

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL: EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS DECISION RECORD

Please use this form to record any Executive Decision taken by an Executive Lead Member or Chief Officer.

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE DECISION TAKER:	
1.	<p>Title / Subject Matter:</p> <p><u>Telephony And Contact Centre Refresh</u></p> <p>Renew the current Netcall Liberty Converse Contact Centre contract.</p>
2.	<p>Is this a Key Decision:</p> <p>Yes</p>
3.	<p>Decision Taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To direct award the contract to Netcall Liberty Converse via the NHS CS Framework. • To procure new features, including Liberty Connect, ContactPortal, Workforce Management, Quality Management (features detailed in attached report). • To approve the proposal and commence the new contract. • The contract terms will be for 4 years. • Authority to instruct the Legal Team to finalise the necessary documentation.
4.	<p>Reasons for the Decision:</p> <p>The current Netcall Liberty Converse system contract ends on the 23rd December 2023. It is installed on-premise i.e. the infrastructure is located at Urban Road and at Brook St. This requires additional infrastructure to support the system, such as SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) trunks and SBCs (Session Border Controllers).</p> <p>Migrating the Netcall Liberty Converse to cloud will eliminate the need for this additional infrastructure and help improve business continuity by removing the reliance on local infrastructure, meaning that telephony would still be available (for home workers) if the Council suffered a loss of connection to the internet or SIP trunks.</p> <p>New features will improve the service provision to the residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web and Chatbot will help customers consume Council services without the need to speak to an agent at a time that suits them. • Auto Agent will enable calls to be directed to the right place without the need to speak to an agent, freeing their time to assist other customers who do need that interaction.

- Workforce Management will help plan agent rotas.
- The addition of the ability for agents to deal with customer interactions through Social Media, email and SMS means customers can interact with the Council through their preferred communication tools.

5. Copy of the Report or Briefing Note setting out the information which was used as the basis for the Decision:

Please attach the relevant Report or Briefing Note. Unless classified as exempt, this information will be included with the Decision Record and published on the Council's website.

6. Was the Decision classed as exempt? If so, what were the reasons for this:

No

7. Alternative Options Considered / Rejected:

Option 1: Do nothing. Renew the Netcall contract but continue to use the on-premise solution.

Option 2: Implement the proposed solution of a hosted Netcall Liberty Converse with additional features.

Option 3: Procure a different contact centre solution. The main other Contact Centre Solution that was considered was provided by 8x8, which integrated closely with the existing 8x8 "back office" solution.

After discussion with relevant stakeholders and a review of the features and cost, it is recommended to select option 2, implement the proposed solution of a hosted Netcall Liberty Converse with additional features.

Option 1 is not recommended as there are concerns about the location of the VMB Resilient SIP, the complexity of the configuration, reliance on third party support and ongoing additional costs of the SIP and comms links.

Option 3 is not recommended as the Netcall system is reliable and provides the features required to help improve the customer experience and efficiencies within the Customer Services Teams. The familiarity of Netcall across all sections that use it requires less training and a more seamless transition to the hosted solution.

<p>8. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations – if applicable: Any Declarations of Interest relating to this decision and subsequent dispensations should be listed.</p>
<p>9. Name / Title of the relevant Executive Lead Member(s) consulted (if appropriate):</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Councillor Vicki Heslop</p>
<p>10. Name / Title of the decision taker:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Executive Lead Member for Customer and Digital Experience: Councillor Vicki Heslop</p> <div style="background-color: black; width: 150px; height: 40px; margin-left: 200px;"></div>
Date: 8 November 2023
TO BE COMPLETED BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
<p>1. Date that the decision was notified to Members:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">8 November 2023</p>
<p>2. Date and time when the Call-In period for this decision ends:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">5pm – 15 November 2023</p>
<p>3. Date when the decision can be implemented (five clear working days following publication):</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">16 November 2023</p>
<p>4. Decision Reference Number (if applicable):</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">N/A</p>

The completed form should be emailed to the Democratic Services Team:

democratic.services@ashfield.gov.uk

They will arrange for it to be published on the Council's web site.

EXEMPT OR CONFIDENTIAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF THE DECISION:

Use this section to share any confidential information. **This will not be published or placed on the Council's web site.** It will only be shared within the Authority, as appropriate.

