EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Scrutiny Review ICT Infrastructure and Systems	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Scrutiny (Value for Money) Committee	
	Corporate Management Team	
	Leader and Deputy Leaders	
	Cabinet	

Scrutiny Committee Review Final Report

Title: ICT Infrastructure and Systems

Scrutiny Committee: Scrutiny (Value for Money Council) Committee

Committee Chair: Cllr R Lock

Sub-group Members Leading Review:

- Cllr R Lock
- Cllr A Legg
- Cllr L Beech

Is the Report Confidential? No

If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 N/a

SECTION 1: COMMITTEE'S REPORT

1. Introduction

1.1. Background / Context

1.1.1. The Scrutiny (Value for Money Council Services) Committee Members agreed to undertake a review of ICT Infrastructure and Systems. A sub-group of the Committee was formed to lead the review on behalf of the Committee.

1.2. What is the purpose of the Review?

1.2.1. To review how effective, resilient, secure and futureproof the Council's internal ICT infrastructure, systems and hardware are.

1.3. What are the core questions the review is seeking to answer?

1.3.1. The core themes of this review are as follows:

1.3.2. To Establish the Current ICT Infrastructure
1.3.3. To Consider Future Plans and Potential Developments
1.3.4. To Consider the ICT Infrastructure in Relation to the COVID-19 Situation

1.4. What was the Scrutiny Approach?

1.4.1. The activities carried out in order to complete the review included desktop studies, surveying of Members and officers, benchmarking with other local authorities and discussion and email correspondence with relevant Council officers.

1.4.2. The ICT manager was invited to a Scrutiny Meeting for a question and answers session.

1.5. What is Within the Scope of the Review?

1.5.1. All internal hardware and ICT systems.

1.6. What is Outside the Scope of the Review?

1.6.1. External facing ICT systems e.g. websites or social media.

2. Review of ICT Infrastructure and Systems

2.1. The Committee has undertaken a review of East Staffordshire Borough Council's ICT Infrastructure and Systems. The core themes and the main purpose of the review was to establish the following:

- To establish the current ICT infrastructure
- To consider future plans and potential developments
- To consider the ICT infrastructure in relation to the Covid-19 situation.

2.2. To assist in exploring these themes the committee undertook a survey of managers and Members, benchmarked against other authorities and discussed a number of topics with relevant Council officers.

2.3. The survey responses are provided in Appendix 2 and 3. Any reference to individuals or individual providers has been redacted.

2.4. Theme 1 - Establish the Current ICT Infrastructure

2.4.1. A number of questions were submitted to the ICT manager to allow the committee to understand the existing ICT infrastructure at the Council. The list of questions and answers are presented below:

2.4.1.1. What is the current internal ICT infrastructure?

2.4.1.2. The current infrastructure is 100% Windows based comprising of 250 client devices running Windows 10 21H2, the server infrastructure consists of 22 servers which are a mixture of physical and virtual hosts running Windows Server 2012R2 / 2016 / 2019 or 2022. The network core consists of Cisco switches and Cisco firepower devices providing external internet connectivity and security. Printing facilities are provided by centralised Canon MFD devices.

2.4.1.3. What is the rationale for running four different server versions? Why are we running 2012/2016 so close to their end of life dates, what is the plan for replacement? Are there particular software systems causing us to run older operating systems? (& if so which)?

2.4.1.4. No additional workload is created by patching different server versions. Patching and updating refers to business applications software such as Capita Academy, Northgate M3 and Frontier C21. The servers generally run the version of Windows that was current at the time of purchase. Whilst the installed version is still supported there is little benefit in updating to a newer version of the server operating system - if we were to upgrade this would present both risk of upgrade failure and additional costs in terms of server licensing and associated CALs therefore upgrades are only carried out where there is a specific need. Additionally there are also occasions where the vendor of an app only supports specific server operating system versions on the host server. e.g. NEC M3 Land and Property.

2.4.1.5. What systems are in place now?

2.4.1.6. The systems in use comprise of a range of off the shelf products like MS Office and Adobe products supported by bespoke business applications providing specific services for Planning and Revenues & Benefits and other teams.

