

**Equality Impact Assessment on
the Future Delivery of
Adaptations Support Services.**

Summary

This document sets out the process undertaken by the five district and borough councils in East Sussex along with East Sussex County Council to procure a streamline value for money adaptations support service, providing a consistent cross county approach. The results of the procurement exercise did not achieve the desired outcome in the west of the county and therefore further options for future delivery have been assessed and a plan for the way forward identified. An equality impact assessment identified impacts which may arise primarily to older and disabled clients. The future plan includes measures to mitigate any negative impacts of the procurement decision.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current Home Improvement Agencies' (HIAs) service level agreements expire on 31 March 2011. The service currently costs in excess of £1 million across the County funded jointly by the District and Borough Councils and East Sussex County Council through Supporting People, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The district and borough's funding is provided through a percentage fee, payable on each individual adaptation and also through a core sum.
- 1.2 The East Sussex Health, Housing, Social Care and Probation Strategic Forum have agreed to use the current financial contribution to commission a new floating support service for older people living in their own homes during 2011 -12. The aim of this service is to reach and assist a greater number of people than those assisted through the existing Home Improvement Agency provision.
- 1.3 All partners are concerned about funding cuts following the Comprehensive Spending Review and the continued availability of core funding. Because of this uncertainty and examining best practice the commissioning authorities concluded that they will pay for technical and support assistance to access Disabled facilities Grants (DFGs) on a fee only basis. Taking this approach enables flexibility in respect of government funding which is provided on a yearly basis and therefore will not commit the local authorities to year on year core fund costs. Whilst the existing HIAs have undertaken the majority of the technical and support services for people requiring disabled adaptations, customers have always had the choice to, and frequently do, independently commission their own support service from other providers in the market place which is payable on a fee only basis.
- 1.4 In addition, the payment of on a 'fee only' basis will release the core sum to fund a Housing Solutions Service. The aim of this new service is to identify alternative options more appropriate to the person's particular situation where an adaptation is not considered the most suitable option or the best long term housing solution. Furthermore in assisting people to move to more appropriate accommodation will help to manage the

demand that would have otherwise have been met by the capital grants budget.

- 1.5 The commissioning partners considered that they could achieve better value for money by procuring a new adaptation support service through the OJEU procurement route. With the cessation of the private sector renewal funding, previously delivered through the now disbanded Regional Housing Board, from April 2011 and the move towards sustainable loans through a third party partner, it was considered that the need for a support service for repairs commissioned by the district and boroughs was limited.
- 1.6 It was anticipated that the provision of a newly commissioned adaptations service in the east and west of the county would provide more consistent access to adaptations for people within East Sussex. In addition the provision of a housing solutions service alongside the adaptations service will mean people can make better informed housing choices and be supported through the process. This will also result in better use of the housing stock in each district and borough council and provide more capacity within the capital DFG budget to deliver a greater number of adaptations.
- 1.7 The tender outcome however resulted in no award of an adaptations support service in the West of the County. It was considered that the tender result failed to provide a value for money service for the districts and boroughs or the people requiring adaptations.
- 1.8 Following this decision the districts and boroughs will be working to ensure that there will not be any diminution of service to disabled adults and children wishing to make adaptations to their home through the disabled facilities grant process.

2. Statutory Duties

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970:

- 2.1 The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, as subsequently amended, places a duty on social service authorities, i.e East Sussex County Council to:
 - identify the numbers of disabled people in their area, and publish the help available to them (Section 1); and
 - arrange practical assistance in the home, and any works of adaptation or the provision of additional facilities designed to secure greater safety, comfort or convenience (Section 2).
- 2.2 Despite subsequent legislation, including the introduction of mandatory DFGs, this duty remains. However, although the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, requires social service authorities to arrange assistance and other organizations this may be through others, such as

a local housing authority providing a grant (or another form of assistance they may choose to offer), or acting as landlord in relation to its own stock, or a Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

- 2.3 Social Service authorities may discharge their duties by the direct provision of equipment or adaptations, by providing loan finance to a disabled person to enable them to purchase these facilities, or by providing a grant to cover or contribute to the costs of provision. If however the customer is in need of help and support they must provide services to them and ensure that they have the facilities they require. They may make charges for their services, where appropriate, using their powers under section 17 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983. They have a duty to ensure that the assistance required by disabled people is secured. This includes those cases where the help needed goes beyond the payment of a DFG, or where a DFG is not available for any reason, or where a disabled person cannot raise their assessed contribution.

**Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996:
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant:**

- 2.4 Since 1990, local housing authorities have been under a statutory duty to provide a grant to disabled people to enable them to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes. Housing authorities are required to administer this grant, consulting the welfare authority where this was a different authority.
- 2.5 The obligation to provide DFGs to eligible applicants for eligible work (subject to means testing) is primary, absolute and remains irrespective of whether other assistance is provided by a social services authority or other body such as an RSL.
- 2.6 Eligible work can include:
- facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the the dwelling,
 - making the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with him
 - facilitating access by the disabled occupant to a room used or usable as the principal family room
 - facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or usable for sleeping
 - facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a lavatory, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
 - facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility

- facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a washhand basin, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility
- facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant
- improving any heating system in the dwelling
- facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat
- facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling in order to enable him to care for a person who is normally resident and is in need of such care

3. Demographics

3.1 All recipients of adaptations support are registered or registerable as disabled. Analysis of DFG applicants identifies that between 70 and 80% are also of pensionable age and over.

3.2 Disability data is limited on a local level however it is identified that:

- Nationally there are over 6.9 million disabled people of working age. This represents 19% of the working population.
- Nationally there are over 10 million disabled people of whom 5 million are over state pension age.
- Nationally there are 770,000 disabled children under the age of 16. This equates to 1 child in 20.
- Nationally there are over 2 million people with sight problems. In the East Sussex region there are 2245 people registered blind and 2193 people registered partially sighted.

3.3 Residents with limiting long-term illness - census 2001:

Age Group Geography	All People	Aged 0 - 15	Aged 16 - pensionable age	Pensionable age and over
England and Wales	9,019,242	447,297	4,224,226	4,347,719
South East	1,157,619	61,093	500,823	595,703
East Sussex	88,983	4,010	35,079	49,894
Eastbourne	17,516	782	6,723	10,011
Hastings	16,698	953	8,333	7,412
Lewes	16,124	691	6,119	9,314
Rother	16,887	640	5,841	10,406
Wealden	21,758	944	8,063	12,751

3.4 In East Sussex in May 2010 there were 20,020 people claiming Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit of working age.

3.5 Age data from East Sussex in Figures:

Age group	65-74	75-84	85+	Total	Percentage
All people	57178	41581	19817	118576	
Males	26918	17759	6453	51130	43%
Females	30260	23822	13364	67446	57%

3.6 Residents by ethnic group in 2001 census:

Ethnic group						
Geography	All people	Percent in white ethnic groups	Percent in mixed ethnic groups	Percent in Asian or Asian British ethnic groups	Percent in Black or Black British ethnic groups	Percent in Chinese or other ethnic groups
England and Wales	52,041,916	91.3	1.3	4.4	2.2	0.9
South East	8,000,645	95.1	1.1	2.3	0.7	0.8
East Sussex	492,324	97.7	0.8	0.6	0.3	0.6

3.7 In 2008 East Sussex County Council commissioned an independent report by Foundations on the Home Improvement Agency services which identified the following data:

3.8 Only 4% of older people of East Sussex were able to access the HIA service during 2007/08.

- 85% were over 60 years of age.
- Most are in receipt of means-tested benefits and so are entitled to full grant assistance or handyperson services (where available)
- 95% were owner-occupiers.
- 2.4% of clients were from a BME background.
- Over half the enquiries received by HIAs result in some form of building job being carried out.
- 58% of jobs done were funded without recourse to a local authority grant (that is, they were funded by clients' own means or through charitable fundraising by the HIA).
- 95%+ of all the clients assisted with building works were classified as vulnerable, by reason of age, disability or income.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 Three Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) currently operate within East Sussex. Some of them have been in existence in the locality since 1990.
- 4.2 HIAs help predominantly home-owners and private sector tenants who are older or disabled to remain in their own home, and to continue to live independently. HIAs assist their clients to apply for local authority grants or loans needed to carry out the required repair or adaptation works. They also help to identify reputable local contractors to do the work and oversee the work. In addition HIA's provide a range of ancillary services including a handyman / small works service and gardening service.
- 4.3 Currently the agencies are funded by a combination of core funding and by a fee income on each case delivered either through the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) or private housing renewal assistance.
- 4.4 In 2008 East Sussex County Council commissioned an independent report by Foundations on the HIA services to assist in formulating decisions about the future direction of these services in East Sussex.
- 4.5 The report identified the following findings:
 - Just over £1m is provided for core revenue costs although there was very little stated allocation of funding streams for a specific purpose as well as a lack of clarity in funding due to the number and complexity of the funding streams themselves.
 - There are variations in the type of services which may be available in any one district or borough
 - The services provided by the HIAs are essentially a package of support aimed at delivering tailored solutions to the needs of vulnerable people seeking to improve, adapt or repair their homes. (The advice and information provided by the HIAs is supplemented by other countywide services such as Navigator Service, County Connect and now First Stop).
 - A large part of the work of the HIAs is assisting people to access Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). Their role in the DFG process is in three areas; form completion, a technical role and added Value (support, advocating, fund-raising where there is a grant contribution, debt and benefit advice and sign-posting to other services).
 - The HIA's provide a range of Handy Person /Small Works Services, funded mainly by Adult Social Care and the LAs, to undertake small repairs to the homes of eligible people. This is an area of work which has been expanding but the funding for this service tends to be short term and insecure.

