

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 9 JANUARY 2024
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION)

AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR REPLACEMENT OF MICROPHONES IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council utilises a range of software, hardware and professional support services to facilitate the webcasting and recording of public meetings.
- 1.2 The microphones that are part of these facilities, have reached their end of life. A high level of battery failures have occurred and it is no longer possible to source replacement batteries for the current model.
- 1.3 Interim solutions have been put in place, including directly plugging microphones into power sources, but with the microphones no longer being supported, this solution is only a short term fix. This report sets out the proposed approach for replacement of these microphones during 2024.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That in accordance with section 31.2(g) of the contract procedure rules, Cabinet grant a dispensation to the Contract procedure rules to allow a direct award to Public-I Group Limited for the provision of replacement microphones for the webcasting system as it is considered to the advantage of the Council to do so.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Council utilises a range of software, hardware and professional support services to facilitate the webcasting and recording of public meetings.
- 3.2 The microphones that are part of these facilities, have reached their end of life. A high level of battery failures have occurred and it is no longer possible to source replacement batteries for the current model.
- 3.3 Interim solutions have been put in place, including directly plugging microphones into power sources, but with the microphones no longer being supported, this solution is only a short term fix.
- 3.4 Public-I Group Limited, provide key aspects of this solution, and have been in contract with the council for a number of years, providing the hosting and software for the webcasting.
- 3.5 Demo session of various models compatible with their products (Televic G4 and Bosch Dicontis) have been provided, including an opportunity for members to see these.
- 3.6 The consensus of those that attended the demonstration and tested the microphones was for the Televic system. The Televic voting suit offers

comprehensive voting display options which are not available on other wireless systems . In addition to this, the Televic microphones are dual use which would require the Council to purchase less units than with the individual microphone option.

3.7 By choosing the Televic microphones the Council will be able to retain the CoCon licence from the G3 System for the use on the new G4 system which would save money on software costs. The G4 is the newest system and as such has the latest security features and also has 'smart hop' technology, where it will automatically switch channels as soon as any interference is detected, without interfering with proceedings. A feature which we understand is not available elsewhere.

3.8 In order to mitigate the risks of system failure as quickly as possible, ensure that microphones purchased remain compatible, and to minimise the number of organisations involved in support arrangements, the recommendation is to provide a dispensation to the contract procedure rules to allow direct award of the purchase and installation of the new microphones to Public-I Group Limited.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 The proposal is below the threshold for the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 to be applicable and a decision to make a direct award, in all of the circumstances, will be in compliance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules.

5 Financial Implication(s)

5.1 By moving to a system which allows dual use, the cost is lower than if the council were to purchase single user microphones.

5.2 A quotation has been received, which inclusive of spare units and batteries, to ensure the life of the system is maximised and provide resilience when the system reaches end of life, is just under £82k.

5.3 This will be funded from existing budgets and earmarked reserves set aside in 2022/23 for this purpose.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 There are risks that the system would fail if the project isn't moved forward at pace. There is a lead time for delivery and installation, and a dispensation to the rules significantly shortens this timeframe.

6.2 There are risks, with any new hardware around failure issues on go-live. Project and risk plans will be put into place, including robust testing of the system before go live.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 None relating directly to this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 Section 31.2(g) of the Contract Procedure rules, within the Councils Constitution, enables the Cabinet to agree a report from a Director or the Chief Executive, detailing a case where it is to the advantage of the Council that the rules be waived, subject to the award being within compliance with the Public Contact Regulations 2015 (PCR)

8.2 The award would be in compliance with the PCR if this dispensation is granted.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 None relating directly to this report

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

10.1 None relating directly to this report.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 None relating directly to this report.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 None relating directly to this report.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority of running an effective Council.

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An EIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Name of author
Title
Date

Richard Baker
Executive Director (Finance and Transformation)
8 December 2023