

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: *Customers*

1. DECISION TAKEN

1.1 To purchase a low-code digital platform, called Liberty Create enabling greater digital evolution at North Herts Council.

2. DECISION TAKER

2.1 Jo Dufficy

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

3.1 17 August 2023

4. REASON FOR DECISION

4.1 Following an extensive period of informal pre-market engagement with a number of suppliers, the decision to purchase a low-code digital platform has been made. This supports the Council's digital aims and enables the Council to accelerate its digital evolution.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 We engaged with a total of 6 suppliers over a period of 7 months. This helped to inform the type of technology we were looking for and what the art of the possible was. After meeting with all the suppliers and having demonstrations of the technology, we completed a desktop review to evaluate whether they could meet our requirements, covering essential, desirable, and technical criteria. This then informed our decision as the Netcall liberty create platform was able to satisfy all criteria.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 Executive Member for Finance and IT, Cllr Ian Albert and Deputy Executive Member Cllr Matt Barnes have been consulted and support this approach.

6.2 The Senior Management Group were consulted for their views on our digital needs, which helped to inform the business case to move to a low code digital platform which was subsequently approved by the Leadership Team on 26 June.

6.3 The project Oversight Group gave approval to proceed following a final demonstration and discussion with another Council already using the platform.

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 initial project was simply looking at options to procure a CRM given the current contract expires on 02 March 2024. Once initial exploratory work had begun, it was clear that there was an opportunity to progress our corporate transformation aims by combining the CRM replacement with a low code digital platform that could enable much faster digital transformation. Within a number of platforms, the staple aspect is the ability to build your own applications to your own requirements. Our research demonstrated that the direction of travel for Councils across the country is moving to low code digital platforms.
- 8.2 The project team then met with a total of 6 suppliers to get a good understanding of what was available on the market, and narrow down requirements.
- 8.3 During this phase of the project, the business case was shaped based on findings from the research, as well as gaining an in-depth understanding of the problems the Council is facing and thinking about how these problems could be resolved through the use of a low-code digital platform.
- 8.4 The Senior Management Group were consulted on 20 June. This meeting was an opportunity for us to showcase some of the technology already available through our Microsoft 365 licences, as well as to understand what managers think digital transformation means for North Herts. We got some excellent output from this session and showed us that managers are thinking about the art of the possible. Some of the responses included:
- Better integration
 - Reducing duplication of work
 - One system to do more.
 - Sharing data between services
- This enforced our approach and formed a key part of the business case.
- 8.5 We are also aware that the public sector is facing challenges with recruitment in a number of areas, including IT. The low-code platform helps to address this issue as low-code development can be achieved without experience of traditional IT development.
- 8.6 Customer expectations are also increasing as technology advances. The platform will enable the Digital Team to build online processes in a user-centric and customer focussed way which will be designed to minimise processing for staff. This can be done in a much faster way due to the low-code environment. We will ensure that customers who do not have digital access are still able to contact the Council through their preferred method, we will not leave anyone behind, linking directly to our People First priority.
- 8.7 One of the key considerations is that the platform will enable the Digital Team to start rationalising the number of applications across the Council's estate. This will enable a more joined up approach on a common digital platform, as well as take control of the technology so that we can adapt as we need to without a reliance on external providers. Our aim is to enable a reduction in current and future costs by decommissioning as many legacy applications as possible, therefore removing licence and maintenance fees for the associated applications. We also have a need to replace a number of internally built applications which are at risk of becoming unsupported in the near future.

8.8 The platform will enable us to address the challenges the Council is facing; therefore, we can begin to achieve our project objectives and business needs, which include:

- Efficient processes by removing non value manual elements and duplication, enhancing employee experience.
- Gain customer insight to provide a consistent and enhanced service in line with our People First objective, in turn providing us with better data
- Faster development and accelerated innovation, with an agile, iterative approach
- More agility and faster response to feedback and changes
- Collaboration with other Councils and working together to achieve end-to-end service design for common customer interactions

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 Netcall contract in year one requires a revenue payment of £101,495, and then years two and three will be £117,782. These payments will be funded through existing IT software budgets.

10.2. In year one, there will be initial implementation and training costs of £42,497 covering consultancy days, professional services, and training on the new platform. Again, this will be funded through existing IT budgets.

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

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There would be more of a risk to the Council if we were *not* to invest in a digital platform. The Council has reached the point of limited development opportunities with the current CRM provider and internal and external customer expectations have increased with the rise of technological advances. The Council needs to keep up with this to ensure these expectations are met.

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 not carried out following advice from the Policy team.
- 12.3 There are no further equalities implications to this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Go Local does not apply to this decision given that the contract is over £100,000 in value.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 This project will affect most staff across the Council; therefore, a robust communications plan is being formulated with involvement from Human Resources. We aim to understand who may require additional digital training/assistance as we move into each service area and include this within the project. We intend to create digital champions across the Council to provide more localised support where needed.

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 17 August 2023

Signature of Decision Taker

