SCRUTINY FORUM EXECUTIVE

Report of the

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

into

I T FOR MEMBERS

15 NOVEMBER 2000

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL - I T FOR MEMBERS

MEMBERS:	Councillor Paul Battye **(Chair)** Councillor Susan May Councillor Graham Simpson
LEAD OFFICER:	Mr Adam Wilkinson (Head of Estates, Property and Markets Services)
COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATOR:	Mr John Quarmby (Tel. 01484 221703)

The Panel was established by the Scrutiny Forum Executive following a request by the Liberal Democrat Group as to the introduction of computers for Members.

The Terms of Reference of the Panel were to determine events leading up to the decision to make IT available to Members, both in the implementation and support offered. The Panel met on 4 occasions and took evidence from Mr Michael Butler, Committee Services Manager, Mr Cliff Stewart, Head of Resources (Personal Services), Mr Darren Greenwood, Senior Officer, InTech and Councillor David Sheard, Deputy Chair of the former Members IT Working Party. The Chair of the former Members IT Working Party ex-Councillor Chris Harpin was invited to give evidence but was unable to attend due to holiday commitments.

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1. **QUESTIONNAIRE TO MEMBERS**

   During May 2000 the Panel issued a questionnaire to Members of the Council (who were Member prior to the May 2000 District Elections) on the effectiveness of IT (personal computers) for Members - 37% were returned. The results of the questionnaire were analysed by the Lead Officer from which the Panel drew the following initial conclusions:

   (a) That not all Councillors were aware of the support services which were available.

   (b) That an introductory manual about computer use should have been made available to Members prior to the installation of computers.

   (c) That general information should have been available in the Members' Lounge and Members' Library at Crown Court Building.

   (d) That the options of either a lap-top or PC should have been made more clear to Members.

   (e) That the use of "Excel" should have been explained.

   (f) That the "pink" database booklet was considered of little value.

   (g) That no further formal offers of training for Members appeared to have been made since the event held immediately prior to the January 2000 Council meeting (as at 25 July 2000).

(h)   That no evening or weekend support was available to Members who were having problems with their IT equipment.

2.   EVIDENCE SUPPLIED BY MR M BUTLER, COMMITTEE SERVICES MANAGER

Mr Butler was asked to comment on the time taken to implement IT for Members. The Chair had a copy of the Minutes of meetings of the Members IT Working Party from which it appeared that the introduction had taken something like eighteen months to come to fruition.

Mr Butler agreed that this was a long time. He explained that prior to implementation the answers to a number of questions had to be ascertained such as would IT be of benefit to Members; if IT was provided was an acceptable back-up service available; that Cliff Stewart needed to ensure that the right technical support would be available to Members; would IT lead to cost savings; that Gordon Gething who had originally been in charge of this project had retired during the process which had caused some delays; that there was no specific budgetary allocation for this project. There had been a certain degree of nervousness amongst Members of the Working Party as to the costs and how this would be seen by the press/public and the likelihood that Senior Councillors would end up defending themselves on cost issues; that the Member IT Working Party had, in his opinion, lost patience of having to continually discuss the proposal specification and had taken the decision to roll out the installation of IT as quickly as possible without a pilot programme taking place. Resourcing had been referred to Budget Core Team and to the Chief Finance Officer - the end result being that approximately £100,000 had been made available which had basically come from savings in Members Services Budget. When estimates had been drawn up "InTech" had recommended a cautious approach i.e. the savings figure (£90,000) plus an additional amount. However, Cliff Stewart had subsequently suggested reducing this figure on the basis that the original estimate was more than required. This had been done on the basis that Members "air time" was not known and also that a number of Members would have Featurenet facilities. There was also at that time some friction between BT, the Featurenet contractor and ATT who were undertaking the installation works. As regards Featurenet, BT had become difficult and had supplied Featurenet to 42 Members and not to all 72 as originally envisaged. BT said that this was due to the line signal strength and that if this strength fell below a certain level then Featurenet could not be installed. Apparently a number of Council Services had Featurenet facilities in Wards where BT said it was not possible for Members to have that service. InTech had taken this matter up with BT but had been unable to get a satisfactory response. Mr Butler stated that the benefit of E-mail for Members had been recognised although he had not been convinced that this would result immediately in a "paper saving". The transfer of Agenda and Committee papers by electronic means was not recognised in Law and currently these had to be issued in "hard" (paper) form.

