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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

JOINT AUDIT & SCRUTINY PANEL

Held on Tuesday, 12 April 2011 at 9.00 am in
Anglia Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, 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

Mark Finch
Helen McAleer
Maxine O'Mahony
Roger Wilkin

- Assistant Director of Finance
- Senior Committee Officer
- Director of Commissioning
- Interim Business Development Manager

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6/11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7/11 APOLOGIES

None.

8/11 DECLARATIONS

None.

9/11 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

None.

10/11 MEMBERS ICT OPTIONS

The Interim Business Development Manager presented the supplementary report and Proforma B which had been circulated electronically to Members the day before. He apologised for the lateness of its issue which was due to his having only recently been appointed.

In reviewing the report it had been apparent that the key issue was officer support to Members. The two options, of hardware provided by the Council or an allowance to Members to provide their own, were both affected by that key issue. A table in the supplementary report showed the true financial difference between the options with and without support. In either case, the option of hardware

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provided by the Council was the cheapest and an allowance with support was the most expensive.

The question was, did Members need IT support or not and if they did, what was the best way to provide it? Support was expensive, especially in the way it was provided at the moment, and the way in which support was provided in future would need to be reviewed.

Mr Jordan felt that all Members needed help at some time with their IT equipment and that it should be provided. As to the hardware, he personally preferred a desktop to a laptop. Existing printers and faxes also needed upgrading at the cheapest cost to provide the necessary service.

Other Members agreed that they had to have the right equipment to be able to provide a good service to the public.

A non-Panel Member had contacted the Chairman to say that she understood that Members at South Holland were to receive new equipment and asked if that had been 'factored in' to the financial considerations.

The Director of Commissioning confirmed that discussions were taking place. South Holland was looking at high-spec laptops for their Members and it might be possible to make savings by joint procurement.

The Chairman supported that idea and thought that it might also make joint working easier if both sets of Members were trained to use the same equipment. He asked about the use of WebEx.

The Director of Commissioning advised that this was being trialled by both Councils and they were currently looking for up to 100 Members and officers to participate to ensure that the system could work well when being used by large numbers of people.

The Chairman asked her to explain why Skype (which was free) could not be used instead and she said that Skype was unable to meet Government security requirements at the current time. WebEx provided phone, video-conferencing and document sharing facilities.

Discussion then turned to Member support. It was clear that support was required and it was acknowledged that Members needed out-of-hours support. With the in-sourcing of the Council's IT support contract there would be a team of staff available and it was proposed to offer an 8am to 8pm support service Mondays to Fridays and Saturday mornings.

Mr Childerhouse said that was no good. He did most of his work later in the evening and also at weekends. Other Members agreed. However, Councillor Bowes pointed out that with new equipment Members should be able to cope with more remote support.

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The Director of Commissioning thought that effective training for Members would help. She advised that there would also be a 24hour Helpdesk service for reporting urgent faults although it would not be manned.

The Chairman said that Members must be informed of network faults by means other than e-mail (which did not work at such times). He suggested text messaging and the Director of Commissioning confirmed that if Members provided their mobile telephone numbers they could be added to a notification distribution list.

The Chairman asked about 'twin hatters' (Members who were District and County Councillors) using the Council's IT equipment. He felt that resident's money should not be used to pay for County work. The Head of Finance advised that some 'twin hatters' had County equipment which they used for Breckland Council work, so it was a reciprocal arrangement.

Compatibility issues were also mentioned and it was hoped that these would be resolved.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Business Development Manager for his report and recommendation. He felt that Option 1 – a laptop (or desktop) would provide savings, best value and fitness for purpose.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND TO THE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE that:

- (1) Option 1, direct provision of a laptop (or desktop) and printer from the Council, with on-going support and maintenance from the IT department, be supported; and
- (2) a review of the provision of Member IT support be carried out in order to ensure that it was provided in the most cost-effective manner.

In conclusion the Chairman added that it was important for Members to have scanner, duplex printing and fax facilities and that routers were fit for purpose.

Mr Bambridge suggested that the Overview & Scrutiny Commission should review the new Helpdesk facilities in six months and the Chairman agreed to this.

**Helen
McAleer**

The meeting closed at 9.47 am

CHAIRMAN