

Public Health response to motion from Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel (28.06.2016) about PH savings on Handyman Subsidy Scheme

Public Health Merton would like to thank the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel for their input, to inform the process of making difficult decisions in times of financial constraints on public sector budgets. We have carefully considered the motion put forth as well as other discussion points made on the day.

Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Motion

Councillor Stephen Crowe put forward a motion asking the panel to support the public health budget except for the cuts to the Handyman Service which he suggested could be funded from the 40K savings above target for 2016/17.

That the Director of Public Health provides more detail on alternatives to the handyman service.

Summary of response to the motion

- Public Health Merton accepts the motion and the Handyman Subsidy Pilot is running in 2016/17. The pilot was initially designed to run for 12 months but is extended for a second year to enable a smooth transition. However, it is planned to cease in 17/18.
- It is important to distinguish the pilot from the Handyman Service itself. Public Health funds the subsidy pilot which is attached to the existing Handyman Service provided through the Age UK Merton. The cessation of the Handyman Subsidy Pilot will not affect the overall Handyman Service which will continue to be available to the target group of the pilot.
- Public Health Services in Merton and across the country are undergoing a sea-change moving away from individual interventions to population-based approaches.
- Pilots like the Handyman Subsidy have to be considered in the light of the opportunity costs of the loss of other services and risks to the Public Health budget.

Detailed response

Back ground

Following the completion of a Falls Prevention Health Needs Assessment (FHNA) in 2014/15 which revealed that a marked number of falls among older Merton residents occurred in the home (this picture is common across the country), Public Health funded a subsidy pilot attached to the Handyman Service which is provided through the Age UK Merton. The pilot subsidised handyman jobs for people aged 65 and over at risk of falling to enable them to mitigate against falls hazards in their homes. This pilot was developed in line with NICE guidelines on general approaches to behaviour change, which recommend building upon the existing skills and resources within a community¹. The pilot was initially designed to run for 12 months but is extended for a second year and is running through 2016/17.

¹ Behaviour change: general approaches, NICE guidelines [PH6] Published date: October 2007
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph6/chapter/3-Recommendations>

In view of the savings pressures on the Public Health Budget, a proposal of savings was made to the Council and approved subsequently by the cabinet. As a first step the savings plan considered all projects and contracts that were due to end in this financial year and budgets for pilots such as the handyman Subsidy that had a natural end-point were incorporated into the savings plan.

Current situation

The Handyman Scheme Subsidy Pilot runs till the end of 2016/17, continuing in this year to ensure that the pilot ending smoothly transitions into the Handyman Service it is attached with. The Age UK Merton Handyman Service has been in existence since 2009 and is not commissioned by Public Health- it is funded through receipts from users who pay for the service. The cessation of the Handyman Subsidy Pilot that was funded by Public Health will not affect the overall Handyman Service which will continue to be available to the target group of the pilot.

One purpose of the pilot was to better understand how to provide a handy man service most effectively. Data are being collected on the types of falls hazards that are being mitigated by the Handyman Subsidy Pilot and the demographic profile of the service users, and the learning will be incorporated into the existing Handyman Service to enable better targeting and provision. We will be working closely with Age UK Merton about this. In the first year of the pilot, 187 jobs for older people at risk of falls have been provided through the subsidy. This is only 12% of the total activity of the Handyman Service.

Public Health Services in Merton and across the country are undergoing a sea-change moving away from individual interventions to population-based approaches. With the reshape and redesign of core public health services in Merton in a more restricted budget, such as Lifestyle Services (Stop Smoking, Health Lifestyle and Weight Management), NHS Health Checks and Substance Misuse Services, and potential financial pressures from the Sexual Health budget, pilots like the Handyman Subsidy have to be considered in the light of the opportunity costs of the loss of other services and risks to the Public Health budget.

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