

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Adult Health and Social Care Committee

approval noting

Ref

Date 08/09/20

Introduction of the Charge for the Community Alarm Service.

From Ross McGuffie, Chief Officer Adult Health and Social Care

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Executive Summary

This report provides an update for the Adult Health and Social Care Committee on the progress of the work to implement the charge for the Community Alarm Service (CAS).

Introduction of the charge for the Community Alarm Service ensures the infrastructure for the service remains viable and sustainable.

Letters have been sent to Community Alarm Service recipients from 24 August 2020 with the charge introduced in September 2020. Arrangements are in place to support people who may be concerned about the introduction of a charge, including a process for maximising income. Experienced and skilled staff have been available to assess the individual circumstances of anyone concerned about the introduction of the charge and considering returning the alarm system to ensure their ability to seek assistance and support appropriately.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Adult Health and Social Care Committee:

- I. Note the introduction of the charge for CAS.
- II. Request an update on the impact of the introduction of the charge for the CAS for a future Adult Health and Social care Committee.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities

Ambition statement (12) Ensure our residents are able to achieve, maintain, and recover their independence through appropriate supports at home and in their communities

1. Background

- 1.1 Since its inception in 1999, there has been a rise in the number of users of the CAS of some 500%. This growth in number of people with a community alarm reflects the positive balance of care in North Lanarkshire and the growing complexity of health and social care needs people supported in the community. The increase in the number of people with a community alarms has, however, required increased staffing levels and the purchase of additional equipment.
- 1.2 There are a number of ways in which assistance and support can be provided depending on the individual circumstances of the call. These include:
- Providing reassurance
 - Contacting a friend or family member to visit
 - Arranging a home support worker to attend
 - Contacting GP or Emergency Services
- 1.3 The service has planned to meet increased demand and respond to other challenges around digitisation by undertaking a review of the service eligibility criteria and has introduced enhanced working with the third sector and greater use of natural supports. Reports on these developments have previously been tabled both at the Adult Health and Social Care Committee and the Integration Joint Board.
- 1.4 The service is registered with the Care Inspectorate and in addition to the core functions of screening, call handling and response to community alarm calls it also call handles for the Social Work Emergency Service and Home Support out of hours service.
- 1.5 The North Lanarkshire Council budget setting meeting on 24th February 2020 approved a weekly charge of £3.40 for the community alarm service, which is consistent with the average charge in Scotland as per 2019/20 Audit Scotland Local Government Overview report. The total annual value of the approved charge is £1.410m.
- 1.6 The agreed charge will support the Council and the Integration Joint Board to continue to deliver this service to a high standard through having the appropriate staffing and financial resources to meet the needs of those who use the service.
- 1.7 The Council introduced a charge for the CAS in April 2016 which was subsequently rescinded in March 2017. As part of the 2016 operating model, residents who resided within sheltered housing properties did not pay the charge directly and instead this cost was met by the Housing Service. This was due to the system being hardwired within each property and there was no technical solution at the time to remove alarms if the individual did not wish to continue with the service. There is now a technical solution to enable the removal of the Community Alarm from individual tenancies if a resident within a sheltered housing complex makes the choice to cease the service.
- 1.8 In accordance with COSLA guidance, North Lanarkshire Council maximises the income of all service users who are liable to make a contribution towards the cost of a service. Therefore anyone who receives a Community Alarm Service and incurs a charge will be offered a financial assessment to ensure that their income is maximised.
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2. Report

Process for Implementation of the charge

- 2.1. A group was established to progress the implementation of the charge for CAS. Membership of this group includes officers from:
- Community Alarm Service
 - Adult Social Work service
 - Social work and Corporate IT
 - HSC Communication Team
 - Financial Inclusion Team
 - Social Work Business & Resources Management
 - Chief Executive's Office - Finance
- 2.2. The CAS implementation group has met regularly and actioned the plan for implementation of the charge. While the original plan was for an April implementation date, the prioritisation of other activity in the early stages of the Covid response has caused a delay. It is important that sufficient time and energy is invested in the setting up of relevant systems including putting in place capacity to deal with enquiries and the need for advance communication with service users. The new implementation date for the charge is 14 September 2020.
- 2.3. The letter informing people who have a community alarm of the introduction of the charge is attached at Appendix 1 and will be sent out from week beginning 24 August 2020. Based on the learning from 2016, the letters have been sent out in batches, to help to control the volume of enquiries back to the service.
- 2.4. An Elected member briefing note has been prepared and is attached at Appendix 2. This was shared with members on 21 August, before the service user letters were distributed.
- 2.5. A dedicated telephone line has been established to be used if people are concerned about the financial impact of the introduction of a charge or are considering returning their community alarm. Experienced and skilled staff will be available to ensure support for income maximisation and an assessment of the person's individual circumstances takes place to ensure people can remain safe at home. The line will be open from 10:00–16:00 Mon–Friday for four weeks following the letters being sent out.
- 2.7. Based on learning from undertaking the exercise in 2016, up to 10 staff have been in place to support the line, with additional capacity in place for the first week which will see the peak demand. Two Home Support Managers have also be available to support the escalation of any concerns raised from the calls.
- 2.8. Forms for benefits maximisation, along with a stamped and addressed envelope, will be sent out with the service user letters to allow individuals to commence benefits maximisation. The Financial Inclusion Team has been involved in the implementation group and will have sufficient capacity to meet demand. In 2016, over 800 individuals were supported to maximise their income through the approach.
- 2.9. In 2016, those wishing to return an alarm were offered options including dropping them off at specified points, including Council offices, health centres and first stop shops. Unfortunately due to Covid 19 we do not have the option of the public accessing both Council and health buildings without an appointment. Learning also shows us that

