



Mayor and Cabinet

Report title: Out of Hours Switchboard Contract Extension.

Date: 12th March 2025

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1.

Ward(s) affected: All.

Contributors:

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Outline and recommendations

It was agreed by Mayor & Cabinet in June 2022 to make a direct award to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of a Borough-wide Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard for a period of three years from 15th September 2022 to 14th September 2025 with the option to extend for a period of up to 3 years thereafter.

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from Mayor and Cabinet to approve the extension of the existing contract with the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of a Borough-wide Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard for a period of a further three years from 15th September 2025 to 14th September 2028.

This will involve expenditure of £240,000 per annum; a total of £720,000 over a three-year period.

The report demonstrates the quality of service currently provided to Lewisham by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, the financial rationale and quality implications for continuing this arrangement.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

As part of savings agreed in 2014 to take effect from the 2015/16 financial year, the Customer Service Centre was asked to look at more cost-efficient means of delivering the out of hours switchboard service which had been in-house until that time. Following a full appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, it was agreed that the Royal Borough of Greenwich would deliver the service on the Council's behalf. A contract was entered into for a period of one year as of 15th September 2015.

Following a further appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was awarded a subsequent contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2016 to September 2019.

Again, after a further appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was awarded a contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2019 to September 2022.

Similarly, On 15th June 2022: Mayor & Cabinet agreed to make a direct award to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of a Borough-wide Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard for a period of three years from 15th September 2022 to 14th September 2025 with the option to extend for a period of up to 3 years thereafter.

2022 – current: Ongoing work has been done with all services in scope to ensure that correct processes, contacts and escalation points are documented for all services. This ensures that the Out of Hours Switchboard is up to date and able to respond correctly to the changing requirements of both services and residents who use the service.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This is a summary of the report. All details including risks, financial and legal implications are found in the full report.
- 1.2. This report details the provision of Lewisham's Out of Hours Switchboard covering a variety of Council services from Monday to Friday, from 5pm to 9am, at weekends and on Bank Holidays.
- 1.3. The report concludes with a recommendation that Lewisham continue with current partnership working with the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a further period of three years.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet:
 - Approve an extension of the current contract to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a further period of three years to supply the Council's Out of Hours switchboard commencing 15th September 2025. This will involve expenditure of £240,000 per annum with a total contract value of £720,000 over

a three-year period.

3. Policy Context

3.1. This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):

- Cleaner and Greener
- A Strong Local Economy
- Quality Housing
- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Open Lewisham
- Health and Wellbeing

In particular, this report is closely aligned to Quality Housing, Children and Young People, Health and Wellbeing, Cleaner and Greener and Safer Communities. This is because the Out of Hours Switchboard provides support for the related services across Lewisham and the residents wishing to access those services

3.2. The provision of a high quality, scalable, Out of Hours Switchboard allows residents to get in touch with the council easily at any time should they find themselves in a vulnerable situation. This provides them with a feeling of safety and re-assurance. The Switchboard puts people in touch with Council experts to report issues such as anti-social behaviour, noise, dangerous structures or to get in touch with Social Workers and the Emergency Services. This ensures residents are able to feel safe and secure living here, as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime,

4. Background

4.1. Any organisation taking calls on behalf of Lewisham would need to be able to manage some highly confidential, delicate and distressing situations. These will include calls to or from social workers, child protection issues and road traffic accidents.

4.2. An Out of Hours Switchboard acts as a front door for our residents and represents Lewisham. One that is provided by well trained, knowledgeable staff provides residents with reassurance and reflects well on the public image of Lewisham. If this is diminished in any way, this becomes a negative reflection on Lewisham for the resident.

4.3. As part of savings agreed in 2014 to take effect from the 2015/16 financial year, the Customer Service Centre was asked to look at more cost efficient means of delivering the out of hours switchboard service which had been in-house until that time. Following a full appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, it was agreed that the Royal Borough of Greenwich would deliver

the service on the Council's behalf. A contract was entered into for a period of one year as of 15th September 2015.

- 4.4. Following a further appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was awarded a subsequent contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2016 to September 2019.
- 4.5. Again, after a further appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was awarded a contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2019 to September 2022.
- 4.6. Similarly, On 15th June 2022: Mayor & Cabinet agreed to make a direct award to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of a Borough-wide Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard for a period of three years from 15th September 2022 to 14th September 2025 with the option to extend for a period of up to 3 years thereafter.
- 4.7. The service is provided from 5pm until 9am Monday to Friday and at weekends and on bank holidays, operated from the Woolwich Centre.
- 4.8. Three members of Lewisham staff were transferred to the Royal Borough of Greenwich under TUPE in September 2015, of which one has subsequently retired.
- 4.9. The contract provides savings of over £200,000 per annum compared to the cost of providing the service in-house. In addition, more robust data capture and improved arrangements for Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery have been achieved and more suitable office accommodation provided.
- 4.10. As in both 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2022, a specification for the Out of Hours Switchboard has been updated in consultation with all stakeholders across the Council setting out Lewisham's requirements in detail.
- 4.11. Since September 2022, the Royal Borough of Greenwich has received over 37,000 calls on behalf of Lewisham and achieved the following Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):

Year	Calls received	% Calls answered (Target >95%)	Complaints received (Target ≤ 1 per 10,000 calls)
2022	12,912	97.4%	0
2023	11,866	97.6%	0
2024	12,849	98.0%	0

- 4.12. The Royal Borough of Greenwich have a track-record of successfully delivering both the Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard since September 2015 as well as their own Out of Hours service, which is very similar in scope and customer expectations since February 2007. Since 2022, call volumes have remained between 12,000 and 13,000 per year with answer rates well in excess of the target and no complaints received.

