

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

2183

Author:

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Department:

Resources

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Subject:

Electoral Registration Software - Mobile Canvassing Application

Total Value:

£ 39,667 (Type: Revenue)

Decision Being Taken:

(1) To authorise the Corporate Director (Resilience) to place an order with Express Software Solutions for the purchase and maintenance of up to 31 Galaxy A tablet devices with pre-installed Mobile Canvassing Application at a total cost of £39,667 and the costs in year 1 (£22,980) be met from the budget provision for Individual Electoral Registration and, in year 2 (£16,687), from the budget provision for the annual canvass.

(2) To approve, in accordance with financial regulation 3.29, that the provisions of contract procedure rules as to the obtaining of tenders should be dispensed with on the grounds that Express Software Solutions Ltd are the sole supplier of the mobile canvassing application that operates with their own electoral management software.

Reasons for the Decision(s)

The door knocking stage of the annual canvass will take place during October and November this year and usually involves a canvass of approx. 56,000 properties. Canvassers are required to make their house to house enquiries carrying and managing large quantities of paper forms. The Council's software supplier has developed a mobile canvassing application which, in its current improved format, has only very recently become available to the Council. Feedback from other authorities, and the outcome of user testing by Electoral Services, indicates that conducting the canvass through use of the application will make the canvass far more efficient, more cost effective and secure. Given the challenges now presented by Individual Electoral Registration (including the need to not only obtain a household enquiry form from every property but also to issue and get responses to Invitations to Register from every unregistered individual at a property), efficiencies which assist in achieving maximum contact with citizens and speedier processing of data are essential.

Testing of the application indicates that the following benefits of acquiring the application will accrue:

(i) canvassers will not be required to conduct advance administration to sort thousands of paper forms or deliver these back to Electoral Services and will be able to devote their time to doorstep engagement with citizens;

(ii) there will be savings from dispensing with payment of an administration fee of £40 per canvasser (£1,200) for the sorting of forms and of approximately £4,000 for printing, plus any additional postage costs where forms are returned to the Council in pre paid envelopes;

(iii) information obtained from citizens by canvassers (which will include name, address, dates of birth and National Insurance numbers) will be held far more securely than on paper forms;

(iv) information obtained by canvassers will synchronise regularly with the Council's electoral management software making both the information canvassers have about properties they are visiting more up to date and enabling Electoral Services to process data and move individual citizens much more quickly into the next phase of the registration process;

(v) canvassers should be able to be more mobile and flexible and perform the door-knocking role more easily and quickly as they will not be encumbered with bulky forms and other materials;

The devices and application will also be used for ad hoc canvassing outside of the annual canvass period for follow up visits to properties and individuals from whom responses are awaited as part of routine updating of the register.

The Council currently is in a contract for supply of Electoral Management Software with Express Software Solutions . This mobile canvassing application is an 'add on' to the existing software system that the Council currently uses and is designed solely for use with Express Electoral Management software. Accordingly, permission is sought to dispense with financial regulations as to the obtaining of tenders as Express Electoral Management software is the sole supplier of this bespoke application.

The costs of acquiring the tablets pre-loaded with the mobile canvassing application and other associated software (eg. tracking) is £17,980 in year 1 and £11,687 in year 2. There is also a hosting and maintenance fee of £5,000 in both years 1 and 2

. It is proposed that the total year 1 costs of £22,980 should be met from IER budget of £94,000 carried forward from 2014-15 and that the year 2 cost of £16,687 should be met from the 2016-17 budget for the personal canvass.

Other Options Considered:

To continue with a paper based canvass. This has been rejected on the basis that, following user testing, the benefits that are anticipated from using the mobile application for the personal canvass (door-knocking) stage are expected to be significant in terms of both the efficiency and effectiveness of the canvass team itself (who will be more physically mobile and have more up to date information as they work) and also for the reduction in administration and processing of data for Electoral Services for whom the mobile application will provide daily updating of canvass data.

