

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT**

To: HOUSING COMMITTEE SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: ALERT COMMUNITY ALARM SERVICE CURRENT PROVISION & FUTURE PROPOSALS
From: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 21 May 1997	Ref: GSW/MW/2	

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the current situation regarding the Alert Community Alarm Service and proposals for future development of the service within North Lanarkshire. This report is concerned with the strategic, operational and financial issues arising from the different approaches taken by the former authorities, and the need to address future provision. This report supplements the Director of Social Work's report dated 16th May 1996 to the Social Work Committee.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Alert service provides an easily activated emergency call facility for elderly, infirm or vulnerable residents. This service was jointly provided by Strathclyde Regional Council Social Work Department and the District Council Housing Departments within the Strathclyde area. Within the North Lanarkshire Council area, the four constituent District Councils all contributed to the Alert service via their Housing Department staff and budget provision. Cumbernauld Development Corporation's Housing Department also contributed..

2.2 Following local government reorganisation South Lanarkshire Council undertook the role of lead authority for the Alert service. Six unitary councils have now withdrawn from the Alert service. South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire established their own local control centre, whilst East Dunbartonshire utilized the control centre previously established by Bearsden & Milngavie District Council. North Ayrshire, Argyll & Bute Council, and Dunbarton & Clydebank also withdrew. The remaining authorities are:

- South Lanarkshire
- North Lanarkshire
- Renfrewshire
- East Renfrewshire
- Glasgow
- Inverclyde (who are considering withdrawal).

As a result of some councils withdrawing from the Alert service, North Lanarkshire Councils (Social Work Department) share of central support costs has therefore increased from 19.5% to 33%.

3. CURRENT PROVISION

- 3.1 The vast majority (approx. 80%) of current provision of community alarms within the North Lanarkshire area is for council tenants, with total provision estimated as:

Motherwell	1269 alarms
Monklands	712 alarms
Cumbernauld/Kilsyth	518 alarms
Chryston	120 alarms
Sub-total	2619 dispersed alarms

- 3.2 In addition there are five sheltered housing complexes currently linked to the Alert Service, together with a further thirteen 'grouped schemes' where high flats or amenity housing are also connected to the Alert Service. (for List, see Appendix 1)
- 3.3 The service provided is 24 hour emergency response, with mobile warden cover included. There are three designated mobile warden teams based in North Lanarkshire providing a response to all areas. Mobile warden teams are based at Meadowside House in Coatbridge, Ochil View in Cumbernauld and Leslie House in Motherwell.
- 3.4 Whilst the vast majority of clients are the 'very elderly' (age 75+), in recent years the service has been extended to all client groups. The Alert Service is for people who are assessed as requiring this service to remain living safely within the community. This includes older people or younger disabled people, house bound or isolated individuals or those living alone, living with another vulnerable person or living with carers where the service is essential to maintain care arrangements.
- 3.5 Referral for assessment to Social Work can be made by an individual, by a relative, or another agency such as housing or health. Applicants for the service are assessed by a member of Community Care/Home Care staff from the local Social Work Area Team. Where an applicant is in hospital, the hospital Social Work Team will undertake the assessment.
- 3.6 The Alert Control Centre is based at 35 Church Street in Glasgow, but following reorganisation is now managed by South Lanarkshire Council.

4 COST OF SERVICE

- 4.1 Prior to 1994, the first Alert service clients had their telephone rental paid by Strathclyde Regional Council. Since 1994 only those clients with transitional protection have continued to receive this facility. In common with other councils contributing to the Alert service, it is considered appropriate to discontinue payment of telephone rental for these pre 1994 clients, resulting in Alert clients being responsible for their own telephone rental costs.
- In exceptional cases (normally 12 to 15 per annum) where the client chooses not to have a telephone handset, but requires the phone line only to allow the alarm unit to function, the phone line rental will continue to be paid by the Social Work Department.

4.2 The current funding of the Alert Community Alarm Service is as follows:

Service Component	Current Cost	Housing Response	Social Work Responsibility
• Central Control Centre	£ 190,400	no	yes
• Mobile Warden Teams	£ 278,500	no	yes
• Purchase Alarm call equipment to install in house	£ 100 per unit, 350 units = £ 35,000	for NLC tenants	for owners and private tenants but all units are currently under warranty.
• Payment phone rental	£ 38,000		yes, for pre 1994 clients only
• Install B.T. socket & line	£10,500 p.a.	no	yes
• Maintenance alarm call equipment in housing	£20,000 p.a.	yes	no
• Install electric 13 amp point	£ 82 each	for NLC tenants	owners / private tenants pay cost

4.3 No charge is made for the service, but it should be noted that there are several alternative private sector schemes providing a less comprehensive service, for which a charge is made. Indeed, prior to reorganisation Bearsden & Milngavie District Council provided a community alarm service, excluding a mobile warden service, to a small number of residents within North Lanarkshire for a weekly charge of £1.31 (plus the initial purchase cost of the equipment) paid by each individual recipient of the service. We have also received information from a recently established Lanark based private enterprise offering a community alarm service at a weekly rate of £3.75 per client, but excluding a mobile warden service. Individuals can also subscribe directly to Tunstall Telecom Ltd's own control centre, which a number of private households do, at a weekly cost of £1.73 in addition to an initial purchase of the equipment for £295.

4.4 However any charge for the Alert service would not be eligible for Housing Benefit, and therefore it may be appropriate to concentrate on means of reducing costs, and considering charges to Housing Associations where their sheltered housing complexes are to be connected to the Alert Service.

5. STRATEGIC ISSUES

5.1 EXPANSION

The Alert Community Alarm service is a vital component in the support provision for care in the community. Whilst the majority of current clients are the very elderly, the service is also provided to disabled residents. Current demand for assessment visits average 50 per month for the Motherwell area alone, covering all tenures, with demand across North Lanarkshire as a whole creating the potential for expansion of over 300 clients per annum.

