

**OVERVIEW, SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**13 DECEMBER 2011**

**REPORT OF ELECTRONIC WORKING FOR MEMBERS TASK GROUP**

**ICT SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR MEMBERS**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider proposals from the Task Group regarding the introduction of an ICT Support Package for Members.
- 1.2 To agree recommendations to be referred to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The following be referred to the Policy, Finance & Administration Committee for consideration :-**

- 2.1 **The Council approves an ICT Support Package for Councillors as detailed at Appendix A.**
- 2.2 **Funding is provided in the 2012/13 budget for 15 packages as detailed at Appendix A1 and any remaining requests for packages in Year 2.**
- 2.3 **Take up of the ICT Support Package by Members be stand alone and not reliant on use of Council passwords or the withdrawal of hard copy agendas at Committees.**
- 2.4 **In order to take advantage of the package Members demonstrate a commitment to move towards achieving ICT competence to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or an equivalent standard. Support will be provided to enable this standard to be achieved and gaining this qualification will not prohibit distribution of the laptop package.**
- 2.5 **An 'ICT Download List' is available at Appendix C and should Members wish to download any products that are not included on the approved list ICT Support will be withdrawn and Members would be required to seek their own solutions to ICT problems. There is a procedure for adding new items to the Approved List outlined in Appendix C.**
- 2.6 **The ICT Protocol for Members be amended to reflect the proposals in the report and be referred to the Constitution Review Task Group for consideration.**
- 2.7 **It be noted that the Council has subscribed to the Modern Councillor, ICT Learning Package for Members for a trial period of one year, at a cost of £1K to be funded from the Member Development Budget.**
- 2.8 **A bid for additional resources for the one-off capital costs and the ongoing**

**revenue costs be submitted as part of the budget setting process for 2012-13 as detailed in the financial implications section of the report.**

### **3.0 KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 Following discussions with the Leader and the Administration, Electronic Working for Members has been included within the Work Programme for this committee. This work is intended to build on the previous work of the Extraordinary Efficiency Task Group.(EETG) A Task Group was established at the June meeting of this committee to progress this piece of work.
- 3.2 The first meeting of the new Task Group was held on 23 August 2011. At that meeting an update was provided on the previous work of the EETG with one of the key conclusions being that there was unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' solution as members were all at different levels of competence in relation to use of ICT. It was also felt by the Group that the previous emphasis on needing to generate cashable savings should not be a constraint on recommendations from the Task Group. There are potentially numerous benefits that could accrue to the Council and to Councillors through Members working more electronically, including potential efficiency savings through for example producing less paper and greater officer productivity.
- 3.3 The Task Group then went on to consider a summary of the support package used by Leicester City Council for their councillors. Whilst it was felt that the specific scheme was not appropriate for Melton, it was felt that the general principles could be used to develop an ICT Support Package that would be suitable to meet the needs of Melton. A suggested specification of an appropriate package is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.4 The rationale for this proposal is that electronic communications is becoming more and more critical to the role of the modern councillor. Attached at Appendix B is a summary of the key activities that are linked to the role of a modern councillor that rely on the individual councillor having the capacity and support to work electronically. In order to achieve this full potential the Task Group is of the view that an appropriate support package should be available to all Councillors. In order to ensure that the package is used to maximum advantage it was considered by the Group that before being able to receive the package each Councillor must be able to demonstrate a commitment to move towards an appropriate level of ICT competence, possibly to the European Computer Driving Licence standard or equivalent. Anyone without this level of competence would additionally be supported by the Council to attain the appropriate skills however gaining such a qualification will not prohibit distribution of the laptop package.
- 3.5 Whilst this proposal will result in additional expenditure in the short term, the longer term aim will be to recover some or all of these additional costs through greater efficiencies. Initially this will require a leap of faith because those benefits will only start to accrue when all Councillors become proficient in the use of ICT and more of the current practises can be phased out.
- 3.6 The ICT Package is designed to offer flexibility for Members to work electronically at home, whilst on the move and at the Council's offices. It is not restricted by passwords or logging into the Council's network. The package would offer the full Windows Office Suite however Members would need their own internet provider to access the web and their emails as they do currently. Support is offered to access

the internet via Broadband. Although the package is offered with no pressure for further reduction in hard copy agendas, it is hoped that Members will organically foster the new ways of working and less reliance on paper as already adopted by the Council's staff.

3.7 The ICT Package presented is based on setting up a Councillor with all the ICT equipment needed to work electronically. However some Members may not need all of the items listed and a 'pick and mix' approach can be adopted. This approach could result in a cheaper budget option that has not been factored into the figures but would result in budgetary savings at the end of the financial year.

