



Report To: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder

23 July 2015

Lead Officer: Mike Hill, Director, Health & Environmental Services.

Environmental Health & Licensing “Out of Hours” Service Review

Purpose

1. To seek the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder’s agreement to proposed changes to the “Out of Hours” provision for Environmental Health & Licensing (EH&L).
2. This is not a key decision

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder agree the proposed changes to the EH&L “Out of Hours” service to a risk-based approach, maintaining a 24/7 system to deal with significant emergencies such as fatalities, infectious disease outbreaks, and adopting a logging service with next-working-day response to all other enquiries.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. These recommendations will maintain 24/7 out-of-hours contact service for the public whilst re-introducing a risk-based approach to responding to emergencies, reducing costs, and freeing-up the expert, but limited, resources of SCDC EH&L officers.

Background

5. The Environmental Health Department has for a number of years provided an out of hours service to address emergency Environmental Health issues, staffed by SCDC Environmental Health officers on a rota basis. Each officer is on duty for a seven day period.
6. The service is intended to respond to ‘emergencies’ only (although these are not clearly defined) and is not an attempt to provide a 24/7 general EH&L advice or complaints service. In principle, an emergency would be an incident or event where there is a clear and imminent risk to the public that requires an immediate response from a qualified officer e.g. an outbreak of infectious disease, a fatal workplace accident. All “out of hours” calls are directed to the contracted “First Call” contact centre in Blackpool which determines, based on a criteria set by SCDC, whether to contact the officer on the rota.
7. Appendix A identifies the number of calls passed to officers over an 18 month period since January 2013 along with the number of visits that have had to be made by officers. Where visits have not been deemed necessary they will have been logged and dealt with on the next working day. This shows that the out-of-hours service dealt with only 2 contacts that required an immediate response from an expert EHO. All other contacts resulted in the Blackpool call-centre simply passing calls through to the duty EHO who provided telephone advice to the caller. This was not what the

emergency out-of-hours service was intended to do, and non-urgent advice can be provided during normal working hours.

8. The service cost £14,937.08 to run in 2013/4, and costs are expected to be similar for 2014/15 & 15/16 allowing for inflation. These costs are made up of £10,600 in payments to staff to run the service and £4300 to “First Call” in Blackpool through a contract which is due to expire in March 2015. Given the very small number of true emergency calls received, this is an expensive and inefficient use of limited EHO staff time.

Considerations

9. In considering alternative arrangements for the EH&L “out of hours” service, officers have looked at what other authorities offer, detailed in Appendix B. Based on this, it is proposed that SCDC changes the EH&L Out-of-Hours service to:
 - (a) Maintain a 24/7 out-of-hours telephone number for the public to call.
 - (b) Clearly define emergencies and incidents that require an immediate response on a risk-based approach.
 - (c) Introduce a call-logging system for non-emergencies and commit to review and action these on the next working day.
10. Noise generally is not considered to be an emergency and if considered as such, it is likely it would be linked to Anti-Social Behaviour which can be dealt with by the Police. It is proposed that out-of-hours inspections to assess noise complaints continue on a pre-planned basis, as is current practice.

Options

11. The Portfolio Holder can accept, reject or amend the proposed changes. Rejection of the proposed changes risks continuing with a costly “reception” service for non-urgent calls and inefficient use of valuable expert EHO time.

Implications

12. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

13. Subject to the final recommendation, there will be a financial saving of around £10k arising from reduced standby payments to EH&L staff. It is proposed to vire this money to the overtime budget to provide a contingency for pre-planned out-of-hours work.
14. It is intended to re-tender the out-of-hours call handling contract and seek opportunities to share this service across SCDC and potentially with other local authorities. This may deliver further savings, subject to any procurement process.

Legal

15. The proposed changes mirror arrangements already in place to provide emergency responses under the Civil Contingencies Act.

Staffing

16. This review is being conducted in agreement with EH&L staff as any changes would require formal changes to existing job descriptions.

Risk Management

17. The proposed changes to the system re-introduce a risk-based approach to responding to out-of-hours service requests and ensures staff can be ready to respond to true emergencies.

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

18. EH&L staff have been involved in re-working the out-of-hours service.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first-class services and value-for-money.

19. Improve efficiency and value-for-money within a viable financial strategy.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: - (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council; (b) on the Council's website; and (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

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