Report to the Council

Subject: Corporate Support Services & ICT   **Date: 28 October 2008**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mitchell Cohen   **Item: 8(e)**

Recommending:

That the report of the Corporate Support Services & ICT Portfolio Holder be noted.

ICT Service Management

The ICT Service has been through a challenging period with the medical retirement of the former Head of ICT and the subsequent resignation of the Assistant Head of ICT. The loss of these senior staff combined with the corporate restructure made it essential to conduct a review of the ICT Service.

Capita were engaged to review and benchmark the existing ICT Service and make recommendations on the strategic direction and future provision of ICT Services at the Council. This review has helped highlight both strengths and weaknesses and has concluded that the current in-house provision should continue. This conclusion is based on Capita's opinion that out-sourcing would be unlikely to provide either cost or risk savings.

Capita presented their findings to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on 16 June and it was resolved that the most appropriate means of future ICT delivery was through targeted investment in the current service. Whilst the review was in progress Mr David Newton acted up as the Assistant Director for ICT. Given the decision to retain service in-house it was appropriate to fill the Assistant Director post on a permanent basis and I am pleased to report that Mr Newton was the successful applicant and was promoted to the post with effect from 1 August.

The review highlighted a number of areas for the service to work on and to take the service forward effectively Mr Newton will be conducting a minor re-structuring. This re-structuring is possible as there are some vacancies within the service and the re-structuring will be achieved within the existing salaries budget.

ICT Security

The risk of loss or theft of data has been recognised in the Corporate Risk Register and steps are being taken to reduce this risk. All of the Council's laptop computers have been encrypted to prevent unauthorised access to any data stored on them. Also, to provide greater resilience against external threats the Council's firewall has been upgraded. An external consultant is currently conducting a security review that will provide advice on additional enhancements.

Following the many high profile data losses by central Government, a new system called Government Connect is being introduced. This system should allow the secure sharing and exchange of data. To gain access to this network the Council has to produce a Code of Connectivity and satisfy the Government that adequate controls are in place. This work is progressing well and the Council should achieve the deadline of 31 March 2009.

Next Generation Servers

Servers are the black boxes that our various systems run on and at the moment the Council has over a hundred servers. New software has been developed that allows more than one system to run on a single server. This is a process known as virtualisation and initial work has indicated that many of the Council's systems could be dealt with in this way. Some capital investment will be necessary but savings on electricity will reduce the Council's carbon footprint and payback the investment in approximately five years. A further report on this project will be made to Cabinet once firmer figures have been established.

Corporate Gazetteer

Currently there are a number of different property databases around the Council and a project has commenced to bring these together into one corporate database or Gazetteer. This should ensure that all Directorates are using the same data and reduce the chances of duplication or error. A first step in this process has been the upgrading of the Planning and Land Charges systems and ensuring the consistency of their data.

Network Enhancements

As part of the general review of current service provision the Council's network has also been examined. This has shown that the network overall is fit for purpose but that some minor tweaking should improve operational efficiency. The network is controlled by a number of core and edge switches and by adapting or replacing some of these it should be possible to provide users with a noticeably quicker network.

The development of the network will also include the Wide Area Network to consolidate and improve connections to the satellite offices.

The Council's Website

An officer Website Development Board meets regularly to consider best practice and look at ways of improving access to services. The Shaw Trust conducted a review of the website and have made several recommendations that should make the Council website more user friendly for people with disabilities. The Society of Council Information Technology Managers (SOCITM) also provides guidance and ratings on Council websites and we will be seeking to improve the website's rating.

Mobile Working

Services including Benefits, Planning and Housing are now using mobile devices to improve efficiency. The ICT service has been heavily involved in setting up and testing these systems and will use this knowledge in the future to help other services implement mobile working.