

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Installation of Wireless Networking in Council Meeting Rooms 17 January 2013

Report of the Democratic Services Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

For the Committee to consider a request for Wireless Networking (Wi-Fi) to be installed in Council meeting rooms.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) That the Committee consider whether Wi-Fi should be installed in Council meeting rooms.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This issue was raised as a supplementary question at Council on 13 June 2012 from Councillor Mace to the Leader of the Council in her capacity as Cabinet Member with responsibility for ICT. The question on notice related to facilities in the Council Chamber and the supplementary question raised was:

Could Wi-Fi be introduced to the Chamber as part of the development of the new facilities?

- 1.2 Councillor Blamire agreed to look into the possibility. Since the question was raised, another Councillor has formally requested that the ICT team look into the possibility of installing Wi-Fi facilities "in the council chamber and in the banqueting hall during planning meetings." The reasons given for the request were:

"The ability for members to refer to documents and look up information during debates would I believe increase the quality of debate and save on paperwork. In Planning the ability to look up on an ipad/ipod or tablet map the location of applications and other details which may not be in the existing documents and illustrations would be helpful. Should the Dept decide to issue ipads to the members this service would be essential."

2.0 Wi-Fi

- 2.1 Wi-Fi is a popular technology that allows an electronic device to exchange data wirelessly (using radio waves) over a computer network, including high-speed Internet connections. Currently there is no Wi-Fi provision in any of the

Council meeting rooms.

2.2 The issue of installing Wi-Fi was last raised on 21 January 2009 during part of the Audit Committee's consideration of various issues relating to a Democratic Renewal Audit action plan. The report recommended that, if the Council wished to increase the number of 'paperless' meetings, then it would be necessary to install Wi-Fi to all Committee rooms used for meetings. At that time, only the Council Business Committee was paperless. Members of this Committee recently decided to return to paper agendas so the Council no longer has any 'paperless' Committees. The minutes of the Audit Committee meeting record that "Members discussed wireless networking but did not feel there was a need to increase the availability of wireless networks to all committee rooms used for meetings." Therefore the issue wasn't taken any further at that time.

2.3 In relation to wireless electronic devices and health, there has been anxiety and speculation regarding electromagnetic fields and their alleged effects on public health. Whilst this does remain a concern for some people, the World Health Organization says "there is no risk from low level, long-term exposure to wi-fi networks" and the United Kingdom's Health Protection Agency reports that exposure to Wi-Fi for a year results in the "same amount of radiation from a 20-minute mobile phone call."

3.0 Costs

3.1 The Democratic Services Manager has consulted with the ICT Manager who has researched the supply of WiFi for the meeting rooms. A low cost solution could be installed given two weeks notice and the costs could be met from existing ICT budgets.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis

4.1 Two options are set out below for the Committee to consider, or to make other recommendations.

	Option 1: To install Wi-Fi in Council meeting rooms.	Option 2: Not to install Wi-Fi in Council meeting rooms (no change).
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would be useful for Councillors who wanted to 'opt out' of paper agendas and use a wireless device to access agenda papers in meetings. This might also result in savings on paper, photocopying, staff time and courier costs.• Would allow the Council to move towards paperless meetings, if it so wished.• Would allow Councillors and Officers access on mobile devices to the internet, which might be useful in certain	This option would not raise the issues of any potential adverse effects on health from electromagnetic fields which have been associated with Wi-Fi.

	<p>circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would allow those giving presentations easy access to the Internet for resources to use in their presentation. • May make rooms more attractive for lettings to external clients. (Currently if a client requests Wi-Fi, the ICT team set this up for the booking and remove it again when the event is over). 	
Disadvantages	See 'Risks' below. Concern about health risks may outweigh the advantages for some Councillors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council would not easily be able to move to paperless meetings which may mean that it is more difficult or impossible to make any savings in that area. • Remains resource intensive for the ICT team to set up and take down Wi-Fi in rooms each time a booking is taken for a client who requests Wi-Fi in the room.
Risks	Some may perceive Wi-Fi as a health risk.	

4.2 The officer preferred option is Option 1, as this keeps the Council's options open to make savings by moving towards more paperless meetings or at least allowing individual Councillors the option to opt out of receiving paper agendas. It would also allow greater flexibility during meetings in an age where the reliance on electronic devices for information and communication is increasing.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Members are asked to consider the information and options in this report regarding the installation of Wi-Fi in council meeting rooms.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly arising from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should the Council decide to move towards 'paperless' meetings, savings could be made. It is estimated that printing agendas cost in the region of £3,500 in 2011/12, along with the staff time in printing and delivering the agendas.

ICT have confirmed that the cost of installing Wi-Fi in the meeting rooms would be around £1,000 and can be met from existing ICT infrastructure budgets. There would be staff implications for setting up the Wi-Fi in all the meeting rooms but this would be offset against the time spent setting up and taking down Wi-Fi for external room hire.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources: None

Information Services: None.

Property: None.

Open Spaces: None.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

(Q&A Wi-Fi Health Concerns, May 2007)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/6677051.stm>

WHO Electromagnetic Fields and Public Health.

<http://www.who.int/peh-emf/publications/facts/fs296/en/>

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