2.4.1.7. Is there a full inventory list for hardware and software? Do IT have this documented to track software/ contract expiration? Is there a roadmap for changes going forwards on both the hardware and software sides?

2.4.1.8. The inventory system for hardware and software is a central database updated automatically by agent software installed on each PC, so doesn't readily output an overall "inventory list" i.e. you can individually report on all the physical hardware items or office versions by PC or any other aspect of inventory.

2.4.1.9. PC hardware is purchased with an expected lifespan of at least five years and eight years for server hardware, we are currently 60% through the desktop replacement project.

2.4.1.10. Software is generally purchased to be used to the point that it is no longer fit for purpose or the vendor ceases support, in the case of business applications responsibility for both of these aspects fall outside of ICT.

2.4.1.11. With regard to a roadmap for changes going forward, changes to the software side is as above dictated by the vendor and the business team, changes to corporate software e.g. MS Office are dictated by end of support dates and budgetary pressures.

2.4.1.12. With regards to e-mail storage, what is it and is this for all Members and Officers? Does the approach to file storage and email limits differ between Officers and Members, and if so why?

2.4.1.13. There are no document storage limits for either group. A small number of accounts have increased mailbox limits as requested by CMT.

2.4.1.14. Why is the e-mail storage level set at c.350mb?

2.4.1.15. No specific reason has been identified

2.4.1.16. How does the e-mail backup process work in regards to this?

2.4.1.17. Backups are incremental Monday to Friday for files with a full backup each weekend, the mailserver is backed up as a mailstore snapshot Monday to Saturday.

2.4.1.18. Does this create a vulnerability by incentivising members & officers to keep offline backups of emails so as not to lose them, putting the data at risk from a backup and security perspective?

2.4.1.19. Whatever the mailbox limit is set at eventually everyone will arrive at that limit. Increasing the mailbox limit will increase demands on storage capacity and increase backup times. Data is not any more secure stored in a mailbox as opposed to any other server based storage.

2.4.1.20. What safe storage / back up options are there for Members?

2.4.1.21. All member data is backed up the same as other officers

2.4.1.22. Have we plans to run phishing tests?

2.4.1.23. At the time of the correspondence the service manager indicated that no specific plans were in place to undertake phishing tests at that time. The Council has subsequently subscribed to a phishing testing provider and a phishing test was undertaken in December 2022 following correspondence with the sub-group.

2.4.1.24. What training is in place to ensure officers and members are aware of the latest threats and IT security? How are these training gaps identified?

2.4.1.25. Training comes under the remit of L&D (HR) however IT will check to ensure that the level of technical detail in correct.

2.4.1.26. What are the weaknesses in ESBCs current security system?

2.4.1.27. The main threat to our systems is no different to all other organisations i.e. the human element, regardless of training and software controls someone somewhere will always click on a link in an email, outside of this a small group of members use their ESBC laptop infrequently resulting in their laptop becoming out of date and posing a risk.

2.4.2. <u>Benchmarking exercise</u>

2.4.2.1. To compare the Council's ICT infrastructure with other authorities, benchmarking requests were sent to all borough / district council in Staffordshire, ESBC's CIPFA family group, and geographical neighbours.

2.4.2.2. Responses were received from the following eight authorities (including East Staffordshire Borough Council), two of which operate a shared service with another authority:

- Bassetlaw
- Chorley
- East Staffordshire
- Erewash
- Lichfield
- Tamworth
- South Staffordshire
- Stafford

2.4.2.3. Responses are summarised below, with full detail provided in **Appendix 1.**

- 7 of 8 authorities have an in-house IT service;

- All organisations benchmarked against utilised enterprise agreements for Microsoft.

