

SELECT COMMITTEES

1. COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

The Communities Select Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor Y Knight (Chairman)

Councillor G Shiell (Vice Chairman)

Councillors R Baldwin, A Beales, K Chana, R Gadsby, L Girling, S Heap, L Hughes, S Jones, S Murray, A Mitchell, B Rolfe, B Surtees and H Whitbread

The Lead Officer was Alan Hall, Director of Communities. The Committee also appreciated the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Stavrou, attending the meetings to help them with their deliberations.

Wyn Marshall represented the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation, attending the meetings as a non-voting co-opted member to provide the views of residents and stakeholders.

Terms of Reference

The Communities Select Committee was tasked to undertake reviews of the services and related functions of the Communities Directorate;

To develop a programme of work each year, informed by relevant service aims and member priorities, to ensure that the services and functions of the Communities Directorate are appropriate and responsive to the needs of the residents;

To consider any matter referred to the Select Committee by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet or a relevant Portfolio Holder, and to report and make recommendations directly to the Committee, the Cabinet or such Portfolio Holder as appropriate;

To consider the effect of Government actions or initiatives on the services and functions of the Communities Directorate and any implications for the Council's residents, service users and others, and to respond to consultation activities as appropriate;

To establish working groups as necessary to undertake any activity within these terms of reference;

To undertake pre-scrutiny through the review of specific proposals of the Council and its partner organisations or other local service providers, insofar as they relate to the services and functions of the Communities Directorate, to help develop appropriate policy;

To undertake performance monitoring in relation to the services and functions of the Communities Directorate, against adopted key performance indicators and identified areas of concern;

To identify any matters within the services and functions of the Communities Directorate that require in-depth scrutiny, for referral to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and

To recommend the establishment of task and finish panels to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as necessary, in order to undertake any activity within these terms of reference.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

(i) Communities Directorate's Housing Service Strategies – At the beginning of the year (June 2016) the Committee received a report from the Director of Communities regarding the Housing Service Standards – Performance 2015/16 and Review.

In 2007, the then Housing Portfolio Holder agreed a range of Housing Service Standards covering all of the Housing Services' main areas of activity. It was also agreed that, annually, the Housing Services' performance against the Housing Service Standards should be considered and whether any changes should be made to the Service Standards. Tenants were provided with a handbook setting out all the agreed Service Standards, this information was also available on-line.

The Committee agreed and recommended to the portfolio holder the various small changes proposed in the report.

(ii) Key Performance Indicators – Outturn (Q4) Performance - The Select Committee received a report regarding Key Performance Indicators 2015/16 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) Performance from the Director of Communities.

The Q4 (Outturn) performance summary in respect of each of the KPIs falling within the Communities Select Committee's areas of responsibility for 2015/16 together with details of the specific twelve month performance for each indicator are listed below.

- (a) 27 (75%) indicators achieved target;
- (b) 9 (25%) indicators did not achieve target, although; and
- (c) 1 (3%) of these KPIs performed within its tolerated amber margin.

Ten of the KPIs fell within this select committee's areas of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at the end of the year for these indicators was as follows:

- (i) 8 (80%) indicators achieved target;
- (ii) 2 (20%) indicators did not achieve target; and
- (iii) 0 (0%) indicators performed within their tolerated amber margin.

(iii) Key Performance Indicators - Quarterly Progress – the Committee reviewed the Key Performance Indicators relevant to their Select Committee on a quarterly basis.

(iv) Housing Strategy: 6 Month Progress Report on Key Action Plan 2016 - The Select Committee received a 6 month progress report regarding the Housing Strategy – Key Action Plan 2016 from the Director of Communities.

The Council had adopted a Housing Strategy that assessed the District's current and future housing needs and set out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. The Strategy also included a Key Action Plan which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the first year of the Housing Strategy.

Members were advised that the authority would be providing 1 x 1 bedroom and 1 x 2 bedroom flats each year for 4 years to Syrian refugees on non-secure tenancies which would be assisting the Government's commitment to accommodate 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK over a 4 year period. The Director of Communities added that the District Council would be the landlords but Essex County Council would be responsible for the families.

