

Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Executive on 3rd April 2023

Review of Members ICT & Support and ICT Service Delivery

Report of the Chair of Customer Services Scrutiny Committee

Classification	This report is Public
Report By	Chair of Customer Services Scrutiny Committee
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PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To present to Executive the findings of the Review of Members ICT & Support and ICT Service Delivery.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

1.1 This review initially commenced during the 2020/21 municipal year, as a result of operational issues raised by the pandemic.

1.2 The initial aim of the review was:

- To ascertain the impact of the pandemic on ICT Service delivery and review the effectiveness of Member ICT equipment and support provision.

Once the review was re-started in 2022/23 the aim refocussed on Member ICT equipment and support.

1.3 The initial review period took place from November 2020 to March 2021. Members identified the following issues for investigation:

- Impact of the pandemic on ICT service delivery
- Member Connectivity
- Remote support for Member iPads
- Member ICT Equipment
- Support for Virtual Meetings
- Chamber ICT equipment

1.4 Once the review was recommenced, Members prioritised the following issues:

- Remote support for Member iPads
- Member ICT Equipment

- Member ICT Support
- Creation of a Member ICT Working Group
- Chamber/Meeting Room ICT equipment

1.5 The Committee met on five occasions in 2020/21 and four occasions in 2022/23 and sought evidence by way of:

- Informal discussions with officers
- Informal Member/Officer meetings
- Written summary of potential ICT kit options
- Briefing on revised Member ICT Support service
- 2 site visits to Ashfield District Council and Gedling Borough Council

2. Details of Proposal or Information

2.1 Initial review period (November 2020 to March 2021) – Summary of findings

2.1.1 The original review commenced during the pandemic. Members looked at a range of issues including:

- Impact of pandemic/remote working/support to onsite meetings on IT service delivery – focus was on compliance with SLA targets, impact on Servicedesk, capacity of service and impact on budgets
- Member Connectivity – 3G/4G and WIFI
- Remote support for Member iPads
- Member ICT Equipment – queries raised around suitability of kit, ability to update, compatibility with documents
- Support for Virtual Meetings – by Governance/ICT/Communications
- Chamber ICT equipment i.e. mics, cameras, facility to livestream/produce recording

2.1.2 Draft Recommendations at the time (which needed further clarification) included:

- Creation of a Member IT Working Group – to act as a consultation/development group alongside officers to address issues.
- A dedicated hotline for Members within the ICT Servicedesk – this was put in place at the time (early 2021).
- A dedicated Technology Officer within the Governance Team – to support delivery of remote/hybrid meetings.
- Implementation of improved remote support to Member iPads through roll-out of Microsoft 365.
- Further investigation of alternative Chamber equipment – particularly a replacement microphone system, and improvements to the projectors.

2.1.3 Following the removal of the temporary legislation enabling remote/hybrid meetings to be held for social distancing, the issues relating to delivery of such meetings ceased and were not investigated further.

2.1.4 Due to lobbying and consultation at a national level on possible changes to legislation around local government meetings (following the end of temporary legislation), and also for internal work on structure reviews (Governance Team), the review was paused while Members waited for updates. This also allowed

Members to focus on other work. Furthermore, Members were aware of discussions at Member Development Working Group and did not want to duplicate work already in place with a scrutiny review.

2.1.5 Key points to note from the first review where the issues were not taken further are as follows:

Member Connectivity

At the time of the initial review both Members and officers were working remotely. Governance advised that Members were having connectivity issues when at home. It was confirmed that where a Councillor doesn't have a good 3G/4G connection in the area, there was nothing ICT could do to improve this as they had no ability to improve telecoms in the area. It would be recommended that they install a home broadband connection. If their Wi-Fi / home broadband connection was causing issues, ICT could provide guidance on how to trouble shoot this (router positions / how to test the speed / ensure the device is connected etc.), however if there were still issues, they would need to raise this with their broadband supplier.

Members agreed that this was beyond the scope of Members influence to make any specific recommendation but the advice on what ICT could help with should be made clear, alongside what is Members' own responsibility.

Support for Virtual Meetings

This was looked at in detail during the initial phase of the review and various issues were raised in relation to support for Members, audio visual equipment and long-term solutions for delivery of remote/hybrid meetings. As the temporary legislation enabling virtual meetings was not extended or made permanent, no further work was completed in relation to this as the Council was no longer required to operate public meetings in this manner.

