

**IT WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN on 3 SEPTEMBER 2007 at 5.30 pm**

Present:- Councillor S Howell – Chairman.  
Councillors K R Artus, J E Hudson and R M Lemon.

Officers in attendance:- M Brean, M Frost, C Roberts and A Webb.

**ITWG11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D J Sadler. There were no declarations of interest.

With the consent of those present, the Chairman took item 4 on the agenda (Website Development Progress Report) first.

**ITWG12 WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS REPORT**

The Web Development Officer presented his report which referred to major advances in design and accessibility of websites and the obligation imposed by the Disabilities Discrimination Act 2005 for websites to be accessible to all which had prompted the decision to redevelop the website. Discussions and consultation had been followed by a list of 50 individual ideas for improvement. The next stage was to create main objectives for the new website which would be sent to three companies who had shown an interest in taking on the project.

Members stressed that they wished to be involved in the redevelopments so far as the physical appearance of the site was concerned and “getting the tone right”. They requested a further progress report at the next meeting.

**ITWG13 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. The Chairman of the Committee thanked Councillor Hudson for his visits to Epping Forest District Council and his helpful observations.

**ITWG12 OCELLA COMPUTER SYSTEM – BUSINESS CASE FOR  
RETENTION/REPLACEMENT**

In answer to a question from Councillor Artus, the Director of Business Transformation explained that Ocella controlled administration of planning applications, Environmental Services, Building Control and Land Charges operations. The Chairman mentioned a presentation in which comparison had been made between the cost per planning application using an Ocella and a Northgate system. The Ocella system was now 18 years old and could be added to, but it was suggested that it be replaced since substantial efficiencies could be achieved with minor planning applications being dealt

with cheaper, faster and with less staff; the Northgate system had the Organisation Re-engineering link.

The Director of Business Transformation stressed that the efficiencies were made by the action of Organisation Re-engineering rather than the computer system.

He added that resilience of the system was a concern. Ocella had recently declined to re-tender for a Birmingham council. News had emerged of some councils joining forces in Essex; in the context of shared services Northgate client base was larger than that of Ocella. The question arose, why the Council should buy any system if a merger with Epping was likely.

In answer to a question, the meeting was informed that Braintree used Plantec. The Director of Business Transformation continued that system convergence was needed. Councillor Artus said that technology was extremely expensive; the attraction of Northgate was if its systems converged with that of the partner council. It was noted that Northgate was not likely to host the interests of two councils without requiring two licences. There might be possibility of hosting hardware, however.

The Group debated the costs of continuing use of the Ocella system. The Head of ICT stressed that hardware would be a small part (under 10%) of the financial commitment of any new system.

The Director of Business Transformation said that OGC Framework would be used if a replacement were sought. There was also the possibility of Insight Direct, another company, but he understood that Swift (the relevant system) had a client base of a similar size to Ocella.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, the Head of ICT confirmed that the Braintree system provider was one not listed on Uttlesford's provider list. Northgate was the biggest provider and had two systems already within Uttlesford. Councillor Artus said that the meeting was being told that there was a choice of one; he agreed that shared services were an extremely important benefit. The process engineering could go out to any council.

The Director of Business Transformation then suggested a third option of retaining the Ocella system for a further 18 months with a view to enhancing the current system, once it was known which the partner authority was, and possibly increasing the space on the partner authorities system.

In answer to questions from the Chairman, he explained that the currently allocated funds could be rolled forward; the Audit Commission was now saying that such funds could be capitalised in circumstances in which the Council would probably find itself so that it would be possible to enhance Ocella using earmarked capital and re-engineer the service at the same time.

Councillor Artus asked about the planning delivery grant and the Director of Business Transformation explained that under previous guidance, it was restricted to revenue expenditure but now £100,000 could be capitalised to apply to the Ocella enhancements and any excess rolled over to a future year. In answer to a question from Councillor Artus, he explained that the re-

engineering of the Planning Department had to be carried out first using the Northgate re-engineering system; the system enhancement/purchase would follow.

