

# Careline

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022

# Introduction

Careline is a 24-hour emergency call system to help people live independently in their own home. Customers have a small base unit linked to their hardwire telephone socket installed and a pendant trigger (known as a Lifeline) is provided which can be worn around a person's neck or wrist. The service also offers the installation of smoke alarms.

There are four parts to the Careline service the council provides.

1. **General Customer accounts**, during office hours, the **Careline Team within Community Services** manage customer accounts of both the general needs of council tenants and private owners/leaseholders in Guildford who need this service. This involves managing residents' account, installations, annual safety checks, lost equipment issues and disconnections.
2. **Council Sheltered Schemes**, careline equipment is available to all sheltered schemes. The management of equipment and hard-wired electrics is managed by the property services team and Housing.
3. **PPP Taking Care Call Centre** is contracted by the council to provide a 24-hour call answering service to all users of careline – including sheltered schemes. In an emergency, customers press the pendant, and a call will be sent to the PPP Taking Care call centre in Chichester which is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Trained operators can identify the source of the call and arrange for help, even if the client is unable to speak. PPP in the event of an emergency call will do one or more of the following
  - During office hours contact GBC careline staff or housing sheltered scheme managers who may undertake a visit
  - Contact the next of kin or a neighbour
  - Contact the emergency services
  - Out of Hours contact the staff visitor for non-emergencies.
4. **Staff Visitor Scheme** is a scheme run by GBC that employs 5 council employees to work overtime as a Staff Visitor. They work out of hours and be on call to answer any non-emergency issues raised by PPP Taking Care about customers. The staff visitors may also attend the council sheltered schemes to assist with fire alarms.

Anyone living in Guildford can apply to use the service and customers include older people, people with physical or learning disabilities, those at risk of falls and patients leaving hospital.

We currently have 2,000 customers – approximately 1,675 in council housing and private homes and 328 in Sheltered housing.

### Current Income

- Council tenants are charged **£3.75 a week** and the HRA provides a subsidy of **£2.27** per week in most cases for sheltered housing residents
- Private clients are charged **£5.10** per week.

### Current Annual Expenditure

- £42,000 annual contract to PPP Taking Care
- £10,966 for Tunstall Healthcare Equipment
- £92,493 for Community Services Careline Staff (general fund)
- £61,000 for careline maintenance in sheltered and supported units (HRA)
- £33,410 for council staff visitor (out of hours) service

Please note that our current data cannot locate any share of costs with the HRA since 2015.

**Significant investment in equipment and technology is required for us to continue to provide the Careline service in its current format. Therefore, this mandate looks at the options for maintaining a cost-effective service to help vulnerable people live safely at home.**

# Strategy

## 1. Why should a programme/project be started now?

Our current contract with PPP Taking Care is due to expire in May 2022 so it is timely to look at the best possible service we can provide our most vulnerable tenants whilst mindful of our financial position as a council.

In addition to this, significant investment in technology and equipment will be required to enable a service to continue. The UK communication providers are transforming the telecommunications network in the UK from the traditional phone-line system to one which is based entirely upon the movement of 'packets' of digital information networks.

It will be increasingly difficult to maintain the older networks and by 2025 most residential premises will be accessing high speed connectivity for voice and data services in place of phone line technology – premises may migrate entirely to optical fibre infrastructure or to a mix of both copper and optical fibre.

This means all voice calls including alarm calls and data will no longer be able to use traditional phone networks and all communication will need to take place via devices connected to a router and over internet protocol networks or via mobile networks.

This digital transfer will put tremendous pressure on council services and the risk around installing new devices will be very high.

With the end of contract imminent with PPP Taking Care to provide our call service (May 2022) there is an opportunity to outsource all the service to an external provider. This will involve an external provider

- buying our connections and undertaking the cost of implementing upgraded digital systems
- managing accounts, installations and annual service checks
- Taking calls and managing risk through contacting emergency services or providing a welfare check of some kind

## **2. What is the good idea, opportunity or problem to be solved?**

As the contract with PPP Taking care is coming to an end, we have an opportunity to investigate how to provide careline services to our most vulnerable in the best and most cost-effective way, whilst ensuring the risk to the council around digital transfer is minimized.

The end of the PPP Taking Care contract provides an opportunity to outsource all of the service under one procurement process.

## **3. What is the purpose of the programme/project and what outcomes, or outputs will it deliver? List Success Criteria.**

Success criteria for the project will be the maintenance of a high-quality emergency response service for elderly and vulnerable residents whilst ensuring the digital transfer presents no risk to the council..

## **4. What priority, corporate objective or strategy is fulfilled by this project?**

Relevant corporate priorities include

- tackling inequality in our communities
- working with communities to support those in need.

# Options Evaluation

## 5. What are the potential strategic options to deliver a solution?

### 1. Do Nothing

Continue to operate the Careline service in its current format. This would require

- significant investment in equipment and technology (estimated at £350K but we would need the technical providers to give us the latest costings)
- significant investment in staffing to ensure the digital transfer is undertaken and the council is protected from increased ownership of risk (any failing of the digital transfer will lie with the council)
- procurement for an external provider of call handling as of May 2022.

