

Housing & Health Working in Partnership **Example Two: Poole Home Safety Scheme Case Study**

At a glance

The Poole Home Safety Scheme aims to reduce the number of accidents occurring in the home, and in particular those that result from falls due to hazards in the house and outside in the garden.

This programme is a joint initiative between Housing & Community Services at Poole Council, Supporting People¹, and Help & Care² (The local home improvement agency) Revenue to manage and run the programme comes from Supporting People. Poole Council funds the capital cost of measures. The Care & Repair team at Help & Care manage and deliver the programme.

The scheme is based around a comprehensive Home Safety Check, which takes a room-by-room approach to assessment, compiling information not only about falls hazards, but also about fire and security risks and thermal comfort.

The scheme, which is primarily for older householders, provides advice and information about practical remedial measures and a fast-track minor adaptations/repairs services. Grants up to £500 are available per qualifying household to pay for the work.

Referrals generally come from the Woodlands Intermediate Care Unit³, the Poole Intermediate Care Team and through the “Gateway” information and referral service, which is run by Help & Care.

What Poole Home Safety Scheme demonstrates

Poole Council’s Housing Strategy seeks to ensure that all households in the borough have the opportunity to live in decent, warm, affordable homes within safe communities. Their private sector housing policy is client-based and driven by the needs of particular client groups as part of the supporting people agenda, the affordable warmth strategy, local improvement plans for health and social care, and the crime and disorder strategy. The stated themes to be examined within this policy include:-

- Hospital Discharge
- Home Accident Prevention
- Maintenance Initiatives
- Emergency Repairs
- Home Safety Audits
- Security and Crime Prevention

Adopting a flexible approach to the deployment of grants for private sector housing, the Poole Home Safety Scheme demonstrates how investment can be injected quickly and effectively into the community to make improvements where they are needed most.

It illustrates the potential use of the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS) to make timely interventions that meet wider health objectives. Even though the project to date has not formally applied the HHSRS, the Home Safety Checklist uses a compatible approach and will be easily adapted as a tool to contribute to the new assessment system.

Of equal importance, the Scheme's place as a key resource for the Intermediate Care Service raises awareness of housing issues and positions them firmly on the agenda of individual care plans and wider community safety strategies.

Background

AIMS of the Poole Home Safety Scheme

- Raise the profile of home safety and security in Poole
- Promote home safety to older and vulnerable people by carrying out home assessments and giving practical advice and assistance to remedy hazards and security issues in the home
- Help prevent hospital admissions and assist local health providers to facilitate a safe, secure and dignified speedy discharge home from hospital
- Reduce the fear of crime among older and vulnerable people.

Poole is an attractive location to retire to, with a significant proportion of its population aged over 60 (over 25%), and an above average number of single-person households occupied by people over 85 years of age. The local housing needs survey found that 4,229 householders live in unsuitable housing, and 5.5 % of households within the borough had been burgled in the past three years. There is recognition locally that falls are a significant cause of hospital admissions, long-term disability, loss of independence, social isolation, and in some cases, death.

1. Supporting People aims to provide a framework to promote and improve the quality of housing-related support services. Promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable people through greater independence will enable additional older people to remain in their own homes and avoid or delay moves to institutional care.
2. For details see Appendix
3. Full details see Appendix

Prior to 2004, Poole Council had a budget of £50,000 set aside for Small Home Repairs Assistance Grants. Qualifying private sector householders could get up to £3000 to carry out a range of improvements linked to Decent Homes. Help & Care referred householders for the grant, and often helped to deliver the practical measures once a successful application had been approved.

