

Report to: Audit Committee

Subject: Standby & Callout Policy

Date: 25th March 2014

Author: Service Manager: Audit & Asset Management

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To report the findings of a value for money review of the Council's standby and callout policy, and to seek agreement on the required action to address the issues highlighted in the review.

2. Background

2.1 As part of the 2013-14 service planning process SLT requested that a review of the standby and call out policy be undertaken. The focus of the review was to ascertain whether the existing policy provides value for money.

2.2 The review was scheduled as part of the internal audit plan for 2013-14. The scope of the review encompassed policy documentation and the various roles and responsibilities in relation to providing an out of hour's service. The following services currently operate a formal standby or emergency callout facility:

- Housing & Localities,
- Caretakers (Facilities),
- Leisure & Culture,
- Direct Services (PASC),
- IT Services.

2.3 Figures and financial data for the 2012-13 financial year were used as the basis for the review.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Audit Committee note the report.



GEDLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

Standby and Callout Policy - Value For Money Review

Internal Audit Reference – IAR1314-07

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Management

Date – 25th March 2014

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

At the request of the Senior Leadership Team, a value for money review of the Council's Emergency Standby and Callout policy and procedures was undertaken as part of the internal audit plan for 2013-14.

The Council has defined the roles of the Standby Duty Officer, Standby Responsive Officer and Emergency Callout as follows:

Standby Duty Officer: Where there is a high and sustained demand for an out of hour's response which may also include specified contractual demands for the service. The nature of these services is that a professional or technical response is required which will necessitate the duty officer to assess the risks and make decisions about the response to be given, including contact with external agencies. Attendance at the scene of an incident may be required.

Standby Responsive Officer: Where a risk to people or property may exist but the level of calls historically is not sufficiently high enough to justify a duty officer, a standby responsive officer role may be utilised. This role also covers functions where there is no professional or technical decision making required. In most situations only one type of response is required. This level of response may require attendance at the scene of the incident.

Emergency Callout: There are some functions where there is a historically low level of callout per annum, however, these emergency situations do occur but do not meet the criteria for establishing a standby arrangement. Attendance at the scene of the incident will be required.

A review of payments made during 2012-13 identified the following services operate a standby or emergency callout facility:

- Housing & Localities – Duty Officer only,
- Caretakers – Responsive Officer and Emergency Callout
- Leisure & Culture – Emergency Callout only
- Direct Services/PASC – Duty Officer, Responsive Officer and Emergency Callout,
- IT Services (internal) – Emergency Callout only.

All duty officer and responsive officer functions are organised on a weekly rota basis between members of staff within the relevant service. Due to the potential risk to the public or property and the potential severity of the out of hours call, members of staff are provided with a mobile telephone and are required to be available to attend a call during their rota.

Due to the low level of calls experienced for those services operating an emergency callout only, no staff rota is required and no mobile telephone provided. Members of staff provide personal home or mobile telephone numbers to appropriate contacts. To recompense members of staff for possible disruption during out of hours, the following fixed payments are made to staff following declaration to the payroll department that a standby or emergency role has been undertaken:

- Duty Officer - £155.82 per week of duty (2013-14 - £157.36),
- Responsive Officer - £119.91 per week of duty (13-14 - £121.10),
- Emergency Callout – 59.92 per callout (13-14 - £60.52).

In addition to the allowances above, staff performing a standby or emergency callout role receive a minimum of two hours pay at the appropriate (substantive) rates from the time the callout commences. For time worked in excess of two hours on a callout, the actual hours worked are reimbursed on a basis of the appropriate premium rates for the individual.

The following financial data was obtained and details the number of standby and emergency duty payments for the financial year 2012-13.

Service	No. of Standby Duty Officer & Responsive Officer Duties (days)	No. of Emergency Callouts	Total Cost (inc NI/Superannuation)
Housing & Localities	362	0	£10,128.30
Caretakers	357	14	£8,404.03
Leisure & Culture	0	11	£627.90
Direct Services (PASC)	755	114	£21,427.48
IT Services	0	6	£668.88
Totals	1474	145	£41,256.59

In addition to the above figures a total of 8 duty/responsive officer days, at a cost of £641.95, were incurred within the Planning & Economic development and Public Protection services. In terms of materiality these were not included as part of the detailed review.

1.2 Principal Findings

A summary of the key findings from the review are outlined below.

