



Handyperson Seminars

Summary of notes from group work from all seminars
March 2009

Topic 1 - Targeting need and prioritising the service

A service for all or a service for those most in need?

Tensions

There are potential tensions between:

- having shared, clear eligibility criteria and staff not wanting to say 'no'
- the scale of demand and the agency's capacity to deliver
- maximising the number of jobs completed (outputs) and achieving outcomes
- providing services and meeting running costs (monitoring, administration, assessment, promotion) while keeping services affordable
- the price charged to the client and the actual delivery costs
- what tasks to deliver in the maximum time that isn't charged for (for example, two hours)
- the wider range of handyperson tasks against more limited specific actions (for example, minor adaptations)
- hard-to-prove prevention and outcomes, and commissioners' objectives, and
- a holistic handyperson service and the commissioning body – objectives and political decisions affect the shape of the service.

Solutions

The following solutions were suggested.

- Having a clear way of identifying people who are most in need. Consider a triage of questions; Fair Access to Care Services; definitions of 'most vulnerable'; Single Assessment Process; mailshots in council tax mail-outs; highest deprivation in Super Output areas; educating a wider range of referral agents and organisations.
- Having a steering group to guide work, promote referrals and so on.
- Facilitating a wide range of operational options:
 - variable quality
 - variable price and costsPeople will choose according to their means.
- Offering a range of subsidies.
- Developing effective referral networks to ensure clients can be signposted to other services they need.
- Networking, branding and marketing are important.
- Liaising with referring organisations and co-ordinate the referrals.
- Using predictive modelling in partnership with health, care and others (police, fire and so on).
- Simplifying monitoring, surveys and prompt sheets.

Achievability and priorities

Some of the solutions could be made achievable by:

- having one simple entry point for the service - a 'hub'
- having sufficient capacity to undertake home assessments or simplifying these to a tick box assessment

- having enough time, resource, will, determination, leadership, funding and income, evidence of success and outcomes measured
- branding, marketing and targeting the service well, and
- having clear eligibility criteria – but offering non-eligible people something else (for example, advice).

External support needed

No comments were made.

Topic 2 - A holistic handyperson service?

Do we want a broader or deeper service?

Tensions

There are potential tensions between:

- the broad agenda and a narrower focus – there is a danger of becoming a “jack of all trades” by developing the skills and role of the handyperson to meet holistic needs
- expanding additional minor services and keeping the focus on strategic housing/Private Sector Housing Renewal
- knowledge of services in area and who provides them
- joint commissioning and competing priorities of commissioners
- different providers in the same geographical areas
- delivering to targets and meeting customer needs
- using contractors/self employed people and delivering a holistic service, and
- the roles of staff – handypersons, caseworkers and assessors.

Solutions

The following solutions were suggested.

- The service should be both broader **and** deeper.
- Have one contact point or ‘hub’ which offers a holistic service or involves the HIA.
- Have a prompt for referrals, or a tick box menu of service options or choices.
- Organisations should work effectively in partnership or there should be joint commissioning to get the service set up right (shared strategic agendas and information gathering).
- Handypersons could be linked with caseworkers to develop closer working.
- The service on offer could be marketed and sold to wider groups.
- Better links with health services could be developed.

Achievability and priorities

No comments were made.

External support

External support would be welcome from:

- Foundations, and
- Communities and Local Government.

Topic 3 - Delivering the service

Directly employed or contracted out?

Main tensions

There are the following potential tensions.

- Making sure the quality of work is good and clients are safe.
- If the service is contracted out, making sure contractors understand the need for a holistic service and are willing to provide it and refer people on.
- If the service is contracted out, assessments may still need to be done by HIA staff.
- There are operational benefits of contracting out (reduced overheads) and increased outputs **but** the agency needs to pay on time, agree charges, manage the relationship between the HIA and the contractor and monitor results.
- Loss of income or work (or both) if the service is contracted out.
- Possible higher unit/per hour costs if the service is contracted out.
- Managing risks, physical risks, CRB issues and client responsibilities.
- Employing handypeople direct gives the agency greater control over their staff, but contracting out allows the agency to choose a contractor with the skills needed for a particular job.

