

Hm 11

REPORT TO THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING OF 28 JANUARY 2020

PURCHASING HOUSING MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE - INITIAL REPORT

STATUS - for comments/plan decision

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 To date, we have never bought proprietary housing management software, i.e. specially written computer programs that have a database on properties, tenants, rents, arrears, maintenance, repairs, etc. These both hold all your records securely but also automate and perform functions that save staff time and ensure consistency, etc. Most such systems nowadays have the option of integrating it with their own finance system, i.e. we would no longer need a separate Sage system.
- 1.2 To date, we use the following: Microsoft Office 2010 Excel spreadsheets, Microsoft Office Access database (for repairs and complaints monitoring) and Sage (v50) for accounts. The yearly cost for these is Zero. We originally will have paid for the Office software and the Sage but that was many years ago. Nowadays such software is often licensed through a monthly fee (Sage, Office 365).
- 1.3 There are three main reasons why Lister needs to buy some sort of housing management software now, with an ideal introduction date of April 2020 (or slightly later and records backdated to then):
 - A. Our repairs database is not as robust and tamper-proof as the best expectations of the Regulator, so it is better to upgrade it if possible. The ARC (Charter) reporting period runs from 1 April each year so it is best to have new systems dating from that date.
 - B. I am planning to retire in December 2021, i.e. in 97 weeks, 5 days, 5 hours, 11 minutes (at the time of typing) and it would be good to have systems which a replacement can easily take over and the staff all know how to use.
 - C. Our rent recording system is manual and the closing of the books and monthly reconciliation (and generation of stats and reports) takes some staff time. This could be reduced considerably by a suitable program.
- 1.4 For all these reasons I recommend that Lister installs a new system.

2. PROCURING A NEW SYSTEM

- 2.1 The market for such software is not large as there are a small number of different suppliers who tend to target different sections/sizes of customer. The bigger suppliers seem to be firms such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Those who have more of the smaller-sizes customer base are firms such as [REDACTED]. There is also a new entrant, [REDACTED].

2.2 I have been in contact with a number of local RSLs to establish what they use and all have one or other of the systems mentioned above. I have spoken to one or two and also visited one to see [REDACTED]. Many people say their existing system has pluses and minuses and there is no stand-out top system of the long-established suppliers.

2.3 I have taken initial advice from our IT firm, and also notified our external auditors (Chiene + Tait) and finance agents (Port of Leith HA). PoLHA kindly sent up their in-house IT strategy person to have a good discussion with me.

2.4 In a normal tendering scenario, one writes one's specification and puts in on the tender portal, Public Contracts Scotland for firms to tender to supply what we want. With computer software it is slightly different in that each firm's system is different, sometimes in small ways, sometimes in bigger, significant ways. As mentioned above, the size and pricing of firms does vary and so I decided to approach a small number of suppliers to assess their products.

2.5 The [REDACTED] I have approached are [REDACTED]. I have had a detailed presentation and information from each of them, and a summary is outlined overleaf. — SUMMARY REDACTED FULLY-COMMERCIALY

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2.6 There are a few more stages before a final decision should be ready to be made:

- a. Take soundings from the Finance Sub Group and Management Committee on thoughts on the approach, costs and other issues.
- b. Gather further comments from other RSLs running the system(s) being considered as front-runner (and possibly a second-place option).
- c. Check further with our IT firm that the proposed set-up is OK to use.
- d. If a further demonstration or interview is required of one or more of the suppliers, then this can be arranged.
- e. Assess if there is any final negotiating to be done with recommended supplier.

2.6 It is likely that the final decision may be done in February. If we are ready by early February, does the Management Committee wish to delegate it to the Office Bearers?

3. THOUGHTS

3.1 The thoughts of the Management Committee are sought.

Alistair Cant
DIRECTOR
17 January 2020
Ref: fbu