

## **Divisions Affected – County Wide**

### **CABINET MEMBER for COMMUNITY & CORPORATE SERVICES**

**14 May 2024**

#### **CCaaS Procurement**

#### **Report by Executive Director of Resources**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to**
  - a) Authorise the procurement and delivery of a suitable supplier to provide the council a Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) platform that can expand and contract as necessary; and
  - b) Delegate authority to the Director IT Innovation and Digital Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Head of Procurement, to award a contract following the conclusion of the procurement exercise.

### **Executive Summary**

2. In the financial year to April 2023, our Customer Service Centre handled 11,412 walk-ins at County Hall, 125,046 inbound and 68,841 outbound calls, 131,991 emails and 15,346 customer facing queries. The outbound calls are made manually, i.e. not using an auto-dialler, to follow up on customer queries.
3. The council uses a call management system, also known as a CCaaS platform, that is used currently by Customer Service Centre (CSC), MASH and ICT, to manage the flow of calls from members of the public (or OCC staff) to the appropriate team within the council. For the most part, the methods of communication are restricted to either voice or email. A CCaaS platform is fundamental to the efficient and effective running of a contact centre.
4. The existing cloud solution requires review and improvement and our configuration, dashboards and reporting are limited. In consequence, there are poor data outputs which in turn hinders good business decision making and the business improvements that could be implemented.
5. In line with the emerging Customer Experience Strategy, there is a desire to provide more communication channels which must be accessed in a single software interface. This means that, in future, the members of the public will

have many more methods of communicating with the council, and the council will have a solution that will

- (a) allow new and improved ways of getting calls and contacts to the right team first time/every time,
  - (b) Improve response times and efficiency,
  - (c) to allow staff to communicate using the same channel that the call or contact is received,
  - (d) improved reporting,
  - (e) improved holistic view of the customer,
  - (f) improved dashboards,
  - (g) effective management of calls and contacts,
  - (h) effective decision making,
  - (i) improvements to the service offered by Microsoft Teams.
  - (j) Enable first contact resolution
  - (k) support the desire to 'Improve the Customer Experience'
6. The existing contract is due to expire on 15 November 2024. The transition from existing commercial arrangements may require both contracts to run in parallel to ensure operational continuity for the progression of Customer enquiries and this will be subject to further consideration by officers. The critical nature of the solution also drives the procurement strategy of obtaining a Contract of reasonable duration, with options for extension. i.e. repeated disruption of re-tendering is minimised whilst changes in business operations and/or technology can be considered through break clauses.
7. For clarity, the importance to not only the CSC, MASH and ICT of a CCaaS solution cannot be underestimated. The telephony platform is the primary route into the council for our customers and there is an imperative to have an operational and fully fledged way of customers contacting the council through a single platform.
8. This project is governed under the 'Improving the Customer Experience' transformation programme and ultimately, the CCaaS product will be one vital cog in the wider customer model that is being developed that will enable Oxfordshire County Council to deliver more innovative solutions leading to wider change across the organisation.

## **Exempt Information**

9. There is exempt information relating to this report where disclosure would distort the proper process of open competition and would prejudice the position of the authority in the process of the transaction and the Council's standing generally in relation to such transactions in future, to the detriment of the Council's ability properly to discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.

## **Summary of scope of a CCaaS Procurement**

10. It is likely to involve an IT software solution from a third party, that is Cross-Cutting and impacting a range of internal service users and external customers

who contact the Council. This contract must be able to be flexed up and down as the Council's needs change over the course of the contract.