Councillor Artus said that the Council did not want to spend £155,000 on enhancements to Ocella. He suggested asking Northgate which authorities used their system with whom the Council could join forces in this initiative. It would be necessary to do the Organisational Re-engineering first. Northgate would otherwise quote a system cost including re-engineering savings.

The Head of ICT informed the meeting that Ocella had offered free loyalty software namely £150,000 worth of upgrades spread over the next three years. Councillor Artus stressed that money ought to be spent in the current year and the Director of Business Transformation said there would be a detailed options appraisal for all systems, on which Members could decide.

Councillor Artus said that he wished to see £150,000 back in the pot this year. The Chairman of the Group referred to head count savings and said that the Director of Business Transformation needed to be confident that he could deliver these. The Director of Business Transformation said that the cost of planning applications had been looked at. The Head of ICT said that at Epping a new system had been introduced, but had not made much difference to savings. It was significantly smaller however. The Director of Business Transformation said that it was possible Epping had not used Organisational Re-engineering. Councillor Artus stressed that it was all the more important to carry out Organisational Re-engineering before buying.

The Director of Business Transformation continued that if the Council chose to use less than the earmarked capital, the unused part could generate interest which could be ploughed back into the scheme. The Head of ICT added that the capital stayed earmarked as such for the project, but always remained capital. The Director of Business Transformation referred to the Northgate “risk and reward” provision and the Chairman of the Group said that he was not happy to give the supplier more payment. The Director of Business Transformation continued that the Northgate revised proposal was £120,000 less than the original, the price having been lowered by £120,000 to £70,000. The planning grant was £483,000. Internal costs were therefore reduced to £360,000. If the Council delayed in accepting the offer, it might become more expensive. Councillor Artus agreed that there would be likely costs and therefore it would be good to have a costs review before the matter was considered anywhere else. It was necessary to review before the project went forward.

The Group considered the Ocella timetable for revisions and updating. It was agreed that the Group should meet on Monday 29 October at 7.30 pm and that the 12 December meeting be retained in the timetable.

Councillor Artus requested a single page spreadsheet at the next meeting on the topic of Ocella. The Chairman of the Group stressed that he was not comfortable to recommend the suggested course of action until firmer details were available on the Organisational Re-engineering of the Planning Department. He stressed that it was necessary for the organisation to want to implement the results of reengineering and the Head of ICT explained that the

appropriate amounts would either be taken from the existing budget or from the requested future budgets, to compel savings.

Councillor Artus said that if the Council was asking Northgate to re-engineer on the back of Ocella, they should see what Northgate wanted to charge for it and the Head of ICT said they would charge £50,000. In answer to a question from the Chairman of the Committee, the Councillors present agreed that they as a Group did not wish to meet Northgate and were content with Northgate's presentation to Messrs Brean and Webb.

The Director of Business Transformation said that Northgate would be doing the planning and the Uttlesford Organisation and Re-engineering would be doing the other parts of the service at the same time. It was agreed, following the request of Councillor Artus, that a bulletin be provided explaining what the IT Working Group was doing and why and the revised timetable for it. The Director of Business Transformation agreed that he would produce a draft bulletin for the Chairman of the Group to publish in Utterings.

#### ITWG13 **ORGANISATIONAL RE-ENGINEERING – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Director of Business Transformation said that following training by Northgate, the Uttlesford Organisational Re-engineering staff had carried out re-engineering in Revenues and Benefits – achieving £44,000 savings, and in Housing – achieving £91,000 savings (from the Revenue account not the General Fund which had a savings requirement). He added that the OR Team had lost a full time officer and that interviews would take place soon. In answer to a question from the Chairman of the Group he explained that the 08 09 re-engineering reductions in numbers were to be from Democratic Services, Corporate Administration, PA's, Mail and Printroom and Finance. There were no big changes from these; Planning was the big one. The Chairman of the Group said that he thought postal deregulation was an irrelevance; there were twice as many savings to be made in Democratic Services. Councillor Artus commented that deregulation had a political cost whereas other savings did not.

#### ITWG14 **MATTERS ARISING**

The Chairman of the Group noted that Simon Martin was not using the electronic benefits module and hoped he was using it enough now.

The meeting ended at 7.18 pm.