

Information and Communication Technology

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond,
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1 Purpose of Report

This report updates Members on the current position with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and requests that some £300,000 be moved from the capital reserve and other budgets for ICT capital expenditure into a specific 'ICT Improvements' Reserve budget, when closing the 2010/11 accounts.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this paper;
- b) Agree to recommend to the Fire Authority that officers move some £300,000 from other related budgets into a new ICT Improvements reserve budget, on closing the 2010/11 accounts;
and
- c) Task the Chief Fire Officer to report back to this Committee at each meeting on improvements to the ICT infrastructure, set out in this paper.

3 Background

Our current ICT infrastructure has developed in a piece meal fashion over the last 13 years with a number of managers implementing significant changes and improvements over that time.

Although we have made a number of improvements over the years, all of these have been carried out as additions to the previous ICT infrastructure and unfortunately without an overarching, strategic ICT development plan. In part, this approach was exacerbated by the expectation that the Regional Control Centre (RCC) project (FiReControl) would undertake several key business critical ICT functions on behalf of fire and rescue services in the Region.

With the RCC project cancelled (a project that should have been completed by 2007), it is now prudent to reassess the Service's longer term ICT strategy.

We are increasingly reliant on robust and fast broadband connections between all our stations to operate a modern fire and rescue service. Unfortunately, much of the hardware supporting this is now outdated and causing the whole system to slow and become unreliable.

Our new ICT Manager has, over the last year, been analysing our network and other risk critical systems and has identified that the whole network requires rebuilding. This gives us opportunities to link with partners' networks (such as Shropshire Council) to save money on the long-term, increased resilience of our network and bring the network up to international standards.

The move to our new HQ and the need to make long-term fire control provision gives us an opportunity to carry out much of this improvement work in a safe way with limited service interruption.

4 Risk and Risk Management

Officers have identified that with increasing reliance on ICT to function the Service must have robust risk management plans in place. Members also identified this and invested in mirrored servers in Telford and broad band connection between Shrewsbury and Telford in order to secure resilience.

As part of the review of systems the ICT Manager has identified a number of risk critical improvements to be made over the next 18 months and is producing a plan for the Chief Fire Officer for this project.

Our current conversations with Shropshire Council (with whom we already have a number of ICT agreements) will, we hope, lead to a sharing of network resources.

In addition Members will be aware that we agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to gain resilience in our mobilising system.

Your Chief Fire Officer has, therefore, identified six major projects that are required to improve / continue the functioning of the ICT infrastructure:

- a) Rebuild the ICT Network to modern standards
- b) Manage the 'lift and shift' of all ICT systems across to the new HQ, ensuring minimum disruption to service and no unplanned disruption to our mobilising ability
- c) Implement a robust fall-back system for organisational resilience

- d) Separate risk critical and confidential systems from the main network, creating a 'virtual network' that is robust and has the minimum single points of failure
- e) Secure the end-to-end running of our mobilising system to ensure no single points of failure
- f) Ensure that our mobilising system is developed but ensuring that it remains compatible with the system procured by Hereford and Worcester

5 Clear Identification of Budget

In order to deliver the improvements in a managerially and financially controlled way the Chief Fire Officer recommends that some £300,000 is moved from reserves balances and other ICT budgets into a single 'ICT Improvements Reserve', when the accounts are closed for 2010/11. Spending from the reserve would, of course, be subject to the Fire Authority's expenditure controls and approval limits. The full scope, operating terms and budget for the reserve would be agreed by the Authority, if and when it is established.

6 Financial Implications

The financial implications are as set out in the main body of the report.

7 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

9 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

10 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.