

RECORD OF URGENT DECISION

Date: 24 July 2024

Lead Officer: Julie Davidson, Business Manager - Housing Services
Ext 5542

Part D, Section 6 of the Council’s Constitution provides that the Head of Paid Service (or in their absence a nominated deputy) shall have delegated authority to take urgent decisions following consultation with the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer (or their deputies). In respect of Executive Functions the Head of Paid Service (or their nominated deputy) will consult with the Leader of the Council (or in their absence the Deputy Leader or in their absence a Portfolio Holder), and in respect of non-Executive functions the Head of Paid Service (or their nominated deputy) will consult with the Chairman of the Council (or in their absence the Vice-Chairman of the Council or in their absence the Chairman of the relevant Committee).

If the matter is likely to be a key decision and has not been advertised for a minimum of 28 clear days on the Council’s website, the decision can still be taken if a) it is impracticable to defer the decision until it has been possible for 28 clear days’ notice to be given; b) the Monitoring Officer has informed the Chairman of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee.

Note – this urgent decision record will be reported to the next available meeting of the Full Council.

Decision Record Summary	
Nature of Decision	Open
Decision Title	Careline Service extension - Mansfield
Summary of Decision	Expansion of Careline Service to accept customers from Mansfield with associated budget commitments relating to resources and purchase of equipment.
Decision Taken	Approval of: i) the expansion of the Careline Service to accept customers from Mansfield; ii) to appoint two permanent Careline Advisors based on current growth in customer numbers and call volume and to provide extra resources for the digital installation programme;

	<p>iii) to appoint a temporary Careline Advisor to accommodate increased caseload of c.1000 private customers from Mansfield District Council;</p> <p>iv) the revenue budget for both HRA and General Fund be increased to take account of the additional costs and income detailed below; and</p> <p>v) additional HRA Capital Budget of £90,000 for Proposal ii), above financed by the MRR; and £195,000 additional budget in the General Fund Capital Programme financed by borrowing for Proposal iii) above.</p>
Decision Taker and Consultation	John Robinson, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Members Consulted	<p>Councillor Paul Peacock – Leader of the Council</p> <p>Councillor Lee Brazier – Portfolio Holder for Housing</p> <p>Sanjiv Kohli - Section 151 Officer</p> <p>Sue Bearman - Monitoring Officer</p>
Reason for Urgency	<p>Mansfield Careline customers will have no provider as of 31 January 2025.</p> <p>The handover of the service to the Council will take several months so budget arrangements and recruitment needs to be commenced urgently to ensure a continuance of service delivery for the customer base.</p> <p>The Council’s Financial Regulations require variations to the Capital Programme to be reported to Cabinet for approval. Due to the date this decision needs to be implemented it cannot wait until the Cabinet meeting on 24 September 2024.</p>

1.0 **Background**

- 1.1 The telecare alarm service run by the Council offers customers with additional needs the ability to call for assistance 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by simply pressing a button on a unit attached to their telephone line or the pendant provided. Careline Advisors, based in two of our Housing with Care schemes, respond to these calls and, if the situation requires it, will ask for assistance from family members, carers or the emergency services.
- 1.2 The charge for this service varies according to the tenure of the customer and the number of sensors fitted. Council tenants pay £2.50 per week for an alarm unit and pendant or fall detector. For those tenants living in designated supported accommodation this charge is covered by a Support Charge included in their rent. For private customers the charge is £26 per calendar month which equates to £6 per week. For monitoring up to an extra five sensors such as door sensors or bed sensors there is an additional charge of £1.82 per week.
- 1.3 The Careline Service is delivered by 8.6 FTE Careline Advisors and 1 FTE Careline Team Leader (plus 1 FTE maternity cover). Of these, two members of staff are dedicated installers, whilst six are call handlers providing the service from 7am to 7pm daily

except for bank holidays. The remaining part-time member of staff covers both roles as needed. Outside of these hours the response service is outsourced to Tunstall Healthcare.

