

# Report

**Subject** : Provision of a Handyperson Service for the Council's Tenants

**Report to** : The Cabinet

**Date** : Wednesday 28 May 2008

**Cabinet Member for Housing:** Councillor Ian Tomes

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## 1. Report Summary:

The purpose of this report is to consider the possible introduction of a Handyperson service for the Council's tenants.

## 2. Background:

2.1 The provision of a Handyperson for the Council's tenants is one of the Council's political priorities. It is a service offered by a number of other local authorities and housing associations which it is believed would be popular with tenants, and offer a useful and trusted source of help with small repairs and improvements. A Handyperson service for private tenants and owners is already run by Age Concern in Salisbury.

2.2 Below are some of the services which a Handyperson service could offer:

### General work

Wall tiling to kitchen or bathroom (additional to any wall tiling provided and maintained by the Council)

Fitting coving

Hanging curtains

Fitting curtain rails

Putting up shelves

Putting up picture

Fit letter basket

Fit floor tiles or lino

Clear a loft

### Security

Fit keysafe

Fit spyhole

Fit door chain

Fit mortice lock

### Mobility aids

Fit extra stair handrail

Fit grab rail



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### **Electrical**

Change light-bulb (this service will only be offered to elderly people, or people receiving disability living allowance, and will be subject to the Council's discretion and convenient location of an operative). The bulbs supplied by the Council at cost would be low energy bulbs unless there are exceptional health reasons why they are not suitable. The operative could offer to change other standard light bulbs in the property in high use areas for low energy ones while at the premises, which would support the Council's environmental policies.

Change fuse to an appliance

Change plug

Fit doorbell

### **Plumbing**

Plumb in washing machine

### **Decorating**

Painting

Stripping wall-paper

Wall-papering

### **Gardening**

General clearance of an overgrown garden

Cut grass

Weeding

General maintenance e.g. edging or sweeping leaves

Clear path

Power wash path or steps

Repair gate or fencing

Fit bracket for hanging basket

**3. Charging for the service** - The amount to be charged is a critical feature of the service. The idea would be to offer a trusted service that tenants can afford. It is therefore proposed that the service should be subsidised, and that the level of subsidy should be based on tenants' ability to pay, with two rates, one for tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit, and a higher rate for people not receiving benefit. While there are various models for charging that could be considered, using ability to pay is probably the fairest. In order to ensure that all appropriate costs are recovered, and avoid the costly exercise of chasing small debts which may not be paid, the Council would insist that payment due is made in advance of providing the service.

- 3.1 Free service for tenants receiving Housing Benefit** – it is proposed that people receiving Housing Benefit should be offered a service in which labour is free for up to 4 hours work, and they should pay only the cost of materials. In booking the work, priority would be given to people receiving Disability Living Allowance or over 60. The Council would reserve the right to limit the amount of work to 4 hours a year per household depending on the demand for the service. An exception to the 4 hour limit on work may be made, for example for decorating or gardening work, at the Council's discretion.
- 3.2 Charged service for tenants not receiving Housing Benefit** – it is proposed that tenants not receiving Housing Benefit should pay £10 per hour plus the cost of materials, for up to 4 hours' work. Again priority would be given to people receiving Disability Living Allowance or over 60. An exception to the 4 hour limit on work may be made for decorating at the Council's discretion.
- 3.3 The cost of the service** –

Please see the appendix for a summary of the financial considerations.

4. **Staffing:** It is proposed initially the service will be provided by re-organising the work of the existing Council operatives to free up some of their time. If the demand for the service justifies it, one or two additional staff will be recruited, and that their time would be organised so that there is a concentration on providing a gardening service in the summer and decorating during the winter.
5. **Issues for consideration:** In proposing the Handyperson service, account has been taken of the service offered locally by Age Concern to private tenants and owners, and the aim in this proposal is to offer the Council's tenants a similar service.
6. **Consultation Undertaken:** A draft of this report will be taken for comment to the Tenants' Panel and the Sheltered Housing Forum to seek their comments which will be reported to Cabinet.
7. **Recommendations:** In order to meet this political priority, it is proposed that the Handyperson service should be introduced.
8. **Background Papers:**  
In preparing this report research was done to look at the services offered by other housing organisations already operating a Handyperson service.
9. **Implications:**
  - **Financial:** contained in the appendix to the report. It is proposed that the Council will seek a funding contribution from the Community Safety Partnership and Primary Care Trust, although nothing has been agreed at this stage.
  - **Legal:** The provision of a Handyperson service offers positive benefits to the Council's tenants and has no significant legal implications. A Handyperson service is already operated by many other areas. The Handyperson service should not seek to make a profit, and the charging arrangements would be clear. In terms of Equality and Diversity issues, providing a Handyperson service would offer a cost-effective and trustworthy service to vulnerable people.
  - **Human Rights:** No impact except the positive impact of providing a Handyperson service would achieve equity for a group of the Council's tenants, with those private tenants and owners who receive a similar service from Age Concern.
  - **Personnel:** It is proposed that the work of the Handyperson would be carried out by the equivalent of 2 additional members of staff if the volume of work justifies this. The level of work would be assessed, and initially done by existing operatives if there is little demand, and additional staff only taken on if necessary.
  - **Climate Change:** No significant additional impact, and the fitting of low energy light bulbs could have a positive benefit.
  - **Council's Core Values:** The proposal for a Handyperson meets the Council's core values of support for disadvantaged people and excellent service.
  - **Wards Affected:** All wards.

