



Foundations

Handyperson Services: Defining the Added Value

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About Foundations

Foundations is the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies in England and includes improving the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants. We are funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which means almost all the support we provide is completely free of charge.

This includes:

- **FREE** DFG Champions Roadshows
- **FREE** In house training on DFG rules and regulations
- **FREE** facilitated workshops on DFG processes and procedures
- **FREE** assessment against the DFG Quality Standard
- **FREE** advice and support

Our Mission

To share the magic about what makes good home improvement and adaptation services

Our Vision

A thriving range of home improvement agencies – supporting people to live safe, independent and happy lives in the home of their choice

Our Values

- We are different and make a difference
- We work in perpetual beta
- We challenge our own thinking
- We speak with integrity
- We trust each other
- We seek partnerships that serve our mission



What is a Handyperson

If you look in a dictionary, a handyperson is “a person skilled at a wide range of repairs, typically around the home. These tasks include trade skills, repair work, maintenance work, both interior and exterior, and are sometimes described as ‘odd jobs’, and include light plumbing jobs such as fixing a leaky toilet or light electric jobs such as changing a light fixture.”

This definition focusses exclusively on the completion of “odd jobs”, and are often provided by firms which typically have an hourly rate, use materials supplied by the purchaser and do smaller tasks that would be rejected by more specialist firms such as plumbers or electricians. They also provide services described as 'fixing' which includes hanging up mirrors and pictures, in addition to decorating and painting, small-scale building works and gardening. They typically market themselves as 'no job too small' with leaflets dropped door-to-door and adverts in local papers and shops.

It is very difficult to accurately size the market for this type work but according to Insight Analytics the UK DIY market is worth around £14 billion per year. This accounts for everything purchased in DIY retailers from simple DIY consumables – screws etc, to large quantity purchases from contractors.

More recently, the “odd job” market has become more complex with the emergence of “gig economy” players such as Amazon, Air-Tasker, Task Rabbit. In much the same way that Uber disrupted taxi services, these players seek to make it easier to find a trusted tradesman after a 2014 YouGov survey reported that 59% of people found it difficult.



YouGov: HomeOwners Alliance March 2014. © Statista 2018

But there is another breed of handyman. Those commissioned by the public sector aren't just about delivering "odd-jobs". They are a "Handyman Service"

They still turn up in a van and do jobs around the home, but they do much more besides. A bit like including hidden veg in a Bolognese sauce, they look very much like other handymen but they have lots of extra goodness.



Handyman Services

County Durham Handyman Service has supported over 77,710 customers and delivered over 136,000 tasks over the last 10 years. They estimate that every £1 invested in their service realises approximately £2.64 in costed benefits. This equates to over £1m of savings for health and social care.

Handyman Services have been around in one guise or another for a long time - funded as a public service for more than 25 years. Each service is individually commissioned and developed to meet local needs which brings significant diversity to the sector, but they all have 3 things in common:

1. The foot in the door

A Handyperson Service is often the first 'public service' that a vulnerable householder will call. Because they are essentially a tradesperson, there is not the stigma or fear that is sometimes associated with a call to social services, for example. This also means that a handyperson may often gain confidence and trust where other professionals may not.

In addition to delivering the practical tasks they've been asked to do a handyperson will have the soft-skills needed to delve a little deeper into the customer's situation, keeping their eyes and ears open to other issues that could be affecting the customer (even if they have not identified such a need themselves). This could be insulation measures for a cold home, a need for home adaptations or a referral for a welfare benefits check. The solutions may be provided by a Home Improvement Agency or through an onward referral to a trusted local partner.

Manchester Care & Repair report that 90% of the initial assessment visits from their Handyperson Service result in an onward referral for another service. All of their operatives are trained in how to deliver a comprehensive assessment for home safety and security and they all hold level 3 City and Guilds qualifications in Energy Awareness. They are also trained in how to recognise and respond to signs and symptoms of elder abuse and how to deal sensitively with clients who may be living with dementia or physical disability.

