

Report of:	Head of Governance and Corporate Services
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Key Decision:	Yes
Report Track:	Cabinet: 12/07/18

CABINET
12 JULY 2018
SOCIAL ALARMS SERVICE

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek endorsement of actions taken to ensure the continued provision of the Social Alarms Service and Out of Hours Service

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the actions taken to externalise the Social Alarms and Out of Hours Service.
- 2.2 That Cabinet endorse the awarding of the contract to Redditch Borough Council for a period of 2 years with the option to extend for a further year.
- 2.3 Cabinet approve the actuarial strain payments as set out in the Financial Implications section of the report.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Social Alarms service has for a period of time faced resilience issues and is now facing a severe staffing shortage which means that we cannot continue to provide an ongoing comprehensive 24/7 service. Given the vulnerable nature of the clients (council housing tenants and private), who use this service this is clearly not acceptable so the decision has been made to find an alternative provider to ensure our clients' safety.
- 3.2 It has been necessary to act quickly on this issue as it would not have been possible to provide a full 24/7 service after 15 July.

- 3.3 Whilst it has not been possible to carry out a tendering exercise in the time available, 3 quotations/proposals have been sought. Following evaluation of these, a decision has been taken to transfer the service to Redditch Borough Council.
- 3.4 Work has commenced to ensure the seamless transfer of the service to Redditch Borough Council. We are aiming to complete the transfer during the week commencing 9th July and all our clients will be informed accordingly. Although all our clients will initially be transferred to Redditch Borough Council, private clients will have the option to cancel and move to another provider if they wish.
- 3.5 All of the Social Alarms staff have been informed. The installer posts will transfer with the service to Redditch Borough Council and the Council is in negotiations, including seeking alternative employment opportunities, with the remaining call handling staff since it is recognised that the transfer to Redditch may be an unreasonable change to their terms and conditions of employment.
- 3.6 There are financial implications arising from the transfer of service in addition to the one off severance payments. However it is envisaged that the overall cost to the council will be financially neutral although there will be additional costs to the General Fund, pending a full service review, and a saving on the Housing Revenue Account.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report supports the Council's Corporate Priority for Community Wellbeing and in particular our aim to support vulnerable people.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The Council currently provides a social alarms service to Council housing tenants and private residents predominantly from within the District. The team also provides:
- (i) a social alarms service to a number of sheltered housing schemes across the Country;
 - (ii) out of hours calls handling for the Council
 - (iii) out of hours call handling for three district/borough Councils within Staffordshire
 - (iv) Lone worker monitoring for this Council and one other Council.

The service operates 24 hours a day all year round.

The service is provided free of charge to the Council's housing tenants. All other users, ie private residents and external clients, pay a fee for the services received.

- 5.2 The call handling side of the service comprises 8 posts working a rolling shift pattern over 4 days. 4 people work a shift each day for 4 days and are then off shift for 4 days, whilst the other 4 staff cover the shifts for the next 4 days.
- 5.3 Three of the shifts are 8 hours long and the overnight shift is 6 hours long. The shift pattern provides for some double-manning of shifts at peak times across the 8 hour shifts but none for the night shift (11pm to 5am) which is single manned. There is budgetary provision for casual staff to provide cover for holidays, sickness etc.

There are also two part time posts which are responsible for installing the alarms in people's homes and undertaking checks etc. On occasions the installers have covered vacant shifts or provided cover for breaks. The Housing Service also has an employee who is not part of the Social Alarms Team but as part of their role installs alarms in the homes of Housing tenants.

