

Project Documentation - Initial Project Proposal Document

Project: Housing Software Review

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1. Purpose of Document

The purpose of this document is to justify the undertaking of the project based on the estimated cost of delivery and the anticipated benefits to be gained. The proposal outlined in this document will be used as part of the process for prioritising future projects.

2. Project Description

To conduct a comprehensive review of all housing software systems, to ensure that the Council are receiving value for money, are compliant with legislative requirements and are providing self-serve options for customers.

The Division is driven to ensure good performance, this review includes performance monitoring processes, ensuring that future service provision and the software that serves it is forward thinking. Enabling staff resource to be redirected to proactive activities, such as reducing homelessness, understanding financial vulnerability, and maintaining a choice-based lettings system in accordance with guidance and legislation.

In scope:

- Comprehensive review of housing systems, including Home Connections to establish whether this software package is providing value for money and to explore whether rent accounting can be incorporated into the current system.
- Comprehensive review of the existing partnership agreement; does this arrangement give sufficient autonomy and provide best value. This will include an appraisal of the partners future intentions as well as consideration to the exit terms within the existing arrangement.
- Comprehensive review of data security and GDPR, ensuring that compliance with appropriate Legislation and audit requirements.
- Soft market testing to establish what is available in the housing software market, with evaluation to establish whether an alternative provider would offer better value.
- Compliancy with legal and procurement guidance.

3. Background

Home Connections have provided a hosted Housing system as part of a Sussex Partnership since 2016. This partnership agreement was extended for 2 years in May 2022, ending May 2024. Current procurement advice is that the contract that exists between Brighton & Hove acting as the lead Authority and Home Connections cannot be extended beyond 7 years. Therefore, this has prompted a review of the current arrangements with a view to ensuring a housing software system that is fit for purpose while offering best value. It is acknowledged that within the current timescales a short-term extension to the current arrangements may be necessary, this is subject to further procurement advice both internally and externally with the lead Authority who hold the current contract on behalf of the partnership.

Appendix 5

Entering a contract directly with a supplier has the potential to offer greater autonomy and best value. The partnership was entered into to facilitate collaboration and reduce costs. However, the demographical differences within the partnership authorities can be potential barrier, with complex decision making and lack of control over costs and resource. The collaborative part of the agreement has not materialised and offers little value.

The market has also changed since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act and management reporting is now crucial to securing Government funding. Therefore, this work will establish whether an alternative supplier would be more suitable.

The provision of Council owned temporary accommodation outside of a Housing Revenue Account is also unusual and something that the Council can be proud of, as it provides a high-quality alternative to the use of Bed & Breakfast or leased in temporary accommodation. To improve rent collection and debt reporting an enhanced system other than the current Paloma rent accounting system is required. Currently some work must be done manually, automating this process will allow for accurate reconciliation and less staff time spent completing manual tasks, this will improve accuracy. This review will consider a combined rent accounting and property management system, or systems that fully integrate with existing or proposed products.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved.

- A comprehensive review of current systems and processes.
- A market appraisal of what is available in the housing software market, including an evaluation of alternative suppliers.
- Compliance with procurement and legal.
- Proposals for a future Housing System, with recommendations on next steps.

5. Timescales

To some extent this is dependent of procurement and legal advice, if an extension to existing arrangements is agreed in the short term (suggested maximum 2-year term, with a preference of 1) the comprehensive review and following procurement exercise will be completed in time to allow for a new contract to commence from the end of the extended term i.e. May 2025, or May 2026.

6. Project Costs and Resources

| | Costs (£) | Source |
|---|--|---|
| One-Off | £60,000 | Existing Housing reserves |
| Revenue | £40,000 pa | Existing IT support budget of £23k with £17k budget growth required |
| Services to be involved in the project delivery | IT - minimal impact. Revenues, Benefits & Housing – medium impact. Legal to oversee GDPR compliance – minimal impact. Procurement and Legal to oversee contract compliance – medium impact. | |

One off cost of £60,000 are the estimated costs of exiting arrangements with existing supplier and set up costs for transferring data to new supplier. If after reviewing software the decision is made to remain with Home Connections as a supplier, with or without the partnership arrangement the one-off costs will be less.

7. **Benefits vs. Cost**

Having a housing system that is fit for purpose, aids customer self-service and automation to support effective service delivery. Effective IT software and support services will help to support good levels of customer service.

8. **Identify Risks**

- Noncompliance with procurement rules may have financial and reputational risk.
- Potential disruption to service delivery although we will seek to mitigate this appropriately.