For further support or guidance please contact Ruth Dennis, Director of Legal and Governance (and Monitoring Officer) ruth.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk or any member of the Democratic Services Team.

Report To:	DELEGATED DECISION
Date:	8TH NOVEMBER 2023
Heading:	CONTACT CENTRE RENEWAL
Executive Lead Member:	COUNCILLOR VICKI HESLOP
Ward/s:	N/A
Key Decision:	YES
Subject to Call-In:	YES

Purpose of Report

Request approval to direct award a contract to Netcall Liberty Converse via NHS CS and procure additional features.

Recommendation(s)

- To direct award the contract to Netcall Liberty Converse via the NHS CS Framework.
- To include new features, including Liberty Connect, ContactPortal, Workforce Management, Quality Management (features detailed below).
- To approve the proposal and commence the new contract.
- The contract term will be for 4 years.
- Authority to instruct the Legal Team to finalise the necessary documentation.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

While the Council has used the Netcall Liberty Converse Contact Centre system for many years, the current contract began in December 2018, for a period of 5 years. The Netcall Liberty Converse system is currently installed on-premise i.e. the infrastructure is located at Urban Road. This consists of two servers located in the main server room and the "Wolfcreek" building at Urban Road combined with dual, resilient VMB SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) trunks, installed at Brook St and Urban Road. SIP trunks are digital connections that carry phone calls and are used to link Netcall to the external telephony network.

Migrating the Netcall Liberty Converse to cloud will eliminate the need for the VMB SIP trunks at Urban Road and Brook St. This will enable ICT to vacate the Computer Room at Brook St and cancel the VMB SD-WAN link.

Migrating Netcall Liberty Converse to the cloud will also improve business continuity provision as it removes the reliance on VMB SIP trunks, on-premise equipment and the third parties who support it. Netcall would provide all technical support for the solution. Any upgrades to the system would be applied directly by Netcall remotely at agreed times with no risk of downtime.

As part of the new contract, it is proposed to procure new services from Netcall, including:

Quality Management Module:

Enables agent evaluation and customer survey capabilities. Customer Surveys allows customers to provide feedback on the interaction with the Contact Centre and/or other service areas. This feedback can then be used to improve the customer experience. This can work across a number of channels:

- Phone – surveys over the phone are delivered using post-call IVR. The customer can be automatically transferred to the survey at the end of their call. When they stay on the line after speaking to the agent, they will be asked their options and can respond using touch tone or speech.
- Email – emails sent by agents contain a link to a survey.
- Web Assistant – automatically starts the survey when the agent completes the interaction.
- SMS, Facebook Messenger, Google Business messaging and Instagram Messaging – will send a link to the survey as a chat message.
- Agent Evaluation allows managers and agents to build a clear picture of agent performance and identify any opportunities for support or improvement.

Surveys can be sent to all customers or targeted to specific channels, or queues. Surveys can also be randomly applied to a percentage of customers. Full reporting is available along with real-time dashboards.

Workforce Management:

Provides a built-in schedule planner to build the required shifts and rotas, ensuring adequate cover of agents, including advisor start and finish times, break times and holiday planning.

Contact Portal:

Contact Portal works as an automated agent and can remove much of the requirement for the Customer Service Officers to direct calls, meaning customers get to the right place first time improving their experience and reducing wait times. It also frees up Customer Service Officer's time to better serve customers and take on the extra demand which is likely to come from having the additional contact methods.

Liberty Connect:

Provides an omni channel service to allow agents to not only deal with telephone calls but also, email, SMS, social media and Webchat.

The omni channel approach means all contacts can be routed to staff using skills-based routing, this allows the customer contact to be dealt with by the correctly trained staff. It also improves the ability to train staff as they can be exposed to different subjects as their experience develops.

Chatbots allow customers to contact the Council when it suits them. The chatbot can triage enquiries, answer FAQ type questions and automate routine tasks, for example bin collection dates. The system also retains conversation history so conversations can be continued without the customer needing to start explaining again if transferred to an agent.

Web Assistant directs customers to the most appropriate chatbot or webpage. Agents can respond with precompiled responses.

