

Civic Engagement Portal

Administrative Committee

07 July 2022



Title	<i>Proposed Customer Engagement Portal</i>
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	<i>Daniel Dredge - Programme Manager</i>
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	<i>n/a</i>
Corporate Priority	Service delivery
Recommendations	<p>1. To agree the expansion of the Granicus Civic engagement platform, to merge our existing self-service portals into one and offer a wider range of features and functions to our communities and customers through that portal.</p> <p>2. To authorise direct award for a call off contract via the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) GCloud 12 (RM1557) procurement framework to system vendor, Granicus-Firmstep Limited “Lot 2: Cloud Software”. The contract will run for a minimum of 2 years with the option to extend the contract for up to 2 periods of 12 months each.</p> <p>3. Authorise the Head of Corporate Governance to enter into any legal documentation necessary to implement the new contract.</p> <p>4. As the planned expenditure is unbudgeted and coming from reserves, there is no delegation to a committee to authorise this. We are therefore seeking a recommendation from this Committee for the report to go to full Council to enable us to deliver improved services to our customers.</p>
Reason for Recommendation	The recommended software platform will provide our residents and businesses with a greatly improved customer experience when accessing our digital services. It will meet our ambition of ‘digital by default’ and align with our Digital vision statement: ‘A Community empowered and connected by simple and relevant engagement’

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 This report puts forward a recommendation to leverage additional capabilities from an existing supplier Granicus to build a modern and functional, digital customer engagement platform for our customers.

- 1.2 Explanation is provided of how residents and businesses in the Borough will receive a better service through this activity as improving our customers experience is key to the project.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 Workshops were held with senior managers, customer facing officers, and system admins to discuss and agree Spelthorne's core digital transformation objectives and vision including identifying customer needs and requirements when interacting with and accessing Council services.
- 2.2 The outcome of these workshops produced a digital vision and digital ambition for Spelthorne to aspire to. The vision is 'A community empowered and connected by simple and relevant engagement'. The ambition is to be 'digital by default'. Core themes of customer needs and requirements were identified through the workshop, these are Ownership, Information, Expectation & Equality. The workshops were critical to the success of this project as it allowed us to validate our analysis of the situation, gain a clear understanding of the problem, and provided context of our customers diverse needs and requirements. This information has directly influenced the recommendation. A write up of the workshop is attached with this document (**Appendix 1**)
- 2.3 At this stage of our transformation process, the focus is on improving our customer facing 'touch-points'. Previously an improvement was made to our telephony system which brought it up to the modern and professional standard our customers expect. We now intend to lift and improve our web-based solution to match it, therefore providing our customers with a consistent, robust, and efficient experience across the board, through whichever channel they choose to connect with us through.
- 2.4 The Covid pandemic appears to have irreversibly changed the way people work and interact with digital entities of any kind. Since March 2020, six in ten UK citizens reported an increase in their household use of smart devices, and the proportion of homes without internet almost halved in the last year. We must be able to adapt to the speed and scale of this change. The product which is recommended will provide the Authority with the flexibility and agility necessary to keep up with the scale and pace of this change and importantly, the customer demands and expectations which are driving it.
- 2.5 If agreed, the proposed solution will consolidate our disparate customer portals into a single 'Digital-front-door'. With a single log-in we will give our customers immediate, personalised access on any device, at any time of day, to the following services.
- Personalised Revenues and Benefits account information. With the facility to make payments, submit applications, inform us of changes in circumstances, view historical correspondence and transaction history. (Including PDF downloads of any documentation)
 - Personalised Council & Democracy information, e.g. borough councillors, ward, nearest polling station etc
 - Personalised refuse collection information e.g., next collection day and refuse type, information of what is/is not permitted in each bin, ability to report missed collections etc.

- Personalised Environment & Planning information, e.g. planning application history, building control application history and details on whether their local area falls into flood risk, green belt, conservation, neighbourhood watch or smoke control zone etc.
 - Access to the 77 existing e-forms available to customers on our website, which cover everything from reporting an abandoned vehicle to applying for a SPAN alarm.
 - Access to a Freedom Of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Request (SAR) library, enabling a search to be made of historical requests for the information they want, before they submit a new one - and if they do need to make a request, they can do it directly through the portal.
- 2.6 Furthermore, customers with user accounts will be able set up alerts and reminders of anything they wish within the portal e.g. to receive a text the night before their bin is due to go out.
- 2.7 Additionally, it will provide the capability for the Authority to conduct focussed campaigns e.g. to encourage direct debt sign ups or inform residents of new services or ongoing consultations.
- 2.8 When choosing to access our services via the portal it is possible to build-in and automate certain actions which will automatically meet several of the assurances included in the recently updated Customer Charter – without any manual intervention. Specifically:
- provide you with clear, accurate and up to date information about our services and facilities
 - ensure our information is in a format that can be easily accessed and understood
 - provide a single point of contact wherever possible and provide responsive and reliable services
 - provide a consistent, co-ordinated and proactive service
 - provide a range of convenient communication channels to contact us
 - enable customers to provide feedback through customer surveys, focus groups and consultations
 - we will supply information requested in Freedom of Information requests within 20 working days, except in exceptional circumstances
 - undertake to resolve your enquiry as quickly as possible.
 - send an acknowledgment email within two working days of receipt
- 2.9 This demonstrates how much this stage of our transformation programme is focussed on delivering tangible improvements to the customer experience and level of service they receive.

