

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder Briefing Note
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director, Corporate Services / Head of ICT

GOVERNMENT CONNECT – MEMBERS’ EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Purpose

1. To update the portfolio holder on the implications of SCDC connectivity to the Government Connect service and set out options for future practice with regard to Members’ email services.
2. The portfolio holder is asked to consider the available options and agree the way forward.

Introduction

3. “Government Connect” is a new secure IT network that is being rolled out by central government to support secure data interchange between local authorities and government departments. The service is currently sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The service includes a secure email system which allows interchange with other national public sector email services such as those provided by the NHS and the Criminal Justice IT service.
4. In signing up to the Government Connect service all local authorities are required to demonstrate compliance with the Government Connect “Code of Connection” (CoCo) which ensures the ongoing security of the service. This places constraints on ICT setups for local authorities and requires a change of practice regarding the way members access their email and the associated practice of forwarding of emails for members to private addresses.

Background

5. Information sharing between the various public sector agencies is fundamentally important for improved service delivery and is seen as being key for certain aspects of carrying out the duties associated with local government. The Government Connect project was initiated several years ago to facilitate joined-up working, shared services, identity management and efficiency gains.
6. However the project has gained urgency following the recent high profile data losses within the public sector, notably Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC). As a consequence of this, DWP have modified their policy regarding sensitive data interchange (see Appendix 1). In addition guidelines have been issued to ensure that emails containing sensitive information must only be sent via secure channels as opposed to the private connections which are currently in use. These more stringent requirements are already impacting service delivery in some areas and makes connection to the Government Connect service a priority.
7. The Government Connect Code of Connection (CoCo) imposes a number of conditions on local authorities which range from technical configuration requirements

through to policy changes. Many local authorities have found the process of compliance with the CoCo particularly arduous, although the South Cambridgeshire District Council CoCo draft submission to the Government Connect standards board was well received and the authority was complimented on evidence of a well-managed network. However there are a number of conditions still to be met and a project is underway to implement these in a timely manner.

Issues

8. Access to Council 'internal' systems such as the intranet (InSite) will only be available via secure means using 2-factor authentication. This process uses a separate user interface, user login and a 'token' to generate a one-time password; it is already in place for a number of our peers including Cambridgeshire County, East Cambs and Fenland Districts.
9. One of the CoCo conditions concerns the auto forwarding of emails and this impacts current practice for a number of Members. Compliance with the Government Connect CoCo prevents the automatic forwarding emails from a x.x@scambs.gov.uk email address to any other 'less secure' address. The reason for this restriction is because the automatic forwarding of emails presents a potential security risk. For example, if Fred Smith has an automatic rule that all email addressed to fred.smith@scambs.gov.uk should be forwarded to fred.smith@hotmail.com then all email, whether generated internally within the Council's network or externally will automatically be forwarded to fred.smith@hotmail.com and will assume a Council identity with no control of the data or information contained within the email.
10. Another person within the authority might reasonably assume that internal email is a secure method of communication and send a highly confidential email to fred.smith@scambs.gov.uk. However because Fred Smith has set up a rule that automatically forwards all emails to fred.smith@hotmail.co.uk, unbeknownst to the sender, the email is sent unprotected across the public Internet network.
11. Due to the special requirements of Members, there has been an exemption in place for some time now that allows the system to auto forward Member email from their SCDC email accounts to their work / personal email accounts in order to minimise the number of email systems they have to use. This is in part necessary because of the stipulation (agreed some years ago) that all Members must have a South Cambridgeshire Council email address cllr.x.x@scambs.gov.uk.
12. As stated, under the principles of Government Connect, one of the conditions of the CoCo agreement for allowing connectivity to the Government Connect secure network is that this exemption is no longer allowed. Therefore alternative arrangements are necessary to close the loophole identified in 11 above, provide a more secure email environment and ensure that Members are able to retain timely and convenient access to their emails.

Considerations

13. It is arguable that there is no optimum solution going forward and that each of the potential options will impose some compromise in terms of convenience, ease of access, and continuity. In considering the two options detailed below, existing levels of administrative support available to Members have been taken into account and it is assumed that there will be no additional resource available.

14. SCDC are required to achieve connectivity to Government Connect by 31st August 2009 and the challenge of change for the delivery of Member email must be met before that time.
15. Additional further changes to the way Members access South Cambridgeshire 'internal' services such as InSite are required, secure access to SCDC email will be supported by those further changes. Full training and assistance (including 1:1 sessions if required) will be provided.

