

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 27 September 2011

Subject: Planning and Technology Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Phillip

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning and Technology Portfolio Holder be noted

Staffing within the Planning Directorate

I am pleased to be able to report some important internal appointments made to posts within the Planning and Economic Development Directorate.

Sarah King has been promoted from Information and Technical Officer to be a Senior Planning Officer within the Forward Planning Team.

Jennifer Cordell (a Senior Planning Officer) is being seconded from the Development Control Team to undertake work on Consultation and Engagement within the Forward Planning Team.

Any outstanding vacancies are presently being put through the internal recruitment process.

Meeting with the Minister

At the time of drafting this item I was preparing for a meeting with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, who is also responsible for Local Government and Planning, Minister Bob Neill on 14th September. I will report verbally to Council about the outcomes of that meeting.

Disaster Recovery (DR)

To enable connectivity to the proposed DR site, both wireless and cabled solutions have been evaluated and both technologies proven to be feasible. A combination of alternative technologies is always a preference within a DR environment and as all current connections are cable, using a wireless solution would provide the true diversity required.

We are therefore planning to issue an invitation to quote to at least 3 local companies this month for the supply of the DR link. As part of this implementation, the successful tenderer may also provide fast wireless broadband capability for use by EFDC residents, as has happened recently in the Maldon and Uttlesford areas.

Website/Intranet replacement

The website replacement is progressing well and the project will shortly be entering the managerial approval process. A demonstration for Members will be arranged by the Website Development Board, following the conclusion of this process.

The intranet replacement is now live and a staged migration of data is currently underway. This open source product has recently been used internally to produce an improvised eLearning solution for Human Resources at no cost, something the current system would be unable to do.

Open Source Software

Open source is free or very low cost software. As well as using open source software for the replacement of the website and Intranet systems, ICT are now also looking to replace some of the smaller graphical and mapping solutions which will again make revenue savings.

Mobile Working Solutions

Following the successful conclusion of the Outlook migration, ICT have recently identified a secure process which enables the synchronisation of Outlook calendar appointments and contacts, to personal or Council owned Smart phones. This solution is 'multi-platform' and not Blackberry specific. Further development is on-going.

New portable tablet computers have been deployed within the Benefits service. The old tablets are to be re-used to develop mobile working potential within Planning (Building Control), Housing and Environment and Street Scene (ESS).

Full System/Contracts Review

Meetings with suppliers have taken place and are still on-going. Unsurprisingly, major suppliers are unwilling to reduce their charges. However, the meetings have identified some peripheral system modules that are not heavily used. These modules could be replaced by internal solutions, should the suppliers choose not to reduce their charges. An example would be the self-service helpdesk module.

This exercise has already identified revenue savings of approximately £40,000. As well as savings, systems such as the Intranet, mobile phone coverage and the speed of the Wide Area Network connectivity to satellite offices have all been greatly improved.