

Appendix 4 – Helpline Consultation Responses

Question 1: With reference to the 2 key principles shown below please indicate how important these are to you.

Principle 1

Increase the cost of the Helpline Service to reduce the gap between the cost of running the service and the income generated from providing it

Principle 2

Charge for the cost of sensors and equipment provided through the Telecare Service

There were 113 responses concerning principle 1 of which 82% stated that it was the most important factor and 18% stated it was the least important factor.

There were 90 responses concerning principle 2 of which 47% stated that it was the most important factor, 52% stated it was the least important factor and 1% that stated they did not use it.

The responses to the principles above are representative of the fact that not all respondents use the Telecare service although all respondents use the Helpline service.

Question 2: How important is the cost of the Helpline Service to you. Please give reasons for your answer.

There were 118 responses to this question of which 47% stated that it was very important, 30% stated it was important, 13% stated that it was neutral, 6% stated it was not very important and 5% stated it was unimportant. Cost therefore appears to be either important or very important to 77% of all respondents.

This response appears to be representative of the fact that the greatest proportion of Helpline customers are of pension credit age and therefore in receipt of a limited income.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full and grouped by category as appropriate.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

Personal Circumstances of Respondent

I am unable to walk unaided. I have had the alarm for five years but not had to use it. However, it is important now to keep safe.

It is a service that I need and accept it has to go up slightly.

I am still fairly mobile but can see myself needing further help in the future.

I live alone with no close family.

I have osteoporosis; my back is weak and my walking very slow.

I am very unsteady on my feet and live on my own. I find it comforting to think I have help available if I fall.

Would find it difficult to bathe.

I have a great need for the service.

I need my pendant in case I fall.

I have had four serious falls recently.

I live alone and at times it is difficult to get out.

I live alone.

I use a wheelchair and am housebound and both my husband and I are aged 90+ so are glad to have use of pendant in case of emergency.

I live alone and am 90 years old.

I have many falls but if one is serious I can ring helpline.

I live alone.

Affects vulnerable adults.

Regardless of cost, this is a valuable service to those who are the most vulnerable.

My mother is bed bound and carers only come 4 times per day. As she is blind and partially deaf, the helpline is the only way for her to get help.

My father suffers from kidney failure and could experience a fall. Without the Helpline service, he could be on the ground / floor for the best part of the day.

Helpline is very important to a frail ill person. I live alone and it is satisfying to know there is some help available.

I am 84 and live alone. The Helpline alarm can alert a neighbour if necessary.

I live alone.

Customer and Family Reassurance
Vital service.

Direct contact.

I am 92 and live on my own and feel that whilst I have not needed to use the service it is there if I need it.

I am 92 and have no relatives.

It is a vital service that enables me to live independently and is a reassurance for my family.

The Helpline is very important to us.

Gives me confidence around the home.

I have worn the pendant for almost three years since returning home from hospital treatment. Just knowing that help is available in any event is reassuring.

If there is a problem, contact for help will be made available straight away. It is a lifeline for those in need. The fire alarm is also beneficial to all concerned.

There is always someone to help in an emergency as I live alone.

It gives a sense of security knowing that help would be available in an emergency or accident like a fall.

When my wife goes to the shops I have Helpline on so that she is not worried about leaving me.

I am an 81 year old living alone. Therefore the service to me is essential.

I live alone and am 93 years old. Therefore I find the Helpline Service useful in an emergency.

In my 90th year and living alone with some difficulty moving, I feel safe knowing the Helpline is there.

To get help as quickly as possible.

Peace of mind for family - increase would be difficult.

Living alone, the helpline is a safety valve in case of a fall or accident.

It gives confidence when I am left alone.

My mother is 94 and needs to know that the helpline is there when she is alone.

As I live alone, the Helpline Service is invaluable and if the cost increases, I would save elsewhere. The service is comforting to my children and me.

It gives myself and my family peace of mind, wearing it 24/7.

I have the Helpline as security as I live on my own. If it has to increase slightly, then that is ok.

It provides peace of mind in the knowledge that help is available.

Just knowing it is there is a comfort.

To know you can get help if you fall or are in any other difficulty.

My Helpline gives me a greater sense of security as my balance is somewhat fragile.

It gives me a sense of security.

If I had a fall, I rely on Helpline.

I know help is available should I trip and be unable to get up.

Miscellaneous

There was a problem with my account as the payment was not received although I have now had an apology letter.

I am being treated at the Royal Free Hospital and went for 6 weeks, 5 days a week by minicab costing me £60 per day.

These questions are badly composed.

It is a strange question to ask how important the cost is to me. I am replying on the basis of how important the service is to me and my family.

Why ask the questions when we are vulnerable people.

I am not assured of the ability to provide best or immediate care due to circumstances in my block or personally.

All I expect when trying to connect by telephone to a department is not to have to give up.

Wording is horrible - by how important do you mean if it cost more, would that stop me using it or - the service itself is important to me?

It has not been used for over three years. We have told Social Services to remove it as it is not needed considering current circumstances.

I have had the Helpline pendant since 2004 and have been paying for the service but not used it yet.

Financial

There should be no increase for persons of pensionable age on minimum pensions or income below £11,000 per annum.

The Telecare Service is an invaluable service provided for vulnerable residents. It provides families with a level of reassurance that they will be contacted should an emergency arise and that the emergency services will be contacted as well should it be deemed necessary. I consider this an essential part of enabling a vulnerable person to maintain a certain degree of independence. Unfortunately, with the continuous cut in public funding, there seems little choice but to charge a reasonable fee for this valuable service.

With increasing costs for everything, those on low income find any increase in essential services distressing and often discontinue these if they feel they cannot afford these. There will be more hospital admissions if the usage of Helpline decreased due to increased cost.

