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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

JOINT AUDIT & SCRUTINY PANEL

Held on Tuesday, 14 December 2010 at 10.00 am in
St Georges Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham, NR19 1EE

PRESENT

Mr S.G. Bambridge
Councillor Claire Bowes
Mr R.P. Childerhouse

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)
Mr C.R. Jordan

In Attendance

Helen McAleer
Jane Osborne
Rory Ringer
Teresa Smith
Kevin J Taylor

- Senior Committee Officer
- Committee Officer
- Elections and Scrutiny Manager
- Member Services Support Officer
- Head of ICT

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8/07 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting dated 24 November, 2010 were confirmed as a correct record by the Chairman; however it was noted that not all Members had received a copy, they were therefore given copies and would read them later.

9/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Claire Bowes as she would be arriving late.

10/07 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were none.

11/07 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

There were none.

12/07 SUMMARY

The Head of ICT recapped on the outcomes from the Panel meeting held on 24 November. His PowerPoint presentation and slides covered the areas below and included some ICT comments received by Members :-

- Connectivity
- Equipment Software
- Software Feedback
- Citrix
- Training

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- Support
- Next Steps

Connectivity

Accepted that broadband speed across rural Norfolk needed to be improved although acknowledged that this was out of the scope or influence of the panel. There were some connectivity and usability issues raised regarding Citrix, although an independent review would be done shortly with a report to Members and Officers.

Equipment Software

Whilst fax use had reduced and would reduce further, it was felt there was still a need for these. One Member had quite a lot of constituents who used faxes, whereas another had not missed the ability of sending or receiving them. The Head of ICT explained about fax gateway services, allowing faxes to be sent and received as emails.

Non Executive Members were not provided with Breckland mobile phones or Blackberrys, Member opinion on the latter was that they could not replace laptops, and that easy access to read screens both in the Committee rooms and at home was required.

There was support for iPads from the Joint Chief Executive and interest shown by the Leader of Breckland Council, provided that there was a strong business case to consider/adopt these devices. Head of ICT referenced that Leicester City Council had based their decision to pilot iPads on savings in paper and postage.

It was recognised however that access to large screens would be necessary, especially with committees that relied on large scale drawings. The Chairman gave the example of the Moving Thetford Forward document and Appendices, half of which were plans, diagrams and spread sheets in landscape format, which caused problems as Citrix could not switch view from portrait, and Members needed the ability to reformat Agendas and associated paperwork circulated to them. He added that there was a big issue with regard to legibility and formatting. The Head of ICT said that this may be a limitation of the PDF formatting, and that he would look into alternative solutions.

It was essential that it was ascertained what the future requirements of Members would be to ensure suitable equipment.

Councillor Claire Bowes joined the meeting.

Software Feedback

The Chairman advised he had encountered difficulty when opening a link within Mod.gov and had not been able to access some political documents. This was due to the site being 'unclassified' as regards web content filtering, and had now been

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resolved.

One Member had been waiting months for external links to be sorted. The Head of ICT would look into this and encouraged Members to contact Andrew or Helpdesk to log these.

One of the options to the current software model was use of 'cloud' based applications such as Googleapps. This could provide access to a range of MS Office type applications, however was reliant on an internet connection to function.

Whilst the need to reduce paper was accepted, a viable alternative solution would be required that allowed Members to view and annotate documents when not connected to internet. The Chairman felt it should be borne in mind how useful hard copies of documents were when Members had "spare time", for example these could be accessed by them whilst waiting for appointments or when travelling on public transport, and was a facility that he would not want to lose, therefore an alternative solution would need to be considered that allowed 'off line' access to documents, providing the ability to comment/annotate.

Some initial feedback received from Communities team regarding the Youth Council indicated that surprisingly, contact by phone was preferred by many, however further information would be sought to support the review.

Citrix

It was recognised that delays with display of typing was a known Citrix issue, although some Members had experience with 'locking up' and 'freezing' screens for a number of minutes, a fault not identified previously and which the Head of ICT would investigate.

Head of ICT stated that Central Government seemed to be taking a less rigorous approach to Local Government data security and that more local authorities were considering use of personal PCs, whereas previously that had not been allowed.

Training

There was a strong drive to ensure that training would be tied into the May elections, would be a mandatory prerequisite, and would be offered at two levels, novice and expert. Decisions needed to be taken by mid February, to ensure any new equipment would be in place by May.

It was expected that IT equipment would be ordered end of March, but a large procurement exercise was not expected.

Support

The way Help Desk calls were dealt with would be revised in the light of the end of the Steria contract, and Members would be

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encouraged to use a new system that provided much more information on faults, diagnostics and alerts.

However, the dedicated Member Support Officer for IT was felt to be extremely invaluable. The Panel were advised that he had secondary activities of procurement and some limited Officer support.

There was no single alerting model in the event of connectivity problems therefore the use of text messaging was being looked at which could be rolled out soon, although it was outside the scope of the current exercise, but would improve alerting and communications. A Member advised that it was suggested 3-4 years ago that this service should be rolled out to the wider community, but nothing happened at that time.

Local View

This was demonstrated by The Head of ICT and it was accessed via a web link on the Biz and contained specific Breckland information, a lot of which was updated on a daily basis. A public and private version was being looked into.