Chatbots and Web Assistant increase the provision for people with hearing and speech impairments to communicate with Ashfield District Council experiencing the same level of customer service in a format which is potentially easier for them to access.

Both solutions include appropriate handoff points where the query will be directed to a Corporate Customer Services Officer where required.

Omnichannel access gives customers some self serve opportunities with the same information and prioritisation of contacts as the telephone during office hours.

The system has flexibility for continued improvement by developing more “bot” functionality as the system is analysed on customer usage.

With all digital contacts there is the ability to build standard responses to assist with regular queries which can be quicker for staff but more importantly gives a consistent response for customers.

All incoming and outgoing messages and emails are stored in the system and can therefore be audited if required and monitored for quality by managers. It is also possible to fully report on contact volumes and response times for all contact types.

The proposed implementation of cloud hosted Netcall Liberty Converse would bring the following benefits:

- Improved customer service:
 - Customers who wish to do so can better self-serve via the chatbot and webchat functionality.
 - The use of Web Assistant can direct customers to the relevant web page.
 - Contact Portal can remove a portion of the need for customers to speak to a customer services advisor by automatically redirecting their call to the relevant department or person.
 - Customer Surveys provide better insight to how the Customer Services Teams, chatbot and website are performing, which in turn will be used to improve the customer experience.
 - Improvements in consistency of responses through the use of Standard Phrases. These can be utilised by agents in webchat, SMS, Social Media and Email.
 - Customers calling at night from a mobile, can be sent a link to chatbot via SMS allowing them the ability to self serve or start a chat which can be picked up by an advisor during office hours.
 - Chatbot options offered to a customer can be seasonally based. For example, during Council Tax billing the main items presented can be related to Revenues services.
 - Functionality can be built into the chatbot process. For example, a change of address process could offer other things the resident may need (e.g., Garden Waste Bin, Elections Registration).
- Work force management:
 - Allows for better provision of cover of the Customer Services team. Agents can view the published rotas from within the Netcall interface.
 - Can be set to compare same time last month/year to predict likely busy times for better allocation of resources but is also dynamic to current requirements.
 - Agent evaluation means management can monitor performance and responses from agents and manage any training needs.
 - Satisfaction surveys can be used to gauge how well the service is being received by the public, with a high degree of flexibility on who is surveyed (email, SMS, Social Media etc).
- Improved efficiency:
 - The use of Omni channel, once implemented, means agents can respond to customers over multiple channels.
 - Contact portal removes the need for a portion of customers to speak to an advisor.
 - Work force management allows for better provision of cover of the Customer Services team. Agents can view the published rotas from within the Netcall interface.

- Customers can contact the Council at a time that suits them. The chatbot can be accessible 24/7, if a customer begins an interaction at night but gets to a point where they cannot continue, the chat can be saved and picked up again once an advisor is available. The chat history will be available to the advisor, removing the need for the customer to supply information again.
- Chatbot interactions can have both in hour and out of hour messages, informing the customer that the offices are closed.
- Omni channel provides better reporting on all non-telephony contacts, showing the number of contacts and speed of response, irrespective of the source of the contact.
- Improved Business Continuity:
 - As a hosted solution, there is no reliance on the Council's network or infrastructure. Agents can potentially access the service from any device in any location.
 - The cloud based Netcall Liberty Converse system is hosted within their own secure data centres and not public cloud.
 - Even though the current SIP links are resilient they still rely on a local exchange, which could suffer an outage. As a hosted solution, resilience is improved due to the company hosting the solution across multiple sites in different locations (in the UK).
- Continuous Improvement:
 - The system can provide Transcription Reports of chats to help highlight phrases spoken by customers that are unknown to Netcall. They can then be added to the system.

It is proposed that the implementation of the new features is undertaken by a member of the Customer Services Team, over a period of six months. This will necessitate the backfilling of that role to ensure ongoing adequate staffing levels and ensure a focused approach to implementation for consistency and accuracy.

Alternative Options Considered

(with reasons why not adopted)

Option 1: Do nothing. Renew the Netcall contract but continue to use the on-premise solution. This is not recommended as there are concerns about the location of the VMB Resilient SIP, the complexity of the configuration, reliance on Council Infrastructure, reliance on third party support and ongoing additional costs of the SIP links.