This would not contribute to our Saving Strategy..

### 2a. Do Something

Outsource the entire service to a private external operator, such as PPP Taking Care. This would ensure the continuation of an emergency response service for elderly and vulnerable residents and continue our corporate commitment to support vulnerable people. An external provider would buy our connections but in doing so mitigate the extensive costs of a complex digital transfer as they would be responsible for the upgrade. As well as the estimated upgrade costs of approximately £365,000, this could also deliver financial savings in the region of £126K per annum for staff costs.

Sheltered Schemes will also need to review the physical systems within their units to ensure it is workable with the new operating model. This can be done by the same provider or commissioned separately or done in house.

As there is an income for the council attached to the careline service, it is also possible to review with an external provider a contribution made by them to the council over the next 5 years of the income they receive – however this may be offset by the expenditure the provider will take on to upgrade the systems.

# Options Evaluation Cont'd

## 2b. Do Something

Outsource to another Council provider such as Mole Valley or Runnymede Borough Councils. (Both of these councils have taken on careline provision for other districts and boroughs in Surrey) This would require

- Interested borough councils to tender for the contract as part of our procurement process
- A Service Level Agreement between the council and successful provider
- Possible Staff resource to contract monitor
- Annual contract fee/contribution to digital upgrade

## 2c Do Something

Bring back the whole Careline service in-house. This would mean that the council is responsible for all elements of the service including call handling. This would require

- significant financial investment in staffing for digital upgrade and call handling
- space to house a careline specific call centre
- significant financial investment in equipment that enables the upgrade and programming of all equipment as part of the digital transfer before 2025

In addition to this, the corporate risk of providing this service is extensive. Failure of service could result in the council being at risk of corporate manslaughter.

# Options Evaluation Cont'd

## 3. Most

As a discretionary service, GBC cease the delivery of Careline to deliver financial savings in the region of £180K for the general fund per annum and allow the market to service the requirement (cheaper to customers in some cases).

Whilst this option would maximise savings, our corporate priorities suggest that scarce resources should be aligned towards supporting those most in need in the borough. Making the service optional within sheltered will increase the need for an alternative out of hours service for those who will now contact the Council direct for assistance



# Considerations

## 6. Who is the lead Director & Service Manager who will lead and direct the project and who will be managing/using the projects products once they are handed over?

Ian Doyle (Director of Service Delivery)

Samantha Hutchison (Head of Community Services)

## 7. What Impact assessments have been undertaken and what are the impacts on other Service Leaders and/or other programmes/projects?

Depending on the preferred option, consideration will be given to the need for an equality impact assessment and a Data Privacy Impact Assessment to weigh up the risks associated with the privacy and data protection rights of the customers along with data security associated with information transfers or data sharing.

There is a staffing impact on outsourcing and possible TUPE considerations as well as staff redundancies.

There is the opportunity to coordinate with Waverley Borough Council and combine outsourcing. Although our deadline of May 2022 to procure the call handling is fast approaching, Waverley may wish to join at a later date depending on the length of their remaining contract. If we were to outsource to our current call handling provider, Waverley may wish to outsource earlier as they too share the current call handling provider.

## 8. What general approach will the project take to deliver?

Any project for the future provision of the Careline Service would be delivered by the Head of Community Services as business as usual.

## 9. When and why must the project start and finish?

The project needs to begin as soon as possible due to the contract with PPP/Taking Care ending in May 2022. To enable this project to be conducted robustly, we will look to extend our current contract with PPP/Taking Care for six months. Changes to the funding of the Careline services should be reflected in the 2022/23 budget-setting process. .

# Resources

## 10. Which stakeholders are or need to be, involved in the project

Corporate Management Team / Lead Councillor / Executive/Service Delivery EAB  
Internal careline staff  
Housing Services/Sheltered Housing  
Careline clients  
Taking Care and other external providers  
Other district and borough providers

## 11. What specialist resources (internal and external) are needed to consider this mandate and develop a strategic outline business case?

Internal Staffing – Legal, finance, procurement and human resources

External Consultants – None

## 12. What Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) are the likely Whole Life Costs (WLC) of the project and live service?

We estimate that the preferred option of outsourcing the service either to a external provider or another district and borough (2a and 2b) could deliver savings in the region of £130K per annum to the general fund and prevent significant investment required for digital transfer as well as remove the increasing risk to the council that digital transfer will present.

