

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer - Resources****Corporate Services Committee: 24 May 2023**

Subject: Tender for Off-Site Print and Posting Service for Annual Council Tax Billing

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval to procure the provision of an off-site print and posting service for annual Council Tax billing, including the merging of relevant benefit letters.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to agree:

- i) that a tender exercise in line with the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015 and Council Standing Orders will be undertaken to procure off-site print and posting service for annual Council Tax billing; and
- ii) That subject to the successful tender being in line with budget and otherwise in line with the tender requirements, the Chief Officer: Regulatory and Regeneration may, after consultation with the Chief Officer: Resources, award the contract on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender for an initial 3 year period with further two potential 12-month periods at the sole discretion of the Council.

3. Background

3.1 The Council is required to issue annual Council Tax notices to all households by the 17th March 2024 to comply with Council Tax Regulations.

3.2 Previously, this process was carried out internally. However, due to restrictions on the capacity and capability of printing and enveloping machines we were unable to merge the Council Tax notice and Housing Benefit award letters which resulted in households receiving multiple mailings from the Council and multiple postage and enveloping costs.

3.3 Following a review of the processes for issuing Council Tax notices in 2011, it was determined that an off-site print and posting service for annual Council Tax billing would be the most efficient method.

3.4 After the last tendering exercise, CFH Docmail Ltd were appointed for an initial 3 year contract period to be extended thereafter for 2 one year extensions at the Council's discretion, which have been exercised. The current contract will expire on 31st January 2024.

4. Main Issues

4.1 As stated above, the Council is required to issue annual Council Tax notices to households by 17 March 2024. However the following tasks need to be completed prior to that:

- Setting of the Council Tax charge for 2024/25;
- Testing of system following the Council Tax charge being set;
- Testing of the output files; and
- Reviewing of the templates of each notice type.

4.2 Due to the tight timescale between the setting of the Council Tax charge and the final posting date to meet the 17 March 2024 deadline, it is imperative that we have in place a service provider who can be meet our requirements, whilst also being able to manage any issues that may occur due to the Council's tight turnaround requirement.

4.3 The scope of work is to merge various Council Tax payment files with related Housing Benefit notification letters and envelope with related inserts as required. The team will have the below approximate volumes of documents to produce, print and post during the annual billing exercise:

- 45,600 Council Tax Notices; and
- 8,000 Housing Benefit notification letters.

4.4 The Revenues and Benefits Service and Citizen Services promote the Council's My Account service which allows residents to self-serve and sign up to online billing, therefore reducing requirement to print and post notices. This is also promoted during the annual billing exercise with information and links to this however take up rates have been low.

4.5 Revenues and Benefits will discuss to Corporate Communications with a view of completing take up campaigns during 2023/24 to increase online billing to reduce costs. The Council are required to issue Council Tax notices and Housing Benefit award letters and the sign up to My Account has to be optional.

5. Options Appraisal

5.1 The option of completing this work internally was fully considered. However, due to the costs involved in purchasing the equipment, the software required along with the cost of materials, and reduction in internal capacity, the option to continue this service being provided externally provides better value for the Council as the majority of cost relate to postage.

6. People Implications

6.1 There are no people implications.

7. Financial & Procurement Implications

7.1 All procurement activity carried out by the Council in excess of £50,000 is subject to a contract strategy. The contract strategy for the provision of an off-site print and posting service for annual Council Tax billing, including merging of relevant benefit letters will be produced by the Corporate Procurement Unit in close consultation with Revenues and Benefits officers. The contract strategy shall include but may not be limited to; contract scope, service forward plan, the market, procurement model and routes – including existing delivery vehicles, roles and responsibilities, risks, issues and opportunities and ongoing contract management.

7.2 The cost of the previous contract was approx. £30,000 and it is our expectation that factoring for the increase in postage costs, the overall annual costs will be higher.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 There is a risk that if approval is not given, we could fail to meet the deadline for Council Tax notices being issued and would also have increased printing and postage costs due to documents not being merged.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

9.1 None.

10. Consultation

10.1 The views Procurement and Legal Services have been requested on this report and have advised there are neither any issues nor concerns with the proposal.

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 Sound financial practice and budgetary control are imperative to assist with the governance of the Council and supports officers of the Council in achieving the five strategic priorities of the Council's Strategic Plan. This report forms part of the financial governance of the Council.

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Laurence Slavin
Chief Officer - Resources

Date: 20 April 2023

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All Council wards.