5. Rationale for Extending the Contract

- 5.1. The rationale to extend a contract with The Royal Borough of Greenwich for a period of three years is as follows:
- 5.2. The Royal Borough of Greenwich has managed the Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard since September 2015 providing Lewisham with savings of £200,000+ per annum when compared with running the service in-house. This has mainly been through leveraging economies of scale from Greenwich's existing Out of Hours Switchboard which it could not achieve alone. Lewisham are able to benefit from the existing infrastructure, staff and management that are in place to run Greenwich's own Out of Hours service. This allows the service to handle peaks in contact volumes, sickness absence, management and support & development activities such as training and reporting at a much lower overall cost.
- 5.3. In effect, eight call centre agents are required to run the service with supervisors plus senior management and support staff for Quality Assurance, reporting etc. Through the current arrangements, Lewisham pay only for the resource required to run the Lewisham service which equates to five call centre agents and one supervisor benefitting, free of charge, from Greenwich's existing call centre agents, management and associated support functions.
- 5.4. With the exception of 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and related staff absence, all Lewisham KPI's have been met or exceeded each year since 2015 and no formal complaints have been received in relation to the service since July 2016.
- 5.5. It should be noted that the Royal Borough of Greenwich have provided an exceptional quality of service to Lewisham since 2015 and that the proposal received from Greenwich offers the best value for money when compared with other options, including the costs of bringing the service back in-house.
- 5.6. As this option would be a continuation of the current arrangements, there is no reason to believe that the quality of service provided would differ in any way. Greenwich have a proven track record of working to reduce contact volumes and are able to offer near immediate access to alternative back-up locations throughout the Borough in case of Business Continuity/ Disaster Recovery scenarios in their main offices in Woolwich.
- 5.7. In addition, Greenwich have offered to maintain their prices for the period of the contract, including any extensions; thereby maintaining costs at the same level until September 2028.

Greenwich have demonstrated over the years that they can provide the service to a very high standard and provide the customer care that is required.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 This report seeks approval to extend the existing contract with the Royal Borough of Greenwich to provide an out of hours switchboard service at a cost of £240k per annum for a period of three years. This expenditure can be met from the budget for this service which is also £240k and is held within the Residents & Business Services Division.

7. Legal implications

The Council's Constitution contains requirements about how to procure and manage contracts. These are in the Contract Procedure Rules (Constitution Part IV), some of which are requirements based on the procurement Regulations (Public Contracts Regulations 2015) with which the Council must comply. Those requirements were complied with when the contract was awarded.

The current contract was awarded on the basis of a 3-year contract with the option to extend for 3 years. The recommendation in the report is to extend the contract with the extension period. This is a 'Permitted Extension' under the Contract Procedure Rules, being one which was clearly provided for in the original contract documents (as set out in Rule 17 of the Contracts Procedure Rules, and Regulation 72 of the Procurement Regulations 2015).

The report sets out the reasons why this extension is proposed. It notes that the performance of the incumbent provider is satisfactory.

The extension of this contract is not a Key Decision under the Constitution because the approval to award the contract on the basis of the extension was approved at the point the contract was awarded. However, where the value of an extension to a services contract is more than £500,000, the decision on the extension is reserved to Mayor and Cabinet.

8. Risk Implications

8.1.

Risk	Mitigation
Risks relating to loss of continuity of service, reputational damage, quality, knowledge loss and additional costs have been identified and detailed under the options appraisal section of the 2022 Mayor & Cabinet report.	These risks can be mitigated in full by the granting of an extension of the current contract to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of the Out of Hours Switchboard Service.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1. The Council's equalities objectives are addressed in the current contract. As service provision will exactly mirror the current service, there are no further equality implications to be considered.

10. Climate change and environmental implications

- 10.1. No impact on the environment has been identified.

11. Crime and disorder implications

- 11.1. The Out of Hours Switchboard provides a conduit through which issues relating to crime and disorder in the Borough may be reported to the Council. These may be passed on to on-call officers or the emergency services as applicable, passed on to day time services in the form of a service request or provided with advice and guidance at the point of contact. It is envisaged that existing provisions in this regard would be maintained.

12. Health and wellbeing implications

- 12.1. The provision of a robust Out of Hours Switchboard function is a benefit to the residents of Lewisham, providing them with a resource to resolve local issues.

13. Social Value implications

- 13.1. The Royal Borough of Greenwich provides employment to 233 staff who are residents of Lewisham. Of these, 16 are employed by the Digital and Customer Services Division and all receive constant training and career development. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a London Living Wage employer.

14. Background papers

- 14.1. OOH Switchboard Procurement 2022 Corporate Report Mayor and Cabinet FINAL Part One – June 2022
- 14.2. Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard Specification 2022
- 14.3. LBL Service Specific Processes 2024

15. Glossary

Term	Definition
Out-source/ out-sourcing	The buying in of services from outside suppliers rather than by supplying them internally.
In-source/ in-sourcing	Use one's own personnel or resources to accomplish (a task) that was previously outsourced.
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006. A situation that may arise when a business

Term	Definition
	or part of a business (the transferor) changes ownership and staff transfer to the new owner (the transferee).
Calls Offered	The term 'calls offered' refers to the total number of calls placed in a queue including calls answered and unanswered.
Call handling times	Call Handling Times take into account the time from when the caller gets through to an advisor until they have hung up.

16. Report author(s) and contact

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17. Appendices

17.1. Appendix A – Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard Specification 2022