- In practice the HIA's advice and support services are provided free of charge and the handyman services can be either free or chargeable. Grant funded work will be chargeable though this charge may be met by the local authority (as in the case of a DFG applicant) by allowing the fee to be added to the grant.
 - Overall, although 62% of the work by value comes from DFGs, only 13% of the jobs undertaken by the HIA were funded by a DFG.
 - All East Sussex HIAs show very high levels of customer satisfaction with typically more than 95% of clients being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service received. East Sussex HIA client satisfaction results are comparable with other HIAs in England.
- 4.6 Private Housing Renewal funding has historically been distributed through the Regional Housing Board to the authorities on a need basis. All the authorities in East Sussex with the exception of Wealden received varying levels of funding prior to 2008. However the funding for 2008 - 2011 was distributed on a bid allocation and the BEST authorities (East Sussex districts and boroughs and Brighton and Hove City Council) were awarded the largest allocation in the South East Region.
- 4.7 Whilst the largest proportion of this funding was directed to energy efficiency improvements, the HIAs in some of the areas benefited from funding allocated to help bring properties up to the Decent Home Standard. HIA's have traditionally also assisted householders access assistance from the local authorities for repair works to properties. It is recognised however that in most areas the HIA does not exist to deliver councils renewal programmes, with Disabled adaptations being the core work. In fact statistically well over 50% of council renewal programmes do not involve the HIA. In Wealden the number of clients commissioning support from the HIA to assist in securing assistance from the local authority has steadily declined. In 2007/8 56% of applications were assisted by the HIA, this reduced to 44% in 2008/9 and 33% in 2009/10. It is anticipated that in 2010/11 this will reduce below 30%.
- 4.8 Much of the Regional Housing Board's private housing renewal funding was targeted towards the provision of sustainable loans in order to create a recycling loan facility from a preferred third partner (South Coast Moneyline), working in partnership with 15 local authorities. This has initiated a move away from grants to a more sustainable form of loan and the prioritisation of ensuring those householders living in the worst conditions and in most need of help. This move away from grants to loans has seen a decline in demand for assistance in some areas.
- 4.9 In addition to the reduced activity in respect of repair work listed above, the Department for Communities and Local Government has announced that the funding for Private Sector Renewal will cease at the end of March 2011 as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. It is the view of the current coalition Government that owner occupiers are

primarily responsible for the upkeep of their own properties although there may have been circumstances when it has been right for the Government to intervene. Therefore local authorities now have greater freedom to prioritise and allocate budgets to support public services in ways which meet the needs of local people and communities. Some areas may decide to provide assistance to vulnerable private sector households, while others may prioritise other activity.

- 4.10 The Commissioning bodies have recognised the high cost of the current HIA service across the county identified in the Independent Foundations report. East Sussex local authorities are aware that the greatest need for assistance and support is in accessing adaptations which has resulted in a waiting list for DFGs in some areas.
- 4.11 As a result the Strategic Housing Steering Group has determined that the most utilised and valued form of support would be a new focused and streamlined adaptations support service. In addition the East Sussex Health, Housing, Social Care and Probation Strategic Forum agreed to withdraw their Supporting People funding from the HIAs in order to commission new services identified as strategic priorities for Older people.
- 4.12 During 2009 Supporting People undertook a consultation exercise on proposed housing support services for older people with stakeholders and service users. Consultation events were held with Service User Networks and a "consultation cafe" was held in each of the five districts and borough. The events were well attended by a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations, service users and potential users resulting in 803 people taking part in the consultation. In summary, the priorities included:
- a handyperson service,
 - a quick response adaptations service,
 - support with form filling and dealing with correspondence,
 - support to make a choice and realise housing options,
 - a flexible support service to adapt to people's changing needs.
- 4.13 The commissioning partners recognised that by 'removing' elements of the service currently provided by HIAs it could make the HIA model unsustainable. However it was identified that the capital adaptations budget (which accounts for the largest value of works undertaken through the agencies) was therefore potentially supporting the other services.
- 4.14 Discussions took place within the last year with the HIAs to inform them of the proposed countywide approach to commissioning a new adaptations support service. The HIA's were asked for their comments and input to the proposed draft adaptations support service specification which was amended as a result.

