

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S  
REPORT TO**

**Cabinet**  
**06 December 2022**

**Report Title:** Procurement of an Information Governance Case Management System

**Submitted by:** Chief Executive

**Portfolios:** One Council, People & Partnerships

**Ward(s) affected:** N/A

**Purpose of the Report**

To seek authority to direct award a 5-year contract to Civica for an Information Governance Case Management System under the Crown Commercial Services RM6194 Framework in the sum of £108,000.

**Recommendation**

**That Cabinet authorise the direct award of a 5-year contract to Civica for an Information Governance Case Management System under the Crown Commercial Services RM6194 Framework (BOS Lot 1) in the sum of £108,000.**

**Reasons**

In line with the One Council transformation programme, the proposed solution delivers a number of time, process and cost efficiencies, modernises the customer interface and provides a suite of improved governance controls and performance management indicators.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council is currently undergoing a process or transformational change, through its "One Council" programme. The programme seeks to reorganise the way in which work, drive a different culture and make full use of available technologies. The programme aims to deliver a new operating model that aims to deliver services differently, to improve the way we interact with customers and provide the most efficient and effective services possible.
- 1.2 As part of the implementation of that programme within the Legal and Governance Services, careful consideration has been given to the opportunities that exist to improve the way we deal with information governance obligations. This follows activity mapping work which has been undertaken across the Service by the One Council Team's Business Architect.
- 1.3 As a result of this work, an opportunity to significantly improve this area of operations, generating savings, improving governance controls and improving the customer experience, has been identified through the procurement of a dedicated information governance case management system. In addition, implementing the case management system will address internal audit recommendations to:-
  - a) Adopt a more strategic approach to the management of DPA, FOI and information rights to ensure that relevant information assets are available to all stakeholders involved in the processing, management and monitoring of information rights requests.

- b) Further develops performance monitoring to assess and report on the overall level of organisational compliance with GDPR.

## 2. Issues

- 2.1 The council is under a number of legal obligations in respect of the way in which it stores and processes (uses) personal information. There are two main areas to consider, information requests, and governance requirements.

### *Information Requests*

- 2.2 Members will be aware that the council must respond, within strict timescales, to requests that it receives to disclose or share information that it holds. Requests can be made for information generally under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 as well as more specific requests from individuals wanting to know what information is held about them (Data Subject Access Requests) or from partner organisations concerned with safeguarding and the detection or prevention of crime.
- 2.3 The council does not currently have in place any form of integrated case management system for dealing with information requests. It currently uses generic Microsoft Office programmes that require a significant amount of manual intervention to operate, and to extract vital management and performance data from.
- 2.4 Currently, a typical information request will be received by email, via Microsoft Outlook. A manual intervention is then required to read the request, ascertain whether it contains enough detail to process, whether it is a valid information request or service query and whether it is asking for information that has already been provided elsewhere. After considering these issues, an officer in the Information Governance team will either enter into correspondence with the requestor to seek clarification, direct them to a relevant contact in an appropriate service or to existing information, often after having made internal enquiries to enable a response.
- 2.5 If it is a legitimate and complete information request, the officer will instead direct it to relevant officers or members, asking for the information to be collated and returned to the Information Governance team. At this point, the officers/members concerned need to diarise response times, and chase where necessary, to ensure that statutory deadlines are met. The Information Governance officer would need to enter the request into a spreadsheet in order to be able to track progress and capture performance management data.
- 2.6 By comparison, a case management system would operate through an integrated web form that would reduce the number of incomplete requests. The web form can recognise subject matter and direct requestors to existing information or alternative contacts that may obviate the need to complete a request. If the requestor proceeds with a request, the case management system would automatically divert it to the appropriate officer to begin assembling the materials. It would create a case in the case management system to begin to capture performance management information and automatically diarise key dates, prompting relevant officers as deadlines approach and escalating as needs be.
- 2.7 Currently, the next stage in the process would be for the collating officers/members to send the relevant materials to the Information Governance Officer. That would typically occur through a series of emails with attachments. The Information Governance Officer would then need to consider whether any statutory exemptions apply preventing disclosure and whether anyone else needs to be informed of or consulted over the intention to release the information. This relies on the knowledge and expertise of the officer concerned and another process of sharing information for consultation by email, and manually diarising and chasing

responses. Again, manual entries would have to be made in a spreadsheet if performance management data is to be generated about this aspect of the process.

