

## EXECUTIVE 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Procurement of a single Revenue and Benefits ICT System for North Northamptonshire</b>
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<b>Executive Member</b>	Councillor Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1974</b>	

### List of Appendices

None

### **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of Executive to commence a procurement process for a single Revenue and Benefits ICT system for the Council.

### **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 This report outlines the current position with regards to the Revenue and Benefits ICT systems across North Northamptonshire and the rationale to procure and implement a single system to deliver the service, commencing April 2023.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Executive:

- a) Approve the commencement of the procurement process to purchase and implement a single Revenue and Benefits ICT System for North Northamptonshire.
  - b) Delegate authority to the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance, to take any further decisions and/or actions required to conclude the procurement and implementation of the new system.
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendations – The Council will gain productivity efficiencies from a single system for Revenues and Benefits by enabling single source reporting and support for billing. It will remove current issues of sovereign council system incompatibility and will assist the Council to provide a unified platform to provide information for residents and businesses. Interactions with the Council will be simplified and require less internal resource.

#### **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1 The Revenues and Benefits Team are responsible for the billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates. They are also responsible for the administration, calculation and payment of Housing Benefit, Local Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payments to residents.
- 4.2 In addition, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic the team has also administered a significant number of new grant schemes to businesses within the area on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. Alongside this they have also delivered Test and Trace Support Payments of behalf of the Department for Health & Social Care.
- 4.3 However, following Local Government Reorganisation across Northamptonshire and the creation of a single North Northamptonshire Council on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the team has been unable to join up effectively as it continues to operate from the separate revenues and benefits systems inherited from the four sovereign District and Borough Councils
- 4.4 Currently there are two main systems providers that support the revenues and benefits systems in North Northamptonshire, namely the Capita Academy System and the Northgate System. Operating from multiple platforms is operationally inefficient and introduces challenges and risks around the ability to produce consistent and timely management information including providing government statistical returns as well as ensuring general compliance, value for money and good practice.
- 4.5 The service will work closely with colleagues within Legal Services, Procurement and ICT to support the effective delivery of any new system ensuring that it does not adversely affect other transformation plans.

## **5. Issues and Choices**

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### Do Nothing Option

- 5.1 There is the option to continue to maintain the four separate systems, however, this is not considered feasible. As a single Council, one system will enable greater flexibility of working through streamlined processes with all revenues and benefits staff able to access the same system in real time. It will also avoid the likely higher cost and administrative burden of supporting and updating four separate systems. Retaining four systems increases the risk of data security issues and has an adverse impact on the Council's ability to manage sensitive personal data.

### Option to Move to a Single Revenues and Benefits System across North Northamptonshire

- 5.2 The implementation of a single system will help to address the issues detailed in paragraph 4.4. It will also improve the customer experience for those moving to, from or within the North Northamptonshire area. Currently, customers have to be directed to the team at the former sovereign area for their service request to be actioned; bringing the systems and teams together will remove the need for this and be an improvement in the service that is currently provided.

### Timeline

- 5.3 It is important that the procurement process is started as soon as possible given the length of time that it takes to procure and implement such a system, and Revenue and Benefits Service date sensitivity. For example, it is essential that the system is stable during the months of January to March due to annual billing preparations for Council Tax and Business Rates and then 'live' billing therefore any implementation work could not be undertaken during this period.
- 5.4 It is estimated that the implementation phase will take 9 months to deliver therefore it is essential that the procurement process is completed in readiness for the pre work and planning to start in January 2022, with the implementation phase following in April 2022 to ensure that it is concluded in the 9-month timeframe available before preparations start for annual billing 2023 from around February 2023.
- 5.3 The procurement will follow a compliant procurement process, run in line with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's internal rules, processes and procedures as set out within the Council's Constitution.

## **6. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **6.1 Resources and Financial**

- 6.1.1 There will be resource implications with regards to procuring and implementing a single system. Early engagement has already taken place with Legal, Procurement, Transformation and ICT teams; in addition, a part of the

procurement process will require the suppliers to provide a project plan which will include details of the resources required from the staff within Council teams.

- 6.1.2 There will also be financial implications due to the complexity of the conversion and merging of four systems. It is proposed that the costs for implementing the single system, currently estimated at c£0.5m, will be met from a one-off contribution from reserves and/or capital funding depending upon the system procured and whether the cost can be capitalised.

## 6.2 **Legal**

- 6.2.1 The Legal Services team have been engaged, to ensure a robust and appropriate contract is prepared for this vitally important ICT system.

- 6.2.2 The billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates is a statutory duty imposed upon the Council by primary legislation. The Council is also required to calculate, pay and administer Housing Benefit, a Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and grants in respect of COVID19. It must therefore ensure that it has in place a robust system which enables it to efficiently manage sensitive information in relation to residents and businesses in its area.

- 6.2.3 The Council is also required to report its performance in respect of the above duties, and must therefore be able to confidently and efficiently extract the required information/

## 6.3 **Risk**

- 6.3.1 The Council's financial stability in large part relies on its ability to collect income promptly and efficiently, failure to collect income can have serious financial and reputational consequences. There is a risk that if the procurement process is not started immediately, the implementation timeframe maybe adversely affected, reducing the time available for the teams to ensure that the new single system is stable and working correctly in time for the annual billing 2023 (February 2023).

## 6.4 **Consultation**

- 6.4.1 Consultation will take place with stakeholders as a part of the procurement process.

## 6.5 **Consideration by Scrutiny**

- 6.5.1 The procurement process and/or any part of the requirement may be selected for consideration by Scrutiny.

## 6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 There are no climate/environmental impacts that may arise regarding the Council area, or particular localities within the area.

## 6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 There are no distinct community impacts that may arise regarding the Council area, or particular localities within the area.

## **7. Background Papers**

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7.1 None.