(v) Housing and Planning Act 2016 – Summary of Key Housing Proposals – The Select Committee received a report regarding the Housing and Planning Act 2016 – Summary of Key Housing Proposals from the Director of Communities.

Following a lengthy and somewhat controversial passage, the Housing and Planning Bill, now the Housing and Planning Act received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016.

The new Act comprised a number of provisions relating to both housing and planning, in particular it covered:

- (a) Lifetime and fixed term tenancies;
- (b) Voluntary Right to Buy for housing association tenants and sales of high value void Council properties;
- (c) Starter Homes; and
- (d) "Pay to Stay" – Increased rents for tenants on higher incomes.

The Committee members expressed some concern about the bill's consequences in terms of the security for neighbourhood cohesion and the authority being forced to sell the higher value properties that they possessed.

(vi) Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2015/16 – Quarter 4 Outturn Position – The Select Committee received a report regarding the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2015/16 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) Position from the Director of Communities.

The Corporate Plan was the Council's key strategic planning document, setting out its priorities over the five year period from 2015/16 to 2019/20. The priorities or Corporate Aims were supported by Key Objectives providing a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for these five years.

Some actions had cross directorate responsibility, where this was the case the most appropriate Select Committee was requested to consider the action. This report presented outturn progress against the Key Action Plan for 2015/16 for actions most appropriately considered by this Select Committee at the end of 2015/16.

There were 55 actions in the Key Action Plan 2015/16, at the end of the year 15 actions fell within the areas of responsibility of this Select Committee. At the end of the year:

- (i) 8 (53%) of these actions had been achieved at year end; and
- (ii) 7 (47%) of these actions had not been achieved by year end.

(vii) Presentation of Disabled Facilities Grants - The Select Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director – Housing regarding Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

Disabled Facilities Grants were a statutory provision applicable to private home owners and private tenants enabling them to live at home despite living with infirmities.

Outline of DFGs: DFGs were means tested and could be paid to a maximum of £30,000; 12 straight lifts were installed a year at £900.00; 5 curved lifts at £3,000; 37 level access showers at £7,000 each; and 1 extension a year at £30,000 each.

DFG Process: An occupational therapist takes a referral from Essex County Council; The householder makes an application to the District Council; An initial means test is carried out; Information gathering in support of the application; The grant would be approved by the District Council; and the work carried out.

The whole process takes about 18 months.

(viii) Annual Feedback on Crucial Crew Event and Proposals for the Future - The select committee received a report from the Community, Health and Wellbeing Manager regarding the Crucial Crew Initiative.

Crucial Crew was an annual initiative which was facilitated and delivered by the Council's Community, Health and Wellbeing Team in collaboration with the Community Safety Team. It was intended for educating primary school pupils aged 10 (Year 6) in a range of personal safety, health and wellbeing topics. With schools reporting their curriculum time increasingly tightly programmed, Crucial Crew was seen as a vital mechanism for pupils.

Crucial Crew had existed in the district for over 11 years and delivered to primary school pupils over a two week period in June.

In 2016, the scenarios delivered were:

- (a) Online safety, cyber bullying and child exploitation – Essex Police.
- (b) Alcohol and drug awareness – AlcoHelp.
- (c) Bullying and Peer Pressure – Red Balloon Family.
- (d) Healthy eating and physical activity – ACE (NHS).
- (e) Smoking awareness – Provide (NHS).
- (f) Anti-Social Behaviour and Environmental responsibility – EFDC.
- (g) Road safety awareness – Essex County Council.

- (h) Fire safety – Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.
- (i) Safety around construction sites – Mears.
- (j) Safety around large vehicles – Sainsburys.

The Select Committee noted the issue of self harming among young people and other mental health problems and thought it was important to de-stigmatise this situation and facilitate a process for greater awareness.

