

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
9 March 2005

ICT FOR MEMBERS

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF
RESOURCES**

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to set out a strategy for the use of ICT by members following the County Council elections in May 2005.

Background

2. The County Council has a policy of developing the use of ICT for members and following the County Council election in May 2001 has offered facilities such as E-Mail and access to the Corporate Information Service via a facility called CITRIX.
3. The means of accessing CITRIX has been via the use of a member's own personal computer (PC), a PC provided by a district/borough council or a PC provided by the County Council. A total of 42 members have been provided with the facility to access CITRIX.
4. In addition to providing access to CITRIX, the Constitution Committee in September 2001, agreed to provide PCs to members who had no such facility and at present 21 members have received PCs from the County Council.

ICT Facilities following the County Council Election 2005

5. In recent months officers have been developing an ICT strategy for Members to be implemented after the County Council elections in May 2005 based on the following:

Hardware Provision

6. The County Council currently provides 21 members with a PC which has the Authority's standard software loaded on it and a printer. The PCs and printers are supported, maintained and upgraded as required by the County Council.
7. Those members who have not been provided with County Council hardware have been using their own equipment which they have purchased and maintained themselves.
8. In some circumstances those members who serve on a district/borough council have been provided with all the necessary hardware from that

authority to access their authority's systems. Also that equipment has been used by these members to access the County Council's CITRIX system.

9. It is proposed that the County Council should provide a PC to any member who requests one. However, there will be certain conditions which will apply to the use of the PC which include the following:-
 - ◆ its use is primarily in connection with the member's responsibilities as a County Councillor;
 - ◆ that access to Internet, wherever possible, will be via CITRIX and the County Council's Internet Gateway;
 - ◆ members must follow the County Council policies regarding acceptable use of computer facilities.
10. The current cost of a standard County Council specification PC including software and printer is £1100. If a member prefers to purchase his/her own PC it is not possible for the County Council to contribute to the costs.
11. Those members who have been provided with a County Council PC also receive regular anti-virus protection updates and it is, therefore, intended that this practice will continue for all members who have a County Council PC.
12. Those members provided with a County Council printer will be supplied with printer cartridges, by the County Council. However, those members who decide to purchase their own equipment will be responsible for the provision of their own cartridges.

Use of District/Borough Council Hardware

13. The County Council would still wish to continue the arrangement with district/borough councils for the sharing of the hardware for those members who serve on both authorities.
14. At present the host authority picks up all the systems costs. When that system is used by County Councillors to access the County Council's system via CITRIX it seems appropriate to recognise this by the County Council contributing towards those costs. The details have still to be discussed with the district councils concerned.
15. The County Council will reciprocate the above arrangements, e.g. if a County Councillor is elected to a district or borough council then provided there are no technical issues they will be able to use County Council's equipment to access the district/borough's facilities such as e-mail.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) Connection

16. For those members who have been provided with a County Council PC, the County Council has also subscribed to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to allow connection to the internet which enables a member to access CITRIX.

17. The ISP which the County Council has subscribed to is a dial-up connection which uses the normal telephone line. This means that when the member connects to the internet, telephone calls cannot be made or received.
18. The County Council has recently developed a strategy for promoting the use of Broadband within Leicestershire for residents and businesses. The benefits of Broadband are that it provides faster access to the internet and the telephone line remains free to make or receive voice calls or faxes whilst the PC is connected to the internet.
19. It is proposed that the Broadband facility should be provided to all members, including those with their own PCs. To achieve economy of scale the same supplier will be used. The estimated cost of this will be £16,500 per annum.
20. The Authority is only able to install and support its Broadband service where a member has a County Council PC. In other cases, even though the Broadband element is being funded by the County Council, members will need to take responsibility for installation themselves.
21. If a Member does not wish to subscribe to the County Council's preferred supplier they can use their own provider but the member will not receive a payment towards these costs.

E-Mail

22. Since September 2001 all members of the County Council have been provided with an "@leics.gov.uk" e-mail address which is published on the County Council's website and in various County Council publications such as Leicestershire Matters.
23. At present there are a number of options for members to receive their e-mails via their County Council address as follows:
 - (a) All messages are forwarded automatically to a member's existing internet e-mail address.
 - (b) The member takes full responsibility for managing their own e-mail account. This is achieved by accessing the County Council's e-mail system from home via CITRIX.
 - (c) Member e-mail account is managed by staff in the members' Secretariat and a hard copy is sent out via post.
24. Option (a) above has given officers some concern because messages forwarded to private accounts are not encrypted and could contain sensitive/confidential information. This means the messages are vulnerable as the possibility exists that they could be intercepted and read by a third party.
25. To resolve this issue of security the County Council is proposing that, in future, there will be no redirection of County Council e-mails. However, for those members who have private e-mail accounts; it will be possible to forward an alert to their private e-mail accounts informing them that there is an e-mail in their County Council account. Once members have received

and read the alert they will then have to access their County Council e-mail via CITRIX to read the content of the e-mail and associated attachments.