I have no idea of the costs of this service so find it difficult to comment.

Finances are limited - I realise that the fee is considerably lower than several of the other private services.

It should be as cheap as possible.

Harrow Helpline cost needs to remain competitive.

I live alone and am registered disabled. I need the service but a regular outgoing for me is a financial problem.

The cost of the Helpline is important but I would not like to be without the service. It obviously could be a life saver.

The cost is not really considered by me at present but I would hope that there would be help for others who are assisted with benefit help financially.

The service provided is very important to our household and so the cost seems to be well worth it. The income of individual households vary enormously so to some it will be very important.

I could manage to pay a little more each week.

I think I pay enough already.

Within reason, the cost should be seen as worth having.

Keeping a watch on prices.

Good value for money.

Current price is reasonable but as I am on a fixed income, any increase is to be avoided.

It is a genuine lifeline enabling my mother to live independently. Increasing its cost will lead to choices that may put my mother and will put others at great risk.

I use Helpline very seldom and it is quite expensive but it is essential that it is available.

As a pensioner on a limited pension, every penny counts.

Not knowing what is involved make it difficult to comment but it seems a lot of money to someone desperate for such help and yet in poor circumstances.

How to be charged, reasonable monthly charges.

Do not want it to be too costly but I appreciate the service and the peace of mind I get through having it.

I could afford to pay more but I am concerned for people who would find it difficult.

Why do you need to make a profit out of services to the disabled and vulnerable?

Because I am on a fixed income

Most people using the helpline are elderly and many will not be able to afford a large increase in the cost.

Very limited finances.

To keep the increases as low as possible for clients.

The service is a necessity so cost must be determined by its value to the recipient.

As a pensioner price is very important to me.

The cost of this very supportive service to me as a vulnerable person is very important. Providing this cost remains within my means, I would be happy to contribute to its survival.

I feel that Helpline should pay its way. I realise that for some it is yet another charge to be paid from limited resources yet others can well afford an extra £0.58 per week for the security it gives.

So long as the cost is not astronomical it is well worth paying a reasonable sum.

Money spent on safety is very important to me.

As long as the charges do not increase every year.

Within reason the cost of the Helpline is irrelevant compared to the efficiency and usefulness of the service.

If it was too expensive, might not be able to use it.

I need the Helpline service but money does not grow on trees.

If it is very expensive we might not be able to afford it we are happy to pay the current price or a small increase.

Cannot really answer until it is known what the increase would be.

The service is of great help to the elderly and their families. If the service will remain unchanged with the increase of 58 pence per week, I support the greater increase.

If the cost escalates too much, I will have to cease using the service.

Dependent upon my son's family and my son is now over 60.

My personal pension is under pressure due to having a full time carer.

Question 3: Do you think the Helpline Service should increase by £0.48 per week or £0.58 per week. Please give reasons for your answer.

There were 120 responses to this question of which 47.5% indicated that they thought that the increase should be £0.48 per week and 47.5% indicated that they thought that the increase should be £0.58 per week. There were 5% who indicated a preference of neither of the two options although this was not an option given.

As both price increase options had an equal response in their favour and with due regards to comments received, it is proposed that the £0.58 per week increase be recommended on the grounds that it will contribute further towards closing the gap between income and expenditure of the service.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

Comments Indicating No Price Increase Preferred

I do not support a price increase.

No point paying extra for a service I have not used.

Do not want it to go up at all but the 10p difference between the two options is insignificant.

If the cost escalates too much, I will have to cease using the service.

No increase we pay enough in Council Tax.

People cannot afford these price increases.

I can't answer either when I do not want to pay either.

No increase and no inflation.

General Pricing Increase Comments

10pence extra per week would not cause hardship and it is vital to keep the service running efficiently.

As a senior citizen, every penny helps when we are on fixed income but if it keeps Helpline going it will help us who need it.

Just to be sure we can keep the service operating.

No increase is wanted but uplift is inevitable so the minimum is acceptable.

At present I am able to afford the higher increase but would have to reconsider if it were more than 58p per week.

I think it is important to narrow the gap as much as possible and there is not much difference between the two options. I would be happy to pay a little more.

Think the service is worth it.

Most pensioners who use these services are cost conscious.

The service is satisfactory as it is. If the 58p increase means the Helpline stays unchanged, I will support the increase.

48p seems reasonable.

If it means charging extra to keep the service going, so be it.

The lower price increase means funding would have to be found from elsewhere in the Helpline service budget to cover the gap between the revenue and expenditure. In my opinion, this whole service is essential for the vulnerable residents so I do not see any reason to jeopardise any of it. It seems sensible to let the income from the Helpline service pay for itself.

Extra cost will affect budget.

With only 10p difference, why not alter it now rather than in another two years' time.

To keep increase as low as possible for clients.

Inflation, 10p or so is irrelevant.

I think that this is a sufficient increase.

Minimum increase will disadvantage fewer people.

Small increase to safeguard the service.

Prices to increase slowly to allow adjustment for users.

If it has to go up - lower amount more affordable.

Cannot see very well.

I think this is an essential service manned 24/7.

Cover costs.

Uplift in cost of living.

I appreciate having the service.

Must have.

I would like a box in my bedroom as well as my living room.

If some people pay nothing for Telecare, it seems unfair to make the extra cost burden fall on people who use the Helpline.

Services cost money but as insurance - it is cheap.

Although I do not use the Telecare service, the helpline is very useful.

To reduce taking money from elsewhere.

To cover the rise in cost of living. It is difficult for pensioners.

Figures are so minimal I do not understand the reason for the work and cost of the exercise to you.

To ensure viability.

This will make a difference of about £6 per quarter from my mother's pension.

My grand-daughter pays for me so I want it to be as cheap as possible.

Better to have a decent increase now than an additional one later. Not much difference between amounts anyway.

