
Meeting of the Adult Social Care Select Committee – 7th March, 2024

Report of the Director of Adult Social Care

Service update from Dudley Telecare

Purpose

1. To provide an update to Members regarding the implementation and impact of the Telecare Charging Policy and the Procurement of the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) procurement as part of the analogue to digital switchover.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:-
 - The impact of the charging policy is scrutinised by Members.
 - The awareness and impact of the analogue to digital switchover is noted.
 - The plan to increase the uptake of technologies to ensure individuals are supported through the digital offer is scrutinised.

Background

3. Dudley has a population of approximately 323,581 people. By 2031 the population is expected to increase by 13,990 (4.4%). Most of this increase is accounted for by the rise in the 65 and over age group, with the 85+ age group increasing by nearly 70%.
4. A new charging policy for Telecare came into effect from 1st April 2023 seeing the cost of the service rise from £16.30 per month to £21.30 per month for private customers, this increase was required to ensure we fully recovered the proportionate costs of the service.

5. The pricing strategy also saw the introduction of charging for council tenants from 1st October 2023, with a phased pricing approach for existing council customers until 31st March 2024 to reduce the financial impact on individual tenants.
6. Adult Social Care staff through the ongoing development of a strength-based approach, must consider technology to support individuals and carers to maximise independence and make best use of resources.
7. A national move to digital has been enforced by phone providers across the country has meant that all Telecare solutions must switch from the current analogue system to digital by 2025. To undertake this, and to ensure the safety of those connected already to the service, Telecare needs to procure a new digitally enabled alarm receiving centre to ensure those connected remain so without any discontinuation of service.
8. The Annual Telecare Service Association (TSA) Audit was completed for 2023/24. Telecare received its highest merit of 'compliant status', demonstrating the sustainable, high-quality service provided by Dudley Telecare, meeting the industry standard and wider reputation with the TSA.

Charging Strategy

9. From April 2023 – January 2024, Telecare has seen a 29% decrease in connections across the borough. The total number of users that have discontinued the Telecare service, (inclusive of those that have given notice) over the past 12 months is:

Private Tenure	- 121
Council Tenure	- 2457
10. It should be noted that some newer Council builds had Telecare hardwired but have never used the service. This has inflated the number of Council tenants who have given notice.
11. From a sample exercise carried out following the uplift for private cohort, we have seen some customers that cancelled their service, due to affordability, come in through the front door into other adult social care services.

Analogue to Digital

12. The length of time the ongoing procurement exercise is taking presents a greater risk to the council, as well as the vulnerable people connected to the service. Failure to provide, or any further delays to the procurement of

a digital alarm receiving centre, unnecessarily, may result in loss of connection, which for some, is their much needed 'lifeline'. We are working as a cross directorate steering group to identify the best route to go back out to the market to procure a digital alarm receiving centre, this approach has previously been endorsed by Procurement Management Group and the approval of the Spending Control Group, is currently being sort.

13. Regular information sessions are attended with the Local Government Association and Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Services Association, to provide us with the updates on the telecommunication upgrade plans and best practices, to support the implementation of our replacement programme.

Technology Enabled Care

14. The Adult Social Care Digital Transformation Fund has allowed the Black Country Integrated Care System (ICS) access to funding to assist with:
 - Adoption of a Digital Social Care Record (DSCR)
 - Sensor Based Falls prevention technology
 - Other technology (not already being funded through other national allocations i.e. Remote Monitoring)
15. Currently Dudley, working alongside the ICS and other local authorities, are working through delivery of the above schemes, and it is expected that the System will deliver the following throughout the life span of the programme:
 - 80% of Adult social care CQC registered providers will have adopted a digital social care record by March 2024
 - 20% of social care provider will have acoustic monitoring solution or equivalent care tech in place by March 2024. This would be targeted at the 20% most at risk residents with social care providers.
 - Full deployment of at least one other type of care tech, driven by the benefits case and local need.

16. Progress so far:

There has been agreed focus with the ICB on Digital Social Care Records (DSCR) and Supporting Independence Through Technology (SITT).

Digital social care records –

- We are struggling to gain traction in converting the 66 Expressions of Interest into Applications (25 so far, which is still the highest number of applications within the Black Country LA's).

- The Application process is being looked at to understand the root cause of the lack of conversion. We are working directly with Tiled House, Intermediate Care Unit in Dudley, as an exemplar to uncover problems and provide solutions.

