

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ICT SERVICES

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

22ND MARCH, 2007

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To respond to the recommendations of the scrutiny review commissioned by the Strategic Monitoring Committee and conducted by a group of Members under the chairmanship of Councillor Ashton.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT

- (a) the response as detailed below be agreed and referred to the Strategic Monitoring Committee; and
- (b) an action plan be developed setting out how and within what timescale the recommendations will be addressed.

Reasons

The Strategic Monitoring Committee agreed to include a review of ICT Services in its forward work programme. Scoping statements including the membership of the review team was reported to the committee in October 2005 and the review commenced in April 2006. The review was undertaken between April and November 2006, and this allowed further time was taken to consider a further piece of work on schools involvement with ICT Services.

The Strategic Monitoring Committee considered the review group's findings and recommendations at its meeting on 22nd December.

Considerations

1. The recommendations arising from the ICT review need to be set in the complex environment in which the Council is now operating. Its recommendations need to be considered along with
 - (a) The Medium Term Financial Strategy and the priorities for the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan 2007-2010 and the Operating Plan for 2007-2008

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Jane Jones, Director of Corporate and Customer Services (01432) 260037

- (b) The overall strategy for the Herefordshire Connects programme. The procurement phase of the selection process for a strategic partner is nearing completion and this will set out the Council's direction over the next three to five years.
 - (c) Publication of a draft ICT Strategy. This is essential to underpin the development of the Herefordshire Connects programme where technology will act as an enabler to the main business transformation programme. There are also many common themes within the recommendations: standardisation, firm financial base, treatment of assets.
 - (d) The work of the strategic review group on accommodation and its complementary assessment of the potential for flexible working in the authority.
 - (e) The way in which these proposals can be implemented along side the development of the Public Service Trust.
2. The executive wishes to thank the review group for its constructive and thorough analysis of the current position in relation to ICT, the challenges which need to be tackled, and identification of benefits which can fall out if they are met. This paper therefore seeks to set out a preliminary response, to highlight work already in progress and to undertake to provide a further report to the committee within a six month period once the landscape issues referred to above become clearer.

Each of the recommendations is taken in turn and the response set below.

- (a) **Responsibility for the line management for all the authority's ICT staff should be placed within the ICT Services Division and implemented with immediate effect.**

This position has already been agreed in principle by the Corporate Management Board. Although the recommendation makes specific reference to staffing in one directorate there is a need to separate out what is effectively service considerations and technical support and make adjustments to line management arrangements accordingly. In Children's and Young Peoples Services this implies a separation of curriculum and technical support. For each area of the Council where staff are involved in some technical activity this clarification needs to be sought and will form part of overall realignment through the Herefordshire Connects programme.

- (b) **Consideration is given to the control for ICT expenditure being placed within the ICT Services Division subject to overall responsibility being held by the Director of Resources.**
- (c) **A review of the financing of ICT Services is undertaken examining the way directorates account for ICT spend subject to recommendation (b) above, base budget for ICT Services, as well as the corporate funding of ICT programmes.**

Overall responsibility for management of the budget arrangements for the Council rests with the Director of Resources in her role as section 151 officer. Within that framework the Director of Corporate and Customer Services has overall responsibility for the budget contained within the directorate and under financial standing orders needs to manage those as a whole. The commitment to the Herefordshire Connects programme has already placed an embargo on any further ICT development and procurement activity (with the exception of desktops). There is

an exceptions process which has been overseen to date by the Herefordshire Connects Board and will shortly shift to the Information Policy Group. In future therefore the expenditure on ICT platforms and software will be subject to the same rigours as at present and signed off a business case approach demonstrating clear benefits on how these will be realised. More specifically in relation to the ICT budgets – corporate ICT projects and the trading account, the Director of Corporate and Customer Services has agreed with the Director of Resources that a fresh look needs to be taken at how these are set out, managed and accounted for.

The ICT projects budget needs to be focussed on support to the implementation of the Herefordshire Connects programme. To date much of it has been used to supplement external funding for web services, to implement necessary email upgrades and to develop a corporate approach to GIS and to put in place server replacement capacity. A more fundamental review is required in respect of the trading account and there is an emerging view about insufficient investment in this area and the need for that to be reflected in any revision of the medium term financial strategy. That work has started.

- (d) **A council-wide policy should be developed and implemented that provides for greater standardisation of desktops and server infrastructure and that ICT Services should have the responsibility for the management and control of this policy ensuring that it provides equipment and software to meet the requirements of the post rather than the wishes of the individual. Further, that this policy provides all ICT assets are corporate and not the possessions of individual services or staff. In effect this means that ICT assets will not be relocated with individuals but rather that individuals will be relocated to existing assets.**

The authority needs to consider provision such as the community network and other infrastructure as a corporate asset and deal with it accordingly.

The call for greater standardisation for both servers and desktops is welcomed. Complexity of the server infrastructure and desktop configurations in the Council has long been a source of frustration and support take up disproportionate account of capacity. The ICT Strategy also sets out the need to standardise. Work is already well advanced on server consolidation as referred to above. In terms of desktops, BT is currently conducting an eleven week analysis of the requirements of specific job roles. This will not prescribe the technology to be used but will set out a range of options. Clearly the move to standardisation also involves consideration of the way in which ICT is financed in the future because for a transitional period at least there will be a 'gap', which needs to be managed and ultimately a rolling programme of replacement every three to four years. Again this will need to be picked up in conjunction with the funding review.