- The size of the IT department varied widely, ranging from 6 to 16 FTE compared to 3 FTE at ESBC;

- The cost of staffing the IT department ranged from £292,300 to £558,000 compared to £173,000 for ESBC. The shared service authorities had staffing costs of £743,780 and £1,064,610;

- The structure charts provided (see separate tabs in Excel spreadsheet) show that the scope of officers/ responsibilities included within the IT service varied between authorities. This is summarised in Table 1 below. At ESBC some of these responsibilities sit elsewhere within the organisation, or there are not specific posts dedicated to these functions;

- The number of users also varied between authorities, with ESBC having the smallest number of users. Other authorities ranged between 330-800 users, with most authorities managing more laptops than desktop PCs;

- The number of applications managed by the IT service also varied, ranging from 25 to 62 (ESBC approx. 40);

- The number of servers ranged from 23 – 90. The shared services had 214 and 300;

- Platforms cited for collaboration between staff and councillors for file sharing included SharePoint, MS Teams, Yammer, Objective Connect, ModGov, Intranets and Network Drives;

- All authorities operated Windows 10, with a variety of versions in operation;

- Most of the other authorities conduct phishing tests;

- Several authorities use Outlook 365 but size limits appear to vary;

- Most authorities seem to replace hardware after five years, but two authorities wait until devices no longer work;

2.4.3. The following table provides a comparison of size, structure and responsibilities of ICT service at ESBC and other borough/district councils:

Ref	Question	ESBC	Authority F	Authority C	Authority B	Authority D	Authority E	Authorities G & H	Authorities I & J
1	**Number of staff in the IT Department (FTE)**	**3**	6	7.4 FTE	15	13.6	16 - including 2 FT Apprentice's	22 plus one PT	30 FTE
2	**Structure of IT Department**	**Manager plus two direct reports**	Network Services, Technical Architect, GIS Officer, ICT Security, Technical Support	An ICT Manager with two staff reporting, including the service desk manager. The service desk manager then has four staff reporting to them	Digital leads/ analysts/ architects/ training etc Infrastructure engineer	Complaints, Information Governance, Infrastructure engineers, Analysts, ICT System Support, Knowledge, Performance & Insight Coordinator, Digital Data	Applications Development Business Analyst Digital, ICT Support Two teams - Applications and Development ICT Technical Team	Five teams: Corporate Systems, including projects, cyber security, digital systems and reprographics Helpdesk 1st Line, Improvement /joint projects, GIS/ Addressing, Systems Infrastructure	Four teams: helpdesk, software developer, systems manager, business systems, Digitisation
3	**Cost of staffing of the IT Department**	**£173,000**	£308,000	£292,300	£558,000	£600,000	£459,200	£743,780	£1,064,610

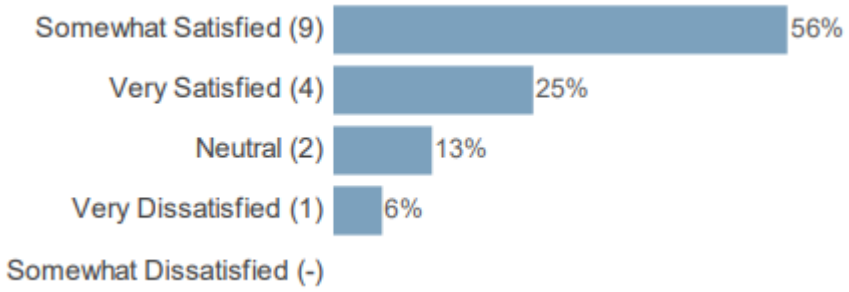
2.4.4. The sub-group agreed to run a departmental survey to establish Officer & Member IT thoughts, needs, pressure points and requirements.

2.4.5. As such a survey designed by the subgroup was circulated to Members during October 2022 to gather the views of councillors in relation to the current ESBC IT provision. 16 of 39 councillors completed the questionnaire.

2.4.6. Full detail is set out in **Appendix 2**, with quantitative data relating to satisfaction is set out below:

2.4.6.1. *Question 1: Overall, how happy are you with the current IT (hardware & software) provision at the ESBC?*

The majority of respondents were either somewhat or very satisfied with the current IT provision at ESBC.



2.4.6.2. *Question 2: Which corporate IT systems do you interact with in your ESBC role, and how satisfied are you with them?*

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
Outlook	1 (6%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	10 (63%)	0 (0%)
Council Website	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	7 (44%)	2 (13%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)
Printers	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	9 (56%)
Planning Portal	1 (6%)	2 (13%)	4 (25%)	5 (31%)	4 (25%)	0 (0%)

N.B. the Council's website is currently being upgraded but is outside of the scope of this scrutiny review, as is the Planning Portal.