He would see if it could be added to the current Citrix set up, and if Members wished to explore Local View further to ascertain if it would be helpful to them and their residents, to let him know and he would arrange for Capita to carry out an overview and some initial training.

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Next Steps

These were :-

Produce an interim report to include

1. Overview of Background to the report
2. Options
3. Cost Recommendations
4. Conclusions

A single supplier source of broadband connection was encouraged to maximise value for money for the Council and at the moment, Outlook software was not the latest version, and it was felt that software upgrades should be built in to the service to keep Members up to date. The Head of ICT said consideration was being given to MS Exchange V2010, but that was a separate piece of work outside of the remit of the panel.

With regard to the Government Grant and CSR, the Chairman said the public would be very aware of savings required, and therefore any spending would need to be fully and thoroughly researched and justified with a strong business case, that clearly demonstrated achievement of best value and fitness for purpose.

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The focus would be to reduce costs and increase efficiency through the innovative use of technology.

Before a cost analysis was done on providing all Members with an iPad, a small trial was proposed.

To ensure a fair spread of representation, it was suggested that any trial should not be limited to Executive Members, but should consider "twin hatters", consider those with wider requirements (i.e access to drawings etc) and consider a Member that struggled with the current service.

It was felt that a Member of the Development Control Committee should be part of the trial to ascertain if the ipad could be used sensibly during the course of a meeting due to the volume and type of documents produced by the Committee, and that if it worked in those circumstances, it should work in most circumstances.

An opportunity existed to improve the quality of service and support for Members within the shared service, and also to make use of work already digitised by Capita. Therefore when specifying pilot devices, the recommendation may be to opt for 64 GB devices rather than 32 GB.

The report would need to pick up all issues and options with the caveat that the review would need to be underpinned by a strong business case, otherwise any recommendation would be premature.

There was potential that video conferencing could also be used to allow cost savings to be made with regard to travel time and mileage. Members asked to be made aware if iPads could be used with an external camera. *(Post meeting note, the next version of iPad was due to include a camera).*

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The cost of a commercial Skype licence was negligible, and it was felt that was another avenue that should be explored.

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In the past Neatherd School had offered to provide training to a commercial standard for Breckland, and a Member asked that consideration be given to contacting the IT Departments of local schools to see if they could provide IT training. This would be good public relations as well as a practical use of local resources.

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13/07 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS

Comments received by Members from their colleagues had been listed and presented to the Panel, they covered the areas listed below, all of which were covered in the Head of IT's presentation summary at Agenda Item 5 :-

- IT Support/training
- Equipment

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- Citrix
- General

14/07 DEMONSTRATION OF AWARD WINNING DEMOCRATIC SERVICES SYSTEM

The presentation on Teignbridge District Council's bespoke, in house application, which won the Excellence in Democratic Services Award at the 2010 MJ Achievement Awards did not take place due to the way that Teignmouth had set their PCs up, which did not suit a remote demonstration at this stage.

15/07 DIGITAL PEN TECHNOLOGY

Digital Pen Technology

An overview and video of this alternative means of capturing the written word electronically was given. Two types of digital pens were shown, they cost on average £120 - £130 each and stored data which could be either sent via blue toothed or linked to a PC and converted to text.

They were felt to be a luxury item rather than a requirement, and initially they had been looked at for the benefit of remote working for officers. They might be useful for annotating agendas, and could benefit Councillors. One Member felt that minute takers should not be writing notes and then typing them, and that digital pens should be considered for the Member Services Team.

As well as the above, video demonstrations on the following took place :-

Apple iPad

Average cost was £600 for 32 GB. A print server device or wireless printer would be required for printing.

It was believed MPs used Blackberrys and/or laptops, and most business people used ipads in conjunction with a PC.

As a piece of hardware, the ipad was believed to have limitations, one being a keyboard. If Citrix was used it was questioned whether the iPad would work without a laptop, the Head of ICT confirmed that it would. The Chairman said that during the trial, the iPad should be used as if it was a laptop with an external keyboard for data entry.

Whilst Mr Jordan could see these would be useful if paperless, he was unsure how they could replace a computer, as there was still a hardware need. As a "twin-hatter" he would be happy to trial these, and would use them and nothing else, enabling a true evaluation to be provided along with the identification of its limitations.

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Keyboard doc

Average cost of keyboard and case was £47.99. If a lot of typing was required, they could be plugged into an ipad.

Leicester City Council

The Panel were advised of what the Council were doing, and Breckland were keeping an eye on how their cost model worked and how the devices were justified.

16/07 FINAL REPORT REQUIREMENTS

It was **RESOLVED** that :-

1. An interim report ready for the next meeting would be produced leading to a final report
2. Trial ipads January 2011 to reflect the needs of different levels of elected Members
3. Those invited to undertake the trial would be suggested as , Councillors C R Jordan, C Bowes and S Matthews with the Executive Members represented by either William Nunn or Paul Claussen
4. Final report ready for Cabinet on 22 February 2011
5. Recommendation to Council for decision on 10 March 2011

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 1 February, 2011 at 10.30 a.m in the St. George's Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

CHAIRMAN