

Alert Project

Report to Adult Services Scrutiny Committee 25th October 2011

The objectives of the Alert project

As the Committee is aware, helping people to stay in their own homes is a key part of the Adult Social Care strategy and is also a key aim of the Supporting People programme overseen by the County Council, the District and City Councils and the Primary Care Trust. The ALERT service is a key element in the way this will be achieved for older people.

The Supporting People Commissioning Board agreed to bring together the funding for Community Alarms, Warden Support and Telecare services into one service. This brought together Supporting People funding and funding from adult social care for Telecare. In addition, there has been a further injection of resources of £300,000 from the extra money from the NHS for adult social care. .

By introducing the new service we aimed to redress the variable provision existing prior to this point:

- Emergency response was not available everywhere in the county
- Planned support was not available to people living outside of sheltered housing schemes
- Personal care in an emergency was either not available or if provided, not compliant with care regulations
- Telecare sensors were not available to sheltered housing tenants
- Charges for similar support services ranged widely and were inequitable

The new service was rolled out across the county from April 2010 to March 2011.

The new service consists of 4 service elements

- Monitoring via a call centre - provided by Seniorlink Eldercare
- 24/7 support - emergency response – provided by Community Voice
- Planned support – visits - provided by Community Voice in South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire, Oxford Citizens Housing Association in Oxford City, Sovereign Vale in the Vale area and Charter Housing in the Cherwell area
- Equipment – including sensors – provided by Tunstall

At the end of September 2011 there were nearly 3800 clients directly supported by this service and a further 700 supported under private arrangements, with more than half of all of these receiving Planned Support and 24/7 Emergency Response.

What did we aim to achieve?

The fundamentals of the Alert project were to transfer roughly 4500 people either in sheltered housing or receiving a telecare service to a new better service which would support their needs in a more efficient and effective way.

The strategic aims were to:

- Develop a 24 hour 7 day a week service, including personal care in an emergency

AS11

- Make housing related support available to older people irrespective of housing tenure
- Ensure funding is spent exclusively on older people who need housing related support
- Ensure geographic equity
- Ensure a steady pace of change to help individuals cope with the new arrangements

Have we met our objectives?

Feedback from service users, providers and other stakeholders, and service monitoring data suggest that the service is on track to deliver its strategic aims:

- Emergency response and personal care in an emergency are available across the county for the first time and are well utilised. E.g. in September 2011 the Call Monitoring Centre received over 5000 calls, of which 2% were deemed life critical, with half requiring attendance by an ambulance. Emergency response staff attended on 400 occasions, with many visits being triggered by falls, ill health or anxiety. Personal care in an emergency was provided on 25 occasions. Most call outs are made by more vulnerable and frail people aged 75 and over.
- The service is meeting steady demand for low level preventative support, with over 650 new people entering the service since April 2010. Most are requiring emergency response and are living in the community. The majority of referrals are being made by health and social care staff, including GPs, with a steady rate of self-referrals.
- The service is mainly being provided for older people who need support, most of whom cannot afford to buy this service privately. Re-assessments of current need and financial eligibility of all service users are taking place in a planned way. This process is enabling older people to exercise choice about service options available to them; not just those on low incomes, but also those who were previously and remain in the private housing sector (either as home owners or tenants).
- We have increased the standards of service being provided, by requiring the contractors for the Alert service to maintain higher service accreditations than required under the previous contracts.
- There is evidence of service growth in priority areas, e.g. in West Oxfordshire, which has seen a 65% increase in client numbers (111 people) since April 2010.
- The transition to the new arrangements was phased over 12 months and was completed by March 2011. It proved more complex than was envisaged by all parties and was managed well in most aspects according to feedback from both service providers and customers. Roll out of the new generation of telecare equipment has been brought forward for operational reasons and is on target to be completed by April 2012.

The service has also delivered additional benefits:

- Older people with more complex needs (e.g. dementia, high risk of falls, sensory impairment) are beginning to benefit from access to specialist equipment, e.g. support packages for nearly 100 people include 3 sensors for each individual property increasing up to 6 in more complex cases.

AS11

- Overall the new service model is working. This service is now used as an example of innovative development by other authorities and recognised by provider market leaders, e.g. Tunstall. We are also taking part in a research project led by Leeds and Oxford Universities, funded by the Technology Strategy Board that is looking at benefits of telecare for service users and their carers in terms of prevention of falls and management of dementia.
- We expected the new service design to trigger a growth in the private market. It has and there are new businesses entering into the marketplace in Oxfordshire.

Re-assessments of clients

Progress and issues to date

An annual programme of re-assessments of existing clients started in June by geographical area: Oxford City, Cherwell, Vale, South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire.

By the end of August more than 500 clients had been re-assessed in Oxford. Most of these people received planned support from Oxford Citizens Housing Association and are tenants of either Oxford Citizens Housing Association or Oxford City Council. Outcomes of these re-assessments resulted in a much higher than predicted conversion rate from planned support to the emergency response service. This development raised immediate concerns as to the guidelines surrounding service eligibility and the requirements for appropriate support from ourselves as well as from many service users, carers, providers and stakeholders, including Oxford City Council councillors.

In response, the Alert project managers met in early September with a range of stakeholders, including service users, Age UK Oxfordshire and all Alert service providers to better understand these concerns and agree a way forward.

It became evident that whilst all providers confirmed that the assessments had been carried out using the agreed eligibility criteria - it was the guidelines around those criteria that needed to be amended. The operational guidance in question was revised and implemented on 1 October, following an agreed two-week pause in the process, to allow operational staff to be briefed on agreed changes.

Way forward

Following a request from service commissioners, Oxford Citizens Housing Association support staff provided additional supporting evidence of current need for planned support for those 500 service users.

Initial analysis of this information shows that:

- In 42 cases (8%) the review upheld the assessment outcome, which found clients to be eligible for planned support
- In 243 cases (46%) the review confirmed that these clients were not eligible for planned support at this point in time
- In the remaining 233 cases (45%) the review outcome was that under the revised guidance clients should be eligible for planned support in contrast to the initial assessment

AS11

Analysis of this last group of cases is taking place as a priority. We are planning to complete this validation exercise by the end of October and set benchmarks for eligibility for planned support within the current service specification.

If these revised outcomes were to stand the validation check, then roughly half of the current clients in Oxford City would continue to receive planned support, with the other half continuing to receive emergency response. This is more in keeping with the expected levels of need and service requirement envisaged by Commissioners and from providers and in line with budget assumptions.

In the meantime Oxford City clients continue to receive planned support visits, pending final confirmation of their eligibility for this service element. It is worth noting that subsequent planned reviews will take place annually, and that service users and their carers are able to request an un-planned review at any point in time, should their circumstances change.

Re-assessments in the Cherwell and Vale areas started in the week commencing 11th October using the new revised guidance. It is planned to complete this work by the end of January. Reviews in South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire will be completed by the end of March 2012. The outcomes of these re-assessments are monitored weekly and will inform future strategic priorities for the service.

Natalia Lachkou
Supporting People Programme Manager