

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

13 January 2016

Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 IT STRATEGY UPDATE

A report updating Members on key projects within the IT Strategy.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The current IT Strategy was agreed by FIPAB on 24th September 2014. The Strategy consisted of four themes - Service Modernisation, Communications, Website and Self-Service.
- 1.1.2 A key enabler for work emerging from the IT Strategy was a new Storage Area Network (SAN). This procurement took place in November 2014 and a report on the successful outcome of the procurement exercise was provided to FIPAB on 7th January 2015.
- 1.1.3 Following the installation of the SAN, the virtual server clusters for the private and public networks required upgrading. The private cluster was upgraded first to allow progression of the Skype for Business project.
- 1.1.4 During the summer of 2015 the IT Services Technical Support Team suffered a significant amount of staff illness with the three Senior Technical Support Officers responsible for major components in all of the current projects. One member of staff was signed off work for 15 weeks, and two members were signed off work for 11 weeks (at the same time).
- 1.1.5 As a contingency, a member of staff from the helpdesk team who was being trained as a "senior" was temporarily re-assigned to provide cover. Furthermore, the Shared IT Service Manager was allowed by his employer (Gravesham Borough Council) to go "full time" at Tonbridge and Malling in order to provide direct hands on support.
- 1.1.6 Despite having additional assistance there was a significant amount that had to be learnt about our environment and work previously undertaken on the projects. This meant work took longer to complete than it would have done with the original staff members, and we slipped behind schedule in a number of areas. All staff

have now returned to work but there do remain health issues that need to be managed.

- 1.1.7 Following agreement by General Purpose Committee on 5th October 2015 to create a new post of Senior Technical Support Officer, the arrangement with the Helpdesk Officer re-assignment has been made permanent to provide added resilience to this tier in the team.

1.2 e-Billing

- 1.2.1 The objective of the e-Billing project is to provide electronic copies of bills through the website My Account section and reduce postage costs for annual billing. The existing base My Account functionality of the website is being used to support e-Bills.
- 1.2.2 Several interlinked components are required for this to work which include the sign-up process, address verification, account number verification, storage space for e-Bills, and print re-direction for e-Bills.
- 1.2.3 Whilst a lot of the groundwork has been done and the data lookup and transfer mechanisms put in place, a major hold-up has been providing the storage space for the e-Bills where it is accessible to the public. This required the setup of the public cluster of virtual servers which was delayed during the summer due to staff illness.
- 1.2.4 Whilst there have been delays in one area a number of others have continued at a good pace. These include redesigning the sign-up page to be more user friendly, using the Local Land and Property Gazetteer as the source of address data (ensuring consistency between the Revenues system and the website), implementing the integration required between systems to extract the bill data, and configure the print re-direction process.
- 1.2.5 At the time of writing, the storage for the public cluster is expected to be provided during week commencing 21st December which will enable bills to be displayed in the My Account section of the website.

1.3 Skype for Business and Microsoft Exchange Outlook

- 1.3.1 The Skype for Business project started with a small “proof of concept” stage to ensure the technology would work in our environment successfully. Once this was complete, additional servers were added to increase the amount of users on the system and to transition us into a “live” environment.
- 1.3.2 Our “live” environment has been set up according to Microsoft Best Practice Guidelines and includes load balancers to intelligently route calls to servers that have the capacity to handle them.

- 1.3.3 As new users have been added to the system we have been co-ordinating the installation of software and telephone handsets with classroom based training for staff so they are able to use the new system upon their return to the office.
- 1.3.4 In addition to the staff telephone equipment we have also provided new “common area phones” where handsets are required but no permanent staff work (e.g. meeting and plant rooms).
- 1.3.5 A new contact centre system has also been procured that integrates with Skype for Business (the previous Macfarlane system did not). The contract was awarded to Freedom Communications who have installed a product called Geomant Contact Expert.
- 1.3.6 This is in the final stages of configuration with the training of a pilot set of users (Elections and Licencing) in early January 2016.
- 1.3.7 The Novell Groupwise email system is being replaced with Microsoft Exchange which uses Microsoft Outlook as the desktop client.
- 1.3.8 The Exchange servers have been built according to Microsoft Best Practice Guidelines and take into account the support of mobile devices (tablets), remote access (web mail), spam and email filtering (MIMESweeper), archiving (Netmail), and co-existence with the Groupwise system whilst users are migrated across.
- 1.3.9 An important goal has been to ensure emails that have been received in the Groupwise system are still accessible via Outlook once we have moved. To achieve this we have used email archiving. As well as containing a record of Groupwise emails the archive will also be used going forward to maintain a record of emails received on Exchange, providing a single point of record for all emails received.
- 1.3.10 The email archiving of Groupwise has completed and the Microsoft Exchange system is fully functional. Mail is flowing between Exchange, Groupwise and the outside world. A number of users are testing the system prior to the phased rollout of Outlook. Elections and Licensing will be the first users due to the dependency of Outlook and the Contact Expert system. Training is being provided for staff on the use of the Outlook software via a Computer Based Training program developed by The Knowledge Academy.

During the transition from Groupwise to Exchange the configuration of member’s tablets will need to be updated. This will be planned to coincide with times when members are at the Gibson Building and will be via drop-in sessions. The operation of the tablets to use email will remain the same.

1.4 WiFi

- 1.4.1 The previous WiFi system had been in place for a number of years and pre-dated the wide scale adoption of smartphones and tablets which have built in WiFi. As a

result, the capacity previously catered for and signal speeds available were no longer suitable.

- 1.4.2 WiFi systems now offer a range of access points to deal with varying capacities of users. For high density areas (such as the Council Chamber) there are high to mid-range units, and for office spaces with fewer users there are smaller units.
- 1.4.3 A survey was conducted of our usage and positioning of access points to determine which size of access points were required to provide the capacities in the correct areas. As a result we now have a mixture of high, mid and low density units in the correct areas to meet demand.
- 1.4.4 The newer equipment also operates on the faster 5Ghz band and supports the newest signalling standard (802.11ac) for the fastest possible operation.

1.5 Conclusion

- 1.5.1 As with all projects, there will always be unexpected problems which need to be dealt with. However, over the last year we have experienced an unusually high number from a variety of sources (staff availability, equipment problems, and issues with suppliers to name a few). During this time, our staff have remained positive and committed to obtain the best result for the Council, and despite a number of projects taking slightly longer to progress than expected, they are being delivered without deviation from the original vision.

1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 None

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 Delivery of e-billing for the 2016/17 annual bills is expected to return £5,000 of savings on postage.

1.8 Risk Assessment

- 1.8.1 Availability of internal staff resources continues to be a concern although the recent appointment of a new Senior Technical Officer will help mitigate this.

1.9 Policy Considerations

Business Continuity/Resilience; Customer Contact; Human Resources

Background papers:

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Nil

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