

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

CABINET

18TH OCTOBER 2012

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY

RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO LEADER(S) – CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT

MEMBERSHIP OF THE STAFFORDSHIRE CONNECTS PARTNERSHIP

KEY DECISION –NO

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform members of developments within the Staffordshire Connects Partnership and seek approval to terminate the Council's participation therein.

2. Recommendation(s)

<p>2.1 That in accordance with Partnership Agreement, the Council serves written notice to terminate the Agreement; such notice to expire in accordance with the two year term.</p>

3. Summary (inc. brief overview of relevant background history)

- 3.1 The Staffordshire Connects Partnership was established in 2002 and comprised Staffordshire County Council, Stoke on Trent City Council and the eight District and Borough Councils of Staffordshire. The purpose of the partnership was to encourage and facilitate efficiency and transformation in customer service delivery across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. At this time, national funding was also provided to Local Authorities for e-government purposes to encourage innovation in electronic service delivery and it is understood that a County wide e-government group was established to explore the potential for joint technology projects. It is further understood that as the Staffordshire Connects Partnership evolved, it assumed the technological scope of the e-government group to enhance its customer service remit.
- 3.2 Thereafter the partnership was fully constituted within an Agreement made on 6th March 2003 and operates through a Joint Committee of elected member representatives from each partner authority. Within the wider structure, the partnership includes a Strategic Advisory Board of Senior officers of each partner authority and a number of supporting working groups and project teams who operate within their constitutional terms of reference.
- 3.3 Since the Council's Senior Management Restructure in 2011, responsibility for customer services transferred to the Head of Policy who has since represented the Council within the partnership at the Strategic Advisory Board. The Cabinet Portfolio Leader for Corporate Improvement represents the Council at the Joint Committee.
- 3.4 The Lead Authority for the Partnership is Staffordshire County Council; who on behalf of the Partnership employ a Core Team of Officers to support the partnership. This structure is funded

through a Core Budget, comprising contributions of each partner authority on an annual basis as agreed by the Joint Committee. In 2003, the initial contributions were £15,000 per partner authority and whilst this amount has varied marginally over a number of years, the most recent contributions for the financial year 2011/12 were £17,800 per partner.

- 3.5 The partnership has facilitated the inception and delivery of a number of projects including:
- procurement and implementation of the current Customer Relationship Management System ('CRM')
 - procurement of the previous and current e-payments system
 - participation in Staffordshire Life Events project ('Tell us Once')
 - ongoing procurement of the replacement CRM system

Whilst these projects have had varying degrees of success, there have been a number of changes within the Partnership, the result of which provides the Council with an opportunity to review its position as a partner thereto. To date, Newcastle Borough Council, Tamworth Borough Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have all served their individual notices to terminate their participation within the partnership and hence their financial contributions. As required by the Constitution, each of the aforementioned partners has served a two year notice which expire at various times within 2012 and 2014. Therefore of the original ten founding partners, only six remain at the time of writing.

- 3.6 The constituted objectives of the Joint Committee (and hence the partnership) are 'to work together to achieve:
- easily accessible services with a consistently high standard of accessibility
 - services responsive to the needs of citizens, business and visitors to the area
 - services recognisably relevant to the users of the services for which the authorities are responsible
 - the promotion of the use of shared access for users of the services for which authorities are responsible, developed and enhanced by pooling resources, knowledge and learning'.

- 3.7 Whilst at the time the partnership was established there were numerous opportunities to optimise the use of partners' e-government funding and achieve economies of scale through joint procurement, such funding streams are no longer available. As professional networks which have been established across the County and Stoke on Trent in many areas including customer services and technology, it is considered that opportunities for joint procurement and project delivery manifest themselves in any event and largely are not as a result of the Council being a partner to Staffordshire Connects.

- 3.8 It is considered that the objectives of the Joint Committee as detailed above are not being met across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. Indeed, the withdrawal of 40% of the partners to the partnership renders the likelihood of achieving these objectives significantly reduced.