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 Two of the Council's existing software suppliers (Netcall and Granicus) were identified as having products/services that are capable of delivering on these ambitions and requirements.
- 3.2 It is important to note that both products are capable of delivering an equivalent level of customer service when deployed at their full capabilities. Both products are aligned to our Digital Vision and Digital Statement and meet the customer needs and requirements outlined above.
- 3.3 Due to this similarity in the 'end-product' an assessment was undertaken with a focus on whether or not the associated risks of each product outweigh the level of customer service they would deliver, how the product fits with existing technical infrastructure, associated timescales, and our capabilities to implement the product.
- 3.4 Granicus carried out product demonstrations on-site which were received positively. Following a scoping exercise, they provided the Council with a full and detailed proposal for how they intend to deliver the transformation. Their return contains a full explanation of proposed work packages, solutions, methods, timescales, and costs required to undergo the development and deliver the associated benefits all at a granular level. **(Appendix 2)**
- 3.5 Netcall provided their own proposal following a scoping exercise and described a similarly innovative product but with a greater focus on what they call 'digital independence'. This term describes an environment where organisations are no longer bound by the limitations of their software products and are instead empowered to develop their own systems, interfaces and processes tailored exactly to their specific needs, whenever they want, however they want. **(Appendix 3)**
- 3.6 Netcall have also demoed Liberty Create to the Council and the product was well received by all. The product is considered a powerful and dynamic tool, with high level of scalability and customisation. It could theoretically deliver significant efficiencies derived from the high level of integration it would have with the Council's contact centre software (Liberty Converse). However, it is not clear at a granular level exactly what features and functions we would acquire as part of the package they are offering.
- 3.7 Therefore, it is proposed that adopting Netcall provides a greater risk to the Authority for the following reasons:
- The speed of development and overall quality and value of what is developed is heavily dependent on the talent and experience of on-site, Netcall certified developers. As of today, we do not have any. The time, resources, and cost needed to fulfil this requirement are prohibitive, lengthy and introduce a great deal of uncertainty.
 - Netcall integrates with back-end systems via a proprietary "On-Premise-Adaptor" (OPA). This method is un-tested and unknown at this Authority. In the event this method fails or is unsuitable, we would have no choice but to either purchase an Application Programming Interface (API) to link systems at excessive cost or lose the integration and related functions we were hoping to develop as well as any related benefits.
 - Granicus is already integrated with around 40 back-end systems and drives over 300 processes for both internal and external users. The

work required to replicate this into a new platform could take several years to complete – meaning several years before benefits can be realised. Additionally, it is not currently possible to offer any assurance that the Netcall platform will offer a significant enough improvement to justify a difficult transition period. This is largely due to the fact it is success would be dependent on the skills of developers we do not currently have and in the current recruitment climate difficult to secure.

3.8 It is therefore recommended that the Council selects the Granicus solution to build its digital engagement platform for the reasons detailed below and in the attached **(Appendix 4)**.

- It sufficiently delivers the initial objective(s) set out at the start of this phase of Digital Transformation.
- It will greatly improve delivery of services to customers through the portal providing a “one stop shop”.
- There is scope for significant future development in key areas e.g., Data Protection, Communications, CRM and more through the future acquisition of additional modules.
- Product specialists are already in post within the Council; therefore, development can be achieved at a more rapid pace. Granicus estimate a duration of 48 days between kick-off and the customer portal going live.
- The intended benefits will be realised sooner, meaning the Businesses and Residents in the Borough will begin to receive a higher level of service at a faster rate.
- Granicus offers a largely equivalent portal experience to Netcall with less exposure to risk.

3.9 In order to comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, it is recommended that the Council call off the Government G Cloud 12 Framework Agreement in order to award a contract for the building and maintenance of the digital engagement platform to Granicus.

3.10 The framework permits an initial contract period of up to 2 years. The framework conditions permit a maximum of 2 years extension to the contract. It is therefore recommended that the contract is awarded for a period of 2 years with the ability to extend the contract for up to 2 periods of 12 months each.

4. Financial implications

4.1 A breakdown of costs for each supplier has been provided **(Appendix 5)**

4.2 The Council will initially be able cancel up to £27.8k of licences for redundant software packages that will be replaced in full by Granicus upon go-live. This will offset some of the cost. It should be noted that there is a lead time of between 6 – 12 months to exit these contracts.

