

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE - 7 JANUARY 2003

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT TITLE: IT Facilities for Members 2003

FOR ACTION

NAME OF WARDS
ALL

1. Summary

- 1.1 It is proposed to extend the current pilot scheme for IT facilities for Members to a full programme which will allow all Members to have access to standard laptop computers, printers, office software and broadband connections to the Internet from their homes. The scheme will also improve the IT facilities which are available to Members from the group offices in the Town Hall.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee approve the report and agree to the current pilot arrangements being made available to all Members.
- 2.2 That this proposal be given high priority consideration for funding in 2004/5 and in future years as part of the Council's E-Government programme.
- 2.3 That Members determine the preferred funding option including any possible Member contributions.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The costs of the infrastructure set-up and an initial 10 Members have been covered by the £50k allocated from the E-Government programme in 2003/4.
- 3.2 Ongoing annual infrastructure costs will be around £22k.
- 3.3 The set-up cost for each Member is around £1870.
- 3.4 The average annual cost for equipment and Internet connection for each individual Member will be around £1020 assuming that the main hardware and software is replaced on a 3 year cycle. The average annual cost of the service is likely to reduce over time as hardware and connection costs become cheaper.
- 3.5 The average annual cost of the scheme once it is fully functioning for all 63 Members will be around £86k. In practice not all Members will take up use of the scheme, in which case the annual cost will be less than £86k. The ongoing annual cost could also be reduced by Members contributing a proportion of the individual costs from their allowances - for example, if all Members contributed the annual

£360 ADSL Internet connection charge then the total annual cost of the scheme could be reduced from £86k to £63.5k.

- 3.6 It is proposed that the ongoing costs of the scheme are provided for by the e-Government budget commencing in 2004/5. It is expected that implementing the full scheme initially will be spread over 2 years and will utilise leasing where appropriate to optimise the use of financial resources. Since the number of Members using the service will vary from year to year it is not possible to predict each year's costs precisely and any unused money would be used for other projects which are funded from the e-Government budget.

4. Staffing Implications

- 4.1 The additional IT and Democratic Services support work will be accommodated within existing staff resources.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 A legal agreement concerning use of the facilities and confirming Council ownership of the equipment has been drawn up by Legal Services and is signed by each Member when they receive their laptop and initial training.
- 5.2 The original proposals for dual council/private use and possible tax savings are no longer applicable because the security requirements effectively prevent any significant private use of the laptops. It has been agreed with the Inland Revenue that less than £2,500 of IT facilities will not be regarded as a taxable benefit while their main use is for Council business.
- 5.3 Budgetary provision has been made for a level of ongoing legal advice.

6 Detail

6.1 Background

An increasing number of local authorities provide IT equipment to Members. This trend has been accelerated by the recent emphasis on e-government and the need for councillors to have access to email and online information. This will make communication with constituents and Council staff easier and allow more efficient access to relevant information.

The Remote IT Facilities for Members report in 2001 agreed a minimal set of IT services for Members and the IT Facilities for Members report in January 2003 proposed a pilot trial of a wider set of facilities including laptops and broadband connection to the Internet from Members' homes.

Provision for the pilot trial was made from the e-Government budget in 2003/4. This has been operating since June 2003 and so far 8 Members have been issued with laptops and broadband connections.

Members have had desktop PCs and printers in their group offices for several years but these are increasingly out-of-date because there is no allocated budget for upgrading them. It is proposed to remedy this situation by including this equipment in the overall scheme and introducing a 3 year replacement cycle in line with the laptop equipment.

6.2 The 2003 pilot trial

The first Members in the pilot trial received their laptops in June 2003. Technical difficulties mainly associated with implementing adequate security measures in the initial stages of the trial caused delays to the project but these have now been resolved and 8 Members have now been issued with laptops, printers and broadband connections. Additional printers for use by the laptops were installed in the Group offices.

Given the potential sensitivity of the communications between Members and the known problems with use of the Internet for confidential material there is a paramount requirement for adequate security measures. Considerable work has been devoted to developing a suitable security environment and this has been validated by external security testing. This has resulted in significant modifications to the original hardware and software proposals for the pilot scheme. Originally it was intended to allow considerable flexibility for Members to modify the configuration of the laptop and to install their own software. However this proved to be impractical in terms of the security implications and the software configuration of the laptop is now fixed when it is first set up and there is very little scope for Members to change this themselves.