- (e) **The existing ICT procurement policies and procedures, including taking positive action to address non-compliance, are enforced. Further that the appointment of the Strategic Procurement & Efficiency Review manager will progress the need to develop the council-wide procurement policy.**

The principle on non-compliance will require any proposals to purchase outside of agreed guidelines to be thrown back and to be the subject of action within the directorates. Since being appointed the Strategic Procurement and Efficiency Review Manager has already set about reviewing the council's procurement policies including that for ICT.

- (f) **Consideration is given to dedicated public relations support to the Head of ICT and the means by which this might be delivered.**

The Council has a corporate communications team, which increasingly offers support for specific directorates on the basis of an agreed communication strategy. This has already been implemented successfully within the Children and Young Peoples Directorate and a similar package is being deployed to ICT Services. There is also work to be done internally in improving communication from ICT to other customers, for example, schools, members and there are a number of mechanisms already in hand, for example ICT liaison meetings with schools and the review of ICT support to members which can assist this development.

- (g) **As part of the corporate review of SLAs the ICT Service ensures that the ICT SLAs are clearly worded, and describe clearly the range of services to be provided, charges and any relevant financial arrangements and are communicated to all relevant officers and issued no later than the start of each financial year moving forward.**

CMB has commissioned a working group of SMT members to conduct a review of all SLA's within the authority. The interim report is expected in May and comprises representatives of not just the providers of support services through SLA's, but also the services which receive them.

- (h) **The responsibility for providing ICT training and its procurement be centralised under the management of the ICT service. As part thereof, the identification of ICT training needs should be formalised as part of induction and recorded.**

Identification of ICT training needs will be derived from a number of sources. In part there is the expectation of the authority on officers to use the equipment they are provided with effectively to set out clearly levels might be achieved. It is recommended that the induction programme for all new staff includes a compulsory module on ICT, as it does for Diversity. It will also be a requirement to set out specific training programmes to accompany the introduction of new hardware and software systems. This again will form a significant element in the implementation of Herefordshire Connects. It will also be necessary to review the training needs that arise as a result as SRD interviews and capture these across the Council so that appropriate remedial actions can be taken. ICT Services needs to work with the HR training and development function to identify and then provide a suitable response to the requirements.

- (i) **The options for offering a variety of income generating services to local partners not covered under existing SLAs are explored.**

The executive supports the view that in the future there may well be opportunities for income generation but this stage recommends attention be focussed on getting the 'ship in order' first.

- (j) **Improvement to the implementation of project management throughout the authority continues and the interface between Corporate Programmes and project delivery within Directorates is strengthened.**

Since the ICT Review commenced the Council has implemented a set of governance arrangements for its transformation programme. This includes project boards to oversee key developments in accommodation, adult services, children and young people services, customer services, workforce strategy and Herefordshire Connects. All of these are allocated project managers and are being quality assured to make sure they meet principles of Prince2 project management. In addition CMB has

endorsed the necessity for other projects to ensure adequate project management arrangements and this will form part of the project approval process. There is an issue of how this resource is financed in the future and consideration should be given to it being clearly identified as a cost in the project approval process.

- (k) **That the feedback from schools be analysed and an improvement plan prepared to address the many concerns identified, with a view to ICT Services becoming the preferred provider of services to schools funded and maintained by the Local Authority.**

The Council has now implemented a series of ICT liaison meetings between representatives of the high schools and primary schools, Corporate and Customer Services (ICT Services) and the Children and Young Peoples Directorate. An independent satisfaction survey was commissioned through HEDRA and feedback provided to the high schools in early December. Feedback has recently been given to the primary schools. ICT Services had already implemented some of the recommendations including, for example, regular report back on incident reporting and set out a clear timetable for discussion of 07/08 SLA's with schools.

The other main focus of this activity to date has been on piloting a remote access solution required by the DFES by 2008, in a high school and a primary school. That is due to report back on the 20th March. There has been continued involvement from both pilot schools in that activity. In addition, the remainder of schools have been kept up to date directly with progress on the project.

The recommendations contained in chapter seven of the ICT review report has been shared with schools and a request made to work with the authority in building the improvement plan. This was agreed at the last meeting. Nonetheless it is important to recognise that the relationship with schools will never be a straight forward and easy one to pursue and that the Council will need to work hard to ensure that any communications to schools is effectively disseminated to all.

- (l) **A single website for all council services is developed ensuring consistent branding and access to services for all. Further that the website should consider the potential for a single, obvious directory of contacts for all council services.**

This principle is already accepted and some websites have migrated. The executive accepts that this process needs to be speeded up and will request a timetable for completion of the exercise.

- (m) **The options for “growing own talent” through training and the use of a form of “golden handcuffs”, possibly by means of recouping the cost of training should the individual leave the authority within a given period, be explored by Human Resources.**

The review team was right to highlight the difficulty in recruiting to some posts in this area and the challenges faced in keeping staff once they have undertaken training and possess highly marketable and sometimes scarce skills. This is not unique to Herefordshire. Work is already underway between HR and ICT Services on developing a recruitment and retention strategy for ICT Services. This was highlighted in the workforce strategy priorities for 07/08.

Risk Management

The ICT Review conducted by the Strategic Monitoring Committee highlighted a number of

key issues which the Council needs to address if the service is to be developed in line with the Council's business needs.

Alternative Options

None

Consultees

Corporate Management Board
Schools ICT Liaison Group

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None identified.