(ix) Incentives for Tenants Downsizing Accommodation - The Council's Housing Allocations Scheme was reviewed in 2015 with the revised scheme coming into force on 27 July 2015, when considering the recommendations of the then Housing Select Committee, the Cabinet agreed that the financial incentives offered to tenants moving to any property with less bedrooms than their current property would be increased. The financial incentives offered for releasing any bedroom had been doubled under the current scheme, a maximum payment of £4,000 being made, an additional payment of £500.00 was made to cover decoration costs over and above the Council's standard decorations allowance. There were a range of other incentives offered as well.

The Council employed a Re-Housing Support Officer who offered support to tenants who were downsizing accommodation in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme.

(x) Homeoption Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Progress report - The Choice Based Lettings Scheme was introduced in November 2007 and was necessary in meeting the requirements of Government that such a scheme was in place by 2010. The scheme was administered by the external Choice Based Lettings agency Locata Housing Services (LHS). Under the scheme all vacant social rented properties were advertised to applicants and a two weekly Property List giving relevant details. Applicants applied for a property by expressing an interest in up to a maximum of three properties for which they have an assessed need.

The select committee analysed the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Information Bulletin for the period 27 July 2015 to 27 July 2016.

Almost 97% of Homeseekers expressing an interest in properties did so over the Internet. The remaining 3% either telephoned, received help from staff at the reception computer or used text. Around 84% of all applicants registered on the Housing Register had participated in the scheme during the last year.

(xi) Corporate Plan Action Plan Progress Quarterly Progress – the Select Committee received quarterly updates on the Council's corporate action plan pertaining to their area of responsibility.

(xii) Community Services Summer Activities 2016 - The Committee noted that the Council's Community Services Team organises and delivers a summer holiday activity programme each year, providing a wide range of activities for engaging children, young people and their families.

This year, over 2,500 youngsters participated in the extensive range of activities on offer.

The Select Committee were advised that the Community Services Team had encountered numerous issues and problems with the online booking portal accessed via the Council's website. This meant that the number of online bookings taken were

less than last year's although administration staff had been excellent in providing support to help people complete bookings by phone. However, a new corporate online booking system was currently being investigated. Fortunately these issues did not have too much of an affect upon overall participation numbers for the summer.

(xiii) Presentation from Chief Inspector Morrissey, Essex Police District Commander for Brentwood and Epping Forest - Chief Inspector D Morrissey gave a presentation in which she outlined the following that:

Epping Forest District had 8 tube stations; The district borders three Metropolitan Police boroughs; 80% of criminal suspects the Police had here, lived outside the district; April – August 2015 – 3,222 crimes reported in the area; April – August 2016 – 3,530 crimes reported in the area, which constituted an increase of 9.5% (308 crimes); Violent crimes against the person; (i) without injury - saw an increase of 24% and (ii) with an injury - went up by 32%. Approximately 30% of violent crime occurred in the home.

Anti-Social Behaviour – 3.4% increase in offences (66 more offences); Chief Inspector D Morrissey had established a problem solving team and Community Hub in September 2014 for co-ordinating anti-crime efforts.

Resourcing had been a major factor in policing recently as Epping Police Station had closed and the nearest police station to the district was now in Harlow. A police contact point had been established at the District Council for reporting low level crime and Chief Inspector D Morrissey had 10 Police Constables and 10 Police Community Support Officers.

Two important police operations had also been initiated, Operation Scorpion for dealing with travelling criminals and Operation Raptor, an anti-gang project.

(xiv) Community Safety Partnership Annual Report 2015/16 - The Committee was advised that CSPs provided a statutory function in all District, City and Borough Councils across the UK. The partnerships consisted of representatives from a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations. Each year they were required to produce an annual report on the initiatives and work that they had undertaken in their designated area to address local crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. The report covered the financial status of the CSP and an overview of the work undertaken in addressing key priorities for the district. The annual report was supported by a range of case studies.

