

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet Member jointly with the Director

Date: 22nd February 2019



Subject: SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND FAIR ACCESS I.T. UPGRADE AND DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING SYSTEM

Report of: Assistant Director - Education and Safeguarding

Relevant Cabinet Member: Cllr Jayne Francis - Education, Skills and Culture
Cllr Kate Booth - Children Well-being

Relevant O &S Chair(s): Cllr Mariam Khan - Learning, Culture and Physical Activity
Cllr Mohammed Aikhlaq - Children's Social Care

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Are specific wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No – All wards affected
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):		
Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, add Forward Plan Reference:		
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential :		

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The accompanying Private Report contains further financial information and seeks approval for the capital spend of £321,000 to upgrade and develop the Schools Admission and Fair Access service's I.T. arrangements.

- 1.2 The Schools Admission and Fair Access service (SAFA) delivers key statutory duties including managing over 30,000 school applications each year as part of the annual primary and secondary transfer rounds.
- 1.3 The service provided to the residents and schools of Birmingham can be significantly enhanced by the investment in a substantial upgrade and development of existing I.T. arrangements. This is one strand of the proposed service modernisation plan.
- 1.4 The I.T upgrade and development of the existing system will support the end to end school admissions process, a fully automated on-line system, and establish a portal to ensure the efficient and robust exchange of data with schools.
- 1.5 The current SAFA I.T. system and arrangements have not been reviewed for over 10 years. The lack of modernisation of the system has led to a range of temporary fixes and inefficient practices undermining the service provided to schools children and families.
- 1.6 The Corporate I.T. Portfolio Board met on 5th February 2019 and considered the proposal to approve infrastructure, concept, and costings and associated papers supporting the enhancements to the current system.
- 1.7 SAFA, Capita and the current provider, CACI have worked in partnership to develop a road map for the end to end process that will deliver a seamless system.
- 1.8 The speedy development and implementation of this proposal will enable work to be aligned to the national statutory deadlines of the admissions cycle thus supporting a full roll out of activity from September 2019.
- 1.9 It is intended that CACI, the current I.T. software provider to the Education and Skills Directorate, will deliver this upgrade and development.
- 1.10 Capita will provide the required project management function alongside a Corporate Project Manager appointed to ensure oversight of the current provider Capita and SAFA interface.
- 1.11 The total capital cost of the project including contingency is £321K which it is proposed is funded from the Directorate capital receipt budget.
- 1.12 The annual revenue costs will be funded via the SAFA budget.
- 1.13 There is an imperative to commence any agreed work urgently so as to ensure the upgrades and development are in place for the opening of the next School Admissions round, 2nd September 2019.
- 1.14 Implementation after this date will prevent critical benefits being secured until the September 2020 admissions round.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Members for Education, Skills and Culture and Children's Well-being and the Director for Education and Skills note this report.

3 Background

- 3.1 The School Admissions and Fair Access Service (SAFA) is responsible for delivering the statutory duties related to school admissions as prescribed by Law and statutory guidance including:

- School Admissions Code (2014)
- School Admissions and Appeals Code (2012)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- Schools Standard and Framework Act 1998
- Education Act 1996

- 3.2 The SAFA delivery plan 2018/19 is a single plan to encompass all the operational improvement and changes across the service from 1st September 2018 to 31st August 2019. The service priorities are directly linked to the Directorate Priorities and the Corporate Priorities as outlined in the Council plan 2018 – 2022. SAFA particularly contributes to Outcome 2 – 'Birmingham is an inspirational city to grow up in' and the related priorities.

1. 'We will improve protection of vulnerable children and young people'
2. 'We will work with Early Years and all schools to improve educational attainment and standards'
3. 'We will inspire our children and young people to be ambitious and achieve their full potential'

- 3.3 The SAFA plan has four service strategic objectives all of which will be supported by this proposal to substantially upgrade the services I.T.

