

Report to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee



Report reference: *FPM-020-2013/14*
Date of meeting: *20 January 2014*

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance & Technology
Subject: ICT Facilities for Councillors
Responsible Officer: David Newton (01992 564580).
Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin (01992 564532).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the responses and conclusions from the questionnaire;
- (2) To not seek additional funding in 2014/2015 for Member ICT facilities; and
- (3) To support enhancements from existing resources.

Executive Summary:

At the request of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel (**FPMS**P), the ICT service invited all Councillors to complete a survey regarding their experience using and connecting to the Councils' ICT systems.

The low level of response, and the lack of consensus in the responses, does not support a significant investment in additional facilities for Members at this time. Efforts will be made to address the concerns expressed through existing resources.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

FPMS P Members requested the questionnaire be distributed and the results fed back.

Other Options for Action:

Council email accounts could be provided for Members at an initial cost of £25,600 and with an annual maintenance cost of £5,480. A case could have been made for this investment if the survey had produced a much higher response rate and consistent results. The fact that only 27% of Members completed the survey and of those only 56% wanted a Council email address would make it difficult to justify the significant investment needed, particularly in the current financial climate.

Report:

- 1) Following a request from the FPMSP on 21 March 2013, a Members workshop was held on the 21 May 2013 to discuss both the development of the website and general ICT facilities for Members. A number of issues arose from this meeting and the potential solutions, along with the costs involved, were presented at the FPMSP on the 17 September 2013. Consequently, the ICT service was asked to distribute a questionnaire to all Members seeking feedback on their priorities and preferred solutions.
- 2) An email with an electronic questionnaire was sent to all Councillors on the 21 October 2013 followed by an email reminder on the 07 November 2013. Before considering the results, it should be remembered that Members do receive additional allowances for their ICT costs and substantial time and effort has been invested by Research and Democratic Services in Member ICT training (e.g. Gold and Platinum Training). By the closing date of 15 November 2013, a total of 16 responses (27%) had been received. These responses were analysed and a summary of the results is listed below;
 - a) 81% still have access to their Virtual Private Network (**VPN**) token.
 - b) Only 43% use VPN to access Council systems, the majority only looking for agenda's.
 - c) 81% have some issue using VPN, most finding the process very unfriendly.
 - d) 60% feel that replacing the key fobs with soft tokens, sent to their mobile phones, will not improve the situation.
 - e) All Members have Broadband,
 - f) 56% have their own iPhone/Android phones,
 - g) 40% have their own iPad/Android tablets.
 - h) 56% would like a Council email address.
 - i) 38% would find access to a smartphone or tablet useful.
 - j) 43% are aware of Mod.Gov app.
 - k) 18% use the Mod.Gov app.
 - l) 80% would like remote access to restricted docs.
- 3) Given the relatively low response it is difficult to establish a definitive approach to address these issues. A summary of the major points are as follows;
 - a) The VPN solution needs improving and this should include both refresher training and a review of the current Gold and Platinum training. The extent of improvement should be monitored through a follow up survey in a year's time.
 - b) The majority of respondents only use remote access to view agendas and 80% would like remote access to restricted documents, so it would seem appropriate to promote the Mod.Gov app as a complementary solution to VPN access. A demonstration of the Mod.Gov app can be arranged if required.
 - c) Members could be provided with a standard Council email address, accessible via VPN and by their own mobile devices, for a capital cost of £25,600 and ongoing annual maintenance of £5,480.

Resource Implications:

The cost of enhancing the VPN system would be dependent on the solution chosen. The Mod.Gov module has already been implemented, so no extra cost is involved. EFDC email addresses for Members will require approval from Cabinet for additional capital funding of £25,600 and the on-going revenue costs of £5,480 would need to be added to the ICT maintenance budget as a growth item.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None

Consultation Undertaken:

This report summarises a consultation exercise with Members on their ICT facilities.

Background Papers:

Various reports on ICT to FPMSP.

Impact Assessments:Risk Management

There is a risk that Members will not be as effective as they might be if they are not adequately trained and supported in their use of ICT.

If significant additional costs were incurred on Member's ICT facilities they might not provide good value for money and could result in external criticism.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? **No**

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? **No**

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process? **None**

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group? **No**