

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by: Beth Culshaw, Chief Officer West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)

Council Meeting of 30 October 2024

Subject: Community Alarm Upgrade

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek approval to progress the Community Alarm Upgrade through a procurement exercise using the Scotland Excel Digital Telecare Goods framework and approval for the award of a contract following the completion of the procurement exercise.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that West Dunbartonshire Council:

- 2.1** Note the capital budget for the Community Alarm Upgrade agreed at the West Dunbartonshire Council meeting on 9 March 2022 of £924,000 over a period of 10 years.
- 2.2** Approve the HSCP to work with Procurement and Legal Services colleagues on a procurement exercise using the Digital Telecare Goods Framework.
- 2.3** Approve the award of a contract, up to the budgeted value of £924,000, following the successful completion of the procurement exercise and identification of a preferred supplier.

3. Background

- 3.1** Communications providers within the UK are replacing the technology they use to provide fixed landline telephone lines, with analogue telephony services being replaced by digital telephony services. The upgrade is expected to be complete by January 2027, however providers within the West Dunbartonshire area have already started transitioning their customers to digital lines and the target date for replacing alarms has remained December 2025.
- 3.2** The HSCP provides Community Alarms to vulnerable residents within the community to support them living safely in their own homes and ensure they can request assistance if required. The alarm devices provided are analogue models, with around 1,800 individual alarms in the community, designed to work on traditional telephone lines. Sheltered Housing complexes with integrated equipment will be transitioned separately, with a further report submitted for approval if required.

- 3.3 A capital bid was put forward to support the Community Alarm Upgrade project which would replace all existing analogue alarms with new digital alarms and ensure in future only digital alarms were provided. The capital bid valued at £924,000 was approved at the West Dunbartonshire Council meeting on 9 March 2022.
- 3.4 The Digital Office for Scottish Local Government has led on a 'Once for Scotland' approach for the analogue to digital transition, which has focused on ensuring availability of a fully digital Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) system and to ensure that all Community Alarm equipment moving forward is fully digital end to end, ensuring the safety of service users is prioritised.
- 3.5 West Dunbartonshire has a shared service with East Dunbartonshire who provide the ARC resource which is used to answer Community Alarm calls and arrange a response where appropriate from residents of both authorities. East Dunbartonshire are planning on going live with a new Digital ARC system on 15 October 2024.
- 3.6 For West Dunbartonshire Council to move to a fully digital Community Alarm model, the existing analogue alarms require to be replaced by new digital community alarms which will be fully functional on new digital lines and with the new digital ARC solution
- 3.7 Scotland Excel have recently published a new framework for digital telecare goods which the HSCP intend to use for the procurement of new digital alarms which will allow the replacement of alarms to progress.
- 3.8 The transition from analogue to digital alarms should be complete by the end of 2025, however it should be noted that for many residents they have already been transitioned to digital lines by their provider.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1 Although analogue alarms can operate on digital telephone lines, advice from the Digital Office suggests that there is a higher risk of call failure from analogue community alarms operating on digital lines.
- 4.2 A number of West Dunbartonshire residents have already been transitioned to digital lines, either through a planned upgrade by their network provider or in response to issues with their analogue lines where a digital line would resolve the problem.
- 4.3 As the shared ARC will be going live in East Dunbartonshire in October 2024, ideally any new alarms provided to West Dunbartonshire residents would be digital alarms to ensure full compatibility, however for a period of time analogue alarms may still be required to be used until a procurement exercise can be undertaken.

4.4 The replacement of analogue alarms with new digital alarms is likely to have a significant impact on resource on a small team of 2FTE Telecare Coordinators and 9FTE mobile attendants, particularly given likely timescales for a procurement exercise and contract award would potentially mean the replacement work cannot begin until early 2025.

5. Options Appraisal

5.1 An options appraisal is not required for this report; however, one will be undertaken as part of the procurement exercise.

6. People Implications

6.1 The replacement of analogue alarms with digital alarms will ensure that users of the Community Alarm service have access to the most reliable technology available to help maintain their independence.

6.2 The replacement of these alarms will be resource intensive, especially when the December 2025 timeline is considered.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 Procurement exercise will be undertaken utilising the Digital Telecare Goods Framework to evaluate and select a provider of Digital Community Alarms for the HSCP.

7.2 Capital funding agreed at the West Dunbartonshire Council meeting on 9 March 2022 will be used to fund the purchase of digital alarms to allow the transition from analogue to digital alarms to take place prior to the December 2025 deadline.

7.3 There is a revenue implication associated with this work estimated to be £66,000 per annum (this is based on 1,800 units). This relates to the annual cost of SIM cards. In addition, the capital borrowing will have an ongoing revenue implication estimated to be in the region of £26,000 per annum. There is currently no dedicated annual revenue budget however, these additional costs can be recharged to the service user. This equates to £0.99 per service user per week. There is currently a mechanism for this, with those service users who have SIM cards paying £404 per annum per SIM enabled alarm, as opposed to £338 for the analogue system. This will be a matter for Elected Members to determine when the local authority sets its charging policy in March 2025.

7.4 Furthermore, there may be opportunities for the for the £924,000 to be replenished through service use charges which would be an alternative way of funding the capital. Officers will explore how his may be done to ensure the service use charges picks up the interest on any borrowing and ultimately the capital repayment.

8. Risk Analysis

- 8.1** Concerns have been raised through the Digital Office that there is a higher risk of failure when analogue alarms continue to be used on digital lines. Digital end to end connections between alarms and the ARC system over digital lines are the most stable and secure option.
- 8.2** The timeline for upgrading existing analogue alarms with new digital alarms will be challenging, and likely to require significant effort to achieve.
- 8.3** Any delays to the procurement exercise and contract award are likely to exacerbate this, particularly as analogue alarms may still be provided to service users after the new digital ARC goes live.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** An equality impact assessment is not required as to allow the procurement exercise and contract award to progress.

10. Environmental Sustainability

- 10.1** A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is not required in respect of the recommendations within this report.

11. Consultation

- 11.1** Consultation has taken place with the HSCP Senior Management Team, HSCP Information Team, Legal Services and Procurement Team.

12. Strategic Assessment

- 12.1** On 9 March 2022 West Dunbartonshire Council approved the Community Alarm Upgrade capital project as part of the approval for recommended new capital projects that had been agreed by the West Dunbartonshire Senior Leadership Team for approval by Council.
- 12.2** Now an appropriate Scotland Excel framework has been launched, the HSCP are seeking to progress a procurement exercise and contract award for a supplier who would provide digital community alarms which would allow the replacement of existing analogue alarms and ensure in future only digital alarms were used.
- 12.3** Implementing digital alarms would ensure that West Dunbartonshire Council can meet the December 2025 target for replacing all analogue alarms, while ensuring that all service users are provided with the most suitable and robust devices to safely support them in their own homes.

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30 October 2024

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Appendices: None