

## Lifeline Business Development Plan

<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Excellent Services positively impacting on our communities.
<b>Relevant Ward Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt Information:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes c) Has significant impact on two or more wards in the Borough and on communities living or working in those areas
<b>Subject to call-in:</b>	Yes

### 1 Summary

- 1.1 Lifeline Services support residents to remain safely and independently at home. Customers pay to receive this service.
- 1.2 Currently there are three separate Lifeline offers delivered by the Council, leading to confusion and a lack of clarity of the offer to people in Melton. The equipment used to deliver the service needs to be upgraded / digitally enabled. The Council currently works in partnership with Harborough District Council who manage the associated control centre, however the Council is not currently achieving value for money through the contractual arrangement.
- 1.3 During the next year, the Council intends to undertake a full review of its approach to providing assistive technology, with a view to establishing a single, customer-focussed and commercially viable, assistive technology offer across Melton, irrespective of tenure.
- 1.4 In the meantime, it is necessary to take initial action to ensure the current service is effective, delivers an immediate saving and is digitally enabled. Efficiencies can best be facilitated through a partnership approach with Harborough District Council, and a capital allocation to support the compatibility of Lifeline Units as part of the Digital Switchover has been incorporated in the Budget proposals for 2022/23.

- 1.5 This report seeks Cabinet approval to progress the first stage actions and enter into a shared partnership arrangement with Harborough District Council (HDC) for the provision of private lifeline services. The report also seeks Cabinet approval to commence the aforementioned review, with a view to establishing a single, customer-focussed, and commercially viable assistive technology offer across Melton, irrespective of tenure (Stage 2). This would include the engagement with the Council's Scrutiny Committee to inform a further report to Cabinet in 2022.

## 2 Recommendations

### That Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Approve the continued provision of private lifeline services with Harborough District Council (HDC), subject to legal approval of contractual arrangements.**
- 2.2 **Delegates authority to the Director for Housing and Communities (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for People and Communities) to negotiate, finalise and sign any required legal documentation.**
- 2.3 **Endorse the 2-stage approach detailed in 3.2 and note that Cabinet will receive a further report on the wider review on the feasibility of establishing a single Lifeline offer for the Borough of Melton**
- 2.4 **Notes that a capital allocation to support the compatibility of Lifeline Units, as part of the Digital Switchover, has been incorporated in the Budget proposals for 2022/23 and this will be progressed alongside the wider review of this service**

## 3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council's Lifeline and Assistive Technology services provide a valuable support to tenants and residents to live independently in their homes. The current provision is though disjointed and the equipment used to support the service needs to be upgraded and digitally enabled. A shared service arrangement with Harborough District Council will allow the Council to achieve greater efficiencies through economies of scale and a consistent service offer.
- 3.2 The two stage process will allow the Council to realise contract and partnership savings and efficiencies now, as well as assist in managing the complexities associated with meeting our obligations as part of the digital switchover (stage 1). It will then also allow time to undertake a wider review, with a view towards establishing a single Lifeline offer for Melton which will be customer focused and provide ongoing commercial viability for the future (stage 2).

## 4 Background

- 4.1 Lifeline Services support residents to remain safely and independently at home. Customers pay to receive this service.

