

Budget and Performance

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

4th April 2006

Report of Head of Information Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To update Members on progress with regard to the Open Source Software Project				
Key Decision		Non-Key Decision	X	Referral from Cabinet Member
This report is public				

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Budget and Performance Panel note the progress to date on the agreed project.
2. That Budget and Performance Panel note the recommendation that the Council continues with the Microsoft Office suite for desktop use and refer the matter to the E Government Cabinet Liaison Group for their attention.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Open Source Software Project Initiation Document was agreed by Budget and Performance Panel in November 2005. Two key items within scope of the Document were for Information Services to undertake :-

an "initial investigation of the options for more open source operating systems – both desktop and server e.g. alternatives to Windows 2003, Windows XP and Windows Server bearing in mind corporate applications"

and

"recommending a clear way forward on the desktops software for office applications e.g. a word processor, spreadsheet and small database system which will work with our existing corporate applications such as Academy Revenues and Benefits system, Flare environment services system etc."

In the last report to the Panel, details were provided of how Information Services, using their current software suppliers list, had contacted all current suppliers of software which the City Council used and tried to establish whether or not they could integrate with an open

product such as StarOffice and whether they would support their product on an open OS such as Linux. These results are now final and listed in Appendix A in the form of a spreadsheet.

Desktop Assessment

The project initiation document specified an investigation into the options for the use of a corporate wide desktop office software suite e.g. a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation and small database system.

Lancaster City Council currently use Microsoft Office and have a total of 769 user licences. Of these licences, 129 are the latest version of MS Office 2003. These licences were purchased when additional PCs or laptops have been acquired. Any PCs that have been replaced due to their age or hardware failure, automatically take on the existing Office licence of the machine that they are replacing.

The remainder of our current licences are a mixture of Office 97, 2000 and XP. The majority being Office 97 as per the table below.

Office 97		
Office 97 Standard	293	
- Office 97 Upgraded to Professional - with MS Access	13	
Sub-Total	280	
Office 97 Professional - with MS Access	175	
+ Office 97 Upgraded to Professional - with MS Access	13	
Sub-Total	188	
Total	468	
Office 2000		Number of MS Office licences required to upgrade all PCs/laptops to Office 2003 640
Office 2000 Standard	20	
- Office 2000 Upgraded to Professional - with MS Access	14	
Sub-Total	6	
Office 2000 Professional - with MS Access	35	
+ Office 2000 Upgraded to Professional - with MS Access	14	
Sub-Total	49	
Total	55	
Office XP		
Office XP Standard	3	
Office XP Professional - with MS Access	114	
Total	117	
Office 2003		
Office 2003 Standard	12	
Office 2003 Professional - with MS Access	117	
Total	129	
Total Licenses	769	Number of licences required if a complete move to another office system 769

Microsoft Office 97 is no longer supported by Microsoft as well as a large number of business application providers. We therefore need to plan to either upgrade the remaining 468 licences to Office 2003 or find an alternative compatible product.

If a decision is made to continue to use the Microsoft Office Suite, then it may be worthwhile waiting for the latest release (Office 2007) which is due out later this year.

Compatibility

As the majority of users each use at least one existing corporate application, the Office suite that we use will need to integrate with these. The full list of these applications can be found in **Appendix A** detailing their providers stance on integration with open source software, including StarOffice. The number of positive responses is however very small and proves that there is not yet enough demand for these suppliers to develop their products for open source.

The very small percentage of users who either do not use one of these corporate applications, or who use one that is fully compatible with open source software, could in theory use an open source software office application. However this option seems to lead to compatibility issues. Users using non open source software would be unable to easily share documents with users using open source software. An example of a Microsoft Word Document which was opened with StarOffice can be found in **Appendix B**. Additionally there would be problems in increased support costs as Information Services would have to support both products and resolve the compatibility issues.

We are also finding that we are now increasingly sharing more documents with external parties including local partnerships, other Local Authorities and government departments. We need to ensure that both parties are able to share these documents without the need of performing time consuming conversion or reformatting of documents.

Unfortunately open source software is not fully compatible with Microsoft Office and documents opened in StarOffice can lose a lot of their formatting. As well as the formatting issues, StarOffice does not support macros created in MS Office or any files that have been password protected.

Additionally there would be problems in increased support costs as Information Services would have to support both products and resolve the compatibility issues.

Conclusion for desktop objective

Lancaster City Council is not able to move to StarOffice or any other desktop products whilst so many applications rely upon integration with Microsoft Office. The current obsolete Office 97 licences need to be replaced and funding exists within the capital programme to do this.

Comparison with Public Sector bodies

The second objective was to explore options used by other local authorities and existing case studies – such as Bristol City , Birmingham City and Central Scotland Police to understand why they changed and why (in some cases) they have reverted to Microsoft desktop. Generally a small number of authorities have done some work in this area and this work is mostly in the form of projects which have not finished yet. This work is summarised in **Appendix C**

Other Objectives of the Project

The other project objectives were looking at infrastructure and joint procurement.

Infrastructure

Information Services are using a number of open source products where they are appropriate but having examined the options for desktop or server operating systems there seems to be no potential

to change away from Microsoft because of lack of application support (**Appendix A**). Also all the PCs that we currently purchase are supplied with the latest version of Microsoft Windows (currently Windows XP Professional). The suppliers of our PCs do not offer any savings if we were to purchase PCs without the operating system.

4 FUTURE WORK

Joint Procurement

The final part of the project is to examine all future purchasing options whether open source or not e.g whether the Council could save money by purchasing software jointly with other Authorities – this work to be undertaken with the Procurement Officer and the Regional Centre of Excellence on her return from maternity leave in April.