**Scrutiny and Overview Informal Working Group –
Information Communications Technology**

16 April 2013

Present:

Councillors Douglas de Lacey (in the chair), Lynda Harford and David Whiteman-Downes.

Officers in attendance:

Graham Aisthorpe-Watts (Democratic Services Team Leader), Paul Grainger (GIS and Information Manager) and Steve Rayment (Head of ICT).

1.   Purpose of this meeting

1.1   At an informal meeting involving Scrutiny and Overview Committee Members in March 2013 it was agreed that this Informal Working Group would be established to consider issues surrounding the tendering and procurement of Information Communications Technology systems. Specifically Members were interested to learn more about the processes undertaken for the Council's new website, its Planning Computer System and Modern.Gov (the Council's committee document management system).

2.   Documentation

2.1   The following documents were provided by officers: -

- an example of a return envelope cover for tender documents;
- the pre-qualification questionnaire for inclusion on the list of candidates to be invited to tender regarding the Planning Computer System;
- an invitation to tender document for the Planning Computer System;
- an invitation to tender document for implementation and support services for a Drupal Content Management System;
- an agreement document between parties for the implementation and support services for a Drupal Content Management System.

3.   The new Website

3.1   Councillor de Lacey highlighted what he considered as his three major concerns with regard to the website: -

- functionality;
- compliance with standards;
- accuracy of data.

3.2   Councillor Whiteman-Downes, in referring to the invitation to tender for the implementation and support services for a Drupal Content Management System, asked officers how they thought the current system met the criteria outlined in paragraph 1.1 of the document. Mr Rayment responded by stating that the new

website was a purposefully bold statement in terms of website design, based around simple principles of why people wanted to contact the Council and what brought them to the website in the first instance. Research on how people used the old website in terms of how they entered, where they came from and where they went to was used to inform the design of the new website. The main reason for people visiting the website was to 'do something'. 90% of visitors came to the website to perform a function and so the new website was designed around task based architecture, resulting in the main 'pay for it', 'apply for it' and 'report it' tabs on the home page and the 'top tasks' facility.

3.3   Socitm, the membership association for all Information Communication Technology professionals working in local authorities and the public and third sectors, as well as suppliers to those sectors, provided commentary and feedback on the Council's website, based on industry standards. Socitm was particularly critical of the design of the old website in terms of user capability and navigation, with the new website actually being used by Socitm and the Local Government Association as the way in which local authority websites should be taken forward.

3.4   In terms of the transition from the old website to the new website, Mr Grainger explained that the Council was forced into a position whereby it had to 'go live' with the new website earlier than anticipated. The old website provider, which was well respected in the industry, went into administration mid-contract and the company that took over sought to provide the Council's website for a much higher price. This new price could not be justified and there was a risk that the Council's whole website would be switched off by the new provider as a consequence of not agreeing to the newly proposed contract. An opportunity was therefore taken to progress faster than originally anticipated with the design of the new website and get it live as soon as possible.

3.5   Scambs.gov.uk as a website was reserved for the Council. The old provider was given delegated authority to administer the domain in order to host and provide the Council with its website. This was due to the fact that the Council did not have the connectivity and bandwidth capabilities to be able to provide the website for itself.

3.6   Councillor Harford sought clarification regarding the process that took place to determine what information from the old website was retained for inclusion on the new website. It was noted that the old website and intranet contained in excess of 8000 pages. All pages from the old website were ranked in terms of number of hits. Officers then took those pages with the largest number of hits and worked down the list in the first instance. A quick audit was subsequently carried out to identify any areas where the Council was not fulfilling its statutory obligations with regard to the website and information it was required to publish through the site.

3.7   Mr Rayment emphasised that the new website was by no means a finished article. It was evolving and would continue to evolve. A feedback form facility had been inserted on each page of the new website to encourage the submission of comments on how aspects of the site or individual pages could be improved. Approximately 270 forms had been received and many of these had already been acted upon. The rest

were in the process of being collated so that they could be put in priority order and addressed accordingly.

