

**Report to the Leader of Council**

24 February 2025

**Wards:** All wards**Procurement of Network Hardware Replacement****Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation****Report Status:**

This item is not exempt

Therefore exempt reasons are not applicable

This is a key decision. The matter is in the Forward Plan  
Forward plan Ref.: 006/25

**1. Purpose of the Report and Summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek authorisation to undertake a procurement exercise to replace several pieces of key ICT network hardware which are nearing the end of their life
- 1.2. Proposed procurement will be via Crown Commercial Services Technology Products and Associated Services Framework (RM6098) which provides UK public sector organisations with a fully compliant route to access a range of network services from network infrastructure to fully integrated communication suites, including emerging technologies that reflect changes in the marketplace and future consumption of network solutions.
- 1.3. Proposed procurement will cover 2 aspects:
  - i) Access switches: a one-year contract for the purchase of hardware using request for quotation of those suppliers on the Framework. Contract value estimated at £250,000.

ii) Core/Distribution Switches: a five-year contract procured through a further competition exercise for replacement of several key pieces of ICT network hardware and associated services (including maintenance) which are nearing end of life. Contract value estimated £300,000 for 5 years. The estimated spend is valued at £60,000 per annum.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1. That Cabinet authorises the Assistant Director for Digital & ICT, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Transformation and the Director of Legal Services and Partnerships to undertake a procurement exercise through Crown Commercial Technology Products and Associated Services Framework (RM6098) framework to provide the Council with network hardware and services in order to replace the network equipment with modern hardware.

That Cabinet approves the allocation of a £550,000 capital budget to achieve this.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1. Core/distribution network hardware is over ten years old.

3.2. In October 2025 the core/distribution network hardware will be classed as 'end of support' which means it will no longer receive software updates for bug fixes or cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

3.3. The existing hardware is over ten years old and is optimised to service the applications in general use at that time. Modern network hardware will be optimised for today's applications and network traffic.

3.4. Modern network hardware should also deliver an improvement in network performance.

3.5. ICT staff are planning to relocate the new primary Data Centre. The timing of this project will allow us to install the new primary core/distribution switch into site 2 allowing for a much smoother transition.

## **4. Key Organisational Impacts**

4.1. Impact on other Executive Committees (including Area Committees) and decision makers:

4.1.1. This is a Council wide contract and has no impact on any one particular Area Committee.

4.2. Contribution to the delivery of the Community Plan, the Council Plan and/or Area Plans:

4.2.1. The procurement of key ICT network hardware will contribute to the achievement of the Council Plan theme to deliver organisational excellence by improving access through digitally enabled services, working in partnership and by making best use of our assets and budgets.

4.3. Impact on other key strategies/business plans:

4.3.1. There is no direct impact on other key strategies/business plans.

4.4. Equalities Impact Information

4.4.1. Please find attached a completed Equality Screening Tool Checklist that confirms there are no adverse effects on any group.

## 5. Consultation

5.1. Consultation has taken place with ICT, procurement and legal colleagues.

## 6. Background

6.1. The Council's ICT computer network consists of two main types of network hardware: 'Core/Distribution Router/Switches' and 'Access' Switches.

6.2. Access Switches are used in buildings to deliver local connectivity and are connected into Core/Distribution Router/Switches which aggregate connections and provide 'fast switching' of traffic between destinations.

6.3. Core switches are generally located at the backbone (core layer) of a network. Their main purpose is to transfer large volumes of data at speed across the infrastructure of the network. In the Council as an example the core switches will connect all the distribution switches across buildings, managing data throughout the different areas.

6.4. Distribution switches sit on the layer between the core and access layers. Data is aggregated from multiple access switches and forwarded to the core layer, they often handle network routing and policy enforcement.

6.5. Router switches combine routing and switching functionalities and serve as a hybrid device that can route data across different networks and can switch data within the same network.

6.6. There are currently 6 Core/Distribution switches in use, 3 large ones at the Primary and Secondary data centres and 3 small ones at key sites on the network. There are approximately 300 Access switches delivering connectivity to all users across the ICT network.

- 6.7. ICT staff refresh network hardware every 5-10 year as equipment comes to its end of life at which point support ceases, being that it is no longer supported at an industry level. It is considered prudent therefore for IT to replace to ensure that the integrity of the Council's network is compliant with industry improvements/enhancements.
- 6.8. Under normal circumstances replacing core switches requires significant downtime as the old switches are required to be powered down and removed and then the replacement switches built and physically installed to replace them. However, due to the pending relocation of the primary data centre there is a requirement that further parallel work will be required to reduce downtime.
- 6.9. The CCS Technology Products and Associated Services Framework (RM6098) has been identified as a compliant route for procurement of the above switches, although the process to procure varies. It is intended to procure the Access switches on the basis of pricing, where the Council will identify the specification for product and seek supplier who offers best value. With respect to the Core Distribution switches a full competitive tendering process is sought, seeking to obtain both best price and quality and quality.

