

COMMUNITY ALARMS UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following a Cabinet decision made on 3 July 2013, the CCTV and Community Alarms services integrated into one team based at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst. This briefing note details the progress made so far, and provides an update to Councillors and officers, particularly those involved in the Task and Finish Group decision.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In September 2013, the Community Alarms function officially moved from Housing to Public Health and Community Safety. Of the 4 members of staff working for the service, 3 declined opportunities to work for the combined team, 2 moved to other posts within housing and the other left the authority. 1 member of staff came across to work for the combined team. Also recruited externally were 6 new members of staff plus an internal redeployment from the 'at risk' register. Of the 4 members of staff already working for CCTV, all retained their position within the new service.

3. TRAINING

- 3.1 Training has been intensive. The new starters were sent on a CCTV 4 day course to achieve Security Industry Authority accreditation. All staff had to learn Community Alarms from scratch with only one member of staff having previous experience. The lack of processes and procedures in place, due to the services being combined, made this an extremely difficult task. In addition, all staff went on a two day shadowing trip to Bristol City Council, where they worked alongside operators in one of the largest local authority control rooms providing a similar service to us, running similar software systems.
- 3.2 Upon installation of the Tunstall call receiving equipment in December, staff received training in Call Handling, Database Interrogation, Stock and Case Manager and the principles of dealing with people with dementia. The team have also had training on maintenance and installing of equipment and safeguarding. An ongoing training programme is being devised to cover related topics and dynamically deal with issues that have occurred.

4. INTEGRATING

- 4.1 The combined CCTV and Community Alarms team has been fully supported by all in Public Health and Community Safety. The admin team have been providing essential support, as planned, and are in close communication with the team downstairs to answer service user queries and book new community alarm installations.
- 4.2 Pest Control Officers within Environmental Protection had been temporarily supporting the team with home visits to assist with a considerable back log of equipment in the community with low battery life. Failure to change the batteries affects the guarantee on the life line unit and voids it from the externally provided maintenance contract.

5. REVERTING IN-HOUSE

- 5.1 Upon completion of the appropriate training and phase 1 refurbishment of the control room, the call handling function was brought in house on 22 January 2014.
- 5.2 On this day, calls were immediately transferred from Tunstall in Doncaster, to Appletree Court in Lyndhurst. Operators have not looked back, dealing with over 50,000 calls since then.
- 5.3 Tunstall still have a daily snap shot of our customer database and in emergencies, they will provide us with disaster recovery support. This disaster recovery arrangement is tested once a month.

6. OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

- 6.1 On 3 November 2014, the Council's out of hour's calls will also revert in-house. Software to manage this has been installed in the control room and operators will be trained by mid September.
- 6.2 Moving this part of the service across is creating an initial workload. As an authority we do not have a comprehensive list of services that are provided out of hours or advice that should be given when a service is not provided. Bringing that together is time consuming, but necessary, so that the operators have the correct information. The existing externalised service has caused many problems over the years and is a source of concern to the Heads of Service who have to respond out of hours.

7. KEY STATISTICS

7.1

Call type	Go Live to date
Community alarm calls	55,770
Ambulance calls	1580
Next of Kin or key holders of service users	1670
Fire Service calls	87
Police calls	150
Test calls from Service Users	5797

8. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

- 8.1 The team have spent a considerable amount of time 'tidying up' the database of service users that was inherited from Tunstall and managed on our behalf. There have been many instances of out of date records and incorrect addresses or next of kin details. We have therefore spent countless hours contacting service users, of which there are in excess of 3000, to obtain the correct information.
- 8.2 Once the calls were handed over, a call divert had to be in place from Tunstall. This, however, was just a temporary measure. In agreement with them, we set a deadline for the end of June 2014, to re-programme all units to our direct number. This involves communicating with every user, which is sometimes incredibly difficult. All 2281 private alarms have now been re-programmed.

- 8.3. We have had to communicate with all relevant service users in relation to Supporting People funding withdrawal, our own price changes and also to inform them that the service had reverted in-house. This gave us added difficulties due to the previously mentioned inaccuracies with the data base.
- 8.4 We have also encountered a lack of procedures or guidance on major parts of the service, particularly as the call handling element is a new function that has been brought in-house. We need to ensure everything we do has direction and consistency. If new employees start, there needs to be clear guidance to follow. This process and procedural development is very time consuming and takes patience from the operators given the complexity of the systems.
- 8.5 New Forest District Council has a contract with Cirrus to carry out maintenance visits and service units in the community. As well as paying an annual charge for maintenance, the Community Alarm Service seemed to have been paying additional invoices for jobs outside the contract. These were totalling between £5k and £10K per annum. When these invoices were examined it seems that we were paying for visits that were included in the contract. This has now been resolved. We are currently re-assessing this contract and when renewed will reduce costs further.

9. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 Our aim is to come up with a clear brand identity for 'Appletree Careline' including logo and direction for where it fits within the co-corporate New Forest District Council brand.
- 9.2 We would like to focus on new initiatives such as Domestic Violence alarms and Dementia Support to target highlighted issues amongst the New Forest demographic.
- 9.3 A marketing push will take place in the autumn with a view to increasing numbers of installations for the winter and spring period. We placed importance initially in ensuring all staff are trained, procedures were drawn up and understood and the aforementioned issues above were resolved before we added extra workload.
- 9.4 We have already been asked to provide a quote to take on a number of care-line connections for a housing agency and internal options for savings include other types of alarm monitoring.

10. AUDIT

- 10.1 Community Alarms was the subject of an internal audit in May 2014. The report, acknowledged the task taken over by the team and most of the issues and actions highlighted by the report had been noted previously by management and was already being resolved. The report overall was very positive with the service achieving the second highest rating on a four tier scoring system.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 By assessing contracts and re-evaluating our pricing structure, running costs etc we have made efficiency savings in the region of £50k. We will evaluate the total of these savings once the changes to the unit have been finalised.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no environmental implications as a result of this report.

13. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications as a result of this report but the longer term aspirations of the Community Alarms Service, as outlined in 9.0 – 9.4 above will have positive implications for Crime and Disorder in the New Forest.

14. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no direct implications as a result of this report but the service does contact on a daily basis vulnerable members of the New Forest Community and provide a direct service to them.

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 That members note the contents of the report.

For further information contact:

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Background Papers:

None