

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

23 November 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Dendle (Chair), Blanchard-Cooper [Substituting for Bennett], Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Huntley, Madeley and Oppler.

Councillors Gunner and Pendleton were also in attendance at the meeting.

453. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting of the Corporate Support Committee.

454. APOLOGIES

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillors Bennett and Roberts.

455. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

456. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 28 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

457. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIR OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no items for this meeting.

458. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

459. PROVISION OF DIGITAL POLLING EQUIPMENT AND SOFTWARE FOR USE IN POLLING STATIONS AT FUTURE ELECTIONS

The Chair invited the Electoral Services Manager to present the report on behalf of the Group Head of Policy who was not able to attend this meeting.

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The Committee was advised that for the Elections held in May 2021, iPads had been used as a trial to manage the issuing of ballot papers and other administrative tasks normally undertaken by Presiding Officers and the core elections team. Positive feedback had been received on how easy the process and trial had been with many electors also commenting upon how happy they were to see this more modern digital approach.

In view of the feedback received, it was proposed to use iPads for future Elections and so the Committee was being asked to give approval for the Council to enter into a contract for digital support in administering future elections, which would include voter ID functionality, would improve efficiency and deliver a better service to voters and candidates. The key features and advantages of using iPads had been set out in the report.

It was explained that the Cabinet Office refunded a number of election costs incurred by local authorities. Although it did not yet refund the cost of a digital system, there was expectation that this would occur with the commitment to introduce more robust voter identification (ID) processes. Voter ID functionality for this system was already developed and had been tested in national trials. Whilst it would be included in this contract, it would only be included in later contracts for other authorities at an additional charge. The Government had announced that voter ID would be introduced from September 2022 ready for the next parliamentary elections in 2024, or sooner.

The providers of the software had been working with and had been accredited by the Cabinet Office. They were also likely to be included in the Electoral Commission's 'Designing Effective Electoral Services Toolkit' which would form part of the framework and guidance provided to local authorities in future elections. This included directions that the Council would need to follow, guidance that it should consider and best practice. The opportunity to influence this at an early stage would be invaluable.

It was explained that the cost of funding this contract would be offset by savings that the software would bring, mainly due to needing less staff at polling stations. It was estimated that approximately 50 less poll clerks would be needed and savings of around £10,000 could be made as the software would save administrative time and would reduce risk from potential human error at a number of stages in an election. Any risk had a potential cost to the Council, both reputationally and financially. The costs of elections to the Council varied depending on what the election was and what could be claimed back from other authorities. It was therefore not possible to be precise about the impact of using iPads and what a new process might have on overall election costs. However, it was anticipated that a minimum of £10-15k savings could be made at each major election.

The reasons for wanting to enter into a contract now were explained. The product was not currently available from any other supplier and a three year contract was being offered to the Council as 'early adopters' meaning that it would have full participation in the user focus group. Future contracts which would include voter ID functionality would be available but at higher costs to those Councils not already using them. A three year contract would cover the local elections in May 2023 and

parliamentary elections in 2024 and so the early adoption of the system was seen to be essential for the future effective delivery of these elections and other by-elections and/or Neighbourhood Plan Referendums that could occur at any time and where tablets could be used.

In discussing the report, the Committee confirmed that it supported the proposals as this software would go some way towards addressing the staffing shortage problems encountered by the Elections team at each major election. At the same time, it would streamline and iron out errors and would be an added benefit to the Council, offering value for money whilst dovetailing neatly in line with the Council's digital agenda.

Following further discussion, Councillor Clayden then proposed the recommendations in the report and these were seconded by Councillor Oppler.

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

- (1) Agreement be given for the Council to enter into a three year contract for the provision of Modern Polling with Modern Democracy Ltd; and
- (2) The virement of £72k to fund the contract from current year underspends be noted.

460. OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chair confirmed that there were no feedback reports from Outside Bodies to present to this meeting.

461. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and noted its Work Programme covering the remainder of the Municipal Year.

(The meeting concluded at 6.20 pm)