

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 14TH MARCH, 2016

REFERENCE FROM DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE:
10TH FEBRUARY, 2016

“839 ICT UPDATE FOR MEMBERS (MD) -

Issues with staff recruitment and retention continued to affect the service. Already in 2016, two staff had left to join the Welsh Assembly, one to the private sector and one more would be retiring at the end of March. This represented a 10% turnover in the first quarter of this year.

A number of meetings had taken place with the other Councils in the South Central Consortium, (RCT, Merthyr, Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale) to investigate the opportunities to create a shared ICT service across some or all of the five Councils. If this went ahead, it would help to alleviate some of the staffing problems being experienced across the public sector and should generate considerable savings for the Reshaping Services programme. However, it had become apparent that ICT support for Members was handled differently across the Councils.

A Member commented that one of the issues faced by the Joint Regulatory Service was around IT support and he stated that a joint ICT service would have helped alleviate these. He therefore expressed the view that plans for a joint IT service should be progressed. The Member went on to query whether the Council had a trainee programme in place, to which the Head of Strategic ICT responded that yes, a programme was in place and that at present IT had four trainees. The Council also used Foundation Modern Apprentices. An advantage of using trainees and Foundation Modern Apprentices was that the Council could train and up-skill these individuals to suit the needs of the Council, but it was highlighted that retention was an issue.

The report advised that it was hoped to release a tender to replace the hardware that supported the Oracle E-Business suite which provided most of the core systems used by the Council, such as finance, HR, Payroll and the contact centre. The hardware was eight years old and had been excellent over that period but did now need replacing. Consideration was also being given to having the system hosted in the Cloud by Oracle, but full costs would need to be confirmed before taking a decision.

The Council was investigating the use of Cloud technology for office productivity tools such as word processing, spreadsheets and presentations.

Microsoft Office was the current supplier provided onsite by the Council's own servers, but increasingly the Council was looking to host these systems on other hardware in the Cloud. The Council was currently investigating both Microsoft Office 365 and Google for Work, both of which could be accessed from anywhere as long as internet access was available. This would make it easier for staff and Councillors to access e-mails and documents whilst out of the office or at home.

Reference was made at the last meeting regarding the use of tablets for Members and the cost of doing so and the potential for adverse publicity for spending money on these devices at a time of financial austerity. However it had been confirmed that if the tablets were used by all Members and paper copies were no longer produced, the cost of the tablets would be covered by the savings in printing costs. As a result, a number of devices were being investigated as to their suitability for use by Members, including tablets, chrome books and touchscreen laptops that could be used as a tablet.

Work was ongoing to look at improving the availability of some of the core Council services, such as e-mail and access to the internet and a report was taken to Corporate Management Team earlier this month to outline some proposals. However, all of the proposals had considerable cost implications.

Members were aware that meetings of the Planning Committee had been webcast for approximately twelve months. Prior to the end of the current Municipal Year, a report on the existing arrangements (including details of the number of "viewings") and whether any expansion of the service was considered appropriate / feasible would be submitted to Members.

In discussing webcasting of meetings, the Committee was in agreement that more Council meetings should be broadcast live, but Members were mindful of the level of staff resources required to support this. The Committee agreed that it would consider this issue further, once the update report was provided by the Head of Strategic ICT. The Head of Democratic Services further advised that there would also be a need for an evaluation of the implications of the draft Local Government Bill should certain parts of the draft promises be enacted (e.g. potentially a requirement for all Council meetings to be broadcast). This could represent a 12 fold increase and would require significant additional staff support. He also mentioned the possibility of webcasting "high profile" Scrutiny Committee meetings which had a large public interest.

With regard to Reshaping Services, a Member asked, what consideration had been given to ICT working on a collaborative basis or as a social enterprise. In answer to this, the Head of Strategic ICT stated that the Council had looked at possible closer partnership working with the private sector, but he was mindful that in some instances where other Local Authorities had done this, the decision to outsource services had been reversed and IT functions had been brought back in-house. An important issue around this related to writing

the right legal contract. In terms of social enterprises, the Head of Strategic ICT mentioned the IT arrangements with Bryn Hafren Comprehensive School, and that the aim for the Council was more to do with running a group of service areas together, such as catering and grass cutting, into a possible arms' length Council organisation.

Further to the points regarding the issues of contractual arrangements around outsourcing services, a Member commented that this was not just about tendering for a contract, but also about implementing the contract in full and he alluded to the issues around a shortfall in service which could be difficult to resolve and the high costs associated with ending contracts. He also stated that there needed to be a very clear business case for entering into such arrangements.

