

BUSINESS CASE

Name of the Project

Northgate Revenues & Benefits System

Reasons for undertaking the Project
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The collection of Council Tax and NNDR, Benefits processing and Benefit overpayments is currently administered by Revenues & Customer Services & Benefits.

All services use the same software package "Civica" which has been in place since 1996.

All other North Yorkshire Benefits & Revenues teams use Northgate except Richmond who are currently implementing Northgate, to be hosted by Hambleton. East Riding of Yorkshire also use Northgate with their contractor Arvarto.

Continuing with the current system is seen as high risk as Civica's Benefit/Council Tax client base are shrinking and there are concerns that at any time Civica may change the emphasis and issue RDC with notice to terminate their product with a limited time in which to change supplier.

In addition to this crucially the existing system does not allow us to share resources, information and benchmark with our neighbouring authorities nor does it provide adequate management and performance information. There are still significant manual fixes and work undertaken around the system, to enable service delivery.

The SPARSE benchmarking information indicated that the cost of Revenues and Benefits was significantly higher than comparable District Council's. This reinforces the view that change to processes and procedures are required and these can only be achieved through investment in a new system and changing working methods.

The favoured option would be to work in conjunction with another authority such as Selby DC or Scarborough BC and replace RDC's existing software with the Northgate solution during 2009/10 which would facilitate joint working & efficiency. Discussions with Scarborough Borough council & Selby District council have taken place.

Options which have been considered

No other options regarding the system have been considered as all other North Yorkshire authorities use Northgate and in time such a move will enable the possibility of further efficiencies being achieved as well as shared expertise available through networking groups.

It is possible to procure the Northgate system through a framework agreement removing the need for a full European tender. This framework agreement fulfils all requirements to tender and a quote from Northgate effectively is based on pre-tendered prices. There are no procurement difficulties with this proposal.

A full tender through European procedures would take an additional year to complete. Ryedale could at the end of the process again find itself with a different system from its neighbouring Authorities.

Discussions have taken place with Scarborough BC and East Riding of Yorkshire for hosting the system. East Riding hosts the system used by Selby and investigations are ongoing into a similar arrangement for Ryedale.

Expected Benefits

This option would involve the system being hosted by another authority who would provide on going applications and database support given they already possess the required level of skills.

In order to maximise the benefits staff from the host authority would assist Ryedale throughout their implementation of Northgate Revenues & Benefits to maximise the benefits and achieve the efficiencies.

The latest version of Northgate's software comes with additional functionality including, form recognition, home working, e-billing, e-forms, and mobile capability offering up potential additional efficiencies in benefit and council tax administration.

Improved customer services speed of processing a claim and being able to input/access info on line will also be provided.

Efficiency savings will be available with the rationalisation of staffing computer hardware, contracts and maintenance agreements as less duplication will occur. Significantly many manual processes undertaken presently will be automated with the new system

It will lead to the standardisation of procedures and it is intended to increase customer satisfaction levels which are currently already high.

The system enables Performance Management and Quality Assurance and would ensure that all work carried out will be measured using management information provided automatically from Northgate Revenues and Benefits. This would give managers detailed analysis of all work performed on a team and individual over any specified period of time with week on week comparisons and enable managers to make accurate projections, performance monitoring and staffing level requirements.

Northgate have also developed a shared service product which can enable one Authority's staff to process claims for another and vice versa. This is a longer term consideration although it should be noted that other north Yorkshire Districts are presently considering this option.

Summary of key risks

No Change:

Loss of reputation, dissatisfied customers, inefficient, not providing value for money and therefore waste of resources.

Change:

RDC staff will be pressured to work on a number of issues during implementation
Additional resources required for backfilling during preparation prior to implementation
Performance levels may dip slightly during implementation (this has been seen in a number of authorities)
Sufficient training will required for all Revs & Bens staff
Staff reductions will require proper consideration
Delays in administering revenue collection or housing benefit

Estimated Costs

Capital	£tbc, up to £400k
Revenue	
Current Costs	£67,283
Northgate	£41,244 plus cost of external hosting (negotiations underway particularly around IT links and associated costs)
Net Revenue	£16,039
Additional Savings	£135,000

(This will be staff savings through changes in working methods and increased automation of manual processes. It is not possible to identify which individuals or posts this will be at this stage. It is possible that there could be some redundancy/ one off costs to facilitate this varying on which individuals and natural wastage/staff turnover.)

Estimated timescales
Implementation will take approx 9 months if approved at December Policy and resources Committee would allow an implementation date of September 2010 avoiding end of year and mid year estimates and subsidy claims. This has been regarded as a reasonable implementation period by the supplier and other authorities who have been through the process.
Author/Date
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