

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Report Title	New digitally enabled Careline System			
Purpose of Report	To update members on the plan for replacement of the current analogue Community Alarm equipment (Careline), with digital equipment in preparation for full digital switchover in December 2025			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to accept a grant from the Gloucestershire County Council, Better Care Fund of £357k to replace the current analogue Community Alarm equipment (Careline) with new digitally enabled equipment.			
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation with Forest of Dean and Cotswold District and Cheltenham Borough Council officers.			
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Options	Members could ask officers to further explore the following alternatives. However, this would exclude SDC from the joint funding secured and would pass over the opportunity to inject significant investment into the service: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do nothing and continue with the current system. 2. Discontinue providing this service across the district. 3. Seek third-party partnership and investment, or a commercial solution to take on the existing customer base. 			
Background Papers	None.			
Appendices	Appendix A – Options Appraisal Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment			
Implications (Further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Careline Service is Stroud District Council's monitored community-based alarm service. It helps provide residents in our communities the support and reassurance to lead an independent lifestyle in their own homes.
- 1.2 SDC currently have around 1,300 Careline customers, each of whom has an electronic careline unit, working in conjunction with a standard phoneline.
- 1.3 The device enables users to access a call centre in an emergency, via their phoneline, from anywhere in the house. Trained operatives refer the caller to either a next of kin, or the emergency services, as appropriate.

- 1.4 Customers are charged between £1.90 and £4.74 per week for the service, which includes the careline unit rental.
- 1.5 In 2023/24 SDC expect to generate revenue of circa. £165k from careline fees.
- 1.6 Our Neighbourhood Wardens, who install the alarms, make valuable links with potentially vulnerable users. They undertake welfare checks to ensure customers are safe and able to live independently. Referrals are made to third party supporting agencies if required.

2. Digital Switchover

- 2.1 National change to digitise phonelines is ongoing. Phone companies are working on a controlled phasing out of analogue services and intend to fully withdraw the entire analogue telephone system, by the end of 2025.
- 2.2 The digital switchover presents a significant risk to Careline functionality. Guidance from the industry and advisory body, has advised that analogue units are likely to fail on the digital telephone system.
- 2.3 As such a fully digital solution is required by the end of 2025, with all customers needing an updated careline unit. This update will need to be carefully managed, with all existing 1,300 units requiring replacement and installation.

3. Solution

- 3.1 In light of the significant investment required, SDC worked with neighbouring authorities to investigate collective solutions.
- 3.2 A full options appraisal was carried out by officers, which reinforced the importance of offering a continued service. This is available for reference as Appendix A.
- 3.3 A joint bid was made to the Gloucestershire County Council Better Care Fund, through the Disabled Facility Grant reserve.
- 3.4 The bid was successful and SDC alongside, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council were awarded a total of £1.3m to replace the analogue units, with new digitally enabled versions.
- 3.5 SDC have been allocated £357k. This sum covers the cost of a full replacement programme, with contingency to ensure the sum covers the final procurement cost.
- 3.6 Thereafter, additional units in excess of the existing subscriber base, will be funded by existing budgets and the additional revenue generated.
- 3.7 Whilst the contract for monitoring (call centre services) is to be re-procured in 2024, the upgrading of alarm units will have little material impact and therefore funding will continue from the existing service budget.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Should members accept the grant funding, an officer working group made up of representatives from Community Services, Customer Services, Housing Services, and Information & Communication Technology will be readied to deliver the project.
- 4.2 A detailed project plan with risk mitigation will be produced to ensure continuation of service delivery, without disruption to users.

4.3 The procurement of new units, utilising the grant funding will be overseen by the SDC Procurement Team, ensuring compliance and best value. One Legal will also provide advice on the terms and conditions of the grant.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 More than 1% of SDC residents use the careline service and ensuring continued functionality, post digital switchover is essential.

5.2 Officers have secured the necessary investment to upgrade units and existing resource will be used to roll out installation.

5.3 One of the key council priorities is *community resilience and wellbeing* and by making this investment into a digitally enabled product we are able to:

- Keep some of our most vulnerable residents in their homes for longer.
- Use the switch over as an opportunity to contact residents and conduct welfare checks.
- Promote the importance and benefits of the Careline service.

5.4 The officer recommendation is that SDC accept the grant funding and prepare the careline service to be fully compatible with digital switchover.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial Implications

There are financial implications associated with this report. A grant of £375k has been allocated from GCC to fund this project, all associated costs must be met within this budget and existing salary budgets. A capital budget of £375k will need to be added to the Capital Programme for 2024/25 budget setting.

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6.2 Legal Implications

The Council will need to comply with its contract and procurement procedure rules to purchase the new equipment and to appoint a new provider to support the new equipment. Advice should be sought from One Legal regarding proposed variation or termination of any current contracts relating to the Careline Service. The new contract(s) will also either need to be prepared or reviewed (in the case of a call-off from a framework agreement) by One Legal. Also, if the County Council grant is subject to terms and conditions, these should be reviewed by One Legal.

One Legal Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

6.3 Equality Implications

An EIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and due regard will be given to any implications identified in it.

6.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

