

Committee: IT Working Group
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Agenda Item No: 6
Title: IT Services Position Statement 2 – Citrix
Author: Adrian Webb (01799) 510421

Summary

1. This paper is the second in a series aimed at defining where the IT service is now and where it aims to be in the future. This first report looked at the area of remote users, this included Councillors, home workers and field operatives. The second report looks at Citrix - the thin client solution currently in place within the Council. This report does not seek additional funding as any expenditure, in the current financial year (2005/06), has been included as part of the IT Capital Programme, which was approved by the Resources Committee on 3 February 2005.

Background

2. The council has operated within a Citrix environment for the last 5 years. Citrix is a thin client system whereby users log on to a suite ("Farm") of servers to access corporate systems rather than have the systems loaded locally on each personal computer (pc).
3. The main drivers for moving to a Citrix environment were:
 - a. to improve the service to the Planning department when it was located at Great Dunmow. At the time the IT department had a separate IT suite at the Great Dunmow office;
 - b. to reduce on-going costs for pc replacement
 - c. to provide a better means of support by "shadowing" users; and
 - d. to provide a platform for homeworkers
4. Citrix was initially installed for the delivery of the Microsoft Office suite only (Word, Access, Excel and Outlook). However over the course of time many other applications have been added to the servers. A large number of these are not actively supported, or recommended to be installed in a Citrix environment. The main driver for adding these additional applications to the Citrix Farm was to improve the service offered to the Great Dunmow Planning Office.
5. With the passage of time, we no longer have a separate IT suite at Great Dunmow nor are Planning located there. In addition, although we installed Citrix we continued to buy pcs rather than the cheaper "dumb terminals". With the reduction in cost of pcs the difference is now minimal. Technological advances now mean that shadowing is not critical as software is available, and being used

by the Support Desk, which enables specific office based pcs to be accessed remotely.

6. At present the Council has a Citrix Farm consisting of 10 servers. In December 2004 a server farm upgrade, undertaken by a specialist support company went wrong and caused significant disruption to the whole of the Council for a period of six weeks. In August 2005 the introduction of a bolt on password manager module, installed by consultants, again caused significant disruption when it did not perform as expected.
7. Whilst the individual applications such as Ocella, Housing and GGP are stable and the individual pcs are generally performing satisfactorily (some old machines may need replacing), Citrix remains relatively unstable and the cause of many of the problems experienced by users.

The Way Forward

8. It is proposed to phase out the use of Citrix within the Saffron Walden office environment. Each pc will need to be rebuilt and have relevant application client software installed. It is therefore logical to undertake the project on a departmental basis. A departmental order is identified below with reasons:

Order	Department	Reasons
1	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Experiencing the most problems ◆ About to purchase 50 new pcs which will enable one system set-up and provide a swap pool of spare machines
2	Environmental Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Experiencing significant problems ◆ Need to resolve to enable ICM pilot to proceed
3	Building Control	
4	Land Charges	
5	Licensing	
6	Revenues and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Main system is already outside of Citrix
7	All support and remaining frontline services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ All remaining frontline services access systems outside of Citrix
8	Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Need to wait for system upgrade on 22/10/05
9	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ System was built by a third party on Citrix. At the next major release (Summer 2006) the system will be rebuilt outside of Citrix

9. Many of the main systems are now browser based (accessed via Internet Explorer) and as such have little or no software to be installed on the individual pcs. The main exceptions are ICLipse where we will have to install the client software on almost all of the 250 pcs, Ocella and GGP, where we will have to install on, in the region of, 100 machines. Ocella inform us that a browser based version is planned, with an announcement this financial year.
10. Citrix MSAM will continue to be the way of working for homeworkers, remote sites and Councillors. The Great Dunmow office, will continue to use Citrix (but switch to MSAM) for accessing corporate systems.
11. Staff will be able to access their data from any pc, therefore hot desking will still be available. However, to speed up pc performance a standard background display ("wallpaper") will be introduced. At present many different wallpapers are used, ranging from standard windows ones through to photos of families and friends. These wallpapers are held on the central servers and loaded over the network each time the member of staff logs-in. Introducing a standard wallpaper will speed up system access and reduce network traffic.
12. There are few negative points to this course of action. However the main one would be that upgrades on non browser based applications, such as Ocella, GGP and ICLipse, will have to be undertaken on every machine (100 plus for Ocella and GGP, and 250 plus for ICLipse) rather than 10 Citrix servers. When an upgrade has been installed on the application server, staff will not be able to use the system until their pc has also been upgraded. With up to 250 pcs to upgrade downtime may increase and will need to be scheduled well in advance.
13. Disruption to staff will be kept at a minimum. There should be minimal downtime, only when the individual member of staff's pc is being rebuilt, as all of the applications will continue to be available via Citrix.

Funding of the Programme

14. It is likely that some additional pcs will be required. Within the capital programme there is funding for Minor Projects in the sum of £30,000. It was identified at the time that of this sum £10,000 should be earmarked for the replacement pc programme. This will be sufficient to meet the needs of this project.

Conclusions

15. Whilst moving away from Citrix is a significant change in direction for the Council, the anticipated improvement in system availability and operation will significantly improve the service the council provides to its customers.
16. Executive Management Team approved the phased withdrawal of Citrix at the London Road Office at their meeting on 12 September 2005.

Background Papers: None