Standby & Callout Policy

The policy is inconsistently applied across the Council. The policy should be updated to set the default payment as emergency call out, with all payments aligned to benchmark figures.

Caretaking

The total callouts for Leisure and Culture (11) is a similar figure to that for the Caretakers (14). However, the annual costs associated with Leisure and Culture (£627.90) are substantially lower than that for the Caretakers (£8,404.03).

Consideration should be given to utilising the existing contract in place within Leisure & Culture, with Foremost Security Limited, to maximise any benefits and cost savings that may accrue from economies of scale.

Housing & Localities

The service should review its current arrangements of providing a Standby Duty Officer role for the provision of an out of hour's service to ensure the service provides maximum value for money.

There have been 148 recorded cases of actual assistance provided over a four year period which equates to an average of 37 per year. A similar model to that adopted within IT services may be appropriate whereby Emergency Call out payments only provide the best value for money.

By paying only the Emergency Call Out rate would reduce the annual cost of providing the out of hours service from £10,128.30 to £2,217.04 (37x£59.92).

Direct Services (PASC)

The service should review its current arrangements for the provision of an out of hour's service and specifically consider the necessity for two standby roles with a view to merging the Responsive Officer role into a single Duty Officer role.

Generic Issue

The Council does not currently utilise call tracking or call recording facilities. Such facilities may assist in protecting staff from violent or aggressive service users. In addition, these facilities may assist management in aligning duty roles to call demand. Therefore, a cost benefit analysis should be completed to assess the provision of number tracking and call recording facilities.

The detailed findings and associated recommendations are provided in section two of the report.

1.3 Assurance Statement

A total of seven (five medium and two low risk) recommendations are made.

Internal Audit can provide **Limited Assurance** with respect to the degree of Value for Money provided by the Standby and Callout policy.

2. DETAILED FINDINGS

2.1 Standby and Callout Policy

Gedling Borough Council's Standby and Callout policy is detailed in Appendix 17 of the Council Employee Handbook. The handbook is available on the Council's intranet. A review of the policy was undertaken in January 2013 by the Service Manager: Organisational Development, however, this review mainly focused upon required changes to job roles and organisational structures. All definitions of standby roles and levels of remuneration remained unchanged.

The policy currently in use contains details of the definitions of Standby Duty Officer, Standby Responsive Officers and Emergency Callout. The policy also details the level of recompense an employee receives when performing either a standby role or emergency callout role together with details of the compensatory time off provision.

The policy does not, however, make reference to the methods to be employed by Service Managers or delegated employees for the recording of duty rotas or callouts. Evidence to support callouts must be recorded and retained to ensure management checks can be undertaken to prevent abuse of the payment system and provide documentation to support any review of the service level of response e.g. an amendment from Standby Duty Officer to Standby Responsive Officer, should callout figures indicate a change of response level in accordance with the definitions of the policy.

The levels of compensatory payments to staff are defined in the policy document. However, the policy does not identify whether standby and emergency callout payments maybe made in combination. In addition, there is no guidance as to the parameters that dictate which of the three payments are appropriate in given circumstances. This has resulted in service areas defining their own limits to payments which has resulted in the policy being applied inconsistently across the Council.

This situation is evidenced with a comparison of payments between the Housing and Localities service, the Direct Services (PASC) and the Caretakers. The Standby Duty Officers within Housing and Localities are in receipt of the appropriate payment for the standby duty, however, no further payment is received for emergency callouts. This is in contrast to Direct Services and Caretakers. Furthermore, IT Services only make Emergency callout payments.

In reviewing the policy, the opportunity has been taken to do some basic benchmarking of the Council's existing approach with that of other Authorities. For example, standby payments at Leicester City Council and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council are limited to £100 per week. Furthermore, whilst standby and callout payments are made at Charnwood Borough Council, employees graded at PO1 and above receive time off in lieu rather than a payment.

Recommendation 1 (Medium Risk)

The Standby and Callout policy should be updated to:

- Set the default payment as emergency call out, only where there is a business case should standby payments be permitted,
- The standby and call out payments should be amended and aligned to benchmark figures at comparative authorities,
- The policy should set standards and guidance for the recording and retaining of supporting evidence of rotas and actual callouts.

2.2 Leisure & Culture

The Leisure and Culture service is responsible for five Leisure Centres and seven Community Centres. The level of emergency callouts at these sites is relatively low, 11 in 2012-13. The service does not operate a Standby Duty Officer or Standby Responsive Officer as defined in the policy, as it is deemed the level of emergency callouts do not justify establishing such arrangements.

