

## **Oxford City Council Out of Hours Emergency Services and Lone Worker Monitoring Services**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To provide CMT with an update of the current and planned arrangements for the provision of the Out of Hours emergency telephone response services and Lone Worker monitoring arrangements and to provide details of the quality assurance included in the invitation to tender for the future provision of these services.

### **2. Recommendation**

It is recommended that CMT:

1. note the detail within the report
2. recommends submission of a follow up report for Single Member decision regarding the procurement process.

### **3. Background**

The Council currently has a 1 year contract (extended to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012 pending completion of the current procurement process) with the Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust, trading as Astraline, for both the provision of out of hours call handling service and lone worker monitoring system. This contract is currently used by Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council & Cotswold District Council, The Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.

Previously both services were provided by Oxford City Council via the call centre located at Beckley View. The Councils needed to find another provider of these services, at relatively short notice, by September 2010. Due to the value of the contract and the requirements of Council standing orders and EU procurement law, it was only possible to put in place an interim 1 year contract.

In respect of the service provided on behalf of Oxford City Council this primarily relates to Environmental Development; Noise, Anti Social Behaviour, Stray / Lost Dogs etc

The out of hours telephone service with Astraline does not include emergency Homelessness, Housing Repairs or Recycling, Waste, Streecare and Transport, as these services continue to be provided by Oxford City Council employees as appropriate. However, if Astraline receive calls for any of these services inadvertently, then they will redirect callers to the appropriate service and they will handle non-emergency calls. Astraline have also provided additional back up services on occasion to ensure business continuity – e.g. during maintenance of the Council's telephone system.

The out of hours call handling service operates weekdays between the hours of 6pm and 8am (4.30pm on a Friday) and including weekends. There is provision in the current contract to extend these hours to accommodate bank holidays and other events e.g. during the Christmas closing period.

The Council's one number – 249811 provides customers with four options between 6pm and 8:00am weekdays and during weekends and bank holidays. (Options 1 & 2 can also be accessed via the Direct Services free-phone number):

Option 1 – for recycling, waste, street care and transport (OCC)

Option 2 – for tenant or leaseholder enquiries / repairs (OCC)

Option 3 – to make an automated payment (automated)

Option 4 – for Noise or dog warden (Astraline)

Selecting one these options will seamlessly transfer the caller to the appropriate emergency service. Information regarding the number to dial for emergency homeless enquires is also provided.

Nb. Calls transferring to Astraline are forwarded by the Council's contact centre telephone system and as such there is no additional cost to the customers.

#### **4. Customer Service, Volumes and Customer Satisfaction**

Early implementation of the contract did result in some customer service issues, including long wait times and some misdirected calls. This was particularly prevalent during the bad weather in Dec 2010 and Jan 2011, when Astraline received a significant increase (50%) in calls volumes and at a time when they were also dealing with the impact of severe weather. However whilst service levels were reduced, the service was maintained at all times and a number of measures were subsequently put in place to mitigate against a similar future event. e.g. implementation of a generator to ensure power can be maintained and access to additional human resources such as via home working.

In January 2011 the Customer First Programme Manager – Karen Tarbox and Licensing and Development Manager – Tony Payne attended Astraline offices to carry out further training with all staff in relation to service processes. Since this time we have continued to work with Astraline to improve the quality of service, which has improved significantly.

Daily logs are received regarding the enquiry or service request and any follow up action is taken by the appropriate service department. Monthly reports are received regarding the number of calls received and the speed of answer (example attached)

These can be cross checked against our own call logs, which provide basic information of the number of calls diverted to Astraline. These call logs are also used to match call volume against costs on invoices.

#### **5. Future service provision – Options Considered**

Following the interim arrangements put in place with Astraline, it was necessary for the Council to review the options for continued out of hours telephone response service & lone worker monitoring.

During initial discussions regarding the scope of the Out of Hours and Lone Workers arrangements, 6 potential options were considered:

1. In house provision of all out of hours telephone response services and lone worker monitoring – Oxford City Council only.
2. In house provision for all out of hours telephone response services and lone worker monitoring services – Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council & Cotswold District Council, The Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.
3. In house provision of all out of hours telephone response services and external provision of lone worker monitoring – Oxford City council only
4. In house provision of all out of hours telephone response services and external provision of lone worker monitoring Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council & Cotswold District Council, The Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.
5. Continue with existing in house arrangements for out of hours telephone response services and seek an external supplier for Environmental Development out of hours telephone response services and lone worker monitoring.
6. Seek an external supplier to provide all out of hours telephone response services and lone worker monitoring.