2.5. **Theme 2 - Consider Future Plans and Potential Developments**

2.5.1. A number of questions were submitted to the ICT manager to allow the committee to understand future plans and potential developments. The list of questions and answers are presented below:

2.5.1.1. How does the Council plan to maintain or improve the infrastructure?

2.5.1.2. The infrastructure and systems in use are subject to continuous review and updating from the point of view of regular patching and larger updates as developed by the software vendors.

2.5.1.3. At what point is IT infrastructure/ systems reviewed? E.g. annually or at license expiration?

2.5.1.4. Quarterly vulnerability scans are run, regular advisories from manufacturers regarding vulnerabilities and end of life statements re specific versions of hardware and software

2.5.1.5. What is the checking process for patches? Do you do patches on a specific day? Does ESBC operate an at-risk period to minimise disruption caused by patching?

2.5.1.6. ESBC use WSUS to manage Microsoft patches, patches are generally released on the second Tuesday of each month which are deployed to a pilot group 48 hours after release then general release 7 days after release unless there is a specific advisory detailing an immediate deployment e.g HAFNIUM.

2.5.1.7. Can we get a copy of the Review of Virtual Servers recently completed?

2.5.1.8. A copy of the review of virtual servers was given to the committee.

2.5.1.9. Is there a plan for upgrade / replacement of systems, critical components etc?

2.5.1.10. All components are replaced as and when they become unsuitable or end of life – we are required by our PSN obligations to not use systems and hardware that is no longer supported by the original vendor, for example the Cisco switches were replaced in early 2021, the firepower devices were replaced in 2021 and client hardware replacement is currently underway.

2.5.1.11. How is the end of life process documented? What is the review/ upgrade / implementation process, is this periodic, or based on a set number of months before license expiry etc?

2.5.1.12. End of life notice takes the form of advisories from vendors followed by an assessment of impact and finally a project will be created to manage the replacement

2.5.1.13. Software procurement policy: How does this work between service teams?

2.5.1.14. Any business application need is identified and procured by the individual business team after technical consultation with ICT, corporate requirements eg MS Office and Antivirus are procured by ICT, recent purchases have all been business applications.

2.5.1.15. Are there any ICT processes that could be improved or further automated?

2.5.1.16. The use of the hosted print/post solution could be expanded across the council for any remaining “must print” scenarios leading to a reduction in the Canon MFDs.

2.5.1.17. Does the helpdesk ticketing service data highlight issues most raised by Officers?

2.5.1.18. The ticketing system can produce data to satisfy any request, free format entry by the user of the issue may make identification of trends difficult, however in my opinion from day to day use there are few repetitive areas outside of simple user error and password lockout on the HR system (HR did not procure the SSO option). The rollout of a new version of new software often leads to a few days of increased calls but again more often than not this is caused by user error.

2.5.1.19. What are the challenges faced by the ICT department?

2.5.1.20. Constant updates take up a significant proportion of the resource available together with the subsequent remedial actions generally caused by a cutback in testing carried out by developers.

2.5.1.21. ‘Constant updates’ – please define why this is the case?

2.5.1.22. Frequent business application updates generally arise from changes in legislative requirements and to address recently discovered bugs and vulnerabilities

2.5.1.23. Does this imply the patches are currently checked and deployed adhoc? If it’s causing significant pressures on the IT department resources, where are these pressure points and can they be resolved by refining/improving the process elsewhere? (e.g. upgrading outdated server hardware, or refining/improving the process elsewhere? (e.g. upgrading outdated server hardware, or redefining the update process to consolidate when they’re deployed).

2.5.1.24. This is not a hardware related issue or even an ICT created issue. The pressures come from the fact that vendors rush updates out to meet for example Whitehall deadlines with little or no testing, The specific business team will request that the update is installed to their requirements.

