

BROADBAND NETWORK PROVISION TO COUNCILLORS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 At the last meeting members requested a report on the project to provide Broadband connectivity for Members .

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It is recognised that the existing Dial in solution for members access to corporate ICT Services is both slow and time consuming to set up. ICT Services have therefore sought an alternative method of connection exploiting broadband technology.
- 2.2 The solution selected is to connect member's homes to the council's network via a private broadband connection.
- 2.3 This solution will not only be used for Members it will also provide improved services for small Local authority establishments where there are only one or two PC's requiring connection.
- 2.4 The attached report was taken to the Members ICT Working Party on the 24th August 2004 and was approved.

3.0 PROGRESS

- 3.1 A contract has now been let for the provision of suitable broadband communication lines and the first two of these have been installed to allow the service to be proven and developed .
- 3.2 We are awaiting delivery of the necessary router equipment to enable these lines to connect to the Council's network. It is anticipated that this will be achieved early in November.
- 3.3 Following a brief period of testing we expect to be able to install this connectivity from December.
- 3.4 Over 50 members have so far expressed a desire to be connected via broadband
- 3.5 We have agreed that where more than one member is located at a single address we will provide a single broadband connection and connectivity within

the household to it. At present it is envisaged that this will be achieved with a Wireless connection(WiFi).

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That Members note the progress made in improving the services available to them.

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Director of Finance

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PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF BROADBAND NETWORK PROVISION TO COUNCILLORS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend an improvement to member ICT infrastructure by the implementation of Broadband.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The current service to councillors operates over a dial-up modem service and has been operating successfully for a number of years. This service uses a 'freephone' 0800 number, which means that call charges are paid by the council, not by the member.

2.2 The type of modems used offer a theoretical maximum connection speed of 56kbps, which is the fastest available over the public telephone network. In practice however, the speed obtained from these connections are often considerably slower. With the increased use of attachments to emails, and the increased volume generally of electronic communication to and between councillors, connection speed has become an increasingly significant issue, giving rise to a number of complaints about the current service.

2.3 The cost of the service depends on the length of phone calls, therefore as take-up of the service increases, so do the costs incurred. The current service also makes use of an authentication device (called a CISCOSecure token) to ensure that only properly authorised connections are allowed to the council network. Although this works well and serves the essential security purpose, it does add further steps to the connection process, and has been the cause of a number of incidents (calls) raised with the ICT Service Desk.

2.4 Private residential broadband connections cannot be fully supported by the council, since the underlying connectivity is provided by the broadband supplier. Internet access is also delivered via a third party, which means that access is not filtered as is the case with the council internet service. Looking to a fully 'residential' solution would not be recommended. However, a commercial Broadband service does exist and this report considers such a service as an alternative to the current dial-up provision.

2.5 Features of a Commercial Broadband service:

Connection Speed

- Broadband connections are not limited by the public telephone network, therefore are able to sustain much higher connection speeds.
- The connection from the service under consideration in this report offers a download speed of 512kbps, around ten times faster than the current dial-up connections.
- The connection is 'always on', so is available immediately the IT equipment is switched on – there is no need for a separate process to establish a connection.

Security

- Broadband links are attached directly to the council network, so are better protected from external misuse than the public telephone network.
- Networking equipment handles authentication automatically - this removes the need for a separate authentication stage when connecting to the network (although the normal Windows login and password must still be supplied).

Coverage and Support

- The service proposed is based on a national service provider. This means that the same service can be offered from any area nationwide.
- The service includes the provision of additional monitoring and management tools for use by Dudley MBC to enhance our diagnostic and fault-finding capability.
- The connections offered here are 'business' services, offering a superior connection ratio to the normal 'residential' services. This should give a better performance than broadband packages purchased by private customers.

2.6 Comparative costs between dial-up service and Broadband

2.6.1 *Costs of the dial-up service:-*

The costs of the current service vary depending on the call duration. Therefore an increased usage would bring an increased cost in call charges. Over the last 12 months, the total cost to the council of connections by elected members to the freephone service is approximately £25,000. Based on current coverage of members, this equates to an average of £343 per member per annum, although this probably understates the true cost, since a number of members included above have not yet served for 12 months.

2.6.2 *Costs of a broadband service:-*

Broadband costs are a fixed subscription amount per month (at current prices c£400 per member per year). This amount is not dependent on usage. For all members, this would give a total annual cost of about £27,500 per annum. In addition, there will be a start-up charge per connection, to include provision of a router and line installation and activation, giving a total one-off cost of about £30,000. As new members are elected, a new installation will be required (connections cannot be transferred). In this situation though, we should be able to reuse the routers.

2.7 Benefits of a Broadband service

2.7.1 The broadband service will offer many benefits to elected members by virtue of a much faster connection speed.

- It is expected that this will increase the take-up of the council service and encourage a much wider use of IT by members.
- Simplified connection should reduce the number of problems experienced by members. This, combined with access to improved diagnostic tools should realise a saving of support costs to the council.
- Deployment of regular updates (for example to virus protection software) should be much easier, further improving the security and usability of the service.
- A high-speed infrastructure to all members will lay the foundation for potential future services which may not be possible with the existing infrastructure.
- The current dial-up capability can also be retained for use in situations when members are not at home (for examples at conferences and seminars).

2.7.2 It is anticipated that rollout of this service can begin in September 2004.

2.8 The Council's requirement to meet electronic government targets extends to e-democracy and electoral modernisation. Broadband should assist in helping meet this agenda more effectively.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 It is proposed that the Council fund the installation and ongoing provision of Broadband connections to all members .

4.0 FINANCE

4.1 The costs of Broadband compared to the current dial-up facility are shown below:-

Broadband	Dial-Up	
	£'000	£'000
<u>One-off costs</u>		
Initial set-up costs	<u>Nil</u>	<u>30.0</u> ¹
<u>Ongoing costs</u>		
Annual subscription	-	27.5
Dial up costs	<u>25.0</u>	<u> </u>

¹ Includes a figure of £18,000 for reusable routers. After initial installation only new members would need to be connected at an additional cost of approximately £150 per member.

Total ongoing costs

25.0

27.5

4.2 The initial set-up costs would be the biggest additional cost to the council and would increase only when new members were elected. However, over 60% of the cost would be on routers, which would be reusable. The costs could be met from the corporate ICT strategy fund balance and the ongoing provision set aside for membertnet.

4.3 The recurring charges are extremely favourable compared to our existing system (the costs for which are likely to continue to grow). These additional costs at around £2,500 p.a could be absorbed from within the Council's existing Networking Budget.

5.0 LAW

5.1 Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is incidental to, conducive to, or which facilitates the discharge of its functions.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 The proposals are consistent with Council policy in this area.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the proposal in paragraph 3.1 be approved.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- annual members usage survey
- connectivity tender

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Director of Finance

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