The Chair asked what research had been undertaken to identify the types of IT equipment which Members would require.

Mr Butler explained that the IT Members Working Party had visited Leeds to view the equipment available to that Council's Members. The Working Party had also held discussions with a Leeds City Councillor. Members of Leeds City Council received "standard" PCs without the option of a printer. The Leeds Members had been supplied with "486 machines". At the time of the visit to Leeds only 12 Members of that Council did not have computer facilities in their homes. The Member of Leeds City Council who had spoken to the Working Party had suggested that the Leeds

system was very good but limited. The Chair of the Working Party (former Councillor Chris Harpin) had in Mr Butler's opinion a good understanding of IT and had floated ideas with other Members of the types of equipment to be provided specifically PC or Lap-tops. Technical reports on specifications had been submitted to the Working Party and Members had expressed preferences.

The intended pilot scheme in Kirklees whereby a number of 'computer literate' Members would test out the computer systems had not taken place. The decision to scrap the pilot had been based on the fact that too many Members wished to be involved so rather than undertake a pilot it would be simpler to provide IT to all Members who required it. The decision to abandon the pilot scheme had been agreed by the Members Working Party. As a result the supply of IT equipment to Members had been rolled-out without the benefit of a pilot scheme and in the initial tranche 30 Members received computers. Mr Butler advised that the Working Party had agreed a specification with dedicated 'phone lines for Members paid out of the budgeted provision. The Independent Review Panel looking at Members Allowances had recommended as part of their proposals that Members should pay their own telephone bills and as a consequence some Members had chosen to have the Featurenet lines taken out.

The Chair asked why the decision was taken not to provide other computer equipment from the beginning e.g. printers.

Mr Butler advised that the equipment purchased had been based on the amount of money included in the budget.

Councillor Simpson suggested that a standard casework package should have been prepared.

Mr Butler advised that the Working Party had discussed a software package and Councillor Sheard had worked with InTech on such a package.

The Chair suggested that when the computers and printers had been installed for Members there had been a problem around ongoing support to Members.

Mr Butler advised that there had been a briefing by InTech on basic computer use which perhaps had not been sufficiently comprehensive for Members who did not understand computers and that due to the decision to install computers as quickly as possible there was insufficient time to provide adequate training. As a result Members were advised that staff within the Training Unit would be available prior to the January 2000 Council meeting for Members to explain their training needs and to be advised of the courses available to them. As far as Mr Butler was aware Diane Fairfax of Training was currently undertaking a training needs analysis.

The Chair asked what technical support was available for Members during and outside working hours.

Mr Butler advised that the original report to the Working Party provided for two dedicated Support Officers based in InTech, however this proposal never happened. InTech currently provided one dedicated Support Officer. Mr Butler advised that the original proposal was for 24 hour 7 day a week cover. InTech expected Members to ring the helpline number. The service was keeping details of Members enquiries.

The Chair asked if any ongoing review of the implementation of IT for Members had been carried out.

Mr Butler replied that there were no immediate plans to carry out a review.

The Chair then asked who was responsible for the cost of additional 'phone lines for computer use for newly Elected Councillors.

Mr Butler replied that those Councillors would have to pay for installation costs as a result of the recommendations of the Independent Panel into Members Allowances.

3. **EVIDENCE SUPPLIED BY MR C STEWART, HEAD OF RESOURCES (PERSONAL SERVICES)**

The Chair asked what initial advice had been given by Officers to the Members Working Party about computer requirements.

