

MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 21 September 2009 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor PJ Edwards (Chairman)
Councillor WLS Bowen (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: AE Gray, KG Grumbley, PM Morgan, AT Oliver and PJ Watts

In attendance: None

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors P.A. Andrews, M.E.Cooper, T.M. James, and R.I. Matthews. Councillor PD Price (Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement) also sent apologies.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were no suggestions from Members of the Public

18. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES – CABINET’S RESPONSE – PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered a progress report on Cabinet’s response to the scrutiny review of Information, Communication and Technology Services.

The Head of Service - ICT Services presented the report. Because a number of actions arising from the scrutiny review had been completed and a number of others, because of their nature, would be ongoing he proposed that any further progress report should focus on a number of specific recommendations as set out in the covering report.

It was also proposed that reporting on the development of technical and governance links between health and social care should be incorporated into the proposed progress report.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Progress on refurbishing the data centre at the Thorn Offices was discussed. The Joint Director of ICT confirmed that the Centre would be of the requisite quality with a 5- 7 year lifespan which was appropriate in the context of the future service delivery model of IT. He agreed to provide details on the final cost of the refurbishment to Members.

The Director of Resources confirmed that negotiations to extend the existing lease of the Thorn Offices would be concluded to ensure security of tenure.

The Joint Director of ICT added that consideration would need to be given by the Council to its data storage policy recognising that storage of data incurred a cost.

It was noted that the Primary Care Trust was now sharing the Council's data Centres which were of a higher standard than its own data centre.

- Members emphasised the importance of extending Broadband provision in the County. It was noted that it had been decided that the use of the Community Network's cabling or ducting to improve the broadband service for all businesses on the estate would have involved the Council in unacceptable additional responsibilities for support and policing the use of the network, with the Council in effect becoming an ICT service provider. A tender had therefore been issued requiring a minimum broadband service of 2 mbs to be provided at Rotherwas. A decision on awarding the contract was due to be made by the end of September. A meeting with BT had been arranged by the Economic Regeneration Service in October to explore wider provision of networks across the County. Members requested that they be informed of the outcome of these discussions
- A question was asked about progress in relation to recommendation (d) of the review relating to rolling out information security accreditation across the Council. The report stated that there was a lack of resource available in the central team to carry out and sustain the required levels of training and awareness. The Joint Director of ICT said that he considered the level of central resource was reasonable. He noted that technology was rarely the cause of a breach of security. It was more commonly due to human error. Education and awareness training were therefore key and a training programme was in place and being offered to directorates.
- The implementation of arrangements providing for only Council approved and supplied memory sticks to be used on Council equipment was discussed. Members proposed that early notification be sent to staff and Councillors about the plan before the programme was rolled out.
- Progress on the development of the website was discussed. The Joint Director of ICT reported that in its most recent audit the website had been rated as transactional but it was recognised that there was scope for further improvement. He noted that it was important the people used the feedback facility to highlight where improvement was needed. The website continued to compare favourably with other local authority websites. Members proposed that the need for content on the internet and intranet to be kept up to date and for out of date material to be removed be reinforced to all staff.
- The report stated that the current schools extranet needed to be replaced as it was insecure. However, no resource had yet been identified to carry out this work. The Director of Resources commented that this would be considered as part of the business planning cycle.
- Some concern was expressed that the notes issued to Members about how to access the intranet were not easy to follow. It was proposed Members be reminded of the opportunity to take up individual ICT training, highlighting that this could include training on accessing and using the intranet.

- It was noted that an audit of all the school websites hosted by the Council was underway. Members requested that the outcome of the audit and priorities identified for action be circulated to the Committee.
- Asked about progress in rationalising the number of ICT systems and licences the Joint Director of ICT confirmed that progress continued to be made. It was requested that an update on this aspect should be included in the next progress report to the Committee.
- In relation to recommendation (t) of the review and the roles and responsibilities of staff within different directorates for ICT, in particular the Children's and Young Peoples Directorate, the Joint Director of ICT reported that whilst there might not be formal line management links in place, relationships between ICT and directorates had been strengthened. ICT was now aware of and supported most of the ICT work carried out within the Council.
- Asked about recruitment and retention the Joint Director of ICT said that market conditions had changed making it easier to recruit, although this might change again in the event of a national economic recovery. The development of an integrated Council and Primary Care Trust team was proving helpful, providing the ability to share specialist skills. Members requested that Human Resources be requested to confirm when the policy on study support including provisions on the reimbursement of training costs to the Council would be produced
- The Deputy Chief Executive reported that an external report prepared as part of the shared services project had considered that the ICT service was good, with a good business strategy.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) a further progress report be made in 6 months time, focusing on those recommendations set out in the covering report and including reporting on the development of technical and governance links between health and social care, and progress on the reduction in the number of ICT systems and licences held by the Council, together with an update on any major issues that had arisen;**
 - (b) early notification be sent to staff and Councillors about the implementation of arrangements providing for only Council approved and supplied memory sticks to be used on Council equipment, before the programme was rolled out;**
 - (c) the need for content on the internet and intranet to be kept up to date and for out of date material to be removed be reinforced to all staff;**
 - (d) Members be reminded of the opportunity to take up individual ICT training, highlighting that this could include training on accessing and using the intranet;**
 - (e) Human Resources be requested to confirm when the policy on study support including provisions on the reimbursement of training costs to the Council would be produced;**

- (f) that the outcome of the audit of school websites hosted by the Council and priorities identified for action be circulated to the Committee; and
- (g) Members of the Committee be informed of the outcome of the meeting with BT in October 2009 to explore wider provision of networks across the County.

The meeting ended at 10.50 am

CHAIRMAN