



Report of the Chief Democratic Services Officer and the Head of ICT

Member Management Committee

Date: 29th June 06

Subject: Members' ICT Support

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on changes to the organisation of ICT support to Members and on a number of ongoing service developments.

It seeks views on consulting Group Whips on the development of draft guidelines with regard to the personal use of Council owned ICT systems by Members and, more broadly, seeks views on how best to consult Members on developments in relation to ICT support to Members.

1.0 Purpose of this Report

1.1 This report provides an update on the development of ICT support for Members' and seeks views on consultation arrangements with Members for future developments.

2.0 Organisational Responsibilities

2.1 From 2003 until recently, ICT support for Members was provided from within a small team based within the ICT Division of Corporate Services and physically located within the Civic Hall. The responsibilities of this team incorporated both ongoing service delivery and service developments.

- 2.2 This team had no clear organisational links with Democratic Services and, consequently, there were a number of communication difficulties. In particular, difficulties arose from the fact that service enhancements were initiated from within the ICT team, from Members' requests, without proper financial provision always being put in place in Democratic Services to fund them. These issues were identified by Corporate ICT and the discussions ensued with the Chief Democratic Services Officer.
- 2.3 Further difficulties arose from the fact that there were no clear arrangements for consulting Members in planning service developments.
- 2.4 Following consultations between the Chief Democratic Services Officer and the Head of ICT, it was agreed that ICT support arrangements needed to be revised. A more robust partnership between Democratic Services and ICT Services was required to meet the needs of Members more effectively.
- 2.5 Essentially, ICT support arrangements have been separated into two distinct functions. The ICT Team within the Civic Hall will focus specifically on providing ongoing support to existing systems. It is anticipated that focusing the team in this way will enable a more clearly defined and effective support service to Members.
- 2.6 Responsibility for service development will fall to the Chief Democratic Services Officer, who will ensure that Members are properly consulted over service developments and that developments are carried out within a clearly funded strategy.
- 2.7 In carrying out these responsibilities, the Chief Democratic Services Officer will be assisted by the Group Support Managers (who will be responsible for identifying and communicating Members' service needs) and a dedicated Principal IT Officer in Corporate Services who will provide professional IT advice in relation to the development of solutions for Members.

3.0 Ongoing Developments

Members' Personal Use Policy

- 3.1 Members will recall that, on 18th October 2006, this Committee received a report detailing a number of difficulties arising from the lack of clear guidelines with regard to what may be considered to be appropriate personal use of Members' home based computer equipment, and resolved that officers prepare clear guidelines
- 3.2 Officers are currently drafting such guidelines and it is recommended that these be the subject of informal consultation with all Group Whips prior to bringing them back for formal consideration by Member Management Committee.

Netware Infrastructure Project

- 3.3 Members may be aware of the Council's Netware Infrastructure Project (NIP). This project has been a huge body of work over a two year period to provide the Authority with an upgraded computer network. A number of benefits have resulted, including:
- 3.3.1 Enhanced and more cost effective support arising from a rationalisation of equipment and the facility for ICT support staff to access PCs and laptops remotely in order to resolve problems.
 - 3.3.2 Easier sharing of files and better facilities for upgrading as a consequence of standardising software.
 - 3.3.3 Improved functionality through the ability of any user to log onto any corporate PC or laptop, and improved methods of remotely accessing the corporate network through the use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and VASCO tokens (security devices which allow an authorised user access to facilities from any web enabled PC or laptop and from anywhere in the world).
 - 3.3.5 Standardisation of ICT hardware also means that the replacement of "end of life" equipment can be co-ordinated effectively.
- 3.4 NIP has been rolled out across the vast majority of LCC networked sites and many officers are benefiting from the increased functionality which has resulted. Similar benefits will accrue to Members but it will not be possible to extend the roll out programme to Members until such time as a clear policy has been agreed with regard to personal use (e.g. it is necessary to clarify what software and hardware may be introduced onto a Member's PC and, in particular, the extent to which non Council software and hardware may be added).
- 3.5 The roll-out of the Members upgrade project could be protracted due to the demand on resources of other projects, therefore, it is important that the Members' personal use of ICT is agreed as soon as possible to allow the requirements to be scoped and delivered.

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs)

- 3.6 In a number of areas, the Council is introducing Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) which have the potential to offer a number of communication services "on the move". These include:
- 3.6.1 Remote access to electronic diary
 - 3.6.2 Remote facilities for receiving and sending emails
 - 3.6.3 Doubling up as a mobile phone

- 3.7 However, with the potential for 99 users, there could be a significant element of purchase/set up costs and, depending on usage patterns, there is the potential to incur high levels of ongoing charges.
- 3.8 Some Members have attended demonstrations of PDAs and have expressed an interest in acquiring them. However no budgetary provision exists for providing PDAs to Members and, indeed, it is not clear as to how many Members would benefit from such a facility or what level of ongoing charges would need to be supported.
- 3.9 A limited trial has therefore been established, with three Members being provided with PDAs on a pilot basis. The pilot is designed to examine functionality and to assess likely costs before consideration is given to rolling them out more extensively to Members.