individuals may have concerns that having the alarm still within their property and switched on may mean that they will incur a charge and so may want to have the alarm removed timeously. We anticipate up to 1400 alarms could be returned through the exercise.

2.10 A more structured approach has been put in place with people having a range of options:

- Collection of the alarm by a member of staff or volunteers from their own home
- Ability to drop off at Council or NHS buildings using locked receptacles or an appointment system (for example, health centres already have established 'safe zones' for the safe collection of prescriptions)
- For those wishing to post the alarm, a stamped and addressed jiffy bag has been mailed out

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

The statutory focus of The Fairer Scotland Duty is on strategic decision making and as such, the proposals outlined in this report require to be considered under the Duty. The Fairer Scotland assessment process has been considered as part of the implementation plan. In particular, the focus was on equal access to service provision for all residents of North Lanarkshire

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

In completing stage one of the Equality Impact Assessment, the service involved is covered by current protocols and any implications for individual service users will be considered on a case by case basis. Every person who is paying for the service will be offered a full financial assessment to maximise their income. Anyone withdrawing from the service will be offered a needs led assessment to ensure that they have the appropriate supports.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

4.1.1 The 2020/21 budget proposal assumed an implementation date of 1 April and therefore anticipated full year income of £1.410m. This was based on 9,383 users, an attrition rate of 15% and a charge of £3.40 per week per household.

4.1.2 Currently, there are 9,812 users which equates to 9,180 households. Applying the 15% drop out rate and charge to the number of households equates to full year income of £1.380m. This represents an initial full year burden of £0.030m, which will subsequently reduce due to the demographic growth in eligible households.

4.1.3 Specifically in relation to the current financial year the delayed implementation of the charge until 14 September 2020 has resulted in an in-year burden of £0.575m.

4.1.4 Following the implementation of the charge the Service will carefully monitor the actual attrition rate, and take appropriate budget action if it is significantly higher or lower than

the 15% estimate. The Service will provide relevant updates to CMT if this position changes.

4.1.5 The introduction of the charge has incurred one off set up costs: a helpline; IT systems for billing; letters and invoicing. These, and any additional costs, will be monitored via the implementation group and managed within existing resources.

4.1.6 Previous reports to Committees have outlined future potential financial pressures for the Service and this includes the national roll out of digitisation of phone lines across the UK. The predicated costs to the IJB for full digitisation of CAS, including the replacement of alarms is estimated at £2.000m and an annual recurring cost of SIM cards of £0.600m per annum. This information will be considered in future Service financial planning models.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

There is no HR impact.

4.3 Environmental Impact

There is no Environmental Impact

4.4 Risk Impact

Any service users who return their alarm following the introduction of a charge for the service will be offered a needs lead assessment to ensure that they have the appropriate supports in place if they require assistance. In addition all service users will be offered a financial assessment to maximise their benefits and the option of a waiver will be considered if assessed as appropriate.

5. Measures of success

5.1 That the introduction of the charge for the Community Alarm Service allows the Council and IJB to continue to be able to deliver a high level of service delivery, including appropriate staffing resources for call handling and a proportionate response to support people in their own homes. This in turn will allow the users of the service to live safe independent lives within their own communities.

6. Supporting documents

6.1 Appendix 1 letter to CAS recipients
Appendix 2 Elected member briefing



Ross McGuffie
Chief Officer Adult Health and Social Care



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Your Ref: **SWIS number**
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Name and address

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Motherwell
Lanarkshire
ML1 1AB
www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk

Introduction of a Service Charge for the Community Alarm Service

This letter is to advise you that a charge will be introduced for all households who use the Community Alarm Service. The introduction of a charge is necessary to maintain the service to the standards that you have come to expect. Prior to the charge introduction, North Lanarkshire was one of only two remaining areas in Scotland not charging for this service and the new charge has been set in line with the Scottish average.

