

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 8 September 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Home Safeguard: Contract with PPP (Night Owl)

### Report summary:

To gain approval for the temporary outsourcing of Home Safeguard's emergency pendant alarm and out of hours service between the hours of 22:15 – 07:15

The Night Operators were a team of 4 call handlers, with 3 members of the team working a shift pattern of 2 nights on and 4 nights off, with the 4<sup>th</sup> member of the team covering holiday and sickness. During the last 12 months we have lost 3 of these night call handlers and have been unable to recruit replacements.

At the same time we are upgrading the call handling system and need to ensure appropriate resilience is maintained throughout the period.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

- 1) That Cabinet recommends the approval of the Contract Standing Orders Exemption Report
- 2) That Cabinet recommends the granting of authority for the signing of the contract with PPP (Night Owl)

### Reason for recommendation:

This is a vital service offering support to elderly and vulnerable residents in the private sector of East Devon as well as corporate customers and tenants living in our Sheltered Housing. Home Safeguard is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

It is also a statutory requirement for the authority to provide an out of hours service to deal with certain emergency situations and Home Safeguard performs this role for East Devon District Council and also for Teignbridge District Council.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergencies
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
- Democracy and Transparency

- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** High Impact

Home Safeguard Service, including monitoring of alarms, out of hours and lone worker services. Home Safeguard is East Devon's Emergency Control Centre providing a service 24/7, 365 days a year. Its core business is the monitoring of pendant alarms for sheltered housing and private individuals living within the district, in addition to a number of small corporate customers. It provides the 'out of hours' service for East Devon and Teignbridge District Councils, plus the lone worker safety provision for both authorities.

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** High Risk; Failure to be able to cover 24/7 service

**Links to background information:**

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

## 1 Background

1.1 The Home Safeguard call centre has maintained essential services throughout the pandemic, but as with many other services, has lost a number of night operators (3), they work between the hours of 2215 – 0715. This is a solo shift in which they respond to emergency alarms that have been activated within people's homes and 'out of hours' calls from across East Devon and Teignbridge districts

1.2 Recruitment to these crucial roles has been repeatedly unsuccessful and therefore alternative arrangements have had to be considered. Resilience in the team has suffered, nights are solo working and when any member of the team has been on leave or absent due to sickness, shifts have had to be covered by existing staff. This has often been the service manager, which has resulted in her not being available for work the following day. Alternatively the alarm calls have had to be redirected to our Disaster Recovery Centre – Exeter Home Call, but this has still left the out of hours calls to be covered by staff locally.

## 2 The Solution

2.1 PPP (Night Owl) operate a call handling service based in Chichester using the same call handling system as we do, and they are upgrading to the same system that we are.

2.2 The wellbeing of our staff is paramount. This is a high demand service with a relatively small staff team. By entering into these arrangements with PPP (Night Owl) staff will not be required to cover as many additional shifts as they have done previously.

2.3 The call handling skills and knowledge base within PPP is an important element in this arrangement; it is crucial that experienced cover is in place in case of emergency response being required. To date we have been reliant on other members of Housing staff to help cover. This is no

longer sustainable as they need to return to their regular roles now that the authority's recovery plans are well underway. PPP (Night Owl) operate three call centres (in Chichester, Exeter and Ashburton) so they have adequate cover regardless of the situation, and all are trained in the same techniques as our own staff. Careful familiarisation training has taken place to ensure they are fully cognisant of our local practices, procedures and requirements.

2.4 From July 14<sup>th</sup> 2021 Home Safeguard has been temporarily decanted to Blackdown House, while system and office upgrades are undertaken at Lymebourne House. It is expected that this decant period will be about 4 months.

2.5 The new system went live in BDH on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021 this is a cloud based call handling system, which means that Exeter Home Call are no longer able to facilitate our Disaster Recovery as they do not use a digital system. PPP (Night Owl) already operate a cloud based system and therefore are able to step in and seamlessly cover our nights.

2.6 Home Safeguard are the first call centre taking up the option of the Night Owl facility. However other call centres are also looking at outsourcing this element of their services due to similar recruitment issues. There are also financial drivers for many organisations as outsourcing is more cost effective than directly employing night staff.

### **3 The Cost**

3.1 Call volumes for nights vary, but average 21 per night currently. It is difficult to quantify the amount of time that will be spent on each call as reasons for them differ hugely, the range of issues Home Safeguard deals with on a daily / nightly basis is extremely varied. PPP (Night Owl) call handlers, are trained and knowledgeable, and able to provide a professional service on our behalf.

3.2 The initial contract term with PPP is 4 months, the costs for which are £18k plus any additional nights we may require (charged separately at £178 pn) should we lose more staff. Our remaining night operator works 3 shifts per week and PPP cover the remainder

3.3 For illustration purposes the following figures show the annual cost of using PPP in comparison to direct employed staff. PPP's annual costs would be circa £48,000 which is relatively good value compared to direct delivery. The annual cost for each of the vacant call handling positions is approximately £17,388, including on costs (30%) and night enhancement (15%) so the figure for the 3 positions is £52,164.

3.4 The outsourcing of this element of our service to PPP would result in an annual saving of approximately £4,164. In practise the financial gain will be greater than this, as we would see a huge reduction in overtime payments to other staff including the service manager, who have been covering these vacant posts. This contract will also provide non-financial benefits in extra resilience and security for a vital service while it navigates through a period of rapid change and future proofing.

3.5 The reason for the cost illustration in 3.3 and 3.4 above is; should the recruitment issues continue beyond the 4 month timeframe, there is scope to extend the arrangement with PPP Night Owl. There is also the potential to make this a permanent arrangement if it offers consistent cost savings, whilst ensuring uninterrupted service delivery and resilience

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### **Financial implications:**

Financial details are contained in the report and the proposal can be met within the existing approved budget.

**Legal implications:**

The contract value falls below the threshold set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and therefore the EU procurement procedure (which is still currently relevant) does not apply and Cabinet has the power to recommend the authorisation (delegated to Senior Officers in accordance with the decision of Council 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021) of exemptions from the requirement to seek quotations or invite tenders pursuant to the Council's Contract Standing orders Rule 2.3. The reason for using the exemption in this case appears justified. There are no further legal comments pursuant to the report.