- 1.4 Between 5pm and 7pm weekdays and 7am to 7pm weekends, Careline Advisors also manage the out-of-hours repairs service, passing this responsibility to an external provider at the end of their shift. The service sits within the Housing Services Team and the General Fund is recharged a proportion of the overall costs of the service depending on the number of private customers.
- 1.5 **Customer base:** The Council currently delivers a telecare alarm service to 2100 customers in our district and those in the neighbouring districts of Ashfield, Bassetlaw and Mansfield. Of these 1880 are dispersed customers ie have equipment that can be removed and installed in the property with ease.
 - 1012 NSDC Council tenants.
 - 748 NSDC Private customers
 - 120 Out of district private customers
- 1.6 The remaining 220 customers live in schemes, where the fire alarms, lift alarms and door entry systems are linked and generate calls to our Alarm Receiving Centre when activated.
- 1.7 The take up of the service offer to customers outside of district continues to increase with neighbouring authorities recently making changes to their services and restricting those they can assist, generally to council tenants.
- 1.8 In June 2024, Mansfield District Council (MDC) requested assistance with an exit strategy for their private customers as a decision has been made to terminate careline service for private sector customers by 31 January 2025. This means 1133 private customers will need a new supplier. NSDC Careline already operates in the Mansfield area following MDCs earlier decision to temporarily stop offering their Careline service to the private sector whilst a review of the service was undertaken.
- 1.9 NSDC Careline Service are also increasingly responding to requests to install carelines to facilitate discharges from hospital to enable residents to return to their homes and free up beds within the hospitals.
- 1.10 NSDC work in close partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) as they supply a wider range of sensors such as door sensors that signal when someone has entered or left a property. Any customers needing careline units only are referred to us.
- 1.11 **Financing the Careline Service:** In broad terms, the Careline Service costs have, to date, been met by the fees paid by private customers, the levying of a Support Charge on Council tenants and by an extra element within the Service Charge paid by tenants living at Gladstone House and Vale View where the Careline Advisors provide a concierge style service. Costs were increased for 24/25 in anticipation of the higher costs associated with the digital equipment.

- 1.12 **Call levels:** Incoming calls to the service show a 15.8% increase from 33,259 in 22/3 to 38,518 in 23/4.
- 1.13 Response times have, despite this increase in call volumes, continued to exceed the industry standards for technology enabled care in the UK:
- Percentage of calls answered in 180 seconds 99%
 - Percentage of calls answered in 60 seconds 97.5%
 - Percentage of calls answered in 30 seconds 80%
- 1.14 Careline Advisors are also increasingly making out-going welfare calls to customers. As a result, it has been successfully argued that a proportion of the increased Support Charge paid by tenants living in designated supported housing is eligible for Housing Benefit.
- 1.15 **Modernising the service:** Over the past two years different aspects of the careline service have been re-tendered to ensure compliance with Financial Regulations and to prepare for the planned changes in the telecommunications industry, ie moving from an analogue based service to one that operates digitally. This significant change will mean customers no longer need to have a landline for their careline to operate and allows for improved connections with other technologies increasingly in use in homes such as an Amazon Alexa.
- 1.16 The Council has therefore recently contracted for the supply of 1750 digital careline devices with the first consignment of 350 units delivered in June 2024. The team are now fitting these and aim to complete the upgrade programme in advance of the original national deadline of December 2025. As the current number of dispersed customers exceeds the units ordered, additional capital funding will be needed in 2025/26 to complete the transition.
- 1.17 The number of careline installations has already increased from 414 to 528 in the last financial year and demand on the installers will increase further as they start to renew the units in customer's homes. With people becoming aware there is no longer a need to have a landline to make use of the service, there is potential for a longer waiting list to build up of those residents wanting to upgrade to digital units.
- 1.18 **Planned improvements:** Further improvements are planned to enhance the service. To reduce the pressure on emergency services and in response to Regulation 28 preventable death reports from coroners, we aim to call back and check on customers whilst they are waiting for an ambulance. In doing so we offer reassurance to the customer but also help triage and prioritise calls for East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS). The provider of our overnight call handling service already does this, so we need to do so too.
- 1.19 With the agreement of Nottinghamshire County Council we have trained our installers to fit other sensors such as door sensors, bed sensors etc. In doing so, we can complete the upgrade or re-programming of all equipment in a home in one visit.