- 2.8 By comparison, a case management system would create a “portal” within the system where collated materials could be uploaded, reducing email traffic and increasing data security. Third parties could be informed or consulted by sharing a secure link to the portal, through the case management system. Again, the system would automatically create diary entries and generate prompts to chase overdue responses and escalate matters if needs be. The system would also contain work-flows and guides which would prompt the Information Governance Officer to consider and apply exemptions. This enables a safer handling of more requests at a more junior level, freeing up time for expert resource to be dedicated to specialist tasks.
- 2.9 Case management systems can automatically generate response letters using pre-loaded templates, selecting standard text based on exemptions applied and populating address fields from the data the requestor originally supplied. It can assist with redacting third party personal information, and disclosure can happen (if appropriate) through sharing a link to the portal where the information would then reside. Management data would automatically be captured in respect of this part of the transaction. By contract, currently all of these steps would have to be undertaken manually.
- 2.10 If there is then an internal review process, invoked by a requestor who is dissatisfied with the response, the case management system can handle this in a similar fashion, as opposed to current systems that relies entirely on manual intervention. Similarly, if the next step is invoked and interactions with the Information Commissioner become necessary, the case management system can quickly provide the relevant information, management data and audit trails to assemble submissions to the Information Commissioner. Currently all of these processes would have to be handled and logged entirely manually.
- 2.11 In terms of a costs-benefits analysis, the first point to note is that the absence of range of reliable management data from the current systems the Council uses makes it difficult to analyse an accurate starting point for such an assessment. However, that said, there are three very clear areas in which efficiency savings will be realised in connection with information requests.
- 2.12 The first is in reducing the level of manual intervention required to deal with the significant number of “round robin” requests the council receives under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. “Round robin” requests are requests emailed on mass to public sector bodies to gather information for research, lobbying or marketing purposes. An analysis shows this request typically makes up around 85% or more of the requests for information this authority receives under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 2.13 Utilising a web-form based request system, which can result in less “round robin” requests being received, and which automatically direct requestors to existing information, is anticipated to save in the region of £40,000 of officer time over the life of the proposed contract when considering just this type of request.
- 2.14 Secondly, whilst case management system automations would save a significant amount of time for the Information Governance team, it would also save time for everyone in the Council who is asked to provide information in connection with a request. It is difficult to quantify this saving, but utilising automations so that officer time can be directed to where it adds most value is a key tenet of the One Council programme.
- 2.15 Finally, the workflow prompts and technical guidance within the system provide opportunities to more appropriately resource volume tasks at junior levels and requires less

intervention from senior, more specialist officers. This aligns completely with the ethos of the One Council programme, enabling a smaller cohort of officers to effectively deal with a wider range of functions. This will be integral to realising savings through reconfiguring officer resource, fully in accordance with council policies and practices that is anticipated to offset the cost of the system within 30 months of its operation, without factoring in any other savings.

### *Governance Requirements*

- 2.16 In addition to dealing with information requests in an efficient manner, the Council must comply with a range of other requirements in how it gathers, stores and uses information. It must, for instance, maintain an “information asset register” containing details of all of the personal “information assets” that it is responsible for. An information asset is a system in which personal information is stored or processed.
- 2.17 In respect of all of the information that it holds, the council must ensure that it is clear on the purposes for which it is held, that the minimal practicable amount of information needed is held, and that it is processed only for proper purposes. It must also ensure that it only retains information for as long as is reasonably necessary with reference to the purposes for which it is held.
- 2.18 There are also requirements in respect of certain types of information that the Council is obliged to publish in its publication scheme.
- 2.19 There are additional requirements about logging, assessing and reporting breaches of information security and ensuring that appropriate corrective action is taken.
- 2.20 There are a significant number of administrative processes that must be undertaken, on a daily basis, to ensure that the council meets these various legal requirements. Much like how we currently deal with information requests, these systems and administrative processes rely heavily on generic Microsoft Office products and manual interventions.
- 2.21 A dedicated case management system would ensure a strategic, co-ordinated approach to implementing and monitoring governance controls. It would bring a number of process and information security benefits and efficiencies similar to those described above in respect of the way that information requests would be dealt with, and would generate powerful performance management information to assess and ensure organisational compliance, in line with audit recommendations.
- 2.22 In terms of a costs-benefit analysis of this functionality, whilst it can be seen that the system will “pay for itself” through information request improvements, the significant benefit here lies in significantly reducing the potential for adverse findings and fines in relation to information security breaches or the improper processing or retention of data. Fines for significant data breaches levied against local authorities have ranged, in recent years, from £80,000 to £150,000.