- 5.4 Over the years there have been numerous occasions where the service has struggled to cover shifts due to the lean staffing arrangements. The nature of the casual staffing arrangements mean that they cannot be relied upon fully to cover vacant shifts and often there is pressure on the team to cover additional shifts. This has been a problem even when the service is fully staffed. There have been numerous occasions when staff have had to work shifts without a break just to keep the service covered.
- 5.5 When the service was subject to review in 2014 as a result of changes to the County Councils' Supporting People funding cuts, it was noted that the service was not resilient and a commitment was made to look at alternative service options. Talks commenced with other parties but they did not proceed as further funding was made available by Housing to meet the cost of the service for their tenants. Whilst this addressed the funding issues, it did not address the service resilience issues.
- 5.6 The service is complex to operate both from the team's perspective and management. It takes on average 2-3 months to train an operative fully in all aspects of the service before they are confident to operate on their own. This makes it difficult to achieve quick fixes to staffing shortfalls.
- 5.7 Staff coverage started to become more challenging than usual in November 2017. The service had been coping with a member of the team off long term sick for 12 months through cover by casuals. A member of the team then resigned reducing staffing levels to 6. Whilst a new member of staff was recruited another employee left in January 2018.
- 5.8 Once it became apparent that staffing was becoming more problematic an alternative solution was sought via partnering with another social alarms provider. Several providers who use the same social alarms software were approached to see if they would be interested in working with the Council to deliver the social alarms service. Only one responded with any interest, Redditch Borough Council (RBC).
- 5.9 A meeting took place in November 2017. RBC provides a social alarms and out of hours call handling service for several other Councils and has capacity to take

on additional clients. Agreement in principle was reached for RBC to provide the night shift for the social alarms service. The team were advised and consultation commenced over changes to the rota to allow for RBC to undertake the night shift.

- 5.10 The next step was to establish a technical solution as to how it could work in practice to switch the service between the two sites. This proved to be a greater challenge than we expected. There have been problems in organising meetings between all the relevant parties from both Councils and the software supplier and then in coming up with a technical solution. A range of solutions were finally identified by the software supplier but these were only confirmed in writing together with costings on 18 June 2018.
- 5.11 However, staffing of the service has now reached a critical point. As of 9 July, there will only be 5 permanent employees on the team. One of the 5 employees is due to be off for up to 3 months for planned surgery reducing the staffing levels to 4 over the summer. Although there are 2 regular casuals and 2 ad hoc casuals it is considered that this is insufficient to cover the staffing rota over the coming months with any certainty especially as the team have leave to take. Efforts to recruit either permanently or temporarily via an agency have proved unsuccessful. Furthermore, it takes 2-3 months to train an operator before they are competent to cover a shift on their own.
- 5.12 Following a meeting on 11 June 2018, the Head of Governance & Corporate Services advised the Managing Director that the social alarms service was at risk of not being able to provide 24/7 cover. Given the vulnerable nature of the service users this situation is not acceptable and the Head of Governance & Corporate Services advised that urgent discussions take place to find an external provider to take on service delivery as soon as possible.
- 5.13 With limited time available three alternatives for taking over the service have been explored:
- Another local authority;
 - A housing association; and
 - A private sector provider.
- 5.14 Meetings/discussions have taken place with all 3 possible providers and they have provided indicative information on costs, deliverability of the service transfer and service standards. Following analysis of the information and consideration by the Managing Director, Head of Finance and the Head of Governance & Corporate Services it has been decided to select Redditch Borough Council as our preferred provider. The whole of the Social Alarms service, including the handling of out of hours calls for the Council and lone worker monitoring will be delivered by Redditch Borough Council.
- 5.15 Redditch Borough Council currently provide these services to a number of other Councils and have sufficient staffing cover and line capacity to meet Cannock Chase Council's requirements. They have Platinum Standard accreditation with the Telecare Services Association and can offer a wider range of monitoring

than Cannock Chase Council currently provides e.g. GPS tracking for clients with dementia.