I would prefer other Helpline budgets to be maintained.

If it were to be increased, the lower figure would be my choice.

This is for affordability by an age group with little chance of increasing their income

Increasing the cost by a larger amount now should mean that a further increase will be delayed.

I understand about cost but please keep it low.

To ensure that I keep the service.

The difference of 10p per week and over a quarter amounts to £1.30 extra all should be able to pay that.

It is a reasonable price to pay for all the work involved in keeping the service going.

It does not seem a lot more to pay if I can still have the Helpline.

We all need to save money where we can.

Reasonable increase.

We would like to see the current service maintained .

No one wants to incur more expense than necessary.

Not much choice. I think it is expensive as it is.

I do not wish to take things from other services.

Out of pension it is enough.

To allow for best services and investment.

Helpline is very good.

If this helps to keep this important service going.

Obviously I would prefer to pay less.

I support the higher rate if it means the service continues.

Important to keep the costs down.

Money wise, help is available if needed so we should all be able to afford another 58p per week.

Less service increase and equipment charges.

People cannot afford the equipment and giving a bit weekly helps know the service is there and people are around to help.

58 pence extra is good.

Obviously we would choose the lower amount.

I hope this cover would be used for an extension.

Need to be realistic.

Cost should be kept low to enable independent living.

As the price has not increased over the past 5 years, it is not unreasonable to change the cost by 58p. It does not seem fair to take the additional money from other Helpline budgets causing problems to other people.

Sharing the costs between all service users.

Helpline is important so either amount would be acceptable.

I think that it is only the telephone service but as I am a new customer, I am not sure

As a pensioner who has to have the service, the least I have to pay is my wish.

I hardly have to use it but it is essential insurance.

As I am a pensioner, the lower price is more attractive.

I am not on a large income but feel this service needs all the backup it requires.

If money is not a problem, hardly a lot, depends on circumstances.

This is a good service and makes me feel safe.

Think that is a fair increase.

The smaller increase is reasonable but not the larger.

10 pence per week is not a lot of money to most people.

Limited finances.

I assume users who have a very low income pay a reduced quarterly bill and so feel all users should pay a little towards the increased cost of the service which should not be loaded onto non-users of the service .

As a pensioner on a limited pension, every penny counts.

Helpline is very important to a frail ill person.

If you need the increase, then it is reasonable to suggest you should have it.

I am 87 years old and life is expensive.

It is costly for me especially as many older users have this service free.

Assuming the cost quoted is not to make a profit, but simply to cover running expenses, the difference between 48 and 58 pence is ludicrous.

Any cost is very difficult to sustain for self financing on a limited income.

I am a pensioner and because of my lack of mobility have a lot to pay out for help.

Have not answered this as reality surely is everyone will select the lower amount but if a 58p increase means the service continuing, then would tick that box.

It is a small amount for peace of mind.

Unfortunately, prices are generally going up and it is important to keep a good service.

I have no idea of the costs to have opted for the lower price.

Question 4: How important is the cost of the Telecare Service to you? Please give reasons for your answer.

There were 95 responses to this question of which 29% stated that it was very important, 25% stated it was important, 23% stated that it was neutral, 8% stated it was not very important and 14% stated it was unimportant.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

General Comments

Being old and living on savings plus pension money it is very important that this is allocated very carefully.

To keep our outgoings as low as possible.

Inflation, 10p or so is irrelevant.

As a pensioner, price is very important to me.

No point paying extra for a service I have not used.

I feel safe with someone on the other end of the line.

I do not use it to its full capacity.

Most pensioners who use these services are cost conscious.

It is very important for those who need Telecare help.

I do not use it.

It is unfair to provide this free and take money for Helpline.

As long as increases are kept to a reasonable amount.

For a vulnerable adult, this can make a difference to living independently and I agree with a small contribution towards the cost.

We are told the lower price increase means funding would have to be found from elsewhere in the Helpline service budget to cover the gap between the revenue and expenditure. In my opinion, this whole service is essential for vulnerable residents so I do not see any reason to jeopardise any of it. It seems sensible to let the income from the Helpline service pay for itself.

If charges are introduced for Telecare, people on low income should be exempt and others should be charged based on their ability to pay through financial assessment. Again, charges might dissuade people from using Telecare consequently increasing accidents, etc and hospital admissions.

Already pay for carers and other medical equipment and facilities not provided by the NHS.

To feel safe if an accident occurs in the home.

Service is very important to me and I want to be able to continue to have the reassurance it gives me.

I have a great need for its availability.

Anyone on a pension has to have regard to ongoing expenses even for good causes like this.

I could not do without Telecare.

It needs to be affordable.

I live alone with no close family.

Emergency reliance for help when needed.

I can afford the cost.

My husband's mobility is very poor and it is reassuring on the rare occasions I have to leave him to know he can make contact with helpers.

I have not used it yet.

Limited income.

We are obviously vulnerable people so the questions are superfluous.

Knowing the service is always available when I use it.

Peace of mind.

Less service increase and equipment charges.

Highly valuable. I am blind and my father is elderly. I have used the button for assistance and you monitor the smoke alarm and fall detectors.

When you live on a pension and have little savings, outgoings have to be monitored.

Obviously we would choose the lower amount.

I have neighbours and children available if phoned.

My mother and family will pay because we value her independence but I am concerned about those of limited means and their consequent choices.

Vulnerable groups of service users.

It is an insurance.

As a pensioner who has to have the service, the least I have to pay is my wish.

I have no computer.

We will ask for the service to be removed.

The smoke alarm gives warning of fire.

I am disabled and vulnerable. Councils should not profit out of disability and suffering.

I can afford the cost.

If in the event I should fall, it is reasonable to understand that I am happy to have it.

As a pensioner, the cost is a large part.

