



Derbyshire County Council - Handy Van Service

Background

Connex Community Support has been delivering the Handy Van service under contract to Derbyshire County Council in the High Peak and north Derbyshire Dales since 2010.

Following the recommissioning of the service in 2016, we successfully tendered to deliver the service across the whole of north Derbyshire, to also include Chesterfield, Bolsover and North East Derbyshire.

Connex employs 4 Handy Van operatives, who are supported by 2 part-time administrators. The service is targeted to provide 2,800 client visits per annum, 700 of these in the High Peak.

The service is delivered in the south of the county by Metropolitan Thames Valley, who also manage the 0203 535 4999 call centre, triaging referrals out, according to geographical area.

In November 2021, Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service (DFRS) decided not to recommission the service, and the Derbyshire Handy Van service will now cease on 31st March 2022.

What the Handy Van service currently offers

The service provides practical support to help older and vulnerable people to live independently in their own homes. It is available to Derbyshire residents who are aged 60 and over. Referrals can also be made by health professionals. It is a free service, and eligible households can have up to two visits per year.

The help provided includes the following:

- home fire safety checks
- smoke alarms provision and installation
- energy efficiency advice
- falls prevention advice
- installation of key safes
- practical DIY tasks, for example:
 - changing light bulbs
 - securing carpets and rugs
 - removing and hanging curtains
 - path and door access clearance
 - other tasks, as appropriate

The service also installs community alarms and Telecare (assistive technology).

Assistive technology works through the client's phone line, linking them to a call centre or a family member or neighbour, raising an alert if abnormal activity is detected. The assistive technology installed depends on the needs of the individual and could include chair and bed sensors, fall detectors, smoke alarms, property exit sensors, carbon monoxide detectors, flood detectors, medication alert and dispensers.

Service performance – April 2020 to January 2022

The Connex Handy Van team continued to deliver the service throughout the Covid pandemic, using PPE, sanitising measures and social distancing to help protect staff and clients. Over this period no additional support was available from DFRS, as their staff were not carrying out home visits.

During periods of full lockdown, the service focussed on urgent calls. This included installing key safes to facilitate hospital discharges, and enabling access to properties for social care and health professionals.

The operatives also installed, maintained and removed telecare, installed smoke alarms where none were present, and attended to pipping or faulty smoke alarms. They provided essential practical assistance where the client would have been at risk without that help. To reduce the risk of infection, we kept client practical support visits to 15 mins, or where the task would take longer, asked that the client stayed in a separate room to the operative.

Many service users told us that apart from care workers, nobody else was visiting them at home. We always receive very positive feedback from those who access the service, but never more so than through the Covid period. Clients told us that they found the service to be a much-needed lifeline and a great reassurance.

Once the vaccine rollout commenced we were able to return to a more normal service offer, and service demand has remained consistently high.

April 2020 – March 2021

High Peak total client visits	600
Safe & Well checks	321
Telecare/Assistive Technology	180
Key safes (install and repair)	61
Practical Support	38
Total client visits completed across North Derbyshire	2,787
DCC annual contract target visits	2,800

April 2021 – Jan 2022 (10 months)

High Peak total client visits	522
Safe & Well checks	259
Telecare/Assistive Technology	153
Key safes (install and repair)	60
Practical Support	50
Total client visits completed across North Derbyshire	2,310
DCC contract target visits for the 10-month period	2,333

These would be impressive results in normal times, but given that they include periods when the country was in lockdown, they are exceptional.

Key referrers to the service over the above periods were Social Workers, hospital discharge teams, Occupational Therapists, DFRS, Police, Social Prescribing teams, the Home from Hospital service, East Midlands Ambulance Service, distanced family members and self-referrals.

The Handy Van team have a trained eye for spotting potential risks that could escalate to a more serious incident. These could include fall and trip hazards, the need for mobility support and adaptations, poor home environment, financial hardship, fuel poverty, hoarded properties and instances of neglect, self-harm or abuse. Where the need for further support is identified, the Handy Van team will signpost the client to other services and sources of support.

Support beyond March 31st 2022

Whilst the Handy Van service will cease on 31st March, we understand from DCC that some elements of the work will be transferred to other providers.

Our understanding is:

- Safe and Well checks/smoke alarms provision and installation will be delivered directly by the Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Community Alarms and Assistive Technology will be delivered through alternative provision until a new Assistive Technology service has been commissioned. Details of this provision will be made available by DCC once the required process has been completed.
- Key safe installation will no longer be provided, although this may vary by area, depending on the district council.
- Practical Help – there are no free offers available for this type of support. Commercial Handypersons are available, but in the main they are not keen to pick up small jobs, which are not financially viable.

Finally

Connex Community Support is very disappointed that the Handy Van service will soon end – we feel that this is a great loss to the community, and will adversely affect those who are isolated and more vulnerable through poor health, age or a disability, and who do not have the financial resources to pay for low level home maintenance and practical help.

We understand that local authority budgets are under great scrutiny to deliver savings, but feel that the closure of the service at this time, will only further exacerbate the mounting pressures on health and social care services.

We are currently in the process of implementing the closure measures. Sadly, all 4 Handy Van operatives will be made redundant on 31st March 2022. They have provided a wonderful service to thousands of people over many years, and in particular through the challenging Covid period.

Dave Morris, Andrew Mitchell, Steve Sowerby and Colin Slater have been absolute heroes.

18th February 2022`

Gill Geddes

Chief Executive

Connex Community Support

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