- 4.15 The commissioning partners considered that they could achieve better value for money by procuring a new adaptation support service through an OJEU procurement route for two providers across the county, one in the east of the county and one in the west.

5. Adaptations Support Service Commissioning

- 5.1 An open OJEU tender process was undertaken with the invitation to tender documents released on the 12th October 2010. A scene setting day was held on the 28th October 2010 attended by 9 potential bidders. Tenders were returned on the 26th November 2010.
- 5.2 An evaluation and interview panel made up from representatives of all the commissioning partners and a service user representative evaluated the tender submission documents and interviewed all the bidders. The tender was evaluated on the basis of 35% price and 65% quality. Bidders were asked whether they had a preference of delivery of the service in the East or West contract area.
- 5.3 Following the tender analysis second clarification interviews were held with the two preferred bidders to discuss delivery of programme and proposed costs.
- 5.4 In respect of the highest scoring tenderer for the East contract, the evaluation panel were satisfied with the guarantees and responses given in the interviews and clarification meetings and recommended the award of the "East" (therefore Hastings and Rother) portion of the contract
- 5.5 The evaluation panel however were not satisfied that the highest scoring tenderer for the West side of the county contract (Eastbourne, Wealden and Lewes) achieved value for money and therefore a decision has been made not to award a contract. It was apparent that a customer with a requirement for an adaptation could procure a more cost effective service in the market place and therefore offer better value for money. Under disabled facilities grant legislation customers are free to choose their own service provider and may be liable for a charge on their property through the grant conditions for such costs.
- 5.6 The evaluation panel also took account that awarding the contract at this level would have a significant negative impact through the loss of £91,000 per annum on the capital budget across the three authorities which would for example fund 20 - 25 level access shower adaptations.

6. Equality Impact assessments

- 6.1 Following the decision by the Strategic Forum to withdraw Supporting People funding from the HIAs in order to commission new services identified as strategic priorities for older people, an impact assessment was undertaken with each of the three existing HIAs in line with the Supporting People Decommissioning Protocol. The assessment focused

on the impact of decommissioning the HIAs in their existing form and commissioning a floating support service for older people but with the continuation of a new adaptations support service within the County.

- 6.2 The assessment identified the following concerns from the existing providers:
- That there was a risk that people wouldn't know where to go to for information and advice around repairs, maintenance and assistance to get the work done.
 - That a Floating Support Service may not focus on the fabric of the building which private tenure clients occupy.
 - That the Adaptations Support Service will only replace specifically the DFG element of the service.
 - There is a risk that service users are not effectively signposted to alternative sources of information and advice.
 - There will be a gap in the provision of advice and assistance with poor housing, disrepair and ongoing maintenance issues.
 - If there is no organisation providing advice and practical help in getting repairs etc. completed older and disabled people may to continue to live in inappropriate, insecure, damp, unheated or poor housing conditions. This will impact upon their physical and mental health resulting in increase need for GP services/hospital admissions.
- 6.3 In response to the above concerns, the district and borough councils always have provided advice on repairs and offered signposting to assistance and will continue to do so. The HIAs have on average assisted with less than 50% of private housing renewal work. The way forward section identifies actions to ensure there will continue to be access to information and advice.
- 6.4 The Equality Impact Assessment carried out on phase two of the Supporting People Commissioning Project has also been updated to take account of the impact of removing Supporting People funding from the HIAs on each of the equality strands.
- 6.5 Following the decision of the tender panel not to award the Adaptations Support Service in the west of the County, a further impact assessment was undertaken on the decommissioning of all HIA services, including support for adaptations in this area.
- 6.6 The assessment identified potential impacts on three equality strands. These included the elderly, disabled and BME population.
- 6.7 The foundations report identified that only 58 people from the BME community accessed the HIA services in 2007/08 and thought that this could lead to the assumption that the current arrangements are not as effective as they could be in targeting hard to reach clients, clients from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, and people living in more

rural locations. (Although the 2.4% of identified BME clients is equal to the ethnic proportions identified in the demographic data set out above in this report.) The report identified that the lack of capacity in the HIA sector means it can only deal in depth with clients who present with specific needs to be eligible for a LA grant or require a handy person service. The service is therefore limiting to the wider community.

