

**Audit Committee 29 September 2022**  
**Response of the Assistant Director, Partnerships**

***(b) in relation to the Careline update, the Assistant Director (Finance & IT) be requested to submit, on behalf of the Audit Committee, the following questions and comments to the Careline Board:-***

***(1) Are the approved new plans for Careline realistic ambitions for the structure and staffing levels in Careline?***

Yes. Careline has already begun to recruit to the new structure. The Control Centre and Administrative function is stable. The Response function still has three vacancies but interest in the roles is good. The service expects to be able to fill the roles. The service also has a small bank of Casual staff which it is actively looking to enhance.

The service will always need bank staff to cover holidays and ad hoc sickness.

***(2) The Audit Committee want a reassurance that the agreed new plans for Careline do not compromise the recovery of the service and its delivery to customers;***

Management Team have stressed that any future growth must be sustainable. This means that the service must be able to safely manage the number of customers it has whilst retaining the Tec Services Association (TSA) accreditation.

The finances that have been agreed by Cabinet allow sufficient staffing for modest, sustainable growth to take place. The priority for this year is the TSA re-accreditation audit (September) and the recruitment of sufficient officers. However, a marketing plan has been drawn up which can be implemented once the service is stable.

***(3) Will the ability to deliver a sustained and deliverable service match the potential interest resulting from the marketing campaign?***

The marketing that shall be undertaken will be a mix of traditional methods, such as talks and demonstrations at suitable groups, newspaper advertising, and digital advertising through Google Ads and Facebook.

Each campaign will have a specific 'call to action' that can be used to monitor its effectiveness. These types of campaigns can be stopped and started very quickly so that the Council has control.

Careline also monitors any service user cancellations. Currently we lose circa 40 service users every month due to the resident going into residential care, moving in with family, or because the service user has passed away.

***(4) Will Careline provide a sustainable and cost effective service, which mitigates the financial and reputational risk to the Council?***

Careline mitigates the reputational risk to the Council by employing the right number of properly trained staff. Attaining the TSA accreditation gives an assurance to the Council that Careline delivers a safe, quality service to residents.

As Careline is a non-statutory service, the management team aim to ensure that income covers expenditure. The plan that has been agreed by Cabinet is that, once the service is stable and the TSA audit undertaken, the marketing plan will begin in order to increase the number of private payers that are attracted to the service. The contract with Personal Alarm watch is already showing growth in this financial year.

As we get towards the end of 2023, and into the normal fee setting cycle, an assessment will be taken of the level of fees that the service needs to charge in order to be self-sufficient. It should be pointed out that Tendring Careline costs less than any other comparable local telecare provider but that cost is very rarely cited as a purchasing driver.

In the meantime, Careline reserves of £221,000 may be used to support the service to become self-financing. Together with colleagues from the Finance team, budgets will be monitored closely and any shortfall in income reported quickly in order that contingencies can be made. The service has recently become aware of a potential VAT issue that may need to be financed.

***(5) What is the current and proposed staffing levels and does the business case support the employment and training of additional new staff?***

Careline uses the Erlang-C formula to forecast the number of call handlers required to answer the incoming calls in a timely manner. Erlang-C is used by the call centre industry worldwide and is the standard for assessing whether or not a call will be answered within a given time-frame by a given number of call handlers. It relies on information such as how many calls are averagely received in a given period, averagely how long each call takes, and whether the call handlers need any extra time to wrap up the calls (administration).

The recovery plan that has been accepted by Cabinet includes the financial support for the service to be able to recruit sufficient numbers of people to operate safely and attain the TSA KPI's. Incoming call volumes and length are monitored regularly. The Control Centre structure has four call handlers during the busiest part of the day (8am to 4pm) and three call handlers at all other times. This is sufficient for current call volumes and will also allow capacity for some growth.

The structure has two Mobile Responders from 8am to 8pm and one Responder overnight when the service usually receives fewer calls. The service also has a small bank of casual staff that are trained to call handle or Respond to cover sickness and holidays. It is usually a casual team member that is appointed to any permanent vacancies that we have.

***(6) Has the Business Continuity Plan for Careline been updated, to mitigate the previous risks and failings?***

Yes the Business Continuity Plan has been updated and can be viewed if required.

***(7) Is there still outstanding unrecovered debt?***

Much work has been done around the outstanding debt and the private payer accounts are much tidier.

- Circa £7,000 has been recovered from private payers.
- £4,500 has been written off (12 private payer accounts) for service users that are either deceased or cannot afford to pay and the monies are uneconomic to chase.
- £1,400 has been credited as invoiced in error.

- A total of 52 private payer accounts have been cleared.
- £44,000 was received recently from an external company with whom we had a contract and we have received assurances that the outstanding £15,000 has been added to the next payment run.

There are still a number of private pay accounts with unrecovered debt. 22 accounts totalling £12,400. Of these, 4 have had payment plans set up so they will pay off the debt slowly. The others are the more difficult cases which are being dealt with by the Head of Service due to their sensitive nature. We are dealing with instances where the service user cannot afford to pay, cases where the service user now has dementia but no power of attorney is in existence, and cases where it was the family members that were paying but they have moved. Finally, we have some service users that insist they are paying every month but we don't receive the money.

With a service of this nature it is always likely that a small amount of outstanding debt has to be written off, nevertheless the Careline team do always try to ensure that all outstanding debts are recovered.

#### Invoice and Debt Recovery Process (if no direct debit)

Service User invoiced in advance, either monthly or quarterly.

Day 28 reminder sent.

Day 35 second and final reminder sent.

Day 56 third reminder sent and debt passed to Responsible Office within Careline service to chase.