Committee:	IT Working Group	Agenda Item
Date:	1 October 2008	**7**
Title:	Government Connect (GC)	
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Summary

1. This report is to advise Members of Government Connect (GC) and the implications for this Council.

Recommendations

2. Members note the content of this report.

Background Papers

None

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Staff are being consulted throughout the implementation process
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	The funds required are available from a mix of both capital and revenue budgets.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	Without the new connection electronic communication with the Department for Work and Pensions will cease on 31 March 2009.

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Government Connect (GC)

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Situation

What is GC?

3. GC is a secure connection between local authorities and Central Government. It provides;

    -   secure e-mail
    -   secure browser access to applications
    -   authentication (of citizens): this would enable people to use a single secure log-on to access Local and Central Government services

4. It is also planned for GC to provide;

    -   secure file transfer and data exchange

    -   secure employee authentication.

5. Central Government already has a secure network. GC gives us access to that network. So GC itself is really just a connection – like an Internet connection, but to a private network – and a box that allows traffic from our network to go out over that connection.

6. The thing that makes GC complicated is the Code of Connection (CoCo). This is a set of policies and procedures that the council must adhere to before it can be granted access to the Government's secure network.

7. Even though the GC connection will only be used by Housing Benefit staff the requirements are that the whole council must satisfy the requirements of the CoCo before connection will be allowed.

Progress So Far

8. On 9 April 2008, Philip Littleavon, the new GC Programme Director, wrote to all Chief Executives asking them to;

    -   complete the GC proforma and return it by 30 April 2008

    -   review compliance with the Code of Connection by 31 May 2008

    -   amend and re-submit document to achieve compliance with the Code of Connection by 30 November 2008

    -   activate the GC connection by 31 December 2008

    -   complete the local configuration and go live by 30 March 2009

9 April letter from
Philip Littleavon

9. Uttlesford has been reviewing the requirements for compliance and submitted a draft CoCo document on 15 August 2008. As expected a number of points for clarification and/or further explanation have arisen. Given the exceptionally high level of technical expertise required, the council has

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employed the services of SOCITM consultants, a recognised expert in the field, to assist us with the work involved with meeting both the documentation requirements and assisting us in compiling an action plan to meet the delivery date.

10. On 7 July 2008, the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) wrote to all councils stating that 'restricted data' from the DWP would only be available through GC: see Appendix for letter. Some of this information (eg on Income Support, Pension Credits etc) is essential to the working of the Council's benefits service. This, in practice, means that GC is mandatory. After 31 March 2009, DWP restricted data will only be accessible via GC. However, an exemption can be claimed for six months to continue access to the current data channels, as long as the authority can demonstrate that it is committed to implementation.

11. The letter refers to fifty authorities not having 'connections or connection requests being processed'. Uttlesford is not one of these councils, as it has been working with GC to process the Council's compliance. However, it is a possibility that the Council will require an exemption from the March 2009 deadline until September 2009. The Council's Account Manager didn't see this as a problem at all, so long as we were working towards going live.

Work Involved

12. The change that will have the greatest impact on staff (and, potentially, Members) is the new approach required for remote working. To satisfy the Code of Connection:

- all remote users must use Council supplied equipment, not their own: this is currently being queried;

- all remote users must use two-factor authentication. Uttlesford already meets this requirement.

13. Other big time-consumers will include;

- the re-configuration of our Exchange e-mail server;

- the installation and configuration of a new GC firewall;

- implementing vulnerability scanning software.

Costs

14. There is no external funding available to assist with the costs of this project. It is estimated that the cost of the project, including purchasing of software, specialist assistance and at least one additional server and firewall will cost in the region of £30,000 to implement. Should it be confirmed that all remote users have to access our network using UDC equipment this cost will increase significantly.

15. Whilst most of the cost if one off set-up there is a requirement for an annual 'health check'. This has to be undertaken by an external specialist and it is estimated that this would cost about £3,500 per annum. There is no budget

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     for this on-going cost and savings will therefore have to be identified within the existing budget.

16. The funds required to achieve compliance are available in the transformation government capital budget. The consultancy costs have to be met from the revenue budget which will use all of the remaining 2008/9 consultancy budget.

Is There a Business Case?

17. There is no financial or efficiency business case for implementing GC.

18. However, GC is now owned by the DWP, and the DWP have effectively mandated its use from April 2009. At Uttlesford, this primarily affects the data transfer between the Council and the DWP on benefits.

19. The vast majority of councils, including Uttlesford, have signed up for GC. Only 43 remain that haven't signed up. However, signing up doesn't actually commit a council to anything.

20. In order to use GC, we have to become compliant with the Code of Connection (CoCo). This is a time-consuming and expensive process. As well as the additional costs itemised in paragraphs 15 & 16, it will take at least 40 man days' work on the part of the ICT team.