There was concern at the meeting that gaps existed in the amount of protection that could be provided to residents. Officers have engaged with Social Care and Community Mental Health Teams but this was still a challenge as they continued to work more closely with these agencies where necessary.

(xv) Proposed Decommissioning of CCTV - A decommissioning assessment of CCTV currently installed across the district was undertaken in 2015 as part of the review process for the production of the Council's CCTV Strategy 2016-2022. This met with the guidance provided in the CCTV Code of Practice which stated that regular reviews of CCTV systems should be undertaken to ensure that the use of surveillance cameras remained in pursuit of a legitimate aim and that a pressing need existed. As a result, the Council's CCTV Officer had identified two sites for potential decommissioning which was based upon the last two years of service and factors such as reduction of service requirement and on-going costs.

These were the first cases to arise under the Council's new CCTV Strategy, therefore the Portfolio Holder was seeking the views of the Select Committee on the proposed de-commissioning, prior to making a formal Portfolio Holder Decision. It was further advised that this would assist in assessing future requirements.

The Select Committee were advised that Parish and Town Councils could fund their own CCTV cameras and that the District Council could also facilitate this for a fee. There was concern that the removal of these cameras in difficult areas could leave residents vulnerable. However, the Select Committee was advised that the Cabinet had agreed the CCTV Strategy and a pressing need had to be demonstrated in order for cameras to be installed.

(xvi) Review of Epping Forest Careline Alarm Monitoring Service - The Assistant Director Housing Operations introduced the report setting out options for the future of the Council's Careline Monitoring Centre, based at Parsonage Court, Loughton.

The service was introduced in June 1984 and offers a twenty-four hour, 365 days per year, emergency alarm monitoring service to older and disabled people living within the District. The Service was also offered to other vulnerable groups including victims of domestic violence and younger people with disabilities. There were currently 2,572 properties (representing around 3,500 people) in the District linked to the centre in this way.

There appeared to be the following four options for the future delivery of the Careline service:

- Option one** – that the Careline Monitoring Service continues to be provided by the Council under the current arrangements;
- Option two** – the Council provides an enhanced Careline Monitoring service;
- Option three** – monitor the service through another provider 24/7; and
- Option four** – monitoring the service through another service provider overnight.

Unison having fully considered options 1 to 4 discarded Option one which they felt was clearly untenable and Option two which was clearly too expensive. Option four appeared to be in the best interests of both the Council and the employees and they asked that it be explored further.

The Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation reported that they agreed with the officer's recommendation for Option Three that the Careline Monitoring Service be outsourced to an external provider.

On consideration, the Communities Select Committee recommended Option Three to the Cabinet, that the Council's Careline Monitoring Service be outsourced to an external provider through a competitive tendering exercise.

[\(See Case Study for full details\)](#)

(xvii) HRA Financial Plan 2016/17 – Six Monthly Review - The Cabinet had asked the Communities Select Committee to review the HRA Financial Plan twice each year. In addition, senior Housing and Finance officers also reviewed the Plan in July and January each year.

SDS Consultancy had acted as the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants for many years and had undertaken its six month review of the current HRA Financial

Plan to take account of the Council's current financial position and national and local policies.

The Select Committee was asked to consider their report and comment on or raise any concerns it found.

(xviii) Presentation by Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau - The Committee received a presentation from officers of the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) outlining their value and impact on society especially in the Epping Forest District area.

The Committee noted that during 2015/16 the CAB service for Epping Forest had advised 2,761 clients on 8,061 issues. They had 9 part time staff and 52 volunteers working in 6 locations and were one of over 300 independent charities that made up the Citizens Advice network. Nationally, 2 in every 3 clients had their problems solved. And it was noted that they were now offering "web chat" in the Epping Forest area.

They worked with some of those most in need, some 38% of their clients were less likely to be in employment; 35% were likely to be in debt; 39% had a long term health problem or were disabled; and 26% were less likely to own their own homes.

They gave examples of some clients' stories giving case history and eventual outcome. It was noted that 78% of their clients said that they would not have been able to resolve their problem without the CAB. They also had an impact on their clients' health and wellbeing, most significantly around mental health. 4 in 5 clients felt less stressed, depressed or anxious following advice.

