

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER, 2001**ICT FOR ELECTED MEMBERS****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the response to a recent survey of members and to consider proposals to encourage and develop the use of ICT by elected members.

Background

2. The County Council has a policy of developing ICT support for elected members and for some time has been piloting arrangements through a small group of members.
3. The development of the County Council's infrastructure, particularly in terms of the Corporate Information Service and County Council Website, has now reached the stage where it would be appropriate to enable all members of the County Council to be able to access information held within the County Council from home at times suitable to them via a computer.
4. Accordingly, all members were asked to fill in a questionnaire which was designed to identify those members who already had access to a computer. The results of the questionnaire have enabled proposals to be developed aimed at allowing all members the opportunity to undertake their work with the support of a computer and to be contacted via e-mail.

Survey Results

5. The survey findings were as follows: -

- (a) Hardware

Members were asked to indicate whether they had access to a PC; either their own PC or one provided to them by the County Council/District Council. The results of the questionnaire indicated that 39 members already had access to a computer. Of these, two stated that they did not require access to the County Council's system.

Following further investigations it is believed that three of the members' PCs would not be of a suitable specification to provide them with access to County Hall.

Members were also asked to indicate whether, if the County Council were able to offer a PC, they would be interested in receiving one. A total of 21 replied they would. However of these, 10 already had their own PC which could be used to access County Hall. Two members share a PC (their own) and indicated that it would be helpful to have a further PC provided to them.

To meet the objective of enabling all members to have the opportunity of using a computer the County Council would be in the position of having to provide a computer to at least 13 members. The estimated costs of providing a (laptop) computer and printer are £2200 per member.

(b) Electronic Mail

As part of the proposal, all members have been provided with an @leics.gov.uk e-mail address with effect from 3rd September 2001.

Members were offered three options with regard to managing their e-mail accounts, namely: -

- 1) All messages forwarded automatically to a member's existing Internet e-mail address (24 members requested this).
- 2) The member takes full responsibility for managing their own e-mail account. This would be achieved by accessing the County Council's e-mail system from home (10 members have requested this).
- 3) Member e-mail accounts would be managed by staff in the Members' Secretariat. (13 members have requested this).

For those members who have chosen option 2 and who will not have access to County Hall immediately (see comments on access below in paragraphs 6 - 8), seven of the members already have their own internet address and their messages are forwarded to their private address. The three remaining members will have their e-mail handled by staff in the Members' Secretariat on an interim basis. As and when they are provided with access, these members can move on to managing their own County Council address.

Access to County Council Systems

6. The Information Systems Unit has been working on the security of the Authority's network so that access to the system is available from any PC. Access for members to the County Council is to be provided via the "Citrix Project" using a standard web browser such as Internet Explorer with the Authority's system simply appearing as another website.
7. Initially, it is proposed that access will be provided to the Corporate Information Service (CIS) along with the facility to access electronic mail, with other applications being made available on a phased basis according to demand. When a member requests access to the Authority's system, the hardware at County Hall will verify the identity of the user by means of name and password along with a unique number generated from a small key fob device.
8. Work has already commenced in "rolling out" access to members on a phased basis – each phase involving five members. It is estimated that (subject to any decision on the provision of computers to those without a P.C. at present) all members who require it will be able to access the County Council's facilities by the end of the year.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) and Telephone Charges

9. To access the County Council's system, members with their own PC, or one provided by the County Council or another local authority, will have to subscribe to an Internet Service Provider e.g. BT Talk Together or America On-Line (AOL) which may involve a monthly fee. Alternatively there are non subscription ISPs but many of these recoup their costs by levying a charge for every minute whilst the user is online and accessing the Internet
10. It is believed that these costs should be met by the member concerned from their basic allowance as for example in the case of fax and other telephone charges.
11. There may be a need for some members to have a second telephone line installed at their home and it is the County Council's practice to pay for the installation of such a line where it is being provided primarily in connection with Council duties. However, it is the member's responsibility to meet the ongoing costs, i.e. line rental and call charges, from their basic allowance.

Members' Information Page on the County Council Web Site

12. In conjunction with providing e-mail addresses each member has been provided with an area on the County Council's web site where information can be placed regarding their particulars and other information which may be useful to electors, for example, when they plan to hold surgeries and information/issues affecting their electoral division. A letter was sent to all members on the 17th August 2001 asking them to supply information for their page. A total of 21 members have responded.
13. An information sheet will be sent to all members once a month asking them to update their information. This will be co-ordinated and edited by staff in the Chief Executive's Department.
14. The "Members' Information Page" became operational from 3rd September 2001.
15. The information placed on these pages is subject to the constraints laid down in the Local Government Act 1986 concerning publicity for political purposes and the National Code of Practice on local government publicity.

