

**IT WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 1 APRIL 2009 at 7.30 pm**

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

Officers in attendance: P Evans (Business Improvement and Performance Manager), R Procter (Democratic Services Officer), A Webb (Director of Central Services) and N Wittman (ICT Manager).

ITWG23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 January 2009 were received and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

ITWG24 BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT TEAM

The Business Improvement and Performance Manager gave an overview of the recent work carried out in the Customer Service Centre. Processes were being mapped to determine the division of activity between front and back office, regarding the four main types of enquiry (general enquiries, environmental health, revenues and benefits, and housing repairs). Officers were exploring possibilities for improvement, and were currently focusing on environmental health enquiries. Monitoring of call flow would help assess the number of enquiries being passed to the back office. Currently the level of information being provided by staff depended on the background knowledge of individual officers, therefore training would be required.

A brief review of housing repairs enquiries had taken place, as call take and despatch procedures and responsibilities were not clearly defined. This enquiry data was still being analysed.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Central Services said that automated call filtering was still a possibility, as this was appropriate where operators were skills based. However, this option had not been progressed, since it would depend on the composition of the Customer Services Centre, which was still under review.

The Chairman asked for an update on tracking Members' enquiries. The Business Improvement and Performance Manager said Performance Select Committee had approved a project to recommend a customer feedback process, which would include tracking of such enquiries. An officers' project group had started work, and two teams within the group were looking at systems and processes. A package developed from existing in-house software might not be sufficiently comprehensive, and therefore other options, including the possibility of joining in with Essex County Council's Respond software, were being looked into.

Regarding the planning and development team, structural changes had now been approved by the Strategic Management Board. These changes would achieve an estimated year on year saving of £50K by means of not filling vacancies, and would result in greater efficiencies of process. An Ocella

system enhancement had also been approved. A further review would be undertaken once these changes had been established.

Regarding housing services, a review of the tenant voids process was under way, following on from the Organisational Review which took place two years ago.

ITWG25 **ICT WORKLOAD AND STAFFING**

Members considered the report of the Director of Central Services. In terms of staffing, the department was nearly at full strength, and there was only one vacancy which would be advertised shortly. Regarding workload, significant Code of Connection work had been undertaken during the last four months, which would be discussed later in the meeting. There had been problems with the finance linked ordering system, as discussed at the recent meeting of the Performance Select Committee. It had transpired the system was not fit for purpose, as any code could be entered under any budget. Contractual payments on the project had ceased whilst a resolution to the issue was sought. The asset management software project was also on hold whilst changes were made by the developers to comply with the CIPFA SORP for capital accounting and the IFRS accounting rules which came into effect on 1 April 2009. In readiness for the blade server and virtualisation project a number of servers had already been virtualised in test.

The major project work plan for 2009/10 had now been agreed, including a new network at the Saffron Walden office. This project would form a significant improvement in the ability to move groups within the offices or to let them out in the future, as the network could more readily be 'cordoned off'.

A major system replacement was also planned. Potential areas and systems were currently being discussed, and further information would be provided to Members later in April 2009.

The ICT Manager said IT officers were working extensive extra hours to ensure systems operated, and were doing so without pay or time off in lieu. Members were very impressed by the hard work and commitment of officers, and asked that their appreciation be passed on to them.

ITWG26 **ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT (EDRM)**

Members considered the report of the Director of Central Services, which set out the background to the proposals for the new system infrastructure. The new system would enable the required outcome to be achieved of a single 'picture' of a customer's interactions with the Council.

This was a significant project, as it would entail scanning records dating from 1974, although only key items would be included. Extensive work would be needed, and four scanning officers would be recruited. Members noted there would be additional staff costs of £120K in 2009/10. The Director of Central Services said the policy of vacancy management was being used this year to cover these extra costs.

In reply to a question from Councillor Hudson regarding the shared system at Chelmsford, the Director of Central Services said this would be an additional safeguard, as copies of all scanned material would be stored there.

Members agreed that EDRM was a step in the right direction, and that as the ICT Section had already proved itself in taking on big projects, they had more confidence in these proposals than might have been the case.

ITWG27 **BLADE SERVER PROJECT**

The ICT Manager said the hardware for the EDRM project had been delivered today and would be set up tomorrow. Work had already taken place on virtualizing a number of systems for CoCo.

The Chairman expressed thanks to the team of officers involved in this project.

ITWG28 **GOVERNMENT CONNECT**

The ICT Manager reported on progress made on Government Connect (GC) and the implications for the Council. Officers had applied for and been granted an extension of time to the end of May, in order not to rush implementing a particular 'must comply' which if wrongly applied would have major implications for incoming and outgoing electronic communications.

She referred Members to the list of work completed to date as set out in the report. Most of the changes to the ICT systems were being done out of hours by staff who were not taking time off in lieu for such work, but who wanted to ensure the minimum disruption to front facing services such as benefits and planning.

Members discussed the onerous nature of the proposals for local authorities. Officers were aiming to be fully compliant by the beginning of May, but advised that this was to be an annual requirement requiring the upgrading of conditions for each authority from 'should' to 'must' status each year. No funding was available, other than for innovative improvements. However, the pressure to comply with requirements did not encourage risking innovations. Officers had tried to ensure compliance with as many conditions as possible to minimise work next year.

The Chairman said this project was a case of overkill and had cost a fortune. There was little benefit at the end of it, and it significantly inconvenienced staff.

Councillor Hudson asked about the implications for Members. The Director of Central Services said Members would carry on as at present, but would receive guidance on settings to ensure the wireless router was secure. Members would also be offered encrypted memory sticks. A newsletter for Members would be issued shortly.

The Chairman questioned the value of the blackberry devices which had been issued to Members. The ICT Manager said a review of usage would take

place. Councillor Lemon asked that information for Members on IT should be set out in plain language.

Councillor Howell asked about the implementation of the intranet changes. The Director of Central Services said work on re-implementation had started and that Bruce Tice, James Burton and Louise Milns were progressing the necessary updates.

ITWG29 **FUTURE OF IT WORKING GROUP**

The Director of Central Services referred to the review of all task and working groups which would be considered at the forthcoming Annual Council meeting. This was an opportunity for Members of the IT Working Group to discuss the future role of the Group. The IT Working Group had originally been set up in response to the e-government initiative in order to demonstrate to Members what was involved. However, many the items now coming before it were capable of being dealt with by the Strategic Management Board. The inclusion of reports from the Business Improvement Team was historical rather than logical. Therefore, Members might wish to consider the future role of the Group, or indeed whether it should continue.

Members went on to discuss various aspects of the work done. Members noted that the IT Working Group reported to the Finance and Administration Committee. IT had a higher profile than it used to, and there ought to continue to be a venue at which major IT projects could be scrutinised. The Group was valuable in providing Councillors with information on major work such as the Government Connect project. It was unlikely the website would have been revamped without the input of the Group. The Business Improvement Team provided a valuable contribution.

AGREED to recommend to Annual Council that the IT Working Group should continue and should meet quarterly.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.