Mr Stewart replied that in 1996 a Teamware trial - E-mail system - had been undertaken and this included members of the Executive Board/ Heads of Service and a number of Elected Members. The result of that trial had indicated that the system was not robust enough for the amount of "traffic" on the system. At that time the Council had something like six (different) E-mail systems in operation with the result that certain systems would not "talk" to other systems. From that period to October 1997 discussions around IT concerned the electronic issue of Committee Reports and Minutes as opposed to an E-mail system and that had influenced what systems would be provided. In June 1998 the Member Working Party had discussed the system to be provided and how that would be supported. The up-shot being a proposed Helpdesk with staff to visit Members homes to repair any PCs which had malfunctioned. This system to operate over an eighteen hour period. The costs of this were estimated to be in the region of £300,000 with an approved budget of £100,000. At that time a managed data network was being provided with agreed corporate standards for word processing and E-mail. Mr Stewart then referred to discussions with Leeds City Council. Mr Stewart advised that he had asked Leeds City Council about their problems around IT.

The Chair then asked a question about BT Featurenet.

Mr Stewart advised that originally BT had intimated that they could provide Featurenet to 90% of Members but that over the next four months BT reversed that decision and stopped supporting Featurenet. Mr Stewart suggested that this was due to BT having to invest in exchanges which were becoming over loaded. As a result BT said that they could only cover 45% of Members. Mr Stewart then talked about issues which had arisen in relation to Members who had their own PCs who wished to link in to the Council's system. Officers were not happy with this proposal from the point of view of security and also that the system "belonged" to Cap Gemini. In early 1999 Mr Stewart became aware of Members frustrations around the proposed system which was "Committee" based and the complexities of such a system. Discussions had taken place about rationalisation with the idea of a lap-top being offered as an alternative to a PC. There were two drivers for this proposal i.e. it solved the problem of insufficient space in Members homes to put the equipment and lap-tops would not require as much maintenance as a PC. The decision was taken to introduce "lock-down" which would reduce Members ability to use the computers for other operations. (This was agreed as a result of the mis-use of computers by two Leeds City Councillors). In May 1999 there was an agreed move

towards the use of Groupwise and around that time BT started dragging their feet in relation to Featurenet. BT also had a track record of being poor at providing a reasonable response time to repair faults.

In June 1999 the Member Working Party agreed to "roll-out" IT for Members using Microsoft Office. The Chair and Deputy Chair (Councillor Harpin and Sheard) had been given demonstrations of lap-tops and a decision was taken to issue lap-tops in September/October. Phase 1 being the issue of IT to Members who were computer literate. The decision was also taken to obtain a batch lot of lap-tops and Officers in debate with Councillor Harpin had selected a "mid range" lap-top as a fair guess of the type of equipment Members would require. Members had also debated which suppliers should be approached for the lap-tops particularly in view of some of the "bargains" which were advertised in the newspapers. Standing Orders did not however allow an Officer or Member to negotiate a deal for lap-tops with a company such as PC World. It was also unlikely that PC World would keep a sufficient numbers of lap-tops all of the same make and standard. Two brands had been looked at, Toshiba and Fujitsu, the Toshiba being more robust. The Member Working Party had also agreed that printers would not be provided only a PC. The decision had also been taken not to have "lock-down". Members had also agreed to review the use of computers under the first tranche. Training sessions for Members on the use of lap-tops had been undertaken on 29 July, 21 August and 23 September. Members had been given a briefing on use with a handbook being supplied. No "pilot" had taken place basically because nothing had been determined on how to evaluate a pilot scheme. Mr Stewart advised of Officer concerns about Members using their own software on the Council's equipment particularly from a security point of view. The possibility existed of Members own material being transferred on to the Council's network.

The Chair then asked if, with hindsight, both Officers and Members should have expected people (Members) with no computer background being unable to use the equipment properly and of the problems which might arise.