3.9 The Task Group received a presentation on the Modern Councillor, ICT Learning Package for Members. The web-based facility is under the umbrella of the 'Learning Pool' which Council staff are already using for shared information and learning materials. The Task Group was impressed by the concept of this type of flexible, electronic learning for Members but which could also include group learning sessions facilitated by officers. The package has a wide selection of Member-related courses such as Code of Conduct, Equalities and Charing Meetings – each unit being of different timed sizes to enable choice as to time commitment – therefore Members could individually pick and choose what they would like to learn or catch up on to fit in with the time they have available.

The package also includes a type of 'blog' for communicating and sharing information with Councillor colleagues in other areas. There is a monitoring facility so that usage can be assessed regularly to ensure the Council is getting value from the package.

The Member Development Steering Group leads on the Member Development budget and the group has already agreed to commit to the package at a cost of £1,000 per annum and this will soon be available to Members.

3.10 Due to the potential complications that can occur to a laptop following web downloads or installation of other web packages, it was considered that Members should be deterred from downloading web products to a Council laptop or installing any additional ICT packages that are not included on the Approved List at Appendix C. If Members feel it is necessary to add other packages to their laptop, then ICT Support cannot be responsible for continuing to support issues associated with the laptop.

If Members wish to have extra products added to the Approved List at Appendix C, then they need to contact the IT Client Manager

3.11 All Members were consulted as to interest in taking up the proposed ICT Package in Year 1. This was to enable the Task Group to get a view as to the initial interest and whether the roll-out could be split across 2 years to spread the cost. The survey resulted in a positive response of 15 Councillors interested in a Year 1 roll-out.

However to help with annual budgets, it is proposed to roll-out the package to Members over 2 years. It is considered that there are possibly up to 4 Members who would not require the package due to having alternative arrangements and others did not respond therefore the costs of the year 1 roll-out have been limited to the 15 and any remaining be provided in year 2. If this was agreed, Group Leaders may need to be involved in prioritising Members for the Year 1 roll-out.

#### **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council's 'New Ways of Working' includes working electronically, being 'paper-light' and meeting environmental government targets. This report presents a proposal for how this type of working could be available to Members.
- 4.2 The initiative meets the Corporate Priority of 'A Well Run Council'. The proposals offer efficiencies in time usage and flexibility for Members. It is anticipated that financial savings will follow in the longer term.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Appendix A sets out the cost implications for the package. One-off set up costs equate to £1,010 per Councillor (including training). In addition, annual revenue costs of £6,525 will be required in year 1 of which £1,000 has already been covered by existing budgets. This assumes take-up by 15 Councillors. These revenue costs may increase in year 2 if additional Councillors opt into the scheme, the maximum revenue costs will be £12,167. These costs will need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for 2012-13 and a project mandate will be required for both the capital element and annual revenue costs and a revenue budget growth request for the revenue costs.
- 5.2 The above represents the costs assuming all the 15 Councillors who responded to the survey take up the offer in year 1 and any remaining in year 2 (see Appendix A1).
- 5.3 The capital costs identified will require funding from either capital receipts or a revenue contribution from the corporate priorities reserve.

#### **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 The legality of the delivery of committee papers electronically and whether this can replace hard copy documentation for decision-making purposes is not clear in current legislation. However this report does not rely on reducing hard copies although it would be hoped this would be achieved.

#### **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no community safety implications in this report.

#### **8.0 EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 Providing Members with the ICT equipment to work electronically offers equal access to electronic communications as well as offers flexibility to enable work/home/Councillor life balance for Members.

## 9.0 RISKS

### 9.1 Probability

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Very High A				
High B				
Significant C				
Low D		1		
Very Low E	2			
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

→  
**Impact**

Risk No.	Description
1	Non adoption of new ways of working following take up
2	Theft or loss of Council equipment

## 10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are environmental benefits to electronic working and reducing photocopying, paper circulation and usage.

## 11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Members have been consulted as to their desire to take up an ICT Package in Year 1 so that interest in the project could be gauged.

## 12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All wards are affected.

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Date:                      November 2011

Appendices :            Appendix A : ICT Support Package and costs  
                                  Appendix B : Benefits of Electronic Working for Members  
                                  Appendix C : Approved Download List and Process for adding new items

Background Papers:    Previous EETG files  
                                  PFA Minutes : 21 April 2009  
                                  Electronic Working for Members Task Group minutes – 230811 and 041011

Reference :              X : Committees\OSA\2011 12\ 131211\Electronic Working TG Report