3.8   Councillor de Lacey made reference to bookmarks that he used for the old website which no longer seemed to work and questioned whether there was anything that could be done to rectify this. Mr Rayment explained that the new website had significantly reduced the number of pages it contained to make it a more agile site and more fit for purpose. Unfortunately, this meant that the URLs associated with the bookmarks no longer existed meaning that it would not be possible to use bookmarks that had been set up through the old website. There were system proprietary products available which could re-create addresses, but this would mean transposing more than 8000 pages which would take up significant resource when considering that the Council's website team consisted of one full time equivalent member of staff.

3.9   Councillor Whiteman-Downes asked how the website was being monitored. Officers were currently in discussions with Socitm to consider the inclusion of something on the website. This would be something different to the usual pop-up survey as officers wanted it to be smarter and more fit for purpose. In terms of logging usage, Google Analytics was currently being used and statistics would be included in the footer of the Council's new Intranet site scheduled to be launched shortly.

3.10   Mr Grainger reported that the use of mobile devices to access the Council's website had increased by 10% following its launch and it was anticipated that 70% of users within five years would be accessing the website in this way. This was another reason why the appearance of the new website was so different in comparison to the previous version, as it was purposely designed to be more user friendly for mobile users.

3.11   Officers confirmed the following as three main priorities for the further development of the website: -

- working with those other domains or auspices embedded within the Council's website to ensure that they fit in with the new design and format;
- opening up dialogue with service areas to develop their webpages following comments received through the feedback forms;
- introducing smart electronic forms within the website.

4.   Modern.Gov

4.1   In discussing the accuracy of data, examples cited by Councillor de Lacey actually referred to Modern.Gov. In particular he referred to records falsely indicating that Parish Councillors had attended 0% of their meetings. Mr Rayment confirmed that Modern.Gov, although fully embedded within the Council's website, was a third party system managed by the provider. The Council's Democratic Services Team had basic administration rights but any overarching changes to the system would need to be made by Modern.Gov centrally. Mr Aisthorpe-Watts agreed to contact Modern.Gov and seek to remove the incorrect Parish Councillor data.

4.2   The Council could and often did provide feedback to Modern.Gov when certain things required attention, such as bugs or errors, but did not have direct control of the system. Mr Rayment reported that Modern.Gov was regarded as one of the best committee document management systems available for its purpose and was used by numerous local authorities across the country, including some in Cambridgeshire. He held regular meetings with his equivalent officers from neighbouring authorities and stated that problems with Modern.Gov had never been discussed as part of that dialogue.

4.3   The Modern.Gov system was procured and introduced approximately nine years ago and would have been based more on a business need rather than an Information Communications Technology perspective at that time.

5.   Other external domains/auspices

5.1   Members agreed that it should be made clearer to people accessing the Council's website when they had navigated into an area that the Council in effect hosted and had limited control over. They sought an understanding of how many other external domains or auspices could be accessed under the scambs.gov.uk website and who was responsible for them. Mr Rayment agreed to provide this information to the group.

5.2   Discussing the functionality of the new website, a comment was noted that Modern.gov did not look like it belonged to the Council's website as its design still mirrored that of the old website. Officers agreed with this but explained that the need to go live as soon as possible meant that all other systems, such as Modern.Gov, had to be embedded at an early opportunity. The next phase of development would focus on these systems to ensure that they were consistent with the design of the new website.

6.   Planning Computer System

6.1   Mr Grainger reported that officers were currently in discussions with the provider of the Planning Computer System to request that new webpages were built in keeping with the design of the Council's new website.

6.2   Councillor Harford sought clarity around the issue of historical data and the transfer of data from microfiche onto the system. It was suggested that a lot of data had already been transferred from microfiche and that when an officer accessed a specific piece of microfiche that was not already on the system it should be inputted at that stage.

6.3   Members were surprised to see that only 25% was allocated to 'compliance with specification' in the award criteria table for the Planning Computer System invitation tender.

7.   Conclusion

7.1   This meeting was dominated by discussion on the new website, further to which Members agreed that they had achieved a much better understanding of the circumstances surround the transition between the old and new websites and the challenges officers had been faced with.

7.2   It was agreed that a briefing note on the issues discussed at this meeting should be submitted to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at its meeting on 25 April 2013 for consideration.