

CABINET

29 JANUARY 2021

REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A.1 SCRUTINY OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL SERVICES

(Report prepared by Keith Durrant and Ian Ford)

BACKGROUND

At the meeting of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 December 2020 (Minute 108 refers) the Committee was provided with an overview of the Council's Digital Services Transformation.

It was reported to the Committee that with Councillors having varying degrees of IT expertise the Council had identified an emerging picture whereby:

- ✘ Some councillors were increasingly becoming disengaged - losing the ability to fully/ effectively engage with the range of digital information and services that the council operated.
- ✘ Some councillors were struggling with their IT and asking Council Officers to fix their personal equipment – potentially creating an insurance liability issue.
- ✘ The diversity of different Councillor Applications, all at different versions, was causing Councillors to experience different IT problems causing unnecessary stress and pressures for all concerned.

The emerging digital picture was therefore perceived as an opportunity to assist councillors in their community leadership role. Through providing each councillor with a standard, managed device backed up by IT training and supported via the Council's IT service desk intended benefits and improvements were, and remain, as followed:

- ✓ To assist Councillors to improve their efficiency and access to stored digital information.
- ✓ Strengthen cybersecurity (and cybersecurity awareness) and further reduce any possibility of a data breach and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) data loss.
- ✓ Enhance Councillors' digital engagement.
- ✓ Enhance mobile working and flexible working capabilities and thereby work/ life balance
- ✓ Further reduce reliance (and the costs) of printed information.
- ✓ Councillor IT equipment standardisation would in turn enable officers council-wide to standardise the range services that they provide which would achieve efficiency savings for both Councillors and Officers.

Members heard how the strategy had been to purchase high quality Microsoft Surface Go tablets during 2019 and at the beginning of 2020 for Councillors to

undertake their council-related duties. With some Councillors struggling with the tablet screen size Officers had additionally offered Councillors: connection hubs, full size keyboards, 24" screens, cabled mouse. This gave Councillors a blend of home-based digital access with the ability to go mobile with their tablets when required.

As a result of COVID-19 and an emerging understanding as to its longevity, officers had become conversant with new face-to-face restrictive working arrangements and the use of virtual Microsoft Skype meetings had become a key 'new working norm'. Likewise, virtual meeting MS Skype capabilities had needed to be extended to Councillors to enable them to perform their duties, which was not an intended original use of the previously purchased tablets.

The Committee was informed that the Council now had a pressing financial, technological and support need to migrate fully from Microsoft Skype to Microsoft Teams. Teams offered a range of additional meeting business functionality benefits over Skype but it was far more demanding in terms of computing processing power. As such, it was close to the limit and was very likely to become beyond the processing capabilities of councillor tablets as Microsoft invested in further enhancing Teams functionality.

With a view to giving Councillors the very best experience possible during multi-party video conference calls, the decision had now been taken to allocate funding to quickly replace Councillors' tablets with the same Lenovo laptops that officers used. Those laptops were tried and tested, high specification devices that had enabled officers to perform the full range of council business demands.

The Committee was also informed in addition, and based upon approaches from several senior Councillors, that providing Members with a council tablet had unintentionally been seen as an 'imposition' by some Councillors, despite Officers' best intentions. Likewise, Officers had now acknowledged Councillors' desire to be increasingly involved in their use of digital technology and how they worked and engaged with council business.

With engagement firmly in mind but reflecting the need to standardise equipment across Officers and Councillors as far as was possible, Councillors would now be asked on an individual basis whether they would benefit more from having a smaller, lighter more portable 13" council laptop, or a larger 15" laptop with a bigger screen and near full-size keyboard. Council provided ancillary devices – keyboards, screens, mice, hubs – would continue to be offered to Councillors and those who already had them would be able to connect and continue to use them with their replacement laptops.

It was the intention to engage with Councillors and roll-out the new laptops during December and early January. Following a period of Microsoft Teams training on virtual meetings the Council would migrate to Microsoft Teams on or around January 18th 2020.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS TO CABINET

During the consideration of this report the Committee made the following:-

COMMENT TO CABINET: that the Cabinet be informed that this Committee endorses the principle that Councillors be consulted on the IT kit that is to be provided to them to fulfil their roles as Members.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Portfolio Holder Comments

The comments of the Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder will be submitted to Cabinet at the meeting.

Recommendations to Cabinet

That the comment of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and the comments of the Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder, in response thereto, be endorsed.