## **7. Issues for Consideration**

- 7.2. IT Network hardware generally has an operational life of ten years after which it may become unsupported by the manufacturer. It is also prudent to replace IT network hardware regularly due to improvements in performance and efficiency
- 7.3. Under normal circumstances replacing core switches requires significant downtime as the old switches have to be powered down and removed and the new switches built and physically moved to replace them however due to the move of the primary Data Centre from site 1 to site 2 there is an opportunity to do some of the work in parallel to reduce downtime.
- 7.4. Core/distribution switches are covered by maintenance with a third party however access switches are much cheaper to buy and therefore it's more cost effective to hold a number in stock so that faulty devices can be replaced by ICT staff.
- 7.5. Professional Services will be procured to replace the core/distribution switches due to the complex technical nature of these devices however ICT staff will undertake the access switch replacement.

## **6. Options and Risk Assessment**

### **6.1. Undertake a competitive procurement exercise via CCS Framework RM6098 (Preferred option)**

This option will safeguard the Councils network infrastructure for the next 8-10 years allowing for modern, reliable, and efficient infrastructure to be in situ. The

decision to undertake a procurement activity will enable competitive tender exercise which will enable the council to consider a tender/quotation which will deliver the best overall quality and price.

#### **6.2. Direct award to a specific supplier:**

This is not the preferred option; in the event a specific supplier was nominated to provide the services the Council would not be able to ensure best value for the provision of the goods.

#### **6.3. Do nothing:**

This option is not recommended– The Council's hardware equipment will ultimately become unsupported by the manufacturer in due course placing the Council at risk for the basic operations of PCs, Multi-Functional devices etc.

Older network hardware will not be optimised for the demands of today. Older hardware is more inefficient in regard to overall energy usage therefore exposing the Council to a higher cost base. Older hardware is also prone to failing which in turn may increase outages and risk for Council's staff and customers alike.

### **9. Comments of the Monitoring Officer (Town Clerk)**

- 9.1. The Proposal to undertake a competitive procedure using the CCS Framework RM6098 for the Council's requirement for Access and Core/Distribution switches is noted. The use of the CCS framework is compliant as a route to procurement under the Council's constitution and the Public Procurement Act 2023 and Public Procurement Regulations (2015) [GL]

### **8. Comments of the Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance and Transformation)**

- 8.1. The decision to commence procurement of the Access Switches and Core/Distribution switches, required to replace outdated network equipment, can be supported on the basis that the works are planned, and the cost will be met from the ICT capital budget on a spend to save basis. The planned expenditure is not expected to exceed the threshold of £250k in any one financial year, however, if during the procurement process this changes, then the governance route of a key decision will be followed prior to awarding any contracts. (TW)

### **9. Comments of the Assistant Director OD & HR and compliance with the Equality**

#### **Duty**

- 9.1. There are no staffing or equality issues arising from this decision.KH

### 13. Comments of Overview and Scrutiny

14. This decision has not been subject to pre-decision scrutiny. However, should the purchase of goods contract exceed the £250k estimate then it will become a key decision and should follow the key decision governance route prior to award. (Ref. Sc8521 (FH))

### 15. Comments of the Deputy Leader of the Council

I support the decision to commence procurement Access Switches and Core/Distribution switches as detailed. Should the cost exceed the threshold for governance of key decisions in any one year then the key decision route will need to be followed prior to any award of contracts.

David Bell, **Director of Finance and Transformation**

Contact Officer: **Paul Muzadi** Telephone No.: **01482 613652**

Officer Interests: None

Background Documents: -

## Implications Matrix

**This section must be completed and you must ensure that you have fully considered all potential implications**

This matrix provides a simple check list for the things you need to have considered within your report

If there are no implications please state

I have informed and sought advice from HR, Legal, Finance, Overview and Scrutiny and the Climate Change Advisor and any other key stakeholders i.e. Portfolio Holder, relevant Ward Members etc prior to submitting this report for official comments	Yes
I have considered whether this report requests a decision that is outside the Budget and Policy Framework approved by Council	Yes
Value for money considerations have been accounted for within the report	Yes
The report is approved by the relevant Director/Assistant Director	Yes
I have included any procurement/commercial issues/implications within the report	Yes
I have considered the potential media interest in this report and liaised with the Media Team to ensure that they are briefed to respond to media interest.	Yes
I have included any equalities and diversity implications within the report and where necessary I have completed an Equalities Impact Assessment and the outcomes are included within the report	Yes
Any Health and Safety implications are included within the report	Yes
Any human rights implications are included within the report	Yes

I have included any community safety implications and paid regard to Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act within the report	Yes
I have liaised with the Climate Change Advisor and any environmental and climate change issues/sustainability implications are included within the report	Yes
I have considered how the decision may contribute or impact on culture and heritage within the city.	Yes
I have included information about how this report contributes to the Community Plan/ Area priorities within the report	Yes
I have considered the impact on air quality, carried out an appropriate assessment and included any resulting actions or opportunities necessary to improve air quality in the report.	Yes