

**CABINET - 6 JULY 2018****“CAREONLINE” SERVICE****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet on the outcome of a consultation exercise regarding the proposal to decommission the CareOnLine Service and to recommend the cessation of the service.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - a) The outcome of the consultation on the CareOnLine Service be noted;
 - b) The CareOnLine Service be decommissioned;
 - c) The measures to mitigate the effect of the cessation of the service as outlined in paragraph 31 a)–h) of this report, including a transitional fund of £10,000 per annum over the next two years, be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The continuation of the service in its current form is not viable, given the funding pressures facing the Communities and Wellbeing Service. Similar services are provided by a number of voluntary organisations and charities and the transitional fund will help those groups to develop offers that will support former CareOnLine users.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the 5 June 2018 (its comments are attached at Appendix A).
5. Subject to approval by the Cabinet, it is proposed that the CareOnLine Service will stop accepting new referrals immediately and will complete the cycle of visits with existing users by the end of December 2018.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

6. In September 2017, the Cabinet considered a report on the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy and requested that the Director of Adults and Communities undertake the necessary consultation and engagement with partners, stakeholders and service users in order to develop proposals to decommission the CareOnLine Service.

Resource Implications

7. The net budget for the Communities and Wellbeing Service (part of the Adults and Communities Department) for 2018/19 is £5.3m. In line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) this will reduce to approximately £4.3m per annum from 2020/21. It is recognised that given the scale of these reductions, service delivery will change significantly.
8. The decommissioning of the CareOnLine Service will deliver approximately £100,000 of ongoing savings to the service's overall savings target of £1.3 million.
9. It is proposed to set aside transitional funds of £10,000 per annum for two years to assist organisations with the transition of service users to alternative services.
10. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council via the Members' News in Brief.

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PART B**Background**

12. The Communities and Wellbeing Service's net budget for 2018/19 is £5.3m. In line with the Council's MTFs this will reduce to approximately £4.3m per annum from 2020/21. It is recognised that given the scale of these reductions, service delivery will change significantly.
13. CareOnLine is a non-statutory service and is part of the Communities and Wellbeing Service. CareOnLine provides training, ICT equipment and telephone support to enable people to use IT to increase their independence. Service users are usually people who have limiting conditions such as frailty, mental health problems, visual impairments and long-term health conditions or disability. Approximately 350 people across the County use the service each year of which 100 people are new referrals. Approximately one third of service users have an active social care support plan.
14. A high-level review of the service in 2017 concluded that the service was not viable, given the funding pressures, and on 15 September 2017 the Cabinet agreed to the development of proposals to decommission the service.
15. Delivery of support is primarily through home visits to service users and a telephone support line. The number of home visits varies, being determined by the individual needs of the service users. The service currently visits 48 service users. In 2017/18, 234 service users contacted the telephone support line.
16. The high-level options appraisal undertaken in 2017 explored options to:
 - Outsource the service to a different provider;
 - Transform the service model;
 - Decommission the service.
17. It was identified that outsourcing the service would not achieve the savings required as it was considered unlikely that alternative voluntary groups/organisations could deliver the same service for less cost and the commissioning process itself would incur further initial expenditure.
18. Consideration was given to aligning the service with other existing Council services but there are currently no avenues to reshape the service in this way, as to do so would require absorbing the costs associated with the service and would not achieve the required savings.
19. A number of voluntary organisations have been identified that offer support to help people to use ICT equipment. Although none offer an identical service to that offered by CareOnLine, in combination they do offer an alternative way for people to meet their digital support needs. The services referenced in the consultation were Community Life Choices Framework; Ability Net; Vista; Enrych; Voluntary Action South Leicestershire and Age UK. More detail about each provider and the scope of their provision is set out within Appendix B. Collectively these services offer support for the range of disabilities and life limiting conditions currently supported by CareOnLine; some providers offer home visits and free telephone helplines for computer advice and information.

Consultation

20. Consultation with service users took place between 11 April and 22 May 2018 on the proposed decommissioning of the CareOnLine Service, which included:
- Emails sent to all active and ongoing service users of CareOnLine;
 - An accessible online questionnaire (accessible also for service users using screen readers), with printed copies available in standard, large print and easy read formats;
 - A freepost return address for completed paper surveys;
 - A dedicated CareOnLine survey e-mail to enable service users to request any help and support that they needed to complete the survey, including requests for surveys in different formats or languages;
 - A phone line offering assistance with the survey through the Customer Service Centre, with Local Area Co-ordinators available to visit service users on request.
21. The questionnaire outlined the proposal to decommission the Service, asked how service users used it and sought information about the impact of the proposed alternative services on their support. It also outlined details of the alternative services that were available.
22. A copy of the supporting information and questionnaire is attached as Appendix B to this report.

