

## **IT SERVICES UPDATE**

### **Executive summary**

1. During the Christmas recess, staff from the BIT Office, working with suppliers, successfully transitioned all of the data and telephone circuits to the Parliament's new supplier. The change, resulting from a recent procurement exercise, will lead to savings of approximately £70000 per annum, increased network capacity for IT services and improved resilience of the Parliament network.
2. This paper provides a brief overview of the benefits and provides an update on other activities being undertaken to optimise the IT Infrastructure.

### **Issues and Options**

3. Last year, the Parliament IT network experienced several periods of unplanned disruption. On analysis of the root cause of the periods of disruption it was clear that there were a mix of technical and environmental (primarily electrical issues) causes. An action plan was developed to mitigate the risk of future unplanned outages and several activities on the plan have now been successfully closed.
4. The change in data communications supplier, resulting from a procurement exercise which concluded last autumn, brought with it the opportunity to improve the resilience of the IT network, as well as introducing cost savings. The new data circuits put in place during the Christmas recess introduce significant improvements in capacity (approximately 6 times more available bandwidth) and improve resilience. These changes benefit network users at Holyrood, where we will see improved performance for internet browsing, email traffic, visitors to our website and the ability to share the service to enable our webcasting service.
5. In addition to providing the telephone and data circuits at Holyrood, the new contract will allow improvements to be made in the infrastructure that supports Constituency and Regional Offices. The early improvements which will be undertaken include increasing the speed of the broadband connection to the maximum available to exploit next generation broadband technologies where available.
6. In the medium to longer term the new contract offers the potential to move towards different technologies to provide connectivity to Local Offices. This move would benefit those Local Offices where broadband performance is not consistent, or of poor quality. The new contract also has the potential to offer centrally provided telephone services for Local

Offices which would remove the burden of managing the telephone provision from Members as well as reducing the cost incurred by the Parliament.

7. Issues have previously occurred with the electrical supplies to the communication rooms at Holyrood. Disruption of the power supply has in turn resulted in unplanned interruptions to the IT systems. Electrical maintenance, including the work undertaken during the full power shutdown on the 11 February, has helped improve the electrical supplies to the communication rooms and to mitigate the risk of disruption to IT services.
8. The Parliament protects its IT network with several layers of firewall, with resilience built into the design. Last year a layer containing two firewalls became problematic and this issue resulted in three periods of interruption to internet services. The firewalls have now been rebuilt, reconfigured and reinstated, and are working well.
9. The change management process used to control changes made to the IT network has been improved. The improvements have seen greater focus on customer impact assessment, testing and additional scrutiny from the Head of Infrastructure, and a decrease in risk tolerance. This additional scrutiny is over and above that of the normal review team.
10. In addition to the activities outlined above, the BIT team have also been focusing on optimising the current IT environment. As part of this exercise there has been work undertaken on the email system and the remote access system. Additional optimisation work will continue, and a further technical assurance exercise of these critical systems is planned to happen in late February.
11. Local Office improvements are also being made. At this point, these focus primarily on updating the environment to align it with the technologies used at Holyrood. This is integral to our strategy going forward, as it will allow the decommissioning of old equipment and reduce the support overhead required to operate two environments, enabling BIT to focus on providing enhanced service. Staff from the BIT Office have worked to improve the approach to refreshing Local Offices. Feedback from the initial pilot group and subsequently refreshed offices is positive, particularly those who have utilised the one to one training service being offered during the refresh.
12. Work has also been undertaken to improve the customer focus of BIT staff and contractors. Vacancies in the new IT structure are in the process of being filled. In addition training is being undertaken or is planned to fill the skills gaps left by the reduction in staff complement and recent contractor turnover.
13. The BIT Office is also engaging with Members and their staff to identify other areas for improvement and planning to address them. The

engagement will not only focus on service improvement, but will also be used to help shape future service strategy for IT in the Parliament.

### **Resource Implications**

14. The resources for the activities outlined within this update are contained within the current operating budget for IT.

### **Governance issues**

15. There are no particular governance issues relating to this update.

### **Publication Scheme**

16. This paper will be published, according with the SPCB's Publication Policy

### **Next steps**

17. The work plan to optimise the current IT environment will continue to be delivered and any new themes emerging will be addressed.

18. Further regular updates will be provided to the SPCB.

### **Decision**

19. The SPCB is invited to:

19.1 Note the progress being made to optimise the IT environment.

19.2 Note that as well as the short term activities being undertaken or planned, the BIT Office intends to engage and consult Members and their staff to help identify areas for service improvement and to shape longer term IT strategy, prior to reporting to SPCB.

### **Business Information Technology Office**

Alan Balharrie

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