2. Jobs that make the home safer

Essentially, a handyperson is a skilled and trusted tradesperson visiting the house to 'fit' things. But a Handyperson Service often fits things that make the home safer too – like security fittings or grabrails.

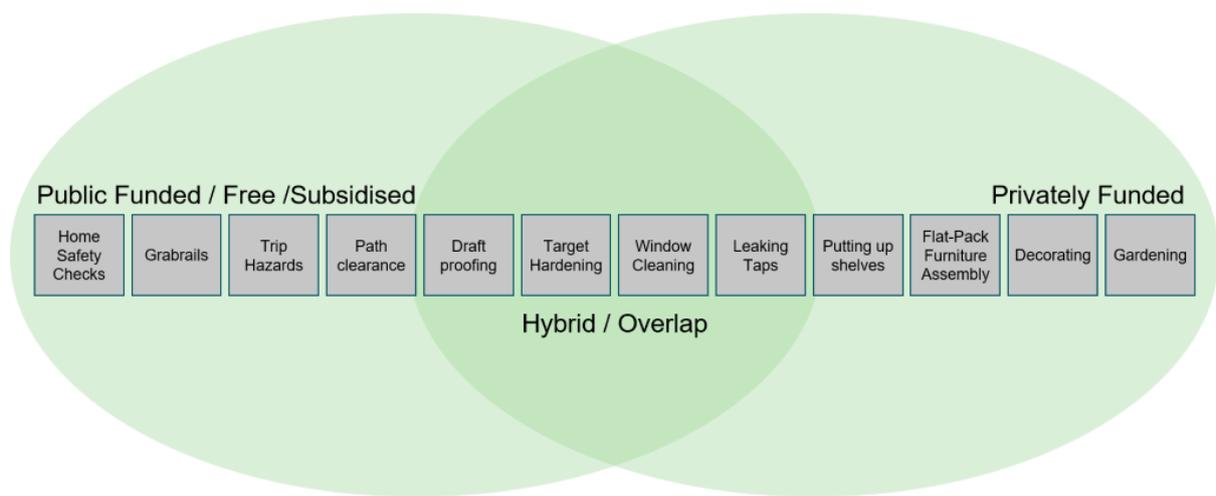
They're increasingly used to aid timely discharge from hospital and carry out falls prevention work.

In 2018 Public Health England developed A Return on Investment Tool for the Assessment of Falls Prevention Programmes for Older People Living in the Community.

They considered a programme of small home modifications alongside other interventions such as Tai Chi and group exercise programmes. They found that home modifications was the only intervention to produce a significant return on investment: Including the value of the improved quality of life results in benefits exceeding costs; for every £1 invested benefits equivalent to £7.34 are generated by the intervention, indicating there is a positive return of £6.34

Which jobs do make the home safer though? For example, fitting a grab-rail is a small practical task regularly carried out by a Handyperson Services that clearly helps to make a home safer. This would be opposed to assembling some flat-pack furniture, as whilst this is clearly practical work, its purpose is probably not focussed on safety.

However, the two types of job described above are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, there could be a situation whereby the assembly of a flat-pack dining suite, could be considered a means of keeping a person safe, especially if their current dining arrangements mean eating hot food from their lap on a sofa in front of the TV!



Another example could include gardening. A path clearance would facilitate safe access in and out of the home, thereby adding safety, whereas weeding a flowerbed may not. However, could it not also be argued that improving the visual appearance of a person's garden not only improves their mental well-being, but also makes them less likely to be a victim of opportunistic crime / abuse, by virtue of an unkempt garden signifying that a vulnerable person lives at the property?



3. Home Safety Check

Most Handyman Services will carry out a short assessment during their visit – a home safety check.

This will typically look at issues such as:

- Falls risks
- Security issues
- Fire safety
- Other hazards
- Items needing repair
- Social isolation

Harmony House Handyman Service in Dagenham has developed a check list that is used on each visit to assess for potential hazards. If found, they are often addressed on the spot, or at a future appointment. Mrs C: “without the handyman we would not of known about the attempted burglary we had.”

