

BROADLAND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Wednesday, 18 October 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: L Starling (Chairman), J Emsell, J Harvey, P Newstead, R Potter, D Thomas, E Tovell and T Yousefian

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: B Baby (Vice-Chair), A Crotch and K Kelly

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: D Roper

Officers in Attendance: C Lawrie (Assistant Director of ICT/Digital and Transformation), S Carey (Strategy and Intelligence Manager) and L Arthurton (Democratic Services Officer)

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs: Baby, Crotch and Kelly.

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record with the minor amendment to add Cllr D Roper and Cllr J Davis as attendees.

8. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME - BUSINESS CASE

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director for ICT/Digital and Transformation, which provided an overview of the outcomes from the discovery phase of the First-Class Customer Service project. The report also sought approval for the subsequent business case, which would go on to Cabinet.

Members noted that the Council was committed to improving the customer

experience and overall satisfaction and that the Customer Experience Programme would allow residents to communicate with the Council in multiple ways, whilst improving access to core information. This would help reduce the number of times customers needed to interact with the Council ensuring a 'right first-time approach'. This would also include 24/7 access to help through a webchat function. This service would help reduce numbers on the more costly channels such as email or telephone.

Members were advised that the proposed capital investment for the programme would be sourced by reprofiling £344,250 from IT Transformation in the existing Capital Programme.

The total revenue investment required was £434,700. The return on investment would be achieved in year five and in the best-case scenario total savings provided by the programme over an eight-year period would be £1.1m, with ongoing savings for Broadland of £319,000 per annum.

A concern was raised regarding the small budget allocated to the project and its implementation. Officers explained that work had been undertaken to review the options for the service and a decision had been made to go with a mid-range technology solution that would fit within the Council's spending budget. A further concern was raised about the 10 percent contingency being too low. Members were reassured that the figure worked within the outline business case but would be reviewed as the project progressed.

Conversation turned to the proposed 24/7 webchat function, where officers explained that it was an aspiration of the Council, but work would need to take place to understand how it would operate with the development of AI technology. It was further noted that phase one of the development would see a customer services' officer run the webchat, with further developments taking place over a two-year period.

In response to a concern about the AI webchat function becoming too impersonal, which could create frustration for users, officers confirmed that this function would be monitored to ensure the balance was right for users and it met their expectations.

A member emphasised the need to be able to contact the Council through traditional means, to ensure that residents who did not use electronic technology were not disadvantaged. In response, the Assistant Director for ICT/Digital and Transformation confirmed that face-to-face contact and telephone communication would continue to be available to residents. She added, however, that this form of communication had been declining and the new system would allow officers to monitor and collect data on customer communications and provide a much more effective service.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development noted that the new system would reduce officer time, making sure that the right information was given at the initial inquiry.

In response to a question on savings generated by the new system, members were advised that these would be seen through a reduction in staff posts as

vacancies arose. The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development added that the project's intention was not to reduce service but to manage officers' workloads and time better.

In answer to a query on the period of time in which the data had been collected for the project, officers confirmed that the volumes of communication received had been recorded over a one-year period.

In response to a concern raised over data protection, it was confirmed that the data protection principles would be adhered to throughout all aspects of the project. It was then;

RESOLVED

To recommend that Cabinet

1. Agrees the procurement of a new Customer Experience Platform with web content and data analytics with integration capability for data capture and workflow for automation.
2. Delegates authority to award the contract for the new Customer Experience Platform to the Director of Resources, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Organisational Development. And;

Cabinet to recommend to Council:

3. The Capital investment required of £344,250 is funded by reprofiling the uncommitted favourable variance from the IT- Systems Replacement Programme 23/24 to Customer Experience Programme 24/25 and 25/26.
4. The revenue investment required as outlined in section 4.0. is built into the base budget from 2024/25.

(The meeting concluded at 6.27 pm)

Chairman