Report of the Chief Democratic Services Officer

Member Management Committee

Date: 20th February 2007

Subject: Members' ICT Developments

Electoral Wards Affected:	Specific Implications For:
	Equality and Diversity ☐
	Community Cohesion ☐
	Narrowing the Gap ☐

Executive Summary

This report provides a progress report on the development of ICT support to Members.
It updates Members on the implementation of Guidelines for Members' use of ICT and of the consequent initiation of a project to upgrade ICT facilities as detailed in previous reports (a verbal update on which will be provided at the meeting).
Members are advised of the imminent introduction of a document management system in Group Offices (April 07) and of the establishment of individual Members' web pages (May 07).

The report also contains an evaluation of a pilot exercise in connection with Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). This concludes that the Members involved in the pilot have reported significant benefits. However, there are significant cost implications.

1.0   Purpose of this Report

1.1   This report presents Members with an update on the development of ICT support to Members.

2.0   Background Information

2.1   Members will recall that, on June 06, they received a report outlining changes to the management and organisation of ICT support to Members.

2.2   That report included a list of ongoing developments at that time and recommended that officers bring forward regular reports to MMC. As Members will be aware, subsequent reports have focused on the forthcoming Members' ICT Upgrade Programme and the associated guidelines regarding use by Members of Council provided ICT facilities.

2.3   This report now presents a brief but more comprehensive report of all ongoing developments.

3.0   Main Issues

Guidelines for Members using ICT Equipment

3.1   At the last regular meeting of Member Management Committee, proposed guidelines were endorsed but it was noted that they were to be submitted for consideration by the Standards Committee which may have given rise to further amendments.

3.2   It can now be reported that the Standards Committee subsequently considered the Guidelines and endorsed them without amendment.

3.3   The Guidelines have now been distributed to all Members together with advice as to their implementation. It should be noted that this has resulted in a small number of suggested amendments from Members. It is proposed to review the Guidelines during March and again following introduction of the Members' ICT Upgrade Programme. Thus far, suggested amendments have been very minor but, should any more substantial issues emerge, these will be brought back for discussion at this Committee.

Members ICT Upgrade Programme

3.4   A Project Board has now been established to oversee this programme and an update to all Members provided by means of a letter from the Chief Democratic Services Officer dated 4th January. A verbal progress report will be provided at the meeting but, at the time of preparing this report, there are no significant issues to be brought to the attention of this Committee

Document Management System

3.5   In June 06 it was reported that the File Plus Document Management system, which had been used successfully for a number of years in the Leader's Office and the Chief Executive's Office, was 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.

3.6   This system was originally scheduled for implementation in December 2006 but operational difficulties have caused some delays. It is now anticipated that the system will be rolled out to Group Offices during April 07.

Case Management System

3.7   Again in June 06 it was reported that there had been some interest from Members in developing a Case Management System and that a detailed investigation would commence once the Document Management System was in place in Group Offices. It was also reported that one possible avenue of approach was to establish a pilot using the Siebel system (the Council's customer service software).

3.8   It can now be reported that Group Support Managers have now examined the Siebel System in more detail and do not consider it be appropriate for this use.

Members' Web Pages

3.9   Members will recall that a feature of the Council's Democratic Services Information System (DSIS) is the facility for Members to have more comprehensive individual web pages information. In June 06 it was anticipated that this facility would be rolled out to Members in August 06. Delays in implementing DSIS and in establishing appropriate arrangements for maintaining individual web pages have led to some delay.

3.10   However it can now be reported that arrangements are in place for all Members to be offered the facility to establish individual web pages, maintained via Group Office staff, from May 07. This process will be managed by Group Support Managers from whom further information can be obtained.

Personal Digital Assistants

3.11   Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) have the potential to offer a number of communication services "on the move". These include:

- Remote access to electronic diary

- Remote facilities for receiving and sending emails

- Doubling up as a mobile phone

3.12   In June 06 it was reported that a limited trial had been established, with three Members being provided with Personal PDAs on a pilot basis. The pilot was designed to examine functionality and to assess likely costs before consideration could be given to rolling them out more extensively to Members.

3.13   Since then, the trial has been extended and now includes four Members chosen to represent a range of perspectives (an Executive Board Member, a Scrutiny Board Chair, a Group Whip and an Area Committee Chair drawn from three political groups).

3.14   Initially, each of the Members on the pilot was provided with an Orange SPV M600 PDA from the Corporate ICT Service catalogue, with two of those being upgraded to Orange SPV M3100 devices from early November.

3.15   During the period of the trial, there have been significant issues with the performance of the PDAs, in particular with respect to the synchronisation of email and diary entries between the device and the Council's network. Corporate ICT has worked extensively with service partners (Internet Service Provider and software provider) over the past few months to improve the service to all users. A combination of the adoption of the M3100 as the standard corporate offering and considerable changes to the software and infrastructure have resulted in substantial improvements in the service.

3.16   One of the reasons for upgrading two of the Members' devices part-way through the pilot was to establish whether the upgraded PDAs were more effective and reliable in supporting Councillors in conducting their Council business (subsequently the M3100 is now the only PDA available on the Corporate ICT Service catalogue).

