

AUDIT COMMITTEE

31 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIPS

A.1 TENDRING CARELINE – RECOVERY AFTER IMPROVEMENT NOTICE FROM TEC SERVICES ASSOCIATION

(Report prepared by Head of Customer and Commercial Services)

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Audit Committee of the recovery actions taken by Tendring Careline after an improvement notice was issued by the TEC Services Association at its last audit of the service.

BACKGROUND

Tendring Careline is a member of the TEC Services Association (TSA). This organisation is the national body of Carelines across the UK and, although membership is not mandatory, it offers the most widely recognised accreditation for the telecare industry.

In order to be accredited, each Careline must pass an annual audit by the TSA in which 13 modules are assessed. In September 2021 Careline was found compliant in 12 of these modules but was issued with an improvement notice for TEC Monitoring. The full audit report can be found in appendix 1.

DETAILED INFORMATION

The TEC Monitoring module within the TSA audit is an assessment of how quickly incoming calls to Tendring Careline are handled by the Control Centre Operators. In order to be passed as compliant the Careline should answer 97.5% of all calls within 60 seconds and in any event, 99% of all calls within 180 seconds. The September 2021 audit of Tendring Careline found that *'KPI's for calls answered within 60 seconds have only been achieved for 2 months out of the last 18 months. KPI's for calls answered within 180 seconds have been missed 6 times in the last 18 months'*.

There are mitigating circumstances for these statistics. Firstly the Covid-19 pandemic had a great impact on staff resources. Between April 2020 and June 2020 there were numerous Control Centre Operators that caught the virus and had to self isolate and numerous others that were considered vulnerable and also had to stay at home. At this point in time Tendring Careline was operating on an old analogue call handling platform which meant that all Operators had to be in the Control Centre which is a relatively small space with no windows and no fresh air circulating. It would be likely that the virus could be transmitted. The decision was taken to close the Control Centre and deploy a new digital call handling platform. This did mean that our Operators could work from home but they would also have to learn how to use the new platform. It took many months of online training for our Operators to get back up to speed and in addition we also had various

problems with staff using the wifi available in their own homes. Problems were often seen where the wifi would 'drop-out' and calls couldn't be answered.

Throughout the months April 2020 until April 2021 the service continued to see staff resources stretched and there were times when it was not possible to have enough trained staff in order to meet the KPI's. It should be recognised that call volumes also increased during this time as we saw more frequent, and longer, calls from our vulnerable service users. A recruitment campaign was initiated in September 2020 with new members of staff joining at the beginning of 2021 but the speed of training that was possible online meant that we were not able to put these new recruits onto the rota until May 2021.

The second mitigating factor is the contract with Provide CIC and the addition of service users from the Essex County Council (ECC) telecare contract. Tendring Careline has been contracted to supply out-of-hours call monitoring services to Provide CIC since 2014 (between 6pm and 8am Monday to Friday, and all weekend and bank holidays). Early in 2021 Provide CIC, with Tendring Careline as a sub-contractor, was successful in bidding for the newly let ECC Telecare contract which started in July 2021. This contract added 2500 new service users that needed to be monitored from day one and the addition of more service users on a daily basis.

The size of the contract and the speed that new service users were being added meant that Tendring Careline was again unable to meet the TSA call handling KPI's. A restructure of the Control Centre Operators was implemented in October 2021 and further recruitment has been undertaken but it became clear that Tendring Careline would not be able to manage the Provide CIC contract and maintain the TSA call handling KPIs.

Recovery Plan

At the current time there is an overlapping internal audit review of the Careline Service. Although actions have been developed in direct response to the outcome of the TSA review, it would be pragmatic to also reflect on the outcome of this internal audit review in terms of agreeing a final action / recovery plan. The outcome from this internal audit review, including the proposed action / recovery plan is due to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in April, so it would still present a timely response.

The Tendring Careline Service will be subject to a review by TSA again in August 2022, which can be managed / accommodated within the action / recovery plan timescales highlighted above.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee determines whether it has any comments or recommendations it wishes to put forward the relevant Portfolio Holder or Cabinet.

Appendix 1. TSA Audit Report – October 2021