2.5.1.25. As an example a service department will advise version 90.0 needs to be installed by dd/mm/yy to meet deadlines. ICT will install it on the test system for the department to test, once tested the service team will advise a date to install on live, during the following days/weeks the software provider will advise that issues have been discovered by other LAs and 90.01 is now available, the above scenario is then repeated to install 90.01. Unfortunately it is not at all rare for there to be a 90.02 and 90.03, resulting in the upgrade being run 4-8 or more

times to meet one legislative change e.g. energy rebate, the whole process is then repeated 3-4 times per year for version 91/92/93 etc

2.5.1.26. What is Internal Audit's view of ICT? Are recommendations identified being progressed?

2.5.1.27. Internal Audits view of ICT is "significant assurance" – any recommendations identified are either implemented or challenged / explored further.

2.5.2. A survey was also circulated to service managers during October 2022 to gather the views of ESBC managers in relation to future plans and potential developments. 9 of 13 service managers completed the questionnaire. The responses are shown below:

2.5.2.1. *Question 3: Do you have ideas for future innovation in IT provision within ESBC? These could for example come from your experiences working for other organisations.*

NA
Not at this time, the current ICT provision is fantastic and the team do an excellent job, a real credit to the council
There is always room for improvement, however any investment needs to be able to demonstrate a business case for change and the examples we have explored to date have not been able to do this.
Please see above - use of MS Teams
It could be beneficial to investigate any products that further improve virtual / hybrid working now that this is more prevalent
Improved use of Dynamics with seamless integration with other microsoft products such as outlook
Personally, all I need is more storage space. My current limit is circa 500mb. One recent period of leave saw me receive 250mb of emails over a two-week period. Consequently, time is lost as these e-mails need deleting or moving so that important ones can be answered. Not being able to send an e-mail causes stress and creates work inefficiencies. I have asked for an increase but this has not been forthcoming. Mobile working, the ability for officers to report in real time any issues that they observe. Band-width has often been cited as the main barrier to this being possible. It appears that in some cases officers have to return to the office to dock or download devices. Working from Council buildings other than the Town hall can be problematic. For example, I have had to abandon a number of Zoom and Teams calls as the internet connection is so slow. This can also hamper [redacted] operations when trying to use the [redacted] database.
[redacted] Provision - wifi should be reintroduced at the [redacted] The current set-up requires users to continually plug their laptops into hard connections during meetings. This is particularly frustrating when multiple people wish to connect at the same time. More agile working in terms of being able to connect to the network whilst away from the office (e.g., in other non-council buildings). Deployment of a large screen for [redacted] connected to [redacted] so it may be viewed simultaneously by all office staff.
Those colleagues on desktops should be upgraded to laptops where they are regularly home working.

2.5.2.2. *Question 4: Do you believe there is any software that ESBC does not currently use that should be investigated relating to the work either you, your department or ESBC undertake? Please give an indication of how ESBC would benefit from such software, for example would it save time, reduce errors, improve resilience etc.*

NA
Nothing immediately obvious
Not at the current time - see answer to question 3
As above
As above
Dynamics 365 which would give integration with emails, calendar etc which would massively reduce officer time and increase resilience for the [redacted] service, especially in relation to [redacted].
This is a question of resource, neither the individual teams nor IT have people available to research best practice. Adopting any software is likely to be through a third-party recommendation- such as a neighbouring authority- or the result of a procurement exercise. The recent transition from Safety Media to Xcenta is a case in point.
None currently
None.

2.6. **Theme 3 - Consider the ICT infrastructure in relation to the COVID-19 situation**

2.6.1. A number of questions were submitted to the ICT manager to allow the committee to understand the existing ICT infrastructure in relation to COVID-19. The list of questions and answers are presented below:

2.6.1.1. How has the ICT infrastructure adapted to cope with COVID-19?

2.6.1.2. Very little adaption was required to meet the demands of Covid outside of the expansion of the use of existing facilities, i.e. we went from 40-50 people using remote access to all staff using remote access virtually overnight on 18/3/20 resulting in no loss of service across the council.

2.6.1.3. What challenges or opportunities has this presented in relation to the ICT infrastructure?

2.6.1.4. The existing internet connection has been identified as would benefit from a speed upgrade in order to better support the demands of the high number of remote connections, this has been raised as a budget growth item for 22-23 and is currently awaiting approval.

