

CABINET – 2 APRIL 2003

## REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ICT

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Corporate and Finance Review Panel has reviewed the ICT facilities provided to members, and the use by members of those facilities. The Panel appointed Cllrs Brooks and Robinson, assisted by the officers, as lead members for the Review. They submitted their recommendations to the Panel on 20 March 2003.
- 1.2 One of the main objectives of the review was to have an updated strategy for the provision of ICT to members and their use of those facilities in place following the May 2003 elections.

### 2. THE REVIEW

- 2.1 Cllrs Brooks and Robinson had comprehensive discussions with a range of members at two separate Focus Groups. The Groups were divided into those members who used the ICT facilities extensively and were confident in their use, and those who were not quite as advanced. A total of 14 members and appropriate officers attended.
- 2.2 Members participated enthusiastically at the Focus Groups. The Panel was extremely pleased with and grateful for the contributions made by Councillors, and to the officers who provided support.
- 2.3 One of the main objectives of the Focus Groups was to ascertain why some members who have been provided with ICT facilities are not using them regularly, and are therefore not accessing important information sent via e-mail or other information available via mediums such as ForestNet and the World Wide Web. Cllrs Brooks and Robinson were also keen to explore what, if anything, could be done to make regular access and use of the ICT facilities easier for members, both for those members who have been provided with equipment, and those few who have not.
- 2.4 Having considered a comprehensive report from Cllrs Brooks and Robinson, the Panel's recommendations are set out below.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISED STRATEGY

#### 3.1 Use of ICT by Members – Compulsory or Voluntary?

- 3.1.1 Some time was spent both at the Focus Groups and in discussion with the officers on the question of whether all members should be obliged to have the Council's ICT equipment and whether all communications with them should be via electronic means. While a few members supported the principle of District Councillors being required to use ICT, the Panel's conclusion was that, whilst it is a very desirable objective, it would be unreasonable to expect every member to use ICT. However, the Panel felt that there should be an expectation that

members will use ICT and that they be prepared to be trained in its use, but stopping short of making its use compulsory. This is an issue that will, in the Panel's view, resolve itself over the coming years as the population in general becomes more IT literate.

**Recommendation:**

***That there be no compulsion on members to use ICT facilities in communications with the Council, but that, in view of the potential efficiency savings, they be strongly encouraged, expected to but not compelled to, make use of ICT equipment.***

### 3.2 Communication with Members using ICT Equipment

3.2.1 Notwithstanding the recommendation in 3.1 above, the Panel considered that if members are provided with the Council's ICT equipment, they should be adequately trained (see paragraph 3.4 below); that they should use the equipment for the purpose for which it is provided; and that communication with those members should be electronic where the communication is appropriate for electronic transmission. The Panel heard that both member/member and officer/member communication is often by both electronic and paper means in the knowledge that not all members will access the electronic versions within a reasonable period of time. The Panel recommends strongly that such practices cease, and that there be a presumption that members with ICT facilities will use them regularly, in particular to access e-mails.

**Recommendation:**

***That there be a presumption that those members who are provided with the Council's ICT equipment or whose own equipment is linked to the Council's ICT systems will use that equipment regularly for purposes of communication, and that electronic means of communication only be used wherever information is suitable for transmission by this method.***

### 3.3 Technical Issues

3.3.1 Cllrs Brooks and Robinson found that one of the members' main areas of concern/difficulty with the current arrangements, and possibly the reason for lower than desirable use of IT, is the length of time taken to "download" e-mails and to access areas such as ForestNet or sites on the World-Wide Web. The Panel understood that this arose largely from the limitations of the BT lines provided to members, but was sometimes also due to the electronic transmission of documents not best suited to this medium. Examples were given of maps and photographs, or text that has been scanned in certain ways, which take considerable time to download. All members who participated in the Focus Groups supported moves to establish faster links. Use of Broadband or ISDN lines was advocated.

3.3.2 Following further investigation of this matter and on the advice of officers, the Panel recommends moving to the use of Citrix Technology for members' ICT. Citrix uses "Thin Client Technology" which links the client PC (in this case the member's home PC) with central servers that would be installed at the Council's offices. Under

this type of arrangement most of the processing would be carried out at the server end, with the server hosting the systems such as Microsoft Office and Outlook that members need to access. It is hoped that by using Citrix technology the main areas of difficulty will be improved.

