

REPORT OF FINANCE MANAGER

SUBJECT: PROCUREMENT OF REPLACEMENT FINANCE SYSTEM

The Authority's current Financial Software (QLX) has been used since 1996. We have been told that the policy of owners of QLX, Unit 4, is to cease to develop QLX or to market it to new users and to move existing customers over to its flagship product (Agresso – a much larger and more complex offering, used by many Welsh Local Authorities and UK Universities). Within 3 to 5 years it is more than likely that Unit 4 will cease to support the QLX software and the Authority will at that stage be forced to replace the system.

Initial discussions were held jointly with the other two Welsh Parks, who both use the same finance system, and our current supplier, with a view to either sharing the cost of moving to the 'flagship' package (Agresso) or continuing to use the current system at a reduced cost on a shared basis. It became apparent that even together the three Parks were too small as a unit to afford the newer system, which is aimed at much larger organizations, and that logistical difficulties would hamper shared use of a single system.

It also became apparent that while a joint procurement between the three Parks would be desirable, each Authority faced different replacement demands and system specification needs. In addition to the Finance System the Authority also needs to replace the EPOS system used at all of the Centres and at the same time Snowdonia National Park Authority need to replace the booking systems used at its Educational Centre. Consequently Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, which only needed to replace their core Finance system, chose to work with Carmarthen County Council to develop a solution, whereas Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and Snowdonia National Park Authority decided to continue to work together in a joint procurement exercise to find more bespoke software fitting our operational needs.

Whilst, in accordance with the Authority's Financial Standards, an advertisement was placed on the Buy4wales website it was thought this would not be the most effective way of sourcing a replacement system. The complexity of Local Government accounting requirements necessitated the use of specialist financial software. Therefore the Authority, in conjunction with Snowdonia National Park Authority, sought recommendations from the Finance Managers of the UK's other National Parks Authorities for replacement systems. The result of that enquiry identified five possible replacement systems; SAGE, Sun Systems, Access Dimensions, Iris Exchequer and Greentree.

These software houses are in the process of making presentations to the Finance & IT teams at the Authority & Snowdonia National Park Authority. Follow up presentations, security checks, customer endorsements and potential client user site visits will be sought from these companies in the forthcoming weeks. It is anticipated

that a decision will be made on the preferred replacement software by the end of the calendar year.

Provision has been made in 2012/13 Capital Program of £35,000 to cover the cost of the replacement system.

Recommendations

Members are asked to ENDORSE and APPROVE the procurement procedure as outlined above.