- 5.16 Given the urgency of the situation, work has commenced to ensure the transfer of the service and our clients safely to Redditch Borough Council. The transfer will take place during the week commencing 9th July.
- 5.17 To ensure the safety of all our clients we are arranging for them all to be transferred to Redditch Borough Council and we are writing to all of them to explain that the service will in future be provided by Redditch Borough Council.
- 5.18 The Council's housing tenants receive the service free of charge and the Council will continue to meet this cost.
- 5.19 The charge to private clients will remain the same but in future they will make all payments directly to Redditch Borough Council. We will be advising them that they have the option of moving to a provider of their own choice if they want to.
- 5.20 Our other private clients, ie the 3 local Councils and private sheltered housing schemes, have been advised of the Council's decision to outsource the service to Redditch Borough Council and that they can transfer their services to them or make their own alternative arrangements. Any arrangements that they choose to make will sit outside of the Council's contract with Redditch Borough Council.
- 5.21 We are working towards a seamless transfer of the service and will be working closely with Redditch Borough Council in the lead up to transfer day and after to ensure that we can resolve any issues that may arise quickly.
- 5.22 In terms of the social alarms staff, the transfer of the service represents a change in service provision and as such the provisions of the TUPE Regulations will apply. In discussions with Redditch Borough Council we believe that the installer function will be subject to TUPE transfer with 2 staff remaining at a local base and delivering this service on behalf of Redditch. The Housing Services employee will be unaffected by the change of service provider and will continue to install alarms in council housing properties.
- 5.23 However, for the call handlers whilst it is acknowledged that TUPE would apply all call handling operations would be required to take place from Redditch. As this would represent a significant change to the call handlers working conditions we anticipate that they are not going to find relocation to Redditch suitable. On this basis protected conversations will take place with the call handling staff and for those staff who believe transfer to Redditch would be an unsuitable change, they will be offered compensation in the form of redundancy payments under settlement agreements. Details of current vacant posts have been provided to all of the call handlers and these may offer opportunities of alternative employment for those interested and who meet the minimum essential criteria for the post. Consultation is underway with the staff affected.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The Social Alarm service currently makes a contribution to overheads or non direct costs of £10,180 however this net surplus does include the administration of other services.

The service is currently funded 47% from the HRA (Council Social Alarm tenants) and 53% for private clients/ Out of hours service.

Pending a detailed review of the service, a residual cost, including past service deficit ,of £95,340 will be incurred in 2019/20, to be met £44,810 from the HRA and £50,530 from the General Fund. In addition an indicative saving target of £20,000 exists in 2019/20 from the proposed re-alignment of call handling between Social Alarms and the Contact Centre.

The provision of the HRA element of the service by Redditch Borough Council will cost £49,950 which after taking into account the above residual costs to the HRA result in an overall saving of £64,720 to the HRA.

In relation to 2018/19 pro rata residual costs will exist and there will be one off additional set up costs of £16,000 required by Redditch BC.

Subject to the finalisation of staffing arrangements with Redditch BC and the outcome of staff consultations potential severance costs of in the region of £107,300 (inclusive of indicative actuarial strain costs of £32,550) will arise due to the relocation of the service being an unreasonable change of location under TUPE.

The costs will be shared 47% HRA and 53% General Fund.

No provision exists within the revenue budget for the additional costs however it is envisaged that they will be partly offset by underspends on Special Equipment: Professional Fees and Telephones .

6.2 Legal

Given the urgent need to transfer the service to another provider it has not been possible to undertake a competitive tendering exercise. An exemption to the Council's Procurement Regulations has therefore been granted by the Managing Director, the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Improvement. Three alternative quotations have been sought to ensure value for money. The value of the contract is below the OJEU threshold.

6.3 Human Resources

The implications for the staff of the social alarms team are set out in the body of the report and the financial implications section at 6.1.

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

None

6.5 Human Rights Act

None

6.6 Data Protection

Arrangements have been made for the safe transfer of the data of the housing tenants and private clients to Redditch Borough Council via the software supplier. Data sharing agreements have been signed. Housing tenants and private clients will be provided with a copy of Redditch Borough Council's privacy notice for the processing of their data.

6.7 Risk Management

The staffing shortages faced by the Social Alarms team means that it can no longer guarantee the cover of all shifts 24/7. This would pose a high risk to vulnerable people and this is not acceptable. In order to reduce this risk it has been decided to transfer the service to Redditch Borough Council who have a larger team and a higher level of shift coverage than the Council currently provides. This will ensure that a 24/7 service can be maintained. There is a risk to service continuity when making the switch to Redditch Borough Council but plans are in place to manage this with minimal disruption.

6.8 Equality & Diversity

None

6.9 Best Value

Best value has been a consideration when seeking alternative quotations from 3 providers. Consideration was given to price, service standards and ability to complete the service transfer quickly and safely.

7 Appendices to the Report

None.

Previous Consideration

None

Background Papers

None