3.3.3 The advantages of this sort of arrangement are that:

- (a) the hardware can be of a simpler specification;
- (b) most maintenance can be carried out at the server by technical support staff. This would mean a need to access members' computers only if there was a hardware failure (most support calls are for login/access type issues and application problems, not hardware);
- (c) members could access their e-mail and other applications from any PC which has NFDC Intranet access. This would be of use to members when attending Council offices;
- (d) the performance of the system would be more efficient. There would be significantly improved speed of access to files such as planning documents or Word attachments. Members should therefore find that faster telecoms will not be required; and
- (e) members could save all their work to the central server configuration. This is a great advantage in that regular, more robust backups of work will be undertaken. Members could be issued with "recovery disks" to rebuild laptop setups if any settings become corrupted.

3.3.4 The initial setup costs for the Citrix option are likely to be in the region of £20,000, but these costs are likely to be offset by:

- (a) reduced costs for replacement of laptops/PCs. Because a lower specification PC/laptop will be required, replacements will not be needed as soon as originally envisaged. When replacements are purchased, they will be of lower specification and also cheaper;
- (b) the proposed flexibilities to enable some members to use their own equipment linked to the Council's systems will reduce equipment costs to the Council. Use by these members of their own ISP arrangements to access the Web could reduce time spent on-line;
- (c) reduced support required from ICT; and
- (d) the fact that many members should be able to spend less time connected via the BT lines as processing times should be reduced.

The Panel feels that, while it is important to be as prudent as possible with regard to overall costs, the recommended move to Citrix technology is an important advance from the current position. It should enable improved electronic working arrangements for members and it is considered that any slight increased costs for these improvements will be justified.

- 3.3.5 The Panel noted that Broadband access has been fully investigated by the officers who arrived at the following conclusions:
- (a) Broadband would clearly reduce the time currently spent downloading documents;
  - (b) Broadband technology “tunnels” users across the web. This would have security implications;
  - (c) Broadband optimises speed for downloading files to the PC/laptop. This would speed up the downloading of files, but also means that upload speeds will become slower. This might prove frustrating;
  - (d) current NFDC technology for dialling in does not support Broadband;
  - (e) the roll out of Broadband in the New Forest is still in its infancy. It is unlikely that many members will have access to Broadband in the short to medium term, and in the absence of alternative methods, would have to continue with the current arrangements; and
  - (f) adoption of the Citrix technology would mean that members would be able to open, read and amend files online and the process would therefore be much quicker. If Citrix is introduced, the requirement for Broadband would be significantly diminished.

***Recommendation:***

***That the Council moves to Citrix technology for supporting members’ ICT in the first instance, and that the possible implementation of Broadband as an alternative be kept under review.***

**3.3.6 Laptop or Desktop Computers**

Some members reported difficulty in using laptops because of the small size of the screen and/or keyboard, and expressed a wish to be provided with a conventional desktop computer rather than a laptop. The Panel sees this as a reasonable request. The Citrix system recommended in paragraph 3.3.2 would require only low specification PCs, as processing will be done on the Council’s servers. Existing members’ laptops could however be used with this technology and could be replaced with desktop PCs as and when the need arises.

### 3.3.7 Use of Members' own IT Equipment

Some members wish to be able to use their own IT equipment to access the Council's systems. This has not been permitted in the past because of security concerns for the Council's systems. The Panel heard that those members who already have computers in their homes for business or personal use find it difficult to accommodate another computer exclusively for NFDC use.

The officers have investigated the security aspects thoroughly and consider that members' aspirations in this regard could be met. However, in order to meet the security concerns and to ensure compatibility with the Council's software, members' own equipment would need to meet the requirements set out in the recommendation below. If a member's personal equipment requires slight upgrading by the provision of small amounts of up to date software to facilitate access to the Council's systems, the Panel recommends that the Council makes a contribution to the cost.

Members using their own equipment will still require NFDC dial-in facilities to access the Intranet and the NFDC's Exchange server. They would be required to subscribe to the Council's security policy, which is likely to continue to require that only Council business will be conducted through the Council's e-mail account and Intranet privileges. All browsing, www interaction and private e-mails will need to be conducted through the member's "private" domain.