2.6.1.5. Is the ESBC internet speed upgrade included in the budget, and if so when is this expected to be rolled out?

2.6.1.6. The speed upgrade is budgeted for in 22-23 and the project will commence shortly, lead times will be dictated by the ISP and related hardware availability

2.6.1.7. What technology was newly adopted as a result of the pandemic?

2.6.1.8. No new technology has been adopted as a direct result of Covid.

2.6.1.9. What challenges have staff and Members faced, or are facing, in relation to remote working during the COVID-19 situation?

2.6.1.10. The main challenges presented by remote working revolve around personal home internet provision which is obviously beyond ICTs control, on the basis the significant proportion of the borough has access to superfast services problems are largely caused by a reluctance to upgrade connections and undetected faults.

2.6.1.11. Some software systems in use are not suitable for remote working i.e. large client /server applications like planning – upgrades are under way to alleviate this situation.

2.6.1.12. Have members and officers been consulted on their needs? If so, when and what did this show.

2.6.1.13. On the basis there has only been a change of location and not a change of needs there hasn't been any formal consultation however members and officers have been able to select their preference for replacement hardware, any additional hardware requirements identified for home working e.g. screens are made via the ticketing system and have all been fulfilled. Nobody has raised any requests for additional software as a result of homeworking.

2.6.1.14. What was the rationale for choosing zoom over Microsoft Teams given we already operate Microsoft products? What are the cost implications of this decision? Are there plans to make more use of Teams functionality to support shared file storage etc for groups such as scrutiny?

2.6.1.15. The decision to use Zoom was not made by ICT, there is currently no plan to use teams or file storage for officers.

2.6.1.16. The Council has 20 business zoom one licenses costing £3,198 per annum. In addition to this the Council has a Zoom webinar license which is £640 in total. The webinar function allows us to have a public virtual meeting and the public are not able to participate in the meeting (unless they are allowed to come into the meeting, for example public speaking at planning meetings).

2.6.2. A survey was also circulated to service managers during October 2022 to gather the views of ESBC managers in relation to the current IT provision. 9 of 13 service managers completed the questionnaire. The Manager survey asked a specific question in relation to Covid impact. The responses are shown below:

Question 2: The pandemic has had a considerable impact on the working environment. In your managerial role what impact do you perceive the current IT hardware & software provision has had on your team's ability to complete work tasks during Covid? Note, these could be both positive and negative.

Difficult to get equipment for officers to work from home when testing positive for Covid. exceptional support from the team with ICT queries
No issues encountered, all services have continued without interuption
The agile ICT facilities already in place at the Council allowed for a relatively seamless transition to full time working from home during the Covid Pandemic. From my knowledge of many other similar sized authorities this is a stark contrast, as many authorities have significant difficulties with service delivery for my particular area.
I understand that ESBC has a limited number of corporate Zoom accounts and so I have had to set up a personal zoom account, as a consequence, meetings are limited to 40 minutes. I have previously used MS Teams which is much easier to navigate as it appears in the email header (menu bar) and is linked to your Microsoft calendar.
All officers in the team were well adapted to working from home prior to the pandemic and were already working on a hybrid approach utilising a mixture of in the office and at home working. The shift to full homeworking was therefore fairly minimal, and the hardware and software continued to work positively with no significant issues being highlighted.
Ability to work remotely from home
IT delivered a seamless transition from office-based working to home working. The fact that the change barely registered was testament to the planning IT employed pre-pandemic.
Generally, there has been minimal disruption to service delivery with all staff able to work adequately from home or in the office. The IT systems have demonstrated that homeworking can work for the Authority. Significant problems have been experienced with the use of MS Teams in the office environment. The signal continually breaks. All the other Staffordshire Authorities use Teams so its use cannot be avoided. By contrast Zoom is stable, but the other LAs will not use this platform.
Crucial positive impact, offering flexibility and connectivity as needed.

