

**IT WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 04 JUNE 2008 at 7.30 pm**

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

Officers in attendance:- M Frost (Website Development Officer) , R Procter (Democratic Services Officer) and A Webb (Interim Director of Central Services) N Wittman (IT Manager).

ITWG1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Sadler, and from Paula Evans, Business Improvement Manager.

ITWG2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2008 were received and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

ITWG3 WEBSITE UPDATE

Michael Frost, the Website Development Officer, updated the group on progress with the new website. Work was continuing in readiness for the website going live. Further work was needed to modify certain online forms (for example job application forms), but the Group agreed that this work could take place after the launch. The new website was shown. Temporary images had been used for certain pages. Work on the calendar was continuing. The Group asked officers to create a dedicated Members' page. It was agreed that a list of senior staff, such as heads of division, should be included on the page of directors' details. Councillor Howell said this was important as it would allow people to ask for officers with responsibility for services by name. Councillor Lemon reminded the Group that the aim of the Customer Service Centre was to channel all calls through a single route. It was therefore not appropriate to give individual telephone numbers. Either the 510 number, or the relevant help desk number where certain services were yet to be diverted to the CSC, should be listed.

It was noted that design costs had been paid, and work was within budget.

The timescale for going live was discussed. Most new content material had now been collected, and it was agreed that the Interim Director of Central Services would seek outstanding responses. Officers were continuing to work with designers on the events calendar and the "apply/pay/report it" system, and on the community portal. A FAQs site was being developed, together with a comments and questions site.

A launch date for the end of July was agreed, with members of the Task Group and committee chairmen to be given two weeks' prior access to the website to consider it in detail.

Improved accessibility for those with impaired vision using different background colours was noted.

Members expressed approval of the modern appearance of the new website, and thanked the Website Development Officer.

ITWG4

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT TEAM UPDATE

A written update of current reviews had been provided by the Business Improvement Manager, and was presented to the Group by the Interim Director of Central Services in her absence. The report on Democratic Services had been considered by SMB, and a Business Improvement Transition plan had been prepared, copies of which would be sent to members of the Group. Agreed actions would be managed by the Democratic Services Manager and the Head of Community Engagement.

A report on the Printroom was being produced. Running costs were £210K per annum, comprising staff costs and raw materials. Discussion took place on possible savings to be made, the condition of the equipment, and the possibility of taking on additional print work on behalf of other authorities. The Printroom had already taken on some external work, and talks were underway with Harlow. It was noted that distance was a factor in delivery, but it was suggested that discussions be entered into with other neighbouring authorities, including in particular South Cambridgeshire.

A time and motion study had been carried out for both the Printroom and Mailroom, and recommendations were currently being drafted.

The Group considered postage costs, which had been reduced by £14K in savings, from a total of £153K. Further action was to be taken on postage, such as the amount sent first class and postage to Members. Councillor Lemon said Members should be reminded to collect items from their pigeonholes, and that electronic versions of agendas should suffice where Members had been provided with laptops. Councillor Howell said that some Members came to the offices only when they were attending a meeting, and that many Members preferred hard copies of agendas. It was suggested that certain items such as publications need not be included in the post. The Democratic Services Officer, said that a communications survey would shortly be sent to Members, aiming to address such issues.

It was noted that all creditors, where possible, were now paid by direct debit, contributing further savings to postage costs. The use of TNT was discussed, as there had been various issues regarding reliability. Following a survey by officers and a series of monthly meetings with TNT at a high level, matters were now improving.

Regarding the development service, the Business Improvement Team had undertaken "to be" workshops with staff, and recommendations were being

prepared. A need had been identified for a dedicated administration officer for the enforcement team, and better use of the computerised planning system was to be recommended.

The Group expressed thanks to the Business Improvement Manager for her weekly reports, and noted that progress was being made.

ITWG5

IT SECTION AND WORKLOAD UPDATE

The Interim Director of Central Services presented a report on staff turnover within the IT service, which was still understaffed and the new staff structure which was currently being implemented. The Group commented on the rate of turnover, which officers explained was due to a combination of factors. There was discussion of the deletion of the post of the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Officer, as this function was now performed by the planning service.

The Group considered current projects for the IT service: introduction of direct credit payment for creditors; a drive to increase direct credit payment for benefit claimants; invoice scanning in the finance service; and commitment accounting, which would prevent budget overspends, and provide a snapshot of how much the council was committed to spend at any time.

An additional verbal report was given on the blade server project: feedback from Dell had been received, and work was taking place to identify whether 31 servers could be virtualised. This would give a 70% reduction in server energy use for those to be replaced. Of the 41 existing servers, Dell had identified 2 that were re-usable. In reply to a question from Councillor Artus, the Interim Director of Central Services said he would investigate costs of a remote service once the tender process had concluded.

Members considered the disaster recovery incident relating to the Revenues and Benefits system, and praised IT staff and external partners for the immense work involved in successfully rebuilding the system and restoring the backup.

ITWG6

ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Artus suggested monitoring of Members' enquiries to enable the tracking and recording of outcomes. Councillor Howell expressed concern that increased bureaucracy might not be justified, as he had not experienced lack response to enquiries. Councillor Lemon questioned how many councillors had complained of such issues, and said he had never had a problem in obtaining officers' responses. The Interim Director of Central Services said he would look into options for such a system.

Councillor Hudson said that his parish clerk had difficulty establishing contact with those officers responsible for certain areas, such as waste disposal bags. It was agreed that the Head of Community Engagement would be asked to send to all parish and town councils a list of contact details.

The frequency of meetings of the IT Working Group was discussed. The Group noted that as the website should have gone live by the time of the next

meeting, quarterly meetings would be sufficient to provide support to officers. It was therefore agreed that the next meeting should take place in October.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.