

The Highland Council
Community services Committee
4 June 2015

Agenda Item	17
Report No	COM 30/15

Out of Hours Call Handling

Report by Director of Community Service

Summary

The Highland Council continually pursues opportunities to work in partnership with other public bodies, particularly where there is a financial benefit. Out of Hours emergency calls for housing and former TECS matters have been handled by Police Scotland at the Force Operation Command Centre in Inverness since April 2012.

This arrangement has recently undergone a review and an alternative option to provide call handling for out of hour calls has been identified. The current and proposed options are described in this paper.

1. Background

- 1.1 Prior to April 2012 the housing service and roads and street lighting functions operated separate and different arrangements for dealing with out of hours emergency calls.
- 1.2 The Partnership with Police Scotland (previously Northern Constabulary) came in to effect in April 2012. The calls handled relate to out of hours emergency housing repairs, homelessness and road and street lighting. This arrangement has been successful in a number of ways:
 - Providing a consistent and resilient service.
 - Being effective at dealing with high volumes of calls at peak periods, such as bad weather events.
 - Complying with call scripts and so reducing the number of call outs to Highland Council staff and contractors to attend to non-emergency jobs.
 - Providing management information in relation to out of hours calls.
- 1.3 There are various ways in which a Contact Centre\Service Centre can be resourced and funded. The current service delivery model was set up in such a way as to manage Highland Council out of hours calls separately from mainstream Police business. This was to ensure continued Police resilience on operational matters, while delivering a more efficient and cost effective delivery model as compared to previous standby arrangements. Other call centre models can offer further savings on the basis of a blended solution, i.e. both parties having similar requirements and shared customer outcomes. We have taken this into account during our review.

- 1.4 During this 3 year period Police Scotland has handled an average of 9,000 calls per year and delivered an annual saving to Community Services of £10,000 per year.
- 1.5 Data around the call statistics has been collected for 3 years and this makes the forecasting of volumes and costs more predictable when considering future delivery options.
- 1.6 Police Scotland operates under the Highland Council's Customer Services Standards and customer satisfaction is monitored through weekly surveys of service users.
- 1.7 The Partnership agreement allows for an annual review of the service to take place. The most recent review has looked at the proposed change to the location of the call handling service from Inverness to a virtual service centre operated between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The current projected date for the change is November 2015.
- 1.8 A review of the cost model was requested. Police Scotland has responded that the cost will increase with effect from 1 April 2016. They have not indicated what the cost increase will be.
- 1.9 The current arrangement with Police Scotland allows either party to terminate the agreement by giving 6 months' notice.
- 1.10 As part of our ongoing work to explore shared services with other local authorities, Aberdeen City Council was identified as a potential partner in delivering out of hours services on behalf of Highland Council. No other Council has presented this opportunity at this stage.

2. Options

- 2.1 The two options for consideration are:
 - Continue the partnership with Police Scotland
 - Enter in to a partnership with Aberdeen City Council
- 2.2 An options approval has been completed, see Appendix 1, which favours Aberdeen City Council as our preferred partner.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource Implications

- The out of hours processes are well established and minimal training would be required for the call handlers at Aberdeen City Council as Highland Council processes match their processes.
- There may be a small cost involved in enabling Aberdeen City Council to access Highland Council IT systems. This cannot be quantified at this stage.
- Aberdeen City Council is looking to procure a new CRM IT System in Partnership with Highland Council. This would allow us to exploit our IT investments fully.

3.2 Legal Implications

A Partnership Agreement would require to be put in place with Aberdeen City Council, similar to the agreement in place with Police Scotland.

3.3 Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has taken place which indicates a full screening is not required.

3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Gaelic and Rural implications

There have been no implications identified when considering these factors.

3.5 Risk

There are risks in moving to any new service delivery model. Service transition will be closely monitored, especially in relation to customer satisfaction with the new service.

If the proposal is not approved Highland Council will be losing the opportunity to make a considerable financial saving.

Recommendations

1. Members are asked to note the benefits and costs involved with each delivery option.
2. Approve the move to a Partnership Agreement with Aberdeen City Council, the implementation date to be agreed between both parties.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 25 May 2015

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Background Papers: Out of Hours Call Handling Arrangements, Resources
Committee, 5 October 2011

Appendix 1 Option Appraisal

Model	Cost	Benefits	Disadvantages/Issues	Risk
Police Scotland Partnership	£100,000 Increasing from April 2016.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resilience in call handling arrangements, able to deal with high volume of calls. 2. A consistent and prescriptive approach has delivered savings through reducing call outs for housing emergency repairs teams. 3. Accurate and audible recording of customer contacts. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cost model is prohibitive in the current financial situation. 2. Not core business. 3. Comprehensive training would have to be delivered on site to staff handling HC calls. 4. The virtual service centre is not yet established so no track record of it delivering non-core police calls. 5. Training and quality management will have to be closely monitored during the implementation and early operating phase. 	High
Aberdeen City Council Partnership Model	£27,000	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Core business, already delivering day time and out of hours services for Councils. 2. Resilience in call handling arrangements, able to deal with high volume of calls. 3. Accurate and audible recording of customer contacts. 4. Proven record of partnership working with Aberdeenshire Council. 5. Same customer relation management technologies will prevent manually inputting 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training and quality management will have to be closely monitored during the implementation and early operating phase. 	Low

		<p>information next day and reduce double handling of data.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Minimum training will be required.7. Opportunity to explore other opportunities for collaborative working.		
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