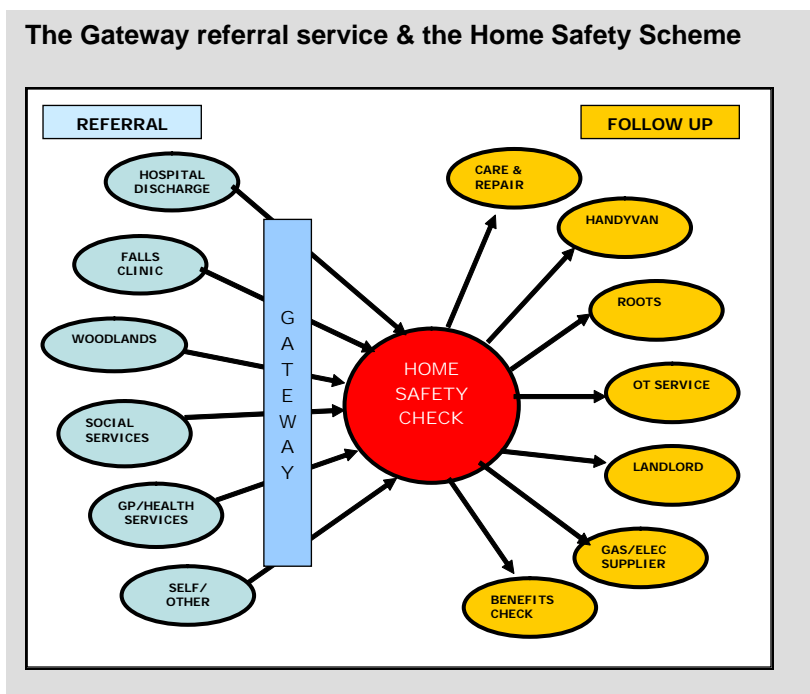
Because the majority of applications were for works costing up to the maximum grant level the budget only helped 20 or so each year and the system was not fast.

Therefore in 2004 Poole Council reviewed its private sector grant criteria, and decided to reduce the maximum amount to £500 per household, making the assistance available to more people for fast track interventions based upon key health and safety risks. The Private Sector Housing Team of Poole Council asked Help & Care to create a checklist to help them target grants accordingly, and entered into discussions about the practicalities of delivering the proposed new grant. Help & Care put forward a successful proposal to deliver the Poole Home Safety Scheme.

The pilot began in April 2005. The agreed Checklist takes a broad and holistic approach to risk assessment, similar to the principles of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System.

How the Poole Home Safety Scheme works

Referral network



Initially, it was proposed that referrals would come through the Elderly Resource Team at the Woodlands Intermediate Care Unit. They are one of the teams that form the wider Poole Intermediate Care service. Help & Care “Advocates” are members of this network, working alongside health and social care professionals to assess their client’s needs in order to prevent admission to hospital or assist with early discharge. This service is wholly funded by Poole Primary Care Trust, as are the Help & Care Advocacy workers.

The Woodlands Unit was chosen because of its location in Alderney, a deprived district of Poole, which is targeted by Poole Council in its Local Strategic Plan. The Home Safety Scheme referral target in the pilot phase is 250. In the event, it looked as if the Woodlands Clinic would not provide this number, therefore the scheme was expanded to all private sector householders over 60 who are at risk from falls or burglary, and to support hospital discharge programmes. Referrals now come from a wide range of sources, increasingly through the Gateway Information Service.

Briefings to programme partners

The Home Safety team hold briefing sessions, usually at team meetings, to inform front line staff (District Nurses, Social Service and hospital-based Occupational Therapists and Hospital Discharge teams) about the scheme.

The sessions are interactive and are based around case studies to promote discussion and encourage participants to relate the Home Safety programme to their own cases.

Inspection

The Home Safety Officer visits the client’s home by appointment or in preparation for hospital discharge, and uses the Home Safety Check to carry out a survey both inside and outside of the home. It is a comprehensive 52-point checklist set out in a room-by-room format, looking in particular at:

- falls & trips hazards;
- position and suitability of amenities & services;
- fire hazards;
- security;
- thermal comfort and ventilation.

Each home visit takes around 2.5 hours to complete and includes questions that involve the client in the process.

Delivering measures

Practical fast track measures

- Grab rails
- Security measures
- Smoke alarms
- Small urgent house repairs
- Carpet and floor repairs
- Leaks and blockages
- Minor electrical works
- Small window and door repairs

In many cases clients are eligible for the £500 home improvement grant to pay for the measures that the Home Safety Check reveals are necessary. Priority is

given to “vulnerable” householders (as defined by ODPM in its Decent Homes guidance) but if there are obvious fall hazards in a non-qualifying household they can still be considered for financial support.

The Home Safety Team also has relative flexibility in the way they use the grant. Care & Repair’s Handy Van team, or a local contractor overseen by the Home Safety Officer usually carry out the work. The grant also provides automatic free membership of the Handy Van Scheme and the Poole Lifeline⁴ emergency alarm service.

