



**Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services
Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 31st January
2023**

**Update on Options Appraisal for Assistive Technology and
Community Alarms**

Purpose	To provide an overview of the approach and resulting decision regarding options for the Assistive Technology and Community Alarms service
Content	This report includes a summary of the Service Assessment, options appraisal activity completed in Spring 2022 and resulting decisions and rationale.
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give their views • Consider the report as part of their scrutiny function
Lead Councillor(s)	Cabinet Member for Care Services – Cllr. Louise Gibbard
Lead Officer(s)	Head of Integrated Services – Helen St John
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1. Background

In 2019 it was agreed that a review of the Assistive Technology service including its dependency on Community Alarms (also known as Lifeline) would be undertaken to achieve the optimal service for both service users and Swansea Council going forward. Significant progress was made from April 2019 to March 2020 including a draft service assessment, engagement event with a range of professional stakeholders and distribution and analysis of service user questionnaires to a cross section of current service users at the time that the questionnaire was circulated.

Unfortunately in March 2020, personnel working on the service review were diverted to focus on our emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic. As a result there was a period of 12 months where progress was not made due to ongoing emergency contingency planning in response to the pandemic.

In April 2021 the Project Board reconvened with some change to membership and a clear expectation to progress the completion of the service review by finalising the service assessment and conclusion of the options appraisal within 12 months. The project 'restart' also allowed capitalisation on some capacity within the Adult Services Commissioning Team to drive forward the work at pace.

2. Service Assessment and Options appraisal

To assist with our understanding of the existing service within Adult Services and to inform options upon which an Assistive Technology Strategy can be built the following work has been completed:

- Consultation with stakeholders
- Service user questionnaires & data analysis
- Service Assessment including:
 - Evaluation of demand data
 - Resources
 - Costs
 - Performance review
- Comparative analysis of alternative models of delivery and use of Assistive Technology services across other Local Authorities across Wales and England.

The resulting Service Assessment outlining all of the above was further developed and updated to include the response and learning from the coronavirus pandemic.

(See Appendix A for full Service Assessment Report)

Headline conclusions from the service assessment included;

- The provision of both assistive technology alongside community alarms services can create an alternative to more traditional managed care routes. It can increase the ability of people living with dementia, sensory impairment or chronic illness to continue to live as safely and independently within their community as possible. In addition the provision of such services and equipment can contribute to the prevention of recourse to social care, hospital admissions, strengthen existing integrated care services and support carers in both their caring responsibilities and own well-being.
- Professionals and service users are generally very positive about the service and the difference it can make. All respondents reported that assistive technology helped them feel safe, have peace of mind, and it has allowed them to remain in their own home.
- The nationwide switchover from analogue to digital telecommunications will create service continuity risks unless it is carefully managed. Ultimately, the decision about how we respond should be aligned to our strategic ambitions for the service. If a decision is made to transition to a more capable, future proofed system delivered via Smart Hubs, then there will be an associated costs.
- The service is income generating and is expected to 'break even' each year. The service assessment indicates that this expectation is increasingly difficult to achieve and is often dependent on ad-hoc grant funding. With additional costs anticipated as a result of the 'digital switchover' programme, a new financial model is required to ensure the service not only remains sustainable but is able to expand where required.
- The service demonstrated adaptability in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Equipment provided by the service supported the re-opening of local care homes, and the Community Alarm Service (CAS) worked effectively with others to support the safe and timely discharge of people from hospital. Unnecessary visits by staff to service user homes were avoided by providing pre-programmed devices (plug and play). This period has clearly demonstrated the creativity and responsiveness of the service, which are valuable qualities that could facilitate the successful implementation of future changes.
- It is submitted that there is considerable potential to grow the service. Strengths based social work practice is absolutely compatible with the opportunities afforded by assistive technology. However, we are missing the opportunity to integrate assistive technology into our practice at the assessment, planning and review stages. The Just Checking pilot was small in scale and time limited, but it proved what is possible: technology can support people to be more independent and ensure value for money for the public purse.

- The profile of individuals using the service shows it is often older people (particularly women in their 80s). While there are some younger adults accessing the service, there is considerable room to explore the advantages of assistive technology with other population groups - e.g. those with learning disabilities, mental health needs, substance misuse – and in different environments – e.g. supported living settings.
- There are a variety of professions referring to the assistive technology service, but the majority are generated by Occupational Therapists working with people following an acute incident or period in hospital. There is considerable potential to promote assistive technology amongst social workers so they routinely consider how assistive technology can contribute to meeting the needs of service users.
- Developing how we use assistive technology in the manner described above will require a cultural change for professionals and members of the public. Embedding assistive technology as a mainstream response will take work to overcome the stigma attached to using devices (particularly in the older male population), and upskilling professionals to understand technical solutions and new and emerging opportunities.

