

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/097/2006.

Date of meeting: 18 December 2006.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing.

Subject: Budget Provision 2007/2008 – Epping Forest Careline.

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Recommendations:

(1) That a one-off sum of £56,000 be included in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2007/2008 for:

- (a) the replacement of dispersed alarm equipment; and**
- (b) the calls recording facility within the Careline Control Centre;**

(2) That, in order to fund purchases of replacement dispersed alarm systems in the future, an additional provision of £14,000 per annum be included in the budget from 2008/2009; and

(3) That, in order for the Council to continue to receive the benefits of having a sole supplier for the Careline equipment:

- (a) Contract Standing Order C6 be waived; and**
- (b) negotiations take place in accordance with Contract Standing Order C10.**

Report:

1. The Council's Careline Centre is based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. The Careline Service offers a twenty-four hour, 365 days per year, emergency alarm service to older and disabled people living within the District. The Service is also offered to other vulnerable groups including victims of domestic violence and bogus callers who are often identified through partnership working with the Police.

2. Users of the service are connected via the telephone network. The Council's own sheltered housing schemes and other designated dwellings for older people on housing estates have a hard-wired system installed in their properties with a speech module mounted on the wall and a pull cord in each of the rooms. A total of 2,600 properties, representing approximately 3,000 people, are linked into the service.

3. Around 1,000 of the connections are from private sector dwellings, which are connected via a dispersed alarm, which has an associated neck-worn radio trigger. The user pays an annual rental to the Council of £144 per annum for the service, bringing a substantial income to the HRA. Alternatively, provided the user meets the eligibility criteria, the system can be fully funded by the Essex County Council's Social Care. Members review the annual rental charge each year, along with all other housing-related fees and charges. The amount charged to the user is market tested throughout Essex each year with the Council's charges comparing favourably with other providers.

4. The Council purchases dispersed alarms at a cost of £120 each from the

manufacturer, Tunstall Telecom Limited, which have to be replaced with new units every 10-years, with the old equipment being discarded. If the systems were not replaced, there would be a serious risk that they may become non-functional, which would jeopardise the safety of the service user. Currently, there are 400 alarms which will need replacing during 2007/2008 at a total cost of £48,000. The pay back period for the equipment only is 5 years, although there are many other costs associated with providing the service.

5. In addition, the calls recording facility within the Careline Centre is over 15 years old and in need of replacement during 2007/2008. This important piece of equipment records all conversations that take place between the service user and the Control Centre Operator, as well as all telephone calls. Should the Council be challenged about the action taken by its Careline staff (which has happened in the past) the calls recording facility would be essential evidence. The cost of replacing the calls recording facility is around £8,000.

6. The existing budget for 2006/2007 for the replacement of Careline equipment and other miscellaneous items is £21,000, which is clearly insufficient to fund the required renewals. Around £8,000 of the budget is spent each year on replacement and new equipment. Therefore, the Cabinet is asked to consider that a one-off sum of £56,000 be included in the HRA budget for 2007/2008 for the replacement of the necessary equipment. Furthermore, in order to ensure that money is available in future years, it is suggested that an additional expenditure item of £14,000 per annum is included in the budget from 2008/2009.

7. At its meeting on 16 September 1997, the former Housing Committee agreed that Standing Orders be waived so as to allow the Council to continue to receive the benefits of having a sole supplier of the alarm equipment.

8. The advantages of using Tunstall Telecom Limited as the only supplier include:

- Having one service agreement with the manufacturer to cover all of the equipment
- Ability to negotiate reduced rates for servicing, and any new group scheme and control centre equipment
- No difficulties and reduced risks of interfacing with equipment manufactured by another supplier
- Tunstall Telecom Limited being the leading supplier in the market

9. It is therefore suggested that Contract Standing Order C6 continues to be waived and that negotiations on prices and terms continue to take place in accordance with Contract Standing Order C10. As part of these negotiations, costs are compared with other alarm system suppliers to ensure that the Council is obtaining value for money. In addition, discounts are sought for purchasing in bulk.

Statement in support of recommended action:

10. The replacement dispersed alarm systems and the call recording equipment is essential to ensure the continued reliability of the Careline service offered to vulnerable people

Options for action:

11. Not to replace the 400 Careline dispersed alarm units.

12. Not to replace the Careline call recording facility.

Consultation undertaken:

13. No external consultation undertaken.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: Additional one-off sum for 2007/2008 of £56,000. Additional expenditure item of £14,000 from 2008/2009.

Personnel: N/A.

Land: N/A.

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A.

Relevant statutory powers: N/A.

Background papers: N/A.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.