Sometimes this will highlight further jobs for the handyman to carry out, like removing trip hazards or fitting draught excluders. In other cases, it may result in a referral for other services such as home adaptations or loft insulation.

Middlesbrough Staying Put has trained their operatives to complete a preliminary well-being assessment. This regularly results in other services being requested which can be booked there and then using an app.

This ‘extra goodness’ does come at a cost. While an ‘odd-job’ handyman may charge £35 to £40 per hour, Handyman Services typically cost £55 to £60 per job when you consider staff, vehicles, tools, etc.

Some Services seek to cover some of this cost through a fee (£16.57 per hour on average) with commissioners subsidising the balance. In other areas, commissioners fully fund Handyman

Services for specific vulnerable groups. For instance, Manchester Care & Repair provides one of England’s largest handyman services, and all its services are offered to eligible customers completely free of charge.

Redcar & Cleveland’s Handyman Service were trained on the spotting the signs of dehydration and what advice to give.



Challenges for Providers

As we've seen, Handyperson Services can cover a wide range of interventions and rarely are all such services grouped under one local commissioner. Any provider wishing to develop a local service will often have to tender for many small value contracts let by several different public bodies. Not all the contracts will be coterminous, and they will usually have varying terms and conditions (performance targets, response times, eligibility criteria, etc.)

Consequently, it can be difficult to carry out several jobs to the same property at the same time as jobs are identified by the commissioner, not the provider. Jobs will be referred for action within a target time, different skills may be required for the necessary jobs and the full range of materials needed for a day's work may not be able to be carried in the van.

The challenges for the provider are two-fold. On the one hand, to keep the service financially viable they must ensure that all the costs of providing the service are met – wages, insurances, materials, tools, training, warranties, other overheads, etc. This means keeping doing enough jobs during the day to generate enough income to cover all expenditure.

On the other hand, the provider needs to add value by discussing other issues and carrying out the home safety check. This takes time, non-productive time, and therefore costs the provider money. Carrying out the checks also requires skills that are different to and not necessarily compatible with those of a person primarily employed to 'fit' things. This creates a tension, which can lead to compromises for either the provider or the commissioner.

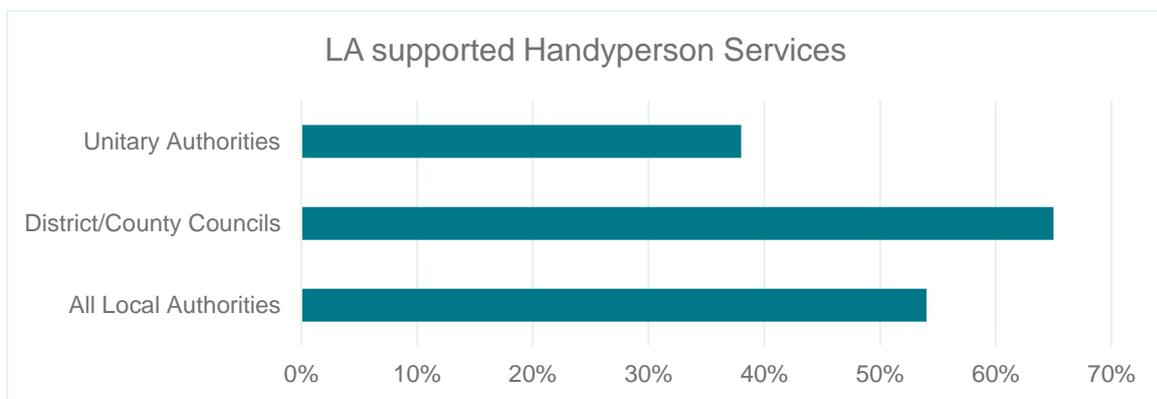
The answer is to put a realistic value on the added value – and to pay for it. This gives the provider the opportunity to organise the service to deliver a Handyperson Service competently without affecting costs; and allows the commissioner to hold a robust expectation that the added value will be identified, recorded, resolved, and reported upon.

