

HOME STRAIGHT SERVICE

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 7 February 2023

Report of: Sarah Robson, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer People and Places

Status: For information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary:

This report provides information on the Home Straight Service, an initiative to help those with Hoarding Disorder. The service is provided as part of Town and Country Housing Association's Home Improvement and Support Team and is funded at a district/borough level with six Councils selecting to fund the service for the residents in their area.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Sharon Donald, Housing Strategy Manager, Extension 7131

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

- a) To note the details of the report and information regarding the Home Straight Service
- b) To endorse a report being presented, for information, to the Housing and Health Advisory Committee (7 February 2023)

Reason for recommendation:

The report is for information only.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Home Straight Service is part of Town and Country Housing Association's Home Improvement and Support team that also includes a Hospital Discharge Team including Health and Housing Coordinators and a Handy Person Service.
- 2 The Home Straight Service began in Tunbridge Wells almost 5 years ago following observations made by Health and Housing Coordinators that many patients had cluttered or hoarded properties that needed to be cleared to provide a safe home environment for them to be discharged to.
- 3 Following on from the inception of the service in Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks District Council joined the following Councils' in accessing this service:-
 - Dartford Borough Council
 - Gravesham Borough Council
 - Thanet District Council
 - Folkestone and Hythe District Council
 - Dover District Council

4 Hoarding Disorder

Hoarding Disorder leads to an ongoing difficulty with discarding possessions, regardless of value or the space to accommodate them. This difficulty is due to a perceived need to save items and the distress associated with disposing of items, regardless of value.

Although hoarding is more common in older adults (55-94 years), it appears to begin at 11-15 years, and starts to cause significant impairment when people are in their 30's.

Hoarding Disorder leads to an accumulation of possessions that overflow and clutter living areas, making these areas difficult to use or move around in and leading to cramped, unmanageable or unhealthy living spaces. In extreme cases, items can become piled floor to ceiling and cover almost all surfaces.

As well as creating dangerous living conditions, this excessive need to accumulate possessions can have a detrimental impact on relationships, and the ability to function in daily life. It can make a person feel ashamed or frustrated at their continued need to acquire items, embarrassed at how they live, isolated from their family and friends as well feeling unable to invite people to their home.

Whether a person's hoarding disorder is mild or severe, just thinking about parting with possessions can be emotionally distressing whilst the beliefs

attached to seemingly worthless items can make trying to discard them be overwhelming with feelings of anxiety, guilt, or sadness.

As the number of items filling a home grows, so too do the health hazards. Despite the mess, clutter, and disorganisation, some people with hoarding disorder do not always recognise a problem in their behaviour. Rather, it may fall on friends or family members to point out the dangers and push for you to make a change.

Local Authorities have always tried to work with householders to identify ways to reduce or eliminate hoarding. Previously, and where the resident was not engaging, Local Authorities have in general served notices on the owner or occupier in an attempt to deal with the immediate problem. However, it was recognised that this often did not deal with underlying issues and the potential for the situation to worsen again.

5 Dedicated Home Straight Officer

Through Town and Country Housing Association's Home Improvement and Support Service, a dedicated Sevenoaks Home Straight Officer has been appointed. Using the Better Care Fund to do so has enabled us to provide this dedicated service for Sevenoaks residents which is flexible and personalised, offering support for those with hoarding behaviours.

The service supports customers in their homes, aiming to address and reduce the risks connected to hoarding. The Home Straight Officer works with customers to declutter homes enabling people to live more safely, providing support to help create happier and healthier lifestyles, while improving physical and mental wellbeing.

This service offers a holistic approach and looks to deal with other potential services customers may require in order to remain in their own home safely such as adaptations and lifelines, which can also be funded through the Better Care Fund.

Working in partnership across the Council, the Home Straight Officer can signpost to other support such as HERO for benefit advice, or the Housing Team if alternative housing needs to be considered. The Home Straight Officer works in partnership with other agencies such as Social Services to provide ongoing support and AGE UK and any other organisations that may be applicable to each individual customer.

Hoarding is a complex issue and the Home Straight Officer is often met with challenges around the delivery of the service. These may include customers cancelling appointments due to anxiety or ill-health or due to hospital appointments or admissions.

The Home Straight Officer will ensure that the process is carefully managed; will go at the customer's pace; involve a mental health professional, maintain a steady presence and balance respect, compassion and gentleness with knowledge and insight and ensure that the customer has the correct ongoing support.

6 Home Straight Referrals

Referrals are accepted into the service from sources including community, health or Housing organisations and can be made through the following contacts:-

Freephone number: 0800 028 3172

Email to HomeStraight@tch.org.uk

Other options Considered and/or rejected

The service is endorsed by other Kent local authorities who had been offering this service prior to our engagement of a Home Straight Officer and, at the time of the Council accessing the Home Straight service, no other agencies delivered this level of provision.

Key Implications

Financial

The resource is provided by the Home Straight Officer who is employed via Town and Country Housing Association and is funded through the Better Care Fund which is allocated to the Council annual. The current contract for the Home Straight service will be reviewed prior to it expiring on the 31 August 2023.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

None.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Appendices

Appendix A - Home Straight Referrals Data - October 2022

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People and Places