



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

Member Management Committee

Date: 18th November 2008

Subject: Members' ICT Developments

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

This report provides the Committee with updates on the roll out of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to Members and on the performance of Members' IT systems following their recent upgrade.

It concludes that the roll out of PDAs has largely been well received by Members and no problems have arisen with their allocation or distribution. Some Members have experienced technical difficulties with the operation of PDAs but these have largely been resolved.

With regard to the recent upgrade of ICT systems it is evident that, initially, there were technical difficulties which caused problems for a number of Members. A package of measures has been introduced over recent months to address these issues. These have combined together to enhance performance and, whilst there are still a small number of Members experiencing problems, further measures are planned (specifically memory upgrades for Members' laptops) which should assist further.

1.0 Purpose of This Report

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on ICT issues including;
- A position statement with respect to the distribution of PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) to Members
 - An update on the actions taken by Corporate ICT Services to improve the service provision to Members

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members will recall that a report to this meeting in October 2007 indicated that following a successful pilot, PDAs would be offered to more Members. A position statement was provided in a report to this committee at the February 2008 meeting. A further update is provided below.

2.2 The February 2008 meeting of this committee also resolved that a working group be established to provide a Member perspective with respect to the service improvements Corporate ICT services were seeking to introduce and also to explore the options around providing a system to assist Members in managing their case work. The working group is chaired by Councillor Latty. The improvements introduced by Corporate ICT Services are outlined below. The investigation of a solution to assist Members in managing their case work is the subject of a separate report.

2.3 Members were surveyed at the end of 2007 to determine their experience of the ICT upgrade implementation process and to establish any particular difficulties or problems they were experiencing with their ICT provision.

2.4 The survey asked two open questions:

1. How did the process of installing new IT equipment go for you?
2. Are you currently experiencing any difficulties or problems with your IT equipment?

2.5 The responses to the survey indicated that in general Members were satisfied with the process of installing their new ICT equipment but there were a number of residual issues which were technical in nature.

2.6 Some issues indicated that additional training might be required to resolve and others related to policies and procedures. Members who reported such issues have been contacted to establish the extent of the difficulties and they have been referred to various contacts to assist in resolution.

3.0 Main Issues

Members PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants)

3.1 Provision was originally made for up to 75 Members to receive PDAs and it was anticipated that, should demand exceed this level, then Group Whips would have been consulted with respect to their distribution. In the event, take up has stabilised at 45 devices allocated as follows:

Labour Group (15)

Conservative Group (15)

Liberal Democrat Group (9)

Morley Borough Independents Group (4)

BNP Group (1)

Green Group (1)

- 3.2 The initial cost of each device is £404 after which there is an annual charge which varied with usage from £396 to £426 p.a.
- 3.3 Feedback from Members with respect to the use of the devices has generally been extremely positive.
- 3.4 Since the beginning of May (when the ICT Call Management database – Remedy – was upgraded to version 7), a total of 22 calls have been raised which have been categorised as either a PDA hardware or a Cadenza (the software which links the PDA to the Council's Lotus Notes system) problem. This may not represent a complete picture of all issues with PDAs over the period as some matters may have related to the Orange service specifically and been dealt with as a business rather than a technical matter.
- 3.5 A number of measures have been undertaken in recent months to improve the service with respect to PDAs. An example of this is the virtualisation of the mNotes server in September. This involved adding this application to the council's server farm to provide a more resilient service. Some users reported replication problems (synchronisation of principally emails and calendar entries on the mobile device with those held on the central systems) immediately following this upgrade but in most cases this was resolved fairly quickly.

ICT service improvements

- 3.6 A number of measures have been introduced over recent months to improve the ICT service provision to Members
- 3.7 Following the survey at the end of 2007, the more generic technical issues reported by Members were broadly defined as follows:
- Slowness to login
 - Frustration at Screensaver timeout period
 - Searching email
 - Sending and receiving email (usually with attachments)
 - Portal slowness
 - Random failures of internet access
 - Slowness/Sluggishness - a few Members indicated that the overall performance of the PC's (Laptops Desktops) was quite sluggish.