Whether a Handyperson service is provided 'in-house' by the local authority, or by an external provider; whether it provides a wide range of 'products' or is more limited; whether it provides a portal to other services through a home safety check or not: it's ultimate success or failure will depend on it being seen by all stakeholders as providing something of value according to their own definition. That can be a real challenge. If it were easy there would be no need for anyone to revisit 'how to' and provide guidance. If it were profitable, Tesco would already be doing it.



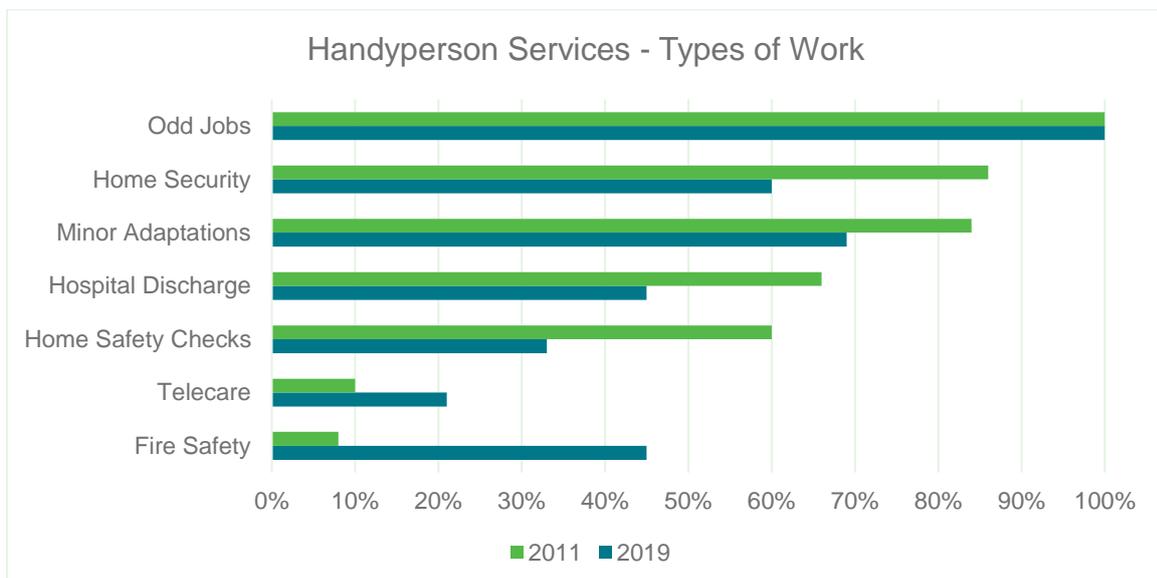
Handyperson Services in 2019

In 2019 Foundations sent out a sample survey to local authorities in England to see how the provision of Handyperson Services have changed since the review of the sector in 2011. We received responses from 78 Councils, with 54% currently commissioning and/or providing a Handyperson Service. Further analysis shows that services are much more likely to be commissioned in County/District Council areas compared to Unitary Authorities. In those two-tier areas services are commissioned by both County and District Councils.



