IT WORKING PARTY held at 6.00 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 22 MARCH 2000

Present: Councillor R A Merrion - Chairman.
              Councillors Mrs D Cornell and R W L Stone.

Officers in attendance: Mrs L Bunting, J K Mercer and A Webb.

I.   APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A R Thawley.

I.   MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 1999 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

I.   MATTERS ARISING

(i)   Minute IT18 - IT Programme 2000/2001

The Head of IT and Audit Services reported that the IT Programme for 2000/2001 had been approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 11 January 2000.

I.   TELECOMMUNICATIONS

As had been reported at the last meeting, the lease on the existing system expired in May 2000 and investigations into the future provision of telecommunications had been carried out. The Head of IT and Audit Services submitted a report on the results of a recent tender evaluation exercise.

ICOSys Computers Ltd, an independent telecommunications consultancy, had been appointed to assist the Council prepare a tender specification. Funding for the project had been increased by the inclusion of a prudent allowance of £60,000 in the 2000/01 Capital Programme. The full combined funding would be required to meet all acquisition and implementation costs and consultant and project management costs, estimated at £10,000.

A specification had been approved in December 1999 by the IT Working Party. The following features for a new system had been sought:

(i)   A switchboard with sufficient capacity to meet current and future requirements.

(ii)   An improved voicemail system, with advanced features such as IVR (interactive voice recognition).

(iii)   Call centre technology including ACD (Automatic Call Distribution) and Call Flow. This technology enabled Business Centres to handle high volumes of incoming calls more quickly and efficiently. Initially, it would be used within the Revenues, Housing and Environmental Services Business Centres.

(iv)   Unified Messaging (the ability to transfer voice messages and faxes to a PC using Microsoft Exchange and Outlook).

(v)   Improved systems administration and management reporting functions.

Eight suppliers had submitted tenders and a shortlist of three companies had been drawn up. Detailed evaluations of the shortlisted proposals had been carried out and the Working Party had received the final report from ICOSys Computers. Each proposal had been rated in percentage terms for compliance with the requirements of the specification.

It was felt that the ML Voice proposal of a Lucent INDeX switch, which was based on the latest technology, was preferable to extending the life of the existing switchboard. However, it was considered that ML Voice's unified messaging solution, which was not part of the standard INDeX system, should be excluded from the project. Unified messaging was a relatively new technology and consequently the cost was still high. Lucent would be releasing its own system in the future and this was likely to be cheaper and offer more functionality.

After discussion it was

RECOMMENDED that

1   A Lucent INDeX Switch based system be acquired from ML Voice Ltd in the sum of £106,422 (including a CPU upgrade at a cost of £856) on contract terms and conditions to be agreed by the Chief Executive.

2   A support agreement, in the annual sum of £12,754, be taken out with ML Voice Ltd on contract terms and conditions to be agreed by the Chief Executive.

I.   MEMBERS' HOME COMPUTING

The Head of IT and Audit Services outlined the progress made to date in developing IT services for Members. A project was in progress for the provision of laptop computers to Members with access to the Council's IT systems. The main uses of IT for Members were to communicate with the public and colleagues via Email; access information, including reports and agenda held on a Council Intranet site; access the Internet for research purposes and utilise office automation facilities.

Investigations were currently taking place to find a suitable make and model of laptop at an affordable price. A shortlist had been prepared of machines which met the minimum specification of 300Mhz celeron processor or better, 64Mg of memory (96Mg if Windows 2000 was installed), minimum 12" screen, preferably 14" and 4Gb hard disc drive or greater.

The Chairman of the Working Party had carried out a trial with a Toshiba laptop of the type currently used within the Council. This had identified a number of issues, notably the weight of the machines, the use of the built-in mouse and the life of the battery. After further discussion on printers and software it was agreed that each laptop should weigh no more than 2½kg, have a battery life of two hours, a minimum screen of 13", the supply of a mouse along with a carry case, charger and spare battery. A Hewlett Packard Jet printer would also be provided.

The personal taxation position of Members receiving computer equipment from the Council had been investigated. Advice had been sought from the Compliance Unit of the Inspectorate of Taxes, which had informally confirmed that, provided the purchase price of the equipment was below £2,000 and it was used exclusively for Council purposes, there was deemed to be no benefit in kind.

The Head of IT and Audit Services asked the Working Party to recommend a timetable based on 3 July 2000 as the earliest possible time to "go live".

Mid April 2000	Make and model of laptop and printer chosen.
End of April	Prices of hardware obtained and supplier(s) chosen.
Mid May 2000	Telecomms solution determined.
End of May 2000	Members' training needs identified
Mid June 2000	Laptops and printers delivered and software installed.
Mid June 2000	Installation of 'phone lines and additional communications hardware.
End of June 2000	Initial member training completed. This was subject to further discussion, but was likely to consist of introductory training in the use of Word 2000, Outlook 2000 (for Email) and Explorer 5 (for Intranet / Internet access). Where required, introductory computer training would be provided to Members with no prior computer experience.

3 July 2000   Live date for project, including launch of Intranet site.

The timetable was very tight and there was little scope for slippage. However, provided IT resources were concentrated on the project, it should be achievable.

RECOMMENDED that the timetable, as set out above, be adopted.

I.   **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was decided to hold a further meeting before the next Council meeting and 25 April 2000 at 6.00 pm was agreed.

The meeting ended at 7.25 pm.