Committee Report Checklist

Please submit the completed checklists with your report. If final draft report does not include all the information/sign offs required, your item will be delayed until the next meeting cycle.

Stage 1
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Yes / No	Date
Councillor engagement / input from Chair prior to briefing		
Relevant Group Head review	**Yes**	**2/11/26**
MAT+ review (to have been circulated **at least 5 working days before Stage 2**)	**Yes**	**2/11/26**
This item is on the Forward Plan for the relevant committee	**Yes**	**29/10/26**
	Reviewed by	
Finance comments (circulate to Finance)	**AB**	**04/11/26**
Risk comments (circulate to Lee O'Neil)	**LO**	**04/11/26**
Legal comments (circulate to legal@spelthorne.gov.uk)	**LH**	**04/11/26**
HR comments (if applicable)		

For reports with material financial or legal implications the author should engage with the respective teams at the outset and receive input to their reports prior to asking for MO or s151 comments.

Do not forward to stage 2 unless all the above have been completed.

Stage 2
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Completed by	Date rec'd
Monitoring Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	**L Heron**	**04//11/26**
S151 Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	**T. Collier**	**2/11/26**
Commissioner engagement	**J. Kingston**	**10/11/2026**
	Delete as applicable:	No issues
Relevant MAT member sign-off	**L. O'Neil**	**05/11/26**
Report reviewed by Management Team	**MAT**	**10/11/26**

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee

Date of meeting 24 November 2026

Title	Procurement of software system for Housing Benefits and Revenues
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Hiren Bhatt Systems Manager Sandy Muirhead Group Head Commissioning and Transformation
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	
Corporate Priority	Services
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: • Authorise the Council's Systems Manager to commence a procurement process for the purchase of the benefits and revenues system for a total contract value over three and half years of £487,000; • Authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to select the preferred supplier of the benefits and revenues system and award a contract not exceeding the available budget; and • Authorise the Group Head of Corporate Governance to enter into the contract and necessary legal documentation to purchase the MRI Academy system to support housing benefits and revenues**.**
Reason for Recommendation	With Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) the Council has been asked to ensure it keeps in place its existing benefits and revenues system for 3 years beyond vesting day to facilitate time for alignment of systems across West Surrey.

1. **Report executive summary:** The Council currently uses MRI Academy to process revenues and benefits transactions. The system is essential to customer services critical revenue operations and housing benefits operations. Under Local Government Reorganisation, the Council has been asked to maintain a contract for three years after vesting day. This report seeks approval to procure the system to meet that requirement in view of the total value of the proposed contract and in compliance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
• With LGR it was originally considered there may be some harmonisation of revenue collection systems (council tax and business rates and housing benefits) for West Surrey. However, it has been requested by the LGR workstream that we maintain and retain our current systems for an interim period to allow time to facilitate alignment across West Surrey. As the main revenues system contract was rolling there is a need to undertake a formal procurement of the benefits and revenues system.	• To ensure we have a working software system for the next three and a half years as requested under LGR. Therefore, the Council needs to ensure a contract is in place with the system provider, and that we have a compliant procurement process.
This is what we want to do about it	**These are the next steps**
• To formally procure the housing benefit and revenues system to ensure effective operation over the next three and a half years.	• Subject to Committee approval undertake the procurement as agreed by the Procurement Board.

2. Key issues

2.1 The **MRI Academy** system (formerly **Capita Academy**) is widely used by UK local authorities, including Spelthorne, and other public sector bodies to manage local taxation, benefits and debt recovery. Its performance, resilience and scalability support these critical, organisation-wide operations, for housing benefits and revenues.

2.2 The Council's MRI Academy system is a key financial system. Its longstanding rolling contract was considered likely to end with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), though this was uncertain.

2.3 However, at the end of September 2026 the Surrey LGR revenues workstream formerly requested all Surrey Councils to extend their existing system agreements. Spelthorne uses an MRI Academy system and needs to procure the system until 2029/2030, to allow time for West Surrey to plan an alignment of systems. Currently in West Surrey two Councils use Academy, two use Civica and two use NEC software solutions Ltd. Most of East Surrey use the MRI Academy system.

2.4 The Revenues and Benefits teams sought advice from Procurement, which confirmed that the contract's value over the requested three years requires a formal procurement process through Committee. This process will also ensure compliance with procurement regulations. Procurement Board has approved this request in principle, subject to final approval by Committee.

2.5 A cost has been provided by the current supplier for three and a half years based on existing uses in housing benefits and revenues.

2.6 The MRI Academy system is vital to maintain the running of two key council functions and therefore must be procured and maintained for the period requested until West Surrey can finally harmonise its systems. Given experience of LGR elsewhere, system harmonisation takes some time and hence the recent request from the LGR team to ensure we have a system in place from vesting day for three years.