- 1.20 **Promotions:** The next stage will be to inform NSDC tenants about the new digital technology available and include this leaflet with the annual rent increase letters due to be sent in February 2025. In staggering the distribution of leaflets we are aiming to manage the expansion in a responsible manner.
- 1.21 Work has already started on the design of information leaflets and a marketing plan to promote our service offer.

2.0 Proposals and Reasons for Recommendation

2.1 The need to increase our staffing levels, at least temporarily, is becoming ever more apparent; both to complete the installation programme in a timely manner but also to ensure our call handling capacity is resilient and current performance levels continue to meet industry standards.

2.2 The opportunity arising from MDC's decision regarding their Careline service brings with it an additional income stream for the General Fund but also the need for further additional staffing resources in the Careline team.

2.3 Proposal 1 – Incremental Growth

2.4 As a result of the factors outlined in Section 1, this report requests the following funding to be agreed:

- To convert one existing Careline Advisor temporary post to permanent.
- To add a further full-time Careline Advisor post to the establishment.
- 500 additional units required at a cost of £90,000.

2.5 Installation capacity would be further increased by releasing the 0.6 FTE from call handling duties to work exclusively on this task.

2.6 Please note, the responsibility of handling out-of-hours repair calls will move to an external provider by 31 March 2025, enabling the Careline Advisors to focus exclusively on the careline service.

2.7 Proposal 2 – Further Growth Associated with Mansfield District Council Private Customers

2.8 Excluding those customers that live outside of our operating areas and service users wishing to opt out of the takeover, it is estimated that the onboarding of Mansfield residents will result in an additional 1000 customers. MDC have advised that those not responding to their letters advising of transfer plans, or failing to provide access by the January 2025 deadline, will continue to receive a service from themselves. The increase in customers will generate approximately 18,000 additional incoming calls.

2.9 These customers will be long term customers generating income for many years. It is also predicted that expansion will be similar to that already being experienced in our district given a growing older population and increased take-up from customers using mobile phones rather than landlines.

- 2.10 The proposed schedule for onboarding 1000 customers into the Careline Service is shown below:

Action	Date
Approval given by NSDC	By 28 July 2024
Negotiations with MDC	29 July 2024 – 9 August 2024
MDC send out letters advising of transfer plans	12 August 2024 – 18 August 2024
Sharing of results and planning installation programme	19 August 2024 – 30 September 2024
NSDC Installation Programme	October 2024 – February 2025

- 2.11 To protect the Careline Service for our existing customers and to ensure the proposal is achievable we are therefore asking for further additional funding to be agreed to employ one further full-time Careline Advisor on a temporary contract from October 2024 to 31 March 2026.
- 2.12 There are no TUPE implications as MDC are retaining all staff to enhance the service provision for Mansfield District Council tenants only.
- 2.13 If proposals are agreed a review of staffing levels will be completed in the second quarter of 2025 to look at the service and whether demands on the service are long term ie whether some or all of the temporary positions need to be made permanent.
- 2.14 In addition to the extra staffing requested, further capital investment will be required for the purchase of extra digital lifeline units to allow the digital upgrade programme to be completed for both Mansfield and new customers already onboarded.
- 2.15 Given both proposed growth plans £285,000 for 1500 units will be needed in 2025/2026 financial year and will be included in budget setting in October 2024 for the next financial year.
- 2.16 Growth of this nature links into NSDC's commercialisation strategy. Local intelligence and experience indicate that other Careline Services in Nottinghamshire are undertaking similar reviews to those made by MDC. If therefore, we can demonstrate the ability and capacity to deliver this growth programme on time, we can expect interest from others. We will also have the necessary knowledge of the resources and internal systems needed to manage such a change, making it easier to make informed decisions about any other opportunities to expand that arise.
- 2.17 Given current growth rates and the need to ensure the installation of digital units goes smoothly plus the unique opportunity of a large increase in revenue into the general fund, it is recommended that **both Proposals 1 and 2 above are approved.**

