

ANGUS COUNCIL

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2024

COMMUNITY ALARM DIGITAL ALARM RECEIVING CENTRE

REPORT BY Jillian Galloway, Chief Officer, Angus Health and Social Care Partnership

1. ABSTRACT

- 1.1 The Community Alarm Control Centre is the main communications hub for the alarm service and has in the region of 3100 Service Users. The current system is experiencing numerous failures due to its age and pressure of supporting digital connections and is at high risk of connection failure due to the proposed switch-off of the analogue phone network which originally predicted by Ofcom to be completed by 2025 but has now been extended to 2027.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 2.1 The strategic objectives of this project link into several of the council's objectives set out in the Council Plan, primarily around "Caring for People", and "Caring for our Place" themes especially connectivity which is key for all the telecare devices to link into the Alarm Receiving Centre.

Caring for our Economy

- Support Angus to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with a particular focus on the long-term potential of private and public
- investment opportunities in offshore renewable energy.
- Encourage and invest in fair work opportunities for those that live, work and study in Angus.
- Support entrepreneurship across Angus

Caring for our People

- Reduce inequalities in all our communities.
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals.
- Improve physical, mental health and wellbeing.

Caring for our Place

- Protect and enhance our natural and built environment.
- Enable inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities across Angus..
- Make our local services accessible.
- Improve connectivity in and around Angus.

3. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Committee: -

(i) approves the procurement of a digital Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) service via the Scotland Excel Framework as detailed in this report;

(ii) delegates authority to the Chief Officer to formally enter into, execute and deliver the necessary contract documents for the procurement of a digital ARC service via the Scotland Excel Framework; and

(iii) notes this will also meet the Openreach deadline of January 2027 that involves switching off the analogue telephony over to digital networks.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Community alarm and tele care service provides an alarm unit with a pendant, alongside other telecare that can enable a person to live independently in their own home. The service can also provide a blend of telecare and standalone equipment to minimise risks. The service currently supports around 3.100 people living in Angus. The alarm unit or device will call into the Alarm Receiving Centre and be answered by a member of staff who will assess the situation through a series of questions to determine the right course of action, This may be to call a designated contact, emergency services or if required the Enablement Response Team.
- 4.2 Community Alarm is a system that enables people who are frail or affected by a disability to remain at home and have the means to ask for help in an emergency through using their personal alarm, so that support can be offered in response. In Angus around 3100 people have a Community Alarm in place. The Control Centre is the main communications hub for the alarm service and is based in Forfar. It currently has a Chubb “Saturn” call handling system in place. There is also a disaster recovery system in place in Arbroath if required.
- 4.3 The control system was installed in December 2002 and although it has had some digital upgrades to the software since then, it is still the same basic call handling system that was introduced at that time.
- 4.4 In October 2018 Angus Council set plans and made available funding to transition our Community Alarm Service to a fully digital service. Part of this funding was to expand the digital connectivity of the existing alarm control centre by upgrading the server and included digital add-ons to support digital receiving compatibility. This project is related to the “Analogue to digital telephony” (A2D) project which is tasked with transitioning all council analogue lines over to digital lines.
- 4.5 The current system is experiencing numerous failings due to its age and pressure of supporting digital connections. The supplier has also advised that parts for the current system are becoming problematic to source and on occasions has taken over 45 minutes to resolve. This is causing significant potential high risk to vulnerable people with a Community Alarm who may require help and assistance, . The service is also experiencing an increase in complaints due to system failings and the customers losing confidence in the support that we offer.
- 4.6 In January 2027 Openreach are switching off the analogue telephony and switching over to a digital only network. This will make the existing Chubb Analogue ARC system obsolete, which will impact the users of community alarm.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The current analogue system is failing due to age and is experiencing problem connection failure to the new digital alarm units and telecare equipment.
- 5.2 Angus Council are required to upgrade / replace their existing analogue alarm receiving centre to a digital solution, the council do not have any other options available if they want to continue to offer a community alarm call centre.
- 5.3 When the 2027 Openreach deadline is reached the existing phone lines attached to the current ARC system will cease to function, this functionality will be transitioned onto the council RingCentral telephony platform and new numbers will be issued.