#### Options 1 & 2

These options were discounted during initial discussions as it was felt that the organisation did not have sufficient expertise, resource or technical capacity to offer a lone worker monitoring service.

#### Options 3 & 4

Both of these options would require, as a minimum, the set up of a 24/7 operation to include technology, human resources and knowledge management. Based on the expected number of callers this would require approximately 5-6 staff, plus access to supervisor / manager to cover weekday evening shifts and weekend shifts at a total of 104 business hours.

Whilst these options have not been fully costed – staffing for shifts alone are likely to be in the region of £140k p.a. with additional management support costs. If the service was office based there would be additional office costs and related staff costs. Home working would also attract supervisory costs and technology costs. In the design of either operation, business continuity costs would also need to be factored in. Given the cost of the current contract between all parties, this would result in a significant increase in cost for all councils involved and is therefore deemed not cost viable.

#### Option 5

This option would replicate the current arrangements that the Council has in place and it is anticipated that this would be achievable within current budgets.

#### Option 6

It was felt that the current out of hours arrangements for housing repairs, waste and homeless were satisfactory, with costs remaining within the

council. No business need or cost benefits were identified – in fact it was considered that the introduction of a third party to screen calls would likely reduce the quality of service as the operator may not have the skills and expertise to provide advice over the phone. This could result in unnecessary attendance at non emergency situations. This option was discounted on the basis of potential increased costs and reduction in service quality – though neither have been explored through soft market testing.

Whilst the initial consideration included an “in house” bid for Oxford City Council to provide this service both for Oxford City Council and the other Oxford District Council, this was rejected due to indicative costs being higher than those currently being paid within the existing contract and the council not having suitable in house facilities for lone worker monitoring.

Service preference was that existing out of hours services for Housing Repairs, Waste and Homeless would continue to be provided by the Council and that the Out of Hours services for Environmental Development and Lone Worker monitoring, currently provided by Astraline, would be retendered – Option 5.

## **6. Service Quality**

To ensure any future supplier provides a quality service the following requirements have been included in the Invitation to Tender and will form part of the basis of contract:

The Supplier will:

Answer calls from the general public and other services who need to access the Targeted Out of Hours Service from 6.00 pm to 8.00 am the following day (i.e. non office hours), and for the full 24-hour periods on a Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday and other dates by arrangement.

Record calls received along with the details of the caller’s name, address and telephone number, the address/description of the premises or location causing the problem, and the nature of the problem.

Screen the calls in accordance with the referral procedure.

Where necessary, refer the call to the Duty Officer as soon as possible via the pager system and provide the Duty Officer with details of the call when he/she phones the Control Centre.

(provision for future recording of service requests into the Council’s CRM system has been discussed with each of the shortlisted suppliers)

Fax/email details of calls received to the appropriate Officer the next working day with the details of the time of the call, the caller’s name, address and telephone number, the address/description of the premises or location causing the problem, the nature of the problem, and if the call was referred to the Duty Officer, the time referred.

Provide monthly reports of call volumes to the service (please see monthly reporting requirements).

Refer any complaints regarding the service delivery to the Service Manager.

Update all records within 24 hours of receiving instruction from the Council

#### Call Handling SLA (service level agreement)

80% of calls answered within 20 seconds with no more than a 5% abandonment rate based on estimated call volumes.

Customer satisfaction at 95%. (A baseline exercise will be required to establish current satisfaction levels – Year 1 target will be 90% moving to 95% by year 2).

#### Monthly Management Reporting Detail

Each Council will require a separate report detailing the following information for each call taken:

Service type e.g housing

Category e.g repairs / register / homeless

Number of calls offered

Number of calls answered (both within and outside of the SLA target)

Abandonment rate

Each Council will conduct its own Customer satisfaction surveys.

#### Penalty Clauses

A scaled reduction in cost has been included in the event of under performance and an agreement that the Supplier and Council will agree a service improvement implementation plan.

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