
Review of Lifeline Service

Background

1. The Council’s Lifeline Service is well established and currently supports 2,700 people to live independently in their own homes. However as the number of older people continues to rise and the service supports an increasing number of frail older people there is a need to review the current level of service.
2. A review of users of the Lifeline Service showed that a significant number of people were aged 80 years and over as shown at Table 1 below:

Table 1 – Age Profile of Lifeline Service Users

Type of Service	80-84 years	85+
	Comprehensive Sheltered Accommodation	18%
Council Accommodation – Hardwired (including Good Neighbour Schemes)	15%	13%
Lifeline Service	24%	42%

3. While we have a range of Council accommodation options available to older people, including Extra Care which is not shown in this table, clearly the Lifeline Service is playing a crucial role in supporting older people to live at home in their privately owned accommodation. These statistics, supported by a review of the dependency level of service users, indicate a need for a higher level of service for some people who are currently relying on the Mobile Service through lack of choice. Similarly there may be other people who would choose to live independently if more support at home was available but are having to move into alternative accommodation such as residential care. Table 2 overleaf shows that take up varies by location.

Table 2: Number of Clients by Geographical Area

Geographical Location		
	Hardwired	Mobile
Cockerton, West End, Heighington	133	304
North Road, Haughton, Redhall	277	197
Bank Top, Hurworth, Middleton St George	78	151
Firthmoor, Skerne Park, Lascelles	153	114

4. It is of particular concern that take up tends to be lower in some of the more deprived areas of Darlington. Individual life expectancy can vary by 13 years depending on the area of Darlington in which you live. These statistics suggest that some people may not be accessing the service due to financial hardship. People receiving the Lifeline Service as part of their Council or Housing Association tenancies are able to access Supporting People Grant and Housing Benefits. However the grant is not available to people who choose to receive the service from standard accommodation across all housing tenures.
5. A total of £369,851 Supporting People Grant is currently available per annum for the Lifeline Service and following a review of the current split of financial assistance between Supporting People Grant and Housing Benefit, savings have been identified of £120,000. This funding can now be reinvested to help people on low incomes across all tenures access financial support for the service. This would not only contribute to the Council's 'Well Being' agenda but it also makes economic sense to fund the Lifeline Service at relatively low costs compared to considerably more expensive options, such as residential care.

Proposal

6. It is proposed that in future three different levels of Lifeline Service will be provided and that Supporting People funding is available for all, subject to a simple eligibility criteria and means testing. However, in the event this future demand exceeds the total level of Supporting People Grant available, then we would need to either operate a waiting list or alternatively, seek additional resources from the General Fund. Table 3 provides details of the proposed three levels of service and it should be noted that the Silver Service is the proposed new service.

Table 3: Proposed Level of Services 2008/09

Level	Services Provided	Weekly Charge £
Bronze	Monitoring and Mobile Response	4.37
Silver	Monitoring Response, Daily phone calls, or Monitoring Response, Weekly Visits	10.50
Gold	Sheltered Housing Service	9.52

7. Supporting People Grant is not able to cover equipment costs but Housing Benefit meets these costs where the service is part of the tenancy agreement. For anyone opting into the service they will need to fund that element themselves and for 2008/09 this has been estimated at £1.51 per week. This should however make the service affordable to the majority of people and full details are shown at Table 4 below.

Table 4: Financial Assistance Available

Level	Weekly Charge £	Supporting People Grant £	Housing Benefit £	Weekly Cost £
Bronze (Hardwired)	4.37	2.86	1.51	Nil
Bronze (Lifeline Telephone)	4.37	2.86	Nil	1.51
Silver (Hardwired)	10.50	8.99	1.51	Nil
Silver (Lifeline Telephone)	10.50	8.99	Nil	1.51
Gold (Sheltered)	9.52	3.96	5.56	Nil

Summary

8. The proposals to create a three-tier service simplify the current arrangements but also provide a tenure neutral new enhanced service for people who would like a daily telephone call or weekly visit. The review of the funding arrangements has made it possible to redistribute Supporting People Grant to enable more people on low incomes to benefit from the Lifeline Service.

Outcome of Consultation

9. A Tenant's Board Task and Finish Group is well established and discusses key issues relating to the Lifeline Service. They have been consulted and were supportive of the proposals. As part of the Supporting People Programme an Older Person's Sub-Group has been formed to review older persons services. This group comprises of service providers, statutory agencies and the voluntary sector including GOLD. This group is also supportive of the proposals. Further consultation is also planned in the New Year.

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