

21 July 2020**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, FINANCE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND
IMPROVEMENT****ICT UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To brief Members on the work ICT has performed to increase resilience, ensure Council staff can work more effectively at home and with the right technology in place, during the Covid19 pandemic.

Information

2. During the initial stages of the lockdown and home working staff had to adapt to using their ICT equipment at home and with only remote access to Council networks and systems. This included office-based staff, call centre staff and frontline service staff. It was evident from the first few days that this would not be possible for all staff and the remote access function (VPN) was not able to support that large number of staff working remotely at the same time.
3. **Remote Access Capacity Issue:** The remote access function (Cisco ASA VPN) was showing that it was not able to take the strain of all the staff using the many tools of their job including Email, Skype, file access etc. from home. Work was done to relieve the strain by forcing some network traffic to go direct to Microsoft and not use the NCC VPN. This was done over a few days and each step allowed more capacity on the VPN back to the users. Traffic from Skype, Outlook, Teams and software updates and patches were successfully routed around NCC to give back vital performance. ICT also turned off video calling for Skype and blocked video streaming services as they have a large demand on the network. Work was also taking another approach to develop an additional VPN remote access solution.
4. **New Remote Access Solution:** A Virtual VPN solution was worked on to increase capacity and allow half the users to operate through the original VPN (Cisco ASA) whilst the other half use the new VPN (Cisco ASA v). A virtual VPN is a server which operates as though it were a dedicated VPN device. ICT managed to get the new ASA v up, running, tested and deployed in 4 days. This meant that by the end of the second week of home working the users had all the performance they needed, and they had been getting daily increments in performance as other steps had been taken.
5. **Contact Centre Remote Working:** Over 180 staff working at the contact centre (CSC), Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Unit had the same needs as all staff to be working

at home but at the start of the lockdown the team was only able to work with about 50% of their staff at home, the remainder had to be in the office to take and make the calls. This was not an acceptable situation and so the ICT team worked with the telephony provider Daisy to make the required changes to get the team able to work from home. As a consequence of this work the Council can provide this service and all of the staff can now work safely from home.

6. **The Emergency Duty Team:** The EDT had no option for remote working and so ICT put in place a system of telephony which would allow the team to do so, using their laptops, take calls to the EDT team 24/7 at home. The solution was different to the CSC Call centre solution as they use a call management and distributions service, but the EDT team used only published telephone numbers routing to the telephones in the office. This solution took a little time to implement but was achieved after about a week and now the team can work safely and remotely at their homes.
7. **Microsoft Teams:** With the need for virtual meetings the Microsoft Teams client has been rolled out and installed on over 4,000 NCC laptop devices. This was done over a 5-day period and was like no other deployment before it. This allows a significantly better team working solution for both internal staff and external parties. The video and audio compression is much improved over the offering given by Skype. ICT have also been working on adding telephone dial in capability to the Teams meetings and this is now rolling out to specific users who have a need for it.
8. **Virtual Committee Meetings:** Together with offering Teams meetings to all officers and Members there has also been a need to continue the democratic process and allow committee meetings to take place including an AGM with over 60 Members. This has been done with the help of ICT working with both the Communications Team and Democratic Services. Each time this has been done the service has improved and more has been learnt to the point where the service has a much lower demand on officer time and is now a reliable and well tested way of operating.
9. **ICT Help Desk:** The ICT help desk has been able to fully remote work for some time so the work done here was to make the service available for a longer period to help staff working on new operating hours. During this period the service increased its operating hours and provided support during weekends, in line with the opening hours of the CSC. This included operating on both Bank Holiday Good Friday and the following Bank Holiday Monday. A review of the calls over this period has resulted in a scaling back of this service to its pre-Covid-19 operating hours. However, ICT has continued to operate an emergency on call rota through its ICT managers so that should an emergency situation occur that stops staff working overnight then a call can be made. This is a service only for significant systems outages which would probably usually be determined as a Priority 1.
10. **WhatsApp:** This has been added to the Google Play store for NCC apps and staff can install it on their NCC mobile device. Some teams have requested this as it gives not only a means of communicating should any NCC systems not work but it also allows front line staff to communicate with the younger citizens who more readily use WhatsApp as their communication tool of choice.

Other Options Considered

11. This is an update paper and as such, no other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendations

12. To ensure the committee is kept up to date on how ICT has enabled transformation of service delivery during the Covid-19 emergency.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee considers if there are actions arising from the report.

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For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 09/07/2020)

14. The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Improvement and Change Sub-Committee.

Financial Comments (NS 09/07/2020)

15. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All