Committee: Resources

Date: 7 September 2021

Title: Proposed IT Systems Update

Purpose of Report

To propose to use modern IT systems and practices to make the Council's IT systems to a more modern and secure and to make work easier and more efficient for officers and members alike.

Recommendation:

1. Move all Member's emails to ilminster.gov.uk email accounts hosted on Microsoft's 365 platform at the cost of £3.80 per user per month.
2. Delegate authority to officers to make decisions on IT management, such as document sharing, backup and the procurement and installation of anti-virus and security software.

Background:

1. Currently members use their personal email accounts for council business and officers have Ilminster.gov.uk accounts that are hosted on Microsoft's 365 platform.

2. Currently there is not a central file share that is accessible to members outside of the council offices and access to officers when not in the office is also problematic, but possible.

3. Currently council data is backed up to a cloud service hosted by Netgear at a cost of £150 per annum for 50gb of storage.

4. Currently not all council owned laptops have up to date anti-virus installed and are not encrypted.

Report:

5. Members using private email accounts causes a number of headaches for officers and members alike.
   a. If a member has an issue with their email provider, then they are uncontactable by all other members and officers. I understand that this is a regular occurrence for some members.

b. The council is unable to guarantee the security on private email accounts and can also not be sure that the email accounts are being hosted within the EU/UK making them non GDPR compliant.

c. As different private email providers offer different levels of security meaning that some members accounts are more vulnerable than others, making security inconsistent.

d. There have been noted cases of fake accounts being made to pose as council members and as there is not a set email policy (i.e. all emails sent from Ilminster.gov.uk accounts) it is harder to identify imposter accounts.

e. Should there be a Freedom of Information (FOI) request or a Subject Access Request (SAR), it is currently not possible to carry these out on all council emails as officers have no access to search members private email accounts. This could potentially leave the council open to a lawsuit.

f. When a member retires from their post there is currently no way that their council related emails can be archived should there ever be a FOI or SAR in the future.

6. Moving members emails to Microsoft's 365 platform will offer a number of benefits.

a. The Microsoft 365 platform has a 99.9% uptime record which means it will be very rare that individuals will be uncontactable via email.

b. The Microsoft 365 platform is hosted within the UK on a GDPR compliant platform, Microsoft are one of the world leaders in email services and are used across the world by £million companies.

c. All officers and members emails will then be on the same mail system meaning that security policy is much easier to enforce. Microsoft offer two factor authentication for their mail account meaning you not only need a password to login but also to verify a code sent by text message or automated phone call, I suggest this is turned on for all members account to provide an extra level of security.

d. Once migrated all emails sent by the council will come from the Ilminster.gov.uk domain making it much easier to spot imposters and malicious emails.

e. After migration all emails would be stored in one system and Microsoft provide tools to make FOI and SAR searches across all mailboxes simple to carry out.

f. The Microsoft platform offers a simple process to archive mailboxes of members who retire from their position. These archives can be kept indefinitely and no extra cost.

g. Easy to use distribution lists can be created making it much easier to email specific committees and working groups etc.

h. The Microsoft mail system is easily accessible via a web browser, mobile app for Apple iOS and Android and the Outlook desktop app. This means it will work on all devices that members and officers

currently have and will also work on any tablet devices the council may wish to purchase for members in the future.

  i.   Licensing is billed monthly at £3.80 per user and can be scaled up and down at any time, which can help to save money in times when the council is not full.

7. Along with email the Microsoft platform will also allow members and officers to access cloud storage. This will mean that all council documents can be uploaded to a central share that is easily accessed in or out of the council office. I suggest that we look into a share for members that contains all documents for upcoming meetings as well as a share for officers that all current digital data stored at the council offices is uploaded to providing easy remote access and removing the need for the council to pay for a backup solution (saving £150 a year).

8. Computer security is currently not brilliant on council devices and as part of recommendation 2 I will happily pass on advice to officers on how to bring this up to recommendations from NALC and the UK governments cyber security team.

9. For both recommendations I will happily provide written and in person training to all members and officers on all new systems to ensure that everyone is able to use them as efficiently as possible.

Ben Jenner-Hurford
Councillor
August 2021