ICT Training for Members

16. The ICT training needs of members will have to be addressed alongside the provision of PC's etc. However, the needs of members will differ from member to member as some will be familiar with using a PC whilst other members may never have used one at all.
17. The type of training offered will need to cover the following:
 - How to turn the PC on and use a mouse
 - Basic Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint courses
 - How to use e-mail

- How to access and search the Internet
18. The courses such as Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint will have to be provided by a specialist trainer and these cost £100 per day per person. Other courses such as E-mail and the Internet could be offered by staff within the County Council.
 19. As part of the Members Expenses budget there is a specific provision for training from which any expenditure on ICT training will be met.

Other Associated Issues

Maintenance

20. The County Council has a policy of placing all the hardware on a third party maintenance contract once the PC and printer warranty has expired. For those members who are provided with a County Council machine, the equipment will be placed on maintenance once the warranties expire. The cost per member will be £94.00 per annum.

Anti-Virus

21. For those members who are provided with a computer by the County Council appropriate anti-virus software will be supplied, including quarterly updates. The mechanism for the provision of updates will be for the member to be requested to bring their PC to County Hall when convenient, for example, when attending a meeting. The software will then be loaded during their visit, so that continuity of service is maintained.
22. As part of the quarterly update a backup of the hard disk would also be taken but it should be noted that members will need to do this themselves on a regular basis, possibly once a week.
23. If for any reason the member did not return the PC for the required upgrade within a specified time (e.g. one month), access to County Hall may have to be suspended so as not to jeopardise the County Council's systems.
24. It would also be prudent to ensure that anti virus software is also loaded on those machines which have not been provided by the County Council. It is therefore proposed that quarterly updates be provided via e-mail to all members who have their own hardware. This would ensure the integrity and security of the County Council's systems as well as the particular PC.
25. The cost of providing Anti Virus software for all members would be £500 per annum.

Printers

26. Those members who have had a printer provided for them will need to be issued with printer cartridge replacements at £55 per cartridge and paper. It would be sensible to assume that members may require two printer cartridges per year. Budgetary provision will need to be made to cover the annual additional costs involved.

Support

27. The adequacy of officer support for members will need to be reviewed in the light of additional demands arising from ICT for members. A peak is bound to occur at the start of the process. However, there may be a need for additional staff resources to meet any ongoing need for support.

Financial Implications

28. The cost of providing computers to members has been calculated on the basis of two options as follows: -

Option 1

Those 13 members who have no facilities or their PC is not of sufficient specification.

Option 2

All 20 members who have expressed a wish to be provided with a PC by the County Council.

Set Up Costs 2001/02

	OPTION 1	OPTION 2
Equipment purchase	£28,600	£42,400
Peripherals	£1,000	£1,500
MS Office Licences (on host server)*	£6,560	£5,125
E-Mail licence (All Members)	£2,700	£2,700
Anti Virus (All Members)	£500	£500
Citrix Licences (All Members)	£2,967	£2,967
Secure ID Key Fob (All Members)	£2,700	£2,700
TOTAL	£45,027	£57,892

* Costs reduce because new PCs will include this software

Annual Costs

	For Members who already have County Council PC	OPTION 1	OPTION 2
Maintenance	£752	£1,222	£1,880
Peripherals	£1,050	£1,950	£3,000
Anti Virus (All Members)		£500	£500
TOTAL	£1,802	£3,672	£5,380

29. The County Council endeavours to replace its hardware on a cycle of every four years and provision will need to be made within the budget to replace equipment provided to members at the appropriate time. The first planned replacement will be in 2003/04 when there will be a need to replace the PCs provided in 1999 (currently 7). The estimated replacement cost will be £10,500 at present day prices.
30. For those members who receive equipment in the next few months the planned replacement will be in 2005/6 – i.e. just after the next County Council elections.

31. There is currently no provision within the Members Expenses budget to provide ICT hardware for members or for the ongoing costs involved. Additional resources will, therefore, need to be provided if members wish to continue to develop ICT support for elected members.
32. The County Treasurer has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Decisions Required

33. Members Services falls within the terms of reference of the Constitution Committee and, therefore, any decision to extend the provision of computers to elected members is a matter for that Committee. However, in the absence of budgetary provision any such decision will need to be subject to the Cabinet being prepared to approve a supplementary estimate in accordance with Instruction 5 of the Standard Financial Instructions.

Recommendations

34. (a) That the arrangements set out in this report be supported;
- (b) That subject to (e) below, approval be given to the provision of computers and printers to those 13 members who have no such facility (i.e. Option 1);
- (c) That the Chief Executive be authorised in consultation with the Chairman and Spokesmen of this Committee to provide computers to further members where they are satisfied that a strong case exists to do so, subject to funds being available;
- (d) That approval be given to the provision of Anti Virus software for all Members of the County Council so as to protect the integrity of the County Council's systems at an estimated cost of £500 per annum;
- (e) That the Cabinet be recommended to approve a supplementary estimate of £50,000 to enable this Committee to proceed with the implementation of proposals for the development of ICT for elected members on the basis now agreed.

Circulation under Sensitive Issues Procedure.

None.

Background Papers

None.

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