- We will improve our customer experience with new and improved systems to deliver a 100% end to end admissions process.
- We will implement a newly designed School Admission and Fair Access service and work force strategy to ensure a more efficient, effective and modern service.
- We will support education outcomes for and safeguarding of children and young people by ensuring all school admission, fair access, pupil tracking, admission arrangements and appeals statutory duties and responsibilities are met.
- We will develop our commercial and commissioning approach to support efficiencies and Directorate and Corporate budget reduction targets

- 3.4 The service provided to the residents and schools of Birmingham can be significantly enhanced by the investment in a substantial upgrade of the existing I.T arrangements. This is one strand of the service improvement programme (see School Admission and Fair Access Delivery Improvement Plan September 2018 – August 2019).
- 3.5 The IT development will support the end to end school admissions process, a fully automated on-line system, and a portal to ensure the efficient and robust exchange of data with schools. The schools portal will also provide opportunities for other service areas to obtain and share information.
- 3.6 The current I.T. arrangements have not been reviewed for over 10 years. The lack of modernisation of the system has required many 'fixes' and manual processes, which have led to inefficiencies and poor quality of information.
- 3.7 The proposed upgrade and modernisation will deliver the following:
- **The schools Appeals Module;** currently the appeals arrangements are reliant on a manual system, the new module will ensure there is an electronic record of the appeal, the hearing and outcomes and will be better equipped to generate letters automatically to key stakeholders.
 - **Distance Checker;** the current/previous facility will be decommissioned. This provision is business critical and ensures the application of admission arrangement over subscription criteria.
 - **A communication module;** this module will enable a range of communication methods e.g. emails, enablement of scheduling letters in bulk, texts to parents, use on android and phone services.
 - **A systematic interface** between all of the existing and proposed new modules.
 - **A schools portal** that will enable schools to input information, which will interface with the child's record instantly (removing the need for some data to be manually inputted by staff). The portal will ensure information is exchanged in a secure manner, removing risk of transfer of data between the schools and LA and will support information to become 'real' time rather than a delayed response.
- 3.8 The benefits to families, schools and the council:
- A more efficient and effective appeals system and improved service to schools and families
 - The distance checker is fundamental to the schools admissions process. The new arrangement will ensure a self-service facility for both schools and families.

- Schools and the council will be able to manage ranking and waiting lists more efficiently and with better transparency, oversight and compliance by the schools and LA.
- The communication module will improve all aspects of communicating with stakeholders. Information will be provided in a quicker and systematic way which adheres to statutory timescales and will provide savings in relation to printing, paper and postage.
- The current system is inefficient in the way in which it is currently operating. The proposed solution will enable the various modules to interface more effectively and less reliance on spreadsheets, reducing duplication and errors.
- The schools portal will enable schools to take advantage of robust and GDPR compliant information and data exchange arrangements with SAFA and will provide a more robust and permanent solution to in-year applications/movement including:
 - The ability to make fair access referrals and exchange of relevant information.
 - A longer term solution to the challenge of schools providing their weekly returns on applications made and related outcomes for pupil movement forms. This will support the in-year compliance and safeguarding children.

3.9 Schedule of Activity

- 3.9.1 There is an imperative to commence any agreed work urgently so as to ensure the upgrades and development is in place for the opening of the next School Admissions round, 2nd September 2019. Implementation after this date will prevent critical benefits being secured until the September 2020 admissions round.
- 3.9.2 The current provider is currently supporting the activity to upgrade and develop the current system without commercial cover. This arrangement will cease on 22nd February.
- 3.9.3 To ensure the upgrade and development can go live in September 2019, the current provider is required to deliver their full test solution by 16th April 2019 (start of the Summer term).
- 3.9.4 From 16th April 2019 Capita will begin their further required tests.
- 3.9.5 Once Capita have signed off their testing (by mid-May) the service will begin 'user' testing with schools.
- 3.9.6 Final testing with schools and staff to be completed by mid-July prior to schools breaking up.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

4.1 No change;

If the service does not improve and the current I.T system is not modernised the service will continue to run at a high level of risk. This risk relates to service performance, inability to meet statutory requirements, reputational risks for the Council and the continuation of temporary fixes which are not cost effective and are leading to service delivery inefficiencies.

4.2 A delayed decision;

To delay any decision pending the migration of the Capita contract and functions back into the Council. There may be some contract cost benefits related to this approach but there are substantial risks as identified in option 4.1 above that would impact on at least the next full admission round (2019/20). Further there are still uncertainties in respect of the detail and on the related timelines for the migration.