Fortunately, I have not had to use it for a long period of time.

Peace of mind to me and others as I live alone.

I am a 91 year old living alone with the support of one son who lives locally.

Direct contact.

It is a small amount for peace of mind.

Vital link.

I am alone.

Do not currently use the Telecare Service

Automatic sensors are not required at this time

Do not have this at the moment.

I do not use Telecare.

I do not use this service at present.

I do not use this service at present.

Do not need at the moment so less important than helpline but if I were to need it, it would be very important.

At present I do not use it.

Not a recipient of the service.

I do not have a Telecare service.

Until receiving this consultation paper I had never heard of Telecare.

Do not have Telecare.

I have no knowledge of this service.

I do not need sensors yet.

At present I do not use it.

I do not know what this service is so cannot comment on it.

I did not know it existed.

Never been told about this service.

Do not use any of them at the moment.

No experience of the Telecare Service.

Do not have them.

I have not needed to use this service.

I have no knowledge of this.

I do not use it.

Question 5: Please add any additional comments to support your responses to questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 on our proposed changes or any alternative options you would like us to consider and your reasons.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below together with a commentary where appropriate. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

Respondent Comment

Certain age groups were given Careline free of charge. Perhaps they should contribute to the costs.

Council Commentary

There are approximately 1,680 Harrow Helpline customers that currently do not pay towards the Helpline service. This is either due to the fact that the service is provided by the Council under the terms of a “reablement” package for which support is provided free of charge for up to six weeks or because of a pre-existing contract arrangement with the Council. All other Helpline customers and those that continue to receive the service beyond the six week “reablement” period pay for the Helpline Service.

Respondent Comment

I feel it is necessary for new people to contribute as I heard from friends that over the last two years or so they have not had to pay anything

Council Commentary

There are approximately 1,680 Harrow Helpline customers that currently do not pay towards the Helpline service. This is either due to the fact that the service is provided by the Council under the terms of a “reablement” package for which support is provided free of charge for up to six weeks or because of a pre-existing contract arrangement with the Council. All other Helpline customers and those that continue to receive the service beyond the six week “reablement” period pay for the Helpline Service.

Respondent Comment

You should make charges to those who receive it free at the moment then perhaps you would not have to use an increase from me to pay for them

Council Commentary

There are approximately 1,680 Harrow Helpline customers that currently do not pay towards the Helpline service. This is either due to the fact that the service is provided by the Council under the terms of a “reablement” package for which support is provided free of charge for up to six weeks or because of a pre-existing contract arrangement with the Council. All other Helpline customers and those that continue to receive the service beyond the six week “reablement” period pay for the Helpline Service.

Respondent Comment

The cost is not really considered by me at present but I would hope that there would be help for others who are assisted with benefit help financially.

Council Commentary

There are approximately 1,680 Harrow Helpline customers that currently do not pay towards the Helpline service. This is either due to the fact that the service is provided by the Council under the terms of a “reablement” package for which support is provided free of charge for up to six weeks or because of a pre-existing contract arrangement with the Council. All other Helpline customers and those that continue to receive the service beyond the six week “reablement” period pay for the Helpline Service. Financial assistance is available more generally to customers on low income for help with their rent and Council Tax through the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support scheme. Additionally, emergency relief funding may be available in certain circumstances for meeting essential needs in an emergency.

Respondent Comment

All of this is about your keenness to increase the price of the service.

Council Commentary

Harrow Council has consulted on two options for price increases and a proposed charge to be introduced for Telecare equipment. The price of the service has not been subject to review for a number of years and during that time, the cost of the service has increased whilst the price for receiving it has remained unchanged. The options proposed are intended to close the gap between the cost of the Helpline service and the income received from providing it.

Respondent Comment

The Helpline should be fully funded by subscription services.

Council Commentary

The Helpline is not currently fully funded by subscription services and to do so, would substantially increase the level of current charges. The price increase options are intended to close the gap between the cost of the service and the income received from providing it and are a part of a range of activities being progressed to reduce the cost of the service whilst increasing levels of income.

Respondent Comment

A friend used your service last year and whilst the phone was answered quickly, it was more than an hour before anyone came. I worry about this as I am less mobile and my neighbours are elderly themselves.

Council Commentary

The Council is unable to comment on response times for services that are outside of its control. However, it will always seek to ensure that the emergency services are contacted promptly in response to a Helpline alarm activation where this is appropriate and let any family or friends know of the situation.

Respondent Comment

For lonely people, it would be nice if the Telecare Service could contact us to ascertain our wellbeing.

Council Commentary

Harrow Council is unable to contact Helpline and Telecare customers on a general basis as it does not have the capacity and resources available to do this and it would prevent emergency calls from accessing the Helpline personnel. However, tests are carried out by contacting customers periodically to ensure that customer alarms are working and fully operational.

Respondent Comment

It would be better if you demonstrated the costs to us so that we could see where the shortfall is and why.

Council Commentary

The current costs of the service and the income received for it are shown within the financial implications of the report to Cabinet.

Respondent Comment

It would be very expensive if someone needed several of the Telecare items. Would a person pay a monthly charge until the full cost was reached?

Council Commentary

The Council would permit a customer to pay for the cost of Telecare equipment over an agreed period of time to prevent financial hardship if the recommendations were to be agreed.

Respondent Comment

I am unable to see the necessity of this consultation. Does it not cost money best spent on these services.

Council Commentary

The Council has undertaken consultation concerning options considered in order to take account of the views and comments of customers prior to making any recommendations. Whilst this does incur a cost in terms of postage and stationery,

the findings are given due regard in terms of any subsequent recommendations proposed.

Respondent Comment

When the services are needed, the cost is important. Rather than a flat rate, it should be means based, less income, less cost.