They also provided value to the local authority, for example by reducing the cases of homelessness estimated to be about £114,573, and also to society in general whereby for every £1 invested in Citizens Advice Epping Forest District:

- generated at least £2.94 in fiscal benefits savings to the government by reducing health service demand, local authority homelessness services;
- provided £15.28 in public value with wider economic and social benefits such as improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers; and
- provided £18.50 in benefits to individuals giving income through benefits gained, debts written off and consumer problems resolved.

(xix) Extension of the Funding of 2 Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau Debt Advisors - The CAB had reported that during the first six months of 2015/16 the Advisors managed debts of around £713,000 and assisted 304 clients. Around 97 (32%) of these clients were Council tenants. The CAB was required under the Agreement to have one Debt Advisor based at the Limes Centre, Chigwell for one half day each week. The CAB extended this service to 2 half days each week in 2015. The CAB had reported that in the first 6 months of 2015/2016, around 120 (40%) of the clients assisted were first seen at the Limes Centre.

On consideration of the benefits of having these offices, the Communities Select Committee strongly recommend to the Finance Cabinet Committee that the funding of the Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two existing Debt Advisors be extended for a further year from 1 April 2017.

(xx) Reality Roadshow - The report on the last years Reality Road show was introduced by the Assistant Communities Health and Wellbeing Manager. She reported that the Reality Roadshow initiative was a personal safety, health & wellbeing event that brought together a host of statutory and voluntary agencies, to deliver a full day of educational workshops to Year 9 (14 year old) pupils at secondary school in the district. It was specifically tailored to address young people's issues that have been identified as a priority concern locally.

The Roadshow was co-ordinated by the Council's Community Health and Wellbeing Team providing over 900 pupils in the District with expert advice and guidance on making the right choices in life for good health and wellbeing.

The schools were not charged for the Roadshow as they were funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner and Essex County Council.

(xxi) Homelessness Initiatives - The Committee was asked as part of their Work Programme to consider various mitigation strategies in order to deal with the current and future increasing pressures due to the rise in homelessness. The latest figures on homelessness in England reveal that nationally the total number of households in temporary accommodation had increased by 53% from 48,010 in December 2010 to 73,120 in June 2016, with 14,930 households being accepted as homeless between 1 July and 30 September 2016. Local Authorities took action to prevent a further 52,920 households becoming homeless in the same period which increased by over 2,000 compared to the previous quarter.

The Committee was asked to consider strategies for the Homelessness Prevention Service. In 2015/2016 the service prevented homelessness in 625 cases. The number of cases being prevented in the first six months of this year was 264 which may result in a lesser number being prevented in 2016/2017.

As at 30 September 2016 (date of the last Government statistical return) there were 111 applicants placed in both temporary and interim accommodation which has resulted in the homeless persons' hostel at Norway House, North Weald and Hemnall House, Epping being full most of the time.

Furthermore, as the chalets in the grounds of the Hostel were falling into disrepair, the option of replacing the chalets with "modular units" was being investigated which may enable the Council to increase the number of units in a more cost effective way.

The numbers placed in B&B had increased from single figures to around 20-25 applicants.

The Committee then considered the 'invest to save' funding proposals for two initiatives.

One was for '*rental loans*', a scheme to provide applicants with a rental loan to meet the costs of (or contribute towards) the first month's rent in advance when securing accommodation in the private sector.

The other invest to save proposal was for '*Landlord Deposits*'. In addition to meeting the cost of the first month's rent, applicants also must pay a landlord's deposit. The cost of the deposit was in accordance with Housing Benefit Local Housing Allowance rates.

It was therefore considered that the funding should now be made available for rental loans equivalent to 4 weeks rent and/or landlord deposits (lodged with a third party by the landlord) in appropriate cases with repayments being made for both loans over an increased period of 36 months in order to make it more affordable to the applicant.

