

Scrutiny Task Group - ICT review

Wednesday, 18th December, 2013
3.00 - 4.20 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Colin Hay (Chair), Andrew Chard (Deputy Chair) and Simon Wheeler
Also in attendance:	Mark Sheldon, Annette Wight, Bryan Parsons, Councillor Jon Walklett, Rosalind Reeves, Matthew Thomas (Forest of Dean) and Robert Milford

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 12 March 2013 were approved as a correct record.

4. ICT PUBLIC SERVICE NETWORK ISSUE

The Director of Resources, Mark Sheldon (MS), introduced the report. He reminded Members that this matter had been referred to the ICT scrutiny working group following a debate at Council on issues arising from the public service network compliance issue. He reminded Members that Council's main concern had been with the risk assessment. Indeed this had been the root cause of the rejection of CBC's submission by the Cabinet Office, who felt CBC had not gone through a proper risk assessment process which followed Cabinet office guidance. Initially officers had responded along the same lines as West Oxfordshire and had described the council approach to corporate risk assessment and management. However, the submission was not accepted and, as a consequence, an external consultant with specialist knowledge, was employed to assist with the process.

Cllr Chard asked whether there were any outstanding risks. MS assured Members that the council was now compliant but there were gaps and actions were in hand to address these. He advised Members that the Head of ICT shared services, Matt Thomas (MT), had been in dialogue with the Cabinet Office between April and September 2013 and therefore the final rejection had come as a surprise. The Cabinet Office had been tightening compliance requirements and it was only the last question of a long questionnaire that was not accepted.

In response to a question, MT confirmed that the Forest of Dean (FoD) was currently going through the same process assisted by the consultant that CBC

had used. Next year it was planned that CBC and FoD would have a joint submission to the Cabinet Office on behalf of the shared ICT service. Members raised some concerns that too much increased security could make systems unusable. Cllr Hay confirmed that at the County Council they now had to take laptops into the council offices every fortnight in order to change their password.

Cllr Hay also asked that the tax implication of using council equipment, such as iPads, for personal use be looked into. He felt that Members were a potential weak link in IT security, so there may have to be more restrictions on the equipment they could use and consideration given to their communications with other bodies/boards, i.e. CBH. In response Bryan Parsons said that any changes to accessing systems now had to be documented and the Security Working Group (SWG) were looking at this and how it could be achieved and a report would be produced.

A question was raised as to how why a red risk appeared so suddenly and were there any early warnings that could have been picked up on. In response Bryan Parsons said that for three years there had not been any problem with compliance, so there was no reason to think there would be an issue this year. The Cabinet Office was just asking for additional information and not new information. When it was rejected it did quickly become a risk but there was a process in place to deal with this. He reiterated that risk assessment for ICT areas was difficult and complex, but that a new process was now in place for assessing and managing ICT risks. All risks relating to this issue were now being picked up as part of the ICT action plan and many had already been addressed and were set out in the report to this meeting.

Cllr Hay was concerned about other risks outside of ICT which may be relatively low but could have a high impact either on the residents of Cheltenham or the reputation of the council. At what stage would be these reported to the Cabinet Member?

In response BP explained that the Risk Management policy was reviewed annually and the last review was carried out in April 2013 when the revised risk scorecard was produced. This scorecard was used by officers to assess risks and to put a score against them. The scoring guideline was based on information from the assessment team. BP explained the scorecard to Members and he referred members to the risk assessment which had been circulated with the report to Council and the reasoning behind the scoring. There was some concern expressed by a Member that the impact scores for reputation risk and availability of systems should have been higher. In response, BP stressed that if the PSN had been withdrawn, this may have slowed down benefit payments but the benefit system would still have been able to function. The council had also been actively working on mitigation actions, talking to the DWP and the potential for back up systems running at the FoD. There was an agreement that the wording of the scorecard should be reviewed.

BP further informed Members that he was initiating a review of risk management which would go to Audit Committee in January. The review would involve all elected Members and it was suggested that a scenario for risk assessment be included in the questions sent to Members. BP agreed to

include this in the review and would revise further if necessary and the results and any recommendations would be taken to Audit Committee in March.

With the increase in shared services the question was raised as to whether all councils had the same risk scorecard. Rob Milford replied that although risk management was not too varied, he was looking at policies across the councils and trying to align them more.

BP reported that all ICT risk assessments were rated from medium to low and that these were monitored by the Security Working group. Work had been done on some of the risks, such as the USB lock down, but more was still required on others. The main two outstanding issues were the ICT Compliance Policy and BPSS clearance for the majority of CBC ICT users.

New software would be installed with regard to the ICT Compliance policy which would ensure that this had not just been read by the user, but understood as well. It would have pop-ups to ask questions and if the user got most of the questions wrong, it would flag up that more training was required.

BPSS clearance was more of a challenge and between now (2013) and 2015 any person with access to the PSN network would have to be BPSS checked. This involved checking ID, any previous convictions, nationality and employment history. The cost of doing this would be between £50 to £100 per person and about 100 people had already been identified to be checked in early 2014. The information would be gathered by GO HR and once completed there was no requirement to keep the information. One point to be considered was the procedure to be adopted if a current member of staff did not pass the BPSS check. BP reported that although this was a compliance requirement of the Cabinet Office, no additional money would be forthcoming from government to pay for it, so cost was a problem for the council. A more detailed report on the implications of BPSS was being produced to report to SWG on 9 January.

Rob Milford reported that his Audit monitoring report would include a review of the risk process, but that the most important point was to learn from this incident and to improve procedures accordingly.

It was agreed that the minutes of this Scrutiny Task Group would be circulated to O&S in January.

5. REVIEW OF PLANS AND NEXT ACTIONS

The ICT scrutiny task group had been asked to consider the issue of recording a Council meeting and how they wished to proceed with this. It was felt that in this day of modern technology and transparency to the public that this should be allowed. However questions were raised as to whether every public committee meeting should be recorded and how would this affect the minutes and how it would be made available on the web site. A member suggested that a webcam should be made available and MT indicated that there would be a cost in the region of £8000. The cost would be a prime concern and the system would need to be removable in view of any possible building relocation. As the Pittville and Montpellier Rooms were also often used for public meetings, these rooms would also have to be considered for any audio / visual recording.

It was agreed to look at this in connection with the accommodation strategy.

The matter was also raised of amending the Council's Constitution to reflect use of electronic equipment in meetings now that iPads were being used and to add any necessary wording relating to meetings being recorded.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was felt that this issue had been addressed for the time being and thus a further meeting was not scheduled.

Colin Hay
Chairman