Council Commentary

The cost of administering a means tested Helpline Service would be expensive in terms of administration and difficult to achieve without changing the software functionality used for providing the service. Additionally, monitoring changes in customer income and circumstances would require additional capacity and resource that would be better served responding to customer alarm activations and providing the core Helpline service. For these reasons, it is proposed that this option is not progressed.

Respondent Comment

Though this is an essential service, I believe that some vulnerable adults would put themselves at risk as they would not be able to afford the full cost of the Telecare equipment

Council Commentary

If this consultation option were to be agreed, the Council would seek to enter into a payment scheme with the customer that spread the cost of any equipment required over a period of time that prevented financial hardship.

Respondent Comment

People like me living on state pension need as much financial help as possible.

Council Commentary

The Council has undertaken consultation on two price increase options on the basis that it has not reviewed existing prices for a number of years and costs of providing the services over that time have increased. The Council is mindful of the fact that a significant proportion of the customers of the service have limited incomes and other expenses to pay.

Respondent Comment

Please remember the people using the equipment do not work and live on small budgets and low income.

Council Commentary

The Council has undertaken consultation on two price increase options on the basis that it has not reviewed existing prices for a number of years and costs of providing the services over that time have increased. The Council is mindful of the fact that a significant proportion of the customers of the service have limited incomes and other expenses to pay.

General Comments

Thank you for your help.

I need to keep the service as it is a life saver for me.

I will be surprised if many people using your services will be able to choose the higher amount to be charged.

Having had it for the past five years, I have not had to use it.

I appreciate having the service.

Vulnerable people living on their own should not be subjected to this questionnaire.

I think a small rise is reasonable as it is an essential service.

I am grateful for your service Helpline. I live on my own.

Your service gives me peace of mind to know that my neighbours could help.

I have sent a copy of this questionnaire to the Daily Mail.

I would personally be prepared to accept a 10% increase to retain this service but appreciate this is not the case for everyone.

One to one service.

I have experienced a few ambulance call outs for hospital admission and cannot speak highly enough of the paramedics I have met.

No point paying extra for a service I have not used.

It is a good service provided and all people on the other end of the line are very helpful.

Any service helping the disabled and elderly is vital.

I am not qualified and do not have enough facts to offer alternative options but think that my answers cover how I feel any changes will affect me.

The Helpline is an excellent service that we are happy to pay for. It means I am safe in my own home.

If you need more money, charging should be fair to everyone.

I think that the Council should give as much help to vulnerable elderly people as is possible and not make financial cuts to those services.

If prices have to go up, so be it.

Question 6: Please comment if you feel that our proposed changes will affect particular individuals or groups more than others and if so, how you think we may address these.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below together with a commentary where appropriate. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

Respondent Comment

The increases are rather small and so should not affect many and those in need can get financial help.

Council Commentary

If a customer experienced financial difficulty in making payment for the Helpline service, alternative payment arrangements would be considered. Alternative means of assistance with other financial commitments may be obtained from Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support in relation to rent and Council Tax and via the emergency relief fund for immediate emergency needs.

Respondent Comment

Certain age groups were given Careline free of charge. Should they contribute to the cost?

Council Commentary

There are currently approximately 1,680 customers that do not pay for the Helpline service either under the terms of a "reablement" package where they receive support from the Council for up to six weeks or due to pre-existing contracts. If any changes to existing exemptions were to be considered, these would need to be subject to prior consultation and contract changes would need to be agreed for each customer concerned.

Limited Income – Respondent Comments

Some of us have limited income so increase is worrying but cheaper in the long run.

People on a low income should have help to obtain service.

It will affect low income recipients.

The price increases will affect people on lower incomes.

Any increase in price will affect low income households. Perhaps people on benefits could be excluded from the increase.

Families on low income and in need of this service would be adversely affected by the charges so perhaps it should be means tested.

Those on low incomes may require help with costs.

Low income groups will not be able to pay the higher charges.

People with a low income would probably be affected by this.

I understand this is all means tested so that less fortunate people can still benefit. If not, please make it so.

My mother and family will pay because we value her independence but I am concerned about those of limited means and their consequent choices.

The proposed changes might affect those on a very low income and the very aged. People on low incomes should be able to have this sort of assistance through Benefits.

Pensions are already very low - this combined with other council costs that are going up is very hard.

Any cost is very difficult to sustain for self-financing on a limited income.

Those on low incomes could be affected and not use the services.

Could a means test be used?

When the services are needed, the cost is important. Rather than a flat rate, it should be means based, less income, less cost.

Your proposals will undoubtedly affect poorer people more but how much can be subsidised.

Additional cost might affect some groups or individuals and some investigation may be necessary.

I am sure that people on Benefits already get this service free - would hope this would continue for those qualifying.

No doubt there are some people who could not afford the increase. I assume that special arrangements could be made for these.

People like me living on state pension need as much financial help as possible.

People living alone in receipt of state pension and who have not been able to save.

We could not afford both Telecare and Helpline charges. Please consider all options.

Transport is expensive if not housebound and pensions increase very little.

Limited Income – Council Commentary

The cost of conducting a means test or similar for the Helpline Service would be expensive in terms of administration and difficult to achieve without changing the software functionality used for providing the service. Levels of income and expenditure and its treatment would need to be determined and agreed and may vary throughout the year and lifetime of the service. Consideration would also need to be given to uprating the figures used each year to represent economic factors such as inflation. Additionally, monitoring changes in customer income and circumstances to ensure that their liability for charges represented their income and circumstances would require additional capacity and resource that could be better served responding to customer alarm activations and providing the core Helpline service. As the majority of the Helpline customers are of pension credit age and / or disabled, it is considered highly probable that they will have a limited income from which they will also have to meet other health requirements that they have. The cost of providing a full or partial exemption for such a significant proportion of the caseload would require the loss of income to be met either from other non-exempt customers or via the General Fund. For these reasons, it is proposed that this option is not progressed.

