IT WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 7 JANUARY 2009 at 7.30 pm

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

Officers in attendance:-   R Auty (Head of Community Engagement), J Burton (Website and Communications Officer), P Evans (Business Improvement and Performance Manager), R Procter (Democratic Services Officer), A Webb (Director of Central Services) and N Wittman (ICT Manager).

ITWG15   **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2008 were received and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

ITWG16   **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i)   **Minute ITWG10 – telephone call handling**
        Reference had been made to a report to be brought to this meeting. The Director of Central Services said the Business Improvement Team had only recently started a review of the Customer Service Centre (CSC). A report at this stage would therefore be premature, but it was the intention to bring a full report to the IT Working Group at the next meeting.

(ii)   **Minute ITWG9 – tracking Members' enquiries**
        The Chairman asked for an update. The Director of Central Services said the whole issue of complaint management was currently being considered.   The Council's management of enquiries and complaints from all customers, which included Members, would be the subject of a report at the next meeting of the Performance Select Committee on 12 February. He referred to work currently being done by the business improvement team, which had relevance (see ITWG18).

        Councillor Artus said it was a matter for the IT Working Group to look at what the existing software could do, and then design a protocol.

        Councillor Lemon said he supported Councillor Artus. If the software was indeed available, then it should be used. He was disappointed that this matter had taken so long, and a time limit for it to be resolved should be set.

        The Chairman asked the Director of Central Services to convey to Performance Select Committee an offer by the IT Working Group to explore software for supporting a protocol for customer enquiries.

        The Chairman asked that further debate on this point be drawn to a close, as he was satisfied that the Group's views would be made known to the Performance Select Committee.

ITWG17   **WEBSITE AND INTRANET**

The Chairman welcomed the new Website and Communications Officer. The Head of Community Engagement provided a summary of recent improvements to the Council's website. Improvements included a complaints, suggestions and compliments box which routed emails to the Customer Service Centre. Councillors questioned whether data from this service could be entered on a database. Officers replied that currently these communications were dealt with on a case by case basis. Councillor Artus reported a problem with the operation of the comments service, which officers agreed would be looked into.

Further website innovations included a benefits check service provided in conjunction with the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and a series of online consultations. The Website and Communications Officer said SNAP software had been used for the website satisfaction survey, and the results would be known imminently. Members' feedback on the website would be welcomed.

Members congratulated Officers on the improvements to the website.   The Website and Communications Officer would attend future IT Working Group meetings regarding operation of the intranet.

ITWG18   **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

The Business Improvement and Performance Manager provided a summary of the team's recent work. In terms of staffing, the team was now at full complement.

The Development report had been approved in principle by SMB. It included recommendations for structural changes as well as a re-evaluation of people management and work delegation. Transition planning meetings had already commenced with HR and Unison input on how to best manage these key changes. Once a transition plan had been confirmed, budgetary impacts would be fully understood and presented to SMB for further approval.

In reply to a question from Councillor Artus, she confirmed there would also be a recommendation for an appeals/enforcement officer post.

Regarding complaint management, the overall approach within the Council was disjointed. Her team was looking at the possibilities for using electronic systems such as Covalent, and an initial report on this subject was being prepared for Performance Select Committee.

An initial scoping of the CSC project was currently underway with a project initiation document and plan being drafted for approval. There were several areas that would be investigated as a priority; these included Housing Repairs call taking and despatch activity, and the possible integration of these functions into the CSC; and completing some customer journey mapping exercises to understand the experiences our community has when dealing with us.

Members asked about the savings achieved as a result of the business improvement recommendations. The Director of Central Services said the focus was on efficiency rather than savings, and no targets in terms of costs

reduction were currently in place. Councillor Lemon felt that since there had been real reductions in costs, publicising this hard work was desirable. Councillor Artus offered his assistance in using the SNAP system, as he was a member of the user development group.

The Chairman thanked the Business Improvement Manager for her excellent work.

ITWG19 **ICT SECTION WORKLOAD AND STAFFING**

The Director of Central Services presented a report detailing the current position with regard to ICT staffing, and highlighting elements from some key projects. Staffing in the IT section was nearly at full complement.

The new server had been successfully installed. Although it was housed at the Council's premises, Digica would have responsibility for disaster recovery.

Possibilities for outsourcing areas were being looked into. A report would go to the next Chairs and Directors meeting.

There was more work to do reducing postage. The Head of Customer Support and Revenue Service was addressing this area.

Whilst not an external audit requirement, Officers were producing an asset register to ensure a comprehensive approach to asset management across the Council.

The Chairman said this was an encouraging report. Progress was being made.

ITWG20 **BLADE SERVER PROJECT**

The ICT Manager said a post was currently being advertised for an assistant for this project. Tender documents were being prepared. Arrangements for shared disaster recovery of virtualized environments were being explored with Chelmsford Borough Council. Virtualization would mean running only 42 servers. Consequently there were advantages in both time and money, as power and air conditioning need would be reduced by about 30%.

There was brief discussion of the tender process. Officers confirmed that a streamlined process was being pursued via a government run site.

The Chairman said progress on this matter was a priority. He thanked the ICT Manager for the significant work she was doing.

ITWG21 **GOVERNMENT CONNECT (GC)**

The ICT Manager reported on what was a frustrating and costly process imposed by the Government. She was on the point of submitting the second formal document indicating the Council's intention to comply with GC. Negotiations had been taking place on home workers' use of wireless networks.

The Chairman said it was important to ensure this Council was treated fairly in comparison with others. Officers replied that advice was being taken from another local authority and from an external advisor. Councillor Lemon said that Officers were doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances.

ITWG22   **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The Director of Central Services referred to a proposed substitution in the 2009/10 budget. The existing item was a replacement electoral system but circumstances had changed with the supplier of the existing system, greatly reducing the need to replace that system. Instead, it was now proposed to use the budget of £50,000 for a document imaging project. Improvement East had provided a further £25K for this purpose.

He went on to explain that as part of the Council's recovery plan, an external diagnostic had been carried out, which had recommended the roll out of document imaging across the Council. The good work being done in Revenues and Benefits in this area had been recognised. Introduction of document imaging would cost £75K.

Members asked questions, in particular regarding implications for staff and the importance of strategic installation of equipment in terms of future use of the building.

The Director of Central Services then briefly detailed the other items of capital expenditure. These included a new network including VOIP (£150K) and new Ocella modules (£60K) following a business improvement review. He considered it was the right decision for the Council at this time that the existing system be modified rather than replaced at a cost of £1.2m.

The Chairman said this was a challenging programme, but that he felt much more confidence in the Council's position regarding IT than a year ago.

> AGREED that
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>> it be recommended to the Finance and Administration Committee to substitute the replacement electoral system in the 2009/10 capital programme with a document imaging project with the same £50,000 funding.

The Chairman thanked officers, and complimented the IT team for their hard work during difficulties which had occurred over the holidays.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.