4.3 Should additional functionality be required, additional modules are priced at £8.5k for a one-time implementation fee, then an annual licence for £11.5k. New widgets will cost a one-off £1,450 to implement

- 4.4 The funding for this project falls into two elements. A capital expenditure of £48,180 which is being covered from the Digital Spelthorne Capital Expenditure Budget of £50,000 and an ongoing annual revenue expenditure of £54,200.
- 4.5 The project is an invest to save opportunity with significant savings, notably replacement of the existing CRM. After accounting for the revenue's costs of the new products, cash savings of just under £16,000 will be produced per annum in 2025. These savings will be returned to our reserves, via the general fund. In the short term, the funding for this initial expenditure will come from a small surplus in our revenue carry forward earmarked reserves.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 Spelthorne have no certified low-code developers for Netcall, so training of existing staff and/or recruitment would be necessary, and this would take some time and cost. Netcall developers would benefit from having experience in a programming language called 'Java'. A typical java developers' salary is upwards of £50k and there is no allocated budget for further staffing particularly at the grade required to meet market salaries.
- 5.2 The Netcall quote is very competitive however there are no assurances of what the costs would be after the initial 3-year period. They have quoted £50k for products with a list price of £93k. The possibility of a substantial rise exists after the three years, and this should be considered a risk as there is no budget to cover this. Furthermore, the discounted rate on their product was offered on the basis of Spelthorne being an existing customer but is conditional on not entering into an informal/formal process with them in order to procure the product. It was advised that the Authority would not benefit from the discounted rate should it choose not to follow their proposed process.
- 5.3 A potential capital outlay of the Netcall solution is the requirement to purchase APIs to integrate business systems into the platform. APIs vary in cost but can be as much as £100k. No budget exists to cover unexpected costs of this nature.
- 5.4 If Spelthorne lose IT staff proficient in Granicus development, there is a chance the product could be un-supported. This can be mitigated by detailed process mapping, process notes and a period of knowledge sharing and cross working.
- 5.5 In the first stage of development, most benefits and efficiencies are customer facing, although favourable for our customers, there is a risk of staff being disappointed if their expectations are too high. This is being mitigated by the communication of realistic goals and in which stage of the transformation they can expect to see the benefits themselves.
- 5.6 The implementation activities in the plan Granicus provided can be run in parallel which would greatly speed up implementation. However, this is dependent on the availability of ICT staff and there is a risk other projects or activities could command their time and attention and milestones may be missed.
- 5.7 By consolidating all of our services into one portal it becomes a single point of failure. Should the service go offline for any reason, it would go offline for

everyone. This will be avoided by robust contract terms on SLA support and maintenance.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 The council has power to enter into the proposed contract under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 and section 1 of the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997, which enable the council to carry out any activity that is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions, and to enter contracts accordingly.
- 6.2 It is open to Members to approve the award of the contract to Granicus. In the event that the award of the contract is approved, it is open to Members to confirm the contract period. Members are advised that in order to comply with G-Cloud 12 Framework conditions, the initial contract period may not exceed 2 years and any extensions agreed may not exceed 2 years.
- 6.3 The estimated value of the procurement is above the current financial threshold for service contracts under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Procurement by direct award via the G-Cloud 12 Framework is compliant with the Regulations as a route to market.

7. Other considerations

- 7.1 Both platforms provide the opportunity to gather customer feedback follow every transaction. This is something we are not currently capable of capturing. These metrics will be used to inform data-lead decision making in regard to improving the services offered.

8. Equality and Diversity

- 8.1 Greater digital inclusivity does not mean leaving certain groups or demographics behind. There is no plan at present to adopt a digital only approach and all existing contact channels will remain. However, everyone will benefit from the more efficient/automated back-office processing and data handling the solution offers.

9. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 9.1 Both solutions will reduce the number of documents printed by the Authority as residents & businesses move to e-billing and self-service thus reducing paper use. Both products also rely heavily on e-forms which will reduce physical correspondence.

10. Timetable for implementation

The overall solution is comprised of several smaller work packages, which will be implemented in parallel where possible.

The work will be undertaken in the following order:

- Customer Portal redevelopment **48 days**
- Customer Portal Widgets **23 days**
- Launching the re-developed portal **11 days**
- govDelivery **43.25 days**

Indicative implementation schedule attached (**Appendix 6**)

11. Contact

11.1 Daniel Dredge d.dredge@spelthorne.gov.uk

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Workshop Write-up

Appendix 2: Granicus Proposal

Appendix 3: Netcall Proposal

Appendix 4: Benefits of Portal Consolidation

Appendix 5: Cost Comparisons

Appendix 6: Implementation Schedule