Supporting Independence Through Technology –

- The Bid Award was announced on 15th January after the review of bid submissions. Connected Care Services (Ethelcare) will be the contracted supplier.
- Looking to organise a kick-off meeting, in early February with the supplier and the four Black Country LA's.

New Initiatives

17. Internal TEC sessions have been introduced to engage with the workforce and upskill them. Sessions are being run every 3 weeks with a view to increasing referrals for technology into Telecare.

Challenges

18. We are working with staff to develop their digital skills and promote the culture that is required across the team to ensure we are ready for the analogue to digital shift and the changes that the team need to continue to make to reach our full potential as a service. Intense training will be required to ensure all staff are equipped and able to perform during the transition from our analogue ARC to our new digital solution.

Finance

19. The Dudley Telecare Service is funded through the general fund, private income, and the Housing Revenue Account for all Sheltered Housing Schemes and the out of hours services provided by Telecare. Additional investment for the replacement programme and SIM card costs in the future is being progressed with Housing, Adult Social Care and Commercial colleagues and any recommendations regarding future charges will be progressed through Cabinet and the appropriate Select Committee.
20. To make best use of resources the Corporate Steering Group have agreed the following:
 - To stop buying analogue equipment, as this will become obsolete at some point in the next couple of years and purchase hybrid equipment. The equipment works both on analogue and when the customer is switched over to digital.

- Costs have now been confirmed by suppliers of hybrid equipment and the SIM card charges currently are £40.00 per annum, after 2 years from the date of purchase.
21. For the 2023/24 financial year, based on minimum income and discounting applied, it is expected that we will see a shortfall on private tenant income of £108k and council tenant income of £67k against target.
 22. This is based on full Council Tax Relief and discount reliefs applied, so should be a maximum shortfall.
 23. We have performed better on Out of Hours income and Sheltered Housing, with the anticipated income to be generated totalling £236k, which is a favourable difference of £35k.
 24. On the same basis as above, before any uplifts to the charging rates, for the financial year 2024/25, there is predicted to be a maximum shortfall on income of £421k.
 25. Modelling around rates and numbers are being considered. A 2% uplift would improve the income shortfall by £20k, whereas an uplift in line with the council tax increases would improve the income by £49k. Any future increases need to consider affordability and the general impact of rising costs, rents and Council Tax for residents.

Law

26. Dudley Telecare Service supports statutory responsibilities. Section 2 of the Care Act 2014 states: where the local authority provides or arranges for care and support, the type of support may itself include support such as assistive technology in the home or equipment/adaptations, and approaches to meeting needs should be inclusive of less intensive or service-focused options.
27. Section 4 of The Care Act states that local authorities should facilitate local markets to encourage a sufficiency of preventative, enablement, and support services, including support for carers to make caring more sustainable where services such as Telecare are utilised to assist people achieve more independence and support the outcomes they want.

Risk Management

28. Working closely with all stakeholders in the Analogue to Digital Steering Group, we have collated a comprehensive risk register and the key risks will be reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

Equality Impact

29. The service is available to anyone in need, living in the borough of Dudley, and shall be delivered in line with the councils Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy 2022-2025, to adhere to equality legislation. Equality impacts arising are positive.
30. Where this can have a positive impact on marginalised groups is evidence throughout the report, such as those protected by equality legislation based on their age, being carers, and having an ageing population.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

31. All necessary changes to the operating staffing structure were completed as part of the previous telecare review through consultation with those affected, involving recognised trade unions, ensuring Council HR policy and Procedures are adhered to.

Commercial/Procurement

32. Systems and equipment continue to move forward with the imminent nationwide telephony shift from analogue to digital by 2025. We are working with colleagues in Housing, Commercial and the Corporate Steering Group, to ensure the procurement of the digitally enabled equipment for the replacement programme is realised.
33. We also continue to manage the outcomes and financial impact of the implementation of the Telecare Charging Policy until full realisation achieved by April 2024.

Council Priorities

34. Throughout the procurement of the alarm receiving centre, we have been working to future proof the service. We strive to achieve the aims set out in the Digital Strategy. We are working with consideration to the Council Plan, to ensure we continually invest in Technologies to support not only our staff to work smarter and maximise remote working but to continually invest in TEC. to Empower people to be self-reliant, independent, and well-co-ordinated to grow strong, connected, and resilient communities.

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