

COUNCIL

21 January 2020

Report of the Director of Corporate and Customer Services

FUTURE TELECOMMUNICATIONS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the progress of the project to replace and upgrade the Council's current telephone systems, to outline potential issues and benefits, and to detail the next steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That approval be given to the early release (in 2020/21) of the £30,000 allocated for Network Switch Replacement in the 2021/22 Capital Programme if technical issues require it.
2. That the project implementation deadline set as 28 February 2021 to accommodate the full proof of concept trial and to allow for a comprehensive internal communications package to be released.

WARDS AFFECTED

All

STRATEGIC LINK

Enabling the customer to enquire of, and transact with the District Council, in the most efficient manner, is at the heart of the District Council's objectives.

This project will reflect the One Team, One Council, One Purpose approach by enhancing communication and collaboration across the authority. The resilience and flexibility it creates should aid residents by improving the services we provide. Additionally it links to the Council's aim of providing excellent services.

Addressing the issue of climate change by reducing carbon emissions links with all three of the District Council's aims to be clean, safe and thriving.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council currently has facilities with associated telecoms systems at the Town Hall in Matlock, the Agricultural Business Centre in Bakewell and Northwood Depot at Darley Dale.
- 1.2 The Siemens Realitis HiPath DX PBX exchange at the Town Hall, Matlock was installed on 4 September 2000. As of 1 April 2017, the manufacturer has ceased all development of software and manufacture of replacement hardware. The current “*best endeavours*” maintenance agreement for the system will end in July 2021. Additionally, the ISDN30e lines are due to be withdrawn from service entirely by 2025
- 1.3 Whilst the Council's telephone first point of contact continues to perform well overall, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that our current system is neither dynamic, nor integrated enough to enable the flexible/remote working outcomes and resilience and disaster recovery capabilities we really need.
- 1.4 In June 2020 the Council tendered for a consultant to help bring in a viable replacement/alternative solution faster than in-house resources at that time would allow. There were no responses.
- 1.5 A Business Case recommending a tender process via the Crown Commercial Service Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework was submitted and approved in principle at the Corporate Leadership Team meeting held on 1st October 2020.
- 1.6. The ICT Service Review Team also approved the Project Brief on 1 October 2020 for incorporation into the ICT Projects Register.
- 1.7 A report recommending this approach was approved by members at the Governance and Resources Committee meeting held on 22 October 2020.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The deadline for framework suppliers to submit tender responses was 4 November 2020. There were 9 responses in total.
- 2.2 An evaluation team consisting of team members from Business Support, Procurement, Transformation and the Joint ICT Service evaluated the supplier responses on 11 - 13 November 2020.
- 2.3 Following full evaluation of all responses on overall price and features/technical merit the highest scoring submission was selected, the proposal being based on implementing a fully cloud-based platform. At this stage (pending formal completion of the tender process and contract signing) the identity of the highest scoring tenderer and full details of the costs remain commercially sensitive.
- 2.4 The tender response was based on our specification with the majority of extensions utilising a softphone (software based telephone installed on a laptop or PC) and a maximum 7 year contract term (on a 3 + 2 + 2 basis).

- 2.5 According to the tender submission and based on 165 users the platform costs over the initial 3 year contract period can be entirely accommodated within existing revenue budgets.
- 2.6 A due diligence meeting between the highest scoring tenderer and the evaluation team was held on 2 December 2020. This consisted of a demonstration of the proposed product, a walkthrough of the implementation process and clarification of some points arising from the tender response.
- 2.7 As a result of this meeting, the evaluation team is satisfied that (in principle and subject to a successful proof of concept trial) the proposed product meets our feature specifications.
- 2.8 The current steps, which are running concurrently, are:
- A proof of concept trial – installation and test usage of softphones and handsets in our real network environment. This is being undertaken at all sites and from home/alternative working sites;
 - Preparation and approval of the contract documentation. The Legal team has been forewarned and apprised of the importance of timescales to this project and have factored this into work plans. The highest scoring tenderer has prepared a contract based on the framework documentation and terms which is currently with Legal for approval;

3. BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The COVID-19 crisis has forced more colleagues than ever to work in new and more flexible ways. It has brought to the fore the inadequacy of our current remote/home working facilities. Our limited capacity to offer remote/home working has a particularly negative impact on team members and colleagues at first point of contact and others who currently have no means of working from home as their calls cannot currently be transferred offsite.
- 3.2 As the bulk of the District Council's lines and extensions are tied to the physical hardware located at the Town Hall, this leaves us vulnerable in an emergency situation that renders that site inaccessible in some way. The COVID-19 crisis has served to highlight this, and reinforced our urgent need for enhanced disaster recovery capabilities.

- 3.3 A move to a cloud-based platform will be a robust and secure way for us to keep or enhance all of our onsite and homeworking features and to maintain the security of both the end users and our team members. Under the proposed model, a member of Council staff can operate easily from the office or home with no difference to their capabilities or the level of service they can provide.
- 3.4 With regard to the environmental impact; the Council currently has 134 employees that work a cumulative total of 26,540 days a year (excluding Bank Holidays and Annual Leave). If they were to work from home for half their working week this would total 13,270 days per annum with no commute. The average employee commute to work at the Town Hall is 21 miles (including the return journey).
- 3.7 Based on this scenario, with Council employees spending half their time working from home and allowing for 120g CO2 emissions per mile (the national average for vehicles), there would be a reduction of 33.44 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 There are two main potential barriers to the successful, timely delivery of this project:
- Technical issues relating to the Council's ICT networking and connections;
 - Lack of awareness and resistance to the cultural change that will be necessary.
- 4.2 Joint ICT Service colleagues advise that the networking and connections issues that may arise will be mitigated by the Network Switch Replacement project, which has already been approved for inclusion in the Capital Programme for 2021/22.
- 4.3 The majority of other potential technical risks will either be confirmed or ruled out by the proof of concept trial.
- 4.4 With regard the lack of awareness and resistance to cultural change, a communications push will be required to inform and update all staff. This will be one of the key factors in a successful delivery. The proposed implementation date of 28 February 2021 will allow for timely communication around the changes that will impact on staff.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1 Legal

The purpose of this report is to update Council as to the implementation timescales and to release funds early to undertake required works. Contracts relating to this project are being reviewed by the legal officers and thus the legal risk is low.

5.2 Financial

With regard to the cost of Network Switch Replacement, a sum of £30,000 has already been approved in the Capital Programme for 2021/22. It is recommended that Council be requested to approve the early release (in 2020/21) of this sum if technical issues require it.

According to the tender submission and based on 165 users the platform costs over the initial 3 year contract period can be entirely accommodated within existing revenue budgets.

As mentioned in the report, improved telephony may result in more homeworking that could result in efficiency savings.

The financial risk is therefore assessed as low.

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has also been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equalities, environmental, climate change, health, human rights, personnel and property.

7. CONTACT INFORMATION

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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Governance and Resources Committee 22/10/2020

9. ATTACHMENTS

None