IT WORKING PARTY – THURSDAY 10 MAY 2001

Agenda Item No: **4**

Title: **ICT PROJECTS – PROGRESS REPORT**

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Summary

1   This report updates Members on progress on the ICT projects scheduled for the first quarter of 2001. The Working Party's views are sought on a number of matters relating to provision of ICT services to Members.

Office 2000 project

2   The project to replace ICL Officepower, the Council's office automation system, with Microsoft Office 2000 was completed by the deadline of 31 March 2001. All staff are now using the new system, having received, in total, 760 days of training.

3   As part of the project, Officepower documents requiring retention have been converted into the Office 2000 format. Also, all database applications have been re-written in Access 2000. As part of this exercise, a car park management system has been developed, which went live at the beginning of April 2001. The system manages car park and on-street parking fines, on-street parking permits and car park season tickets.

Internet and Intranet

4   Further Intranet development has taken place in recent weeks, including the installation of a complete set of on-line Office 2000 manuals. Some issues are still outstanding, including the introduction of on-line discussion forums and providing Intranet access to local government and planning law encyclopaedias. This work will take place in the next few weeks.

5   The initial phase of the development of a new Uttlesford web site is nearing completion. A demonstration of the web site will be given at the meeting and comments on the layout and content will be sought from Members and officers before the system goes live.

Other projects

6   An upgrade to the underlying Oracle database of the Ocella system was successfully completed, whilst a similar project is being carried out in respect of the First Software housing system. As part of the latter project, the application is being transferred from a Unix to a Windows NT platform. This move is being made to simplify future upgrades and reduce upgrade costs.

7   Year end procedures were successfully completed on the financial, revenues and housing systems.

8   Completion of a central computerised document management system has been delayed due to the upgrade work described above. It is expected that the build of the "live" system will be completed within the next month, enabling data input to begin. The system will replace the paper based central filing system in Office Services.

Members' project

9   A questionnaire has been sent to members seeking views in three areas:

     a) **Preferences for the future delivery of committee papers.** The possibility of withdrawing some, or all, of the postal deliveries of committee papers is being canvassed. An update on the responses from the questionnaires will be given at the meeting.

     b) **Out-of-office-hours ICT support requirements.** A number of options are being canvassed, ranging from the existing office-hours only arrangement to a 7 day a week, daytime and evening service. Again, an update on the responses will be given at the meeting.

     c) **Future ICT training requirements.** An indication is also being sought of training requirements for 2001/02. Whilst the formal training sessions held last year were successful, there was little demand for evening "drop in" sessions. Informal, one to one, sessions are currently proving more popular and effective. The Working Party will be advised of the potential training demand identified from the results of the questionnaire. Officers will then draw up a training plan for the year and identify funding.

10   Taking into account the responses to the questionnaire, the views of the Working Party are sought regarding: -

     a) Future arrangements for the delivery of committee papers.

     b) Future requirements for out-of-office hours ICT support.

     c) Future ICT training requirements.

11   The Members' dial-up system has been working reasonably well, although some problems were experienced with its reliability and performance. This matter was taken up with Cable and Wireless Ltd and the service has improved in recent weeks. Various improvements to the Council's ICT infrastructure are in progress which will also aid system performance and reliability. Scheduled work includes an upgrade to the speed of the Internet connection and the addition of a further Citrix server into server pool.

12   Issues currently outstanding include the need to simplify the procedures for attaching documents to Emails and saving documents to the PC's hard drive. Both procedures require changes to Citrix which are proving problematic. Specialist advice has been sought and a solution is still awaited.

13   At the last meeting of the Working Party the possibility of diverting personal Email to the Uttlesford Outlook system was discussed. It was agreed that officers would investigate the ramifications of this matter and report back.

14   Technically, Email can be diverted in this way, provided that the Member's private Email system has the capability. There is also no specific legal or tax reason why Email should not be diverted. However, paragraph 31 of the Councillors' Code, issued in January 2001, states that support services, including IT, should only be used on Council business and should never be used in connection with party political or campaigning activity or for private purposes.

15   Paragraph 31 could be amended to permit private use, provided that the amount of use for private purposes was incidental to the main use for Council business, and the Email system was not used for business or political campaigning.

16   The Working Party's views are sought on whether the Council should be asked to amend paragraph 31 of the Councillors' Code to allow private use of the system in the limited circumstances described above.

        Background Papers: Councillors' Code, January 2001