Where appropriate, the Team also helps householders to apply for Warmfront⁵ or Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC)⁶ grants.

If the Home Safety Team is satisfied that the householder qualifies, work can begin straight away; it does not have to wait for lengthy, bureaucratic grant application procedures to complete. A certain amount of administration is involved but this takes place simultaneously. An invoice for the work, with supporting paperwork, is sent to Poole Council once work is completed.

If the client does not qualify for the grant, the Home Safety Team will help them to look for funding from other sources, or will refer owner-occupiers to the local Equity Release scheme.

Links to other services

Case study

4. Mr. A was referred by his OT to the Home Safety Scheme. The Check revealed that his house was in such a state of disrepair that Mr. A might not be able to cope with the scale of the work required. Therefore, the Home Safety Office referred him to the Housing Options Advocate at Help & Care, where he received expert support and guidance to consider whether it would be best to move, and if so the choices that were open to him.

5. The Warm Front Grant provides a package of energy efficiency, insulation and heating measures up to the value of £2,700 (or £4,000 for oil heating systems).

6. Under the Energy Efficiency Commitment, electricity and gas suppliers are required to achieve targets for the promotion of improvements in domestic energy efficiency. To fulfil EEC, most fuel suppliers provide grants and incentives for a range of measures, often targeted at those experiencing fuel poverty.

A further advantage of the scheme lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive approach to service delivery. With links to the wider Intermediate Care network through the Gateway Information service, the referral system works both ways, and the Home Safety team have access to a wide range of local advice and expertise that is not exclusively housing-based. All of this is “programmed in” at the beginning, when the package of measures is put together.

The referral network also works internally, offering Home Safety Scheme clients the opportunity to benefit from Help & Care’s other specialist services, including a range of advocacy services, advice on housing options, and the ROOTS garden clearance scheme.

Monitoring, evaluation and outputs to date

The targets for the pilot are to:

- carry out 250 home visits;
- spend a capital budget of £50,000 on practical measures and services.

Monitoring to check progress is ongoing, but is reported on a quarterly basis. Current statistics show that to date the pilot programme is on course to deliver the target for home visits.

Evaluation will take place at the end of the pilot, and will make an analysis of any reduction in repeat admissions. However, all parties recognise that a major problem with schemes of this sort is the difficulty of coming up with hard evidence to prove that intervention has prevented accidents and hospital admissions. Therefore, there will also be follow up visits with service users to find out if they think the adaptations and improvements have made them feel healthier, safer and less at risk from falls. These results will be presented in the form of case studies.

An Effective Partnership

Increasingly seen as fundamental to tackling many social, economic and community strategies, cross sector partnership is a complex concept. Flexibility and pragmatism are important prerequisites for successful partnerships. A genuinely flexible approach relies upon trust and confidence in each other’s ability to work to compatible standards.

The working relationship that has developed between Poole Council, Supporting People and Help & Care to deliver the Poole Home Safety Scheme demonstrates just how valuable these attributes can be.

A flexible arrangement

When Poole Council asked Help & Care to work on the idea of a Home Safety Scheme, they gave them relatively free rein to develop ideas based on their proven experience of delivering practical home improvement programmes. Procedures and protocols that would allow for fast-track delivery on the ground were key to the concept. The resulting scheme, with its new approach to assessment and departure from traditional private sector housing renewal grant procedures illustrates a true commitment to flexibility.

In practise, the removal of grant bureaucracy⁷ means that the Home Safety Team can just get on with the job. The turn-round from initial referral to completion of the building work has been reduced drastically. How this ability to effect early intervention will impact upon health statistics can only be speculated on at this point, but it is hoped that the follow-up evaluation will show just how much the recipients value their safer and healthier environments.

“I really appreciate the light touch where administration is concerned” says Ken Young, a Home Safety Scheme Officer. “I measure my effectiveness by the amount of time I have to spend at my desk, and how much I’m out and about actually helping householders. I’m able to spend over 70% of my time with clients and that tells me we’ve got it right”.

Experience of working together in previous years has made this light touch possible. All parties had confidence that the procedures would work and that they could deliver. When it looked as if the Woodlands Intermediate Care Unit wouldn’t produce the level of referrals they hoped for, Poole took an equally pragmatic approach to broadening the geographical parameters for the programme.