- 4.2 Following the presentation of a commercial framework in 2018 to explore the scope available for commercial success within the Council's Private Lifeline Service (operating under the timesage banner), the Council undertook some initial activity to understand how the service was being delivered. Covid 19 required the Council to refocus resources, leading to a delay in progressing this work.
- 4.3 This identified a number of immediate challenges which needed to be addressed. This included having more robust controls in place and drawing clear lines between this service and the roles of other teams and partners who serve vulnerable residents within the community.
- 4.4 Since these early discussions, the Council has already made a number of positive changes:
- a) A shift in the culture and mind-set of the team towards a more commercial approach to the service whilst being mindful of our supporting people values and ethos.
  - b) Established clear lines of onward referral where welfare concerns were identified.
  - c) Implemented stock controls and profit and loss to ensure we had a suitable commercial model with which to work.
  - d) Back office processes have substantially improved along with the recovery of income via direct debit for most customers.
  - e) Removal of timesage website and associated costs which includes the web hosting, web maintenance and PayPal charges. The service title and strapline will change to Melton Lifeline; "Maintaining Independence. Providing Peace of Mind"
- 4.5 However, there are some current challenges that need to be addressed:
- a) Historically, unpaid monies have not been pursued leading to an issue of aged debt of approximately £22k. A separate decision will be required at a later date to determine the action required in relation to monies owed to for the provision of Lifeline services. This will form part of a wider piece of work in 2022 in relation to the management of historic debt
  - b) Currently there are three separate Lifeline offers delivered by the Council, leading to confusion and a lack of clarity of offer to people in Melton.
  - c) The equipment used to deliver the service needs to be upgraded / digitally enabled due to a national Digital Switchover.
  - d) There is a need to increase promotion and awareness of Lifeline Services in Melton
- 4.6 The Council currently works in partnership with Harborough District Council who manage the associated control centre, however the Council is not currently achieving value for money through the contractual arrangement. A review of the contractual arrangement and negotiations has led to an opportunity to enter into a partnership agreement to ensure the continued delivery of lifeline services and achieve greater value for money and income generation potential, whilst also ensuring resilience and expertise to support the digital switchover that the Council would not otherwise have.
- 4.7 It has been determined that the review of Lifeline Services in Melton requires two distinct programmes of work:

Stage 1	Initial actions to deliver immediate efficiencies and respond to the Digital Switchover. This would best be facilitated through a partnership arrangement with Harborough District Council that will deliver an effective and digitally enabled assistive technology (AT) service. This includes completion of the process to disassociate from the timesage brand, associated web activity and renegotiation of the costs per connection that will see an annual cost saving of circa £7k per annum. This does not include the units and service currently provided within the Intensive Housing Management Service (IHMS). The increase in set up fees for new customers will mean that the Council can recover a higher proportion of its costs upfront.
Stage 2	Undertake a more detailed review with a view to establishing a single customer-focussed and commercially viable assistive technology offer across Melton irrespective of tenure

## 5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 In relation to stage 1 of the proposed approach, entering into a formal partnership will allow us to realise even more benefits including:
- a) Achieving economies of scale for increased marketing activities.
  - b) Re-negotiate prices per weekly connection with Harborough Lifeline.
  - c) Move to increased posting of units with remote installation, which will be easier to implement with new digital units. This will also allow for greater flexibility between the two Councils.
  - d) Greater negotiating power with AT providers.
- 5.2 With the move to Digital units, both Harborough District Council and Melton need to re-evaluate the plethora of AT providers that are in the market and achieve greater value for money.
- 5.3 The partnership with Harborough would allow a partnership approach to the procurement of telecare equipment. The new equipment will be 'digital ready' and not incur further costs as a result of the switchover.
- 5.4 Although Melton's weekly charge to customers will only be increased in line with inflation, the Council would be increasing the set-up fee from the current £30 to £65 in line with what Harborough are also proposing. This will only impact on new customers not existing customers and will allow us to recoup a larger proportion of the unit cost from the outset. This takes into consideration the upgraded units, the immediate devaluation of the unit and that there is no guaranteed usage period per customer due to factors outside of our control e.g. moving into care or death.
- 5.5 The proposed new model utilising remote installation (with physical installations by exception) will allow the Private Lifeline Officer to focus on working closely with the finance team to ensure both invoicing and recovery are prioritised. The approach will also ensure payments are received and a proactive approach to addressing non-payment in a sensitive and appropriate manner.
- 5.6 Long term historic debt will be addressed through the debt profiling work expected during this financial year on the Revenues and Benefits team.

- 5.7 Housing colleagues are currently reviewing the existing IHMS service and part of this will be considering what Assistive Technology will be required and how this will be delivered.
- 5.8 Alongside securing the above benefits, the Council would also commence work on the wider review to support the stage 2 work programme outlined above.

