
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

**Held on Wednesday, 30 March 2011 at 9.30 am in
Dereham Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham NR19
1EE**

PRESENT

Mr W.H.C. Smith (Chairman) Lady Fisher
Mr P.D. Claussen

Also Present

Mr J.P. Cowen

In Attendance

Adam Colby	- Senior Business Improvement Officer
Mark Finch	- Head of Finance
Andrew Head	- ICT Members Support Officer
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Stephen McGrath	- Member Services Manager
Maxine O'Mahony	- Director of Corporate Resources
Kevin J Taylor	- Head of ICT

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30/11 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

None.

31/11 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

None.

32/11 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

No declarations were made.

**33/11 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA
ITEM 4)**

Mr P Cowen was in attendance (as Chairman of the Joint Audit & Scrutiny Panel).

34/11 ICT OPTIONS FOR MEMBERS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Chairman explained that the Joint Audit & Scrutiny Panel (JASP) had been set up to look into the options for replacement IT equipment for Members which would provide best value, for both Members and tax payers.

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He thanked the JASP Chairman and Panel for all the work they had done. That work would help to inform the public on the reasons why new equipment was needed and to ensure them that, in this time of economic retrenchment, the Council was looking for value for money.

Mr Cowen, Chairman of the JASP, said it had been an interesting exercise which had taken longer than expected due to the advent of Shared Services with South Holland which had delayed the process.

The equipment had to provide best value, connectivity, security and accessibility. It had been hoped that it would be ready in time for issue to new Members following the election on 5 May.

At their last meeting on 2 March 2011 the Panel had received a report with costs and options. Some of the information in that report had been challenged and further evidence had been requested, particularly in regard to tablets, which were known to be being trialled at other authorities. Questions had been asked of those authorities, but no answers had been received. However, on the traffic light evaluation system in the report, it was clear that tablets had functionality restrictions as well as being financially unviable.

Of the six options put forward, only three were considered to be appropriate:

Option 6 – Allowance

This option was considered suitable for a limited number of Members for whom a separate computer was not appropriate: some 'twin-hatters' (District and County Councillors) would already have suitable hardware provided by Norfolk County Council; some Members did not want two computers; some worked for organisations which supplied computers; and some did not have room for two computers in their homes.

Options 1 – Laptop and 4 – Netbook

There had been no preference between these two options which both relied on good Broadband connection.

The Netbook was good because of its size. If the authority was moving towards being paperless, Netbooks would be easily transportable and would not create a barrier at meetings in the way that a laptop might. However, some documents were very substantial and contained a mix of text, tables, diagrams and graphics. If Netbooks were the preferred option they would need the following additional items:

- a large screen for ease of reading larger documents
- a CD drive as some information was provided to Members on CDs
- a full size keyboard and mouse

Other essential items were scanners and printers. The ability to have video conferencing had also been discussed. This would help to reduce the amount of travelling needed.

Members also took very seriously the issue of support. It was felt that there was a lack of understanding of the way that Members worked. Many had jobs and did most of their Council work early in the morning,

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later in the evening or at the weekends. Those were the times when they needed support. Members also needed to be able to work whilst 'in transit' on trains, etc and during short periods of free time, between meetings for example.

The JASP Chairman thanked the Officers for the work they had done which had enabled the Panel to arrive at an informed conclusion. The Panel's recommendations had been presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at their meeting on 24 March 2011 and the recommendations had been supported. At the Commission meeting Members had also stressed the importance of out of hours support.

The Head of ICT noted that a clear message had been received about the need for out of hours support for Members. However, he suggested that support was outside the current remit which was to decide on future IT hardware.

The Chairman of BISC suggested that the allowance option would give Members the freedom to choose whichever equipment they wanted, subject to meeting pre-agreed criteria/specifications.

The Chairman of JASP said that the cost of supporting that option was the problem. Support costs were included in the report and had formed part of JASPs determination. However there was a need for additional equipment, such as screens/printers, etc and it was not clear whether those costs were included in the report.

The Director of Corporate Resources suggested that as support was being discussed the Member Support Officer should leave the room, which he did.

The Chairman of BISC agreed that Member support was vital but that it could be provided in another format and that other authorities managed without a dedicated officer.

The Director of Corporate Resources explained that they were considering changing the way that Members were supported. The current system had a very high call-out rate due to the ageing equipment, which was also expensive in terms of mileage. The provision of new hardware and other improvements should reduce that need.

The Head of ICT advised that Citrix was critical for both Members and Officers especially when travelling between sites and in future support would be focussed on ensuring that the Citrix service was highly resilient.

To make best use of resources and to deliver a more standardised service (which could apply to South Holland Members as well) the plan was to deliver Members support from a pool of resources. This would provide much more knowledge across the team and valuable cover in the event of leave/sickness, etc, as well as ensuring that the Authority's health and safety obligations and working time initiatives were met. It should also lead to a reduction in mileage through ensuring that the hardware and back-office systems were working.

The Chairman of BISC added that it would be important for Members to

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receive training to ensure that they knew how to use the equipment. That would also lead to a reduction in support calls.

Discussion turned to the financial implications if the allowance option was chosen. The Head of Finance advised that an allowance would be taxable, but that any expenses incurred, such as printer cartridges, paper, etc could be offset against the taxable liability. From a value for money perspective, option 6 was the most cost effective as it did not have any up-front capital injection.

The Chairman of JASP was concerned about public perception. He felt that the ICT support costs in the report were distorted. The JASP recommendation had been based on functionality not figures.

The Head of Finance distributed a Proforma B of the first year's figures.

Members discussed the issues further and raised various concerns:

- taxation of allowances, particularly for Councillors with jobs
- the inclusion of printing and postage costs in the report
- the cost of support
- public perception of Members receiving allowances for equipment – especially in the case of 'twin-hatters' who were provided with hardware by Norfolk County Council

The Senior Business Improvement Officer suggested that the printing and support costs should be removed from the report.

The BISC Chairman agreed and said that costs and taxation needed looking into. He suggested that the JASP should have one final meeting now that those issues were known. The points raised needed to be clarified.

He sought the views of the two other BISC Members and they both agreed that Option 6 looked best. He therefore asked that the Panel look at that option first and if they decided it was not viable, to consider Option 1 (as Option 4 needed too many add-ons).

The JASP Chairman asked the Head of ICT to provide the Panel with a summary of how the allowance option would be supported. He also asked him to write a specification for the equipment, including security expectations. A new Protocol would be needed to ensure that Members complied with the requirements. He raised concerns about the potential for equipment misuse and hoped that the Protocol would make clear Members' responsibilities.

It was **AGREED** that a final JASP meeting would be held, before the next BISC meeting, to consider options 6 and 1, with updated figures and costings.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

CHAIRMAN