

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 3 September 2009

PRESENT: Councillor JD Batchelor – Chairman
Councillor JA Hockney – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	Mrs VM Barrett	R Hall
	Mrs EM Heazell	Dr DR de Lacey (substitute for Councillor Mason)
	MB Loynes	Mrs DP Roberts
	Mrs BZD Smith	Cllr Mrs JEO Squier
	Mrs BE Waters	

Councillors SM Edwards, MP Howell, Mrs HM Smith and TJ Wotherspoon were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Holly Adams	Democratic Services Officer
	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Steve Rayment	Head of ICT
	Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs JM Guest and MJ Mason.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

19. CALL-IN: GOVERNMENT CONNECT: COUNCILLORS' E-MAIL OPTIONS

The Chairman introduced this item on the call-in of the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder's decision, to retain webmail e-mail accounts for all Councillors and to switch off the auto-forwarding of messages to personal addresses, by informing the Committee that its task was to:

- Determine whether the correct decision making procedure had been followed;
- Decide whether the portfolio holder's decision was a rational one.

Government Connect Code of Connection (CoCo)

The Head of ICT explained that the CoCo document included 91 provisions, of which the requirement for a secure e-mail system was only one. He explained that due to this Government instruction the Council would no longer be allowed to automatically forward a message to a personal e-mail address as the Authority could not vouch for the security of those external e-mail providers. It was noted that if the Council did not comply with the instruction in the CoCo document the Government could refuse to share information with the Council, which would have a detrimental effect on the Council's services. It was understood that the overwhelming majority of Councils had already complied with the CoCo instruction. The Head of ICT advised that the Government would be launching the fourth version of the CoCo shortly.

It was suggested that more warning should have been given to Members about the issues involved regarding this decision, as the CoCo was published in July 2008. In response the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder explained that the Council had considered this matter in April 2007 and, more recently, Members had been informed of the forthcoming decision at the 23 April 2009 Council meeting and in the Weekly

Bulletin. Additionally, the Portfolio Holder had delayed making a decision to ensure that all Councillors were consulted. It was suggested that a decision with implications for all Councillors should not be taken at short notice in August when many were on holiday.

History

Councillor Edwards explained that as the Portfolio Holder responsible for ICT in 2007, he had taken the decision not to require all Councillors to use webmail on the grounds that it would have inconvenienced Members unnecessarily. He added that, had the Government issued the CoCo document two years ago, he would have taken a different decision.

Consultation

The Portfolio Holder explained that whilst he had known of the issue for some time, he had only recently been made aware of the pressing need to take a decision. It was understood that, as this had not been a key decision, it was not required to be on the Council's Forward Plan.

Consultation group

Disappointment was expressed that the pilot group of Councillors, first suggested in April 2007, was not formed before this decision was taken. It was understood that three Councillors had volunteered and tested the system in 2007, but that based on their feedback the Portfolio Holder had decided not to proceed to requiring all members to use webmail at that time, although since 2007 more than 20 members had since begun to use the system. It was noted that this matter had been discussed by the ICT Steering Group, which consisted of senior officers and the Portfolio Holder. It was suggested that had the Committee received prior notification it could have set up a task and finish group to examine this issue. Members also suggested that the ICT Steering Group should include more Member representation, especially when discussing issues that impacted on them.

Training

Committee members expressed concern that had the decision been implemented, Councillors would have been unable to access their e-mails as they had not received training on how to use the new system. In response the Portfolio Holder explained that training had been offered on the webmail system and if the decision were agreed training would be provided, with one-to-one sessions if necessary, before the decision was implemented and the auto-forwarding system switched off. It was suggested that training should provide instruction on how to use the webmail system, as well as how to login.

Using the system

The Portfolio Holder explained that Councillors already accessed the Council's secure site to view the Authority's performance on CorVu and its minutes and agendas on Modern.Gov. Access to e-mail would also be provided on this site. He informed the Committee that almost half of all Councillors were currently using webmail and would be unaffected by the change. Councillor Loynes stated that the webmail was easy to use and that the ICT Section had responded promptly his queries.

Alternative solutions

It was suggested that the Portfolio Holder should have given more consideration to alternative solutions, which would allow Councillors to keep using their personal e-mail addresses for Council business. These included setting up encryption software on all Councillors' computers or purchasing a new server which could act as a "Demilitarised Zone". The Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder explained that he had considered these alternatives and had rejected them as being too expensive. Members of the

Committee asked for a cost comparison between the option agreed by the Portfolio Holder and the training it necessitated, and the two alternative options suggested above.

Separate e-mails

The opinion of Committee members was divided on whether it was preferable to have separate e-mail systems for personal correspondence and Council-related business.

Learning points

Members of the Committee made the following points, to assist future decision making:

- The Portfolio Holder should have informed Members before taking a decision that the Council was required to implement this process, to allow Councillors to prepare for the changes it would bring.
- More effort was required to ensure that Councillors were aware of the implications of any decisions which affected their working practice.
- Training should have been provided before the decision had been taken.
- With prior warning the Committee could have set up a task and finish group on this matter to ensure Councillor ownership of this issue.

The Committee unanimously **agreed** that the correct decision making procedure had been followed.

The Committee then took a vote on whether the decision was rational and so should be implemented and by 7 votes to 4 the Committee

AGREED with the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder's decision that Council "owned" SCDC email accounts be retained for all Members (no auto-forwarding to personal addresses allowed.)

It was evident that Councillors had not understood the implications of the decision and so the Committee **RECOMMENDED** that this needed to be addressed by both Members and officers.

The Meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.
