



Councillor Cliff Lunn

Executive Member for Finance and Resources

Report to Council on 13 April 2021

Executive – 11 March 2021

Veritau North Yorkshire Contract Extension 2021

Following consultation with the Audit and Governance Committee, the Executive approved the extension of the current contract with Veritau for a further 2 years. The contract covers internal audit, counter fraud, information governance and risk management services. The service is considered good value for money, covering a wide range of assurance services and providing both resilience and economies of scale. The contract was initially for seven years from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2019 with options to extend for three years and then a further two years. In 2018, the council agreed to extend the contract for three years from April 2019. This extension is due to expire on 31 March 2022. The 2 year extension will allow the council to consider its requirements for assurance services in the longer term, once the results of the Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation is known.

Executive – 1 April 2021

S106 Affordable Housing Commuted Sum Allocation

This report presented a proposal for revision of the allocation of s106 commuted sums for affordable housing. Delivery of the programme has been frustrated by rising house prices and there is a risk that the funding will not be spent within the timescales set out in the s106 agreements. The report proposed a sum of up to 80% of market value per property towards delivery of SDC's affordable homes programme. Based on the approved programme budget, latest market values for properties and indicative spread of property types, it is estimated that £3,376k could be spent over the next year. A further report will be brought forward in due course to considering extending the programme into 22/23 and ensuring that delivery can be maximised within the funding timeline.

Other Portfolio issues

Digital update

Progress continues on a range of digital activity. As part of our transformation programme, we have now completed the rollout of Microsoft Sharepoint. This is now supporting greater collaboration and the sharing of documents across the Council and we will be shortly opening up opportunities to collaborate more widely. We continue to look at new ways to improve security – such as using biometrics, using our fingerprints to log on to our devices - and we will be simplifying the password re-set arrangements to take the pressure off the IT helpdesk.

We have completed the rollout of new devices to all staff and will extend this to new devices for councillors over the coming months. The IT Training Portal is now available to all councillors on our desktops. It is a website, which enables access Microsoft 'how to' training videos and can be used to support you to get the most out of programmes such as Email, Video Calling, Virtual Meetings, and Documents. Information about to access the portal has been circulated via email and the videos are really helpful.

In terms of day-to-day IT, we plan to replace the printer/copiers in the Civic Centre, taking the opportunity to reduce the number of devices – and the cost – as we seek to be as paper-lite as possible. Since Christmas we have completed upgrades to many of our key systems such as the Northgate Revenue and Benefits system – to support annual billing – to the Uniform Planning system and our Information@Work corporate document management system. We have also upgraded Repairfinder, the software used by our Customer Services Advisers to support tenants with their repair enquiries.

Housing Management System (Civica Cx), the Housing and Rents team are now using the system and we have now completed our first annual rents billing. The live system will be upgraded in May and we will then progress phase 2 of the Cx implementation which will focus on assets and repairs as well as other elements such as the tenants' portal.

In addition to Cx, the spring and early summer will also see us introduce online Licensing applications, upgrade the customer self-service elements of our Revenues and Benefits system as well as introducing new software (CivicaPay) to enable more customers to make payments online and simplify how we process those payments.

We have extended the partnership arrangement with the County Council and they continue to support our ICT infrastructure. A key element of this includes keeping up to date with what is needed to maintain cyber security, such as proactively keeping our Microsoft software up to date with the latest versions and patches and responding promptly to any vulnerabilities identified by Microsoft and/or the wider IT world.

Business Grants

A range of further grants from central government have been introduced to support businesses in the January lockdown and through its further extension. Public houses forced to closed in the Tier 2 restrictions have received grants totalling £94,232 and 56 wet led pubs received one off Christmas Support payments of £1,000.

Those businesses forced to closed in the national lockdowns in November and January have now received payments due to 31 March 2021 totalling for £5.8 million in weekly support and an additional one-off payment for the January 2021 lockdown.

A discretionary scheme has also been implemented to support those businesses that may not have properties in the rating list or have been forced to close but their trade has been severely affected by the lockdowns and payments to 352 businesses have been made so far at a total of £1,394,144

A new Restart Grant was announced in the Budget from 1 April onwards and the team is awaiting the further details on the eligibility criteria and funding allocations for these but as with previous grants will seek to make automatic payments to businesses wherever possible.

Annual Billing

In the week commencing 15th March just over 41,000 council tax bills were posted out to residents and 2770 National Non-Domestic Rates bills. In the Budget the Chancellor announced an extension of the extended retail and nursery 100% rates relief scheme for a further 3 months to 30 June 2021, followed by a 66% discount and following a quick turnaround of the required software changes the team managed to get the NNDR bills out on time with this change included.

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