



Department of Housing and Health Services
Central Emergency Communications System

Best Value Performance Plan

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Draft

Executive Summary

Emergency Communications Service

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Strategic and Operational Objectives

The Council's 1994/95 Estimates describe the policy objective of the CECS as being:-

"To operate a call system to enable people at risk to have a means of quickly summoning help in an emergency. To operate a partnership with other Local Authorities and Housing Associations to achieve an income sufficient to cover costs."

The Central Emergency Communication System (CECS) has two broad financial objectives. Within this policy:-

- i. ***To achieve the necessary income to ensure that at least a "break even" position is maintained.***
- ii. ***To achieve growth compatible with the financial and operational guidelines above.***

Developments During the Course of the Review

- Complete upgrade of CECS hardware and software
- Relocation to PBC, providing improved accommodation and room for expansion.
- Restructuring of full time operators rotas to ensure compliance with the European Work Time Directive.
- Development of corporate user group.
- Ongoing development of partnership with Tunstall Telecom.
- Partnership pilot Tele-Medicine projects with the Health Authority and Primary Care Groups.
- Marketing of Remote Management systems to corporate clients.
- Introduction of a training plan for all CECS staff., in line with the Councils Investors in People (IIP) policies.

Challenge

In recent years two distinct roles have evolved for the CECS:

- Providing an initial response to individual, vulnerable members of the community in an emergency.
- Providing a local focus of operation for the Borough Council's response to civil emergency.

The former was the original purpose behind the establishment of the service and although there is no statutory requirement for district councils to undertake this activity it was and still is consistent with the historical role that District Council's in Surrey and Guildford Borough Council in particular have taken in providing front line services for the elderly and vulnerable. e.g. Day Centres, Meals on Wheels, Community Transport.

As more and more elderly are remaining in their own homes and the focus of social care is following this trend the provision of this service locally has greater relevance

than ever. The increasing potential of telecommunication technology to monitor individuals and deliver services further increases the potential of the service.

The latter is more recent and has taken advantage of the fact that the Council has a ready made 24 hour, 7 day a week staffed facility, equipped to continue operating in most foreseeable eventualities. It was at the centre of the Council's millennium contingency plans and has played a vital co-ordinating role when recent flood warnings were in place.

Consult

The CECS provides services to a complex network of clients and for a wide range of services.

For what might be described as its non-core services, such as those in connection with civil emergencies and out of hours staff monitoring any review and consultation with stakeholders should be in relation to the "headline service" overall not that element that the CECS contributes. In this respect.

Stakeholders for core services are in three categories:

- External corporate clients (RSL's and Local Authorities) for whom the CECS provides monitoring and out of hours service.
- Partners with whom the Council provides services to the community in Guildford
- Individuals in Guildford connected to the CECS

For a number of years informal "account management" meetings have been held with major corporate clients to ensure the range and quality of services offered were meeting their expectations. However it had become apparent that the original concept of a partnership between service providers had become eroded and required a fresh impetus. A recent initiative towards this has been the establishment of a Partnership forum involving all clients with over 150 connections to the service. The first meeting was held on 24 January. Further meetings will be held half yearly to discuss issues of mutual concern and a regular newsletter is planned to update clients on service developments and proposals. Specific working parties will also be set up for matters of specific interest to sections of the client base.

The CECS is part of a network of local services provided to the elderly and vulnerable through a range of agencies who could be referred to as local "provider stakeholders". They include the Primary Care Group, Surrey County Council Social Services and a range of voluntary organisations. The issue of providing greater integration in the provision of all these services has been the subject of detailed consultations between all the agencies concerned for over a year and the role of CECS forms part of these consultations. In addition service developments in the areas of tele-medicine and falls monitoring have been the subject of specific partnership consultations with those agencies.

Consultation with individual users has not taken place to date. Although it is essential that views of these service users and their carers/relatives is sought, it is considered that this would be a more constructive exercise in the context of the overall provision network of care and support services that are available locally.

It is recognised that much work needs to be done to develop proper engagement with service users. However it is considered that the CECS forms only one part of the provision of care and support services locally. It provides the initial communication link to front line services but not the services themselves and as such should not be treated in isolation.

As part of the Council's Best Value Review Programme it is intended that this interim report will be included in a much wider inter-agency review of care and support services that are provided locally. In this way the CECS can be looked at in the context of the services to which it provides access.

Compare

As the majority of community alarm monitoring centres operate in commercial environment it is difficult to obtain data on operating costs and financial performance. As part of the Association of Alarm System Providers (ASAP) the Council is committed to compliance with its Code of Practice that sets out specific service standards. These standards have been agreed across the industry as offering a realistic service standard to users.