Mr Stewart replied that he had two views, firstly that the computers when issued should be used purely for Council business and that if they were used for other purposes then this would be a "perk" for Members with a secondary view along the lines of did the Council want Members using computers for private use. With regard to training for Members Mr Stewart was of the opinion that the briefing note issued to Members who were computer literate was probably ok. however discussions took place with the Members Working Party about training and it was recognised that InTech were probably not the right people to offer "training" other than a briefing session for Members. The Council's Corporate Training and Development Unit would be used for training Members in computer use.

The Panel then went back to discuss BT and their apparent negative approach to the installation of Featurenet lines. Mr Stewart indicated that the Council had a contract with BT for the Voice Network but that the BT lines had subsequently been replaced with NTL lines and that NTL were "keen to get in on the act". However discussions with NTL had suggested that the Company had nothing better to offer than BT in relation to Featurenet. Mr Stewart also advised that BT's change of strategy about Featurenet had taken the Authority by surprise.

Mr Stewart reported that the lap-tops had been purchased from Toshiba (65 in total) and they had been purchased within the framework of the main contract. If that had not happened then the Authority would have had to have sought tenders. Mr Stewart

was unsure as to whether any savings in the cost of purchase would have been achieved if the Council had gone to tender.

Mr Stewart then reported upon assistance for Members who had problems with their computers. At present such assistance was by means of the Helpdesk available from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday although he had been asked to consider proposals to extend this service to 8.00 p.m.

The Chair then asked why Members had been placed on "Websense" as opposed to being given access to the Website.

Mr Stewart reported that the Members Working Party had decided this and basically because "Websense" was considered to be of more benefit to Members.

4. **EVIDENCE SUPPLIED BY COUNCILLOR D SHEARD, DEPUTY CHAIR OF THE FORMER MEMBER IT WORKING PARTY**

The Chair asked Councillor Sheard to comment on the implementation of IT for Members and to give his perception of the role of the Working Party in this matter.

Councillor Sheard advised that approximately 3 years ago an e-mail trial was undertaken by approximately 18 Members. For the purpose of this exercise "ordinary" computers had been supplied (not laptops) and the trial had not been a great success as the computer systems failed. As a result of this Councillor Sheard thought that some Members had probably been disillusioned about the use of computers. Subsequent thereto the Working Party had asked Officers to investigate new systems. After some time the Working Party decided that all Members should be supplied with IT and that if the Authority's system was not installed then Members should use the Internet. Officers looked at GroupWise and Microsoft and suggested that GroupWise was the most appropriate. As a number of Members already had the GroupWise system on their own personal computers it was decided to use this system. Officers had advised the Working Party that Members should not use their own computers for Council business but should have computers installed as part of the Council's internal network. The Working Party then discussed how quickly the "system" could be rolled out to Members, also that those Members who had their own computers would be offered laptops. The Working Party had discussed dedicated Officer support for Members vis-à-vis IT requirements and at that time the suggestion was that four dedicated staff would be required. The computers and laptops provided had initially been selected by Officers and following the decision to go ahead all Members who required IT were supplied. Councillor Sheard advised that at the time of the initial supply of computers 8 Members had suggested that they did not wish to have computers. The IT Working Party had taken a stand to the effect that all Members would be supplied with and should use IT. Those Members who had refused IT would be referred to the individual Group Secretaries. Councillor Sheard confirmed that the original pilot programme had not taken place. The trial referred to earlier by Councillor Sheard involving 18 Members had been used to test out e-mail facilities within the Council, however, this had not proved successful due to the fact that a number of Services used different e-mail systems. Councillor Sheard advised that many of the decisions taken by the Working Party had been based on the amount of money allocated for Members IT requirements. As regards training Members could have arranged to attend the in-house training courses at the Deighton Centre and he understood that Members had been given a brief introductory session on the use of GroupWise. Councillor Sheard also referred to the decision to introduce "lock down" on computers supplied to Members although

he was of the opinion that any Member who was computer literate could, if they wished, have overridden "lock down". Councillor Sheard indicated that he had suggested that a "case management" system should be provided for Members which would assist them with their Ward work etc. but his suggestion had not been followed up.

