REVENUES AND BENEFITS DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT UPGRADE AND SERVER REPLACEMENT

Cabinet Member: Councillor David Watson

Wards Affected: All

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RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

To approve and release £126,500 funding from the major projects programme for the migration of revenues and benefits to Northgate information at work (document management and workflow system) and enable the replacement of the Revenue's and Benefits application server.

Reason for Decision

The current Northgate application used for storage and retrieval of electronic documents no longer provides the functionality required to capture documents electronically and is being phased out by Northgate (we are one of a handful of sites remaining on the product).

The server used to host the Revenues and Benefits system has reached end of life and needs to be replaced. There is no budget provision within the ICT Rolling Programme for server replacements and therefore funding is sought.

Corporate Implications

1.   Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything including spending money or acquiring property or rights which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to any of its functions. There is no budgetary provision for funding the replacement of the current system, or provision within the ICT capital programme for replacing or upgrading application servers. The existing document management system is now no longer being fully supported by Northgate due to its age and the availability of more modern solutions. It is proposed that this system is funded from the Revenue Development Reserve and the project added to the Council's Major Projects Programme. As the current system is no longer being supported, if it should fail then the Council would be unable to scan, file and automate processing of documents for Housing Benefit applications. This would have significant service, customer and financial implications for the Council.

Executive Summary

2.   All incoming documents are scanned and stored electronically. This includes all benefit applications, customer letters, emails, and online forms. The existing document management system has been in place for over 10 years, is fully integrated into the Revs/Bens system and has been ideal for basic scanning and storage of documents. In recent years the system has been pushed to its limits to accommodate modern technology such as emails online forms.

3. Some of the technology currently used to import documents is no longer supported and will fail at some point. When this happens manual workarounds will be needed for some work types (such as emails/online forms) and it will not be possible to manage incoming work within existing staffing levels and this will have a knock on effect to processing times and costs.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities – Implications

4. Value for Money

Background and Issues

5. Northgate Documents has been in place for over 10 years. Systems and technology has developed over this period but more recently the system has struggled to cope with the range of modern files, such as emails and attachments, required for quick and efficient processing. There has been an expectation that the system would need replacement at some point in the near future, however this need has now become urgent because key elements of the system are no longer supported.

6. Further innovation and savings are also being held back as manual workarounds being used to overcome system shortcomings (this can include printing off documents received, then scanning them into the document management system) increases the overheads of processing these files and therefore drives cost/workloads up whilst preventing further improvement to processing times.

7. The third fourth and fifth Data Protection Principles under the Data Protection Act 1998 provide that personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purposes for which they are processed, they shall be accurate and where necessary kept up to date, and that they shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for those purposes. Given the age of the existing system and its technological limitations, the new proposed system would significantly strengthen and streamline compliance with these legal obligations. The quickest and most effective solution is to migrate to the improved and updated Northgate system Info@Work, their standard document management product used by the majority of current customers as well as provided to any new customer. The revenue charge for this solution will remain unchanged; however there is a capital charge for setting up the solution and migrating the data which including 3rd party costs is £54,500.

The main advantages of migration to Info@Work are summarised as follows:

a) Info@Work will be fully supported.
b) As the revenues and benefit systems are also Northgate products Info@Work is fully integrated with existing systems
c) Email attachments can be directly imported into the system
d) Webforms will be automatically imported into the document imaging system
e) Multiple referencing of documents can be undertaken in a single operation. Currently lists (such as notification of death and tenancy lists) can only be stored against one account, which means that each list has to be manually copied several times and scanned and indexed against every account on the list.

f) Data protection. Info@Work has a retention and disposal module that allows deletion of old documents in accordance with the council's retention policy thereby complying with data protection legislation.

g) Info@Work can import a variety of formats the current system cannot accommodate, such as photos

h) Info@Work also gives Customer services the ability to also scan documents in reception, rather than photocopying passing to the back office for scanning as at present. This would eliminate double handling and allow documents to be accessed immediately.

8. The current server which was purchased in 2008 on which the Revenues and Benefits application is hosted has reached end of life. There is no budget provision within the current capital rolling programme to fund its replacement. The server is a critical part of the ICT infrastructure for the revenues and benefits application without which the service cannot function. The cost of purchase and installation is estimated at £72,000. The new server is expected to have an operational life of 5 years.

9. No additional funding is required for on-going maintenance as the current revenue budgets are sufficient to fund the on-going support costs of the new document management system and replacement server.

Conclusions

10. With key elements of the existing system no longer supported it is inevitable that unless replaced the system will fail at some point which would mean further very significant manual work and consequences in the areas mentioned above. As more and more incoming work is being submitted electronically, case handling times will continue to increase as the bottleneck caused by having to manually print, then scan documents received electronically continues. This would increase the on-going cost of the service as overtime/external resources would need to be used to maintain work turnaround.

Next Steps

11. Subject to funding the document management system and new server will be procured and implemented within the next 6 months.

Background Papers

Held in Financial Services.