

Informal Scrutiny Working Group – redundant ICT equipment

PRESENT

Members: Councillors Bridget Smith (in the chair), Janet Lockwood and Bunty Waters.

Officers: Graham Aisthorpe-Watts (Democratic Services Team Leader) and Steve Rayment (Head of ICT/Facilities Management)

Councillor Bridget Smith opened the meeting by saying that there used to be a lot of old ICT equipment stored throughout South Cambridgeshire Hall and she was interested in what happened to it and whether the equipment could be donated, for example, to charities or parish councils for their use. The main purpose of this meeting, therefore, was to consider how the Council could make better use of its obsolete equipment and gain a better understanding of some of the restrictions.

Steve Rayment made the following points in explaining the Council's position with regard to obsolete ICT equipment: -

- equipment was only replaced according to business need and there was no defined PC replacement programme. Some members of staff were still using PCs that they brought with them from the Council's former premises in 2004. This was due to the fact that they were still fit for the business purpose and did not need replacing;
- the 'Thin Client' project meant that upward of 350 PCs would be coming off desks, however, as some of those could be up to ten years old it limited how attractive they were to any other third parties wishing to use them;
- as a local authority the Council dealt with personal data and that data was processed via a desktop PC. The Council was therefore challenged through a number of government initiatives and regulations to ensure that this data was protected from inappropriate access and distribution. This had to be taken into consideration when a piece of equipment, such as a PC, came to the end of its life especially considering that all of the Council's PCs selected for replacement would have been connected to back-office systems. If the data contained on these PCs was to be accessed by unauthorised parties, the Council would be at a significant risk;
- the Information Commissioner's Office heavily fined local authorities for disposing of equipment, information and data in an inappropriate manner or failing to adequately protect information or data;
- the Waste, Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations stated that the Council was duty bound to ensure the safe disposal of its ICT equipment in an appropriate manner;
- the Council only used accredited suppliers and ensured wherever possible that disposal of its ICT equipment, which included a range of things such as PCs, laptops, monitors, telephones and PDAs was at no cost to the Council. The Council made sure that its means of disposal did not encourage a 'pick and choose' process. The supplier would agree to collect all of the equipment that required disposal, taking the good pieces of equipment along with the bad;
- disposal companies had to certificate and authenticate the destruction of data from the PC and how they disposed of equipment. The companies also had to be accredited from the Cabinet Office/Government and the Council would only use companies that had this accreditation;

- the Council currently arranged disposals of ICT equipment approximately once a year.

Members asked a range of questions and the following points were noted: -

- processes and procedures were in place to ensure the appropriate disposal of ICT equipment, but the Council did not have a documented policy;
- a number of years ago the Council did attempt to offer some appropriate ICT equipment to charities, but found that they were not interested as the equipment would usually be more than three years old;
- a 'pick and choose' service was not appropriate as the Council would then be left with the 'unattractive' equipment, which it would then have to pay to dispose of;
- the Council did not currently have the means to dispose of ICT equipment or wipe data to the required standards. In order to do this an investment in equipment and software would be required, as well as additional officer resource;
- another issue with the Council's PCs/laptops was that the operating system license could not be transferred with the machines, meaning that whoever obtained the PCs/laptops would have to acquire software (such as Microsoft Windows for example) to make them work. This was usually at significant cost to the potential user and as such made the proposal unattractive;
- the Council did not own many standalone printers and most computer generated printing was now provided by the large multifunctional devices which were all leased;
- obsolete ICT equipment was currently being stored in a room that was supposed to be used as a workshop for ICT staff. Whilst the room was full of redundant equipment, it could not be used for that purpose as a consequence;
- there had to be enough equipment to dispose of for disposal companies to be interested in picking it up, so there was an issue of critical mass and the limited storage facilities at South Cambridgeshire Hall. The depot at Waterbeach was identified as a potential storage location should it be required;
- laptops used by Members did not connect to the Council's network or any back-office systems. It was unlikely that they would contain any data or information that needed protecting and would not require additional software or licenses to make them work if used by other third parties. Laptops previously used by Members could therefore potentially be 'donated' to parish clerks or charities, whilst acknowledging that Member turnover was very low and, generally, the age of the laptop would make it unattractive. The average age of Member computer equipment was 4.2 years, with the oldest in current use being 7.5 years;
- the rollout of Thin Client would result in the majority of the current 17" PC monitors being surplus to requirements, although it was noted that some would be retained for spares. Monitors contained no data so could be used by other external parties. Officers were in the process of considering what to do with these monitors in terms of whether they could be sold or donated, taking into account that a large number of them were ten years old as they were part of the original installation at Cambourne.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the evidence gathered at this meeting, Members made the following recommendations: -

- (1) Production of a documented policy on the disposal of ICT equipment. This would remove any ambiguity around the Council's processes and set out its responsibilities with regard to the appropriate disposal of ICT equipment and the protection of data and information.
- (2) Provision of dedicated on-site storage for obsolete ICT equipment, ensuring that the ICT workshop is cleared and can be used by ICT staff.
- (3) Consider offering laptops previously used and no longer required by Members to Parish Councils or to a community use endorsed by the Parish Council or a District Councillor, free of charge.
- (4) Consider offering monitors surplus to requirements as a result of the rollout of Thin Client to Parish Councils or to a community use endorsed by the Parish Council or a District Councillor, free of charge.