

**Report to:** Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

**Date of meeting:** 23 May 2023

**By:** Chief Operating Officer

**Title:** East Sussex County Council Wi-Fi Service

**Purpose:** To approve the recommended route to market for the replacement East Sussex County Council Wi-Fi service.

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## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to:

- 1) Note the contract end of the existing Wi-Fi solution and need for a replacement service;
  - 2) Support the recommendation to use the SEG Network Services Framework as the route to market for the procurement of the replacement Wi-Fi service;
  - 3) Support the recommendation to use the Fortinet solution as the underpinning technology; and
  - 4) Delegate contract award to the Chief Operating Officer.
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## **1 Background**

1.1 Wi-Fi is now an essential part of the Council's Information Technology (IT) infrastructure. It provides access to IT systems and the internet without a physical connection to a network port and therefore enables flexible working within council buildings for council employees, partners and visitors.

1.2 The contract and associated licencing for the current Wi-Fi service ends in 2024. Therefore, there is an urgent requirement to procure a replacement service and commence the implementation.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 Wi-Fi was originally introduced to complement wired networks. With the shift to hybrid working and greater flexible use of buildings, it has become the primary means of connecting for most staff. It is also an enabler of newer technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) which is likely to be used in the future for a range of activities such as energy and intelligent buildings management.

2.2 The current Wi-Fi service was originally contracted through the Link Consortium with the delivery and support sub-contracted to CloudConnX (CCX), a company part owned by Eastbourne Borough Council. As part of the cessation of the Link contracts and Consortium, a transition arrangement was put in place, which has enabled the continued use of the legacy CCX Wi-Fi service until the end of March 2024.

2.3 In 2021, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) set-up a 15-year Network Services framework agreement for the supply of digital infrastructure services across the county, including Wide Area Network (WAN) and Wi-Fi. This contract was awarded to MLL and is delivered through the South East Grid (SEG) Consortium, hosted by the Council, and the associated client function which manages the contract and supplier management arrangements.

2.4 ESCC used this framework to procure the replacement WAN. It is proposed that further value is extracted from the Network Services Framework by using it as the procurement route to source and implement the replacement Wi-Fi service.

## Options and recommendation

### Compliant procurement route: Find a Tender Service (FTS) vs. Framework

2.5 The Council needs to undertake a compliant procurement, in accordance with the Public Procurement Regulations, to put in place a new Wi-Fi service before the legacy service ends.

2.6 For the expected value of the Wi-Fi services contract there are two potential compliant procurement routes: Find a Tender Service (FTS), a full tender activity like the previous Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) Restricted procurement; or the use of a framework agreement. Frameworks, are predefined agreements with suppliers that establish terms governing contracts that may be awarded during the life of the framework.

2.7 While the FTS cost of change route would take circa 12 months to implement and consume external resource of circa £100k, the Framework route would minimise this time and cost, taking circa 2 months and consuming internal resource of circa £15k equivalent. It is therefore recommended that a Framework is used to contain the time and cost of procurement activity over the FTS route given that the existing Wi-Fi provision is only in place until March 2024.

### Framework Selection

2.8 There are a considerable number of potential frameworks available, including the SEG Network Services Framework Agreement, Network Services 2 Framework hosted by Crown Commercial Services and the Kent Commercial Services (KCS) Framework, and other commercial and sector specific frameworks. It is recommended that the SEG Network Services Framework is used as the route to market.

2.9 There are a host of benefits associated with using the SEG Network Services Framework, as follows:

- It was created by East Sussex County Council. The terms, conditions and standards, including cyber security and resilience standards have been defined to meet the Council's needs and reflect public sector values.
- As a tried and tested procurement mechanism this option can be completed in the shortest timescale with the lowest implications in terms of cost and resourcing.
- The framework has a dedicated Client Function that supports the service recipients that use the SEG Framework and Consortium arrangements. The Client Function will be directed to undertake ongoing market and cost comparison reviews to support their robust contract and supplier management for the resulting Wi-Fi service.
- Surrey County Council have already used this framework to procure their Wi-Fi service and by working in partnership with other public service bodies, the Council can expect to benefit from the economies of scope and scale from the aggregation of common technology requirements met through a shared provider.
- Having the same provider for the WAN and Wi-Fi service simplifies the set-up and ongoing operation of the Wi-Fi service with fewer 'hand-off' points when responding to outages and performance issues.

### Technology selection

2.10 There are a broad range of potential technology options for the Wi-Fi solution. In their capacity as the Network Services provider to the SEG framework, MLL were engaged to undertake a market review of the potential technology components and solutions to provide the Wi-Fi service. This technology review has been undertaken transparently and in collaboration with the technology specialists within IT & Digital. This collaborative approach to the identification and selection of underpinning components has provided significant visibility and a level of influence over the technical decision making.

2.11 From this technology review, the Fortinet hardware and management platform has been identified as the proposed solution. MLL are contractually obliged to transparently test the market in order to provide best value solutions. This comes with an obligation to ensure that components

remain compatible. The recommendation is therefore to use Fortinet hardware and management platform.

### **Strategic Rationale and Benefits**

2.12 MLL is also the incumbent WAN provider which would simplify the ongoing contract and supplier management as the underpinning infrastructure and the Wi-Fi service would reside with the same supplier.

2.13 The new Wi-Fi Service will be designed to support and enable improvements in staff productivity due to enhanced network performance achieved by moving to the next generation of Wi-Fi. The new technology will also be capable of handling the new bandwidth demands anticipated as part of the adoption of the Internet of Things (IoT) over the next 5 -10 years.

2.14 The recommended option would also lead to the configuration of the WAN infrastructure and lay the foundations for the Council's public sector partners to access and use the Wi-Fi service at a date that suited their needs and priorities.

2.15 Finally, social value benefits are expected, with MLL contractually committed under the terms of the SEG framework to provide benefits equivalent to 10% of the value of the overall contract value.

### **Financial implications**

2.16 The financial implications are presented in a later agenda item that contains exempt information.

## **3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 In conclusion, there is a requirement to replace the existing Wi-Fi service and it is proposed that this need can be met by using the SEG Network Services Framework. The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to approve the use of the SEG Framework as the procurement route to secure a replacement Wi-Fi service and to use the Fortinet solution as the underpinning technology platform.

3.2 The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to approve delegation of the contract award to the Chief Operating Officer to use the existing SEG governance to oversee the implementation and operation of the replacement Wi-Fi service.

**ROS PARKER**  
**Chief Operating Officer**

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### **LOCAL MEMBERS**

All.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.