Scrutiny Inquiry - ICT Resourcing

This statement from Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) provides the Board's observations and recommendations following its consideration of ICT resourcing.

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Information and Technology and therefore ICT Services critically underpin the running of the majority of the operational services of the Council. Further resource will be required from ICT Services to deliver the technology components of projects that deliver the Best Council Plan.

1.2   Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) agreed at its June meeting   to examine the resources available to ICT and the capacity pressures being faced by the service and ask whether ICT has the ability to   support   both 'lights on' maintenance and to deliver the projects.

2.0   Scope of the inquiry

2.1   The purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

(i)   Capacity in ICT to support both 'Lights On' maintenance and to deliver projects

(ii)   Recruitment & retention issues

(iii)   Expectation in Council of hours of service, reliability and availability

3.0   Observations and recommendations

3.1   With a total of 67 active major projects and 159 minor projects, ICT are clearly at the limit of capacity. We reviewed the effectiveness of governance arrangements within Directorates and concluded that whilst there is some directorate level review and prioritisation, overall they are not as robust as they could be in filtering project demand and in assessing the value of proposed projects. It is our view that there should also be provision for projects to be paused or stopped in order to direct resources to new, more important projects

> **Recommendation 1** –That corporate challenge should be carried out at CLT level and that projects are assessed/reviewed/rejected/agreed at this level. Provision should also exist for projects to be paused or stopped in order to direct resources to new, more important projects

3.2   The Board is of the view that ICT would benefit from a 'peer review' of the governance arrangements in place for project management.

> **Recommendation 2** – That ICT arrange a peer review of the governance arrangements in place for project management

3.3   The Board felt a lack of elected member involvement in ICT and bemoaned the demise of the member steering group as a way for officers and members to jointly understand ICT and its resource demands.

> **Recommendation 3 –** That a member group be established as a forum for officers to share the challenges and opportunities facing ICT. This to cover ICT, Information Governance, Digital and City agendas.

3.4   Members very much welcomed the 'place based' work being undertaken by officers with partners in the city and felt this work to be crucial to maximise the 'Leeds £'. Members would like to see greater information on the budget available to achieve this initiative and the timescales involved.

> **Recommendation 4** – That a clearer indication is given on the resources available to achieve the place based initiative and the timescales involved.

3.5   Recruitment (and retention) is an on-going issue for the service, resulting in the need to pay agency staff for both project work and for 'keeping the lights on' work. Having discussed the matter with the Chief Officer, Human Resources we agree that increasing salaries for selected critical posts, where the market is paying around £10k per annum more than Leeds City Council would not necessarily resolve the issue and would more likely have a detrimental impact of pay scales across the authority. The Board is of the view that the Council should be looking at longer terms solutions to attract staff. We acknowledge the work undertaken around apprentices, particularly for service desk staff and the developing graduate scheme. We consider that both of these schemes should be extended and developed as far as possible. We acknowledge that experienced and resourced staff would be needed to support these schemes. We also acknowledge that whilst this approach would not, in the short to medium term, resolve the on-going need to utilise agency staff whilst the issues with retaining experienced staff continue, it

would, in our view, offer a more sustainable long term approach to recruitment as long as staff can then be retained within the Council. The council should also be positively 'selling' its favourable terms and conditions 'offer' when recruiting. We note the gender imbalance of staff (In favour of males) within the ICT service. Our flexible working and family friendly working patterns should be emphasised to encourage more women to join the ICT profession.

> **Recommendation 5** – That the Council continues to develops strong graduate and apprentice schemes to resolve its long term recruitment problems within ICT

> **Recommendation 6** – That the family friendly terms and conditions of working for the Council continue to be emphasised in order to attract a more diverse workforce

3.6   In addition to be above measures we would recommend that ICT undertake an exercise in relation to the cost benefits of introducing higher grades and the potential savings this might generate if this resulted in the use of fewer agency staff.

> **Recommendation 7** – That ICT undertake an exercise in relation to the cost benefits of introducing higher grades and the potential savings this might generate if this resulted in the use of fewer agency staff.

3.7   The resilience of ICT systems was considered. Current resilience and availability levels were deemed acceptable and there was no specific need seen to extend the current service hours. Of note was the resilience of systems during the recent flooding and the former Vodafone contract. We are concerned that this contract was not managed correctly, putting the Authority at risk. We recommend that internal processes for monitoring contracts are reviewed and specifically we recommend that investigations are made, in conjunction with legal services, as to whether Vodafone was in breach of its contract and if so what remedial action could and should be taken.

Recommendation 8– That that internal processes for monitoring contracts are reviewed and specifically in conjunction with legal services, a review as to whether Vodafone was in breach of its contract and if so what remedial action could and should be taken.