who operate the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) for the Council announced that they wanted to move away from Home Improvement Agencies as part of their core function. Throughout the year the Trust was in discussion with several interested parties with a view to transferring the HIA. In September 2010 Anchor Trust confirmed their intention to transfer the majority of their Home Improvement Agencies to Mears Group Plc.
- 5.5 Mears Group Plc provides repairs, maintenance and adaptation services to over 500,000 social homes in the UK as well as providing home care to 20,000

people and currently undertakes adaptation and improvement work where necessary to properties occupied by vulnerable people.

- 5.6 Anchor Staying Put – Harborough and Melton transferred the existing agency contract to Mears Group in January 2011 with a view to renewing the contract for a further 12 month period in April 2011. The agency is now called Mears Home Improvement Ltd.
- 5.7 From April 2011, Mears Home Improvement Ltd. has been awarded a 3 year contract to provide a Countywide Handyman Service throughout Leicestershire. This service will provide up to three hours free service to vulnerable households to undertake general small scale repairs and maintenance work around the home.
- 5.8 Mears Group Plc sees that the role of HIAs is likely to expand in the future to cover a broader range of services that support independent living, including home safety and signposting of services such as domiciliary care to Individual Budget holders. The Personalisation Agenda, set out in the recent Department of Health Adult Social Care Green Paper, means individuals will be taking greater responsibility for decisions about their own care. Mears Group anticipates that HIAs will offer a vital tool for helping people to get the care they want and enabling them to live independently for longer.
- 5.9 The potential to expand the role of the HIA in the future has also been identified during a review of older person's housing related support throughout the County. One of the recommendations from this review is to explore the possibility of establishing a Countywide HIA to provide a "common thread" across the county achieving economies of scale, better value for money and a consistent approach throughout. The proposed timeframe for the establishment of a Countywide HIA is 2013.
- 5.10 Following an assessment by the Audit Commission in 2009 a review of the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants across the County was undertaken to improve service delivery. As a result of this process service standards have been developed which set out time frames for the completion of various types of adaption works. The service standards are challenging and will require all of the agencies involved in the process working together to ensure year on year improvement for the service user. In addition the review is looking at the procurement of building work to ensure value for money. The County Council has undertaken a procurement process for the provision of stairlifts and the DFG review group is looking at other common works such as the provision of level access showers to identify where savings can be made.
- 5.5 Prior to the Business Planning process the agency was funded through an annual grant of £10,000 along with £15,000 to fund a part time Technical Officer and a further part time Technical Officer post is seconded to the agency from Council staff. However following the Business Planning process funding for the annual grant and the part time Technical Officer was withdrawn. Funding has been subsequently identified to support the annual

grant to the agency for 2011-12 by utilising funding from the Decent Homes Grant which is provided by the Homes and Community Agency. Funding the agency this way for a further 12 month period will enable negotiations to take place with the agency to try and identify a more sustainable way of maintaining this service.

## 6 Legal Issues

- 6.1 The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants is a mandatory service. Whilst it is not mandatory to provide financial assistance to enable home owners to carryout repairs to their properties, the Council does have a mandatory duty to ensure that homes are free for category one hazards in accordance with the Housing Act 2004. If assistance is not available through the HIA to encourage home owners to carryout essential repairs it could result in the Council having to take more enforcement action against vulnerable home owners.

## 7 Resource Issues

- 7.1 Funding has been identified through the Decent Homes budget to support the annual grant to the agency for 2011-12. Throughout the next 12 month period negotiations will be undertaken with the agency to identify a more sustainable way of maintaining the service.

## 8 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes

- 8.1 The Equality Impact Assessment on the provision of a HIA concluded that this service would have a positive impact on client groups such as the elderly and disabled residents in the district. However a reduction in the resources to the HIA or on the Capital Budget for the provision of financial assistance will have a detrimental impact on the service delivery.

- 8.2 The Initial Equality Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix A.

## 9 Impact on the Organisation

- 9.1 The continued support of the Home Improvement Agency will enable the Council to work towards the objectives set out in the Council's Housing Strategy – A Home for All.

## 10 Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 None identified

## 11. Carbon Management Implications

- 11.1 None identified.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory. The additional resources a HIA can provide will ensure better business continuity and service delivery. The introduction of service standards for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants will provide a challenging framework but should result in improved timescales for the implementation of adaptation measures which will reduce the likelihood of challenge by grant applicants on the local authority for the provision of this service.

### 13 Consultation

13.1 The Portfolio Holder has been advised of the progression of the transfer of the Home Improvement Agency.

### 14 Options Considered

14.1 The following options have been considered –

- **Cease providing grant assistance to disabled residents and vulnerable homeowners.** This option was not considered viable as the Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory and the provision of assistance to vulnerable households to carry out repairs to their property reduces the enforcement burden on the local authority.
- **Bring the service in house.** As a result of the Business Planning process the funding for the Technical Officer has been reduced which would have a significant impact on the service delivery and time frames for the completion of works and business continuity.
- **Renew the contract with Mears Home Improvement Ltd for a further 12 month period.** In addition to local authority funding, a HIA receives funding through Supporting People and whilst the reduction of funding from the Council to support a part time Technical Officer will have an impact on the service delivery, this additional funding from Supporting People will ensure a higher service provision through the provision of extra resources. The Private Sector Housing Renewal policy introduced loans and equity release products developed by Anchor Staying Put. Mears Home Improvement Ltd has agreed to continue providing these products to vulnerable homeowners.

### 15 Background Papers

15.1 N/A

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**Previous report(s):** n/a

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure:** N

**Ward Members Notified: N**

**Appendices:** *list any appendices here including title and filename in brackets (e.g. Performance Data 2010 (perfddata.doc)).*

**A. Initial Equality Impact Assessment**