As an alternative, the service utilises a third party private contractor, Foremost Security Limited, to act as key holders for the various sites during out of hours. Should an alarm system be activated the contractor is responsible for first attendance to establish the nature of the incident. Where an incident requires escalation by the contractor, one of the leisure centre managers is contacted to attend.

The utilisation of a third party key holding service is considered by the Service Manager to represent best value for money. The standard operating costs of the key holding service is £16.00 per month, plus £20.00 for each emergency callout.

No rota is maintained for the callout of leisure centre managers, however, the key holding contractor has been provided with a list of private telephone numbers for all managers of each specific site. Following a callout the attending member of staff completes a standard form which is authorised by the General Manager (or deputy) and forwarded to the payroll team for an emergency callout payment.

An incident log detailing the time of call, nature of incident and time spent on site is not maintained within the service. Due to the extremely low level of incidents resulting in the call out of a member of staff, it is recommended that a centralised log for all sites is maintained by the General Manager or Service Manager to evidence call out payments.

Recommendation 2 (Low Risk)

The Leisure & Culture service instigates a centralised log to record details of emergency call outs including, time of call, nature of incident, time spent on site and resulting action.

2.3 Caretaking

Three caretakers are currently employed on a part time basis to attend the sites at Arnot Hill House, the Civic Centre and Jubilee House. There is a shared responsibility with the PASC team for the gates within the depot area. The senior caretaker is currently employed for 20 hours per week and performs the role of liaison between caretakers to ensure coverage is maintained. The remaining two caretakers are employed for 12.5 hours, completing morning or evening shifts of 2.5 hours per day.

The team operates a standby duty mobile telephone which is available 24/7. The three caretakers form a rota for the Standby Responsive Officer role and attend emergency callouts as required by the monitoring stations for the site alarm systems and emergency services.

During out of hours a caretaker may be called by the alarm system monitoring stations to attend one of the sites to check on the activation of an alarm. The caretaker will attend the premises and either rectify the problem or escalate the incident.

Following an out of hours callout the caretaker reports to the Facilities Manager the details of the incident, including nature of incident and action taken, time called out and duration spent on site. Requests for payment of emergency callouts are completed on a monthly basis by the caretakers using the standard finance department form which is authorised by the Facilities Manager.

The level of emergency callouts is relatively low, 14 during 2012-13. The Caretaking service should adopt the use of a third party key holding service similar to that utilised by the Leisure and Culture service. The use of a key holding service should negate the requirement for standby responsive payments to be made.

Consideration should be given to utilising the existing contract with Foremost Security Limited, to maximise any benefits and cost savings that may accrue from economies of scale.

It should be noted that the total callouts for Leisure and Culture (11) is a similar figure to that for the Caretakers (14). However, the annual costs associated with Leisure and Culture (£627.90) are substantially lower than that for the Caretakers (£8,404.03).

Recommendation 3 (Medium Risk)

The Caretaking service should adopt the use of third party key holding and monitoring services. Consideration should be given to utilising the existing contract arrangements within Leisure & Culture.

2.4 Housing & Localities

The Council transferred its Housing stock (in excess of 3000 properties) in November 2008, to Gedling Homes, an external Housing Association. Post property transfer it was recognised that the majority of out of hours calls involved cases of homelessness.

The statutory requirement for the provision of an out of hours homelessness officer may be a matter of interpretation of the Housing Act 1996 in which provision must be made to assist those in need. The Council recognises that this need may be out of regular office hours and as such provides the facility of Standby Duty Officer.

The duty officer provision within the Housing and Localities service is provided on a rota basis between the Service Manager and the Senior Housing Needs Officer on a week on / week off basis. The Standby Duty Officer payment is apportioned accordingly. An internal department decision was made that staff receiving the Duty Officer payments would not receive further payments for Emergency Callouts or time off in lieu. This is in contrast to that for the Caretaking staff.

The Council operates a Freephone telephone number for members of the public or external organisations (e.g. Police, Social Services, Women's Aid, Street Outreach workers) to contact the Duty Officer in time of need. The Freephone number is redirected to the Duty Officer's mobile telephone.

The Council does not currently record telephone calls or utilise telephone number tracking (caller ID) which may assist the service in tracing persons when no telephone number is left by the caller. The recording of calls may assist in protecting staff in cases of dispute or aggressive behaviour by callers. The utilisation of a recording facility may also assist the Council to monitor the effectiveness of the service.