## **6 Options Considered**

- 6.1 Continue with the service in its current format:
  - 6.1.1 The service in its current format does not achieve value for money and incurs additional costs which does not allow us to recoup the full costs of buying and maintaining the units in the long term. This financial pressure will only increase with the digital switchover as costs of the units will rise.
- 6.2 Disassociate from the timesage brand and develop the service on our own :
  - 6.2.1 With an increasingly competitive AT market, the timescales within which to achieve digital transition, and a lack of resilience in relation to staff expertise in this field, venturing alone will not give us the resilience, flexibility and potential to achieve maximum financial performance that a strength in partnership will provide. The shared service arrangement will allow us to retain full control of decisions we make in relation to responding to changes in the AT market.

## **7 Consultation**

- 7.1 Internal informal consultation has taken place with the Portfolio Holder and key internal departments: Housing colleagues, Finance, Legal and Procurement.
- 7.2 External consultation will need to take place prior to implementation of stage 2 as this will impact on tenants within the sheltered schemes.

## **8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication**

- 8.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the contract with Harborough District Council would be finalised and signed off. This includes ensuring procurement and legal obligations are addressed and a decision is finalised on the choice of assistive technology provider.
- 8.2 Work with tenancy services colleagues to review the IHMS Lifeline offer and to commence the stage 2 review with a view to establishing the new single AT offer for Melton.
- 8.3 Continue working with HDC in relation to immediate marketing and future ongoing development of the service.

## **9 Financial Implications**

- 9.1 A partnership approach has strong potential to deliver efficiencies, increase income generation and provide a consistent, effective and value for money service for customers.
- 9.2 Although our weekly charge to customers will only be increased in line with inflation, we will be increasing our set up fee from the current £30 to £65 in line with what HDC are also

proposing. This will only impact on new customers not existing customers and will allow us to recoup a larger portion of unit cost from the outset.

- 9.3 Disassociation from the timesage branding and renegotiation with HDC has already identified immediate savings of circa £7k per annum, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.
- 9.4 There is a need to ensure a robust process to securing monies due for the provision of Lifeline services, including a proportionate approach to pursuing non-payment. A customer focussed process will be developed, including the provision of support to customers who are unable to make required payments.
- 9.4.1 Historically, unpaid monies have not been pursued leading to an issue of aged debt of approximately £22k. A separate decision will be required at a later date to determine the action required in relation to monies owed to for the provision of Lifeline services. This will form part of a wider piece of work in 2022 in relation to the management of historic debt.

**Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate services**

## **10 Legal and Governance Implications**

- 10.1 The Council has the power to enter into contracts in order discharge its functions (Local Government Act 1972, s111 and the Local Government (contract) Act 1997, s1). The Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to have regulations for how it enters into contracts.
- 10.2 In addition to complying with all relevant UK and EU legislation every contract entered into on behalf of the Council must also comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Council's Financial Regulations.
- 10.3 There is no statutory duty to provide Lifeline and Assistive Technology services.
- 10.4 The new contract arrangements have been reviewed by Legal Services and includes provision for variation by mutual agreement to accommodate the development of closer partnership working.
- 10.5 Welland Procurement have provided advice regarding compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and have confirmed that the contract will be exempt from procurement requirements under the Local Government Act 1972.

**Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer**

## **11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications**

- 11.1 There is currently an inconsistency in the service provided to residents in relation to Assistive Technology depending on whether they are a private or Council tenant. Progression of stage 2 will ensure we have a consistent offer to our residents irrespective of tenure.
- 11.2 Historically, there had been a reluctance to pursuing non-payment of monies due for Lifeline services due to the specific demographic that largely accessed the service.

## **12 Community Safety Implications**

- 12.1 There are no community safety implications in relation to this report.

## 13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 Moving to increased remote installations will have a positive impact on reducing carbon footprint.

## 14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 There are no other significant implications arising from this report.

## 15 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	Savings and / or increased income generation are not realised from the shared arrangement	Very Low	Marginal	Low Risk
2	A competitive AT market and lack of customers renders the service financially unviable.	Low	Critical	Medium Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low			2	
	2 Very Low		1		
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	Disassociation from the timesage brand and renegotiation with HDC has already identified immediate savings of circa £7k per annum.
2	The Council is a trusted brand and a shared arrangement will only strengthen this reputation. We also receive direct referrals from public sector partners in health and social care.

## 16 Background Papers.

16.1 None

## 17 Appendices

17.1 None

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