Members did note that a number of Councils had chosen to maintain recording and streaming of meetings as this improved accessibility where the public could not attend in person. Members believe this is still something that the Council may need to consider in the long-term, not least because there is continued lobbying at a national level for a change in legislation to enable virtual/hybrid local government meetings.

Impact of the pandemic/remote working on ICT Service Delivery

During the pandemic, Members reviewed a number of service areas to assess the impact on service delivery and budgets. In relation to ICT, Members were keen to understand the impact of remote working, support to onsite meetings and the impact on the service, the impact on SLA targets, implications for Servicedesk, capacity of the service to cope with additional and unexpected demands and impact on budgets.

Members were advised of the support provided to Governance to set up the various remote meeting platforms – Go To Meeting, then Zoom. Streaming solutions had been sourced and these were still available, and likely to be used long-term. Support had been provided initially at The Arc in relation to camera operation and remote support to Members/officers attending meetings. On site

camera support had however been withdrawn eventually due to capacity and this was taken on by Governance.

Detailed information was provided during initial review stages on impact to service, the range of additional objectives delivered, the impact to delivery of SLA targets and how this had been addressed.

It was noted that Emergency Covid funding had covered costs of additional home working equipment, headsets, conferencing solutions, additional licenses, power line adapters and additional virtual server hardware.

Members were conscious that the service was unusual in that there was a specific Joint Committee which oversaw delivery. Members looked at work being completed by Joint ICT Committee and how the Committee monitored delivery of the Joint service. Members queried how the information received at Joint Committee was relayed to the wider group of Bolsover Members, to ensure there is a good knowledge of what is being delivered/issues arising. Members noted that due to the separate monitoring function, there was less knowledge and awareness of what was currently being delivered and current service performance.

2.1.6 Following assessment of evidence in the original review phase Members had agreed the following recommendations linked to the monitoring of ICT service delivery:

- That performance of the ICT service be incorporated to the quarterly performance reports produced via PERFORM to both raise the profile of the service and ensure delivery was monitored alongside all other key service areas.
- That an email alert be sent to Members as and when new performance data becomes available within PERFORM.
- That there should be adequate PC/laptop provision to ensure Member access to PERFORM to view performance data.

2.2 Second review period (December 2022 to March 2023) – Summary of findings

2.2.1 Towards the end of 2021/22 municipal year, Members acknowledged that there were still a number of issues remaining unresolved as well as new issues that now needed addressing. They agreed that pending duplication of any existing work, it should form part of the 2022/23 work programme. In the early part of the 2022/23 municipal year, Members became aware that there was no longer a risk of duplicating work by other Member groups and were keen to pick the review back up. Members were still concerned with the following:

- Remote support for iPads to enable easier updates – this had still not been implemented as indicated previously in 2021. Members were advised of delays to the roll-out of Microsoft 365 which had ultimately resulted in a delay to the roll-out of remote support. Both Members and officers were clear that this was a critical improvement required for both Member and officer iPads. It was noted that this should be in place post-election but there was no set date at present. Members were asked to start to bring in their existing iPads to enable updates to take place which would aid the roll-out of the software used

to enable remote support. Members welcomed this development and were pleased that work was in place to ensure the incoming Members would have an improved service.

- Member ICT Equipment – Members noted that they were still experiencing issues with battery life, app and OS updates and general operational issues. It was noted that officers were considering options for Member ICT kit post-election 2023, and were looking at options across the three authorities covered by the Joint ICT Service. As part of the review officers presented a number of possible options for future Member devices. Each option was assessed for practicality and cost. While ICT noted the clear benefits of moving to laptops and a Microsoft based OS, there were concerns as to the complexity of security and ability to use a different OS, which could make the option more cumbersome for Members to use. Discussions took place as to whether other elements of the Apple OS could be enacted including fingerprint and password recognition to enable a smoother operating experience, and officers noted a number of options were being considered. Due to portability and ease of use Members concluded that iPads likely remained the most effective option both due to cost and ease of use. Screen size was also noted as a consideration and that options should be available for those Members requiring a larger screen size for improved visibility. It was also noted that the option of a keyboard/keypad had proved beneficial for a number of Members and availability of such options needed clearer promotion.
- Members ICT Support – Members noted that they had been satisfied with the level of service from the joint officer in terms of ICT Support and the specific training provided. A number of Members had commented that there appeared to have been no consultation on the removal of the dedicated support within the Governance team and/or that they had not been briefed on the changes.