Compete

The CECS operates in what is already a very competitive market and over the years since its establishment, it has successfully competed for and to a large extent retained a very broad client base. This has been achieved not simply through price but by offering a balance of price, high quality service standards, and continuous service a technological development.

Unless the CECS is able to continue to offer clients the right balance of service there are a number of alternate suppliers to which the existing client base could turn should they so wish.

Issues Requiring Urgent Review

- The role of the CECS in the provision of out-of hours corporate services to GBC, particularly with regard to emergency planning , including funding issues.
- Clarification of the effects of the Supporting People legislation on the CECS operation.
- Implementation of Tele-Medicine services.
- Review of charges for Out-of-Hours Services.
- Review of the staffing, management, marketing and support of the local "Help on Hand" service.
- Review of the management and staffing structure of the CECS in light of the reorganisation of the Housing and Health Department.
- Preparation of the CECS Business Plan for 2003 – 2005.

Financial Review

A financial appraisal of the CECS was carried in the 1999 / 2002 Business Plan, to establish the overall viability of the service, where it is most vulnerable and where efforts to maximise income should be directed.

The way in which the finances of the CECS were presented did not lend themselves easily to identifying the costs and income in relation to the individual elements of the

service. Although not suggesting a complete restructuring of the financial monitoring arrangements there are certain aspects of the way in which the cost centres are structured which would assist in identifying the true financial performance of the elements which make up the service.

These elements have, for the purposes of this exercise been separated into the following operational sectors:

- Monitoring services to Guildford residents
- Monitoring services to corporate clients
- Maintenance consortium
- Out of hours services

There is no overall requirement for each sector to be in surplus but treating the service in this way enables the financial contribution and dependency of each sector to be properly analysed and assessed.

In order to improve financial monitoring of the services a number of financial models have been developed during the period 1999 / 2001. These models can be used both to monitor performance and produce forecasts.

Opportunities

Opportunities to attract additional corporate clients continues to be pursued but the market is extremely competitive. The addition of a large client will also have an impact on costs as the system could quickly reached a threshold in terms of accommodation, equipment and staffing. Of greater significance is the ability of the CECS to retain the existing corporate client base.

In order to achieve stability of the current client base it is imperative that the CECS can offer a range of value added services in addition to the basic social alarm monitoring.

The relationship with the larger clients, especially the larger local authorities was originally established as one of a partnership with Guildford to provide a cost effective service in the areas concerned. This relationship has become increasingly difficult to justify in recent years as it has become more one of service provider and client. This change of emphasis poses serious risks to the future of the service in that the market is getting increasingly competitive and Guildford is not being seen as offering any benefits over and above any other commercial service provider. The value of the partnership to the major corporate clients is becoming less relevant than their ability to achieve a service at less cost from an alternative supplier.

A number of aspects have been addressed to re-establish the partnership relationship both in the 1998 Business Plan and at the recent Partnership Forum.

The potential market within Guildford is substantial as indicated by the statistics taken from the Borough Population Survey.

In the private sector population statistics from the 1998 Census would indicate that there are over 11,000 properties in owner occupation and occupied by pensioner households. To date there are only 740 clients linked to the system in this sector.

In the public sector there are 6114 households renting from the Borough Council, including 428 residents of sheltered accommodation. The latter and 1163 residents of other elderly persons accommodation are connected to the service with either hard wired or dispersed alarms. Included are also a small number of tenants in general council accommodation.

Various marketing strategies have been tried including local radio and press advertising using specialist brochures but it would still seem that 'word of mouth' is the most successful method. Targeting of elderly people by Ward has however produced encouraging results.

In order to reap the benefits of any marketing campaign it is necessary to have the equipment to install and with this in mind it is important to ensure that sufficient funds are made available in the tools and equipment budget to purchase on-site equipment for private sector clients.

The CECS has not previously been set formal targets for the connection of individual clients. However it considered essential that such targets are now set, not only to maintain and improve the profitability of the service but to ensure that those residents who could benefit from connection to the service are given the opportunity to do so.

Opportunities for the CECS to enter into seamless integrated multi-agency initiatives with the Health Authority, Primary Care Groups (PCG's), Social Services and GP's are also addressed in the service plan.

Training Plan

A comprehensive training plan including budgetary provisions for the training and overheads has been prepared for the period July 2000 – March 2002.

A further review of the training plan will be made in September 2001 following the annual appraisals, in order that appropriate budgetary provisions can be made in the estimates for 2002 – 2003.