### 3. **Proposal**

- 3.1 That Cabinet authorise the direct award of a 5-year contract to Civica for a GDPR Case Management System under the Crown Commercial Services RM6194 Framework in the sum of £108,000.

#### 4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 The way in which the Council currently manages information requests and information governance demands is suboptimal. Officers do an excellent job of using generic Microsoft Office products to handle what is an important, high-volume and time pressured area of work for the council, which the council is obliged in law to undertake. However, reliance on generic Microsoft Office products makes the task significantly more resource intensive than it needs to be, relying on a significant amount of manual intervention across the council.
- 4.2 The level of manual intervention currently required creates a significant burden on the Information Governance team, and those officers (and members) who are, for instance, asked to collate and supply information to satisfy information requests. Manual interventions invariably give rise to a greater potential for errors to be made or deadlines to be overlooked. These processes are automatically managed through workflows in a bespoke case management system.
- 4.3 The system sits foursquare within the council's digitisation journey as part of the One Council initiative. It will empower and enable staff, modernising the council's approach by automating administrative functions. That enables higher performance to get things done by allowing officers to better spend their time on more value-added, specialist tasks. The system would also address a number of areas for improvement identified in a recent information governance audit.

#### 5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 Very serious consideration has been given to a "do nothing" option, whereby the team would continue to use generic Microsoft Office programmes with a high-level of manual intervention to continue delivering the service. This option was discounted as it does not accord with the Council's One Council and digitisation objectives and, ultimately, is likely to result in much higher costs for the council in terms of time lost to manual interventions and the opportunity costs of not benefiting from the many information governance improvements the system would enable.
- 5.2 A second option was to attempt to configure the legal iCasework system, currently being implemented in legal services, to operate to provide a similar level of functionality. This option was discounted because it would be using the legal iCasework system for a purpose not intended, so a significant number of the benefits in terms of automation, casework prompts/guidance and reporting would not be realised. This would not necessarily bring any significant improvements over the current Microsoft Office suite.
- 5.3 A third option was to procure an alternative case management system. After careful consideration, this option was also discounted. The system proposed is an Amazon Web Services based system which operates as an additional module to the iCasework legal case management system currently being implemented in legal services. Whilst the systems serve two distinct purposes, there are significant benefits to having systems that share commonality in terms of user-interface, back-office configuration and a common supplier. This enables officers to work more easily and intuitively across both systems with minimal additional training. In addition, lengthy negotiations have secured a very competitive price based on that commonality, and the existing customer relationship built up through the existing use of Civica financial and legal systems.

#### 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 In terms of procurement law, a direct award is permissible through the framework referred to above. In terms of the Council's internal procurement rules, for the reasons set out a direct

award is considered appropriate under Paragraph 4.1 d of the Contract Procedural Rules as a propriety product is required to be compatible with an existing installation.

## 7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 The proposal has a net neutral impact on those with protected characteristics, but by virtue of the anticipated performance and efficiency improvements, it is considered that the services on offer to those with protected characteristics will improve as they will for those with no such identifiable characteristics.

## 8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 The contract is for a minimum initial term of 5 years and involves the following costs:-

- implementation and configuration costs of £33,000
- annual software licence fees (for an unlimited amount of users) £15,000 p.a.

8.2 Funding of the new Civica GDPR Case Management System will be via the capital programme in respect of the implementation of the system and the first year licence fee. Once the system has been installed it will then be funded through revenue as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It is expected that the system will generate staff efficiencies in the future.

## 9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are always risks associated with the implementation of any new ICT system, but it is considered that these can be appropriately managed through a proper implementation and testing programme, with the benefit of implementations previously undertaken with other Civica products.

9.2 It is considered that the far greater risk lies in a missed opportunity to improve information governance, and to make better use of staffing resource by automating administrative processes to free up staff time to devote to more specialist activities.

## 10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1 By modernising a key system and function, using innovative technology to drive efficiencies into digitised processes, it is considered that the proposal makes a contribution to the following UNSDGS



## 11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 Factoring in implementation costs, the revenue expenditure for the 5-year minimum term exceeds £100,000 making this a key decision.

## 12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 N/A

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 N/A

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 N/A