

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 15 December 2022

Officer Response: Call-in by Cllr Lee Chamberlain of Decision List 27/22-23 - Key Decision 5357 Meridian Water Security Budget Extension

These arguments are detailed below:

| Reason for call-in |
|---|
| <p>1 - Case is not made for expenditure in terms of costs of the alternatives, ie to clear site or deal with consequences of not enacting security. It is not clear why stronger physical measures would not be sufficient, or the costs to rectify damage done to the site for example.</p> |
| Officer response |
| <p>Security at Meridian Water is a mixture of proactive, reactive, human and static or physical measures. Requirements change as the project develops. The contract that was procured in 2019 was for a 3 year term with the opportunity to extend by one year subject to programme. The Contract is also very flexible, in terms of being able to change the specification on a month by month basis. Should there be an imminent threat of incursions or anti-social behaviour security can be stepped up and equally should an area change as tenants move out, human security can be removed, and cheaper physical security can replace this. This report seeks to approve the permissible 1year extension and extend the available budget by £800,000.</p> <p>Officers are working hard to reduce costs and the need to draw down this budget on two fronts. Firstly, by accelerating the handover of areas to contractors undertaking infrastructure work. Contractors would then take on the security responsibilities. Secondly by rationalising security and removing human security. Examples include the removal of CCTV from security contract as the Council's own system is expanded into Meridian Water and the removal of human security on certain areas where tenants have moved out and 24 hours access is no longer required. Physical Barriers can be substituted. Where the Council has to provide access for tenants, physical security is not appropriate and human security is required to give access to those that have rights to be on Meridian Water land but to stop those that may want to undertake antisocial or illegal activity.</p> <p>Whilst it is hard to estimate the costs of damage that the security contract has prevented, the cost of rectifying damage has ranged from £5,000 to £10,000 per breach for some of the lower level incursions. In terms of some of the larger incursions the clean up bill for an incursion that impacted the VOSA Site and an area of Phoenix Wharf at Meridian Water in 2017 was in excess of £300k. The Cost of clearing the Thames Water site (Edmonton Marshes) of Fly tip is in excess of £580K. These costs are the direct costs of clearance and do not include the Councils staff time in arranging for the clearance and procuring the clearance contractors.</p> <p>Whenever there are instances of Fly tipping or rubbish left behind there are almost always materials that are hazardous to human health, these range from human waste</p> |

to chemicals and oils to asbestos. These materials create health and safety challenges and there is an obligation on the Council as the landowner to remove them safely to protect residents and users of the site.

Reason for call-in

2 - Insufficient clarity is provided in the report as to a scale of costs for elements of the security, either as levels of service or by breakdown of services provided. Expenditure of £800,000 warrants significantly greater detail to explain and justify its expenditure. Paragraph 21 information should set out in greater detail, including staffing numbers, quantified security activities, numbers of CCTV cameras etc.

Officer response

This report is seeking approval to extend the existing contract by the year that was approved in the original Key Decision (KD 4910). The original paper and specification set out the rationale for the design of security measures which remains relevant and proposals were evaluated on the basis of price having a 60% weighting and quality 40% weighting. Quality evaluation was based on responses to nine questions exploring skill levels, competencies, previous experience and implementation plans. The nature of the security arrangements are confidential and their disclosure risks reduced effectiveness of the overall strategy.

The Report seeks a budget extension of £800k. (For the last 3 years the costs have been split on a 25% Revenue and 75% capital basis.) It is anticipated that this will cover a year's extra costs if no changes happen. The Government delay in the decision making around the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) grant for the Council's Strategic Infrastructure Works (SIW) at Meridian Water has meant that the contractors haven't been handed their areas to work on and secure. If the decision regarding HIF is made early in 2023 the costs will reduce significantly and the budget of £800k will not be fully utilised. This is because the SIW contractors will be responsible for securing their compounds.

Reason for call-in

3 - Further consideration of tendering in order to achieve better value for money is insufficiently documented in this decision. Due diligence should include a comparison of commercial rates.

Officer response

The original Key Decision approved a 3 year contract with the ability to extend this by a year should it be required. The original decision included due diligence and 4 bidders bid for the original contract against the published criteria allowing the market to be tested. Pricing was 60 % of the original appointment. With inflationary pressures and labour shortages there is a significant risk of costs increasing on a re-procurement exercise. The current contract allows for a reduction in services during the contract thereby allowing for a reduction in the costs during the life of the contract should this be possible.

Reason for call-in

4 - The insufficient time argument in paragraph 49 implies that this decision was not dealt with in good time. An explanation of why the decision was not made earlier should have been included.

Officer response

The Profile security contract was 3 years and included the ability to extend by a year. The initial 3 year contract started in November 2019 and ran until November 2022. As stated above flexibility is built into the contract. This was done in the anticipation that the HIF funded SIW works would begin during 2022 and security for a number of areas would become the responsibility of contractors. The decision making around the HIF Funding was delayed by the Government a number of times starting from early 2022 which then was pushed back to November 2022. Officers were anticipating a HIF decision in November which would have then allowed for a different ask of the extension. When it became clear that the Governments HIF decision was going to be made later than November 2022 the paper was written seeking a 1 year extension and further budget be identified. A funding decision from Government is not now expected until the end of March 2023.

Reason for call-in

5 - I note a cost saving strategy dependent on police presence is included (paragraph 6). Apart this appearing entirely unrealistic, it is not clear how this could be a strategy to reduce costs as security costs, as police involvement would be likely to be linked to criminal activity.

Officer response

A cost mitigation approach identified in Para 6 includes; greater co-operation with the police, looking for long and short term tenants that can take on responsibility for security, reducing the costs of the CCTV by moving to the Council own system and increasing the use of physical barriers as access requirements reduce. Ongoing liaison with the police "Safer By Design" Team has led to greater awareness and to a site visit to Meridian Water by Detective Superintendent Marco Bardetti and a number of his team from the Mets North Area Team on the 14th November 2022. He is the Detective Superintendent for Local Investigations primarily based at Wood Green Police Station. His teams are responsible for investigating and reducing the Offences of Violence, Burglary, Robbery and other serious Crime. We are hoping that these closer relations will prove beneficial for the Meridian Water Project. Discussions have started with regard to the possibility of shared use of facilities on Meridian Water. Officers are of the belief that an increase police presence on Meridian Water will reduce anti-social behaviour and will reduce the need for security.