- 3.8 A number of measures have been introduced over recent months to address these reported problems. Due to the nature of the issues described above, a single change could not be made to improve the user experience but rather a series of changes were designed to make incremental improvements. These changes included:
- **Global change to portal Login page** – this included removing logos and images from the login screen to speed up the login process
 - **Global Single Sign-On cache change** – this change again was designed to speed up the login process by reducing the amount of communication between the workstation and the central servers during the login process.
 - **Screensaver change for Councillors** – the period of inactivity on a Member workstation before the screensaver is activated has been extended from ten minutes to half an hour
 - **Changes to ADSL policies** – changes have been made to the way in a Member's workstation connects to, and interacts with, the Council's network. The changes showed improvements to both logging in times and the overall speed of use.
 - **Upgrading the broadband service to Members' homes to ADSL MAX** – the speed of the broadband provision to Members' homes has been increased from 2mb/s to the most stable service British Telecom are able to provide up to 8mb/s.
 - **Local Lotus Notes profile provided** – an additional profile has been created to improve the functionality of the application. This allows a member to work locally yet still send and receive mail to and from the Lotus Notes servers. This option improves the latency when creating/sending and receiving/opening email by communicating with the central server in the background every ten minutes rather than constantly.
- 3.9 A further change to improve the user experience is to increase the memory (RAM) within Members' workstations by 0.5GB to bring them up to 1GB. In conjunction with the memory upgrade, we are also improving the performance and security of the equipment by upgrading the operating system to XP Service pack 2 and also installing Pointsec encryption software.
- 3.10 Changes have also been made to service desk. Members have a dedicated ICT help line on **247 4866**. This help line is serviced by the ICT service desk officers and calls to this number are prioritised. The current target is to resolve 70% of all calls to service desk at first point of contact. Tools to assist in this include the ability to remote-control workstations.
- 3.11 It is recognised that Group Support Managers and their deputies provide a unique service to Members, hence they are also permitted to use the dedicated Members ICT helpline in order to raise service desk calls on behalf of Members.
- 3.12 The Member working group considered and discussed all of the technical issues which had been identified and gave guidance to officers as to the above package measures to address them.
- 3.13 An automated report provides details on a daily basis around the number of Members' calls which are currently open, what the issue relates to and to whom the call has been assigned. This gives visibility across the service to ensure that support calls for Members are dealt with as expediently as possible.

- 3.14 At the time of writing this report, there are 4 open service desk calls, 2 of which relate to problems with the broadband provision to Councillors' homes (one case has been escalated to the highest levels within British Telecom to provide a satisfactory resolution), 1 relates to an investigation as to why an email from an external source has not been received and 1 relates to a problem with scanner software installed on the workstation.
- 3.15 Anecdotally, a small number of Members have indicated that logging on and loading applications (specifically Lotus Notes) still takes an inordinate amount of time (between 5 and 10 minutes). Experience in this area is likely to differ from user to user due to the number of variables involved such as the prevailing speed of the broadband connection to the property, the time of day that logging on is attempted etc. Others have confirmed that they still randomly fail to connect to the internet, although this is a less frequent occurrence than previously and is usually rectified by closing the browser down and opening it up again.
- 3.16 Once the improvements have been implemented including increasing the memory, we will seek to address these remaining issues on a case by case basis.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 There are no implications for Council Policy and Governance

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal or resource implications of this report

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The roll out of PDAs has generally been well received by Members and no problems have arisen regarding their distribution or allocation. Some Members have experienced technical difficulties with the operation of PDAs but these have largely been resolved.
- 6.2 With regard to the recent upgrade of ICT systems it is evident that, initially, there were technical difficulties which caused problems for a number of Members. A package of measures has been introduced over recent months. These have combined together to enhance performance and, whilst there are still a small number of Members experiencing problems, further measures are planned (specifically memory upgrades for Members' laptops) which should assist further.

7.0 Recommendation

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to request a further report on ICT performance issues after a further period of operational experience