

The use of technology to drive down costs and to communicate with the Borough's residents

Resource and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 30th January, 2017

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Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report draws attention to the changes enabled by technology to drive down some of our corporate costs in doing business but particularly in communicating with the Borough's residents.
- 1.2 This outlines the direction currently being taken by the Information and Technology Department and Communications Department and offers opportunity for oversight of the approach.

2. Recommendations

Resources and Corporate Scrutiny committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider the report and note the work highlighted in the examples of the Information and Technology Department and the Communications Department.

3. Detail

- 3.1 Since the invention of the first Olivetti typewriter people have been investing in technology solutions for the office workplace to increase staff productivity, raise quality of communications and drive down costs.
- 3.2 Technology may have evolved from the typewriter but the principles remain. This report will not cover all the investments made by the Council but highlights several key initiatives which have been delivered or are to be delivered in the coming months relating to communications. This report will also focus on an example of technology used in the communications department to increase citizen engagement.
- 3.3 Technology investments in Swindon are making savings across many areas such as optimising waste rounds in Street Smart or improving asset management in Housing. This report will not go into the whole of the Council Services for its

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examples but will identify some projects driven out of the Information and Communications department for oversight.

3.4 Hybrid Mail

3.4.1 Hybrid mail is a solution the IT department are enabling to streamline printing and posting of letters. Whilst other projects are in flight to reduce our paper consumption from 15,000,000 prints in 2016 to 1,000,000 prints in 2021 this Hybrid Mail implementation is about streamlining and making best efficiencies from the paper and letters we need to post for now.

3.4.2 Before hybrid print the life of a simple letter may be as follows: It exists on an office computer inside an application. It is printed locally, collected from the printer (after the officer logs in to the printer), put in an envelope, put in an out tray, collected by the post room staff with a trolley, transported to the post room, franked, and finally collected by Royal Mail.

3.4.3 Following implementation of hybrid mail the officer will select a different printer from the computer and this will be the end of their activity. The actual process will involve this being printed off site in Bristol, put in an envelope, franked and posted. The total costs for this are 40p. The price of the old solution was 43p without any costs allocated for staff time or post room fixed costs.

3.4.4 More complex 'use cases' exist where large systems create multiple letters and these letters need to be posted with different inserts etc; for these we have a very similar way of routing the work to the hybrid mail solution. The example in 3.4.3 was kept simple to aid understanding but our Hybrid Mail solution is capable of extremely complex printing posting combinations.

3.5 Office 365 email

3.5.1 In December 2016 the first department was migrated to Office 365 email. The migration plan sees the last department migrated before the end of February. This Office 365 email solution will provide an email service with 300 times the capacity of our current Capita delivered email service with a reduced cost. This service is also designed to be more resilient with higher availability and disaster recovery built in. Costs will be similar.

3.6 Egress Switch

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- 3.6.1 The security of our data and the data entrusted to us by our citizens and businesses is of paramount importance. Egress Switch delivers for the first time a government accredited security solution for the exchange of emails or files classified as OFFICIAL and OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE. Using AES 256 (Advanced Encryption Standard) we have implemented this for secure exchange of files and emails with some government agencies, departments, the NHS and Wiltshire Police. The previous secure route to share data was via fax machine which was in practice not secure and very expensive.
- 3.6.2 The next big implementation of Egress Switch will hopefully see the Children's Case files being prepared and delivered securely and electronically cutting out up to 1,000,000 printed pages per year.

3.7 Telephone Carrier Solutions

- 3.7.1 In the course of normal business telephone calls are made and received by the Council. As residents we would use telephone technology commonly known as analogue lines. As a business we use more advanced technology known as ISDN lines (Integrated Services Digital Network) During 2017 we will be migrating to cloud based SIP trunk technology (Session Initiation Protocol) which will deliver us over 60% cost reduction on our leased telephone lines. This technology will be more familiar to people as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology which is essentially the technology behind VoIP apps such as Skype or Facetime.
- 3.7.2 There are further savings to be made during 2017 from changes to the way we deliver a phone service but these are yet to be architected but are likely to involve hosted PBX (Private Branch Exchange) which will be adopted to reduce support overheads and increase resilience of our telephony solution.

