Thoughts on member roll-out 2015

The 2011 rollout of Members ICT equipment had a few hiccups along the way, but was completed by Breckland District Councils ICT department within time and budget in an efficient manner despite the fact that the department had been 'in house' for only one week on election-day and changes in member support were being applied from that day

The main problem in 2011 was the late start to a roll-out. This was in part due to a late decision/recommendation by the panel (4 months) and in part by the slowness of officers in getting clear orders in place. This caused frustration for new and returning members. The panel was originally set up in August to report in December, but delays ensured that it did not reach a final decision until April

Rollout was perceived as being slow with first kit being delivered late May and a target for completion end July. Priority was given to new members (rightly) but poor connectivity locally and general standards of response from BT etc meant that many problems occurred. This will always be un-avoidable as the location of new members cannot be pre-determined. Hopefully the broad-band initiative by County will improve matters by 2015.

I believe that the slow rollout was avoidable, but that no single person or reason was entirely at fault. Therefore we can have a better experience in 2015.

Once the rollout had started it proceeded at a good pace and the ITC department fulfilled their remit with a week in hand and so should receive the thanks of the council for that. The problems that members have reported stemmed from in a large part the late introduction of training, both for new and returning members.

CONCLUSIONS

1/   we should complete our examination of technology earlier, at least by a new panel from summer 2014 reporting to responsible executive member by 31st Dec that year with recommendations supported by ICT and fully costed. This needs to be approved (rejected) in January 2015 and all kit on the premises and set up **BEFORE** the election in May 2015. The panel should examine in

several areas including, available technology, members need to act as councillors, standards of service expected by the public, costs to BDC and the service provided by neighbouring and similar councils

2/   The level of kit and service the council provides – This should be a member led group drawing on officer expertise and resourced in such a way that we can examine all areas the final choice should be decided by members and should be based on the criteria of optimum service and value for money

3/   Member IT is of increasing importance and whilst funding constraints are a factor this should not overshadow the efficient working of the member element of the council. A four year refresh has been suggested and this should be taken care of in the budget for 2014/5

4/   The new rollout should incorporate all that is best and latest in proven technology at that time

5/   New members should of course be a priority for roll-out, from the day of the announcement of the result they are full councillors. However as we have seen in 2011 there may well be problems with lines etc then roll-out to returning members can be integrated with it and those members who are returning un-opposed could get the kit in the few weeks before the election reducing the log-jam in May.

6/   from this distance training needs cannot be assessed but for new members it should – indeed must - form part of the induction day. Connectivity to council services is a priority. I believe that most new members would not object to an extended induction day, or this should be in the days before the 1st council meeting rather than following it. Any compulsory element of the training needs to be incorporated with the issue of kit rather than as in 2011. If the recommendation of the exec member had been followed we would have had fewer problems

7/   If training is required for returning members this should be concurrent with new members and if the kit is ready prior to the election there can be no reason for this not to start on the week following the election. A useful target would be all new issues within two weeks of the election date – subject to connectivity availability

8/   Once a package has been developed by the panel and approved by the council process it should not be changed without a return to that/those committees. As an example the 2011 rollout was complicated by an inadequate printer against the panel recommendation and replaced with one which is barely suitable

9/   without seeking to pre-judge three years ahead the panel ought to examine alternatives to using BDC supplied kit and councillor owned and maintained kit.

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October 2011