

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION RECORD

<b>Portfolio Holder:</b> Councillor Chris Boden Leader & Portfolio Holder for Finance and Elections	<b>Service:</b> Policy and Governance (Elections)
<b>CMT Officer:</b> Paul Medd, Chief Executive Anna Goodall, Assistant Director,	<b>Delegated Power Being Exercised:</b> Part 3 - Responsibilities for Functions; Tables 4 and 5, paragraph 9 To approve any action within their functional area up to a value of £250,000.
<b>Subject of Decision:</b> To approve the purchase and associated contract for the provision of Polling Station Software for a 4-year period.	

### Decision Taken:

Cllr Chris Boden, Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Portfolio Holder for Elections authorises the procurement of Polling Station Software for 4 years (with an option to extend for 2 further years). From May 2024 – May 2027 at a total cost for the 4 years of £132,220 exclusive of any CPI increases.

**Key Decision Reference:** KEY/02FEB24/01

### Reason for the Decisions:

Currently our polling stations use a very traditional, manual, paper-based process in order to process electors. This manual system has served us adequately; however we are experiencing challenges in relation to staffing electoral events, particularly in recruiting and retaining Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, which increases the possibility of electoral events not running effectively and smoothly.

The feedback we receive from elections staff is that they are finding the additional responsibilities associated with the implementation of The Elections Act increasingly onerous and therefore this has resulted in experienced Presiding Officers no longer willing to participate. It is worthy of note that the issue regarding the recruitment and retention of Presiding Officers is not unique to Fenland, this is a nationally recognized widespread issue.

We are working with all councils across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough regarding a generic approach to staff recruitment, but we do not yet know if this collaborative approach will be successful.

As a result of the staffing issues, we have investigated alternative options which may assist in mitigating the risk that the recruitment and retention of polling station staffing creates, whilst still ensuring we are able to successfully fulfil our responsibilities in association with the administration of the poll.

The option for utilising electronic polling station software, provides a digital polling station for staff to operate. This software essentially negates the need for the current staffing levels in our polling stations whilst automatically completing all the relevant documents, therefore removing any risk of human error, which we recognise is the key issue that experienced Presiding Officers cite as being the main reason they no longer wish to participate in the elections process.

In summary, the benefits of using the Modern Democracy System have been identified by other public sector organisations who have deployed the software as follows:

The experience for voters was quicker and more efficient, as less time was spent facilitating the paper-based manual process. If the elector inadvertently went to the wrong polling station, the tablet advises the Presiding Officer accordingly as well as confirming which polling station the elector should be at, without the need to call the Elections Office for the information, therefore providing a better customer experience.

Fewer polling staff were needed as a result of deploying the software, therefore other elections teams were able to reduce their Voter ID staffing requirement for poll clerks by approximately 33%, which helped to mitigate the biggest challenge of finding enough staff and reduced polling staff costs, the savings from which were then utilised to offset some of the costs associated with using the system.

The verification process is able to start sooner following the close of poll as all Ballot Paper Accounts are submitted electronically via the software following the close of poll and are immediately available to the Verification Control Desk at the verification/count location.

The Department of Levelling Up Communities and Housing (DLUCH) have confirmed that they fund some of the costs associated with the use of polling station software via the elections account submission process.

The polling station software and its associated processes are legally compliant.

**Alternative Options Considered** (if appropriate):  
N/A as the Polling Station Software is a unique product.

**Background/Reports/Information** considered and attached:  
Polling Station Software Briefing Note

### **Legal and Procurement Implications**

Procurement colleagues have been engaged in relation to the procurement process to ensure compliance.

### **Financial Implications**

S151 Officer has been engaged with the report and associated costs.

### **Any other Implications**

The software fits with principals encapsulated within the Corporate Transformation Programme and associated principles.

Portfolio Holder Signature  
  
Councillor Chris Boden  
Leader & Portfolio Holder for Finance and  
Elections

Date:  
  
9 February 2024

**Please forward to Democratic Services upon completion**

**For Office Use Only**

**Implementation Date: 16 February 2024**

**Date copy passed to  
Democratic Services**

**(if not called-in)  
(Allow 5 clear working days after publication  
of decision)**

Circulation: Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder, Officer and Accountancy.