SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Cabinet	19 November 2013
LEAD OFFICER:	Executive Director Corporate Services	

ICT FACILITIES FOR MEMBERS

Purpose

1. To review the current ICT provision for Members and outline the proposed way forward.

2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

3. That Cabinet delegates the Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services to: -

   (a) Consider the cessation of Council funded ICT equipment and provision to Members.

   (b) Consider the proposal for Member funded ICT provision based on the use of tablet computers and appropriate software to support a more sustainable approach with regard to the production of paper agendas and reports.

   (c) Consult with Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee before taking a final decision on (a) and (b) above.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. To provide an improved, more cost effective, sustainable and efficient ICT service to Members.

Background

5. The provision of Member ICT facilities is seen as fundamental to the effective working of the Council.

6. For a number of years Elected Members have been provided with laptops or PCs to allow the use of ICT as a means of providing an effective service to the public. The use of these has brought a number of advantages including improved communication with local residents and the Council, and the ability to access and process information that is necessary for Members to effectively undertake their role as democratically elected representatives.

7. While the laptops and PCs have achieved significant benefits they also have some major disadvantages which have become increasingly noticeable over recent years. In particular the current ICT solution works by providing Members with access into the authority's ICT infrastructure. While this enables access to features such as email

and the intranet it increases the burden of ensuring effective ICT security. A number of Members have found that the use of ICT in its current form is increasingly complex and not intuitive.

8. Changes in the basic software, in particular the demise of the operating system (Microsoft Windows XP), gives rise to a significant issue that needs to be addressed. With effect from 31 March 2014, Windows XP will no longer be supported by Microsoft; for Members this means a potential exposure to viruses, malware and security flaws. For the Council, this means non-compliance with minimum standards as required by the PSN, Cabinet Office and the government's Communications-Electronics Security Group (CESG).

9. An upgrade and/or replacement of Members' ICT from Windows XP to Windows 7 (the Council's current business model) would entail significant cost, currently estimated at £41,000. Whilst budget provision has been made to support this work, the Council's financial position means it is appropriate that this is revisited and, in the light of newer technologies and opportunities, alternative options be investigated.

10. Current access to email and other Council ICT resources is somewhat cumbersome, designed around systems installed some 5 years ago. Modern technology means a much simpler and easier process is available providing all the functionality to access email, calendar, contacts, our intranet site and other relevant internal resources.

11. Printed matter and paper (meeting agendas and reports) consumption and costs continue to rise. Modern technologies now allow for electronic copies to be made easily available and provide a timelier, cost effective and sustainable approach to the provision of information. The Council's 'Modern.Gov' system is designed to work with electronic copies and will provide Members with a very intuitive and easy to use system.

Considerations

12. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services therefore requested a review of Member ICT with particular regard to the on-going costs of the provision and the opportunity to encourage Members to move to a paperless provision.

13. Continuing pressure on Council budgets means it is appropriate to look to make savings wherever possible.

14. ICT is critical to the Council. This proposal would enable Members to work better with officers and from anywhere where there is internet access available including the Council's own buildings.

15. Modern tablet computing devices are easier to use, lighter, less cumbersome, less intrusive in a meeting environment and have significantly increased battery life when compared to the conventional laptop.

16. This proposal would provide access to new equipment for members to use on council business, allow easy and secure access to corporate emails without redirection and give members a choice of their preferred style – either iPad type tablet or retention of the existing laptop. The iPad is chosen ahead of other devices as it has a standard configuration, is easily managed and represents the best value for money.

17.   Security of data and encryption to a high standard is now available on tablet devices. The proposal will allow Members to access their scambs.gov.uk email and other browser based resources without the need for separate tokens (dongles); options for remote secure intervention will provide assurance to the Member in the event of loss or theft.

18.   Members should consider moving towards being paperless to make savings on paper, postage and mitigate delays on receiving post. The overriding need is value to all residents alongside demonstrable savings.

19.   As part of the review, consideration has been given to the use of iPads and tablets which offer a number of advantages including portability, ease of use and potential cost reductions. The initial review of the software and appraisal of iPads indicates that they and the appropriate new software would be a better option for meeting the needs of Elected Members. This review included the Customer and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder along with senior officers of the Council and members of the ICT Team.

20.   Training provision is currently under consideration. The provision of appropriate training should reduce the disruption to Members, reduce the number of support calls arising from the upgrade and help to reduce any frustrations with the system. Members will be able to participate in training arranged by the Council that will cater for all levels of knowledge, experience and expertise in using tablet devices and associated software.

Options

21.   The Council provides tablet devices and cases (Apple iPad 16Gb WiFi is the Council's preferred device) to be funded from each Members' basic allowance. The cost of this would be approximately £10 per Member per month for the full 4 year term of office. This option would be fully supported by the Council's ICT service. Upgrades to the device specification would be available, the cost of the upgrade being the responsibility of the individual Member and payable as a one-off at the beginning of the arrangement.

22.   For those not wishing to fund the device from their basic allowance, an option is to use their own tablet device (iPad or Android based). This iPad option would be supported by the Council's ICT service but for devices other than the iPad, i.e. Samsung Galaxy Tab, this would be on a best endeavours only basis.

23.   For those wishing to retain the current PC / Laptop environment, the Council will transfer ownership of the equipment to the Member for the usual annually depreciated price (50% per year). This option will **not** be able to be supported by the Council's ICT service.

Implications

24.   In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

    Financial
(a)   The cost of the new software and acquiring and operating the iPads can be met from within existing budgets, the costs to be recovered via the Members' basic allowance.

(b)   The proposal will remove the need to replace or upgrade the existing Windows XP laptop estate saving £31,000 in the first year.

(c)   Annual revenue savings are estimated to be in the region of £3,000.

(d)   Additional savings can be generated by reductions in postage, paper usage and savings in staff time.

Legal

(e)   The Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to serve Members with a formal summons by post to their usual place of residence. The agenda front sheet for all of the Council's public meetings acts as the summons and is posted with the agenda pack for the meeting to fulfil this requirement, unless the agenda pack has been collected in person. There is provision within the 1972 Act for a Member to nominate an alternative address for the issuing of the summons. Any Member opting to receive agendas electronically will therefore be requested to sign a form nominating South Cambridgeshire Hall as their alternative address for the delivery of all summons', instead of their usual place of residence. Once published, a copy of the agenda sheet for each meeting will subsequently be displayed on the notice board in the Members' Room rather than placed in individual Members' pigeon holes.

(f)   Paragraph 38 of the Responsibility for Executive Functions in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution sets out the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder's authority "to approve arrangements for Member training and support (including IT support)".

(g)   Members may be interested to know that the Leader of Epping Forrest District Council has written to the Department for Communities and Local Government requesting an amendment to primary legislation, enabling councils to use modern methods of supplying their members with agendas and related papers for meetings. A response from Brandon Lewis MP expressed the Department's interest in implementing changes to modernise council communications, but indicated that it has been necessary to give priority to other new legislation.

Risk Management

(h)   It is envisaged that the replacement of existing ICT equipment with iPads will enable Members to perform their duties more effectively.

(i)   The impact of Data Protection legislation, as it affects the use of computers by Members of the Council, will be the subject of appropriate guidance and will be included in a revised User Agreement.

(j)   The proposed solution includes all necessary security controls to ensure continued compliance with PSN and Cabinet Office requirements.

Consultation

25.   This report has been discussed with the Corporate and Customer Services portfolio holder.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 - We will listen to and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money

a. Communicating and engaging with residents, businesses and staff
b. Delivering value for money and sound management of resources
c. Being open, transparent and accessible

Background Papers

None

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