

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL – PEOPLE

held in the Council Chamber,  
Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

31<sup>st</sup> March 2011

commencing at 6.30p.m.

Present: Councillor Graves (Chairman)

Councillors: Beaty, Davies, Dunton, Hart (Ex Officio),  
Mrs. A. Hill, Holyoak and Mrs. Robinson.

Also in attendance:  
Councillor Mrs. Ackerley (Portfolio Holder for Housing Infrastructure and Planning).

Officers: E. Bird and E. O'Neill.

MINUTES

RESOLVED that: the Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Panel for People held on 3rd March 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs. A. Hill declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the agenda item Private Sector Housing – Disabled Adaptations and Private Sector Renewal. The reason for the interest was stated to be that she had a friend who received funding via this scheme.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING – DISABLED ADAPTATIONS AND PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL

E. Bird, Environmental Health Team Leader, introduced this report to the Panel. The purpose of the report was to update members on the level of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and the Private Sector Renewal Programme; to advise on the future of the Home Improvement Agency and to advise on the outcome of the County Wide review of the DFGs.

At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Commission, on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2010, a request was made to update members of the Scrutiny Panel for People on the level of demand for the Disabled Facilities Grants.

Members were asked to note: the level of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants and the Private Sector renewal Programme, The current situation with regard to the Home Improvement Agency, the outcome of the Countywide review of the Disabled Facilities Grant service.

Following discussion of the report, the Panel NOTED that:

- (i) Disabled Facilities Grants are means tested (except if the applicant is in receipt of benefits or is a child).
- (ii) Since 1999 the Home Improvement Agency – Anchor Staying Put has been administering the Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grant programme for Harborough District Council. The Agency provides technical and case worker support to vulnerable residents applying for assistance. In early 2010 Anchor Trust, who operate the Home Improvement Agency, announced that they wanted to move away from Home Improvement Agencies as their core function. Throughout 2010 the Trust had been in discussion with several interested parties with a view to transferring the agency and in January 2010 Anchor Staying Put was transferred to Mears Group and they took over the existing contract between the agency and the Council. This contract expires on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

- (iii) Disabled Facilities Grants are the only mandatory grants available and there is always a very high demand for this service. Generally the expenditure is greater than the original budget allocation.
- (iv) previously 60% of the budget for DFGs came from specific Communities and Local Government grants with local authorities funding the remaining 40%. From 2008-09 the 60:40 DFG funding split was removed and local authorities were given a DFG allocation without the requirement to provide the match funding. Historically Harborough District Council has always funded DFGs beyond the 40% requirement.
- (v) the original approved budget for 2009-10 was £256,000 however during the year a further £125,000 was identified to top-up the budget in an attempt to clear some of the back-log of grant applications. Whilst the budget was increased staffing resources to process the applications remained the same. The nature of the grant process means it can be very difficult to control the process. The grant application process can be complex and there are a number of external factors which can influence the length of time it takes to approve a grant. Once a grant has been approved the applicant has 12 months to carry-out the work and once again delays can occur which are outside of the control of either the Council or the Home Improvement Agency consequently whilst there was an under-spend of £20,000 in 2009-10 there was a carry-over of committed work to the value of £92,000 into the next financial year.
- (vi) typical alterations made to homes via DFGs include the creation of level-access showers and the installation of stair lifts.
- (vii) some of the alterations made to properties via DFGs are structural in nature and require the submission of a Building Regulations application. In such circumstances the client is not required to pay for their Building Regulations application.

The Panel thanked the Officers for the production and presentation of the report and RESOLVED to note its contents.

#### MATTERS OF SPECIAL URGENCY

None were received.

As this was the last Meeting of the Scrutiny Panel for People, during the 2010/11 period, the Chairman thanked the Members of the Panel for their work and ended the Meeting at 7.03p.m.