Before being able to progress with developing an Assistive Technology Strategy a 'high level' decision was required regarding the operational model of delivery of both Community Alarms and Assistive Technology.

2.1 Delivery Model Options

The project established five options for review; The options focus upon the high level decision regarding the service delivery either remaining in-house, outsourcing elements and the establishment of a regional offer with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

2.1.1 Option 1 - Do Nothing: retain services as they stand. Community Alarms would continue to administer the provision and maintenance of alarms and the assistive technology offer would remain largely as is.

The strengths of this option include:

- Local Authority is offering and delivering a service that members of the public and service users value
- Service aims align with the Council's preventative agenda
- For members of the public looking to purchase a Community Alarm, the Local Authority is a trusted provider

The weaknesses of this option include:

- Service offer is limited as are opportunities to expand / explore more innovative opportunities
- This is in part a consequence of the staffing structure not being fit for purpose therefore continued pressure on staff

- There is no budget for the Assistive Technology Service. Its costs are dependent on income generated by charges to service users for Community Alarms. As income is fluctuating, we are unable to plan developments.
- Options to develop the assistive technology offer would continue to be largely time limited dependent on sporadic grant funding

2.1.2 Option 2 - Retain Community Alarms and Assistive Technology in-house and develop Assistive Technology offer

The Strengths of this option include:

- Advantages of Option 1
- Potential of cost avoidance by supporting statutory services
- Provides an opportunity to review and develop charging arrangements (linked to expanding service) which may result in increased income
- Opportunity to develop Assistive Technology Strategy
- In line with developing a strategy, opportunity to expand current offer, for example:
 - Reviewing function for Assistive Technology, in line with Care Management statutory review requirements
 - Provide information, advice and assistance to professionals and members of the public to increase use of Community Alarms and Assistive Technology (privately and via AT Service).
 - Assistive Technology support for statutory services
 - Explore Response / 'Pick-up' service to support fallers at home and diverting demand from the ambulance service and hospitals

The weaknesses of this option include:

- Service budget required (figure dependent on options and expansions agreed)
- Swansea Council responsible for day to day running of whole service excluding monitoring centre
- Swansea Council responsible for managing risk of Community Alarms and Assistive Technology service when not a statutory duty
- No current Assistive Technology Strategy – this would be needed to ensure any improvement / expansion is focused

2.1.3 Option 3: Decommission & Signpost Community Alarms; Outsource

Assistive Technology: Swansea Council to stop providing Community Alarms to individuals and instead agree a list of suppliers and signpost to the market where they can purchase a Community Alarm service (this is not an assessed for service).

Swansea Council to commission an external company to provide Assistive Technology to individuals where a social work/occupational therapy assessment concludes that Assistive Technology should be installed to meet an individual's care and support needs.

The Strengths of this option include:

- Able to focus Local Authority's resources on statutory services
- LA would not have day to day responsibility for running a Community Alarms service and therefore would not be managing the risk of providing a service that is not a statutory duty

The weaknesses of this option include:

- Reliance on external provider to meet contractual obligations
- Large scale change for stakeholders including service users in addition to the change required by the Digital Switchover
- Existing staff may be required to TUPE across to new provider(s)
- Costs for service users may increase which may price some people out of the market
- Service budget required to fund commissioned Assistive Technology service
- Income from Community Alarms would be lost (approx. £432k pa)
- Impact on housing due to current arrangements with LA Community Alarms Service
- Depending on service decision re. existing community alarm customers a phased change approach may need to be followed. This could result in having to run a Community Alarms service in the interim.

2.1.4 Option 4: Decommission & Signpost Community Alarms; retain Assistive Technology. Swansea Council to stop providing Community Alarms to individuals and instead agree a list of suppliers and signpost individuals to the market where they can purchase a Community Alarm service (this is not an assessed for service).

Swansea Council to continue to provide and manage Assistive Technology equipment to individuals where a social work/occupational therapy assessment concludes that Assistive Technology should be installed to meet an individual's care and support needs.

The Strengths of this option include:

- Internal service provided by LA will focus on supporting individuals with an assessed need
- LA would not have day to day responsibility for running a Community Alarms service and therefore would not be managing the risk of providing a service that is not a statutory duty
- Digital switchover and associated ongoing equipment costs.