The charge for the alarm service will be £3.40 per week (49p per day) and will start on 14th September 2020. Your first bill for this can be expected week commencing 28th October, and will cover the period from 14th September until 11th October 2020, totalling £13.60, and thereafter you will receive a further bill every 4 weeks. Information on ways to pay will be included with your bill.

If you would like to discuss the introduction of the charge or **do not want** your Community Alarm Service to continue, please either; email your name and contact telephone number to the email address at the top of this letter and someone will call you; or contact the helpline on 01698 403 278. Lines will open daily Monday to Friday, between 10:00–16:00, from Tuesday 25th August.

If you do not contact us your service will continue as normal and you will receive your bill automatically as detailed above.

The Community Alarm Service plays an important role in supporting people to remain safely within the community. The introduction of the charge ensures we can continue to deliver the same high standard of service our service users expect. It is vital that we are in a position to meet this demand while protecting this important service for our most vulnerable residents.

We understand you may have some concerns around the introduction of charges in these uncertain times. We can arrange for someone to check your income is fully maximised and you are receiving everything you should be through a financial assessment. For this, we require you to complete the enclosed form and return it in the enclosed Freepost envelope. On receipt of this someone will be in touch with you to ensure your income is maximised.



Please note that the Community Alarm Service will not be able to provide advice or assistance about charging or benefits so please do not either press the alarm or call the Community Alarm Service for advice in relation to this matter. Please use the dedicated helpline as noted above on 01698 403 278.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ross McGuffie".

Ross McGuffie
Chief Officer
Health & Social Care North Lanarkshire

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|  | | Appendix 2 |
|  | | Briefing Note |
| Date : | 24 th August 2020 | |
| To : | Elected Members | |
| From: | Ross McGuffie Chief Officer, Health & Social Care North Lanarkshire | |
| Subject: | Introduction of a Charge for the Community Alarm Service. | |

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As part of the Council's budget planning for 2020/2021 the Social Work Service submitted a proposal to re-introduce a charge for the Community Alarm Service. This proposal was subsequently agreed by members during the budget setting meeting on 24th February. The total annual value of the approved saving was £1.410m.
- 1.2 The approved charge for the service is £3.40 per household per week. (At the time the proposal was prepared this was the average charge for a Community Alarm Service in Scotland). The agreed charge will support the Council and the Integrated Joint Board to continue to deliver this service to a high standard through having the appropriate staffing and financial resources to meet the needs of those who use the service.
- 1.3 The Council had previously introduced a charge for the CAS, in April 2016, which was subsequently rescinded in March 2017. As part of the 2016 operating model residents who resided within sheltered housing properties did not pay the charge directly and instead this cost was met by the Housing Service. This was due to the system being hardwired within each property and there was no technical solution at this time to remove alarms, if the individual do not wish to continue with the service. There is now a technical solution to enable the removal of the Community Alarm from individual tenancies if a resident within a sheltered housing complex makes the choice to cease the service.
- 1.4 In addition to the financial context noted above the social work service has seen a rise in the users of the Community Alarm Service since its introduction in 1999 of some 500%. This growth, and the need to support people at home

who are living longer with more complex health needs, has meant a need to increase staffing levels and the purchase of equipment to meet demand.

- 1.5 The Council and Integrated Joint Board recognises that the Community Alarm Service are key services along with home support, district nurses, G.P's etc who support the most vulnerable residents in North Lanarkshire to remain living safely in their homes.
- 1.6 The introduction of the charge, £3.40 per week (49p per day) for the Community Alarm Service will allow the Council and the Integrated Joint Board to continue to deliver these services to a high standard.
- 1.7 In accordance with COSLA guidance, North Lanarkshire Council maximises the income of all service users who are liable to make a contribution towards the cost of their support.

2 PROCESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARGE

- 2.1 Service users will receive letters week beginning the 24th of August 2020, advising them of the introduction of the charge.
- 2.2 The charge for each of the services will be implemented from the 14st September 2020 with people who use the Community Alarm Service receiving their first bill from 28th of October 2020.
- 2.3 All service users will be offered a financial assessment to ensure that the person's income is maximised.
- 2.4 We have set up a dedicated helpline for service users staffed by experienced staff who will assist people with any questions that they have around the introduction of the charge from 25th August 2020 which will be staffed between 10:00 – 16:00, Monday –Friday.
- 2.5 A question and answer information sheet will be on the Councils website and a copy is attached for information. I have also attached a copy of the letter which is being sent to users of both services for ease of reference.

For further information on this please contact Jim McCreanor, Community Social Work Manager or Dennis McLafferty, Manager, Adult Services.