



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 MARCH 2020

PROGRESS ON THE 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 progress following the decision to decommission the CareOnline (COL) Service in 2019 and to report on the consequent activity undertaken by the Enrych Connect service.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 2 Following a high-level review of the COL Service in 2017, and due to budgetary pressures, the continuance of the service in its established form was not viable and plans were put in place to consult on options.
- 3 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 to develop proposals to decommission the COL Service.
- 4 A consultation took place between 11 April and 22 May 2018 with service users and stakeholders to explore alternative methods of delivering the service.
- 5 The results of the consultation were reported to the Committee at its meeting of 5 June 2018 and proposed the decommissioning of the service.
- 6 On 6 July 2018, the Cabinet made the decision to decommission COL and put in place measures to mitigate the effect of the cessation of the service. This included the provision of a transitional fund of £10,000 per annum for two years to help alternative organisations develop their capacity of their support offer similar to that of COL.
- 7 The Committee was updated on the decommissioning of COL at its meeting of 11 March 2019. The report detailed that the transitional funding had been allocated to Enrych, who proposed to develop an extension of its offer called Enrych Connect. Additional funding from the Big Lottery fund had also been confirmed by Enrych giving them three years of secure funding to develop their project.

Background

- 8 The COL Service sat within the Communities and Wellbeing Service of the Adults and Communities Department. It was a non-statutory service with an aim of providing

training, ICT equipment and telephone support to enable people to use IT to increase their independence. Service users with limiting conditions such as frailty, mental health problems, visual impairments and long-term health conditions or a disability used the service.

- 9 Following a high-level review of the service in 2017, the Cabinet was advised that due to budgetary pressures the continuance of the service in its established form was not viable and plans were put in place to consult on options to decommission the service and look at alternatives.
- 10 As part of the review undertaken in 2017, a range of third-party organisations were identified that although not operating a like for like service, could support people with IT needs. A transitional fund of £10,000 for two years was offered to help interested third parties to develop plans to meet the objectives of COL.
- 11 Following an application process, Enrych was successful in securing the transition funding of £10,000 over two years. Enrych is a national organisation with 30 years' experience of supporting people with disabilities to lead active and independent lives. They planned to develop a similar service to COL, called Enrych Connect.
- 12 Enrych Connect also secured Big Lottery funding for three years helping to sustain the funding and were confident of their developmental plans.
- 13 Enrych Connect was established in February 2019. It supports people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and/or mental health needs and their carers who are at risk of or experiencing isolation or social disadvantage. This may be eased by support and access to digital interfaces/internet technology (building on the service model established by COL). The project has a focus on "hardest to reach" groups.
- 14 All COL staff (four in total) successfully secured posts with Enrych Connect and the County Council additionally supported the project by enabling the transfer of COL's stock of specialist hardware and software so that Enrych could loan equipment to their service users.
- 15 The remainder of this report sets out the progress that Enrych Connect have made since its operational inception in March 2019.

Update on progress

- 16 Enrych has been working to address the digital issues faced by service users by providing expert trained staff who have identified and assessed needs, provided training and support to individuals to access IT solutions and trained volunteers. IT equipment has also been loaned.
- 17 Its staff have continued to offer one to one support to people requesting digital assistance directly or who have been referred by other stakeholders. In addition, four volunteers have been recruited to assist in the work. Enrych Connect has plans in place to increase the volunteer base to ten.
- 18 During its first three months of operation, Enrych managed the transfer of those COL service users who requested continued support into the new arrangements. They enrolled 77 service users, received 58 enquiries and provided 174 home training visits. It is currently averaging ten new referrals per month. As at January 2020,

Enrych has made 888 visits to clients, and responded to 242 general phone enquiries.

- 19 Enrych Connect is establishing a contact network of potential referrers through visits to social care locality teams, Local Area Co-ordinators, GP practices, NHS services and stakeholder charities. A new initiative is developing digital help and support in a group of residential care homes. This has been well received and has delivered additional benefits through increasing social interaction amongst the residents.
- 20 The service is operating within its resources and has started discussions with a local corporate organisation who has expressed an interest in supporting the work of Enrych Connect. It remains confident of its ability to sustain the service beyond the three year funding received from the Big Lottery.

Resource Implications

- 21 The net budget for the Department's Communities and Wellbeing Service for 2020-21 is £5.1m. In line with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy this will reduce to approximately £5m per annum by 2023/24. It is recognised that given the scale of these reductions, service delivery will change significantly.
- 22 The decommissioning of the COL Service delivered £113,000 of ongoing savings to the Community and Wellbeing Service's overall savings target of £1.3 million.
- 23 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).
- 24 The transitional phase has not impacted on established social care budgets.
- 25 The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the content of this report.

Conclusions

- 26 Enrych Connect has made positive progress in the establishment of a service which has ensured that clients of COL have been able to continue to be supported by experienced staff in meeting their digital requirements. Former COL clients have played a positive role in a monthly user forum established by Enrych Connect. Enrych Connect is developing plans for the longer-term sustainability of the service and the service continues to thrive.

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>
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 11 March 2019 – Decommissioning of CareOnline Service – <http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=5687&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

- 27 The Equalities Challenge Group reviewed the COL 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 indicated that the proposal to decommission COL impacted on older people and those with a disability. These were mitigated by the establishment of Enrych Connect who took up the support of those COL service users who requested it.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

- 29 Enrych Connect is working actively with partners and stakeholders, including Local Area Co-ordinators and other social prescribers in growing its user base.

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