3.0 **Implications**

In taking this decision, officers still need to give consideration to the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

3.1 **Financial Implications FIN24-25/1446**

Staffing Costs – Proposal 1

3.1.1 **Incremental Income**

3.1.2 Since the current staffing establishment was approved, the Careline Service has experienced net growth in its customer base of an additional 127 private sector clients. At a weekly charge of £6 these additional clients will generate an ongoing income of £39,600 in 2024/25. Income will also be supplemented by further forecasted growth of an additional 200 private sector clients over the next 12 months. With the full-year effect of all growth expected to be approximately £100,000 of additional income, it is anticipated that this will effectively fund the costs of the additional staffing proposals over the next two financial years.

3.1.3 Clearly, if projections of growth and income are not realised there may be some impact on the revenue budgets within the service.

3.1.4 **Incremental Costs**

3.1.5 There is current budget provision within the Careline Services establishment for Careline Advisors at 8.6 FTE, with an additional 1 FTE covering maternity leave until August 2024. There is also 1 FTE post of Careline Team Leader. Currently, the cost of the additional maternity leave post is offset by staffing savings related to the substantive post holder being on maternity leave.

3.1.6 The table below details the anticipated income for proposal 1:

Proposal 1 - Internal Growth Only	2024/25	2025/26	Future Years
	£	£	£
Income			
Existing client base growth 127 clients	-39,600	-39,600	-39,600
Forecast internal growth 200 Clients	-30,200	-60,400	-60,400
	-69,800	-100,000	-100,000
Expenditure			
Staffing - 1 Extended Mat Leave FTE at NS06 - 9	19,632	36,032	0
Staffing - 1 additional FTE at NS09 - 8		34,032	0

ICT 1 x Laptops and Licenses	2,000		
	21,632	70,064	0
Incremental Net Income	-47,668	-29,936	-100,000

Note: Projected inflationary increases and pay increments have been taken into account.

3.1.7 Capital Requirements

3.1.8 Capital investment of £90,000, for 500 digital lifeline units at a cost of £190 per unit would be required for Proposal 1. This would need to be added to the existing Capital Programme for the digitalisation of the Careline Service and funded either from the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) or from the Service Improvement Reserve within the HRA.

3.1.9 The current capital programme has a budget of £460,540. £80,540, was set up in 2020/21 with a further £380,000 added in to 2023/24 and 2024/25 to move from Analogue to Digital and financed by the MRR.

Proposal 2 – Transfer of Mansfield DC Clients

3.1.10 Incremental Income

3.1.11 At the weekly charge of £6 per week per client, the total incremental income generated, should Proposal 2 be approved, would be £312,000 full year effect, with £156,000, or 50% of this, expected in 2024/25. There is a current charge of £25 per client for installation of the Careline service in their home. However, it is proposed that this installation charge would be waived, as the change in provider is not because of client choice. Although there is the possibility that Mansfield could be asked to make an equivalent contribution of £25,000.

3.1.12 Incremental Costs

3.1.13 As per paragraph 2.0, it is proposed that one additional, full time Careline Advisor would be sufficient to accommodate the additional 1000 private sector clients from Mansfield DC. This additional employee would be required initially for six months from October 2024, and then for a further 12 months to the end of March 2025. At a grade of NS06-8, rising to NS06-9 in the second financial year, the costs would be £16,543 in 2024/25 and £35,411 in 2025/26.

3.1.14 Further costs for Call Handling and Connectivity total £54,560 on a recurring basis, with some additional one-off costs surrounding IT equipment and licenses.

3.1.15 The table below shows the net incremental income for Proposal 2. It shows that there is adequate additional income to cover the additional costs. Appraisal of the staffing requirements to run the enhanced level of service may lead to increased staffing costs, for which there is currently headroom within the forecasts below.