Types of Work

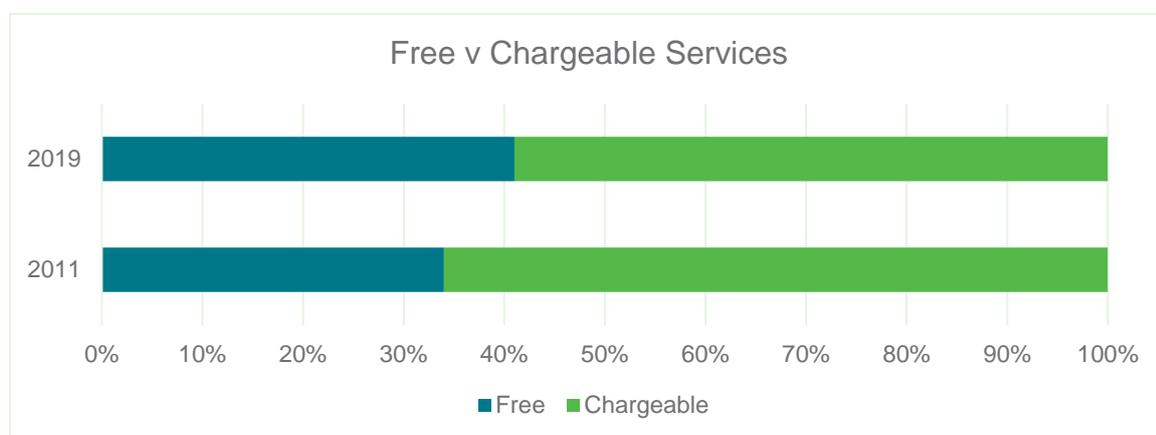
We also asked about the types of work carried out by Handyperson Services, to compare with a previous survey from 2011



All services still carry out odd jobs, but there the survey suggests that there has been a reduction in the amount of added value services that are commissioned – with falls in home security, minor adaptation, hospital discharge works and home safety checks. Encouragingly there is evidence of increased collaboration with telecare and assistive technology provision and joint working with Fire & Rescue services.

Handyperson Service Charges

One of the defining features of a Handyperson Service is usually the low charges made to the customer – often focussed on vulnerable and low-income households. Our survey found that for 41% of services all labour (and some materials) is free of charge – a slight increase on 2011.



For those who charge, the average hourly rate is now £16.59 (up from £13.07 in 2011) with a range from £15 to £37 per hour.

Other Handyperson Services

In addition to Handyperson services commissioned by Local Authorities, a few national organisations provide handyperson services in some areas.

Royal British Legion (RBL) provides a free Handy Vans service called (previously called Poppy Calls). In 2019 there were 23 Handy Van services which can carry out minor repairs and adaptations for people who are eligible for the service (usually armed forces personnel, veterans and their dependents).

There are also more than 70 handyperson services provided by local **Age UKs**. The nature of the service provided, access criteria and funding arrangements vary. The type of services provided includes minor repairs and adaptations, the fitting of key safes and garden maintenance. In some areas the provision is limited to supplying a list of 'trusted' odd-job

tradespeople. In most cases there is a charge, though this may be subsidised depending on local funding arrangements.

A new type of service is offered in some areas by **Good Gym** which matches runners with older people needing one-off practical tasks completed. Referrals can be made through Good Gym's referral partners, including some Home Improvement Agencies. Good Gym operates in 53 areas (with more in the pipeline) and has completed over 160,000 tasks.

Fire & Rescue teams are increasingly devoting more resources towards prevention and general home-safety awareness raising. Whilst their focus is very much on the identification of risk in relation to fire safety, they also offer an opportunity to identify other hazards in the home. For example, Mersey Fire & Rescue service attend around 11,000 homes per year. If the intelligence gathered on such visits is harnessed, it presents a valuable opportunity to undertake more preventative interventions by a more practical based handyperson service.



Future Handyperson Services

As we've discussed, the market predominantly provides "odd-jobs". The growth of the gig economy and quality assurance schemes like Trustmark may make finding them more accessible to the growing numbers of older and disabled people comfortable with digital technology. For them, making informed choices about employing people to do small jobs has never been easier, but if more vulnerable consumers are to be protected and provided with choice and control in order to maintain independence in their own home, the public sector will need to invest in Handyperson Services as part of an overall preventative agenda in the health and care economy – as recommended by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee on Housing for Older People in 2018¹.

Handyperson Services are another aspect of the growing integration across Health, Care and Housing. Local areas can take opportunities to strategically commission targeted Handyperson Services in order to reduce duplication, address inefficiencies in the wider health and care system and prevent high costs elsewhere.