Document Management System

- 3.10 The File Plus Document Management system, which been used successfully for a number of years in the Leader's Office and the Chief Executive's Office, is currently being extended into the Group Offices. This system enables officers to scan, reference and electronically retain documents in a way which will reduce storage space and improve access to relevant records.

Case Management Systems

- 3.11 Over a period of time, some Members have requested an electronic casework management system to assist them with managing their ward work.
- 3.12 Following implementation and evaluation of the File Plus system described above (which should provide a measure of assistance to Members in managing their correspondence), consideration will be given to whether there remains a need for a casework management system.
- 3.13 Although no detailed work has yet been undertaken in this area, it is understood that there is no "off the shelf" product designed around the specific needs of Members (some political parties offer software to their members which includes a casework component but, being designed around the political needs of particular parties, this is clearly not a solution that can be rolled out for all Members).
- 3.14 The Council has, however, purchased the Siebel system to support customer service and this may provide for some of Members' needs. Early indications are that it may not necessarily be ideally suited to this task but it does have the advantages of being readily available and supported by the Council's ICT Division. It is therefore proposed that, as a first stage, a pilot exercise be mounted amongst a small number of Members with the results being evaluated and brought back for further Member consideration.

Website Blocking

- 3.15 There are clearly a large and developing number of internet websites which contain inappropriate material, accessing which would contravene the Council's internet policies. It is not possible for Council Officers to assess all such sites individually so the Council subscribes to a service which screens websites for inappropriate content. The resultant list is then used as the basis for automatically restricting user access to these sites.
- 3.16 Amongst the categories of websites restricted in this manner are those which are determined to have extremist political content.
- 3.17 For some time Members have raised concerns that they may have a legitimate need to access some such sites, for the purposes of monitoring activities in their wards. As a consequence, some ad hoc arrangements have been made from time to time.
- 3.18 It has now been agreed that Group Support Managers will have the authority to arrange for individual sites to be de-restricted to individual Members. Should Members wish to access a particular site, this can be arranged by completing the appropriate form (available from Group Offices).

Members' Web Pages

- 3.19 At its meeting in October 2005, this Committee received a report on the then planned procurement of a Democratic Services Information System (DSIS) which would incorporate facilities for including in the Council's internet site, individual web pages for Members.
- 3.20 It can now be reported that the Council has purchased "Modern.Gov" to deliver this requirement. This is currently being implemented with basic information being provided about Members (photograph, contact details etc.). It is expected that the facility for Members to use the system to provide more comprehensive, individualised information will come on stream in approximately two months time and, in preparation for this, Group Support Managers are drafting guidelines regarding content, editorial control etc.

4.0 Member Consultations

- 4.1 Member Management Committee is constituted to act as an advisory body for the purposes of implementing practices and procedures affecting Elected Members and, also, to consider matters in relation to the provision of information, communication and associated technologies in support of Elected Members.
- 4.2 In December 2004, the Committee decided to set up a working group of Members, headed by one of its Members and with a remit to consider ICT related issues and make recommendations to the Member Management Committee.

- 4.3 In practice, it has proved difficult to integrate such a standing group into decision making regarding Members' ICT. After May 2005, the chair of this sub group was no longer a member of the Member Management Committee with the result that there was then no commonality of membership between the two bodies. Given that both forums were, in effect, advisory bodies this contributed to a degree of ambiguity over respective roles and responsibilities, exacerbated by the lack of clarity over officer responsibilities as described in paragraph 2.0 above.
- 4.4 This working group is now effectively dormant having not met for some time.
- 4.5 In order to raise the profile of Members' ICT and to establish a more effective channel for Member consultations it is recommended that Member Management Committee retains an overview of ICT support to Members by receiving regular reports. Should the Committee decide that any particular issue requires more intensive discussions between officers and Members, then its terms of reference enable it to establish informal working groups of Members, drawn from beyond its own Membership as considered appropriate.

5.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

- 5.1 No issues of Council Policy or Governance are raised by the recommendations contained in this report.

6.0 Legal and Resource Implications

- 6.1 No legal or resource issues are raised by the recommendations raised in this report.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Member Management Committee is asked to:
- 7.1.1 Note the contents of this report.
 - 7.1.2 Request officers to liaise with all Group Whips before bringing forward draft guidelines on Members' personal ICT use for consideration at a future meeting.
 - 7.1.3 Advise officers on any matters which should be added to, or reprioritised within, the programme of developments identified within this report.
 - 7.1.4 Request officers to bring forward regular reports on the development of ICT support to Members
 - 7.1.5 Discontinue the standing ICT working group as established in December 2004 and consider establishing new working groups to look at individual ICT issues should the need arise.