If members do use their own equipment for accessing the Council's systems, the Council could not provide support for the members' own hardware. It would, however, give members more freedom to install other devices such as scanners or cameras where they so wish. Members would be free to use their own Internet Service Provider (ISP) for Internet usage, and would be free to use the Internet as often as they wished.

#### **Recommendation:**

- (a) That members who have private computing equipment in their own homes and who do not wish to be provided with Council-owned equipment be permitted to use those facilities to access the Council's Intranet and Exchange Server, provided that:**
  - (i) they subscribe to the Council's security policy;**
  - (ii) the equipment is of a minimum specification that meets the requirements of the Head of ICT;**
  - (iii) their equipment is fitted with up to date Microsoft Office and related software such as Adobe version 6; up to date anti-virus software and that they subscribe, on a regular basis, to anti-virus software updates; and**
  - (iv) they have their own Internet Service Provider and connection arrangements.**

- (b) ***That a limited financial contribution, at the discretion of the Head of ICT, be made to the provision of limited upgrades or enhanced software to those members who use their own ICT equipment.***

### 3.3.8 Printing

Some members find it takes unacceptably long to print documents using the deskjet printers provided. It was clear, however, that the printers provided to members were not intended to cope with large quantities of printing. The review revealed that members might be printing more than should be necessary because –

- (a) They have difficulty in reading documents on the small laptop screens. This might be addressed by providing desktop computers on request;
- (b) They need paper copies of documents to take with them to meetings, or for other purposes. It seems to us that this problem could be reduced if officers in particular understood the limitations of the members' printing arrangements and exercised more discretion in sending documents via the e-mail rather than in paper. A protocol for officers in communicating with members electronically is recommended (see paragraph 3.5.2 below), and this could include issues relating to printing.
- (c) It also appears that some members receive via e-mail large documents electronically from outside bodies on which they serve as the Council's representatives. Those members should be encouraged to request paper copies of the documents if they are likely to require a printed version.

When printers are replaced (commencing 2003/04) they will be more modern with higher print capacity so printing of documents will be quicker. On balance, the Panel does not recommend a significant change in the capability of the printers provided to members.

***Recommendation:***

***That no significant changes be made to the specification of printers provided to members at this stage, but that***

- (i) ***any protocol on electronic communication with members that is prepared (see paragraph 3.5.2), should highlight the need for officers to be aware of the limitations of members' printing capabilities and to send paper copies of documents where such paper copies are likely to be required; and***
- (ii) ***members be alive to the need to request paper copies of documents from officers and other sources if printed copies are likely to be required.***

### 3.4 Training

- 3.4.1 Almost without exception, those members attending the Focus Groups expressed the view that they were not using the IT facilities to best advantage and that more training was needed. The consensus was that a mix of training needed to be offered – classroom based (with members using their own laptops if indeed they have laptops at home); 1:1 in their own homes and possibly computer-based training programmes. The possibility of maintaining a library of training manuals at Appletree Court was raised. All members felt that training provided should not be too long or too intensive.
- 3.4.2 Because of the need by most members to access planning documents on a regular basis, separate training on this topic should be arranged.

***Recommendation:***

- (a) ***That a mix of training methods be offered to members – classroom based, 1:1; and computer-based; and that care be taken that individual sessions are not too long or too intensive;***
- (b) ***That a training needs analysis be undertaken to assess the needs of both new and existing members;***
- (c) ***That a library of training manuals for members' use be maintained at Appletree Court; and***
- (d) ***That separate training sessions on accessing planning documents be offered.***

### 3.5 Other Issues

#### 3.5.1 Meeting Papers

There was agreement that the current practice of sending paper copies of agenda and reports only to those members serving on Committees and Panels should continue. Members not on these bodies should access relevant agenda and reports on ForestNet if required. Exceptions are meeting papers for the Cabinet and for the Standards Committee, where undertakings have previously been given that paper copies will be provided to all members of the Council. The Panel did not feel it appropriate to recommend changes to these arrangements.

***Recommendation:***

***That the current arrangements for the distribution of paper copies of meeting papers continues.***

#### 3.5.2 Protocol for Officers corresponding electronically with Members

The Panel considers that a protocol should be prepared for officers corresponding with members. This should cover issues such as the need to correspond with members electronically where electronic

means are appropriate, while avoiding transmission of documents containing large amounts of graphics, maps and photographs unless this was essential. The protocol should also cover the issue of printing dealt with in paragraph 3.3.8 above.

