

Report of the Responsible Financial Officer

Telephone system

Background

1. The history of your office telephone system is unclear. It seems as if, at some stage, the office operated on a single phone line, with three extensions. This meant only one call could be made at any time. This is sometimes referred to as POTS (plain old telephone service).
2. A previous town clerk took the decision to move the telephone system from POTS to a voice over internet protocol service (VOIP). This involves phone services being provided via a business broadband (ADSL) system; enabling multiple phone connections at any given time, and with additional other features such as a web client that enabled calls to be via a mobile phone with a 3g / 4g internet connection.
3. Service quality has been, without exception, unacceptable. VOIP services depend upon the quality of service of the internet connection, and the asymmetric nature of ADSL services is illustrated by a speed test today that suggested download speeds of 19 Mbps download and 1.6 Mbps upload. Experiments using one of the VOIP handsets from the Town Clerk's home, where there is a 76Mbps fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) connection suggests that some of the issues are line capacity related, but some appears to be issues of capacity at the host provider.
4. The contract with the existing provider comes to an end on 30th July. The options exists to roll over that contract, but with a price increase that amounts to approximately additional £180 per year.
5. The service quality issues are such that your officers cannot recommend continuing with the existing service.
6. The cost of a telephone contract is such that your officers believe there should be member oversight of the arrangements put in place for future telephony. Your opinions are sought as to whether officers should continue to pursue the VOIP route for telephony, or should seek to revert the phone system back to a variant of POTS.
7. Similarly your officers believe that financial commitments that extend beyond one year should also be the subject of member scrutiny.

Recommendation

1. Committee is invited to recommend to council that it delegate authority to the RFO to enter into a new telephony contract, including authority to enter into a multi year contract, after consultation with the chair and vice chair of the budget and administration committee.