11. The solution must be able to provide Customer Service Assistants (CSAs) with all the information that is required when handling a case, regardless of the channel used to initiate the call.
12. The solution must be compatible with the Council's:
  - current telephony infrastructure and integrate with Microsoft Teams, M365, Outlook, Microsoft Co-Pilot, and other Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies;
  - desktop provision;
  - adherence with all industry standard headsets and call related devices;
  - existing Pay360 Call Secure software to take card payments at the outset of the contract, but as this may change over time, it must also be compatible with other standard PAY applications and
  - other products that emerge over time.
13. The solution must be capable of delivering an Omni-channel function whereby the ability to handle contacts from multiple channels including telephony, email, web chat, video call, SMS, AI, or social media is handled within a single platform with enhanced reporting. This level of functionality or 'channel choice' will need to be aligned to the current work being undertaken on the production of a future customer operating model and may expand / retract.
14. The solution will include technologies that allows straight forward configuration using voice recognition software that can use "flagged" words to immediately route the call to the correct officer or specialist service and be capable of handling simple and repetitive requests without human intervention.
15. The supplier must provide a comprehensive training package which is available for the duration of the contract to support the development of a changing workforce within the service.
16. To allow forecasting of contact demand and scheduling of appropriately skilled staff, a workforce management application is desirable.
17. The solution must:
  - provide robust disaster recovery and business continuity processes and measures;
  - meet the Council's security and data protection requirements;
  - meet the ICT Strategy which has a "cloud first" principle for hosting of the solution and any related data.
18. The above aspects of scope represent a high-level aspiration and does not provide a comprehensive list of the requirements. Detailed specifications will be delivered in the Procurement exercise to follow, after the approval of the Cabinet member has been granted.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. Vision: Our customer service is your experience ... Your satisfaction is our success...
20. Key Principles from the draft Customer Experience Strategy
  - Having a 'customer first' approach across the Council
  - Having a better understanding of our customers and what they want from us
  - Improving customers' access to our services
  - Designing an excellent Customer Experience from beginning to end
  - Listening to, and learning from customer feedback
21. The Local Digital Declaration signed by the Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020 supports the government initiative as a commitment to:
  - design services that best meet the needs of citizens
  - challenge the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services
  - protect citizens' privacy and security
  - deliver better value for money.

## Financial Implications

22. The existing contract value is circa £180,000 per annum. The Total Cost of ownership for the full lifetime for a contract term of up to seven years is £1,260,000 which would be subject to several breakout clauses, for example - at one, three and five years.
23. As part of the procurement, we will push to reduce these costs to get best value for the council, while maintaining all the requirements and flexibility.
24. Budget provision for the new solution has been forecast from Capital Budget to cover implementation/transition costs and ongoing service costs will be taken from operational budgets that are already included in the medium-term forecast.

Comments checked by:

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## Legal and Procurement Implications

25. The value of the contract is such that the procurement will need to be undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR).
26. It is intended that, in order to comply with the PCR, the procurement will be undertaken either by way of an open competition or a mini-competition under a PCR compliant framework agreement. This selection of route to market is

determined by best fit, best value, least risk, and ease/timing of delivery. An open approach offers the maximum access to providers operating in this market sector, commercial flexibility, and associated terms.

27. Legal Services will prepare the necessary contract documentation.
28. The council will be relying on its general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 in procuring and contracting for this service

Comments checked by:

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## **Staff Implications**

29. There will be no changes to the staff complement that would be impacted by this procurement at the onset of the contract.
30. However, the solution will provide a toolset fundamental to the delivery of the Customer Service Centre to provide improvements and enhanced ways to communicate with our customers and residents of Oxfordshire to manage transactions and Council business. This may deliver organisational resource benefits.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

31. Stated in our Fairer priorities in the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 - Inequality commitment - We will support digital inclusion initiatives that give our residents the skills and connectivity to access our services and provide alternative options for those who cannot access our services digitally.
32. Despite the increasing digitisation of services, a significant portion of our community still faces barriers to accessing online resources and support. Whether due to lack of internet connectivity, limited digital literacy, or financial constraints, digital exclusion exacerbates inequalities and undermines efforts to provide inclusive service delivery. We aim to ensure everyone has the same access and consistent service when contacting us whether they are using technology or not and our recent digital inclusion strategy reflects this.

## **Sustainability Implications**

33. The procurement will be run in line with the Council's Social Value Policy.

## Risk Management

34. The CSC enables the customer (be they residents, businesses, or visitors of Oxfordshire) to access several Council services, many of which are statutory in nature, such as the initial gateway to Adult Social Care. The absence of a CCaaS platform will hinder customers to access these services in a timely and efficient manner. We are seeking to mitigate this risk, as far as possible, by considering a number of options which will offer either a full service from the outset or a partial service for a limited period of time while additional functionality is configured and delivered in a scheduled approach. The former option is the preferred.

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources

Annex: Appendix 1 – Financial analysis (Exempt)

Background papers: Nil.

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