2.7. ICT Manager Question and Answer session at Scrutiny Committee

2.8. Following the initial questions to the ICT manager, benchmarking exercise and Councillor and Manager surveys, the ICT manager was invited to the Committee meeting on 22nd December 2022. A full recording of the agenda item is available on the Council's website[1] however a summary of the salient points are summarised below:

2.8.1. The ICT manager outlined the Council's ICT provision is set up around legacy scenarios where the applications we are required to use don't adapt themselves to agile working. Since lockdown, the Council has been working through applications and adapting them so they suit a homeworking environment and removed performance bottlenecks, however the environment is still very much client server based. In terms of the future, many providers are pushing organisations by not supporting older features and moving into cloud solutions. The Council's strategy is to preserve our investment by moving things as and when they need renewing, rather than in one go.

2.8.2. It was indicated in the benchmarking exercise that many organisations have enterprise agreements which allow them to shift between different versions of software easily. The ICT manager was asked why ESBC has not followed this route but the traditional of purchasing licences. The ICT manager explained it was historically based on the costs but moving forward the model we use will no longer be available from Microsoft. Purchasing has been made through the Crown Commercial Framework.

2.8.3. The Council has not conducted a cost-benefit analysis of moving its estate towards an enterprise approach however the organisation has analysed the cost and benefits on specific elements.

[1] https://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/council-democracy/committees/scrutiny-value-for-money-council-services-committee/2022-12-21-000000

2.8.4. The Public Sector Network requires the Council to meet certain criteria. The Council's ICT security is tested on a regular basis.

2.8.5. The Council does not have strategic agreements in place with hardware suppliers and vendors however utilising the Crown Commercial Framework, we are able to receive discounts via volume purchasing.

2.8.6. The Council has not considered moving ICT to a shared service? The ICT manager indicated that shared ICT services have been implemented to varying degrees of success and much is dependent on the Councils involved in the shared service.

2.8.7. Benchmarking exercise suggests other Councils are more active in terms of training end users in ICT security, have we conducted simulated ICT attacks. The Council has subscribed to a phishing testing provider who conducted a test in December 2022 to all Councillors and Officers and follow up training was provided to Councillors and Officers in early 2023.

3. Conclusions of the Committee

3.1. The ICT review started in Month 2021, and undertook a range of data collection approaches, including desktop studies, surveying of both members and senior managers, benchmarking with geographical and CIPFA nearest neighbour organisations, and interviews. On investigation, the approach taken by the ESBC to date has been a pragmatic one, seeking to minimise cost to the Council whilst retaining services, and our security compliance. Changes within the marketplace however, in terms of new approaches to software licensing for example, have however enabled new opportunities for the ESBC, and many of the recommendations made by the review relate to these. The recommendations are, to a large extent to explore new approaches, rather than to categorically state they should be followed, as there are many factors to take into account during such transitions which cannot be assessed solely through the lens of a scrutiny review. The recommendations assume, and endorse a continuation of the current Digital Strategy Group as a vehicle to enable the Cabinet to work with officers to explore these.

3.2. The benchmarking data gathered for CIPFA nearest neighbours indicates that our current approach to software licensing for both server and desktop equipment (both for officers and members) is becoming increasingly out of step with the norm. Where we are largely purchasing individual standalone licenses as needed, many of our neighbours use Strategic Microsoft Agreements for the supply of Operating Systems and generic office related software. There appears to be potential for the rationalisation of IT systems in certain areas, for example utilising Microsoft Teams rather than Zoom, eliminating an ongoing subscription cost, and allowing closer integration for file sharing etc.

3.3. Further, and considering the longer term, exploring the potential use of software available via the Microsoft Strategic Agreement could enhance intra-organisational communications, combating some of the isolation issues of home working, for example, using the aforementioned Microsoft Teams. Such an approach has not been viable to date, as the version of Microsoft Office commonly licensed has not included Microsoft Teams. Given the discussions held indicated that our current strategy has not been costed against a move to a Strategic Microsoft Agreement, we therefore recommend that the council do so (Recommendation 1). It is worth highlighting that even if the Council does not wish to enact Recommendation 1 the situation with licensing is such that it may not be possible to continue our current approach in the longer term, as there is doubt over whether software such as Microsoft Office will continue to be available using more traditional software licencing models.

