City and County of Swansea

Community Alarm Service & Telecare

A review of the community alarm and telecare services and their sustainability

July 2010
Chair’s Foreword

The Community Alarm and Telecare Services provide 24 hour rapid response alarm systems to older, disabled and other vulnerable people for use in their own homes. The purpose of Community Alarm and Telecare systems is so that people are enabled to live more independently in their own homes, but with the knowledge that help is there, should they need it. Since 2003 individual recipients of the Community Alarm Service have received this service free and equipment was bought by a one off grant from the Welsh Assembly which has since come to an end. The Board was asked to undertake a scrutiny of the current service and to consider how this valuable service to older people in Swansea can be sustained in the current economic climate where services are being asked to maintain services or provide a greater level of service with less financial resources.

The Board considered a number of different charging models, it looked at how other Welsh local authorities deliver the same service and it talked to a number of important stakeholders.

The Board concluded that while the Community Alarm and Telecare services provided valuable support to older, disabled and other vulnerable residents in Swansea and should continue to do so, it fell short of the service that could be provided if the service was better funded. The Board agreed the service needed to be modernised and that charging should be considered to address the funding shortfall. Throughout the evidence gathering process the Board consistently agreed that vulnerable Community Alarm and Telecare users who qualify for free services under the eligibility criteria should not be required to pay for this service if the recommendation for a re-introduction of charges is accepted by the Cabinet Member.

I would like to thank officers who assisted the Board with its evidence gathering and to the councillors who attended the task and finish group.
1. **Aim of the Review**

1.1 The aim of this review is to:

   Consider how the Community Alarm and Telecare services could be safely maintained;
   Examine options to ensure the sustainability of the services

2. **Evidence Considered:**

   Initial Briefing
   Presentation from Tunstall
   Engagement with Reference Group
   Report on charging options
   Evidence of practice in other Local Authorities
   Evidence gathering results and conclusions discussed

   A copy of the findings report and initial briefing are attached in appendix 1 and 2.

3. **Conclusions**

   3.1 Investment in equipment for installation has not been sufficient for some time to meet demand for a valuable and important service
   3.2 The current financial position is unsustainable
   3.3 There are limited options available to address the funding shortfall and a charge should be considered

4. **Recommendations**

   The Board recommends that:

   4.1 Council, through Social Services, continues to support the provision of Community Alarms and Telecare in Swansea
   4.2 Council provides the service free of charge if recommended by a Social Worker or Health Care Professional. Any shortfall in funding should be addressed by re-prioritising financial and service priorities
   4.3 Council investigate the feasibility of more cost effective alternative and digital technology with Swansea University which would safely maintain older people in their homes
   4.4 Council, through Social Services, seek a financial contribution for the community alarm and Telecare services from the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University
The Corporate Director (Social Services) pursue with his counterparts in the other Welsh Local Authorities a sustainable all-Wales system of technology to maintain older people in their own homes.

Council through Social Services ensures that the service is improved to include an efficient and suitable maintenance and repair schedule.
1. **Aim of the Review**

1.1 A task and finish group was set up in January 2010 to review the community alarm and Telecare services. The terms of reference for the review were agreed at the Board’s on 16th December 2009.

The Board identified a number of reasons or carrying out the review:

1.2 • The current community alarm service cannot continue to operate in its current form and will need an injection of additional resource to ensure its sustainability and compatibility with developments in Telecare technology and rising demand.

• A Welsh Assembly Capital Grant enabled the Authority to purchase Telecare sensors, but this was a one off award and the supply of equipment already purchased is now exhausted.

The review aims and objectives were to:

• Gather evidence and engage with stakeholders to consider how the community alarm and Telecare services cold be safely maintained.

• Consider options which would ensure the sustainability of the services.

2. **Evidence Considered and Findings**

2.1 The Task and Finish Group considered a range of evidence including briefings, interviews with relevant officers and external witnesses, all of which is detailed below.

• An initial service briefing from the Corporate Director (Social Services)
• Presentation from Tunstall
• Engagement with the Reference Group
• Report on charging options
• Evidence from other local authorities
• Consultation results and conclusions discussed
3. Conclusions

3.1 Investment in equipment for installation has not been sufficient for some time to meet demand for a valuable and important service

3.1.1 Investment in equipment for installation (including Lifeline Telephones, alarm pendants and other peripheral devices) has not been sufficient to meet demand for some time. A previous stockpile of Lifeline telephones – bought with windfall income– has been depleted. There has been no replacement policy for equipment used in the community and some stock installed in users’ homes was likely to be obsolete. The introduction of digital telephone exchanges may present difficulties as some older equipment cannot be guaranteed to operate through a digital exchange.

There is no scheduled maintenance arrangement in place for the 8,000+ installation in the City and County of Swansea and it was found that maintenance was carried out reactively. Furthermore there was found to be no scheduled battery replacement scheme and installation of the newer Lifeline model (with automated self reporting of low battery) has only occurred in the previous two years.

3.2 The current financial position is unsustainable

It was clear to the task and finish group that the current community alarm service could not continue to operate in its present form to an acceptable standard without change.