The Alert Control Centre equipment has substantial capacity for expansion. There are estimated to be 16,476 elderly persons over 75 years of age resident within North Lanarkshire of whom 16% currently receive the alert service. Whilst there are no national guidelines for levels of provision of alert alarm services to the various client groups, including vulnerable people of all ages, there is considerable scope for expansion. Action to purchase 300 units to meet current needs is being progressed at present. The revenue implications of an expansion of the service are presently being addressed by Social Work.

5.2 *DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY*

Following reorganisation it is appropriate to review the departmental responsibility which evolved under the previous local government structure. There is not a uniform structure of provision across Scotland. Both Central Regional Council and Grampian Regional Council previously accepted full responsibility for community alarm provision within their area's. Since reorganisation, Fife Council which previously had a system of joint provision by housing and social work, has transferred sole responsibility to the Social Work Department (with sole responsibility for sheltered housing wardens transferring to the Housing Department). A joint service review to be undertaken by Housing and Social Work Departments to consider departmental responsibility is now considered appropriate.

5.3 *ESTABLISH EMERGENCY CENTRE*

A final strategic issue which requires consideration is whether North Lanarkshire Council should establish its own Community Alarm Centre. If other authorities withdraw from the Alert service, leaving an increased central support cost for the remaining authorities, this may become cost effective.

A detailed option appraisal is outwith the scope of this report, but this issue will be investigated by a working group of officers and reported to a future committee.

6 **CONVERSION/UPGRADING SHELTERED COMPLEXES.**

- 6.1 The existing warden call equipment in our sheltered housing complexes will require replacement on a phased basis over the next decade as wear & tear and obsolescence impact. This provides an opportunity to enhance the level of cover provided by installation of equipment compatible with the Alert service. This would enable tenants to receive 24 hour emergency response in addition to the services of their on site warden. The 1995 cost of upgrading one sheltered housing complex to Alert compatible equipment was £7,000 though the actual cost will vary dependent upon the number of houses and specific requirements at each complex, with upto £10,000 cost being envisaged for some locations. Proposals for future upgrading of sheltered housing warden call equipment to Alert Service compatibility were approved by the Housing Committee in September 1996.

7 **OPERATIONAL ISSUES/**

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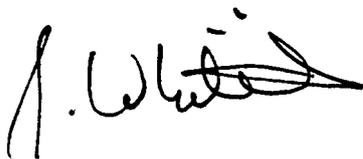
- 7.1 Officers from both Housing and Social Work Departments meet on a regular basis to review installation progress and resolve any routine problems arising. In addition, a working group of officers have met on several occasions since May 1996 to discuss and resolve practical operational issues following reorganisation. The consensus of the officers was to develop a streamlined service by reducing the number of communication steps, time lags and administration required, whilst enhancing the role of the mobile warden. The primary objective is to provide a quick and cost-effective service to the vulnerable clients requiring the Alert service. Appendix 2 describes briefly the contact occasions and the process clients experience, together with the procedures which have previously operated and those recently revised or proposed.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

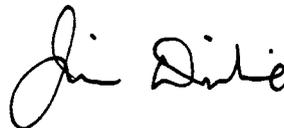
1. Payment of telephone line rental for clients who were in receipt of the Alert Service prior to 1994, should cease at an estimated saving of £38,000 per annum, which means that all Alert Service clients in North Lanarkshire would become responsible for payment of their own telephone line rental. (This saving is equivalent to the cost of financing an expansion of the Alert Service by purchase of 380 new units per annum.)
2. A joint service review group be established to consider departmental responsibility, control centre options, and charging policy.
3. The committee note the contents of the report and revised procedures.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Available from the Housing Department.



G S Whitefield
Director of Housing



Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work

Appendix 1**Housing groups connected to the Alert Service:****Motherwell Area**

Anderson Tower
Brandon Court
Caledonia Road
Cambusnethan Street
Coursington Tower
Glassford Tower
Harestone Cres
The Loaning
Merry Street
Muirhouse Tower
Ochil Street
Meadowhead Road

Monklands

Shawhead Cottages

Sheltered Housing Complexes connected to the Alert Service**Cumbernauld**

Rannoch Court
Roadside

Monklands

Afton Gardens
John Smith Court

Strathkelvin

Auchengeich Gardens

Appendix 2

Alert Service Operational Procedures

CONTACT REASON	PREVIOUS PROCEDURE	REVISED PROCEDURE
Installation of alarm equipment.	Use staff resources and install by Housing/ Social Work/ or instruct contractor, then notify mobile warden to visit.	Mobile warden installs and explains operation of system all at one visit.
Equipment fault: minor items such as battery replacement needed.	Mobile warden visits in response to automatically generated fault report, notifies Alert control centre, who notify housing, who then notify contractor/staff to repair.	Mobile warden visits, has stock of replacement batteries, radio triggers and neck cords, and can replace minor item there and then.
Equipment fault: major items.	Alert notify housing /social work who then notify contractor/ authorise/instruct work required.	Once maintenance agreement signed, Alert authorized to notify contractor direct by fax for prompt repair under contract agreement.
Removal of equipment, client no longer resident or is moving house.	Mobile warden notify control centre who notify housing/social work, who arrange visit/removal and reinstallation at new location.	Mobile warden visits, collects portal unit and can re-install at new house or for new client. If house given up housing collect unit
Assessment procedures	Social Work at Area Office level.	Social Work at Area Team level.
Administration of client database.	Alert, Social Work, and Housing all kept & updated records for their own requirements.	Alert Control Centre and Social Work to maintain database and provide reports to housing as required.