We support the need for a protocol, although mindful of the fact that if the Citrix technology recommended in paragraph 3.3.5 above is introduced, many of the difficulties experienced with download times will be minimised.

***Recommendation:***

***That a protocol for officers corresponding electronically with members be prepared.***

**3.5.3 Personal Use of Council Facilities by Members**

Members are permitted a limited amount of personal use of the Council's ICT facilities. The relevant extract from the Council's Security Policy reads as follows (Annex 5 paragraph 6.1):

"The Council wishes to encourage the effective use of the Internet and e-mail facilities. Employees and Members may use their Internet connections for occasional private purposes at the discretion of their Director or Head of Service, provided:

- (a) it does not interfere with Council work;
- (b) it is not related to a personal business interest;
- (c) it is not used for commercial purposes including the sale or purchase of goods and services;
- (d) it does not involve the use of newsgroups, chat lines or similar services; and
- (e) it complies with this policy, including its provision regarding misuse".

"Misuse" is defined as including a variety of activities, including wasting network and other resources.

Members appear to have placed different interpretations on what constitutes a reasonable amount of personal use. Average bills for the first three quarters of the 2002/03 financial year are as follows:

Less than £50	18
£50 - £100	22
£100 - £150	4
£150 - £200	4
£200 - £250	1
£250 and over	4

It is not possible without considerable analysis to estimate what proportions of the above bills are likely to be for Council purposes and what element is likely to be private. There was some support at the Focus Groups for discontinuing any private use by members, but the



majority favoured continuing with some limited private (not commercial) use. The Focus Groups felt that some guidance on what was considered to be a reasonable amount of private use should be given.

The Panel heard that an hour's time on-line at peak periods will cost approximately £2.40, and at off-peak times approximately £0.90 during week nights and £0.60 during the weekend period. The Panel recommends that 1-2 hours per week off-peak time be regarded as a reasonable amount of private use.

It appeared that members are not clear that web interactions, e.g. ordering goods, making payments, e-banking, etc, are not permitted under the Council's security policy. Cllrs Brooks and Robinson asked the officers to look at the policy with a view to making it clear exactly what is and is not permitted. However, the Council's ICT Security Policy is in the process of being redrafted following a Consultant's review (as part of the Best Value Review) and it was considered that the outcome of that review should be awaited before any changes are made. The Council's existing policy contains some inconsistencies. It is anticipated that the new policy will prescribe that there should be no differentiation between the rules for members and those for officers. Members are, however, free to make any recommendations they might wish at this stage to input into the Consultant's review. In the meantime, the Panel suggested that members be reminded that they should not be using the Council's equipment and lines to access the web for any purpose other than browsing.

Members need to be aware that there is no tax liability on them arising from the provision by the Council of ICT facilities, because they are intended for use on Council business. Any departure from this principle is likely to lead to liability for tax.

***Recommendation:***

- (a) That a reasonable amount of private use of the Council's ICT equipment installed in members' homes be permitted, provided that such private use is strictly in accordance with the Council's ICT Security Policy, and that, as a guide, 1-2 hours private on-line time per week at off peak periods be regarded as reasonable;***
- (b) That it be noted that a review of the Council's ICT Security Policy is being undertaken by Consultants; and***
- (c) That members be reminded of the contents of the Security Policy and that they should not be using the Council's systems for accessing the web for any purpose other than browsing.***

**3.5.4 Use of Calendar Facility**

The use by members of the Calendar facility was raised. The facility has considerable advantages in an environment such as the Council's where members' commitments often need to be known. The Panel appreciated that not all members will find it convenient to use Calendar. We consider that, because of the benefits to the

organisation, members, and in particular senior members such as Portfolio Holders, Committee and Review Panel Chairmen and the political group leaders, should be encouraged to use it.

**Recommendation:**

***That all members, and in particular Portfolio Holders, Committee and Review Panel Chairmen and the political group leaders, be encouraged to use the Calendar facility.***

**4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Panel submits the above recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration. The Panel felt that the review was an excellent example of “scrutiny” working proactively cross-party, with appropriate officer support, with positive outcomes.

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**Background Papers:**

Published documents