

The role of caseworkers

Putting your residents at the centre
of your home improvement service

A Good Home Network briefing



Introduction

A successful caseworker service is about more than providing another route into home improvement support. It is about making the system easier for residents to navigate and ensuring that people receive support that reflects their individual circumstances.

Caseworkers can be the vital link between residents, home improvement services and the wider support available in a local area. By providing trusted, ongoing and personalised support, they help residents overcome the practical barriers that can prevent them from making their homes warmer, safer and more suitable for their needs.

Improving a home can be far more complicated than simply identifying a problem and arranging a repair. Residents may be unsure what work their home needs, who can help, how much it will cost or whether financial support is available. They may also be dealing with several issues at once which are not restricted to housing.

For people facing these challenges, navigating different organisations, funding schemes and services can be overwhelming. This is where a caseworker can make a real difference.



What is the Good Home Network?

The Good Home Network is a hub for active learning connecting professionals across England who are exploring ways to improve poor quality homes in their area.

The Centre for Ageing Better set up the Good Home Network, in partnership with **Foundations**, to help local authorities ensure people in their communities can live independently, safely and with dignity in their own homes.

Find out more:

Visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or email goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk

What is a home improvement caseworker service?

A caseworker service provides tailored support to residents who need help to repair, adapt, maintain or improve their homes.

The exact model and where the casework service sits will vary between areas. But the focus is the same: supporting the resident to find and achieve the right solution for them, rather than simply dealing with an individual repair or referral.

A caseworker should take time to understand the resident, their home and their circumstances, helping to identify priorities and work through the options available. This is particularly important where someone has multiple, complex or interconnected needs.

Different residents will need different approaches too. Some people may need straightforward information or signposting, while others may need more sustained practical support to overcome barriers and see improvements through to completion.

“We know home improvements take a long time, so we have this wonderful grace of not having a time-limited service, so we’re able to stay with people until they’re hooked into the service that’s available to them, or until they’ve engaged the contractors to do the work that they need to do.”

Good Home Lincs



Shaping the service round the resident

At its heart, casework is about joining things up around the resident – including services, organisations and support.

A caseworker can start by understanding the person's circumstances and the problems they are experiencing in their home. They can look at the bigger picture: what is affecting the resident, what matters most to them and what needs to happen to improve their situation.



Benefits of caseworker services

For residents, the biggest benefit may be having someone on their side. A caseworker provides a consistent point of contact who can explain what is happening, help residents understand their choices and support them to take action. This can be particularly important for people who are less confident navigating services or who face multiple barriers to improving their home.

A holistic approach can also prevent services from treating problems in isolation. For example, a resident experiencing a cold home may also be struggling with energy costs, poor insulation, damp or mobility difficulties. Looking at the whole situation can lead to a better solution than addressing each issue separately.



In the first year of its pilot, Good Home Lincs caseworkers had nearly 1,400 contacts with clients, with most cases involving around six contacts. Clients typically waited around 11 days to be assigned a caseworker and about 71 days for their case to close. This underlines how casework often involves an ongoing relationship rather than a single intervention. The person-centred, resident-led approach helps those residents who were able to go on to find their own solutions while providing targeted support for the most vulnerable.

The Centre for Ageing Better's [**national evaluation**](#) of eight comprehensive home improvement services found that service users reported benefits including greater independence, improved safety and better mental wellbeing (see the further resources section at end). The evaluation also found that the one-stop-shop approach was valued because it made it easier for residents to access a range of services.

Benefits of caseworker services

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There are benefits for professionals and local systems too. Caseworkers can provide a valuable coordination function, connecting services that might otherwise operate separately. Caseworkers for Oxford City Council HIA support professionals as well as residents with information and advice, and act as a central point within a wider, cross-system service.

Ultimately, the value of casework is not just in the number of people contacted or referrals made. It is in whether residents are better able to resolve problems with their homes and achieve outcomes that matter to them.

Caseworkers in Oxford City Council HIA play a key role in establishing and maintaining trust between residents and the range of services that can be marshalled to help them. Caseworkers are often the first point of contact and use their visits and on-going contact to assess the home as well as the person, prioritise what support is needed, make sure that information and advice is understood and, importantly, they often open up other much-needed referrals (such as to Occupational Therapists) because of the relationship they have established with residents.



Shaping your caseworker service

For an area considering developing or strengthening a caseworker service, in addition to understanding local need and mapping existing provision, some useful starting points include:



✓ Define the role clearly

Be clear about what caseworkers will do themselves, what they will refer elsewhere and how they will initiate and maintain contact with residents. You can find an example role profile for an advice caseworker [here](#) that can help your thinking.

✓ Build partnerships

Strong relationships with housing, health, social care, energy, the voluntary-sector and other local services are essential to providing genuinely joined-up support. Having the right contacts to help promote the service – both to residents and to other services – is also key.

“One of the most important things [we do] is going out there to promote the service... We go out to lunch clubs, breakfast meetings or things like that. We go out to the hospitals as well to engage with people and let them know about the service we provide.”

Oxford City Council HIA

Shaping your caseworker service

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✓ **Recruit for the right skills.**

Caseworkers need more than technical knowledge. Communication, empathy, problem-solving, relationship-building and partnership-working skills are equally important.

✓ **Start proportionately and learn.**

A service does not need to have every answer from day one. Starting with a clear offer and learning from residents, caseworkers and partners can help the service develop over time.

✓ **Measure what difference it makes.**

Alongside activity measures such as referrals and cases closed, consider other outcomes: problems resolved, improvements completed, residents' confidence in engaging with services as well as their confidence in maintaining or improving their homes.

The overarching principle is to design the service around the resident and to understand their journey through and with your service, rather than around organisational boundaries.

“[Our caseworkers] haven’t come from traditional housing improvement, repair or maintenance backgrounds. We’ve had a mix of social care, Disabled Facilities Grants, special educational needs, computer literacy and Ukrainian support projects – people who are good at working with others and understanding how they want to tackle those issues.”

Good Home Lincs

Further resources



- > **Centre for Ageing Better – Evaluation of existing home improvement services** – national evidence on the impact, costs and benefits of comprehensive home improvement services.
- > **Centre for Ageing Better – Better homes, better lives** – summary of the national evaluation and its implications for health and wellbeing.
- > **Centre for Ageing Better – Good Home Lincs: first-year interim evaluation** – practical learning from the development of a new caseworker service.
- > **Centre for Ageing Better – Developing a Good Home Hub** – practical tools to help local areas understand need, design services and improve commissioning.
- > **Foundations – Casework Guide** – practical guidance on casework, including the casework journey, levels of support, partnership working and measuring outcomes.

You can find more about the two organisations quoted in this briefing at **Good Home Lincs** and **Oxford City Council HIA**

For more information please visit **ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network** or email **goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk**

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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The Centre for Ageing Better is an independent centre of excellence on ageing and demographic change. We work with national and local government, industries, businesses and community organisations to improve how people experience ageing. Our work focuses on creating better workplaces, homes and communities, while tackling ageism and addressing inequality in later life.