

Reference from Community Services Committee 9 November 2023 - Procurement of Digital Alarms

Members are referred to the report which was circulated as part of the agenda for the meeting of Community Services on 9 November 2023.

The original report was exempt under paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 as it contains commercially sensitive financial information relating to the procurement of digital alarms.

Draft extract from the Minutes of the meeting

The Committee was asked to approve an approach to upgrading the Careline equipment in both Runnymede and Surrey Heath; and if approved, to recommend the proposed procurement route and associated costs to Corporate Management Committee and ultimately full Council given the overall cost in the sum reported.

Officers explained that they had been working to find an appropriate solution to the impending Digital Switchover for the last few years, during which time the industry was uncertain as to what they were able to recommend or promote as the way forward.

Officers advised that the work covered two main areas. These were the refresh of digital equipment in residents homes, to ensure connectivity and compatibility, and the need to digitalise Safer Runnymede as the monitoring centre that receives the alerts via Community Alarm Systems. Officers confirmed that the current timescales meant that the work needed to be completed by December 2025.

Members noted that with well over 1000 alarm units installed in residents' homes, the financial implications of having to replace analogue equipment with a digital solution were significant, as reported, whilst new, additional equipment would also have a new cost element to it.

The Committee was mindful of the current financial position of the Council and the fact that a capital provision was not budgeted for to replace the equipment, had led Officers to have to consider other options in order to preserve the service.

Members recalled that the Council was in receipt of Better Care funding, primarily for the delivery of disabled facilities grants, as well as other solutions that promoted independence and safe living at home.

Officers confirmed that in previous years, there had been an underspend against the grant, resulting in the monies being retained by the Council in a ring fenced budget, as they could not be absorbed into general fund budgets.

Officers were pleased to announce that the aforementioned underspend, provided the opportunity for the digital refresh to be funded, given recent changes to the guidance on how the funding was utilised and the opportunity to work more flexibly with the funding in support of the health and care system was available to the Council.

Members were asked to note that the Council's CLT had approved the business case and written permission had been secured from the Adult Social Care lead, and the NHS Place lead, who were responsible for the Better Care Fund in North West Surrey, to repurpose a sum, as reported, to the digitalisation of the Community Alarm service. Both parties had recognised the important role that the service played in supporting residents to live

independently at home, as well as supporting health and care in meeting the needs of residents.

Officers confirmed that through Homesafe Plus, the hospital discharge offer from boroughs in NW Surrey, the most referred to service as part of discharge planning was Community Alarm and Telecare.

The Committee was satisfied that Officers in both Community Services and Law & Governance had researched the proposed way forward extensively to ensure that such an approach was an appropriate use of the funding awarded as set out in the report.

Members recognised the acute value of the service to some of the community's most vulnerable residents and appreciated the efforts which Officers had made to source funding. When asked, Officers were confident that re-purposing the underspend would not have a detrimental effect on applications for Disabled Facilities Grants but this would be monitored.

The Committee understood that the Council had no choice in the matter as it was Utility led, save to find the most reliable and value for money route for the Council and at the same time retaining it as an affordable lifeline to residents. This would form the basis of a wider review to ensure the best interests of users of the Careline service.

Members were concerned that the most suitable and technically efficient provider was sought and asked for some benchmarking to be completed in this regard as well as confirmation of what the anticipated increase in data charges per month would be.

Members welcomed the intention for the procurement of suitable equipment to commence early in the new year, with the roll out taking place immediately thereafter.

Resolved that –

the proposed approach towards the digitalisation of the Community Alarm Service, be approved.

Corporate Management Committee be asked to recommend to full Council that-

- i) a supplementary Capital estimate in the sum reported to Community Services Committee for the purchase and installation of digital Community Alarm Equipment to be funded from the Better Care Fund over the next 3 years; and**
- ii) approval is given to enter into a procurement process for the purchase of digital Community Alarm Equipment, on behalf of both Runnymede and Surrey Heath Borough Councils up to a potential total value in the sum reported to Community Services Committee.**