The end result is a successful and effective collaboration that allows all those involved to use their expertise to target private sector housing funds in a way that really gets to the heart of creating healthy home environments and helps vulnerable householders to live safely at home.

7. The terms for grant allocation says that “Subject to agreement on protocols and financial controls, eligibility, and eligible works, it is proposed that Help and Care’s Handyvan Service be given authority to carry out small works in the homes of vulnerable people up to a value of £500 without the requirement to submit a grant application.

Information & Resources

For further details about the Poole Home Safety Scheme contact:

Trevor George (Private Sector Housing Manager) at Poole Council on 01202 633427 or on t.george@poole.gov.uk

Dick Bunting at Help and Care on 01202 432288 or on www.helpandcare.org.uk

Other information/resources

A PDF copy of Poole Council's Housing Strategy can be downloaded from http://www.poole.gov.uk/docs.asp?act_doc=display_doc&id=51&unitID=4EBC046EC5BE45

For information about Decent Homes go to www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/191/ADecenthomeThedefinitionandguidanceforimplementationPDF262Kb_id1152191.pdf

More details about the Single Assessment Process are available at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/SocialCare/SingleAssessmentProcess/fs/en>

Draft operating guidelines for the Housing Health & Safety Rating System are available on www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161785

Examples to support the Housing Health & Safety Rating System are on www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/844/HousingHealthandSafetyRatingSystemHHSRSWorkedexamplesVersion2PDF6551Kb_id1152844.pdf

Details of the Warmfront grant are available on www.eaga.co.uk and information about the Energy Efficiency Commitment can be found on www.ofgem.org.uk

Information about Lifeline is on <http://www.poole.gov.uk/servicetitles.asp?id=8D37A958C7B646&title=Lifeline>

Appendix

Help & Care

Help and Care was founded in 1985 to look into the needs of older people in Bournemouth. In 1989, it became an independent charity and expanded its role to include carers of all ages.

- The Gateway Information service
- Advocacy on a range of subjects that include housing, money matters, complaints and a variety of health and social care issues.
- Support for Carers including factsheets, outreach, sitting services, events
- Housing Services (see Care & Repair)
- One-to-one support
- Hospital screening
- Patient and Public Fora
- Older People's Programmes

There are currently 60 employees and the organisations co-ordinates 40 volunteers.

Care & Repair

There are currently 11 people in the Care & Repair Team, which was formed in the early 1990s. They offer a range of practical home improvement services

- Handiworks/Handy Van scheme, which provides an affordable home repairs service for older people. For a small annual fee, (currently £12 or £9 for those receiving income-related benefits) and a subsidised hourly rate (currently £15 an hour or £12 an hour) membership of the scheme provides reliable help with small DIY jobs around the home.
- Gardening services including the ROOTs scheme
- Home Improvement Works including technical advice and co-ordinating minor home improvements and adaptations
- Finding a builder

The services they offer are representative of the kind of programmes that agencies generally provide. However, these vary at local level and further information about the network of home improvement agencies is available from Foundations, who are the national co-ordinating body for the movement.

www.foundations.uk.com

Appendix

Woodlands Rehabilitation Community Team

Woodlands Rehabilitation Community Team is part of Woodlands Intermediate Care Unit, based at Alderney Hospital.

It is a multi-professional, multi-agency team who work together to promote the independence of adults, prevent admission to hospital and enhance discharge from hospital. The team includes:

- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists and Social Services Occupational Therapists
- Specialist Nurse and Assessment Nurses
- Rehabilitation Assistants
- Rehabilitation Home Care Workers
- Care Managers
- Community Pharmacist
- Advocacy Support Worker (seconded from Help & Care)
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Community Geriatrician.

Lifeline

Poole Lifeline provides a compact emergency alarm system for all people at risk living in their own homes:

- elderly
- people with disabilities
- anyone who can be considered at risk

It is backed up by a local Control Centre equipped with a call-handling computer which provides 2-way speech communication between callers and caring staff: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At the Control Centre there is a team of 14 Control Operators who answer calls and a team of Community Alarm Officers, who are all first aid trained and provide a 24 hour response to emergency calls for help (24 hours) from those who subscribe to the Mobile service.