

# CITY OF PLYMOUTH

**Report:** Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel – E Governance for Members

**Subject:** E Governance for Members

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission

**Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2002

**Ref:** 5/SP/EG/NK

**Part:** I

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## **Executive Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to submit recommendations, through the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, to the Executive and the City Council following meetings of the Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel established to consider the processes following the approval of laptops for 21 Members as a pilot scheme.

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## **Corporate Strategy:**

The establishment of Overview and Scrutiny Panels forms part of the corporate strategy for implementation of that part of the modernisation agenda relative to new democratic arrangements.

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## **Financial Implications:**

The cost of phase 1 of the project (for 21 members in 2002/3) will be £78,203 from capital and £12,780 from the IT revenue budget. The cost of phase 2 (the remaining 36 members in 2003/4) will be £97,559 from capital and £25,740 from the IT revenue budget. Approval for this expenditure was given by delegated decision on 30th May 2002.

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## **Recommendations**

- (1) the Executive be asked to advise the 21 Members on the pilot scheme that they must use the laptops to enable the pilot scheme to be effective;

- (2) the proposal to roll out laptops to the remaining Members in tandem, be endorsed and use by all Members be enforced through a written policy;
  - (3) candidates be advised from the outset of the expectations of Members with regard to e governance and of the associated costs and allowances;
  - (4) the target date for roll out to all Members be after May 2003 elections;
  - (5) laptop training and issue be incorporated into Members' Induction;
  - (6) training needs be tailored to the ability of individual Members;
  - (7) equal opportunity issues should be addressed as necessary, i.e. facilities for visually impaired etc..
  - (8) the data protection provisions be reinforced;
  - (9) consideration be given to the provision of a separate smaller case for laptops;
  - (10) consideration should be given to wiring the Committee Rooms to enable laptops to be plugged in;
  - (11) the thanks of the Panel be extended to all those who participated in the scrutiny process.
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**Background papers:**

- (1) Schedule of order of deployment of laptops;
  - (2) Notes of meetings of 10<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September and 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2002;
  - (3) Report of the Democratic Support Manager on the Impact on Democratic Support;
  - (4) Protocol for the use of Information Communications Technology for Members;
  - (5) e mails from Peter Smith and Colin Poyntz with regard to Broadband.
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## **REPORT OF THE SPECIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – E GOVERNANCE FOR MEMBERS**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 As a pilot scheme, laptops were provided to 21 Members comprising Members of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, the Chairmen (and spokespersons of the majority party) of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Chairman of Standards Committee, the Shadow Leader and 3 Members of the minority party.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission, at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2002, agreed that a Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel be formed specifically to look at the processes following the approval of laptops for 21 Councillors.

### **2.0 Panel Structure**

#### Councillors

Councillor Mrs Harden, in the Chair.

Councillors Mrs Angel, Davey, Horler (substitute for Councillor Bell) and Jordan.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Bell (attendance at the first meeting only) and Coleman (attendance at the first meeting only).

#### Officer In Attendance:

Nicola Kirby, Scrutiny Support Officer

### **3.0 Objectives**

- 3.1 The Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel: E Governance for Members met on 10<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September and 11<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2002, to consider –
  - (i) training;
  - (ii) cost / benefits / potential savings;
  - (iii) technical support;
  - (iv) impact on Democratic Support;
  - (v) security / data protection.
- 3.2 The Panel's findings and recommendations would then be submitted for consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission prior to submission to the Executive or the City Council.

#### **4.0 Invitees**

The Panel heard from –

Colin Poyntz, IT Manager

Mike Hawkins, IT Manager, Infrastructure  
Peter Smith, Democratic Support Manager  
Peter Tracey, Executive Support Manager  
Jim Trotter, IT Training Manager  
Rachel Watson, Area Committee Support Officer  
Councillor Viney

Councillor Camp and the Deputy Chief Executive were also invited to attend but were unable to do so.

#### **5.0 The Detail**

##### **5.1 Member Experiences’ – General Issues**

From the experiences of the Member witness, the Panel was advised of the following issues –

- (a) the bulky nature of the laptop, printer etc. which had provided difficulties in terms of space within his house and until the provision of Broadband he would be hampered in its use;
- (b) the benefit of the system was in communication with Members and Officers;
- (c) e mail provided an opportunity for a measured response which was not the case in telephone conversations;
- (d) there was future potential to link with mobile phones.