The weaknesses of this option include:

- As described in option 3
- Service divided and lose potential to track individuals with community alarms that may benefit from assistive technology
- Reliance on external provider(s)

- Fit for purpose staffing structure and service budget to deliver Assistive Technology Service will still be needed along with income from Community Alarms being lost
- Further costs anticipated if Assistive Technology service is expanded from current offer with no opportunity to increase income via Community Alarms
- If individuals purchase a Community Alarm from other providers and then require Assistive Technology from Swansea Council, there may be an issue with compatibility.

2.1.5 Option 5: Regional service. Services retained and delivered in partnership with Neath Port Talbot Council.

The Strengths of this option include:

- Economies of scale when developing components of a service across the region including pooled resources for staffing, infrastructure and innovation
- Potential for colleagues in the Health Board to become more involved including service redesign and developments
- Aligns to regional agenda across the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board

The weaknesses of this option include:

- NPT open to discussing opportunities to work regionally within our Assistive Technology services once we have agreed a model but not in developing a complete regional service together.
- A service budget would still be needed to invest in service and expand current offer
- Unlikely to benefit from progressing Digital Switchover as a region due to timeline and work already significantly underway

3. Conclusions of Options Appraisal

In reviewing the options the decision made by project board and Head Of Service in April 2022 to progress with Option 2 - Retain Community Alarms and Assistive Technology in-house and develop Assistive Technology offer.

The potential impact of an enhanced assistive technology offer is undisputed. The delivery of this strategy relies heavily on the provision of base unit equipment i.e. a community alarm therefore the two services are intrinsically aligned. By committing to developing our Assistive Technology offer provides us with opportunities to identify, educate, signpost and provide new and innovative technology solutions.

To separate or decommission community alarms would curtail the development of the assistive technology offer and result in the loss of income provided through its provision via the Local Authority from service users as well as any future grant funding opportunities. It would also result in removing

the opportunity to support existing Community Alarms customers with additional technology if their needs increase.

Option 2 does however require investment to maximise the potential for the service and to realise the potential cost avoidance across other areas of managed care provision. Investment would be required to maintain and enhance a fit for purpose staffing structure although grant funding could continue to support the service with the projected additional equipment expenditure.

As Option 2 is developed and implemented, links with Neath Port Talbot Council will be maintained in order to pursue components of an expanded Assistive Technology Service on a regional basis.

In May 2022, discussions were held with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Director of Social Services regarding this preferred option. It was again agreed to proceed with Option 2 as a result of the service review and to develop a long term Assistive Technology Strategy which is required to distil and focus the potential opportunities into a tangible model and implementation plan.

3.1 Progress and ongoing activity of the Assistive Technology Project

The service assessment has provided a clear focus for the work of the Assistive Technology project. Over the last 12 months significant progress has been made to address some of the immediate priorities including;

- ✓ Digital Switchover management & cost mitigation programme (70 upgrades a month, at the end of October 20% of existing clients upgraded to the required digital kit (approx. 520 units)
- ✓ Additional (temporary) resource to community alarms and assistive technology specific posts
- ✓ Permanent Assistive Technology Operational lead established within staffing structure
- ✓ Reinstatement of 'just checking' provision
- ✓ Internal promotion and communication of Assistive technology options
- ✓ Revised external communications
- ✓ Progression in development of performance framework and establishment of measures of success
- ✓ Regional capital grant funding secured to establish digital demonstration suite of digital aids for demonstration and short term loan from the service.
- ✓ Exploration of pilots including Delta Wellbeing and online 'self help' tools including ASKSara
- ✓ Assistive Technology officer presence at integrated MDT review panels regarding Domiciliary Care and Hospital to Home
- ✓ Review of current charging arrangements and exploration of potential opportunities
- ✓ Inclusion of Assistive Technology resource costs within regional Optimal model S33 agreement

The overarching strategy for Assistive Technology is also in development with the project team and stakeholders to describe the high level ambition for the service in the long term.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

4.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

4.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

4.2 Depending on the outcome of the Assistive Technology's exploratory development work and Assistive Technology Strategy, a full IIA may be required. However, until a proposal / proposals for development are identified it is not possible to complete a full IIA on the Assistive Technology Strategy and the potential options that could be considered for implementation in the future.

Further, any Business As Usual activities implemented as part of the outcome of the work of the Assistive Technology Operational Subgroup will be assessed separately and not as part of the Assistive Technology's Steering Group's work programme.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Full Assistive Technology Service Assessment



Assistive
Technology - Service ,

Appendix B – IIA Screening form



Assistive Technology
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