



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 MARCH 2019

DECOMMISSIONING OF THE CAREONLINE SERVICE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Committee on the decommissioning of the CareOnLine Service in 2018.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. In September 2017, the Cabinet approved the development of proposals to decommission the CareOnLine Service as part of several actions to realise the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020.
3. The details around the proposal to decommission the service were reported to this Committee on 5 June 2018. The Committee requested that a report on progress with supporting existing users and alternative organisations be submitted following the decommissioning of the service.
4. On 6 July 2018, the Cabinet approved a report which recommended that the CareOnLine Service be decommissioned, and that one-off transitional funding of £10,000 per year over two years be provided to help organisations to develop their offer to mitigate the cessation of the service.

Background

5. The CareOnLine Service was a non-statutory service providing training, ICT equipment and telephone support to enable people to use IT to increase their independence. Service users were usually people who had a disability or limiting conditions such as frailty, mental health problems, visual impairments and long-term health conditions.
6. Following a high-level review of the service in 2017, the high cost per service user meant that to continue the service in its established form was not viable given the funding pressures facing the Communities and Wellbeing Service.
7. A number of voluntary organisations had been identified that also offered support to help people use ICT equipment. Although it was acknowledged that none of these offered an identical service to the one provided by CareOnLine, in combination they did offer an alternative way for people to meet their digital support needs. Some of these services offer home visits and some provide targeted support to older and disabled people.

8. Engagement with service users on the proposals to decommission CareOnLine and signpost current and future users to alternative provisions was undertaken between 11 April 2018 and 22 May 2018 and the outcome was reported to both this Committee and the Cabinet as outlined in paragraphs 3 and 4 above.
9. Following the Cabinet decision of 6 July 2018, the CareOnLine Service was decommissioned on 31 December 2018.

Progress

Transition Funding

10. As part of the mitigating action in decommissioning CareOnLine, a transitional fund of £10,000 over two years (£20,000 in total) was made available to organisations to assist them in developing their digital support offers to the client groups.
11. An application process and funding guidelines were made available on the County Council's website for organisations to apply for the funding from 3 September and 15 October 2018.
12. The fund was available to help organisations manage the gap between the service they offered across Leicestershire and the service which has been provided by CareOnLine. Organisations needed to demonstrate that they could provide services which included delivering training, providing a telephone support line and support visits to help vulnerable people to become digitally enabled across Leicestershire. Any proposals for funding also had to demonstrate sustainability and continuation of a service beyond the duration of the transitional funding.
13. Three organisations applied for the funding and following an evaluation process the grant was awarded to Enrych, a voluntary organisation with a 30-year track record of supporting adults with disabilities to lead independent lives.

Enrych Connect

14. Through the creation of an extension of a service called Enrych Connect, Enrych proposes supporting people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and/or mental health needs, and their carers, who are at risk of experiencing isolation or social disadvantage that could be eased by support and access to digital technology. The project has built on the model of CareOnLine and will have a focus on the "hardest to reach" groups.
15. Enrych Connect has been successful in applying for funding from The Big Lottery which has guaranteed sustainability of the service for a minimum of three years. It is confident of sustaining the project beyond that time as it has a strong track record of attracting funding from a variety of sources.
16. Since securing the transition fund Enrych Connect has engaged the staff that formerly worked for CareOnLine. This is a positive outcome enabling these highly skilled and trained staff to use their knowledge and expertise to help develop and deliver the project.
17. The project was launched in February 2019.

CareOnLine service users

18. In the lead up to decommissioning, CareOnLine officers worked to ensure that as far as possible, existing service users were not disadvantaged.
19. Officers worked with partners to establish appropriate referral and transition routes ensuring that service users were signposted to alternative or specialist service provision and any barriers to move on from the service were removed or mitigated against. This included:
 - working closely with the network of public health funded Local Area Co-ordinators to identify local organisations to combat any loneliness and isolation experienced by service users;
 - Customer Service Centre and First Contact teams have been notified of the support that can be provided by alternative providers in order to signpost any queries to appropriate organisations, including Enrych Connect;
 - Service users eligible for adult social care services who require digital support will be assisted through their personal budgets where appropriate and as identified in individual support plans;
 - CareOnLine staff completed training sessions for all current service users;
 - Service users have been informed that they can retain any equipment that had been loaned to them as part of the CareOnLine Service;
 - Ongoing contact with Enrych Connect will ensure that any existing service users can access the Enrych offer.

Resource Implications

20. 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 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.
21. 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.
22. Transitional funds of £10,000 per annum for two years have been set aside to assist organisations with the transition of service users to alternative services (granted to Enrych).
23. The transitional phase has not impacted on established social care budgets.
24. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Conclusions

25. Following the decommissioning of CareOnLine, a number of actions have ensured that service users have information about how they can continue to receive support for their digital and IT needs should they choose to. The successful funding bids undertaken by Enrych have ensured that as close a match to CareOnLine as can be reasonably expected is available over the medium term.

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>
- Report to Cabinet: 6 July 2018 – ‘CareOnline’ Service – <https://bit.ly/2GYOXUL>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None.

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equality and Human Rights Implications

27. The Equalities Challenge Group reviewed the CareOnLine Service proposals from an equalities perspective on 8 June 2018. The Group welcomed the efforts made to consult with service users over the proposals and broadly supported the mitigation measures put forward.
28. A full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) was prepared for the Cabinet report on 6 July 2018 and is available upon request. 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. There are a series of detailed and robust mitigating actions which address the areas of concern. The Departmental Equalities Group are actively monitoring the mitigations through an action plan that is reviewed regularly.

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