

MEMBERS' IT WORKING GROUP

Members: Howard
Pease
Fisher
Mrs Woods
Bisnauthsing
Nadarajah
Moore
Kerr

Meeting date: 22nd September 2005

Members Present: Nadarajah
Mrs Woods
Bisnauthsing
Moore

Officers Present: Rebecca Chadwick
Ian Pick

1. Introduction and General Issues

Cllr Nadarajah clarified that the group had been established to explore how members could be encouraged to use their laptops. Initial thoughts were that there may be a fear of use or a fear of damaging the laptop. Those who did use their laptop may be discouraged from increased use because of problems with emails and access to documents. Those members present spoke on their own individual problems with using their laptops.

There had been some difficulty in logging on to systems and Ian Pick confirmed that ICT was working on providing a simple interface for users. He demonstrated the broadband version on a laptop. This was being worked on for analogue and dial-up systems, both of which could be demonstrated if required.

Conclusion (1) – to support the implementation of a simple menu style interface for members' laptops.

Further discussion on individual problems continued. One member spoke about their success in using the laptop for modern.gov access but could not print documents. There had also been an abundance of 'spam' emails about which members were very concerned. It was suggested that there should be an official reporting and repair system for members' laptops but it was also considered that there may be an issue regarding communication of what members can do when they have difficulty or problems with their laptops. It was also commented that it was important to have good connection with parish councils, although it was noted that any technical problems experienced by other organisations could not be solved by the district council.

Conclusion (2) – Individual councillors seem to have their own problems with using their laptops and therefore need addressing individually.

The group discussed briefly that it was sometimes difficult to communicate a problem to ICT because of members' lack of understanding.

Conclusion (3) – to recommend that members print or write out error messages to assist in the communication to ICT of problems with laptops.

The group also queried the Government's position with regard to members' use of IT but this was not certain.

Conclusion (4) – Rebecca Chadwick to research Government policy on member use of IT and whether any funding was available for training.

2. Councillors' Survey 2005: Your Laptop

Ian Pick circulated initial analysis from the Councillors' Survey 2005: Your Laptop. There had been a good response rate but those members who had not responded needed reaching. The survey results could be used as a starting point to find out not only why some members did not use their laptop but why some used it only occasionally.

Conclusion (5) – Identify those members who had not responded to the survey and approach them individually by setting up a meeting with the member and an appointed mentor from the working group.

Conclusion (6) – Councillor Bisnauthsing to be the appointed mentor and give suggested questions/approaches to Rebecca Chadwick before the next working group meeting.

Conclusion (7) – that further analysis of the survey be presented in graphical format at the next meeting of the working group.

3. Broadband

The group identified that one of the main factors discouraging members from using their laptop was that dial up was too slow thereby causing significant frustration. Broadband connection resolved the problems associated with dial-up but this did come at a cost. Members believed that the benefits far outweighed this cost. The working group would have to evidence the requirements for broadband and that it would encourage members' use of their laptop. Members noted that not all broadband suppliers provided the required connections.

Conclusion (8) – Ian Pick to provide at the next working group meeting a list of those members with broadband access and those converted to the new system.

Conclusion (9) – Members should be encouraged to receive Broadband connection. This could be achieved by a demonstration showing dial-up alongside Broadband.

Conclusion (10) – To investigate whether or not other authorities finance members' Broadband access and whether or not a corporate deal could be reached with a supplier.

Conclusion (11) – Ian Pick be asked to email or write to all members asking them to contact ICT before signing up to a Broadband connection.

4. Committee Papers

The group discussed access to committee papers via modern.gov. Although this system provided good access, most members still preferred to read through paper copies. It was suggested that members did not require paper copies for all meetings, perhaps only those which they attended.

Conclusion (12) – Rebecca Chadwick to determine cost of printing committee papers to compare with modern.gov publication. This could then be used to show members the real cost of posting and sending agendas and hence the savings that could be achieved via laptop use.

Members discussed their experiences of using modern.gov and saving documents on their laptops. Ian Pick reminded members that saving information on laptops required backup and that synchronisation on the main server was required.

Conclusion (13) – Ian Pick to confirm storage within Outlook on members' laptops and whether members can set up directories.

5. Training

Members discussed training sessions they had undertaken. Whilst these had been satisfactory, it was considered that further support was required. One member had undergone a local college course and recommended that other members did the same as a follow up to in-house training. Initial thoughts on providing training included that it be held in the Council Chamber or in smaller sessions. Members should use their own laptops during 'discovery learning' training sessions. It was acknowledged that training would be a two-stage process; first gaining confidence and then concentrating on technical issues. Training should also be supported by guidance in writing or on a CDROM showing FAQs and correct procedures. Training could be provided by officers and members as it was essential to send out a positive and supportive message.

6. Next Meeting

20th October 2005, 3pm. Location to be confirmed.

Agenda – Analysis from Members' Survey – presentation from Ian Pick
Broadband – Ian Pick and Rebecca Chadwick to provide feedback as above
Strategy for Encouraging Members' Use of ICT including modern.gov–
members to discuss
Feedback on Storage in Outlook – Ian Pick to clarify
Feedback on Government Policy and Financial Support for Training – Rebecca
Chadwick to report

Conclusion (14) – Given that those members who had attended this meeting were reasonable confident with using their laptops, those members who had not attended the meeting be encouraged to attend the next meeting.