In discussing the use of tablets and the reduction in printing costs, the Committee heard that the Council did have a printing strategy in place. This had led to the removal of costly inkjet printers, which had been replaced with new copiers. The new system therefore allowed the Council to have more control, by which regular printing reports were now sent to managers to inform them of printing within their departments. The Committee also noted that that Head of Strategic ICT had been asked by the Corporate Management Team to develop a digital strategy for the Council. This had been requested because, although the Council did a lot of things electronically, a lot more could be done, such looking at the Council printing out cheques for payments. Furthermore, he also stated that the Council could be more active in seeking people's preferences around correspondence, with many people happy to receive information via e-mail instead of receiving information through the post. Greater use of digital technology also had another advantage of speeding up processes through messages being sent / received more quickly.

With regard to the use of tablet computers, a Committee Member stated that the use of these needed to be fully justifiable on the basis of cost, but he felt that their use should be pushed ahead. He also queried whether there was any statutory obligation to provide Members with hard copies of agendas. In reply, the Head of Democratic Services stated that the wording of the relevant legislation had not really kept pace with changes in technology, and still referred to "being sent by post". Legislation stipulated that the agenda had to be made available to Members. However, for many years, most Members had been happy to receive electronic links to papers of, for instance, Committees of which they were not actually a Member and, indeed, in some cases where they were a Member of the Committee. Further to this query, the Head of Strategic ICT alluded to the example within the Shared Adoption Service in which lay members of the Adoption Panels had been provided with tablets during the course of meetings. This meant that agenda papers, which could be rather lengthy, did not need to be posted.

Overall, in considering the use of tablets, the Committee was keen for the Council to explore the use of these and possibly for a trial with Members to be undertaken.

With reference to the Cloud, a Member enquired about the number of data breaches and attempts to hack into the Council's IT system. In response, the Head of Strategic ICT advised that in terms of data breaches, the Council had not incurred any fines, although the loss of data was always a potential risk. He also stated that the Council would regularly ask specialists to try and breach the Council's IT security systems, this would show which areas need to be improved. He also advised that following a Public Services Network inspection back in August 2015, the Council's system had passed with flying colours.

The Head of Strategic ICT further added that for the Cloud, a key security element was the location of the data portal. It was a legal requirement for the data portal to be in the UK or European Union, but he stated that some could be anywhere in the world and so it would be difficult to know who had access. To meet the Public Services Networks Requirements, Microsoft had been cleared by the GCHQ up to Level 3 for personal and sensitive data, so this provided an element of reassurance. Finally, he also alluded to the thousands of spam e-mails sent to the Council each year which contained the potential risk of malware and viruses and he stated that hackers only needed to be successful once and that this was a day to day battle.

With regard to a previous point raised around the IT contract with Bryn Hafren School, the Chairman commented that this was good and he asked if other schools were being considered. In reply, the Committee heard that a new role had been developed within the ICT service to look at IT support to primary schools. If Bryn Hafren School Governors endorsed the approach and support provided by the ICT service, then this would be used as a case study that could be showcased to other schools in the Vale.

The Chairman also made mention of the need for the Council to better advertise its meetings and he also commented about the use of social media such as Twitter. In reply to this, the Head of Democratic Services agreed that there was merit in engaging with a wider.

Further to this, the Head of Strategic ICT added that the Council had a number of Facebook pages and would regularly use Twitter feeds. He advised that following a visit to Monmouthshire Council it had been identified that this organisation would actively encourage all staff to use Twitter and this was something the Vale Council could do more of as a way of updating members of the public on a regular basis. Furthermore, he mentioned the 'Get the Vale Online' initiative and he indicated that the use of Twitter was climbing, with thousands of followers and this was an important means of communication, for example during occasions when schools were closed.

A Committee Member enquired about progress in relation to the Welsh Community Care Information system. In response, the Head of Strategic ICT explained that this new integrated system was a national programme that would allow Health Boards and Local Authorities to share health and social care information across one single IT system. The new system had been developed by an Irish company called Care Works and this was being trialled in Bridgend, which would be up and running by the end of March 2016. All other Local Authorities in Wales would switch to the new system over the next two years with the Vale going live at the same time as Cardiff. In describing some of the current technical issues, he highlighted that Care Works had found it difficult to recruit extra staff in order to increase the company's capacity. Also, there were issues around the transferring of data into the new system, but he reiterated his previous point which was that Bridgend was on track to go live by the end of March and that progress was being made.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Council should explore the possibility of more meetings being webcast and this should be referred to Cabinet for the purpose of consideration.
- (3) T H A T the Council should pursue the wider use by Elected Members of tablet computers, specifically in terms of Committee papers and for this to be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Reason for decision

- (1) To ensure Members are made aware of any developments to their ICT service and the wider Council.
- (2) To allow Cabinet to consider the number of meetings that could be webcast live over the internet.
- (3) In order to consider Members using Tablet computers as a way of reducing printing costs for the Council.”

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Democratic Services Committee: 10th February, 2016](#)