

| Report of                | Meeting                         | Date             |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Corporate Director (ICT) | Overview and Scrutiny Committee | 1 September 2009 |

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AVAILABILITY FOR MEMBERS

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To report on recent out of hours down-time and the work done to improve availability

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

- Members note the report.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

|                                                                                                |  |                                                                   |   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region |  | Develop local solutions to climate change.                        |   |
| Improving equality of opportunity and life chances                                             |  | Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live |   |
| Involving people in their communities                                                          |  | Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization       | X |

### BACKGROUND

- At the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was requested that I report back on how we aim to maximise service availability. The query arose as a result of recent service interruptions during weekends and therefore this report also reviews the causes and resolutions of those particular issues in the context of the wider availability question.

### THE SERVICE – TECHNOLOGY

- Although the service provided by Members can be seen as an end to end service, in reality it consists of three distinct elements;

Local equipment – laptop, printer, telephone  
 Server based systems – email, theloop, moderngov etc.  
 Third party communications – BT/Telewest broadband services and equipment

A failure in any of these three elements will prevent Members from using Council systems.

The fourth element of the solution is the support service provided by ICT Services to resolve any issues encountered.

6. Initially, I will concentrate on the 3 technology elements of the service provided to Members and how we are working to improve the availability of services in each area.

### **Local equipment**

Members will be aware that the laptops they are using are nearing the end of their useful lives. A programme is underway to replace them with thin client devices that are, by their very nature, less susceptible to faults. This is due mainly to the fact that they do not contain any moving parts. As well as being less likely to fail, the way in which 'thin client' works is that the software and data used by Councillors will no longer reside on the laptop and therefore, should a thin client device fail, we can simply bring a new one out and plug it in. This will reduce the downtime experienced by Councillors.

### **Systems accessed by Councillors (based at Union St.)**

Our new Citrix environment has been built to maximise resilience and reduce the downtime of key systems. This is achieved by using features such as;

- Server imaging
- Virtual servers
- Multiple physical servers
- Thin client technology itself

I will explain these in more detail at the meeting if required.

Although we are currently experiencing implementation problems, the long term benefits of thin client, including improved availability, remain valid.

### **Third Party Communications**

This is the element of the solution which is outsourced. In the past we have used a joint BT/Telewest solution to deliver the necessary levels of security. This has been a source of problems in the past and has contributed to down-time for Councillors. On occasion, this has been due to both parties being unwilling to accept responsibility for problems which added to the resolution times. The implementation of our secure remote access system has allowed us to review this situation and we have now opted for a wholly BT provided solution which should eliminate the uncertainty around responsibility. The solution also provides us with an element of self-service fault finding which may prove useful.

### **The ICT Support Service**

The final element of the service is the support provided by ICT Services to Members when they experience problems. Currently the service is provided from 08:45am to 5:00pm. Cover beyond these times is on a best endeavours approach. This clearly does not cover the weekend period. Members will be aware that, in order to better understand their views, I carried out a simple survey on the impact of no out of hours cover. At the time of writing this report I had received the following replies;

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| 15 replies received |     |
| Not a problem       | 53% |
| Manageable          | 47% |
| A real problem      | 0%  |

I will provide Members with an update to these figures at the meeting.

## INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE

7. The Council's corporate computing environment is a complex series of systems that are increasingly integrated and interdependent. As with all ICT systems and supporting infrastructure, regular maintenance is essential to ensure major failures are avoided. As the working day is extended, the opportunity to carry out routine maintenance at that time is reduced and it is necessary for work to be carried out at weekends. These occasions are kept to a minimum but they will, nevertheless, occur regularly. As mentioned previously, during system design, we are mindful of minimising the impact of faults and maintenance through the use of features such as dual power supplies and disc-drives that can be exchanged without powering equipment off.

## RECENT DOWNTIME

8. Members will be aware that during recent weeks we have experienced two significant events that have resulted in out of hours system downtime. There is a perception that these were due to the thin client implementation but this is incorrect.

### **Air conditioning failure**

As a result of an air-conditioning failure, services were lost during a weekend. A system reset allowed a resumption of services. We are currently investigating whether our monitoring system can send SMS messages warning of increasing temperature allowing us to intervene prior to a loss of service.

### **Infrastructure maintenance**

As mentioned previously, this was unavoidable and will be repeated in the future. We will give Members notice of all maintenance where possible but urgent problems may require action at short notice.

## CONCLUSION

9. In conclusion, I would assure Members that maximising system availability is a central to the design of our systems. It has added complexity to our thin client implementation but this is justified by the availability improvements that will result. I would stress that the recent downtime encountered was not a result of the thin client project and would have affected the 'old' laptops in the same way.

In terms of the support service, the results of the survey indicate there is no justification to extend the present support arrangements outside of normal working hours.

## IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

10. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Corporate Directors' comments are included:

|                 |  |                                          |   |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------------------|---|
| Finance         |  | Customer Services                        |   |
| Human Resources |  | Equality and Diversity                   |   |
| Legal           |  | No significant implications in this area | X |

TIM MURPHY  
CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ICT)

There are no background papers to this report.

| Report Author | Ext  | Date           | Doc ID                       |
|---------------|------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Tim Murphy    | 5455 | 20 August 2009 | OSICTAvailabilityReportSep09 |