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| Background Papers: | None |
| Published Works: | None |
| Affected Wards: | Citywide |
| Colleague / Councillor Interests: | None. |
| Dispensation from Financial Regulations: | Yes |
| Consultations: | Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision. |
| Crime and Disorder Implications: | It is a legal requirement for residents to return a household enquiry form and there is also a civil penalty for failure to respond to an Invitation to Register. In canvassing properties, canvassers are seeking to ensure compliance with electoral law . Conduct of the canvass itself is also a statutory requirement . |
| Equality: | EIA not required. Reasons: This decision does not relate to a new or changing policy, service or function nor will it have an effect on services or implementation of policies developed outside the Council. |
| Decision Type: | Portfolio Holder |
| Subject to Call In: | <p>No</p> <p>The call-in procedure does not apply to the proposed decision because the delay likely to be caused by the call in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public's interests. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (or Vice-Chair) in his/her absence has been consulted and agreed both that the decision proposed is reasonable in all circumstances and that it should be treated as a matter of urgency.</p> |
| | <p>Person Consulted: Brian Parbutt</p> <p>Consultation Date: 22/09/2015</p> <p>In order for canvassers to receive and be trained in the use of the tablets in time for them to begin the canvass in the 2nd week of October 2015, an order needs to be placed as soon as possible.</p> |
| Advice Sought: | Legal, Finance, Procurement, IT |

Legal Advice: There are no particular legal implications arising from the proposals contained in this report. Advice provided by Sarah Molyneux (Legal Services Manager) on 22/09/2015.

Finance Advice: In 2014/15 the Council received funding to support Individual Electoral Registration (IER). £94k of that funding remained unspent and was accrued into 2015/16 to support additional expenditure associated with IER. There is uncommitted funding available from this amount that will support the Year 1 cost of £22,980. The Year 2 cost be met from the Services current budget in respect of the personal canvas. This can be achieved as savings will be made as follows:

- It is estimated that there will be a £1.2k saving from the administration fee paid to the Canvasser and £4k from print savings.
- The remainder will be funded from savings in respect of reduced expenditure on temporary staff required for the personal canvas.

In addition there will be the following non financial benefits:

- Use of single provider hardware and software reduces the risk of incompatibility.
- There will be increased security of personal information as this will not be paper based. In addition information will synchronise regularly with the Council's electoral management software making the process more efficient.
- there will be reduced administration both prior to and after canvas visits again improving efficiency.

It should be noted that approval is sought in accordance with financial regulation 3.29, that the provisions of contract procedure rules as to the obtaining of tenders should be dispensed with on the grounds that Express Software Solutions Ltd are the sole supplier of the mobile canvassing application that operates with their own electoral management software.

Advice provided by Steve Hales (Finance Analyst) on 24/09/2015.

Procurement Advice: Approval to dispense with Contract Procedure Rule 5.1.1 in accordance with Financial Regulation (3.29) (Operational Issues) to allow for this one off purchase is required.

The Procurement Unit supports this purchase.

Advice provided by Paul Ritchie (Procurement Category Manager) on 24/09/2015.

IT Advice: The IT Service supports this proposal. Democratic Services have successfully piloted this technology. Purchasing the hardware and software together from the single supplier minimises risks of incompatibility, providing a 'turn-key' solution with ready accountability should any difficulties be encountered in operation .

Advice provided by Paul J. Burrows (Strategy Manager) on 24/09/2015.

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| Signatures |
| Graham Chapman (PH for Resources and Neighbourhood Regeneration) |
| SIGNED and Dated: 25/09/2015 |
| Ian Curryer (Chief Executive) |
| SIGNED and Dated: 25/09/2015 |
| Theresa Channell (Head of Corporate and Strategic Finance) - Dispensation from Financial Regulations |
| SIGNED and Dated: 24/09/2015 |
| Chief Financial Officer's Comments: |