4.3 Procure one directorate solution for the Education and Skills Directorate;

The process to scope, procure and implement a new Directorate I.T. solution has previously been progressed but unsuccessfully (SENAR). Such a process would take 2-3 years to conclude. Given the need to affect change in a speedy manner such an approach would involve significant risk including as outlined above in the 'No Change' option

4.4 Align arrangements with that of other local authorities.

This may have potential for a much longer term project which can consider the range of different admission authorities, relative size and volume of Birmingham's activity and complexity of existing contractual arrangements.

4.5 Upgrade and develop the current IT software and arrangements;

Upgrading the current I.T. software and infrastructure is the most feasible and cost effective way in moving forward. The proposal is to utilise the existing software provider and builds on a long standing relationship with the Council. The current system has a 'core' module which other services are reliant on with many interdependencies. The current provider and CAPITA have committed to a staged approach to implementation with full delivery being available by September 2019, development however has already started (at risk to the current provider and no commercial coverage) to allow developments to commence and align to the SAFA statutory deadlines and activities.

5 Consultation

5.1 The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources has been briefed as regards the proposals.

5.2 The Director for Education and Skills, senior managers within Education and Skills and officers from Finance, Corporate Procurement and Legal and Governance have contributed to the preparation of the report.

5.3 Schools have been engaged via the Primary and Secondary Heads and Schools Forum as regards the need to modernise and improve the service.

- 5.4 The Education and Skills Directorate Management Team considered the proposals on the 6th February 2019 and asked for a report to be submitted for joint Cabinet Member and Director consideration.
- 5.5 The corporate ICT Portfolio Board received and approved the documents and related infrastructure requirements on 5th February 2019. This Board is chaired by Peter Bishop, Assistant Director ICT and Digital, (Digital and Customer Services Directorate).

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 Included in the Capita (ICT and Digital Solution) quotation are the project risks and related mitigation. Four areas are identified - Value for Money, School Portal development, Impact of the upgrade on the current system and the implementation timescale.
- 6.2 The Education and Skills Directorate follows the Corporate risk management methodology and will be applying this in respect of this project.
- 6.3 There will be a project manager from CAPITA monitoring the implementation, contractual obligations and infrastructure requirements.
- 6.4 A project board will be established and project lead secured from within the Council to ensure implementation and spend is monitored alongside colleagues from CAPITA.

7 Compliance Issues:

7.1 How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?

The approval of the proposal will support SAFA's contribution to the Corporate Plan particularly to Outcome 2 'Birmingham is an inspirational city to grow up in' and the related priorities.

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7.2 Legal Implications

- 7.2.1 The Local Authority's main duties and functions relating to school admissions are conferred by Part 3 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Pursuant to section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Authority has the power to do anything (including involving expenditure) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

7.3 Financial Implications

7.3.1 The capital implementation cost is £321,000 with annual support costs of £57,837. In addition there will be one off project management costs of £26,220 which will be sourced from the directorate budget.

7.2.2 It is proposed that the full £321, 000 costs are funded via the directorate capital IT developments budget.

7.3 Procurement Implications (if required)

7.3.1 Officers from Commissioning and Procurement Services have been involved in the preparation of this report.

7.3.2 There are no implications under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 as this contract falls under the Capita ICTDS managed service agreement.

7.4 Human Resources Implications (if required)

7.4.1 The additional cost of annual support for the upgrade will be part met through a service redesign, including the deletion of a vacant post in the School Admissions service.

7.5 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.6.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to comply with the requirements of the School Admission Code (2014) and Equality Act (2010) as identified within the Code. The School Admissions and Fair Access services Improvement plan (September 2018) identifies the School Admission Code as underpinning the services delivery framework

7.6.2 The proposed upgrade and development of the service's current IT system is designed to improve service delivery for the customer. The service has progressively developed its on-line focus and activity and ensured that where families do not have access to on-line facilities that hard copies of school applications are provided

7.6.3 No adverse impact is expected by developing and upgrading the service's IT system.

8. Appendices

N/A

9. Background Documents

School Admissions and Fair Access Service Improvement Plan

End to end School Admissions process map