- 3.9 In addition the Council's Corporate Plan 2011/14 and more recently Priority Deliver Plans for 2012/13 affirm the Council's priority outcomes and service aims and the actions we will take in order to achieve them. The original constituted objectives of the Partnership are fundamentally enshrined within the Council's own policies and the annual policy and budget setting processes

and therefore it is not considered that added value has been achieved, or could in future be achieved in this regard by maintaining the Council's partner status and contributions to the Staffordshire Connects Partnership.

4. Key issues and Implications

- 4.1 In light of the recent developments within the Staffordshire Connects Partnership, the Council have the opportunity to review and consider whether it wishes to remain a partner to the Agreement having regard to the objectives of the partnership, the outcomes delivered to date and the likelihood of achieving the stated objectives in the future, given the termination by four of the ten partners to the Agreement to date.

5. Conclusions and Reason(s) for the Recommendation(s)

- 5.1 Whilst the establishment of the Partnership and previous partnership projects have had some success, the benefits to the Council of remaining as a contributing partner are limited and the opportunities described within the objectives of the partnership can readily be embraced and facilitated through existing professional networks and forums. The contribution of £17,800 per annum to the Partnership in order to achieve these objectives is not considered to present good value for money.

6. Other Options Considered

- 6.1 The Council could continue as a partner to the Agreement and provide the annual financial contributions as agreed by the Joint Committee.

7. Report Author Details

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SCHEDULE OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Section 1**Contribution to Council Priorities (i.e. Corporate Plan)**

Participation within the Staffordshire Connects Partnership does not contribute to the Council's priorities and therefore termination of such an Agreement would have no adverse impact.

Section 2**Contribution to Promoting Community Engagement**

Participation within the Staffordshire Connects Partnership does not provide enhanced opportunities for the Council to engage with the community; as such the termination of the Partnership Agreement would have no adverse impact.

Section 3**Financial Implications**

The payments to Staffs Connects for 2011-12 were made up of the following:

	£
Staffordshire Connects 2011/12 Core Team	17,800.00
CRM	46,648.63
Epayments	9,495.85
New Epayments	44,262.49
Customer Insight	5,483.25
Shared Email Directory	845.00
Total (Exc VAT)	124,535.22

By withdrawing from the Partnership the only saving that would be made from the above table is the Core Team cost of £17,800. The Core Team currently provide support to the main Partnership Contracts, i.e. CRM and Epay, and the general expertise required for cross Authority procurement within this technological area, in conjunction with the other Partnership authorities.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships has indicated that there are no financial penalties from withdrawing from the contract.

The other elements of the Staffs Connects payments shown above are contracts this Authority has with Staffordshire County Council, through the Partnership. Therefore there would be no effect on existing contracts or contracts entered into within the 2 year notice period on these technological services. However, after the 2 year notice period has been served consideration will have to be given as to the level of support that can be obtained through the Partnership for these services should it be required.

Once the main services shown above have fulfilled their useful life, e.g. the Epayments contract expires, this Authority will have to consider how it wishes to proceed in procuring replacement systems and this will have to be subject to a separate report at the appropriate time.

Section 4

Legal Implications

The terms of the agreement require at least 2 years written notice be given by any party wishing to terminate the agreement.

Section 5

Human Resource Implications

There are no identified human resource implications.

Section 6

Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

Participation within the Staffordshire Connects Partnership does not provide mechanisms for the reduction of crime and disorder; as such the termination of the Partnership Agreement would have no direct or indirect implications in respect of the Council's S.17 responsibilities.

Section 7

Human Rights Act Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications as a result of this report.

Section 8

Data Protection Act Implications

There are no Data Protection Act Implications as a result of this report.

Section 9

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications as a result of this report.

Section 10

Equality and Diversity Implications

The recommendation to terminate the Council's participation in Staffordshire Connects Partnership is considered to have entirely neutral implications with regard to the Public Sector Equality Duties outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

Section 11

List of Background Papers

Section 12

Report History

Council Meeting	Date

Annexes to Report