Option 2: Recommended – implement the proposed solution of a hosted Netcall Liberty Converse with additional features.

Option 3: Procure a different contact centre solution. The main other Contact Centre Solution that was considered was provided by 8x8, which integrated closely with the existing 8x8 “back office” solution.

Option 3 is not recommended as the Netcall system is reliable and provides the features required to help improve the customer experience and efficiencies within the Customer Services Teams. The familiarity of Netcall across all sections that use it requires less training and a more seamless transition to the hosted solution and the implementation of the new features.

Detailed Information

Netcall Liberty Converse costs

Current annual costs:

Item	Cost
Netcall Liberty Converse	£29,667
VMB SIP trunks	£20,686
VMB SD-WAN (Brook St)	£3,937
Cisco SBC Licenses	£8,345
Total annual cost	£62,635

Liberty Converse Cloud options:

Converse licensing

60 Concurrent agent licences	£31,680
Quality Management - cloud	£2,016
6 days professional services (in hours)	£5,580
1 day professional services (out of hours)	£1,225
4 days consultancy	£4,220
6 days project management	£6,540
Total one-off cost for professional services	£17,565
Cost per annum (years one to four)	£33,696

GAMMA Telephony

120 GAMMA - SIP trunk	£10,080
Cost per annum (years one to four)	£10,080

Workforce Management licensing

Workforce Management - cloud	£2,304
2 days consultancy	£2,110
1 day project management	£1,090
Total one-off cost for professional services	£3,200
Cost per annum (years one to four)	£2,304

ContactPortal licensing

2 ContactPortal bots	£11,520
Speech recognition and tuning subscription pack	£3,500
4 days professional services (in hours)	£3,720
2 days project management	£2,180
Total one-off cost for professional services	£5,900
Cost per annum (years one to four)	£15,020

Liberty Connect:

Connect licensing

Connect subscription small	£4,080
Connect Workspace	£3,600
1 day consultancy	£1,055

1 day project management	£1,090
1 Liberty Connect Administration	£795
Total one-off cost for professional services	£2,940
Cost per annum (years one to four)	£7,680

Pricing Summary:

Item	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Total
Licensing	£68,780	£68,780	£68,780	£68,780	£275,120
Professional services	£28,810	-	-	-	£28,810
Training	£795	-	-	-	£795
Total	£98,385	£68,780	£68,780	£68,780	£304,725

The pricing in this proposal is based on contracting via Netcall standard terms and conditions. Pricing via NHS CS Framework on request.

Note: As part of this project, it is recommended that the two 0800 numbers currently in use are phased out. The numbers are in use in Housing Repairs and Waste and Environment. Over time this could realise a saving of approximately £4000 per year. The numbers cannot be ceased immediately as they are advertised widely across the District so this would have to be a phased approach.

Changing the advertising of separate numbers to a single number at the same time as phasing out the 0800 number will mean contacting ADC is easier for customers having just one number to connect to all departments.

The cost of backfilling a position in Customer Services to free a member of the team for the implementation of the additional features is estimated to be £16,000 for the period of six months. Ongoing improvements after that time will be treated as business as usual and call on support from Digital Teams and ICT as required.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Implementing the enhanced functionality will assist in improving the efficiency of Council services and the customer experience.

Legal:

Contract Procedure Rules set out the process for procuring contracts. The rules allow the use of frameworks. Directly awarding to a specific contractor requires the approval of the Executive Lead Member as an exception (17.6.2). [RLD 12/10/2023]

Finance: The additional costs in 2023/24 will be met from the Corporate Transformation Reserve. The additional £6,145 cost per annum will be reflected in the revised budgets from 2024/25 onwards. [PH 27/10/2023]

Budget Area	Implication
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General Fund – Revenue Budget	See above
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Not achieving 80% digital channel shift	Implement new features within a reasonable timeframe and provide reporting on benefits realisation.

Human Resources:

No implications [KB 6/11/2023]

Environmental/Sustainability

(to be completed by the author)

Equalities:

(to be completed by the author)

Other Implications:

Not applicable

Reason(s) for Urgency

Not applicable

Reason(s) for Exemption

Not applicable

Background Papers

None

Report Author and Contact Officer

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