- 6.8 In addition, East Sussex County Council identified through the BME Engagement Project (in East Sussex) that BME people in the local population including Gypsies and Travellers, have particular difficulty accessing public services due to lack of knowledge about what is available, communication problems with telephone based systems and a lack of culturally appropriate services. There were particular concerns in relation to accessing housing and housing related services.
- 6.9 Furthermore during the consultation cafés held by supporting people issues were raised that the BME communities were not being reached (culture and language). Concerns were highlighted particularly around access to information, especially BME, deaf people etc.
- 6.10 Consideration to mitigate any negative effects and ensure assistance and access to information with no diminution of service to customers is set out below with proposed actions identified in the way forward.

7. Consideration and Analysis

- 7.1 When the HIAs were established some twenty years ago the specialist knowledge and equipment available in the technical market was limited and clients benefited from the expertise the HIA could provide. However it is considered that the sourcing of contractors and technical support in the current market place is more accessible than before. Contractors and architectural firms now specialise in providing services to disabled residents. A diverse range of suitable equipment is now currently available. Access to advice is available through voluntary agencies such as the East Sussex Disability Association. Sign posting services are available through the Navigator Scheme, County Connect and First Stop in addition to signposting by the district and borough councils and East Sussex County Council.
- 7.2 In addition to these, the local authorities have always provided and will continue to provide advice on:
- benefits availability,
 - housing conditions,
 - accessing financial assistance where available,
 - energy efficiency,
 - administering the delivery of disabled facilities grants, and
 - sign posting to other voluntary and statutory organisations where appropriate.

- 7.3 The majority of contacts for adaptations to a property come via the Occupational Therapy service. In approximately 70% of cases these works are deemed to be 'straightforward'.
- 7.4 In the current market place, one could question whether there is there a need to use an agency to deliver works of a less complex nature, perhaps using a standard specification that meets the Occupational Therapists requirements? The HIAs currently undertake approximately 70% of the Council's DFG work. By reducing the need for technical support on just 20% of these straightforward cases it could result in an annual saving of just under half a million pounds which again could be re-invested to provide more adaptations.
- 7.5 The HIAs may consider that removing the more straightforward work would make it difficult to provide an effective service to those cases where there are difficulties. However again it is questionable whether it is right for straightforward cases (the bulk of the referrals) to subsidise the cost of the more complex cases?
- 7.6 There will naturally be cases when an agent is required, especially where the adaptation is complex in nature or even where the adaptation is straightforward but the person is considered vulnerable and it is recognised that they require additional assistance. However people have always had the right to choose their own provider and in a number of cases have done so. The ability to retain choice and control is extremely important for many people. In many cases the grant will result in a land charge on the person's property for the cost of any works in excess of £5,000 which would be required to be repaid should they move within 10 years. Value for money is therefore an important consideration.
- 7.7 In recent years there has been an upsurge in the development of handyperson services. During 2009/10 and 2010/11 Supporting People were given additional funding to deliver handyperson funding. This was delivered in the form of grants for older people and the evaluation showed the breadth of services available in the market place and the enthusiasm of householders to commission their own works.
- 7.8 Previously the HIAs have been instrumental in assisting DFG applicants fund raise their contribution to the cost of grant eligible work as determined by the statutory test of resources. With the change in the means test legislation and the increase in the number of passported benefits, which automatically result in 100% funding, as well as removal of means testing for children's adaptations (subject to the maximum £30,000 limit) this has reduced the number of applicants requiring this assistance. It is now estimated that some 90% of cases go through with no financial contribution being required at all.
- 7.9 Analysis of HIA versus local authority roles in other geographical areas has highlighted the potential duplication. Again, it would be considered reasonable to question whether using the HIA adds another layer of

bureaucracy which increases communication requirements, adds time delays and duplicates work, especially when the LA grant officer will be seeing the customer regardless and has to check that the work has been completed appropriately.