##### **5.2 Training**

From the experiences of the Member witness, the Panel was advised of the following issues –

- (a) the initial training had been excellent but there was a need to revisit it and expand upon it;
- (b) training sessions of small equal ability groups would be more beneficial than larger groups. One to one training may be required;
- (c) with regard to a suggestion that use of the system should be imposed, the point was made that use of the system required discipline and that there should be awareness of the Council elections in May 2003 having regard to new Members

and the need for Members not re-elected to return equipment. Annual elections would impact on training needs;

- (d) confidence was needed in order to try different things with the system;

The IT Training Manager reported that the current use was a pilot scheme to identify problems and resolve issues.

With regard to an error in the cleaning of a specific laptop, any Member in receipt of equipment not clean from a previous user should return the equipment for cleaning.

With regard to downtime, maintenance on the system was generally conducted after office hours. The need to use the dial up facility had also caused difficulties but Broadband would eliminate the need to use this in the home.

The vast majority of the 21 Members were progressing well and had competency to use the system and e mail. There was a concern at the lack of take up of training on offer.

Consideration needed to be given to the format and timing of training for Members which could be in different groupings or by e mail. At the outset, Members had been provided with a CD ROM and a dial up handbook.

The Council had a policy not to have games on the system but a special dispensation had been given to Members to retain the standard Windows 2000 games for mouse dexterity training purposes.

Officers were looking at the Document Image Processing system, with the Committee Support System, e documents and the submission of forms, all of which would require documents to be scanned.

With regard to the use of the system, the Council had a policy where if a particular member of staff did not use the system for a period of 30 days, reasons for this were sought. Although staff were encouraged to use the system, if it was not needed then that person was deleted from it. This criteria would identify Members' training requirements.

### 5.3 Cost / Benefits / Potential Savings

In order to include all Members of the Council a further 36 laptops and associated equipment would be required and all would need to be configured to use the Council's network and applications.

Preliminary work on costings had identified a saving of approximately £20,000 for printing of agendas resulting in the move from the Committee system to the new Constitutional Arrangements. There would be costs associated with the new system namely the assembly of information electronically, posting it on the web and housekeeping. However there was concern at the thickness of the current Council agenda which had resulted in increased printing costs which if sustained for future meetings would reduce any savings to be made on printing.

The cost of posting agendas had been estimated at a minimum of £7,500 p.a.

Monthly payments for the broadband facility would be met centrally by the Council although Members would require a landline with Broadband facilities.

#### 5.4 Technical Support

The IT Manager indicated that his role was Project Manager, maintaining a Project Plan.

The IT Manager Infrastructure reported that he oversaw the design and delivery of the technical solution. Generally laptops were provided for officer use and for Members it was necessary to ensure the right facilities were available. It was the intention to move to broadband which would improve the speed of access to the Internet. Members would require a landline with Broadband facilities to be cost effective and efficient. Reference was also made to a report that had been circulated to Members by Tom Unwin, IT Team Leader.

The life expectancy for laptops was 3 –4 years.

There were currently no plans to replace Windows 2000 with Windows XP.

Following a suggestion that Members could use their own printers in conjunction with the laptops, the IT Training Manager indicated that different printers had different ink cartridges, there would be a loss of the economy of scales and that technical support would be very difficult for the IT Unit. Therefore Member's personal computing equipment was not viable.

#### 5.5 Impact on Democratic Support

The Panel heard that –

- (i) the Unit welcomed the introduction of the laptops which could assist Members and Officers in the future;
- (ii) the introduction of the democratic software would provide a service which informed the public, deal with the scrutiny and call-in process and track decisions;
- (iii) the publication of documents on the internet would provide greater access by the public meeting the requirement for accountability and transparency of Local Government;
- (iv) the system greatly aided the storage, retrieval and archiving of documents;
- (v) there had been an increase in e mail traffic from some Members;
- (vi) the electronic system would improve communication between the Democratic Support Unit and Members. At present communication with users was much

speedier since the introduction of laptops, which was particularly essential with the demanding deadlines of the scrutiny process;

- (vii) the use of e mail reduced dependence on telephone messages left with others and also on the postal system;
- (viii) the Unit was able to track e mails;
- (ix) the role of the Executive Support Manager was to give information to Members and implement the Committee Management System which had been approved by the Leader;
- (x) there were savings to be achieved from the initiative which needed to be identified and monitored;
- (xi) there would be a reduction in paperwork although at present, the only reduction in paperwork related to draft minutes for the Chairmen;
- (xii) the Windows 2000 system was relatively new to the Unit;
- (xiii) downtime was relatively low and during these periods it was often possible to use an alternative drive. However Members identified specific difficulty in relation to downtime outside of normal office hours;
- (xiv) a written protocol for Members would be essential to ensure the best use of the system;
- (xv) some Members outside the pilot had shown interest in the roll out as the advantages of improved communication were recognised.