The Committee then went on to consider the placements of homeless households by London Boroughs outside of London. Following representations from Essex councils, figures for placements across Essex have now, for the first time, been provided by around 24 of the 32 London Boroughs. As not all London Boroughs had provided this information, the true figures were likely to be much higher, but Boroughs had placed applicants in 47 private properties (that we were aware of) in the last 12 months.

Some are in order for London Boroughs to discharge their homelessness duties which can lead to the Council taking responsibility for such households should homelessness re-occur after two years.

(xxii) Council Rent Increase 2017/18 Briefing – The Committee received a short briefing about the required rent reductions for Council tenants for 2017/18 and that the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee would be asked to make a recommendation to the Cabinet on a Council rent reduction for 2017/18.

The Government had determined that all councils must reduce their rent by 1% each year for four years. This started last year, leaving the Council with an estimated £390,000 less rental income in the current year.

A reduction of 1% for next year would mean a further £303,000 forecast reduction for the next year; the reduction for next year would be less than for the current year as the first new properties under the Council Housebuilding Programme would be built next year, bringing in additional income.

It was noted that although this was generally good news for tenants, it would leave the HRA with less money to deliver the Council's Housing Service.

(xxiii) Annual Report of the Youth Council – at their last meeting of the year the Select Committee received their annual report from the Youth Council on their activities and achievements during the current year and plans for the next 12 months.

They thanked the members for the Council's loyalty and support for the Youth Council over the past nine years. The Committee noted that these were newly elected members and were looking forward to their two years of service. In total about 25 Youth Councillors were elected in November 2016.

They thanked members for the grant of £8,000 project money that had enabled them to deliver the highly successful Emotional Health & Wellbeing project – 'MiLife' in seven secondary schools.

The North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) and NHS England had expressed their approval of the MiLife Roadshows and would like to work with Epping Forest Youth Council (EFYC) to digitalise the programme so that it can be delivered to all schools, nationally, at no further cost. This project had exceeded the Youth Council's expectations and they were very proud of their work.

Youth volunteering remains a big theme for them and they will be taking part in a Youth Volunteering Day during the summer holidays.

They also reported that in their short time as youth councillors they have obtained external funding of £2700 from various sources over the last 4 months.

(xxiv) Presentation on Disabled Adaptions to Council Premises - A short presentation on Disabled Adaptions to Council properties was given by the Assistant Director (Housing Property and Development), supported by the Housing Asserts Manager. The meeting noted that about six months ago the Assistant Director Private Sector Housing and Communities Support gave a short presentation on adaptions carried out in the private sector. The Committee then asked for a similar review of Council properties.

The adaptions were divided into two types, Minor Adaptions (Revenue) and Major Adaptions (Capital). They had an annual budget of £450,000 a year and they all started with a referral from Essex County Council's Social Care Occupational Therapy (OT) Service.

The adaptions help people remain in their homes and clears beds in hospitals. They also have an under occupancy test, if the property was under occupied by 2 or more bedrooms, they would not carry out the adaptions as they should really downsize. Also if tenants were in rent arrears they would not carry out any works. It was also noted that they did not means test Local Authority tenants.

Case Study: Review of Epping Forest Careline Alarm Monitoring Service

In November 2016 the Committee received a report setting out options for the future of the Council's Careline Monitoring Centre, based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. The service was introduced in June 1984 and offers a twenty-four hour, 365 days per year, emergency alarm monitoring service to older and disabled people living within the District. The Service was also offered to other vulnerable groups including victims of domestic violence and younger people with disabilities. There were currently 2,572 properties (representing around 3,500 people) in the District linked to the centre in this way.

Around 1,380 of the connections were private sector dwellings, which were connected via a dispersed alarm, which has an associated neck worn radio trigger. A range of various sensors were offered such as on line smoke alarms, fall and flood detectors. The user paid an annual rental to the Council for the service; in 2015/2016 the Council received a total income of around £185,000, inclusive of associated sensors. The Council worked in partnership with Essex County Council which funds the first 12 weeks rental for the user.