It was clarified that the decision to move to using Servicedesk for ICT support had been made at May 22 Council and come in to operation in September 2022. Members had been briefed by email and at Council meetings on the new service being provided.

Members noted a mixed experience of using Servicedesk, but were aware that some Members were having issues but not actually logging them so they could be addressed correctly. This was causing significant issues for ICT as they were unable to gather sufficient data to understand technical/software issues. Members also acknowledged that the move to Servicedesk support meant that officers were now accessible throughout the working week which was an improvement on the more limited access to the shared officer.

- Chamber/Meeting Room ICT Equipment – no progress had been made on the purchase of replacement equipment and issues still remained with the microphone system. Members completed site visits to other authorities to see systems in action. It was noted that the current AV Maintenance contract was managed by ICT and that the current equipment had been in place since approximately 2015 when the new Chamber was created.

Two site visits were completed to Ashfield District Council (Auditel system) and Gedling Borough Council (Brahler DIGIMIC and Camera system). While the systems differed across both site visits, one thing that was abundantly clear, was the quality of the microphone system over what was currently present in the Chamber at the Arc. Members were aware that both companies offered fixed and wireless microphone systems. These could be furthered enhanced with camera systems which integrate easily.

Some work had taken place by the previous Governance Manager following the initial review work in 2020/21 and a specification developed to complete a tender process. This looked to use the Bosch DICENTIS system or an equivalent system. Members were aware that such a system was widely promoted within the Governance/Democratic sector.

Members were mindful that on relocating the committee rooms (now used by Leisure Services) it had not been a 'like for like' replacement and there was still limitations in terms of camera facilities for video conferencing/hybrid meetings. The smaller rooms would likely also benefit from a central microphone that could be used for hybrid/remote meetings.

While it was noted that public Council meetings could not operate in this manner due to current legislation, all working groups and partnership meetings and officer meetings were regularly held in this manner and would benefit from an improved system. In addition, a number of core training providers now predominantly used webinars and online training which required access to cameras, projectors and adequate conferencing software.

Due to time limitations when completing the review, Members concluded this needed further investigation post-election by the new Members ICT Working Group and the Governance & Civic Manager, so proposals could be presented to the new Council for delivery.

As a minimum a replacement microphone system and improvements to the existing projector system within the Chamber were identified as high priority issues.

- Power supply within the Council Chamber – Members had identified a lack of power supply within the Chamber should Members/Officers need to charge devices during meetings. A quote was sourced via Property Services during 2022 for remedial works to create power supply across all the desks. Further detail is provided within the quote attached at Appendix 1 and the works will not require any amendment to the existing furniture. Members note this is required to accommodate greater use of iPads/electronic devices within meetings and will also likely be need to accommodate a replacement microphone system.
- Creation of a Member IT Working Group – while this idea was welcomed by ICT services when the original review had commenced, and was seen as an ideal additional operational process to run alongside the Officer ICT Working Group, this had not yet been put in to place. It was agreed this would add value to service delivery and should be actioned for the 2023/24 municipal

year. The group would act as a consultation/development group alongside officers to address operational issues.

- Mod.Gov – accessibility had been identified as an issue by a number of Members. Officers noted that the system required a re-build by Civica which would hopefully address some of the connectivity issues. Further development work was also planned by the service, which would hopefully give Members greater access to documents and improved use of the system by officers.

Members were reminded of the need to log all ICT issues with Servicedesk so that further investigation could take place. It was also noted that all issues related to Mod.Gov specifically need to be raised with Governance as this was dealt with outside of the core ICT support.

- Access to the Intranet – Members noted that they found the site poor to navigate in comparison to the previous version, and a lack of information (particularly officer contact information).

It was noted that Members had very limited access as the site as it had been created for network-only access. Members could previously access the joint extranet via their iPads and requested clarification why the replacement Bolsover-only site has been created with reduced access. The new Intranet was not accessible from a Council iPad and there were currently only two general use PCs – one in the Conservative Members room and one in the Independent Members room.

Members queried whether there could be additional training on the site and where to access the different information. Members also queried whether elements of the previous system could be integrated to ERIC – particularly officer contact information and access to documents.

