

To: City Executive Board

Date: 8th December 2010

Item No: 16

Report of: Graham Stratford, Head of Service, Housing and Communities

Title of Report: Proposals for Hard-Wired Alarms in Elderly Designated and Sheltered Properties

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide proposals for the future of hard-wired alarm systems in elderly designated and sheltered properties following the start of the new Alert service contracts under Supporting People in October 2010.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Cllr Joe McManners

Policy Framework: Housing Strategy, Older Person Housing Strategy.

Recommendation(s):

a. Hard-wired alarms in designated level 2 and 3 properties are disconnected after Supporting People and the new contractors for the Alert service have replaced the alarms for SP funded clients and made appropriate arrangements with self-funding clients. Any tenant moving into a designated level 2 and 3 property in the future (or indeed any council property) can be assessed for an alarm service by the new service contractor or pay for the service directly themselves. The cost of disconnection in these properties is minimal, requiring only removal of the hard-wired 'rack' in the block and pull-cords in properties. This will save an estimated £8,306 p.a. in maintenance costs and avoid expenditure on costs associated with upgrades to the equipment which is now very old.

b. Hard-wired alarms will be retained in sheltered properties including in communal areas. This will see ongoing maintenance charges of £10,038 p.a. retained.

c. The Council will negotiate with SP for the retention of SP funded monitoring of hard-wired alarms in sheltered properties though the Alert service contract (i.e. SP funded for SP clients and self-funding for all others). Permission is sought to proceed with these negotiations.

d. This will include monitoring of communal area alarms in these blocks at a fee to be negotiated between the Council and SP. It is estimated that this fee will be low (i.e. below £10,000 pa) and recouped through rent and service charges for the 340 properties concerned. In this way, hard-wired alarms will be retained ensuring schemes remain secure and safe for residents and that blocks retain their 'sheltered' status.

1 Appendices to report

Appendix 1: Equipment list for sites covered by hard-wired alarms

Appendix 2: Specification for Supporting People Contract

Appendix 3: Risk Register

2 Background to Alarm Service

2.1 Until recently the Council provided community alarm monitoring and mobile warden services to a range of clients across the county, including those in Oxford City Council's own sheltered and semi-sheltered accommodation. The Alarm Control Centre also provided lone worker and out-of-hours reporting services for a number of corporate clients, including Oxford City Council.

3 Funding

3.1 The funding for this activity came from multiple sources (including from City Council budgets), but latterly has largely been provided by the Supporting People Programme, administered by Oxfordshire County Council.

3.2 Clients of the alarm monitoring services in Oxford City Council properties have either been in receipt of Supporting People (SP) funding or have been self-funding.

4 Re-tendering of the Alarm Monitoring and Mobile Warden Service and Outcome

4.1 In 2009/10 the County Council and the Supporting People partnership re-tendered the alarm monitoring and mobile warden services across the county, including those services delivered by Oxford City Council. This overall contract, referred to as the Alert Service, covers Supporting People funded client alarm monitoring, planned and emergency cover for mobile warden and equipment provision.

4.2 Oxford City Council bid for 3 contracts to provide county-wide cover for alarm monitoring and city wide cover for planned and emergency mobile warden cover. Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in obtaining any contracts and our existing contracts with Supporting People and the County Council ended at the end of September 2010.

4.3 New contracts started on 3rd October 2010 in the City and were awarded thus:

- Alarm monitoring – Senior Link Elder Care
- Planned mobile warden service – OCHA
- Emergency mobile warden service – Community Voice
- Equipment provision – Tunstall

4.4 All services funded by Supporting People have therefore transferred to the new providers. All residual City Council contracted services were transferred to Community Voice following CEB approval on 30th June 2010.

5 Hard-wired alarms locations.

5.1 Alarm systems were installed in City Council properties that are sheltered or designated level 2 or 3 semi-sheltered (elderly ‘designated’ properties)¹. These alarm systems are hard-wired into the fabric of the buildings concerned and provide pull-cord alarm systems inside resident’s flats as well as in communal areas in sheltered housing schemes. More modern alarm systems are routed through telephone lines and are based on pendant-type alarms and are thus more flexible.

5.2 The council has approximately 445 elderly designated level 2 and 3 properties (see Appendix 1) fitted with hard wired alarm systems. There are 188 Supporting People funded clients in these properties and 16 self-funded (with therefore approximately 241 tenants in these properties opting out of the service all together).

5.3 The Council also has 13 sheltered housing schemes. There are 205 SP funded clients in City Council sheltered housing with 79 tenants currently self funding or opting out of the service altogether and approximately 30 vacancies at present.

5.4 The location and type of hard wire alarm systems in each of these properties is identified in Appendix 1.

¹ (City Council definition - General needs properties, designated, for allocation purposes only to single applicants and couples, with no dependent children. The properties have traditionally included a ‘hard wired’ alarm system however, although these systems are becoming increasingly obsolete, as community alarms are used more. The level of support is determined through a support needs assessment. They can also be known as ‘Category 1’ schemes (usually by RSLs), or as ‘independent sheltered’ (with respect to the one Council Designated 3 scheme). They are usually allocated to persons over 55 years of age, but this is reduced to 40 years on some schemes. The properties are mostly studio and one bed flats, but also include some two bed flats & bungalows).

6 Specification of new Alert services contract (relation to upgrading hard-wired alarms).

- 6.1 The provisions in the SP Alert Service specification (see Appendix 2) outline that it is within the contract price of the Alert service awarded to successful providers to convert alarms for Supporting People funded clients from Hard Wired alarms to telephone based systems. This means that SP are funding the transfer of alarms from Hard-wired to telephone based systems for SP funded clients; this includes the provision of telephone lines where none are currently available.
- 6.2 This will however not cover the cost of equipment upgrades or telephone lines for self-funding clients or systems in communal areas of sheltered housing.