- 7.10 Not utilising an HIA could mean that more people would only have to deal with one single point of contact and may see this as a benefit. People are often confused by the different agencies involved and many do not appear to understand where the funding for the adaptations derives from. Many assume the HIA has funded the work. This has been evidenced in a recent lifestyle survey conducted by Wealden District Council in 2010 which surveyed all customers who had received a DFG over the last three years. A quicker more streamlined model where grant officers take more responsibility and the majority of the paperwork is completed at a very early stage would allow the customer to know where they stand relatively quickly and provide a direct line of communication. Equally it's clear that the area of customer support cannot be ignored and if there is a need for additional support, then alternatives need to be available. This could potentially be delivered by the proposed floating support service currently being commissioned by Supporting People.
- 7.11 It has become apparent that reviews of Home Improvement Agencies, their value, costs, benefits are taking place across the country. Some authorities have withdrawn core funding and the HIAs are expected to manage on the fee income alone. Counties neighbouring East Sussex are currently undertaking reviews. Procurement exercises in other areas have resulted in a nil award and further options are being considered.

8. The Way Forward

- 8.1 It must be recognised that an adaptation will enable or restore independent living, privacy, confidence and dignity for individuals and their families.
- 8.2 A good process should be based on the needs of the customer which is about making the right decisions early in the process and completing the work efficiently once it has been agreed that a DFG is the most appropriate solution for the individual. These could include:
- Ensuring OTs use standard recommendations and provide design briefs.
 - Grant officers could complete applications with customers on first visit where possible.
- 8.3 The local authorities are working together on joint protocols to provide a consistent streamlined approach to the DFG process across the county. It is recognised that some variations will exist between the areas particularly in those areas where a waiting list operates due to the high demand for adaptations. As there will be an adaptation support service in

the east of the county but not the west, monitoring will be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of these two different systems and monitor any impacts on the people involved. A full review of the impact will be undertaken in April 2012.

- 8.4 Where adaptations are straightforward applicants will be directed to an existing contractor list with a schedule and design brief or to an approved contractor list for example the East Sussex County Council's Buy with Confidence Scheme and Support With Confidence Scheme, Check a Trader, Guild of Master Craftsmen etc to appoint their own preferred contractor. For adaptations that require designing before submission to a contractor, free design services are available from some specialist equipment companies.
- 8.5 The government has removed the prescribed form regulations and the DFG application forms will therefore now be simplified with a shorter less onerous form for applicants in receipt of a passport benefit and clearer designed form for applicants providing financial information.
- 8.6 Where additional technical advice is required on straightforward cases and for complex cases, applicants will be signposted to existing approved lists of services, for example Royal Institute of British Architects, British Institute of Architectural Technicians and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. A reasonable fee will be included within the grant in respect of these cases.
- 8.7 Where clients have powered equipment installed, i.e stairlifts, hoists and are therefore responsible for the ongoing maintenance, in cases of hardship they will be directed to East Sussex County Council who may be able to assist in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.8 The council's will work with community BME groups to disseminate information and raise awareness of the assistance available. Joint working with BME supporting organisations, such as Sompriti, will also be vital to assist people from minority groups to access assistance. Wealden District Council have a supporting customer booklet which provides visiting officers with useful information on equality strands and communication methods. The copyright of this booklet will be offered to the other East Sussex district and borough councils.
- 8.9 The local authorities will continue to work with disability groups and senior forums to evaluate the ability and ease to access information and determine best practice and improvements which can be implemented to improve services.
- 8.10 For applicants requiring additional short term support, floating support services are currently available for applicants aged 16 - 64 and are currently being commissioned by Supporting People for people aged 65 years plus.

8.11 The service provides a named floating support worker for each service user who operates on a face to face basis delivering an outreach service empowering service users to do things for themselves. This ensures a service is based on need not age and can reach the whole community to achieve agreed outcomes.

8.12 In particular service users will be supported to for example:

- maximise their income including claiming appropriate benefits and grants
- fill in forms and deal with authorities and other correspondence
- manage and maintain the property they own
- engage with private landlords and managing agents
- minimise energy consumption
- change utility and insurance providers to reduce outgoings
- access a handyperson service
- access housing advice to explore all housing options when independence is threatened
- find a more suitable home and arrange the move
- access support for carers

8.13 Handyperson services were highlighted by older people as a priority during the Supporting People consultation. As previously mentioned a successful handyperson grant project was delivered through Supporting People. Adult Social Care have funding for handyperson services and plan to adopt a similar model of delivery. Early analysis showed that 30% of the applicants heard about the grant through the Navigator scheme, 25% from Social Care Direct, 16% from friends and family and 16% from voluntary organisations. 75% of the applicants were already known to Adult Social Care. Numerous private handyperson services exist plus the local authorities may wish to consider working with voluntary organisation such as Age UK to deliver such a scheme in the area.

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