There have been various difficulties with the broadband connections and these have not always been easy for Members to install at home themselves. ADSL routers rather than modems have been purchased so that Members can attach more than one PC to their broadband service. In cases where Members do not have a BT phone line then this needs to be purchased and installed for use only by the ADSL facility.

The extension of the Council's VPN (virtual private network) system which provides secure access to the Council's data network was successful. The wireless network at the Town Hall was more complex than anticipated and there are still some problems with connection times and speed. Security penetration testing was carried out by an external organisation and demonstrated that the security precautions were adequate.

A legal agreement concerning use of the facilities and confirming Council ownership of the equipment is signed by each Member when they receive their laptop and initial training.

No provision was made in the pilot trial for any adaptation for disabled use and it is proposed that £1k p.a. should be included in the budget to allow for future disability software and hardware modifications.

A survey of the participants of the trial shows that the service has largely been operating successfully once initial problems have been resolved. The key findings from the survey were:

- Whilst there had been some initial teething problems, most of these had been rectified. In some cases the difficulties were due more to lack of familiarity with the equipment than to actual technical problems.
- Members were generally agreed that the provision of this type of IT facility was essential for Councillors.
- All pilot Members have either already used the facilities to communicate with their constituents and carry out work-related research on the Internet, or are planning to do so. Most thought that the laptop and Internet connection had significantly increased their ability to fulfil their council duties.
- In terms of contribution to the cost of the service, Members generally felt that they would be willing to pay for all or some of the ADSL broadband costs (about £360 pa) but that they should not pay for any laptop costs because they were unable to install or use their own software or hardware.
- The less IT experienced Members suggested that ECDL training/certification would be beneficial before getting their laptops. In addition, general training on how to use the Internet for research, email and other purposes would be advantageous. There were very positive reports about the ECDL training from those who had received it.
- The more familiar with IT a Member was, the more satisfied they were with the facilities provided by the pilot trial.
- Less IT experienced Members would have liked their equipment to be installed for them at their homes because it was difficult to remember all the required activities after their initial familiarisation session in the Town Hall.
- More IT experienced Members wanted to be able to access their Council email and the Internet from anywhere, either by using a dial-up connection, or by using the various wireless zones around the country. (However this would have security implications at the present time).
- It was stated that money had been saved as fewer letters were being mailed out or sent by courier, and fewer phone calls were made. (Note that the cost of sending an email over ADSL broadband is zero and therefore less than the price of a phone call).
- It was felt that there might need to be a dedicated help-line provided for the reporting of any technical problems and that less IT experienced Members would need a greater degree of help to resolve their problems. More regular updates of progress on reported problems would have been appreciated.
- It was felt that the current levels of security and functionality may have been more than was necessary. (However the current security is essential given the nature of the information accessed and the need for the Council to comply with Government security guidelines. The functionality provided on the laptops has been designed to accommodate the needs of most Members).

6.3 **Hardware**

It is proposed that the Council will issue standard Windows based laptop computers and printers on loan to all Members. Laptops are more suitable than desktop PCs in this case because they will reduce support costs and allow greater convenience for Members.

The laptops will be equipped with wireless access to the Council's network within the Town Hall so that Committee papers on the Intranet and other documents can be accessed easily in meetings. It is expected that secure wireless access will be extended to other Council offices in the future.

Consumables such as paper and inkjet/laser cartridges would be made available for collection from Democratic Services.

It is proposed to upgrade the desktop and network printers in the group offices and then replace them on a 3 year cycle.

The possible use of Member's private PCs and printers has been considered but this has proved to be impractical. To ensure adequate security it is necessary to provide a controlled environment. This effectively means that it is necessary to provide a Council configured PC and rules out the use of private computers even if they were to have the standard software installed on them. It is possible that private printers could be used if they were compatible with the standard laptop configuration but it would be impractical to hold stocks of consumables (e.g. inkjet cartridges) or provide support for a wide range of printers other than the standard one.

The possible use of redundant Council desktop or laptop PCs was rejected because of the additional support costs which would arise from the variety and age of the hardware and software. The Council only disposes of computers when they are no longer adequate to run the required software.

6.4 **Software**

A standard software configuration will be installed on all machines.

The Council will purchase Microsoft Office software for Word, Excel etc and Lotus Notes for email (where required) and provide remote connectivity and anti-virus/firewall software. Additional security software will be installed on each laptop.