The charges made by the Council were very competitive compared to other authorities in Essex.

It was noted that as the Careline Monitoring Centre had expanded in terms of the number of private sector connections and the advances in technology, the management and operational aspects of the service had become more complex. In

addition, there had been difficulties in recruiting staff due to the nature of the work and the salary level. This had led to additional pressures on existing staff that have had to cover, not only vacant posts, but also annual leave and sickness absences. Also, all new staff completes an 8 week training programme prior to commencing full duties, which adds to the burden of covering shifts.

In 2011 the Careline Monitoring Service became Telecare Services Association (TSA) accredited. TSA was a nationally recognised standards body for the delivery of technology enabled care and support services in the UK. The Council's Careline Service has to date met all of the Audit requirements.

Importantly, the TSA have recently brought to the attention of the Council and authorities nationally the British Standard (BS8591), extracts of which currently states:

"There should be a minimum of two operators in an ARC [control centre] at all times, capable of carrying out all operational procedures, at least one of whom should be at their workstation at all times".

TSA have also confirmed that the above standard was under review and should be brought in line with the European Standard. Although 2 operators on duty at all times was expected to be desired, this would result in Centres who do not have 2 operators on duty at all times being required to put contingency measures in place should more than one emergency call be received at any one time.

Although the service currently provided an excellent and reliable service to residents, due to the reasons above it was considered important that this review was undertaken to ensure the future resilience of the service. There appeared to be the following four options for the future delivery of the Careline service:

Option one – that the Careline Monitoring Service continues to be provided by the Council under the current arrangements;

Option two – the Council provides an enhanced Careline Monitoring service;

Option three – monitor the service through another provider 24/7; and

Option four – monitoring the service through another service provider overnight.

It was reported that since writing the report the current PNC5 system went down and officers had to switch to the disaster recovery service. The service engineer who came out to repair the equipment said that it was getting old and would need upgrading very soon (within months). So this would have to be done regardless of what option was chosen. Officers have had discussions with the supplier Tunstall Telecom about the cost of upgrading to a PNC7 system. This will now be purchased under emergency budget procedures at a cost of £44k, guaranteed for a year so there would be a saving on service charges in the first year. It was also noted that the voice recording system need not be replaced straight away and so this would also save some money.

The Committee agreed to a recommendation that budget provision was made of £70k in 2017/18 and £70k in 2018/19 in order to fund the transitional arrangements. If it was agreed to outsource 24/7, the payback period would be around 9 months.

It was noted that the Careline operators had favoured option two but were mindful of the cost implications for this option. They had accepted that option one could not be considered as an option and the service could not continue under the current arrangements.

They did not agree with Option three because of the perceived implications for job losses and the adverse effect this change would have for all service users. In addition alternative arrangements would need to be made for tasks currently undertaken by the Careline team.

Careline staff wanted Option four to be presented in more detail in the report as they thought it had not been given enough thought. The report was so amended.

Unison having fully considered options 1 to 4 discarded Option one which they felt was clearly untenable and Option two which was clearly too expensive.

On considering Option three they were unsure about its value to the Council as they thought, amongst other concerns, that there were no costings for the removal of the current equipment, the Council would lose a degree of autonomy over the service, the scheme managers would lose the support of the staff and the service, redundancy costs will need to be built into the tenders and the Council would need to deal with the problems associated with keeping the service running through to the start of the transfer to an external provider.

Option four appeared to be in the best interests of both the Council and the employees and they asked that it be explored further.

The Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation reported that they agreed with the officer's recommendation for Option Three that the Careline Monitoring Service be outsourced to an external provider. They added that they would also like to commend the exceptional work that Careline staff has put in over the years.

Each option was examined in detail by the Select Committee and their merits for and against were debated. Finally on consideration the Select Committee recommended Option Three to the Cabinet, that the Council's Careline Monitoring Service be outsourced to an external provider through a competitive tendering exercise.