Solutions

- Having a menu of service provision (mix of in-house / external provision) may be a good option.
- Taking flexible approaches – by type of work, outstanding needs, and targeting.
- Promoting best practice.
- Having effective partnerships at commissioning level (shared agendas, strategies, monitoring and information gathering).
- Better joint working around measuring improved outcomes.

External support

External support would be welcome from:

- Foundations, and
- Communities and Local Government.

Topic 4 - Evaluating the service

Outputs or outcomes?

Main tensions

- There are diverse outcome requirements between clients, providers and commissioners.
- The independence of the reporting comes into question when providers are the ones who report.
- There are tensions over the time, cost and capacity of providers to deliver monitored outcomes and evaluation instead of providing services.
- There are tensions between the size of handyperson jobs and the time spent evaluating the outcomes of those jobs.
- Outputs are easy to measure and report, but outcomes and prevention are much more difficult to evidence.
- Are outcomes related to savings further down the line for commissioners or benefits to users and providers?
- There is the challenge of evaluating and interpreting reported outputs and outcomes.

Solutions

- There is probably a mixture of outputs and outcomes required.
- There is a need to establish a baseline of evidence to measure against.
- Outcomes can be framed by the national indicator set, should be fitted into the QAF and new Foundations Quality Mark.
- A shared responsibility between providers and commissioners can be developed, including:
 - agreed monitoring and shared information systems
 - a national evaluation process or model that local providers and commissioners can use without losing consistency – for example, guidance or a toolkit, and
 - allowing people to fail and learn from it.
- A budget for evaluation could be allocated as part of the commissioning process.
- A web-based information exchange or a facilitated network (or both) would help agencies to share learning and evaluation tools.
- Use expertise to benchmark handyperson services: St Andrews, Foundations, outside consultants.

Achievability and priorities

- The two years of handyperson funding could be used to establish the evidence base and evaluate outcomes.
- Work on toolkits and evaluation models can start now – Communities and Local Government, Foundations and local commissioners all could have a role to play.
- Commissioners and providers can take shared responsibility for evaluation in terms of a budget built into the commissioning process.

External support

- Help to develop toolkits
- A support sharing website
- Guidance on moving from outputs to outcomes.

Topic 5 - A sustainable service

Main tensions

- Is the service driven by needs in the community or by funding?
- The cash-strapped client base will limit commercial opportunities and the ability to generate surpluses.
- There is a culture of resource-based management rather than one driven by market demand.
- Conflicts exist between commercial responses and desirable outcomes relating to supported housing.
- The unpredictability of the commissioning and funding process does not allow services to forward plan.
- Because of different professional cultures between providers and commissioners (and between different commissioners), sustainability is not always looked for as an important outcome. Statutory duties, contract compliance, departmental budget pressures, delivery and evaluation are all competing priorities.
- The natural cautions of the third and statutory sectors in relation to social enterprise does not easily sit with ambitions to generate surpluses.
- How can commercial risks be managed and quality of service maintained?
- Can council-run or 'in-house' providers resolve these tensions?

Solutions

- Personal budgets will transform the relationships between users, providers and commissioners.
- Design 'fair' charging structures that take into account clients' ability to pay.
- Design holistic services that provide alternatives for those who cannot, will not or should not have to pay.
- Tolerance from commissioners about providers' legitimate commercial ambitions.
- Develop an understanding of the true cost of services.
- Market services to individuals and to other potential funders (registered social landlords).
- Develop a deeper understanding of the 'market': Who are the customers and what are their needs? Who are the providers and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Put in place robust evaluation and monitoring processes.

Achievability and priorities

- It probably needs a blended approach; enterprise balanced by clear social aims.
- Handy person services are very likely to require a measure of public subsidy to achieve commissioners' outcomes.

- Use the funding from the national strategy to provide a platform capable of attracting other funders. Bring new funding into one service and don't fragment and duplicate it.

External support

- Management and business planning and support skills.
- Technology (work flow and monitoring and reporting systems that are fit for purpose).