Younger People – Respondent Comment

Younger people especially disabled or blind people who are reliant on the service.

Younger People – Council Commentary

This option would require the definition of “younger people” to be determined and would require potentially greater administrative time in processing and invoicing arrangements especially when the customer’s age exceeded the relevant age threshold to qualify. As the service has no customers aged under 25, this proposed option would appear to offer a limited benefit. Additionally, any customers to which a full or partial exemption applied, would require the reduced income to be offset either by increasing charges for other customers or via the General Fund. For the above reasons, this option has not been progressed.

Vulnerable People – Respondent Comment

The changes will cause vulnerable people a great deal of stress making their situation even more difficult. Please do all you can to help them in these circumstances.

Vulnerable People – Council Commentary

As all Helpline customers are potentially vulnerable, any reduction or exemption by definition would be applicable to all customers. This would need to be financed via the General Fund in full. For this reason, this option has not be recommended for progression.

Older adults – Respondent Comment

Older adults are likely to be the most vulnerable and benefit from the Helpline and Telecare equipment. This group may also be the most isolated and as such most in need of the detective equipment.

Increase in charges to the elderly are hard to be borne because failing health is expensive.

Older Adults – Council Commentary

The majority of Council Helpline customers are of pension credit age. Helpline prices have not been reviewed for a number of years during which costs have increased. The price increase options consulted on are intended to reduce the gap between income and expenditure and maintain value for money for the wider Council Tax Payer. An exemption from payment of the service formerly existed for persons aged 75 and over but subsequently ceased for new applicants on cost grounds. Any full or partial exemption from the charges would need to be offset either by increasing charges for other Helpline customers or by funding it via the General Fund. For these reasons, it is not proposed that this option be progressed further.

Respondent Comment

Helpline and Telecare services should be made available to all those who need them irrespective of income.

Council Commentary

Helpline and Telecare Services are currently available to eligible persons irrespective of their income. This provision is not subject to change under the recommendations set out within the main report on this matter.

Respondent Comment

Home care services for disabled are a financial strain and no one wants to add to the burden.

Council Commentary

The existing charges for the Harrow Helpline do not differentiate between customers by groups. The Helpline equipment and resourcing provided are similar for all customers with the only potential difference being in terms of any Telecare equipment requirements. The current charges for the Helpline service have not been reviewed for a number of years during which service costs have increased. The price increase options that were subject to consultation were intended to close the gap between income and expenditure and therefore ensure that value for money for the wider Council Tax Payer is maintained. As the majority of Helpline customers based upon the consultation responses are disabled, any exemption or partial exemption to the current Helpline charges would need to be met either by increasing the charges to other Helpline customers or via the General Fund. For these reasons, it is not proposed that a reduced or no charge be applied for disabled customers.

Respondent Comment

Customers that have regular visits to the hospital and their Doctor.

Council Commentary

This option would be administratively difficult to achieve as the definition of “regular visits” would need to be determined and would need to consider mandatory and voluntary visits. The respondent comment may have been submitted in the context of persons with a low or limited income which has been considered in an earlier comment.

Respondent Comment

The service is fine as it is.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Health and Age Respondent Comment

There are so many different appeals, health, age, many difficulties.

Health and Age – Council Commentary

A significant proportion of Helpline customers experience health issues affecting their mobility, vision, hearing, etc based upon the consultation responses. Additionally, the greater proportion of these customers are of pension credit age. Helpline prices have not been reviewed for a number of years during which costs have increased. The price increase options consulted on are intended to reduce the gap between income and expenditure and maintain value for money for the wider Council Tax Payer. An exemption from payment of the service formerly existed for persons aged 75 and over but subsequently ceased for new applicants on cost grounds. Any full or partial exemption from the charges would need to be offset either by increasing charges for other Helpline customers or by funding it via the

General Fund or savings in other areas. For these reasons, it is not proposed that this option be progressed further.

Respondent Comment

People with Helpline are the most vulnerable.

Council Commentary

As all Helpline customers are vulnerable within the above comment, any reduction or exemption by definition would be applicable to all customers. This would need to be financed via the General Fund in full. For this reason, this option has not been recommended for progression.

Respondent Comment

What is the alternative to this service being cut? It will only place pressure on other existing services already under threat of cuts.

Council Commentary

The consultation documentation issued to customers indicated that it was currently proposed that the services continue.

Miscellaneous Respondent Comments

My main concern is myself.

There is no point paying extra for a service I have not used.

This question is beyond my comprehension and I am unable to answer it.

I do not understand what groups are involved.

I do not know.

Why ask for my comment. I am not an expert.

Any increases affect most people.

I am sure it will affect some individuals or groups more than others and some may consider discontinuing the service.

It is a very needy service as far as I am concerned. I could not do without it.

It is a trivial amount to increase.

Can appreciate the Council's problems but this can be a desperate need to which thoughtful answers must be applied.

Principle 1 should only be increased by no more than 30 pence per week.

I have sent a copy of this questionnaire to the Daily Mail.

Council Commentary to Miscellaneous Respondent Comments

As the above comments do not appear to refer to particular groups that may be affected by the proposals more than others and how they may be addressed, no further comment has been made regarding these.

Question 7: Please provide any other additional comments you wish to make concerning the proposals.

Free text responses to this consultation question are set out below together with a commentary where appropriate. In some cases, the response may be summarised rather than repeated in full.

There were a range of responses given to this question with some respondents giving no response and others a range of responses. Consequently, the number of options does not equate to the total number of consultation responses received.

