



GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

Minutes

Thursday, 14 December 2023 at 17:00

Councillor Smith (Leader & Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Major Projects) (in the Chair), Councillors Plant (Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Operational Property and Asset Management); Flaxman - Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Housing Health and Communities); Bensly (Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Culture & Coastal); Candon (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development & Growth); & Wells (Portfolio Holder for Environment & Sustainability, Waste and Licensing).

Also in attendance:-

Ms S Oxtoby (Chief Executive Officer); Ms C Whatling (Monitoring Officer), Mrs P Boyce (Executive Director - People), Ms K Sly (Executive Director - Finance), Mrs N Turner (Head of Housing Assets), Mrs K Price (Head of Health Integration and Communities) Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager).

Councillors Wainwright, Jeal, Martin and Capewell attended as observers to the meeting.

01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received at the meeting.

02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

03 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Leader advised that there were no items of urgent business to be discussed.

04 22-161 - CONTROL CENTRE AND COMMUNITY ALARM SERVICES EMERGENCY CONTRACT DECISION

The Cabinet received and considered the Head of Health Integration and Communities and Head of Housing assets report.

The report advised that the the Council currently operated an in-house Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) which takes calls from sheltered housing resident alarms, dispersed community alarms and provides the Councils' Out of Hours call response service. After charges to residents and tenants for paid-for alarm services, the cost of the ARC is around £200,000 in subsidies from the Councils' budgets.

With the national switching of phonelines from analogue to digital, which is already underway and is due for completion by 2025, the current software and hardware used by the in-house service would require significant investment to maintain this service going forwards.

In addition, there is a current service risk associated with the digitalisation of phone lines which requires prompt action to resolve, and additional issues related to this are emerging weekly along with difficulties caused by recent IT changes.

This, combined with significant risk to the service from a lack of resilience in the staffing capacity and limited ability to draw on shift cover from our existing partnership arrangement means we have a significant risk that this service could become undeliverable at short notice, which would put the lives of those relying on the alarm monitoring service at risk.

Cabinet received a presentation from the Head of Health Integration and Communities and Head of Housing assets which looked into more detail around the current situation and recommended proposals.

The Leader reminded Members that he had referred this particular item to the Scrutiny committee for consideration before a decision was taken by the Cabinet, he advised this meeting had taken place on Tuesday 12 December and therefore, asked in the absence of the Chair of Scrutiny Committee, the Vice Chair to provide any comments or feedback from the Scrutiny Committee with regard to the report.

Councillor Freeman, Vice-Chair of Scrutiny Committee advised Cabinet that Scrutiny considered the report and a vote was taken by the Committee to ask Cabinet to consider the following :-

1. Taking time to develop a full Business Case, undertaking a procurement process and any relevant consultations during the proposed 14 month consultation period.
2. Addressing any immediate risk by undertaking a recruitment campaign and increasing the number of shifts given to relief staff.

The Leader asked if the presentation presented to Cabinet had been shown to the Scrutiny Committee, and it was advised that these had not been shown due to being circulated late to the meeting.

Councillor Candon raised some concern with regard to the request for time to develop a full Business Case when Members were being advised the service was at risk of being undeliverable.

Councillor Wells, sought clarification from the Monitoring Officer that following comments and concern that had been raised from other Members that the emergency provision being applied remained relevant to this matter, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this provision could be applied to this matter.

Councillor Wells sought assurance that the system currently in use was able to fulfil the service currently being provided, The Head of Health Integration and Communities advised that everything was being done to fulfil the service requirements however noted that these were short term measures.

Councillor Wells commented further on the recruitment of staff to vacant posts which had been raised by the Scrutiny Committee and it was advised that it was a 2 month process when a new member of staff commenced due to the level of training required.

Councillor Plant commented on the proposals and recognised that Officers had highlighted that the level of risk was too high to allow time to undertake a full procurement process but noted that a full business case would be developed. Councillor Plant commented on the need to recognise that this was a system being supplied to the residents within the Borough that was at risk of failing them, therefore he accepted that the proposed solution presented by Officers was the quickest solution at this time.

Councillor Bensly asked with regard to the sickness absence levels and why these had been so high, it was advised that this could not be discussed in detail but it was confirmed that the days shown had accounted for 3 separate staff members.

Councillor Bensly asked whether the service had ever been at full capacity, it was advised that the service had more recently struggled to retain trained staff. It was advised that the risk of the service failing had been escalated due to the potential risk of not being able to cover incoming calls.

Councillor Martin raised concern with regard to recruitment as she had been informed that no roles had been advertised to assist with recruitment since March 2023, she further advised that she had been made aware that Relief Operators were not being allocated additional shifts.

The Leader reminded Members that the proposals would see the cutting of this service, but that these proposals were necessary to provide a more resilient service.

Councillor Wainwright made reference to a business case that he believed had been seen by the Council's Executive Leadership Team (ELT), The Chief Executive Officer advised that an options appraisal had been reported to ELT in March as part of the original contract awarding for Careline365.

Councillor Wainwright asked with regard to a letter that had been sent to all sheltered housing tenants and raised his disappointment that Members had not been informed nor sent a copy of this letter. The Head of Housing Assets advised that the Council has a duty as landlord to communicate such proposals with its tenants, but apologised that Members had not been informed or sent a copy of the letter.

Councillor Jeal questioned why this matter had not been addressed sooner considering the risk that had been advised, it was confirmed that this matter had been a risk identified on the Corporate Risk Register but that the risk status had gone up and down, it was advised that what this showed was the risk had been monitored however it was now felt that the risk had escalated to the point that needed to be

looked into.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :-

(1) Agree to Officers commencing with the next steps as detailed within the Head of Health, Integration and Communities and Head of Housing Assets presentation.

(2) Support the direct award of a contract to the current standby service provider, CareLine365, which provides current shift cover in order to minimise risk to residents under existing officer delegations to the Executive Director – People and Section 151 Officer in association with the Monitoring Officer as an Operational Emergency under article (42.10.5) given the possible risk to life.

(3) Note the procurement of a 24/7 out of hours telephone call answering service needed to deliver the emergency out of hours call handling (currently provided by the alarm monitoring service as an additional service) will need to be expedited as a result of the above.

The meeting ended at: TBC