6. PROPOSALS

- 6.1 Angus Council previously partnered with 14 other local authorities to work with Scotland Excel to invite suppliers to tender for the purpose of establishing a Framework to provide a Digital ARC system suitable for nationwide use. This collaborative exercise was supported by funding from the Scottish Government.
- 6.2 This Framework Contract is intended to provide an efficient method of engaging a single Supplier for the provision of a Shared Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) Technology Solution to Councils to ensure that the Solution is delivered in a consistent and co-ordinated way across all of Scotland.

- 6.3 As part of the submission process to get accepted onto the Framework, the supplier had to provide information relating to Cyber Security, Service Innovation, Fair Work First, Sustainability as well as evidencing their ability to fulfil the mandatory, operational, and technical requirements of the contract.
- 6.4 After evaluation, Scotland Excel have awarded the framework to the successful supplier, Chubb Fire & Security Limited.

<https://home.scotland-excel.org.uk/our-contracts/contract-directory/digital-alarm-receiving-centre/>

- 6.5 It is therefore our intention to “Call Off” from this existing Framework for Angus Council’s requirements, as per the Scotland Excel terms and conditions.
- 6.6 To deliver a Digital ARC that is fit for purpose regaining public confidence lost through poor connection and connection failure of our current system. In addition to this be capable of using the latest innovations in telecare provision to enhance the lives of the citizens that are receiving the service.
- 6.7 For older people, independence is about exercising choice and control and we want to empower them to be able to live independently and safely in their own home for longer. Telecare plays an important role in helping them achieve this.
- 6.8 To provide services which improve outcomes for citizens whilst also reducing costs.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The current revenue budget for the community alarm service is £557,457 per annum.
- 7.2 To update to the Sky Response cloud-based platform an annual additional recurring investment of around £60k in year one and £43k in subsequent years is required through the IJB revenue budget. The contract can be terminated with no fees with 28 days notice.
- 7.3 In the first instance there will be no cost savings to be made, however the new system should allow for the following:
- Cost Savings in Disaster Recovery (DR): The Shared ARC Platform enables significant reductions in disaster recovery (DR) expenses by allowing DR to be shared among multiple providers. This eliminates the necessity for providers to maintain duplicate call handling infrastructure or engage a commercial DR call handling provider.
 - Cost Savings in Shared Call Handling: The Shared ARC Platform facilitates reduced call handling expenses by seamlessly supporting shared call handling, such as overnight operations, across multiple providers such as other Local Authorities.
 - Enhanced Staff Retention and Attraction: The Shared ARC Platform brings the positive impact of enabling greater flexibility in working conditions, facilitated by cloud technology. This includes options like remote work and flexible shift schedules. Additionally, providers stand to save on hiring and training expenses due to reduced staff turnover.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 As with the introduction of any new technology there are risks, but with the help of the Digital Office team, who have already migrated several local authorities over to the new system, the risks should be reduced as they will have covered them in previous installs.
- 8.2 The major risks are:
- Importing existing data into new system from old system - Possible loss of data and restricted data migration: Reassurance has been sought from Chubb that this will not be problematic, and to reduce risk they will carry out the import of our data to ensure there are no issues.
 - Devices communicating with Chubb system can be problematic and are unreliable.
 - Problems communicating with clients (telephony) - There is an analogue to digital bridge that will remain in place to support the remainder of our analogue users until we migrate over

onto the sky response platform. Both the analogue bridge and sky response platforms will be running together until the migration is fully completed

- 8.3 As with all Digital projects there are risks, all associated risks for the project will be recorded in the Risk Log

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Aligns with the Scottish Digital Strategy (Part 3 Digital Government and Services)

- Place national and local government at the heart of an ecosystem of organisations, across the public, private and third sector, working together in new and different ways to meet public needs.
- Staff will be more agile about where they / how they work.
- Reduction in environmental impact (reduction in mileage)
- Operational Efficiency

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

- 10.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the following reason: it is a procurement report which is technical in nature.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices: NA