Councillor Sheard suggested that Member access to the Internet was useful and that information on the Intranet, particularly that issued by the Corporate Development Unit, was of value to Members. Also that for those Members who had laptops they could take them to surgeries and enter case work straight on. Also that if the laptop required any repairs it was easily transportable to InTech, whereas a PC meant that staff had to travel to the Members' home to collect the PC in case of a breakdown. Those Members who had PCs had been provided with an "approved" computer desk and chair. Councillor Sheard suggested that PCs allowed Members to type their own letters rather than having to bring tapes or drafts to Crown Court for Members' Services staff to type.

As regards the installation of Featurenet to Members' homes Councillors Watson and Karran were the first two Members chosen to have Featurenet installed. This had been supplied to Councillor Watson but BT had indicated that it could not be provided to Councillor Karran. Councillor Sheard suggested there had been a great deal of confusion around the installation of Featurenet by BT who in some cases had arrived at Members' homes to fit the appropriate lines with no orders being given to them and they had not advised Members of the purpose of the line. It was also rumoured that BT staff had suggested that the line was for computers and had not mentioned that it could be used for "internal Council" phone calls. BT had been asked to undertake a feasibility study in the first instance but had failed to do so.

The Chair asked Councillor Sheard whether the Working Party had received any feedback from Members about any problems associated with IT.

Councillor Sheard suggested that those Members who understood computers and knew how to operate the various systems obviously had no complaints. Training courses were held at the Deighton Centre on the use of IT and any Member who required training could have signed up for the relevant course. Arrangements had also been made at the January 2000 Council meeting for Members to discuss their computer and training requirements with staff from Training and Development and InTech. The Working Party had not received official feedback from Members and any feedback which Members of the Working Party had received was on an informal basis. Councillor Sheard advised that the provision of IT for Members was only a small part of the business of the Working Party who, at that time, were looking at problems which might arise as a result of the "millennium bug"; they had also discussed the ATT transfer and associated matters. With hindsight it might have been sensible to set up a Member User Group to look at training for Members and to consider feedback on problems which Members were having. Members were also concerned about press coverage which specifically highlighted the costs associated with Members IT. That coverage had had an effect on the way some Members considered future provision. Certainly at that time, the decision to have four dedicated staff specifically to assist Members with their computer requirements could not be justified or sustained. Any proposal to introduce 24 hour cover should be for the Council as a whole rather than just for Members. There were obviously problems in that Members generally used computers during the evening and if any problems occurred there was no facilities for Members to contact InTech.

The decision to introduce "lock down" had been removed although the decision not to allow Members to place GroupWise on their own personal computers still stood.

5. **EVIDENCE APPLIED BY MR D GREENWOOD, SENIOR OFFICER, INTECH**

The Chair asked Mr Greenwood to comment on his involvement in the provision of IT for Members.

Mr Greenwood advised that he had been appointed to the Authority and had taken up post on 23 July 1999 and had conducted his first briefing for Members on 11 August 1999. He had also been asked to "set up" laptops for issue to Members and to issue these as quickly as possible. He also had to support Members with their IT requirements and deal with any problems which arose. He stated that the process from his point of view appeared very rushed. A number of Laptops had been delivered to the Computer Centre and initially he had set up 3, one for Councillor Sheard, one for Councillor Harpin and one other which had been passed to the suppliers who used that as a basis to set up other laptop computers. 10 had been delivered on 3 August 1999 with a further 12 on 6 August 1999. He had removed the "lock down" from the laptops and done further work to set up the laptops to individual Members' requirements. Mr Greenwood was of the opinion that the work he had carried out had generally been ok but that things would have been better if he had been appointed earlier with more time to undertake the work. He also thought that Members should have received printers but had been advised that typing of Members' correspondence had to be undertaken by the Group Secretaries. He considered that Members should have had training prior to the computers being released, although if the training had been offered too early before the supply of computers then Members may have forgotten some of the things which they had been taught. He was of the opinion that Members who were computer literate appreciated the potential which computers offered them whereas other Members who had very little knowledge of computers had found them difficult to use. One Member returned the computer. Members had been given an initial quick briefing on use of the computers but there had been little or no interaction between the Member and the trainer. Mr Greenwood had given group sessions based on the "classroom system" i.e. he spoke and Members listened. Ideally one to ones would have been far better. A training manual had been provided but this had required a number of amendments. One of the main problems being that the manual told Members how to log on but not how to log off.

