



Date: 11 September 2014

Subject: Mears Help to Live at Home Wiltshire

**Authors: Alan Long, Mears Executive Director and
Bernadette Walsh, Mears Chief Operating Officer**

1. Summary

- 1.1 Mears is a strong believer in the approach taken by Wiltshire Council to reshape services for the benefit of older and disabled people and to improve terms and conditions amongst the care workforce.
- 1.2 Despite having a 4 week mobilisation period in 2013, Mears delivered a very good service from contract start.
- 1.3 A good service continued to the point of acquiring some sub-contractors, notably Careline in May 2014. The impact of these acquisitions were to significantly de-stabilise, what had been a very good service.
- 1.4 We are leaving no stone unturned to get back to pre-acquisition service levels and are making progress. We are confident that with the continued support of Wiltshire Council, that this will be achieved.

2. Background

2.1 Mears were awarded the Help to Live at Home contract for the East and South regions of Wiltshire on 21/08/2013. After the termination of the previous contract, Mears agreed to support Wiltshire Council by mobilising in a four week time period. The contract started on 30/09/2013.

2.2 Services were TUPE'd and transitioned seamlessly from the outgoing provide Aster Living.

2.3 At the point of transfer there were:

- 470 service users
- 136 care workers
- 5,153 hours of care (3015 hours delivered by subcontractors)
- 15 subcontracting companies

2.4 Since being awarded the contract Mears has made significant improvements to service delivery including:

- An increase in the office and infrastructure staff from 14 to 38 team members.
- All care workers have been offered salaries, contracted hours and retainer payments.
- Training and support has been increased including a bespoke Help to Live at Home induction with Helen Sanderson personalisation training.
- Customer care initiatives have been delivered designed to tackle social isolation and loneliness.
- In January 2014, four months after contract start, Mears were the first provider to successfully pilot the new model of working in the Salisbury area in partnership with Age UK, Wiltshire Carer Support Network and the wider voluntary sector. It involved joint assessments of need and utilisation of the voluntary and support sectors to make the Help to Live at Home vision a reality.

3. Rationale for Acquisition

3.1 In April 2014 Mears were directly delivering 2125 hours of care (36%) but were subcontracting 3840 hours (64%). An integral part of Mears strategy in partnership with Wiltshire Council was to enhance the terms and conditions of care workers and ensure the workforce was built with career development and sustainability of service at its foundations.

3.2 Subcontractors supporting the contract with staff on zero hour contracts with no option for salaried work did not align to this strategy. There were further concerns about the quality of care delivered and sustainability of some parts of the subcontracted workforce. Officers from Wiltshire Council and Mears agreed that the acquisition of sub-contractors was important to drive forward improvements in the workforce.

3.3 Mears focused on those sub-contractors that wanted to sell. Wiltshire based domiciliary care company Careline had seen a previous attempt to sell the company collapse and they approached Mears to see if we would be interested in acquiring their business.

3.4 Following a 4 week period of due diligence incorporating operational, financial and legal scrutiny, Mears acquired Careline on 02/05/14.

3.5 At the point of acquisition there were:

- 38 service users
- 27 care workers
- 554 hours of care
- 2 office staff

3.5 Careline and its care workers operated in one of the most remote areas of the County. Many of the service users were on the Dorset borders. A number of care workers who had previously operated in these areas did not transfer. Replacing care workers willing to work in the most remote areas of Wiltshire is a significant challenge.

3.6 The former owner of Careline left the business on the day of completion 02/05/14. Despite a formal understanding that the registered manager and care coordinator would transfer to Mears, both left within a ten day period without giving any notice period.

3.7 Despite having a compliant CQC inspection report. Service user records were inaccurate and incomplete and the information upon acquisition failed to match the assurances made during the due diligence process.

3.8 In agreement with Council Officers, Mears also acquired:

Institu acquired on 15/05/2014

90 service users
59 care workers
900 hours of care

Agin Care acquired on 07/07/2014

41 service users
32 care workers
852 hours of care

4. Key issues:

4.1 In total 28 care workers did not transfer to Mears after acquisition. This placed additional pressures on Mears existing staff who have had to cover the shortfall and cover packages in the most remote areas of the County. This was further compounded due to some subcontractors having staff shortages of their own which resulted in them having to hand back existing work to Mears at very short notice.

5. Action Taken:

5.1 Mears are working hard to resolve the issues and have taken the following actions:

- Daily service progress reports produced for Wiltshire Council and CQC.
- Invested in dedicated IT support to align the IT packages of acquired companies to the CareFirst IT system.
- The South, the area where service delivery has been most challenging has been divided into South 1 and South 2.

- Invested in a dedicated Help to Live at Home Recruitment team, based in Amesbury with the purpose of recruiting new care workers.
- Employed two full time nurses to support customers with complex health needs.
- Designed and rolled out a programme of visits to service users and advocates to discuss care provision.
- Seconded staff from around the UK to deliver care, drive up service standards and support operational delivery .
- Provided service tags to all service users to enable electronic monitoring of the service.
- Initiated a programme of risk assessments and care plan reviews of all service users.
- Developed a partnership with YMCA to source 50 apprentices
- Substantial investment in the Care Management team and infrastructure taking the team from 22 posts in May 2014 to 38 posts in September 2014

5.2 Following a non-compliant CQC inspection report and receipt of notice of decision from CQC on the 03/09/14, no further referrals can be accepted by Mears until 30/11/14 by which time the service needs to be fully compliant with CQC and a further re-inspection of service will be undertaken.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Mears Help to Live at Home has the full backing of the Mears Board to support all additional investment required to return to the service levels previously achieved.

6.2 We are extremely sorry that some service users have seen their service deteriorate. We are already seeing signs of improvement and are dedicated to resolving the issues as quickly as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or enquiries:

alan.long@mearsgroup.co.uk or bernadette.walsh@mearsgroup.co.uk