2.2.2 Following discussion at Scrutiny Committee on 20th March 2023 of the evidence gathered via officer reports and site visits completed, Members agreed the following recommendations:

- That the necessary works are completed in the Chamber to upgrade the power supply. This will future proof the space enabling all those in attendance to access power and accommodate the move to use of electronic devices for committee papers. This would also likely be required should alternative speaker/chamber systems were purchased. As per quote supplied at Appendix 1.
- That consideration be given to providing additional access to ERIC (Intranet) either via an extranet link or additional on-site PC/Laptop provision for Members.
- That the roll-out of Microsoft Teams access for Members be delivered as a priority action post-election to ensure new Members have improved connectivity to officers.
- That additional boosters be installed within the Arc to secure a more efficient WIFI service, particularly in proximity to the ground floor Member areas and Meeting rooms.

- That a Member ICT Working Group be created and added to the Meeting Schedule for 2023/24. (*This has been added to the Schedule approved at Council in March 2023.*)
- That a review of the Chamber and Meeting room ICT equipment takes place post-election, based on the evidence gathered, in conjunction with the Member ICT Working Group, Assistant Director for ICT Services and the Governance & Civic Manager. This should incorporate as a minimum a replacement microphone system and an improved projector system within the Council Chamber.
- That a review of Members ICT Equipment provision takes place post-election in conjunction with the new Member ICT Working Group.
- That where a decision be made to remain with iPads as the preferred Member device, that the option be made available for either the 10.9” or 12.9” screens to accommodate those requiring a larger screen size. Furthermore that a case and charger be provided as standard with the option of a keyboard if required.
- That an ICT Support drop-in session be made available at all Council meetings. (*This was initially trialled at Council in February and March 2023.*)
- That consideration be given to a revised approach to Member ICT Training, both face-to-face and online, to ensure Members remain able to use their ICT equipment effectively.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 The Committee have put together 13 recommendations, as outlined at 2.1.6 and 2.2.2, which will hopefully assist the Council in improving equipment provision and support to Members and the operation of meeting spaces within a modern post-Covid environment.

3.2 The key findings arising from the review were:

- That the ICT equipment within the Chamber and meeting rooms required an urgent review to ensure it remained fit for purpose for current and future delivery of meetings. This would need to include replacement microphones, voting facilities, provision of cameras to enable full use of online meeting software and recording/streaming of meetings where required. Due to ongoing lobbying for a change in legislation in relation to local government meetings, the Council must ensure it is able to deliver more accessible public meetings where required.
- That the ICT equipment provided to Members be reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose in terms of operational delivery, compatibility of systems, ICT security and ease of use.
- That the full roll-out of Microsoft 365 will have significant benefits to the management of Member equipment and should improve Member contact with officers once Teams is made available.
- That WIFI provision within the Arc be reviewed and improved to ensure greater coverage within core public areas, Member office areas and in proximity to meeting rooms.
- That the profile of the Joint ICT service be raised through increased visibility in core performance monitoring reports.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 Executive could choose not to endorse the recommendations of the review, where they feel the course of action recommended is beyond the delivery capacity of the Authority.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Executive endorses the recommendations of the review outlined at 2.1.6 and 2.2.2.
2. That for recommendations approved by Executive, monitoring by Committee takes place over a twelve month period via the PERFORM system with an update report to Committee at the end of the monitoring period.

Approved by Chair of Customer Services Scrutiny Committee

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: There are a number of recommendations in the report that relate to further investigation of replacement ICT equipment, both personal and within meeting rooms, and improvements to WIFI provision. These will require additional investigation and further reports to Executive in due course in relation to the individual decisions. Depending on costs associated this may also require a tender process and agreement for additional budget allocations in the MTFP.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: In carrying out scrutiny reviews the Council is exercising its scrutiny powers as laid out in Part 1A, s9F(2) of the Local Government Act 2000.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment:

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details: Improvements to Members ICT equipment will hopefully in the long-term lead to a significant reduction in paper usage and a move to full usage of electronic committee papers. This will generate a carbon reduction in relation to paper usage and associated costs benefits.

Staffing: Yes No

Details: There are no implications from this report.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p>	No

<p>District Wards Significantly Affected</p>	None
<p>Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	Details: Specific engagement as part of the evidence gathering process.

<p>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.</p>
<p>Customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving customer contact and removing barriers to accessing information <p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing our carbon footprint whilst supporting and encouraging residents and businesses to do the same.

<p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION</p>	
<p>Appendix No</p>	<p>Title</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Quote for electrical works</p>

<p>Background Papers</p>
<p><i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).</i></p>