Proposal 2 – Transfer Mansfield DC Clients	2024/25 (6 Months)	2025/26	Future Years
	£	£	£
Income			
1000 additional customers at £6 per week	-156,000	-312,000	-312,000
	-156,000	-312,000	-312,000
Expenditure			
Staffing - 1 additional FTE at NS6	16,543	35,411	0
Overnight Call Handling (per annum)	7,280	14,560	14,560
Connectivity Fee (per annum)	20,000	40,000	40,000
ICT 2 x Laptop & Licenses	4,000		
Additional PNC Licenses	2,100	0	0
	49,923	89,971	54,560
Incremental Net Income	-106,077	-222,029	-257,440

3.1.16 Capital Programme Requirements

3.1.17 The additional budget for proposal 2, for 1000 units for the clients currently with Mansfield District Council of £195,000 should be included in the General Fund Capital Programme, financed by borrowing. The cost of borrowing would be £3,900 in Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and £9,750 in interest. A total of £13,650. This cost will be covered by the additional income detailed above.

3.1.18 Summary

3.1.19 The Careline service has clients that are Council tenants and private customers. The cost of running the service originates in the HRA and is charged on a percentage basis to the General Fund. The income generated from the private customers is received directly to the General Fund.

3.1.20 should both proposals be approved, the income projected above, will be 100% general fund and the costs detailed above will also be chargeable to the General Fund.

3.2 HR & Equalities implications HR2425/1299 FK

3.2.1 These proposals seek to increase the establishment by 3 FTE in Housing and Estates; two on a permanent basis and one on a temporary basis. This follows an increase to the establishment of 32.29 FTE in 23/24 (21.29 perm) which included an increase of 6.43 FTE within the Housing and Estates Management Business Unit. Note however that that the Intensive Housing and Careline actually had an overall reduction of 0.57 FTE. The increase proposed will support an enhanced service which, in turn, is likely to bring in additional income. In light of the increased volume of calls and installations stated above, as well as increased complexity of interactions, the additional resource

is likely to have a positive impact on wellbeing of the team, their capacity, and the overall resilience of the team.

- 3.2.2 Given the specifics of proposal 2, if it is agreed for NSDC to take on those customers who can no longer be supported by MDC, an increase in staff will be necessary to ensure capacity is there to undertake the additional volume of work without an impact on existing staff.
- 3.2.3 Recruitment to the additional posts should be done in line with The Council's recruitment and selection policies ensuring a fair and consistent approach so as not to disadvantage anyone due to holding a protected characteristic.
- 3.2.4 As it is proposed to offer one of the roles on a temporary basis, the recruiting managers should note that if required, when terminating the employment at the end of the FT period, the end of Fixed Term Contract procedure should be used in an adequate timeframe to allow contractual notice to be applied. They should also be aware of any continuous service the postholder may have and whether a redundancy payment would be due (>2years service).
- 3.2.5 At this point, MDC have advised that they will not be making any redundancies as a result of the changes to their service. Once more details are known, however, consideration should be given as to whether there could be a TUPE situation, if MDC have any staff who are focussed solely, or mainly, on the delivery of careline to private customers.

3.3 ICT Implications

- 3.3.1 Software – The software supporting call handling thereby underpinning the Careline Service has the capacity to cope with the higher levels of call volumes expected with no further investment needed.
- 3.3.2 Hardware – Currently there are three desktop machines in use by the Careline Advisors, two in Vale View and one in Gladstone House. There is also a laptop that can be used by Advisors providing an option for occasional home working. To allow for further hybrid working thereby increasing the resilience of the service, it is suggested that a further two laptops and an extra desktop machine are needed. The latter is to be fitted at Gladstone House, replacing one of the docking stations to allow for increased capacity at weekends.
- 3.3.3 The cost implications for additional hardware and software licences have been built into the financial implications.

3.4 Tenant Implications

- 3.4.1 There are no detrimental implications for council tenants; rather they are already receiving a more proactive service including welfare calls and an annual personal visit. The proposals to offer checks whilst tenants are waiting for an ambulance or the falls team to call will provide greater assurance. Furthermore tenants living in designated supported accommodation will be able to receive the service they pay for within their rent irrespective of the type of telephony they use.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.