Respondent Comment

I feel you are correct in keeping up to date.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I do not want to have to worry about very high increase. The service is excellent, reassuring and it is there.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

So many different appeals, health, age, many difficulties.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I will leave any proposals as to improvement in the Care Service to those in the know about such things.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I am sure that extra revenue is needed by the service as the cost in all organisations is rising and I am sure we all recognise that. I value the Helpline very much.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I had a fall earlier this year and although the ambulance took three hours to arrive, the care I received was excellent. As I live alone the reassurance was very welcome.

Council Commentary

The Council is unable to comment on the response time for services outside of its control. However, it will always seek to contact the relevant emergency service promptly where an alarm activation call is received and inform relatives of the situation. Any concerns regarding response times for specific services should be taken up with the relevant organisation.

Respondent Comment

All costs undoubtedly affect me. However you cannot take it with you and it is very important that I am looked after generally to a reasonable standard even if it means deliberately having to go without something else.

Council Commentary

The Council has not reviewed the price of the Helpline service for approximately five years and the costs of providing the service over that time have increased. The service is not self-funded and the gap between the cost and income for the service needs to be reduced due to the financial pressures that the Council faces. The Council is mindful of the fact that its Helpline customers are likely to have a limited income but also needs to balance the cost of the service with a price that offers value for money for the wider Council Tax Payer.

Respondent Comment

This questionnaire is not the easiest form to fill in but I have filled it in as best I can.

Council Commentary

The format of the questionnaire will be reviewed with due regard to comments received and results obtained to make it easier for completion in any subsequent consultation undertaken.

Respondent Comment

I think Helpline is very good and gives confidence to one's relatives when they go out.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I understand and believe that costs should be realistic. Many could afford to pay the full price but have to take into account other arrangements available.

Council Commentary

The pricing options proposed take into consideration the fact that the Helpline price has remained unchanged for a few years despite operational costs increasing. Additionally, the cost of purchasing Telecare equipment which was formerly subsidised by a grant continues to be offered free of charge. The options proposed are intended to apply a reasonable balance in relation to the above whilst continuing to offer value for money to the wider Council Tax Payer.

Respondent Comment

Having used Helpline for 6 years and whilst I am disabled, my wife would not be without it.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I am not sure how often I am going to use helpline but whenever I needed it, they were helpful and prompt.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

It is not a free service, I pay.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I understand Hillingdon Council provide the service for free. Perhaps discussion could be had with them to find out how they manage.

Council Commentary

Hillingdon Council offers its TeleCareLine service free of charge for residents aged 80 and over, residents currently receiving Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support and for up to six weeks, as part of a reablement package.

The service is chargeable to other residents dependent upon the service level required. There are four levels of service available as set out below with the weekly cost varying from £1.13 to £12.00.

Level 1 – This is the standard service comprising a lifeline unit and pendant, smoke detector and bogus caller alarm, the resident must have 2 named responders who hold a key and agree to respond to an emergency any time (£1.13 per week).

Level 2 – In addition to Level 1 support, this includes access to a mobile response service for those residents who do not have named responders (£5.00 per week).

Level 3 – In addition to the Level 1 service, the resident has access to a range of additional detectors and/or sensors appropriate to their assessed need (£8.50 per week).

Level 4 – This level of service includes access to the full range of TeleCareLine sensors and detectors to address needs, including safer wandering equipment and also the Mobile Response Service (£12.00 per week).

Harrow Council offers its Helpline Service free of charge for up to six weeks as part of a reablement package. There are currently 1,684 residents that receive the Harrow Helpline Service free of charge either under the terms of a “reablement” package for up to six weeks or under pre-existing contracts. Other Harrow Helpline customers pay for the service.

Annual Helpline costs that cannot be fully financed by income received for providing the service are funded through the General Fund. Consequently, any reductions in income that could occur through exemptions would need to be financed either by a greater call on the General Fund or by increasing charges made to other Helpline customers.

Respondent Comment

I understand the financial costs involved with these services but there must be other ways of making economies.

Council Commentary

The consultation proposed two options regarding a potential price increase and an option to charge for Telecare equipment and sensors. Concurrently with the consultation proposals, the Helpline service is seeking to achieve a cost reduction of £100K from its base revenue operating costs in 2015/16.

Respondent Comment

I appreciate having the service.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I do not have a TV so have no licence. Perhaps my £145 for this could be used for the Helpline Service?

Council Commentary

As this comment relates to services outside of the Council's control, no Council comment is provided.

Respondent Comment

If this service is withdrawn, I may become a burden on the NHS. This is a false economy.

Council Commentary

The consultation documentation issued to customers indicated that consideration had been given to whether to cease providing the existing Helpline and Telecare Services or continue to provide the services but with pricing changes. They were also advised that it was currently proposed that the services continue.

Respondent Comment

If this service has to end, it would leave many people vulnerable.

Council Commentary

The consultation documentation issued to customers indicated that consideration had been given to whether to cease providing the existing Helpline and Telecare Services or continue to provide the services but with pricing changes. They were also advised that it was currently proposed that the services continue.

Respondent Comment

Helpline service staff are prompt and very caring and helpful. It is an important lifeline for me and very reassuring. It is vital it continues.

Council Commentary

The consultation documentation issued to customers indicated that consideration had been given to whether to cease providing the existing Helpline and Telecare Services or continue to provide the services but with pricing changes. They were also advised that it was currently proposed that the services continue.

Respondent Comment

Whenever we have spoken with the operators, they are so helpful and efficient so please let it continue.

Council Commentary

The consultation documentation issued to customers indicated that consideration had been given to whether to cease providing the existing Helpline and Telecare Services or continue to provide the services but with pricing changes. They were also advised that it was currently proposed that the services continue.

Respondent Comment

The service is important to me but it is worth pointing out that the cost needs to be kept down. You need more language support as when my mum really needed help last year, no-one was there to help her and respond in Gujarati, improve response times to contact key contacts.