3.17   At the end of November, the four Councillors were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire to determine their experience of the functionality of the PDAs from both a technical and business perspective. Despite the technical problems encountered during the trial period, the overwhelming response from the four participants was that PDAs represented a powerful and effective tool in supporting the way many Members wish to conduct their Council business.

3.18   Key elements of the completed questionnaires are as follows:

- Two of the Members found the calendar to be the most useful, the other two identified the email to be the most useful function
- Replication of the device was generally satisfactory when connected to a PC or laptop, but remotely "over the air" was deemed largely unsatisfactory
- The M3100 device was found to have greater functionality and to be more reliable than the M600
- Little or no training was received in using the device but the devices were found to be generally easy to use
- All participants were satisfied with the reliability of the PDAs themselves and network coverage was found to be good.
- In the section provided on the questionnaire for general comments, one Member commented that he felt the PDA was "essential for all Councillors", another indicated that "the email and diary are so crucial now that I couldn't easily cope without it"

3.19   Despite the positive results of the pilot evaluation, it should be noted that there is no funding within the Democratic Services budget for the provision of PDAs. The equipment and set-up costs of the devices used during the pilot were provided by Corporate ICT with the ongoing revenues costs being met by Democratic Services. The pilot was arranged on the basis that the devices would be returned at the end of the pilot if the service offering was not taken forward and incorporated into the support arrangements for Members offered by Democratic Services.

3.20   There are significant setup and running costs associated with adoption of PDAs. These are detailed in the Appendix to this report. Initial set up costs, including the device itself, the software licence and configuration charges are approximately £600 per unit.

3.21   Based on the usage data from the pilot group, the running costs of the devices are calculated to be around £550 per annum. (line rental, inclusive data transfer costs, support and maintenance charges etc.) This includes £350 per annum for line rental and data transfer costs. However it should be noted that this figure could vary considerably (particularly if the device were to be used abroad).

3.22   It should also be noted that a significant feature of PDAs is the potential to use them as telephones. However, this was not fully explored during the pilot and, hence, the costs of such usage have not been taken into account (this approach was dictated by the Members' Allowances Scheme which requires Members to meet the cost of all telephone calls from either land lines or mobile telephones).

3.23   Based on the experiences of the Members who were included in the pilot it is clear that PDAs could be of some benefit to Members. However, it is equally clear that there could be significant costs which have not been provided for within existing budgetary provision.

3.24   For discussion purposes, the appendix to this report sets out the costs of providing varying numbers of Members with PDAs, operated in accordance with the criteria applicable during the pilot (i.e. assuming that the costs of any telephone calls are met by the Member but all other costs are met by the Council).

3.25   The options are calculated on three levels of provision

        10 Members (assuming Executive Board Members each have a PDA)
        32 Members (assuming provision to Executive Board Members and to Scrutiny, Regulatory and Area Committee chairs
        99 Members (i.e all Members of Council).

3.26   In practice, however, demand for, and usage of, PDAs is likely to vary significantly and it could be difficult to define and manage agreed appropriate elgibility criteria.

3.27   Finally, it should be noted that the Members' ICT upgrade programme referred to in pargaraph3.4 above anticipates the provision of VASCO tokens to Members. This will provide Members with the facility to access the Council's systems from any pc with internet access and can be achieved at minimal cost to the Council (approximately £55 per Member with no recurring costs). Whilst not replicating the flexibility provided by PDAs, their provision may go some way to meeting Members' remote access needs at a much lower cost.

4   Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1   The recommendations in this report do not have any implications for Council Policy or Governance.

5   Legal and Resource Implications

5.1   The recommendations in this report do not have any legal implications. There is no budgetary provision for the allocation of PDAs to Members, the cost of which could be significant.

6 Recommendation

6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to offers such guidance and advice as they consider necessary with regard to the development of ICT support to Members.

PDAs – Analysis of Costs

Table 1 – Set up costs

Cost of device (SPV M3100)	£158
Msuite licence	£134
Configuration fee	£120
Maintenance costs	£180 for 1st year
Total	**£592**

Table 2 - Revenue costs

Maintenance costs (year 2 onwards)	£180
Software maintenance fee (year 2 onwards)	£24
Sub Total	**£204**
Line rental and inclusive data transfer costs (includes first 25MB downloaded per month, subsequent downloading costs 60p per MB)	£164
Additional Data download costs (average based on usage during the pilot)	£180
Total	**£548**

Indicative current call charges are at the following rates - 4p/min calls to landlines and Orange Mobiles Peak & Off Peak. 15p/min calls - all other mobile networks Peak, 10p/min calls all other mobile networks Off Peak.

Table 3 - Options

	PDA provided and maintained by Council Council meets all running costs Members pay for all telephone charges	
	Set up Costs	Annual Costs
10 Members[1]	£5920	£5480
32 Members[2]	£18944	£17536
99 Members	£58608	£54252

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[1] This level of provision would include, say, Executive Board Members
[2] This level of provision would include, say, Executive Board Members and Scrutiny, Regulatory and Area Committee chairs