3.8 Citizen Portal

- 3.8.1 The citizen Portal is a technology platform IT have been implementing with our Content Management System Partner Jadu and with our key user, the Customer and Business Services Department. This Portal will go live on

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the 17th February providing a new channel for the completion of transactions with the Council.

- 3.8.2 This new channel will be the fulcrum of Swindon's Digital and Customer transformation programme providing a new hub for services designed digitally by default around our customers.
- 3.8.3 The first service to go live will be the launch of the Green Waste Subscription service providing new technology for the first time in Swindon to: Look up an address via web service, take paperless direct debit instructions and create and access a customer account. These components will be reused in the deployment of subsequent customer services over the next few months, some will further integrate with back office systems or line of business systems.
- 3.8.4 The Citizen Portal replaces a previous CRM (Customer Relationship Management) solution Lagan. Lagan had been poorly implemented and not integrated with the Council's business systems and consequently it failed to deliver many of the benefits envisaged. The running costs of the new Customer Portal are in line with the costs of the previous CRM product.

3.9 Web Chat

- 3.9.1 The replacement of our telephony solution is planned in 2017 which will provide a new capability to our Customer Contact Centre to engage with citizens in a new form known as web chat. This is an online exchange of written messages which is a favoured way for segments of the population to interact with businesses for the purpose of exchange of information.
- 3.9.2 The costs and benefits of implementing Web Chat have not been analysed but it is thought the setup costs will be minimal. Further work on a business case will be developed in 2017. Close monitoring of contact centre agent productivity with this new channel will be required. Most industry modelling has shown that Web chat can help prevent people from giving up on the Web channel and picking the phone up or abandoning the contact. Research on the value for Local Authority work is scarce though several Councils have begun to deploy this across the county.

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3.10 E-Newsletters

3.10.1 The Communications Team oversee a growing suite of e-newsletters that currently cover Swindon Libraries, Highways News, Swindon Travel Choices, Your Swindon and STEAM. These are a cost-effective way of communicating directly with residents who choose to subscribe to them. They are managed through a single platform which provide data on subscriber numbers and audience interactions, to help refine the Newsletters and make the content as useful to readers as possible.

3.10.2 The monthly Swindon Libraries is the longest-running e-newsletter typically opened by over 20,000 readers per month. The fortnightly Highways Newsletter was introduced last summer and its content is regularly picked up and amplified in the local media.

3.10.3 One of the challenges is the Council currently lack an overall corporate engagement strategy / stakeholder management plan that ideally would feed into engagement through our e-newsletters and social media.

3.11 Social Media

3.11.1 Since April 2009 the Communication Department have managed a corporate Twitter account, now with over 8,600 followers including 1,000 added since April 2016. This channel allows them to quickly warn and inform residents in response to events, respond to resident messages and proactively use video and images to engage residents in a range of council services. It is an accountable medium, with data available to demonstrate how residents interact with and share the content we Tweet. The Communications department are also building momentum around communicating with residents through our corporate Facebook page

3.11.2 The Council's social media use has been typically 'broadcast mode', one way, but the ambition behind the team restructure is to try to bring in more resource to look at nurturing two-way engagement with residents.

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4. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 4.1 All changes to the IT infrastructure go through rigorous business case development to make call off from the IT reserve.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 4.2 None

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 4.3 None

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 4.4 None

Risk Management

- 4.5 Risks associated which each communication initiative are addressed in the Project Risk register. The major escalated risk to the IT Risk register is around availability of internet connection which is being actively managed. Further work in 2017 to increase resilience in the connectivity for the Council will be progressed.

5. Consultees

- 5.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 None

7. Appendices

- 7.1 None