Council Commentary

Harrow Council has recently recruited a member of the Helpline Team who can speak Gujarati and will continue to seek the recruitment of personnel that are able to support the broad delivery of the service as it relates to the need of Harrow residents.

Respondent Comment

I believe that when a person reaches old age the service should be free.

Council Commentary

The Helpline Service caseload is comprised primarily of customers of pension credit age. Consequently, offering the service free of charge to such persons would effectively mean that the service would either need to be funded by the Council through other means, including the General Fund, or savings would need to be made in other areas to compensate for the loss of income. Consequently, this option has not been progressed further.

Respondent Comment

As a point, it would be useful if someone could call me from time to time to check that my lifeline is working as I forget.

Council Commentary

As a matter of good practice, Harrow Helpline personnel contact residents to check that their equipment is operational and to address any issues identified as a consequence.

Respondent Comment

As payments for Helpline are made quarterly, it would have been clearer to state the proposed new quarterly rates. I can do the arithmetic but not everybody can.

Council Commentary

As there were two options for the proposed pricing change, it was considered that expressing these as a weekly increase would be easier to present. This was particularly the case as a price change occurring during the course of a financial year would lead to a variable quarterly payment dependent upon the effective date of the change.

Respondent Comment

Please look very carefully at pensioners' plight. Pensions do not go up.

Council Commentary

The Helpline service prices have not been subject to review for a number of years and in that time, the costs of providing the service have increased. The Council has consulted on two proposed price increase options and is mindful of the fact that a significant proportion of its Helpline customers have limited incomes. However, as the service is partially funded by the General Fund, it also has to balance the price of the service with offering Council Tax Payers value for money.

Respondent Comment

I cannot understand why you are asking questions regarding ethnicity - gender or other questions that have no relation to the proposed increase in charges. I would like an explanation by someone in authority.

Council Commentary

The consultation questionnaire stated that questions concerning the personal status of the respondent were optional and that the Council has a legal responsibility to promote and advance equality. It also stated that to help with this, it was important to have a good understanding of our communities, how services are accessed and who would be using or likely to use the services and the questions were designed to help us with monitoring progress.

Respondent Comment

Have you ever thought of privatising the service?

Council Commentary

As the existing Harrow Helpline service comprises the Helpline Service for Brent Council and other local organisations such as Housing Associations, any consideration of outsourcing as a future option would require prior discussion with the primary stakeholders affected. The strategic approach taken by primary stakeholders as a consequence could have a significant impact on the scope and viability of any such proposals. Further information concerning this option has been included within the main Cabinet report on this matter.

Respondent Comment

With assurances on the annual increases in the cost of the service, can the service be run with those run by other local authorities.

Council Commentary

Harrow Council provides the existing Helpline Service for Harrow Council residents and Brent Council residents in order to reduce cost through economies of scale. Where further opportunities are identified and approval is given, these will be progressed.

Respondent Comment

Make all payments monthly and by direct debit to spread the cost.

Council Commentary

Harrow Council will undertake investigation concerning the feasibility of this option.

Respondent Comment

What is the actual cost, can you save money differently by providing services more effectively.

Council Commentary

Alternative ways and means of delivering the service are considered and progressed where feasible and practical. For example, the Harrow Helpline service provides a monitoring service on behalf of Brent Council which helps to spread the overheads and contribute towards the achievement of economies of scale.

Respondent Comment

If the increase helps to provide a better service to the elderly, I do not mind.

Council Commentary

The proposed options for price increases are intended to close the gap between the cost of providing the service and the income received for receiving it. The current performance of the service is expected to be maintained for all of its customers.

Respondent Comment

No point paying extra for a service I have not used

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I think more people should pay for this very important service which would help your costs.

Council Commentary

There are currently approximately 1,680 customers that do not pay for the Helpline service either under the terms of a “reablement” package where they receive support from the Council for up to six weeks or due to pre-existing contracts. If any changes to existing exemptions were to be considered, these would need to be subject to prior consultation and contract changes for each customer concerned.

Respondent Comment

I think most people can find the cost of Helpline even if the family help.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

I always wear my pendant.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

Fortunately, I have not had reason to actually use it in an emergency but to have it gives me a feeling of being slightly more protected.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

Money spent on this consultation could have been better spent on running the service.

Council Commentary

The Council conducted this consultation to obtain the views and comments of its customers and to give due regard to these prior to making any subsequent recommendations. The cost of the consultation in terms of postage and stationery is small in proportionate terms and enables due regard to be given to comments and views expressed prior to making any subsequent recommendations for decision.

Respondent Comment

Clearly increases are justified as the service provided at present is impressive and staff are helpful.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.

Respondent Comment

Some of the questions are ambiguous and vague.

Council Commentary

The Council will review the format and content of questions with regard to comments received for any subsequent consultation undertaken of the service.

Respondent Comment

I am somewhat puzzled by the necessity for this consultation.

Council Commentary

The Council conducted this consultation to obtain the views and comments of its customers and to give due regard to these prior to making any subsequent recommendations for decision.

Respondent Comment

Most users of your services come from the most vulnerable groups of society and do not have much money to spare for your rising costs.

Council Commentary

The Council recognises that a significant proportion of its Helpline customers are vulnerable and has conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment in support of the report recommendations for this matter. The Helpline service prices have not been reviewed for a number of years during which the cost of the service has increased. The increased price options subject to consultation will close the gap between the cost of the service and the income received from providing it. As the balance is met via the General Fund, value for money in relation to the wider Council Tax Payer also has to be considered. The options proposed are intended to achieve a balance between these factors.

Respondent Comment

I am happy to pay a modest increase to reduce the gap for the cost of the service but I also think some charge should be made for the Telecare service.

Council Commentary

There is no comment required for this response.