26. Where members decide to use the alert service they should note that a message will be sent automatically to the sender which will indicate the member's private e-mail address.
27. In addition, when the automatic e-mail is generated it is possible to include a short message indicating that the County Council has received the message. It is, therefore, proposed to set up a standard message for all members who wish to use the alert service.
28. In the future options available will be as follows:-
 - (a) Members receive an e-mail alert to their private address informing them that an e-mail has been received in the County Council e-mail address.
 - (b) The member takes full responsibility for managing their own e-mail account. This is achieved by accessing the County Council's e-mail system from home via CITRIX.
 - (c) Member e-mail account is managed by staff in the Members' Secretariat and a hard copy is sent out via post.

ICT Support for Members

29. ICT support for members is a very sensitive issue and, indeed, has caused problems for officers over the years.
30. The County Council's policy is to support only those members who have been provided with County Council equipment. For those members who have their own equipment it is the responsibility of the members to have appropriate support arrangements. The County Council is not able to provide support to the wide range of hardware and software configurations which are now available.
31. Among those members who receive support, there have been instances where this support has become very time consuming. It has sometimes been necessary to visit the member at their home to rectify the problem.
32. On some occasions members with their own equipment have asked for support and wherever possible officers have tried to assist to resolve the problem but as the PC configuration is not in line with County Council standards this can often be very time-consuming.
33. Where members are entitled to and request support, every effort will be made to respond quickly. However, it will be easier to provide assistance during normal office hours (8.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday) rather than at other times. It is recognised that this may cause difficulties for those members who are not available during the working day who may experience some delay.

34. The office hours limitation also applies to the monitoring of servers at County Hall and it is important to note that the Authority is, therefore, unable to guarantee 24 hour, seven days per week cover.

Provision of Information

35. On the basis of funding Broadband access for members, it would be reasonable to require members to accept that increasingly this will be the mechanism through which they receive information from the County Council and various practices and processes adopted by the Council and members alike will need to be amended to take this into account. Where members do not wish to embrace new technology their information needs will continue to be met using more traditional methods.

ICT Training

36. Since the roll out of ICT for members on 2001, it is apparent that members have varying degrees of knowledge/skills in using the various applications. In some instances members are proficient/experts whereas in other cases members are being provided with a PC for the very first time.
37. It is important that the training needs of members are addressed and if they receive appropriate training, the members may be able to make full use of such products as e-mail and Word.
38. In recent months the County Council has established a Member Training and Development Working Party, which is chaired by Mr. R. Miller, CC, to establish a strategy for the training needs/requirements of Members following the County Council elections. The Group is currently taking ICT training into account in its deliberations.

Financial Implications

39. The cost of providing hardware and Broadband as outlined in the report are as follows:
- (a) Cost of a Council PC and printer is £1100 per member.
 - (b) Cost of Broadband per member is £300 per annum.
40. Within the existing Members' Expenses budget there is currently a provision to cover the renewal of the existing equipment, every four years, in the members' accommodation at County Hall and for those members who are currently supplied with equipment by the County Council
41. The County Council is not in a position to estimate the possible take up of the proposal but a realistic estimate if all members take up the facilities the costs will be as follows: (assuming re-use of existing equipment)

Cost of County Council PC and Printer	£25,500
Cost of Broadband	£16,500

The cost of Broadband is an annual cost whereas the PCs purchased in

2005 will not be due for replacement until 2009 – after the next election.

To ensure that the County Council is able to implement the proposed recommendations in the report a growth bid has been included within the 2005/06 revenue budget.

Recommendations

42. (a) That the arrangements set out in this report be supported.
- (b) That it be agreed that access to the County Council's systems be via the CITRIX system.
- (c) That it be agreed that the County Council will provide a PC, printer and Broadband access to all members who wish to take up these facilities.
- (d) That it be agreed that the County Council will fund Broadband access from its chosen Internet Service Provider (ISP) to all members who wish to access CITRIX using their own equipment.
- (e) That it be agreed that in future access to the County Council e-mail system will be as follows:-
- (i) Members receive an e-mail alert to their private address informing them that an e-mail has been received in the County Council e-mail address.
- (ii) The member takes full responsibility for managing their own e-mail account. This is achieved by accessing the County Council's e-mail system from home via CITRIX;
- or
- (iii) The members e-mail account is managed by staff in the Members' Secretariat and a hard copy is sent out via the post.
- (f) That it be agreed that the County Council will only provide support where the PC, printer and Broadband access have been paid for and supplied by the County Council.

Circulation Under Sensitive Issues Procedure

None

Background Papers

Report of the Constitution Committee 26th September 2001

Officers to Contact

David Pitt ☎ 0116 265 6034
Graeme Wardle ☎ 0116 265 6002
Andy Roberts ☎ 0116 265 7800