REPORT TITLE	ICT Desktop Strategy
Submitted by:	Executive Director (Resources & Support Services)
Portfolio:	Communications, Policy & Partnerships
Ward(s) affected:	Non specific

Purpose of the Report

To seek Cabinet approval to procure and subsequently award a contract for replacement ICT Desktop equipment as a result of the move to Windows 7 and Office 2010, and in parallel to put in place a robust and manageable ICT Desktop Strategy.

Recommendation

That Cabinet give approval to:
- undertake a procurement exercise and subsequently award a contract for the supply of replacement ICT Desktop equipment;
- implement the ICT Desktop Strategy (the Strategy) as detailed in the report.

Reasons

- ICT will need to replace some of the current desktop equipment to enable the Council to move to a Windows 7 and Office 2010 environment by the beginning of April 2014. This is due to incompatibility or age of the current equipment. This also provides the opportunity to introduce more sustainable and cost effective ways of delivering the desktop equipment.
- The introduction of the Strategy sets out the means by which ICT will deliver physical desktop equipment that is effectively managed, allocated and developed in line with users and Council expectations for the next three years.
- Adoption of the Strategy will ensure that common standards are applied across the ICT environment.

A Glossary of ICT terms used in the report is shown attached as Appendix A.

1. Background

1.1. In June 2012, Cabinet approved the ICT Strategic Review and Consolidation report. The course of action contained in the report aims to:

- generate savings on current contract costs through the review, consolidation and, where appropriate, re procurement of systems and hardware;
- ensure that we maximise the usage of the Council's investment in ICT systems;

- put in place standards for the management and maintenance of ICT systems that aim to maximise their life expectancy.

1.2. The consolidation programme is well underway, and considerable cost savings and efficiencies have been achieved so far.

1.3. ICT uses a number of different technologies and environments for desktop and server hardware which enable access to Council systems and software. This combination continues to be the most efficient and cost effective way of providing ICT services. Therefore, the overarching ICT Strategy is to continue to use and develop these environments to ensure that:

- hardware costs are kept to a minimum;
- electrical consumption and heat output is reduced;
- a flexible working environment is maintained; systems can be accessed by users and other computers from any location;
- the requirements of the Council's Disaster Recovery Plan for the provision of ICT access are met and continue to be improved upon.

1.4. Microsoft will end support for the Council's current desktop operating system (Windows XP) and 'Office 2003' suite of products (the suite includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint) on the 8th April 2014. A programme of work is already underway in ICT for the move to Windows 7 and Office 2010. This is a major undertaking and involves a complete review of all core systems, departmental applications, servers, software licensing and support agreements together with desktop hardware to ensure compatibility with, and the ability to run, the Windows 7 operating system and Office 2010.

1.5. ICT has facilitated a number of workshops with all service areas to ascertain their likely requirements for the next three years. This information has enabled ICT to develop the Strategy which takes into account the needs of corporate users and the authority moving forward.

2. Issues

2.1. A preliminary review of the Council's current desktop equipment indicates that it is likely that approximately 111 PCs will require replacement to enable the roll out of Windows 7 and Office 2010. This is due to their age, type and lack of capacity to run the new operating system.

2.2. The Council could be faced with paying for more expensive 'custom' support agreements or take the risk of service interruption/failure in the event of support being needed, should we continue with Windows XP after April 2014. Gartner[1] report that "pricing for *continued* support may be significantly higher than it was in the past" and that this will "cause tangible budget issues for many organisations that need to run Windows XP securely after 8 April 2014"[2].

2.3. Currently, the replacement strategy for desktop equipment such as PCs, laptops etc, has been to manage with existing equipment for as long as possible so as to achieve the best possible return on investment. PC systems are repaired or replaced only when they fail[3] i.e. it is a reactive service. This has lead to performance problems and increased support costs which has a negative impact on staff productivity as well as the perception of the ICT infrastructure and service. These elements have resulted in unplanned resource which could be more effectively managed with a formal desktop replacement policy.

2.4. Central and Local Government departments have to comply with the requirements of the Public Services Network (PSN), in that we agree to undertake regular updating and maintenance of our ICT systems. As Windows XP will no longer be supported, it cannot therefore be updated or maintained; in effect resulting in non-compliance which will seriously impact service delivery.

3. Options for delivery

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[1] Gartner is a leading company that specialises in information technology research, analysis and advice and produce regular reports of their findings.
[2] Gartner report : Prepare Now for the End of Windows XP and Office 2003 Support in Less Than a Year ; 8th April 2013
[3] This is known as a 'Fix on Fail' strategy

3.1.   Option 1: Do nothing.

Although support for Windows XP and Office 2003 is withdrawn in April 2014, the Council could continue to use the software for an extended period but would need additional support. However, the challenge to move from Windows XP will increase, and with it expansion of the project in terms of time and resources with each subsequent release of Windows. It is already estimated that a move from Windows XP directly to the latest version, Windows 8, will take an additional 5% of time, cost and effort compared to a move from Windows XP to Windows 7. Microsoft have indicated that they will put 'custom' support agreements in place for those organisations not able to move from Windows XP to Windows 7 in time, but custom support will not be given without the customer having a plan to move from Windows XP in the near future.

Doing nothing also:
- increases the risk to the authority in terms of resolving operating system issues and therefore the potential for disruption to normal service.
- results in non-compliance with the Public Services Network (PSN) which would prevent the authority from sharing/submitting statutory information to Government bodies such as the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP).
- increases costs in term of putting in place high cost custom support agreements.