If the preferred option of outsourcing the service was agreed, consideration will need to be given to redundancy costs and possible TUPE considerations

# Potential costs to proceed to the next stage to develop the Strategic Outline Case

## Resource costs to progress to the next stage/gate and develop the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC)

	Q3 (21/22)	Q4 (21/22)	Q1 (22/23)	Q2 (22/23)	Total	
Internal staffing costs	Existing internal staffing					
Specialist external consultants' costs	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

# Issues, Assumptions & Risks

## 13. What are the strategic Risks, Assumptions, Issues,

### Issues

- Significant investment required in existing equipment and technology to continue inhouse service provision (£350k)
- Significant upskilling of the workforce will also be needed to prevent the council being exposed to increased risk if we keep inhouse
- Should we look to outsource we will need to conduct market testing to ascertain which companies will meet our requirements so we can compliantly procure and advise on routes to market a clear indicative value of this contract
- Careline is considered an important part of preventative care and helps people avoid hospital and care home admissions for longer
- Sensitive issue, which will need careful management, communications and engagement with stakeholders
- Management of human resources implications of outsourcing the service and potential redundancy costs
- Consultation with affected staff

### Assumptions

- That the Council wishes to continue providing an emergency response service for the elderly and vulnerable. This is not a statutory service, but local councils to offer some form of support for careline – whether inhouse or via external provider. If the case to outsource is agreed, there will be a handover process with the Community Services team that ensures customers needs are met.
- That any external provider will purchase our current connections and as part of that purchase undertake digital upgrade and transfer.
- Procurement protocol will ensure that any application from an external provider predominately considers how customer needs, safety and welfare are met so that any transition is as easy as possible for our most vulnerable customers

## **Risks**

**If we do nothing (option 1)** we will have to procure a new call handling contract and implement the digital transfer ourselves at a significant cost. There will be a huge risk to the council via the digital transfer.

**If we outsource via procurement (option 2a and 2b)** we will need to ensure a quality of service is maintained through transition. There is a risk that potential savings are lower than expectations and that an external provider will not want to take on our connections and the digital upgrade due to a changing market. We will also have to consider TUPE implications and redundancy costs.

**If we take back in house the careline service (option 3)** significant investment will be required not only to implement digital transfer but to facilitate a specific careline call handling team 24 hours, 7 days a week. The risk to the council will catapult including possible corporate manslaughter

**If we do most (option 4)** we completely cease the careline service and tell our most vulnerable people to take up service with independent providers. This does not align with our corporate priorities to care for communities and the most vulnerable.

## **General**

Quality of service being maintained at acceptable levels – in taking on the digital transfer ourselves we are exposed to a huge risk

Potential savings are lower than expectations

Budgetary pressures require the cessation of any support for this discretionary service area

Public and press criticism of any perceived reduction in service levels

Insufficient time to conduct all the pre-work required by the expiry of current contract (May 2022) and an exemption to CPB may therefore be required to extend our current arrangement for a given period.

This is a sensitive issue and could result in public and press criticism of any perceived reduction in service levels.

Sheltered housing will need to consider whether the schemes are included in any outsourcing and if not, the implications around that for sheltered tenants.

# Dependencies, Constraints & Opportunities

## 14. What are the Dependencies, Constraints and Opportunities?

### Dependencies

Ability of an external provider or other district and borough to deliver a satisfactory service – there are providers but not all deliver a customer focused care approach so any outsourcing would need to have a tailored procurement approach.

### Constraints

Digital Transfer is inevitable because our current careline service use basic BT lines built on old copper technology – investment will be required to upgrade the systems and upskill workforce.

The council's financial position

### Opportunities

To provide a the most effective careline service for our most vulnerable residents.

Work collaboratively with Waverley Borough Council to have a united approach to Careline delivery.

# Reviewer List

## **Involved or Sighted so far and to be updated on changes**

Executive Liaison 2nd March 2022

CMT – 19th January 2022

Lead Councillor for Housing and Community

Stephen Benbough, Strategy and Communications Manager

Samantha Hutchison, Head of Community Services

Louise Odell, Interim Project Officer

Samantha Adam, PMO Officer

Ian Doyle, Service Delivery Director

Claire Morris, Director Resources

Faye Gould, Procurement Manager

Dawn Hudd, Strategic Services Director

Diane Owens, Lead Specialist (Legal)

Vicky Worsfold, Lead Specialist (Finance)

Louise Kolmer, Lead Accountant

Francesca Chapman, Lead Specialist (HR)

James Beach (ICT)

Matt Gough (Housing Lead)

Ciaran Ward, Information Governance

## **Next to be consulted**

Service Delivery Executive Advisory Board 10th March 2022

# Careline – Next steps

## CMT

CMT considered this mandate at its meeting on 19 January 2022 and agreed it should be presented with an update to the options to the next Executive Liaison Group meeting on 2 March 2022 to include possible outsourcing to district and boroughs who already manage careline services.

## Executive Liaison Group

The Executive Liaison Group considered the mandate at its meeting held on 2 March 2022. A preference was expressed for future delivery of the service with a local authority partner or through a contract with a private sector provider with appropriate governance and monitoring arrangements.

The Executive Liaison Group also noted that a decision was required due to the forthcoming ending of the existing contract. It emphasised that its objective was to provide a high quality, cost-effective service to some of our most vulnerable residents rather than deliver financial savings.

It was agreed that the mandate should be submitted to the Service Delivery EAB on 10 March 2022.