It was originally planned to go live with the new software on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2003 with the system available to the Democratic Support Unit, before that date, to use the system and load data. It was also hoped to arrange a further presentation for Members early in the New Year. There had been a delay in obtaining approval for the system but every effort would be made still to meet the target date. However it was emphasised that the experience of those on the pilot was essential prior to May 2003.

The Panel was advised that in a recent exercise, of the 21 allocated laptops less than half had responded by e mail although it was acknowledged that in part this was due to technical difficulties.

## 5.6 Security / Data Protection.

With regard to security arrangements, the data on laptops was not encrypted onto the hard drive. All Members had been issued with the Council's Policy Document on use. With regard to the internet, the Panel was advised that private use was acceptable within the guidelines issued subject to adherence to the Council's Internet Code of Practice and associated policies.

The Council's systems were password protected which provided more security than written material received in the post and seen within the department, or faxes sent but the content and the nature of e mail should be given the same consideration as that of written correspondence.

## **6.0 Written Material**

The following documents were considered by the Panel -

- (1) Schedule of order of deployment of laptops;
- (2) Notes of meetings of 10<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September and 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2002;
- (3) Report of the Democratic Support Manager on the Impact on Democratic Support;
- (4) Protocol for the use of Information Communications Technology for Members;
- (5) an e mail which had been received from Councillor Camp with regard to the costs, connections and electricity costs associated with the provision of Broadband;
- (6) e mails from Peter Smith and Colin Poyntz in response to Councillor Camp's queries.

## **7.0 Comments**

From the comments that were made during the course of the Panel's investigations, a number of important issues were identified which the Panel felt should be taken into consideration. These were -

- (a) that although Councillor Viney had little experience of the system, he was enthusiastic with regard to its implementation apart from his reservations on the impact of space required to accommodate equipment;
- (b) the differences between pc's and laptops and the need for assumptions not to be taken on ability in the use of a laptop having regard to ability on a PC;
- (c) the need for a laptop to be allocated before any training sessions;
- (d) the need to have regard to the Council Calendar of Meetings when suggesting dates for training sessions;
- (e) that the initial form sent to Members assessing Members' capability was excellent and that information could have been used to group Members having regard to capability, though users perceived capability and actual competence needed to be assessed by the trainer;
- (f) the difficulties with the dial up facility for which there had been no training;
- (g) the need for effective and timely technical support given the importance Members would place on the use of laptops;



- (h) a particular instance where a laptop had been allocated which had not been entirely cleaned;
- (i) the need for avoidance of duplication of systems and the compulsory use of the electronic system once all Members possessed laptops and were adequately trained;
- (j) removing printers could in future enforce the use of the system and discourage the printing of hard copies of everything although it was acknowledged that some printing was essential;
- (k) the possibility of powerpoint presentations for Committee reports and agendas at meetings to minimise the production of written material particularly for Area Committees and provide an opportunity to reduce the need for a guess of copies of Area Committee papers required. The normal notice of the meeting and the agenda could be published and staff could respond on request;
- (l) that in assessing the costs of the system, comparisons should be made with the costs of Members' telephone bills in the past and the use of mobile phones;
- (m) costs associated with advertising the implementation of the system to the public;
- (n) opportunities from the marketing of expertise which could arise from the software system which was not yet being employed by any of the neighbouring authorities;
- (o) the need to improve the Council's website, currently being looked at by a task group on communications;
- (p) the need for Officers to be sensitive to the 21 Members with laptops being seen to be in a privileged position with regard to the distribution of information.

## **Conclusions**

- 8.0** The increase in workload due to new constitutional arrangements needs to be accounted and reflected in the benefits produced by a more efficient method of working -E Governance. Currently producing, printing, copying, collating and distributing hard copy reduces the ability of Democratic Support to service the new structures of Executive, Scrutiny and Area Committees.

E Governance will allow all Members, Executive, Scrutiny and Back Bench equal opportunity for information enhancing transparency in Local Government.

## **9.0 Review**

A report be submitted to the Panel in 4 month's time, to include –

- (i) a Members' satisfaction survey of the 21 users;
- (ii) feedback from the Democratic Support Unit on the continuing impact;

- (iii) the impact on the resources of the training department;
- (iv) feedback from technical support on the impact of the introduction of Broadband.

## **10.0 Recommendations**

The Panel Recommends that -

- (1) the Executive be asked to advise the 21 Members on the pilot scheme that they must use the laptops to enable the pilot scheme to be effective;
- (2) the proposal to roll out laptops to the remaining Members in tandem, be endorsed and use by Members be enforced through a written policy;
- (3) candidates be advised from the outset of the expectations of Members with regard to e governance and of the associated costs and allowances;
- (4) the target date for roll out to all Members be after the May 2003 elections;
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