

# **COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

## **Review of Computer Usage Report for Members 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

### **Report of Head of Democratic Services and Head of Information and Customer Services**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

Proposal to provide for improvements to computer equipment and services provided for Members.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That Members note the action being taken to purchase new laptops and improve broadband connections over a period of two years to be funded from the current Capital Programme which will improve security and the speed of Members' file and network access as well as further protecting the Council's data and information services.**
- (2) That more training be offered to Members on the use of laptops and software and of access to the LCC network remotely**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 A report was submitted in January 2008 to review the computer usage of Members. The report was designed to inquire whether the existing, aging computer provisions for Members was adequate.
- 1.2 The preferred option of the Officers was to undertake a survey for all Members to share their views on the current provisions in place. Questions were asked on the type of equipment provided, the accessing of services such as the Intranet and Internet, the level of technical support provided, the current training and documentation offered and where the Members thought there could be improvements. A summary of the findings of the survey is attached as Appendix A
- 1.3 Following the results of this survey Officers can now assess the areas of concern to the Members and improve equipment and services offered. The results of the survey have shown that Members are generally pleased with the current provision but there are areas for improvement including training and speed of equipment which need to be addressed.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

### **2.1 Equipment**

The survey highlighted a common view of the equipment not meeting speed expectations. Accessing services on the network and general speed of file access on the laptops was the major concern of the Members and in some cases made the equipment almost unusable. A new range of Lenovo laptop is now available that will greatly increase the speed of file and program interaction. The new laptops are extremely powerful, very robust and have great technological longevity. With a mixture of high performance components and technology such as built in wireless and Bluetooth the Lenovo laptops are also reasonably future proof and could be used in the wireless areas in the Town Halls, at meetings etc. as required.

### **2.2 Network**

To improve the Members' experience the speed of the broadband lines to Members' homes will also need to be upgraded. Upgrading the speed of accessing information over the network will open the bottleneck typical of remote file access and will improve the download times from servers. Internet Service Providers now offer faster broadband connections than were available five years ago when the existing provision was installed so this can be arranged from existing budgets

### **2.3 Security**

Members will be aware of the national issues surrounding the loss or theft of personal or otherwise valuable data. Newer and more robust techniques in the data centre and improvements in the network carrier need to be introduced by Officers. The way in which Members access the Council's network will change so that they are quicker and more secure. Instead of the current VPN tunnel access Officers will provide Netilla access for Members which is a vastly improved carrier than the VPN system.

Logging onto the system will also be more secure and will require two forms of authentication. Members will be provided with a simple keyfob which generates a random security number. This number will be used in the logon process and will mean that the council is able to meet the new national security standards which are mandatory for Lancaster to exchange information electronically with Central Government Departments such as the Department of Work and Pensions. These standards must be in place for April 2009.

### **2.4 Training**

The training needs of Members was another shared concern in the survey and comments quoted the need for more training on the use of the laptops and of accessing network services. Officers have provided a succession of drop in workshops which are run on a monthly basis, often before meetings where help can be provided with any IT issues The Helpdesk can also provide advice and help with laptops and software.

#### **4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

##### **4.1 Option 1**

Replace the equipment as outlined above over a two year period. This is the preferred officer recommendation as the current capital programme has sufficient funds and some of the older machines are already failing and beyond economical repair. This is the least risky option as security and other issues can be addressed in one visit and failing equipment replaced before it fails completely.

##### **4.2 Option 2**

Replace the equipment as outlined above and add a more dedicated "Home Visit" support service. This could entail a Helpdesk technician visiting Members' homes on request and would offer a more complete, tailored IT service. However, allowing for travelling time this would be about 0.8 of a FTE and therefore there would be a large cost implication for this service. This option carries mainly a financial risk.

##### **4.3 Option 3**

Continue with existing provision and replace equipment only as each item is no longer repairable. This option carries a risk that nearly all equipment will have been replaced anyway by the end of three years (the equipment will be nearly 8 years old then ), the work will be less efficient as unplanned and each member will have to wait whilst their equipment fails and is then replaced. The security work will need to be done as part of the Council's Security upgrade and therefore most Members will need two or more visits.

#### **5.0 Conclusion**

5.1 Provision of IT for Members has led to some efficiencies for Democratic Services as fewer paper agendas have been produced and Members have been able to work more efficiently. By replacing the equipment in a structured and scheduled way the success can continue.

#### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

None

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications of Options 1 or 3 as the costs will be met from the existing budgets - £116,000 capital budget for Desktop Equipment/Members Notebooks and £16,500 revenue budget for Members Line Rental.

If Option 2 is preferred however there would be cost implications with the need for a new Helpdesk Technician and these costs would need to be identified and reported back to members.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

Regarding capital budgets, Members will be aware that the Council has a general rule in that capital spend only progresses when the funding is in place. The s151 Officer will be reporting to Cabinet in October on the overall capital funding situation, with proposals on how to manage this year's funding position. The outcome of that report will influence the timing of any major replacements for computer equipment.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Review of Computer Usage by Members –  
Report of Council Business Committee  
January 2008

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