

9 March 2016

Environment & Housing Management Committee

Community Alarm Service

Report of: *Helen Gregory, Acting Head of Housing & Benefits*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Council has a number of fees and charges relating to the services it provides. As part of the budget setting process, these charges are reviewed on an annual basis. Whilst some of the fees and charges are statutory, and therefore determined through legislation, the Council must also review its charges for discretionary services to ensure they reflect the current costs of service provision.

1.2 Historically review of fees and charges for this service have been on an adhoc basis and have not reflected the true cost of this service.

2. Recommendation(s):

2.1 The Committee is asked to recommend to PFR Committee to approve Option B to increase the Community Alarm Charge by 0.50p per week from the 1 June 2016. This will generate an additional income to the general fund of £22,620.00.

2.2 To approve that these fees and charges are reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The Council currently operates a Community alarm service to residents in the Borough which is a discretionary service. The purpose of this service is to provide a 24 hour response service for vulnerable or older residents who may suffer with ill health, disability or other risk due to age. This service provides residents with the opportunity to remain independent in their own home.
- 3.2 Currently, we have 1142 clients that use our alarms service, and it is anticipated that this figure will continue to rise given the increasing financial pressures on other organisations.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 The fees and charges for this service have not been reviewed since 2013/2014 and it is proposed that the existing fees & charges are increased for the 2016/17 budget.
- 4.2 The review of the current fees and charges for this service has been carried out and it has demonstrated that our current fees and charges are one of the lowest in Essex and we will remain less in comparison to other Authority's in Essex if we increase our charges (See Appendix A).
- 4.3 Various options have been considered of what increase would be appropriate in this financial climate as below;

Option A	£0.25p increase
Option B	£0.50p increase
Option C	£0.75p increase
Option D	£1.00p increase

- 4.4 It is recommended that Option B is approved for the 2016/17 financial year and that these charges are reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process. Based on initial estimates, it is anticipated that the option B proposal will generate an additional fee income of approximately £22,620 to the general fund which is based on the number of current service users and the charges being implemented from 1st June 2016.

- 4.5 It would be recommended to consider increasing the charges by 0.25p per year which would mean an increase to £45,240.00 in year 2017/18 and a further increase to £60,320.00 in year 2018/19 based on the current income of £148,070.
- 4.6 There are 101 service users that pay a lower charge as they are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Pension credit.
- 4.7 It is anticipated that this will virtually offset the anticipated loss of income from Essex County Council.
- 4.8 With the proposed increase of 50p per week, the comparison below demonstrates that our fees and charges will remain below that currently provided by other Local Authority's.
- 4.9 The increase in charge would be implemented at 1 June 2016 to allow resident consultation to take place.

5. References to Corporate Plan

- 5.1 Value for Money – “Investing and innovating in key services.

6. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 6.1 Increased income for the General Fund.

Legal Implications

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- 6.2 Taken with s93 of the Local Government Act 2003, s3 of the Localism Act 2011 contains general powers for a local authority to charge for non-statutory or discretionary services, subject to a duty to secure that , taking one financial year with another, the income from charges does not exceed the costs of provision.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 6.3 The review of Community alarm fees affects vulnerable or elderly clients. Proposals for reduced fees for clients in receipt of benefit will minimise the impact of this.

7 Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8 Appendices to this report

Appendix A - Local Authority comparison

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