3.2.   Option 2: Migrate to Windows 7 and Office 2010 and implement the ICT Desktop Strategy.

This option involves moving to a Microsoft supported platform for both operating system and 'Office' suite. This will ensure that:
- the authority continues to share/submit statutory information with Government bodies such as the DWP.
- the authority continues to be supported by Microsoft for security and operating system updates and critical information such as upgrades and any security issues.
- the Council takes advantage of the up to date features available in Windows 7 and Office 2010

The move provides the opportunity to adopt an ICT Desktop Strategy which ensures that:
- users are allocated the most appropriate equipment that meets the business and user requirements;
- the most cost effective equipment is provided;
- common standards are adopted across the ICT environment which will increase efficiency and improve support;
- ICT maximises the availability and performance of ICT systems whilst minimising downtime;
- ICT maximises the opportunities presented through proven new technology and innovations.

3.3. Option 3: Migrate to Windows 8 and Office 2013 and implement the ICT Desktop Strategy.

This option involves moving directly to the latest versions of the Microsoft operating system and Office suite and bypassing Windows 7 and Office 2010.

Although a move to Windows 8 and Office 2013 is anticipated to take place in the future, it is not feasible at this time due to:
- Compatibility: most departmental applications are not yet certified as being able to work with Windows 8 or Office 2013. These include a number of the Council's major systems such as IDOX Uniform applications, in use in services such as Planning, Building control, Property and Land charges.
- Ease of Use: the look and operation of Windows 8 is very different to Windows XP or Windows 7. These changes are significant for users and it is widely accepted that Windows 8 is the first operating system that requires formal training for its users.

- Business Benefits: Windows 8 is designed to address the touchscreen market; it is an ideal operating system for managing mobile devices and therefore does not have any major business benefit for the Authority at the current time.

Windows 7 is a stable operating system with the ability to support most Council applications. It will continue to be supported by Microsoft until 2020.

The advantages of implementing the Desktop Strategy are as stated in Option 2 above.

3.4. Option 4: Replace the Microsoft Operating system and Office Suite with suitable Open Source alternatives.

Open Source is a term used to describe software that is produced as a result of collaboration between IT developers who create software that is freely available, without the normal licensing restrictions that exist when software is purchased from a single vendor such as Microsoft. However, the take up of Open Source alternatives so far has generally been restricted to individuals, small businesses or specialist academic usage. Nevertheless, ICT continues to review and monitor the availability, usage, compliance with local and national government security standards and applicability of Open Source alternatives; for example the new Content Management System for publishing Council information to the web is likely to be Open Source software that has developed successfully, with proven usage in a number of large organisations and councils.

In addition, the Council also uses open source operating systems on certain specialist devices where this is the most suitable environment. For example, the Council's anti-virus, internet and email monitoring systems all run on an open source operating system.

However, a move to replace the Microsoft operating system and Office suite with Open Source software in the desktop environment is not considered a realistic option at this time due to:

- Lack of compatibility with Council systems. None of the Council's software suppliers provides a corporate system that runs on Open Source computer operating systems such as 'Linux' and office applications such as 'LibreOffice'.
- Cost. Even if suitable alternatives could be found, replacing the current Windows and Office applications will result in costly and time consuming retraining of all staff (including ICT to support the changes) in times of economic austerity which would outweigh any economic benefit.
- Implications for the security of sensitive data and the sharing of that data with third parties on differing operating systems.
- Implications for the security of the Council's network; non-compliance with central government security levels for data sharing due to the inability to demonstrate effective virus protection and upgrading of the software to prevent 'hacking'.
- Although Open Source software is free to license, its development and deployment for use can be very costly in terms of purchasing external resource to undertake the work and the disruption to "Business as Usual" operations.

4. Outcomes linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

4.1. The outcome supports "Becoming a co-operative council which delivers high quality community driven services", by providing up to date, manageable technology that underpins efficient front line delivery of services to our citizens.

5. Legal and Statutory Implications

5.1.   Although there are none relating specifically to the report, it is a requirement of compliance with the PSN that the Council keeps its ICT infrastructure up to date; non-compliance will critically impact the ability to deliver statutory services such as Revenues and Benefits and Elections.

6.   Equality Impact Assessment

6.1.   No adverse impact has been identified as a result of delivering this proposal.

7.   Financial and Resource Implications

7.1.   Indicative costs for the recommended option are circa £100K, which will include the following items:

Server Hardware
Virtual Desktop Interface Licenses & basic support
PC Replacements

These items will be subject to procurement.

7.2.   Any potential to reuse equipment will be identified through the roll out programme. Options for reuse include:
  - storage at Disaster Recovery sites for usage as emergency terminals;
  - securely prepare the redundant equipment for collection and recycling through Council facilities. The collection of equipment and subsequent disposal has been shown on previous occasions to be cost neutral.

All equipment will be subject to compliance with the Strategy. This could reduce the overall number of PCs to be procured. Funding can be met from the existing PC replacement budget within the ICT Development Fund.

8.   Major Risks

8.1.   The main risks identified are:

  - Potential service disruption resulting from running on an unsupported operating system
  - Security issues – increase in security breaches and virus attacks
  - Incompatibility between core and departmental software and the existing operating system
  - Failure to comply with the requirements of the PSN
  - Time delay impacts on other ICT Projects (e.g. replacement of the Financial system, Content Management System (CMS))

A full risk assessment is available on request.

9.   Earlier Cabinet Resolutions

ICT Strategic Review and Consolidation report, June 2012

10.   Recommendation

It is recommended that Option 2 be approved for the reasons stated in Section 3.2 above.

11.   List of Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of ICT Terms used in the report.

12.   Background Papers

The ICT Desktop Strategy 2013 is available on request.