

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 5 November 2020.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Caroline Bamforth

Councillor Colm Merrick
Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan in the Chair

Attending:

Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Murray Husband, Head of Digital and Community Safety; Louise Pringle, Head of Communities, Revenues and Change; Alison Balingall, Senior Revenues Manager; Debbie Hill, Chief Procurement Officer; Graeme Smith, Communications Manager; Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillors Danny Devlin and Alan Lafferty.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1418. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX AND COUNCIL TAX AND WATER CHARGE WRITE ON AND WRITE OFFS

1419. The Cabinet considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive advising of new arrangements for Council Tax collection and seeking approval for the write off of Council Tax and water and sewerage charges as well as the write on of historical credit balances.

The report explained that an exercise was underway to replace the current system used for, amongst other things, the billing and collection of Council Tax. As part of this a data cleansing exercise was being carried out. It was explained that the current system contained historical data back to 1993-94. However historic debts prior to 2000-01 could not be pursued in addition to which in terms of data protection the retention of data deemed unnecessary was not permitted. It was also noted that the data cleansing exercise had identified a number of historical credit balances.

An examination of the years in question had identified net debt balances of £949,077.50 in respect of Council Tax and £193,410.38 in respect of water and sewerage charges. It was noted that water and sewerage charges were collected by the Council on behalf of Scottish Water but none of the income was retained by the Council. Discussions had taken place with Scottish Water who were in agreement to the write off.

It was clarified that the Council Tax debt to be written off represented 0.1% of the total sum collected since 1996 and could be met from existing bad debt provision which meant that the Council's forward financial planning was unaffected.

Referring to the credit balances that had been identified the report explained that should any new information become available, steps could be taken to "write on" and provide the customer with a refund.

Having heard the Head of Communities, Revenues and Change further on the proposals in the course of which she paid tribute to the work of the team involved in the implementation of the new system in challenging circumstances, Councillor Buchan was heard to welcome the introduction of the new system and the benefits it would bring. He also noted that there would be no impact on the Council's financial planning as adequate bad debt provision had been made.

Councillor Merrick also having paid tribute to the work of the team in delivering the system under challenging circumstances, the Cabinet:-

- (a) noted that a new software system would be implemented for the billing and collection of Council Tax and for administering Housing benefits and Council Tax reductions;
- (b) approved the write off of Council Tax arrears totalling up to £949,077.59;
- (c) noted that the write-off of these sums would have no net impact on the Council's accounts or financial planning as provision had been made for the debt, in full, in previous years and these debts were now over 20 years old;
- (d) noted that Water and Sewerage charges totalling up to £193,410.38 were also being written off in discussion with Scottish Water;
- (e) noted that a data cleansing exercise on historical data was underway; and
- (f) approved the write on of historical credit balances without prejudice to future refunds.

DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS INTERFACE FOR HOUSING SERVICES

1420. The Cabinet considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive seeking an exemption from tendering in relation to the Council's current job costing system to enable information to be passed to the Council's new core housing management system.

The report explained that in 2019 the Council had purchased a new housing management system, NPS Housing, replacing the legacy system OHMS (Open Housing Management System).

The report emphasised the importance of developing an interface between Servitor, the Council's job costing system, and NPS Housing. This interface would allow information to

pass between both systems providing enhanced performance management reporting such as information on appointments and repair status which in turn supported the aspiration of Housing Services to have officers accessing systems 'in the field' or from remote working locations. Furthermore, the progression of the interface provided opportunity to create efficiencies in current processes and working practices.

The report explained that an options appraisal exercise had taken place. Each of the potential options was listed and it was explained that the favoured option was the creation of the interface as outlined. It was noted that the cost of the proposal was £170,000 this comprising capital outlay of £80,000 with an annual support charge of £15,000 for a six-year term. The capital costs would be met from the Housing Capital Programme with revenue costs being funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

The Head of Digital and Community Safety was heard further on the report. In response to questions from Councillor Bamforth he explained the additional benefits of pursuing Option 1, particularly when compared to Option 2, these being that Option 1 allowed for a number of potential development opportunities and a better degree of "future proofing" for the service.

The Cabinet approved an exemption from tendering in accordance with Contract Standing Order 15 (iii) to allow interface development work to Servitor in order for information on repair works, work variances, appointments etc. to pass to the Council's new system NPS Housing.

HEWLETT PACKARD ENTERPRISE – SERVER HARDWARE PROCUREMENT

1421. The Cabinet considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive seeking an exemption from tendering in relation to the procurement of server hardware directly from Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE)

The report explained that HP servers were used across the Council and the Leisure Trust in the delivery of critical services.

Hardware lifecycle management was a key activity undertaken by ICT, ensuring technology was managed, maintained and supported through its working life. Server replacement was now required.

It was explained that HPE provided a number of proprietary tools for managing servers, and that any change of vendor to this core technology area incurred significant time and cost impacts with regards training, management tools and implementation, and best practice dictated no frequent change in this regard.

HP server hardware was previously available to the Council via the Crown Commercial Service Framework. However the term of the framework had now lapsed and procuring this critical hardware from HPE via an alternative framework was currently not an option.

It was explained that replacement of existing HP servers with new hardware was essential to support the phased replacement programme of the technology lifecycle to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. This was reinforced with ICT staff having the skills and knowledge of HP hardware to support the programme.

It was noted that the cost of the replacement hardware would be in the region of £150,000 subject to final quotation and would be funded from approved 2020/21 capital funding.

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The Head of Digital and Community Safety having commented further, and Councillor Buchanan having recognised the need for upgrading the Council's current IT infrastructure both in terms of having a more robust system and better value for money through reduced downtime, the Cabinet approved an exemption from tendering in accordance with Contract Standing Order 15 (iii) to allow the procurement of HP server hardware to ensure a smooth transition from existing aging hardware which is nearing the end of its useful life and support contracts.

CHAIR