

## RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

### \*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

**SERVICE DIRECTORATE:** Customers

#### **1. DECISION TAKEN**

To extend the existing contract with Inform Communications for a period of two years and add two new additional services (navigational chatbot & live chat) taking the overall contract value over £50k.

#### **2. DECISION TAKER**

Jo Dufficy, Service Director – Customers

#### **3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:**

16 May 2023

#### **4. REASON FOR DECISION**

4.1 The reason for the decision is so that Customer Services can continue using the system which has now been trialled for 8 months and has proved to be successful. There are now two additional features that can be added that would be beneficial to the residents/customers of North Herts.

#### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 The alternative would be to not extend the contract; however, this was discounted, as the automated telephony service is handling the additional calls that do not need human intervention.

5.2 Soft market testing indicates a similar solution from a different supplier would cost more.

#### **6. CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)**

6.1 Consultation took place with the Leadership Team prior to the decision being made, and the Leadership Team supported the proposal.

#### **7. FORWARD PLAN**

7.1 This decision is not a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

#### **8. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 The automated telephony service put in place on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 has been consistently handling at least 50% of high-volume Revenues and Benefits calls. This

has proved to be cost-effective and continues to allow the Customer Service team to focus on more complex enquiries. The service can be accessed 24/7 meaning customers can call at a time that suits them, and still receive the information they need or receive a link to our website to fill in the form relevant to their enquiry.

- 8.2 In December 2022, the supplier built us an out of hours interactive voice response (IVR) to use over the Christmas close down period. This enabled customers to be quickly directed to the relevant web page or receive a text message with a link to a specific form on our website to request a call-back when we re-opened. This provided us with excellent data to understand why customers were calling during this period and provided customers with good customer service.
- 8.3 The Inform chatbot will be fully managed and updated by the supplier as part of the contract. Whilst we do have a chatbot which the Council has developed internally which has helped to prove the concept, it does require manual updating to keep the content relevant. If this does not happen due to resources being required elsewhere, then it can provide a poor customer experience rather than the positive one intended.
- 8.4 In December 2022, the MSU Careline admin team also implemented an automated telephony service which has also proved to be successful in handling their high-volume enquiries. As such, they wish to extend by a further 12 months to continue taking advantage of the benefits they have seen from the service, including the potential to generate efficiencies in the future.
- 8.5 The introduction of the Careline telephony solution, as well as the chatbot & live chat has now taken the overall contract spend over £50k.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. Section 14.6.4 (a) (ii) of the Constitution provides that Service Directors are delegated the authority to enter into contracts to carry out works and/or for the supply of goods and services within approved budgets.
- 9.2. TOR 14.6.6 (b) (ii) (a) of the Constitution provides that the Service Director: Customers shall exercise the functions powers and duties relating to: Customer Services, including A – the Customer Service Centre.
- 9.3. Section 14.6.6 (a) (i) of the Constitution also specifically gives the Service Director – Customers, the authority to manage, direct and control all resources allocated to the Directorate in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures.
- 9.4. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014\* (No. 2095) require officers undertaking non-executive decisions to record (amongst other things) an award of a contract that materially affects the Council's position in a written delegated decision. At North Herts, this is any award of a contract or financial decision that is or is likely to be above £50,000.
- 9.5. The Contract Procurement Rules at 14.9 require the publication of a Decision Notice for any spend with a value of above £50,000.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The total costs of the Inform contract including the two new services are £60,830. The on-going revenue costs are being funded from existing budgets, including New Burdens funding as it directly relates to Revenues and Benefits. The below will all be funded from the New Burdens reserve.

Revenues and Benefits Automated Telephony (2-year extension): £32,010  
Navigational Chatbot (1 year): £9,950  
Live Chat (1 year): £1980

10.2 MSU Careline Admin will be funding the cost for their service (£9240) from existing budgets.

10.3 The one-off set up costs for the services (£7,650) are being funded by existing capital budgets and new burdens funding.

10.4 There are no further financial implications arising from the report.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Not extending the telephony service would mean having to use more expensive resource in the Customer Service Centre to handle the additional Revenues and Benefits calls.

11.2 If we didn't extend the contract, it would reduce the out of hours provision for customers who need it.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 An equalities impact assessment was carried out for the MSU Careline service.

12.3 There are no further equalities implications to this report.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 As the recommendations in the report relate to a contract below £100,000 the "go local" policy has not been applied as this is an extension of an existing contract.

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 There are no known human resource implications that apply to this report.

## **16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None

**17. APPENDICES**

17.1 None


**NOTIFICATION DATE**

*Date sent to all Members, put on website and appears in MIS – Committee, Member & Scrutiny Services can confirm this with you,*



**Signature of Executive Member Consulted ...** .....

**Date ...19<sup>th</sup> May 2023.....**



**Signature of Decision Taker**