Duty Officers are at risk from potentially violent or aggressive behaviour from members of the public requiring their assistance and therefore attempt, where possible, to deal with calls without making a site visit. Should the case arise in which the Duty Officer must attend a known violent or aggressive incident, the staff member not currently on standby will assist and claim a one-off emergency callout payment. No such payments were made during 2012-13.

Recommendation 4 (Medium Risk)

A cost benefit analysis should be completed to assess the provision of number tracking and call recording facilities.

Detailed records are kept for callers in which the service has been able to assist in accordance with current legislation (148 cases in four years). Duty Officers receive requests from callers which must be redirected to other agencies or departments or indeed calls for services outside the remit of the Housing and Localities service. These are currently not recorded.

To provide the Council with an understanding of the call level received by nature of call, all calls to the duty officer should be logged detailing date/time of call, nature of call and any subsequent action taken.

Recommendation 5 (Low Risk)

The service logs all calls made to the Standby Duty Officer, not just the cases in which assistance is provided.

The 148 recorded cases of actual assistance provided over a four year period equates to an average of 37 per year. A similar model to that adopted within IT services may be appropriate whereby Emergency Call out payments only provide the best value for money.

By paying only the Emergency Call Out rate would reduce the annual cost of providing the out of hours service from £10,128.30 to £2,217.04 (37x£59.92).

It should be noted that the provision of the out of hours service for the Housing/Homelessness service is currently under review.

Recommendation 6 (Medium Risk)

The current review of the out of hours service arrangements should reflect the proposals outlined above in recommendation 1:

- The default payment should be set as emergency call out,
- Payments should be amended and aligned to benchmark figures at comparative authorities.

2.5 Direct Services (Parks & Street Care)

Direct Services provide the largest and busiest out of hour's service to the general public and external agencies with tasks ranging from street cleansing and sewage, vandalism clearance, flood clearance, road traffic accident clearance to the removal of dead animals from the highways. Although certain tasks are undertaken by Council staff, many tasks are the responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council. The standby roles are undertaken by senior members of the Direct Services team (mainly Parks & Street Care) on a rota drafted by senior management.

The service operates a Standby Duty Officer and a Standby Responsive Officer 24/7. Out of hours calls are routed through the Council's main switchboard and transferred to the Duty Officer's mobile telephone. Call statistics over a prescribed period may indicate if the level of out hours cover is adequate/proportionate to the level of call demand.

Cross reference Recommendation 4 (Medium Risk)

A cost benefit analysis should be completed to assess the provision of number tracking and call recording facilities.

Following the receipt of a call, a decision is made by the Duty Officer as to where the responsibility lies between the Council or Nottinghamshire County Council, and the appropriate level of response required where responsibility rests with the Council.

Where possible, the Duty Officer role is undertaken without attending the incident. Should on-site attendance be required, the Standby Responsive Officer is despatched to appraise the scene of the incident and to assess if external agencies are required and whether Council staff are required on an Emergency Callout basis.

In accordance with the Council's policy, the Responsive Officer role should not include technical or professional decision making, however, it is evident that a Responsive Officer may be required to make such decisions at the scene of an incident and is effectively performing the role of Duty Officer. The service should consider a review of the requirement for two standby roles and the associated costs.

Recommendation 7 (Medium Risk)

The service should review its current arrangements for the provision of an out of hour's service to ensure the service provides maximum value for money.

In exceptional circumstances e.g. flooding, the Responsive Officer may call upon members of the wider Direct Services team to assist with the response. Staff members called upon to assist receive an emergency callout payment. Neither the Duty Officer nor the Responsive Officer are in receipt of emergency call out payments in combination with regular payments for these roles. During 2012-13, 114 payments for emergency callouts were made to staff.

Detailed records are maintained by the service identifying out of hours responses to incidents. All claims for Duty Officer, Responsive Officer and Emergency Callout payments are authorised by the Service Manager, or their deputy, prior to processing by the payroll team.

2.6 IT Services

IT services provide Emergency Callout payments only to staff. There are no Standby Duty Officer or Standby Responsive Officer roles. This is in contrast to the out of hours models adopted within Caretaking and Housing and Localities.

This approach does represent Value for Money and enables an appropriate and effective out of hours service to be maintained. As outlined above, this approach should be established as the default position for the provision of an out of hours service, other than where third party provision is not deemed feasible for reasons of technical specialism.