

Report to Cabinet

15 March 2023

Subject:	Award of Unified Communications Telephony Contract
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bob Piper Deputy Leader Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources
Director:	Director of Regeneration & Growth Tony McGovern
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Helen Green Strategic Improvement Manager – Business Excellence Helen_green@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Director of Regeneration & Growth and the Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, be authorised to award a contract for Corporate Unified Communications – replacement Contact Centre telephony, via the Crown Commercial Services Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework for a 5-year period (3 + 2), following a successful further competitive exercise.
- 1.2 That the Director of Law and Governance – Monitoring Officer be authorised to execute any documentation necessary to enable the action referred to in 1.1 above to proceed.
- 1.3 That in relation to 1.2 above, approval be given to fund the costs in 2023/24 from a combination of HRA resources and the Customer Journey Priority Service Investment budget, and future costs be considered as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process.









2 Reason(s) for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report is seeking approval to award a contract for Corporate Unified Communications – replacement Contact Centre telephony services following a compliant procurement process.
- 2.2 The current Council telephony system Avaya CS1000 and Avaya CS 1000 (AACC6) in use within the Council’s Contact Centres has been in place since 2007. This system is out of date and unsupported as a result.
- 2.3 This project commenced in 2018 and was still on-going when the Pandemic hit but as a result of the Pandemic the project was put on hold. However, this has necessitated the continued use of the outdated system, with the Contact Centres now starting to see regular issues that impact customer service, productivity and overall performance.
- 2.4 A large proportion of the Council’s customer contact is still through the telephony route (2020-2021 617.7k calls received, 2021-2022 641.0k calls received and 2022-2023 to date 511k), despite continued digital solutions being offered and therefore we need a system that is fit for purpose, responsive and future proof.
- 2.5 There are a number of key reasons why the implementation of a new telephony system is required:
- The current system is outdated and unsupported.
 - Parts etc are becoming obsolete.
 - Cyber security risks.
 - Verint application is on a legacy server.
 - No back up system if the system was to go down.
 - Current market leaders offer much more effective and efficient options which take full advantage of the latest technology e.g. Virtual Agent.
 - The telephony system will remain on the risk register until renewed due to the risks associated with the current system.
 - A new system will increase productivity and improve management oversight.
 - Improvements to the Customer Experience – such as more automation for simple tasks; can translate in to over 20 different languages; Customers can rate their satisfaction; option to keep their place in the queue and get a call back rather than have to wait at busy times.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People	All Contact Centre staff will benefit from the introduction of a new telephony system. All residents accessing one of the Council's Contact Centres will benefit from a new state of the art system which will use AI, Virtual Agent and can translate in to over 20 different languages. In addition, completion of this project will align to the Corporate Plan principle of One Council One Team 'we will create a modern workplace and give staff technological tools that encourage creativity, collaboration and transformation'.
	People Live Well and Age Well	
	Strong Resilient Communities	
	Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods	
	A Strong and Inclusive Economy	
	A Connected and Accessible Sandwell	

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Up until this financial year the Council still received the majority of its contact via the telephony route, although this has changed to on-line for Quarter 1, 2 & 3 figures for this financial year, the telephony route still accounts for 41% (511k) of all contact. Therefore, our telephony channels need to be fit for purpose and responsive.
- 4.2 The current telephony system is outdated and unreliable and presents a potential cyber risk. Due to its age it has also lost a number of areas of functionality such as the ability to capture customer satisfaction scores.
- 4.3 The current system has been out of contract for a significant time and whilst there is a maintenance contract in place it is becoming increasingly difficult to replace parts etc due to them being obsolete. As the product is end of life it is also impossible to purchase new CC6 licences.



- 4.4 In May 2022 a request for information was conducted through the Council’s INTEND system, to gauge interest in providing a new telephony solution to Sandwell MBC. This exercise confirmed that there were a number of Suppliers on the Crown Commercial Services Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework that were interested in providing this service.
- 4.5 The contract will be procured via the Crown Commercial Services Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework for a period of 3 years with an option to extend for up to a further 2 years.
- 4.6 The Business Case which included an Options Appraisal was presented to Capital & Asset Management Board on 6 February 2023 and was approved subject to the project receiving a satisfactory strategic appraisal score.
- 4.7 Based on the information we have gathered through the duration of the project we have estimated the total cost of the contract should not exceed £2.8m for the 5-year period, however, this will not be confirmed until Suppliers have submitted their offerings.
- 4.8 Implementation of the new system will be managed by the successful supplier in conjunction with key Council staff, with the successful supplier acting as Implementation partner as well as supplier. The implementation period is estimated to be 8 months. As part of the procurement process the implementation period will be reviewed and evaluated for each potential supplier and a detailed project plan for implementation will be agreed with the successful supplier.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 An options appraisal was completed as part of the Business Case for this project and the option presented in this report was found to be the most appropriate.

6 Implications

Resources:	The total cost of this contract is estimated to be in the region of £2.8m for the 5 year period. The cost of this is to be met through the General Fund & HRA
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	accounts, with a proportion of Capital to cover initial set up costs.
Legal and Governance:	The Council's Contract and Procurement Procedures and Public Contract Procedure Rules (PCR) 2015 will be adhered to. Legal Services will also be involved in the preparation of the Contract Documentation prior to the award.
Risk:	The corporate risk management strategy has been complied with to identify and assess the risks associated with the recommendations being sought. The risks are associated with implementation and continuity of service and steps have been taken to highlight how these can be mitigated. Further measures will be put in place to ensure that if any risks are identified during the procurement process they are considered and appropriately mitigated.
Equality:	The introduction of a new telephony system will benefit all, as it will bring omni-channel capability as well as translation of a number of different languages. An EIA was carried out as part of this process.
Health and Wellbeing:	No Implication.
Social Value:	Social Value will be considered during the procurement process.
Climate Change:	Cloud hosted VoIP telephony solutions are considered a green technology and are much better for the environment than outdated analogue phone systems.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