There is strong evidence that minor home adaptations are a cost-effective intervention for preventing falls and injuries, improving performance of everyday activities and improving mental health. Minor adaptations are particularly effective at improving outcomes and reducing risk when combined with other necessary repairs and home improvements, such as improving lighting and removing trip and fall hazards². Given the statutory duties on welfare authorities to provide minor adaptations under £1,000 free of charge to people with an assessed need, more schemes now provide this support. To maximise the outcomes of these services local commissioners and providers should look to ensure that:

- operatives are trained and properly supervised trusted assessors able to prescribe and fit in a single visit;
- providers have a commercial incentive to address necessary small repairs and home-improvements at the same time; and

¹ UK Parliament. 2018. Housing for older people needs national strategy. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/news-parliament-2017/housing-for-older-people-report-17-19/>. [Accessed 23 December 2019].

² Powell, J., McIntosh, S., Bird, E., Ige, J., Garrett, H., & Roys, M. (2017). The role of home adaptations in improving later life. London: Centre for Ageing Better.

- providers monitor and report appropriate onward referrals to other services across the local health, care and housing sectors as a proxy-indicator of service effectiveness.

The cost of Integrated Community Equipment Services (ICES) contracts are rising sharply in many places as demand rises and people use triage priorities to ensure a quick service for many customers. There is clearly an opportunity to align the outcomes generated by an effective Handyperson Service and those expected from community equipment services operating locally either by ensuring they are delivered by a single provider or by incentivising collaboration between the two.

The Better Care Fund (BCF) provides a mechanism to commission and target Handyperson Services. The inclusion of Disabled Facilities Grants in the BCF provides a means to jointly agree plans across housing, health and care and the focus on reducing delayed transfers of care, avoidable admissions and the number of people going into residential care provides a driver to commission preventative services targeted at those most in need – whether they are in hospital or at risk in the community.

Growing numbers of Handyperson Services are facilitating discharge from hospital. Foundations and the Housing LIN maintain an interactive map on the variety of services which collaboratively focus on the outcomes the system needs to achieve in order to reduce pressures³. Access to that little bit of practical help is essential whether that is being organised as part of a discharge from hospital or an intermediate care package aimed at recovering function and independence in the community². There is a real opportunity for these services to be closer aligned to the reorganisation of primary care clusters and neighbourhood social care teams.

Lastly, the recently published DFG Review⁴ noted that with the rise in smart technology, there is a growing range of solutions that can be used to modify the home of older and disabled people to increase their independence and connect them to their family friends and community. Excitingly, most of these solutions are part of the consumer drive towards smarter homes and the emergence of the “Internet of Things” – devices that are connected to the internet, can be controlled remotely and send back data about their environment. These solutions will require installation, maintenance and support as well as upskilling of users. Providers are considering this as an opportunity to exploit an emerging market which

³ Housing LIN. 2018. Home from Hospital. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/home-from-hospital/tool/>. [Accessed 23 December 2019].

⁴ Foundations. 2018. DFG Review 2018. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www-foundations.uk.com/dfg-adaptations/dfg-review/>. [Accessed 23 December 2019].

given the expertise of the Handyperson workforce and its back-office support within the Home Improvement Agency sector, it is well placed to support.

On the other hand, Social Care commissioners are increasingly scoping the feasibility of commissioning Assistive Technology alongside a range of low-level preventative services. Peterborough Council ran an 18-month pilot installing sensors and devices in some 100 homes using the local in-house HIA. This has now been subsumed into a regional Digital Strategy across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire encouraging wider take-up of assistive technology.

This paper sets out some of the ways in which integration and technological change is providing challenges and opportunities for Handyperson Service providers. It is likely that the emerging gig-economy will need greater quality assurance and safeguarding than that currently provided by individual customer reviews and ratings before it may safely and confidently be used by more vulnerable people in society. Nevertheless, the rise in services which are only a click away means that subsidised Handyperson Services will be challenged to provide similarly easy to access systems.





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