The Chair asked Mr Greenwood to explain the type of problems which Members had come to him with from August 1999 to present.

Mr Greenwood advised that a lot of the problems were around Members not logging on properly, not entering passwords correctly, not understanding GroupWise, problems around hardware and software updates. Mr Greenwood thought that improvements could be made to the system in relation to the use of an Internet service provider and connections to GroupWise; cheaper phone calls through NTL; GroupWise 5.2 could be put on the Internet with a Web based access for that system. This would have the effect of removing the use of passwords.

Mr Greenwood advised that a number of the calls which he received were from the same Members with the same problems. Mr Greenwood did not see this as any fault of the Members as computers were new to quite a number of them and in his view insufficient training had been given. There should certainly be a "tailored" course for the use of laptops.

Councillor May asked Mr Greenwood if, in his opinion, there should have been a pilot scheme.

Mr Greenwood suggested that it would probably have been better if a pilot scheme had been introduced although so far as he was concerned the pilot scheme had consisted of Councillors Sheard and Harpin being issued with laptops, both of whom were computer literate. Perhaps other Members should have been included who were not computer literate. This would have led to a greater knowledge of the training requirements of Members rather than running basic courses. The impression that he had been given was that if Councillors Sheard and Harpin could "work the system" then other Members could. Mr Greenwood advised that initially the training for Members had been set up by the Members' Services Co-ordinator.

6.   **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

(1)   That details of general training courses currently available for IT should be forwarded to Members on at least an annual basis. The Panel supports the development of training for Members on IT on a one to one basis with an assessment being made of individual Members future needs. Further work needs to be undertaken jointly by the Training and Development Unit and the Members Services Co-ordinator to determine Members requirements "across the board".

(2)   That Members should be notified of support available to them in the case of computer failure, general enquiries etc. with a contact number and details of the times when the Service is available.

(3)   That any future proposals for the introduction of IT should be on a phased basis with "pilots" being arranged comprising of Members who are computer literate and those who are not who would report back to the Information and Customer Services Panel on problems which have occurred.

(4)   That newly elected Members should be given the option of either a lap top or PC. That the existing briefing for new Members held between the date of the election and the Annual Meeting of the Council should be extended to include a short (½ hour) induction course on the use of IT.

(5)   That future Council Telecommunication contracts should aim to resolve inequalities in call charges paid for by Members.

(6)   That the future management of projects which involve IT should be undertaken in accordance with the Project Management Hand Book with an evaluation being undertaken of the costs of providing IT for each individual Member by the Members Services Co-ordinator.

(7)   The Panel noted that the provision of IT for Members had generated press interest in a negative way by focusing on the costs rather than on the benefits. The Panel recommended that any future contracts of a similar nature which will become public in the normal course of the Council's business should be handled with sensitivity from a public relations view point.

(8)   That the Members Services Co-ordinator should carry out a six monthly assessment of Members software needs with Members being advised by

InTech of the software packages available of benefit to them in their day to day roles. Costings to be provided by InTech.

(9)   The Panel recommend that a Review be undertaken to examine whether the anticipated savings in paper as a result of the implementation of IT across the Council has been achieved. Such Review to take into account Council publications (e.g. Service Area Annual Reports) which might be made available by e-mail as opposed to "hard" copies being produced.

(10)   That Members should be reminded of the Health and Safety requirements appertaining to IT.