The number of people using the system has grown without additional resources allocated to support the infrastructure of repair and replacement of obsolete and faulty or damaged equipment.

The standard community alarm systems operating in the UK have been surpassed by technology which offers a wider range of updated alarm and monitoring systems. The Community Alarm Service would like to take advantage of these, but is hampered by old equipment and lack of staffing resource.

A Welsh Assembly Capital Grant enabled the Authority to purchase Telecare sensors, but this was a one off award and the supply of equipment purchased has been exhausted.

Currently investment in any equipment (whether Telecare or basic Community Alarms) is limited to an annual revenue budget of £30,000, which was found to be insufficient to meet the requirements of replacing faulty stock, replacing obsolete units or meeting increased demand.

Since 2003 individual recipients of the Community Alarm Service have received this service free.
A Revenue Grant, also provided by the Welsh Assembly Government, which supports part of the team of Telecare workers, is due to end in March 2011.

3.3 There are limited options available to address the funding shortfall and a charge should be considered

The task and finish group understood that there was no likelihood of further funding from the Welsh Assembly Government in the future, given that it had already provided two grants. A transfer of resources from other non-Social care budgets within the control of the Authority was considered unlikely given the current financial situation faced by the Authority.

Funding from other sources was considered an attractive option by the task and finish group. An obvious candidate from which a contribution could be sought was the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board. However, the group was informed that the current Telecare Strategy has supported two pilot schemes to use the benefits of Telehealth technology – as opposed to Telecare and it was arguable that Health Board would be more likely to seek to invest any available funding into an extension of the Telehealth pilots as opposed to Telecare/Community Alarms.

The task and finish group recognised that there were limited options available to address the funding shortfall and considered a re-introduction of a charge for service users. A survey was undertaken in Swansea in 2008 and achieved a 50% response rate. 7,000 users of the service were sent questionnaires, and approximately 3,500 were returned. The survey noted that 60% of respondents indicated a willingness to pay for a community alarm service.

Any service user who met the eligibility criteria for social care services would be subject to the Fairer Charging arrangements and as such the most vulnerable users of this service would not be subject to any additional charges. This equated to around 1,400 of the current users. Charges could be levied at those service users who fell outside the current eligibility criteria for social care. It was estimated that 5,000 current Lifeline users would remain as prospective charge payers. A charge of around £100 per annum (£2 a week or £9 a month) would provide sufficient funding to adequately maintain the service.

Telecare sensors are provided to people who have been professionally assessed and are likely to meet the current eligibility thresholds for Social Care and would therefore not pay any additional charges for service. It was suggested by officers that a scheme for individuals who did not meet the Social Care eligibility threshold to include a range of sensors with the Lifeline for a nominal addition – dependant on the nature of the sensors required. This additional amount would be between £2 per week and £10 per week dependant on the range of sensors required.
The group was in agreement however that as long as the current technology was used charging was inevitable and that there was a clear need to examine alternatives provided by newer and more cost effective technology.

The group also agreed that a regional or all-Wales approach to the development of financially sustainable systems which kept people safe in their own homes needed be considered by the Corporate Director. The group concluded that this approach would provide economies of scale to local authorities as their purchasing power would be greatly increased if they worked collaboratively.
The Board commends Cabinet to consider all issues and ideas raised by this review and, in particular, the recommendations set out below.

The Board recognises that the Authority:
(a) will need to ensure that any subsequent actions are legal and meet the requirements of any relevant legislation;
(b) has a responsibility to make the best use of limited resources and that any additional costs will need to be considered carefully as part of the annual budget setting process.

The Board has kept these principles in mind in the course of its review.

Given the evidence detailed in this report and the findings and conclusions of the Task and Finish Group, the Health Social Care & Well Being Overview & Scrutiny Board therefore recommends that:

4.1 Council, through Social Services, continues to support the provision of Community Alarms and Telecare in Swansea

4.2 Council provides the service free of charge if recommended by a Social Worker or Health Care Professional. Any shortfall in funding should be addressed by re-prioritising financial and service priorities

4.3 Council investigate the feasibility of more cost effective alternative and digital technology with Swansea University which would safely maintain older people in their homes

4.4 Council, through Social Services, seek a financial contribution for the community alarm and Telecare services from the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board and other partners

4.5 The Corporate Director (Social Services) work collaboratively with his counterparts in the other Welsh Local Authorities to pursue a financially sustainable all-Wales technological system which would safely maintain older people in their homes

4.6 Council through Social Services ensures that the service is improved to include an efficient and suitable maintenance and repair schedule
Acknowledgements:

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The Health Social Care & Well Being Overview & Scrutiny Board is a cross-party body of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. The role of the Board is to hold the Cabinet Member to account and support and challenge improvement in Adult social services.

Specific activities of the Board include:
- Holding the Council’s executive to account
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- Contributing to corporate policy and strategy development
- Contributing to the development of partnership strategies and plans relevant to the Board’s remit
- Conducting in depth reviews of service and policy areas
- Involving the public in service improvement & policy development

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