Consultation Feedback

23. A report detailing the results of the consultation is appended to this report as Appendix C. In summary:
- 119 people responded to the survey, the majority online;
 - Two petitions were received, an online petition of 61 signatures and a paper petition of 51 signatures, both petitions asking that the County Council should not decommission the service;
 - A number of individual responses were received and these are detailed as part of the consultation analysis outlined in paragraph 24 below.
24. Feedback indicated that:
- Most responses came from current service users;
 - Most people use the service for training, advice and technical support in IT;
 - Most responses came from people with a long standing illness, disability or infirmity;
 - A small number of service users stated that they last used CareOnLine between one and two years ago, or longer than two years ago;
 - Most service users did not feel that alternative services would meet their needs due to the specialised nature and flexibility that the CareOnLine service offered through home visits;
 - Most service users were not aware of the alternative services available;
 - Most service users felt that the alternative services would make it harder for them to use technology to undertake a range of activities, such as communicating with friends/family, accessing information and living independently.

Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed decommissioning of the CareOnLine service on 5 June and a minute of the discussion and representations received are attached as Appendix A.
26. The Committee noted the responses to the consultation and the petitions, one of which was presented to the meeting, and received questions from two service users which included concerns that alternative providers would not meet the needs of some very vulnerable and isolated people who were currently supported by CareOnLine.
27. Members commented on the need for continuity of support and asked that further consideration was given as to what would be provided by other organisations if CareOnLine was decommissioned, noting in particular the need for ongoing support over a long period.

Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group

28. Officers attended the meeting of the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group on 8 June 2018, which considered the proposals for the CareOnLine Service. The Group consists of people and organisations from across the County and works to ensure that people are not excluded or disadvantaged by virtue of their age, disability, religion etc, providing input and challenge to proposals for service change such as this.
29. The Group welcomed the efforts made to consult with service users over the proposals and broadly supported the mitigation measures put forward. They noted concerns that some users may need to contact several providers to get the same level of support currently provided by CareOnLine; that service users may face additional barriers in accessing support and the majority of service users are women.
30. The feedback from the group has informed the EHRIA, attached as Appendix D.

Proposed Mitigation

31. Careful consideration has been given to the extensive feedback from the consultation and this has informed the proposed mitigation, which will comprise of:
 - a) Developing detailed transitional arrangements for CareOnLine service users, both those currently active and those who may not have used the service recently. Particular attention will be given to women and those from ethnic minority groups.
 - b) Continuing to support service users who are eligible for adult social care services and who identify a requirement for digital support through means of their support plan.
 - c) Signposting new referrals to alternative providers which have been identified by the County Council, these being the Council's Community Life Choices Framework; AbilityNet; Vista; Enrych; Voluntary Action South Leicestershire and Age Concern, and introducing existing service users to the provider(s) which is best placed to support their need going forward. A list of providers and their current offers is given in Appendix B.

- d) Giving service users who have borrowed IT hardware and software the opportunity to keep that equipment where possible.
- e) Advising service users of funding sources to which they might apply for funding for their IT needs.
- f) Establishing a transitional fund of £10,000 per annum for the next two years. The purpose of this fund would be to help organisations, such as those identified above, to develop and increase their capacity to support service users with complex needs in accessing IT and digital services.
- g) The Council will maintain a dialogue with these organisations and review progress made in April 2019.
- h) Engaging the Council's network of Locality Area Co-ordinators (who work with GP surgeries and adult social care) to help support service users to access all their local services both in terms of their digital needs and in helping to combat social isolation.

Conclusion

- 32. The CareOnLine Service has been a highly valued service for a small group of service users and it is operated by committed and experienced staff. However, the continuation of the service in its current form is not viable, given the funding pressures facing the Communities and Wellbeing Service. Similar services are provided by a number of voluntary organisations and charities and the transitional fund will help those groups to develop offers that will support former CareOnLine service users.
- 33. The proposed decommissioning of the service has been given careful consideration including, as set out in this report, the issues raised by service users and their families, by the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 34. It was apparent from the consultation that most service users were not aware of other services which might be available. Alternative support has been identified from voluntary and third sector organisations in Leicestershire, most of which offer free access support for all user groups including people with limiting conditions such as frailty, mental health problems, long-term conditions and disabilities. These include providers such as AbilityNet, which offers digital/IT support for people with disabilities and home visits from its network of volunteers. Whilst these individually may not replicate the CareOnLine role at present, the providers have indicated that they are keen to work with the Council to develop their services further.
- 35. Subject to the measures proposed to ensure continued targeted support for CareOnLine service users, it is therefore recommended that the service is decommissioned. Should this be agreed, new referrals to the service will cease and support will end for existing users by the end of the year.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

36. A full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) has been completed and is attached as Appendix D. Key protected groups affected by the proposals were identified as: People with Disabilities, Older People and Women.
37. The EHRIA indicates that this proposal has an impact on older people and those with a disability. There could also be impact on those at risk of rural isolation and carers. Whilst a decision to decommission the service would have a negative impact, there are a series of detailed and robust mitigating actions which address the key areas of concern, take account of the need to respond to individual circumstances and therefore reduce any adverse impact.

Background Papers

- Report to the Cabinet: 15 September 2017 – Progress with the Implementation of the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20
<https://bit.ly/2GC2yxR>
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 5 June 2018 – CareOnLine Service <http://politics.leics.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=55901>

Appendices

- Appendix A - Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny - 5 June 2018 – Minute Extract and representations received.
- Appendix B - Questionnaire and supporting information – Have your say on proposed change to the CareOnLine Service
- Appendix C – Consultation feedback analysis
- Appendix D – EHRIA

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