A standard software "image" will enable the basic operating system and application software to be reinstalled if necessary. Any personal data will be the responsibility of individual Members and would not be reinstalled by the IT Unit. Members will be responsible for backing-up their own data on the laptops.

If Members wish to use special software of their own then they will need to use a private PC of their own for this purpose rather than the one supplied by the Council.

Updates to the anti-virus and firewall software will be automatically applied when the laptop is connected to the Council network.

The desktop PCs in the group offices will have the standard office software installed.

6.5 Connectivity to the Council network and Internet

The Council will purchase an ADSL broadband connection from a common Internet service provider for each Member. This is significantly faster than an ordinary modem connection and does not interfere with normal use of the existing telephone line. There is a standard monthly charge for ADSL and the computer can be connected to the Internet at any time without incurring any additional charges.

Arrangements to provide a similar service would be used where a Member has already committed to a cable provider and does not have a separate BT phone line but in such cases only the Internet access costs of the cable service would be covered. Cable and any other broadband providers that do not satisfy the Council's connection requirements cannot be used.

A logon and password will be provided to ensure secure access to the Council's data network via the VPN (Virtual Private Network) system.

The desktop PCs and printers in the group offices are already connected to the Council's data network.

6.6 Email

Members can use any Internet email provider or they can opt to have an email account on the Council's Lotus Notes system.

All Members have their own email address (the current format is `cllr.firstname.lastname@brent.gov.uk`) and email is automatically forwarded by the Council's email system to whatever email location is appropriate.

Members who already have their own Internet email account will need to make sure that this is still available via the new broadband connection. Members who use the Council's Lotus Notes email will be able to access this via the VPN connection to the Council's data network.

6.7 Support

The IT Unit provides support via a telephone Help Desk from 8am to 6pm Monday to Thursday (5pm on Fridays) for data network connectivity and system software problems.

There will be additional work to support the new hardware and software and in order to minimise the costs it is proposed that the laptops and software would be supplied in a standard configuration which can be easily replaced when problems occur.

If the equipment needs to be repaired or software problems fixed then the Member would be responsible for bringing it to the IT Unit who would either resolve the problem, re-install the standard software configuration or provide a replacement

machine. In order to minimise support costs there would be no visits by IT Unit staff to Members' homes with the exception of initial assistance with setting-up the ADSL connection if necessary.

The current levels of support are only sufficient to cover the primary equipment and software – the help desk will not be able to provide support on issues which are not directly related to the equipment provided.

Council IT staff currently have no experience of Apple or Unix software and support can only be provided for Windows based PCs.

6.8 Training

Members are encouraged to obtain the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) level of IT proficiency.

Some funding is available from the Democratic Services training budget on a first-come first-served basis. Members are responsible for organising their own ECDL training.

6.9 Costs

The initial set-up costs of £32k for equipment, central software and testing have already been met from the 2003/4 e-government budget. Initial replacement of the PCs and printers in the three Group offices will cost around £6k and will be carried out in 2004/5.

The annual ongoing costs of the service infrastructure are: -

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|
| IT Support/Helpdesk | 16,000 |
| Test equipment | 2,000 |
| Group Office PCs and printers (3 year cycle) | 2,000 |
| Legal advice | 1,000 |
| Disability provision | 1,000 |
| Total | £22,000 |

The approximate individual costs of the service for each Member are: -

| Item | Initial | Annual | Replacement |
|---------|---------|--------|-------------|
| Laptop | 950 | | 310 |
| Printer | 120 | | 40 |
| Router | 90 | | 30 |

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Software | 190 | | 120 |
| Consumables | | 100 | |
| Broadband | | 360 | |
| Insurance | | 60 | |
| Totals | £1,350 | £520 | £500 |

The initial set up cost for each Member is thus £1,350 + £520 = **£1870**.

The average annual costs for each Member once the scheme is fully operational will be £520 + £500 = **£1020**.

The average annual cost for all 63 Members would be £64,260 + £22,000 = **£86,260**.

Not every Member will require Lotus Notes email so these costs (around £100 per user) have been excluded from the totals.

It is assumed that equipment and Microsoft software is replaced on a 3 year cycle.

Insurance for the hardware is arranged through the Council's internal insurance scheme to provide all risks cover which includes loss or theft within the UK.

7. Background Information

Details of Documents

Remote IT Facilities for Members – 31 July 2001

IT Facilities for Members – 16 December 2002

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers can find them on the Council's website at www.brent.gov.uk/democracy or can contact:

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