Options

16. **Option One** - Members chose which email account to use for Council business, either SCDC or personal
 - (a) Advantages
 - (i) The advantage of this solution is that it is most convenient for Members who currently have multiple email accounts and means that by choosing which email to use, they can access their emails from a single system as and where they wish, using the most convenient access method.
 - (ii) For those Members (approximately 25) who already choose to use a cllr.x.x@scambs.gov.uk account, there will be no changes.
 - (b) Disadvantages
 - (i) Members who chose to no longer use a cllr.x.x@scambs.gov.uk account will then have to use their own email accounts for all correspondence, Council or otherwise.
 - (ii) Members using their own email accounts will become responsible for their own backup / recovery and support arrangements via their independent service provider; at present all South Cambridgeshire emails are stored on a central server with a comprehensive backup and recovery regime managed by the ICT Support function.
 - (iii) Members will need to undertake a commitment to transfer of any relevant existing and historic South Cambridgeshire related email in the event that they cease to be a South Cambridgeshire councillor.
 - (iv) Security constraints mean that embedded internal links within emails sent to a personal address (for example emails with references to the South Cambridgeshire intranet) may not work and Members will need to access the pages directly via their secure network access.
 - (v) The Council may not be able to fully meet the commitments required for the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act.
17. Should a Member **choose** to use a personal account, interim arrangements will be required.
 - (a) In order to ensure a smooth transition between the existing arrangements an "out of office" notification will be set up on the existing cllr.x.x@scambs.gov.uk account to inform everyone sending an email to the account of the alternative email address.
 - (b) Democratic Services may need to check Member accounts for a certain period of time and manually forward to the revised email addresses in order to minimise the potential for loss of emails during the transition.
18. **Option Two** – Council 'owned' SCDC email accounts retained for all Members (no autoforwarding to personal addresses allowed).

19. There are currently in the region of 50 Members who have autoforwarded enabled to send to non-South Cambridgeshire email addresses. However, some 25 Members already choose to use the Council's facility to access their email.

(a) Advantages

- (i) The Council fully meets the requirements of the Government Connect CoCo.
- (ii) Members will have access to a safe and secure email service with technical support from the ICT team.
- (iii) Emails relating to South Cambridgeshire business will be managed in line with existing standards and continuity issues will be minimised.
- (iv) A managed service including full Helpdesk assistance.
- (v) Full archive, backup and recovery options.
- (vi) increased mail box size (200Mb – some 2x larger than that offered by most personal Internet Service Providers).
- (vii) The Council's commitment under the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act will be fully met.

(b) Disadvantages

- (i) Members will lose the ability to have their South Cambridgeshire emails autoforwarded to their personal email accounts to conduct Council business.

Implications

20. Non-compliance with the requirements of Government Connect will impact severely on the Council's ability to conduct its business. The Council has committed to project and will ensure it meets the 31 August 2009 deadline.

21. Financial	None beyond existing budget
Legal	Possible FOI and DPA non-compliance as detailed above.
Staffing	None
Risk Management	None
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

22. Consultation with other agencies involved with the Government Connect programme including:

- (a) Other local authorities (inc our peers)
- (b) County and Districts ICT Group
- (c) Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
- (d) Dean Bessel, Consultant (PMRC)
- (e) Peter Johnson, Consultant (VEGA)

Effect on Strategic Aims

23.	Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
	Opportunity for improved service
	Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.
	None

Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
None
Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.
None
Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
None

Conclusions/Summary

24. Compliance with Government Connect is not a choice – there is no ‘opt in / opt out’.
25. Members are required to change the way they manage and use email as a communications tool for their Council business.
26. The ‘choice’ is clear – a Member can either:
 - (a) Use a Council provided email account / address and take advantage of the robust systems environment and support provided.
 - (b) Use a private email address but the implication for systems reliability and support remains with the Member.
27. It should be noted that use of a private email address would effectively circumnavigate any FOI and DPA responsibilities of the Council and could result in a breach of legislation.

Recommendations

28. The portfolio holder is asked to support Option 2.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Changes to Councillors’ E-mail – report to Resources, Staffing, Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder 24 May 2007
 DWP Restricted Data Policy update memo (Appendix 1)

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