3.4. Given the benchmarking data also indicated that some councils have sought to combine ICT support with other councils we would recommend that this be explored, and, if a suitable council is identified, costed for future consideration by the council (Recommendation 2).

3.5. Discussions held with the Council's ICT Manager as part of our scrutiny meetings indicate that a growing number of our IT system suppliers would prefer us to move from local hosting of services to one where they run the service for us; something we have so far minimised on cost grounds. Combined with the potential benefits of virtualisation using cloud platforms both internal and 3rd parties it is clear that the future of the ICT estate will likely make use of fewer physical on site servers. It is also clear however that an explicit strategy for this transition has not been documented, and, in the interests of forward planning we have recommended this (Recommendation 3).

3.6. The recent simulated spear phishing exercise, which saw a number officers/members fall victim to a simulated attack illustrates the importance of cyber security training, and, with an election in May 2023, an opportunity to ensure the new intake of councillors attain, and retain, a high degree of cyber security awareness. Previous intakes have relied heavily on the efforts of the IT department to make members aware of cyber security through guidelines and briefings, backed by 3rd party cyber security training. We would recommend that simulated phishing/spear phishing tests are run throughout the elected period, to ensure the training provided does embed. In addition, that the training documentation be made available via the new member intranet when launched, to ensure this is easily accessible in the longer term (Recommendation 4).

3.7. Given the sensitive nature of much of the information we handle as a council, consideration of more advanced attack simulations, for example Whaling could be run for key senior staff (given the discussions with the Council's ICT Manager indicated that the software procured for the purposes of Phishing testing could support this). Note: Whaling is a more detailed form of attack, relying on some internal knowledge of systems, staff responsibilities, and relationships. It is generally associated with attacks on CEOs, Senior politicians etc. (Recommendation 5).

4. Recommendation(s) of the Committee

4.1. Explore with Microsoft the potential for an Enterprise Agreement. Production of costings for Cabinet including:

4.1.1. Identification of products within the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement which could substitute for existing product licenses, for example moving from Zoom licensing for teleconferencing to Teams teleconferencing.

4.1.2. Identification of potential enhancements to existing workflow & communications using software available via a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement.

4.1.3. Cost comparison over the full projected hardware lifecycle for both servers and laptops/desktops of both the current approach and Microsoft Enterprise Agreement approaches.

4.1.4. Consideration of a potential phased move to a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement in order to leverage fully our existing software investments.

4.2. Exploration of cost savings associated with shared ICT provision with another Borough Council, with production of a report to outline costs, benefits etc.

4.3. Creation of a forward plan for phased transfer of services from dedicated servers within the ESBC, to cloud infrastructure. Noting that this may include both 3rd party cloud providers and internal cloud provision.

4.4. Encourage the IT team to engage closely on ICT training for new Councillors:

4.4.1. To ensure training is appropriate in a local security ecosystem context.

4.4.2. To combine this with periodic simulated phishing/spear phishing attacks throughout the elected period.

4.4.3. Support access to training materials via the forthcoming member intranet.

4.5. To consider the potential for Whaling tests in addition to simulated phishing/spear phishing attacks for senior staff.

5. Appendices

5.1. Appendix 1: Benchmarking Responses

5.2. Appendix 2: IT Provision Survey – Councillors

5.3. Appendix 3: IT Provision Survey – Managers

SECTION 2: OFFICER CONSIDERATIONS

6. Financial Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit:
Lisa Turner

6.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of the Committee, as if approved they will be subject to a future report containing the relevant financial analysis.

7. Legal Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
John Teasdale

7.1. There are no significant legal issues arising directly from the recommendations of the Committee.

8. Risk Assessment and Management

8.1. The main risks arising from this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

8.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):

8.2.1. Contributes to ensuring ongoing value for money.

8.2.2. Contributes to ensuring effective training and testing.

8.3. **Negative** (Threats):

8.3.1. Service managers will need to ensure relevant resource to manage any additional requirements.

8.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register.

8.5. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

9. Equalities and Health

9.1. **Equality Impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

9.2. **Health Impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

10. Human Rights

10.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

11. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

11.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) N/A