2.7 Given the nature of the system and its vital importance to the Council in running services, a framework can be used which allows a direct award using a pre-tendered list of approved suppliers, which includes our current supplier, for a defined scope and period. This will enable our existing services to continue with their critical functions serving residents and the Council.

3. Options appraisal and proposal

3.1 **Option 1** (Recommended) To proceed with a direct award via a framework (RM6098 for the provision of Technology Products & Associated Service 2). for the MRI Academy system to ensure that housing benefits and revenues teams can continue their work as required for a further three and a half years.

An award via a framework will also ensure compliance with the applicable procurement regulations and the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

3.2 **Option 2**: Not proceeding with procurement would completely disrupt housing benefits and revenues services, including the collection and recovery of council tax and business rates, a statutory service, as the contract would end together with associated technical support as it is a rolling contract. This would not be compliant with Contract Standing Orders and the Procurement Act 2023.

3.3 **Option 3** To procure a different system. This would cause considerable disruption with staff moving to a new system when there are LGR pressures and annual billing undertaken in the new year and would be unlikely to be completed prior to Vesting Day.

3.4 **Option 4** Merge systems with another authority using Academy. This is not technically feasible at this time, which is why contract extensions have been requested under LGR. Authorities using MRI Academy have different configurations and packages; for example, Spelthorne uses more automation than others. Merging systems would therefore cause considerable disruption, particularly in relation to annual billing and payment of the £100 Household Energy Payment to qualifying households.

4. Governance and Risk Considerations

4.1 Not undertaking this procurement would disrupt Council services especially to vulnerable customers by not enabling them to claim housing benefits or to issue council tax and business rates plus pursue debt recovery.

4.2 Not undertaking the procurement will mean the contract would not be compliant. Undertaking the procurement will ensure that legal compliance

4.3 Not undertaking the procurement would leave the Council at risk of no systems for housing benefits or revenues leaving us at reputational risk to residents and West Surrey Council.

4.4 There is a risk that the contract may have to be extended in 2030 if harmonisation of systems has not been achieved.

4.5 The MRI Academy system is compliant with relevant standards and provides the necessary levels of legal and operational assurance in managing housing benefits and revenues.

5. Financial implications

5.1 The MRI Academy contract was due for renewal when the extension was requested. The Council now seeks a compliant three-and-a-half-year contract covering October 2026 to March 2030. The annual cost of £139,135 is within the software budget. The total contract cost, including future years' costs, will be £487,000.

6. Legal comments

6.1 The Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions (section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972). This includes procuring a system to process revenue and benefits transactions as this would directly support the Council in fulfilling its statutory duties.

6.2 The Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 enables the Council to enter into contracts for the provision of services as part of discharging their statutory functions.

6.3 General Power of Competence under the Localism Act 2011 allows the Council to do anything that individuals generally may do, unless explicitly prohibited by law. This power provides a broad basis for the Council to carry out the proposed procurement exercise and enter into the necessary contracts.

6.4 Any contract with a supplier must comply with the Council's Contract Standing Orders and all other applicable rules and regulations. Legal Services will assist in the preparation, negotiation and the formal completion of the proposed contract.

6.5 This committee's areas of responsibility include Revenues and Benefits (Part 3b of the Constitution).

Corporate implications

7. Commissioners' comments

7.1 Commissioners support the recommendations of this report.

8. S151 Officer comments

8.1 The S151 Officer confirms that all financial implications have been taken into account and that the recommendations are fully funded from within the current and future years budget.

9. Monitoring Officer comments

9.1 Provided the proposed procurement exercise and the appointment are undertaken in accordance with the relevant legislation, the framework's requirements, the Council's Contract Standing Orders and governance processes, the Council has the necessary powers to implement the recommendations in this report.

10. Procurement comments

10.1 Procurement Board have approved a request to begin this procurement exercise, subject to Committee approval. The reference number is e2026143.

The selected framework provides a compliant route to market and would be the least disruptive option. It also allows sufficient time for West Surrey to review the current provision and undertake a procurement process.

11. Equality and Diversity

11.1 The services involved both take account of equality and diversity in their daily dealings with residents and the Council.

12. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

12.1 Any system uses data which is stored on servers either externally or internally and therefore there are emissions associated with the use of any system.

13. Other considerations

13.1 There are none.

14. Local Government Reorganisation Implications

14.1 Under Local Government Reorganisation it will take time to harmonise key Council systems. Therefore, the Council has received a request to extend the MRI Academy system for three and half years, so critical Council operations can continue. The proposed approach is in the context of ensuring a safe and legal position for West Surrey.

15. Timetable for implementation

15.1 To undertake procurement as soon as possible following a Committee decision to ensure a contract is in place for the MRI Academy system.

16. Contact

16.1 Hiren Bhatt Systems Manager

16.2 Sandy Muirhead Group Head Commissioning and Transformation.

Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.

Background papers: There are none*.*

Appendices:
There are none