7 Current costs associated with the monitoring and maintenance of hard-wired alarms

- 7.1 Oxford City Council has a contract with Tunstall for the maintenance of the hard-wired alarm systems installed in the Council's sheltered and elderly designated (level 2 and 3) properties.
- 7.2 There is an annual service charge of £55 per block covered with an additional monthly maintenance charge of between £15 and £100 dependant on the block in question. The total maintenance charges for designated level 2 and 3 properties are:

Designated level 2
*19 blocks

Total annual service charge £1,155.00 Total maintenance charges £6,675.36 Total maintenance charges £7,830.36

Designated level 3
* 1 block

Total annual service charge £55.00 Total maintenance charges £421.80 Total maintenance charges £476.80
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7.3 The total maintenance charges for hard-wired alarms in sheltered blocks are:

Sheltered

Total annual service charge £660.00 Total maintenance charges £9,378.36 Total maintenance charges £10,038.36
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7.4 Monitoring charges for all SP funded and self-funded clients are met through the contracts between SP, the new contractors and the individual clients.

7.5 Monitoring charges for communal alarms in sheltered blocks have been provided free of charge to date by the Council's Alarm Monitoring call centre and by Community Voice who have taken over the residual contracts and the Barton facility on a temporary basis. This will no longer be the case once Community Voice vacates the Barton premises.

8 De-designation

8.1 The Council is currently considering a process which will include the phased de-designation of some level 2 properties over a five-year programme. Level 3 properties will not be de-designated.

8.2 Changes to the provision of hard-wired alarms in level 2 properties will not affect proposals for de-designation of those properties as the

provision of alarms by SP will become client-centred and tenure and property neutral.

9 Proposals

- 9.1 The proposals for hard-wired alarm systems in Council properties are thus:
- 9.2 Hard-wired alarms in designated level 2 and 3 properties are disconnected after Supporting People and the new contractors for the Alert service have replaced the alarms for SP funded clients and made appropriate arrangements with self-funding clients. Any tenant moving into a designated level 2 and 3 property in the future (or indeed any council property) can be assessed for an alarm service by the new service contractor or pay for the service directly themselves. The cost of disconnection in these properties is minimal, requiring only removal of the hard-wired 'rack' in the block and pull-cords in properties. This will save an estimated £8,306 p.a. in maintenance costs and avoid expenditure on costs associated with upgrades to the equipment which is now very old.
- 9.3 Hard-wired alarms will be retained in sheltered properties including in communal areas. This will see ongoing maintenance charges of £10,038 p.a. retained.
- 9.4 The Council will negotiate with SP for the retention of SP funded monitoring of hard-wired alarms in sheltered properties though the Alert service contract (i.e. SP funded for SP clients and self-funding for all others). Permission is sought to proceed with these negotiations.
- 9.5 This will include monitoring of communal area alarms in these blocks at a fee to be negotiated between the Council and SP. It is estimated that this fee will be low (i.e. below £10,000 pa) and recouped through rent and service charges for the 340 properties concerned. In this way, hard-wired alarms will be retained ensuring schemes remain secure and safe for residents and that blocks retain their 'sheltered' status.
- 9.6 The alternative option to these proposals (9.2 through 9.5 above) would be to provide and maintain parallel alarm systems and monitoring services in addition to the Supporting People Alert service for any resident who is not SP funded (which is a relatively small number) for which there would be an additional cost to the Council (procurement costs and contract charges) and the retention of the maintenance and service charges for hard-wired alarm systems in designated level 2 and 3 properties at the cost of £8,306 p.a. This has not been recommended as it is viewed as impractical, inefficient and unnecessarily retaining outdated hard-wired systems where there will be minimum demand.

10 Climate Change

10.1 There are no implications for climate change in accepting the recommendations of this report.

11 Equalities Impact

11.1 Vulnerable residents in elderly designated level 2 and 3 stock will continue to receive alarm monitoring services either via the Supporting People contracts funded by SP following an assessment of their ability to pay, or on a self-funding basis if assessed as having sufficient resources to pay. Those living in sheltered housing stock will, under these proposals, continue to receive alarm monitoring services either through the SP Alert service or via retained hard-wired alarm monitoring arranged by the Council.

12 Financial Implications

12.1 There is a minimal cost attributable to disconnecting the hard-wired alarm systems as they can be simply turned off and annual savings of £8,306 will be made in maintenance charges.

12.2 The cost of replacing alarms systems in SP funded client's homes falls within the Supporting People contracts and for replacing them for self-funding clients falls to the client themselves.

12.3 The retention of alarm systems in sheltered housing will see costs for maintenance retained (currently charged at £10,038 p.a.) and an additional cost (to be determined through negotiation with SP) will be liable for external monitoring of the communal area alarms which will not be covered by the SP alert service contracts. Permission to negotiate with SP for this service is sought in this paper. The anticipated minimal additional costs will be recouped through rent and service charges for the relevant properties.

13 Legal Implications

13.1 The council does not have contracts with tenants living in the designated blocks to provide alarm services to SP funded clients following the transfer of the Alert service at the beginning of October. Council contracts with private clients (self-funding) transferred to Community Voice at the beginning of July following CEB's decision on the 30th June 2010.

13.2 Maintenance contracts with Tunstall can be terminated according to the terms of the contracts in place once hard-wired alarm systems are disconnected.

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List of background papers: none

Version number: 6