### Cost of the Service – Proposal for a Handyperson Service

It is proposed that the cost of the service should be limited by stipulating that the work would initially be spread among the existing Council operatives. Capacity for the Handyperson work among the operatives would be created by sub-contracting additional work as required. If there were sufficient work to justify it, one or two additional operatives would be employed subject to the approval of Wiltshire County Council under the transitional arrangements. County approval may also be needed to acquire new equipment to provide the service.

If the time of available staff is filled in providing the service, a waiting list will operate. To ensure that best use is made of the service, some jobs like changing of light bulbs would only be done if there were an operative in the relevant area anyway, and bulbs would only be changed for elderly or disabled tenants, who would be prioritised generally in operating the scheme.

The cost of the service would depend on the level of demand, and the spread of work between tenants receiving housing benefit or disability living allowance, and those not in receipt of these benefits. If demand is limited, the work might be done by spreading it among the existing direct labour force, in which case the cost would consist of having to sub-contract additional work to create capacity, the cost of providing new equipment for the gardening element, and the extra administration costs of estimating work and raising invoices where appropriate. If the demand is more significant, additional employees would have to be recruited, with the additional expense of providing and maintaining a vehicle for them. In the scenarios given below the cost of materials is excluded, since as this cost will be recharged in full, the heading is cost-neutral. Some of the figures are broad estimates due to numerous variables. The figures given are the annual cost.

#### Scenario 1

Limited demand for service. Work distributed among existing operatives. Work done exclusively for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance

	Income	Expenditure
	Nil	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £5,000 in the first year, then £2,000 in subsequent years
		Administration cost of invoicing for materials – Estimated - £5,000
Total	Nil	£30,000 in the first year, then £27,000

**Estimated Overall cost** – First year £30,000, and then £27,000 per annum in subsequent years

**Scenario 2-**

Limited demand for service. Work distributed among existing operatives. 50% work for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
	Charged work – Estimated – Say 15 operatives, able to spend 2 hours a week on the service for 45 weeks a year at £10 an hour- £13,500, 50% chargeable, = £6750	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £5,000 in the first year, then £2,000 in subsequent years
		Administration cost of invoicing– Estimated - £5,000
Total	£6,750	£30,000 in the first year, then £27,000 per annum

**Estimated Overall cost** - £23,250 in the first year and then £20,250 per annum

**Scenario 3-**

Medium demand for service. 1 extra operative employed. Work exclusively for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
	Nil	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
		Employment of new operative - £26,000
		Purchase of new vehicle - £10,000 in the first year, then £2,000 per annum to cover depreciation and running costs
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £10,000 in the first year then £4,000 per annum
		Administration cost of invoicing for materials – Estimated - £10,000
Total	Nil	£76,000 in the first year, then £62,000

**Estimated Overall cost** - £76,000 in the first year, then £62,000 per annum

#### Scenario 4-

Medium demand for service. 1 extra operative employed. 50% Work for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
	Charged work by existing operatives – Estimated – Say 15 operatives, able to spend 2 hours a week on the service for 45 weeks a year at £10 an hour- £13,500, 50% = £6,750	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
	Charged work by new operative - say 14 hours a week x 45 weeks x £10 an hour - £6,300	Employment of new operative - £26,000
		Purchase of new vehicle - £10,000 in the first year, then £2,000 per annum to cover depreciation and running costs
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £10,000 in the first year then £4,000 per annum
		Administration cost of invoicing– Estimated - £10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13,050</b>	<b>£76,000 in the first year, then £62,000</b>

**Estimated overall cost - £62,950 in the first year, and then £ 48,950 per annum**

**Scenario 5**

High demand for service. 2 extra operatives employed. Work exclusively for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
	Nil	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
		Employment of 2 new operatives - £52,000
		Purchase of 2 new vehicles - £20,000 in the first year, then £4,000 per annum to cover depreciation and maintenance
		Administration cost of invoicing– Estimated - £15,000
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £15,000 in the first year then £6,000 per annum
<b>Total</b>	Nil	£122,000 in the first year, then £97,000 per annum

**Estimated overall cost** - £122,000 in the first year, and then £97,000 per annum.

**Scenario 6**

High demand for service. 2 extra operatives employed. 50% of work for tenants on Housing Benefit/Disability Living Allowance.

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
	Charged work by existing operatives – Estimated – Say 15 operatives, able to spend 2 hours a week on the service for 45 weeks a year at £10 an hour- £13,500 – 50% - £6,750	Additional work given to sub-contractors to free up existing operatives' time – Estimated £20,000
	14 hours a week x 2 new operatives x45 weeks x £10 an hour - £12,600	Employment of 2 new operatives - £52,000
		Purchase of 2 new vehicles - £20,000 in the first year, then £4,000 per annum to cover depreciation and maintenance
		Administration cost of invoicing– Estimated - £15,000
		Additional equipment – cost of purchase, maintenance and depreciation Estimated – £15,000 in the first year then £6,000 per annum
<b>Total</b>	£19,350	£122,000 in the first year, then £97,000 per annum

**Estimated overall cost** - £102,650 in the first year, and then £77,650 per annum.