

ICT Strategy Review for Creating Central Bedfordshire

Report to Shadow Executive

23rd October 2008

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1 ICT Strategy – Report to Shadow Executive

1.1 Introduction and Background

Deloitte have been commissioned to undertake a high level review of the ICT Strategy for transitioning between the existing Bedfordshire authorities and the new unitaries. The purpose of the review is to determine if the necessary activities and arrangements are in place for Vesting Day and to determine approaches to any risks identified.

This high-level review has focused not just on the technical elements of the Strategy, but also the financial, organisational and operational elements. We have explored both the Strategy being devised for Central Bedfordshire and the approach being taken to delivering it. We have also specifically considered the issues that arise from splitting aspects of the current County ICT Service and areas where the two new authorities anticipate that they will provide joint/hosted services.

This report focuses only on the key findings, risks and mitigation strategies for Central Bedfordshire Council; however the ICT Strategy review is a joint commission between Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC).

1.2 Key findings

The findings from this review are focused around the key steps which form good practice for developing a ‘business-led ICT Strategy’. Because of the timescales and levels of change required by the creation of the new authority we have focused this report primarily on the short-term.

1a) Current ICT environment - What is the ICT environment you wish to change, and how well does ICT currently support your requirements? This question also needs to consider the legacy environments of Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils combined with the relevant environments of Bedfordshire County Council.

1b) Future ICT environment - What are the ICT requirements for the new Central Bedfordshire authority and what must be in place for Vesting Day?

2) Delivering the future ICT environment – What changes need to be made, and based on your priorities and constraints, how much will it cost and what resources will you need?

1.2.1 Current and Future ICT environments

- Extensive work has been undertaken by the CBC ICT Team to identify the need for widespread change to deliver a fit for purpose ICT environment for Central Bedfordshire. It is widely recognised that ICT will play a key role in helping to deliver the aims and objectives of the new authority and build on the progress already made across South and Mid Bedfordshire District Councils.
- The CBC ICT Team is adopting leading practice and are planning ahead to ensure that the new Authority’s ICT provision will provide a high level of service and in particular be secure and properly sized. There are some good examples of where

the ICT Team are considering future compliance issues, i.e. Government Connect and its impact on the Revenues and Benefits service.

- The requirement for change is being driven by two key factors i) a view that some elements of the existing MBDC, SBDC and BCC ICT systems and infrastructure are not fit for purpose. For example the existing County Network is not planned to be used by CBC, and the SAP implementation is proposing to use new hardware. ii) convergence of solutions across the existing districts is being made inevitable through the creation of a new unitary. In respect to both factors, the ICT team have undertaken due diligence to enable evaluation of a range of options, but they should now ensure that they communicate their decisions more effectively to provide greater transparency and facilitate opportunity for challenge. In some cases, viable alternatives may still be available and should be revisited where time allows.
- Although service areas have been consulted on their future requirements, there is not yet a shared understanding of the critical elements of the ICT solution required for Vesting Day. In some areas the CBC ICT Team has not had a clear enough steer from service areas to determine what they require. There are plans to merge some of the different systems across Mid and South Beds for Vesting Day. For example, the reasons behind the merger of the Planning systems for Vesting Day need to be understood.

1.2.2 Delivering the future ICT environment

- Due to the splitting of some existing BCC services and the timescales involved, it is inevitable that some parts of the ICT service will need to be shared post Vesting Day until a future solution is determined and implemented. This may include large applications such as SWIFT and a large number of minor applications. A strategy for all systems needs to be developed which will ensure minimum impact to users during the transition period.
- The core focus of the planning activities to date has been to identify the tasks required to deliver the new solutions. However, the plans have not yet been adequately challenged to ensure that they are feasible, neither have the plans been incorporated into an overall programme plan to ensure that the dependencies and capacity constraints are fully understood.
- Engagement between the CBC, BCC and BBC teams has to date not reached an agreement on a shared technical and management solution for Vesting Day and the costs associated with joint operations. A number of key areas have not yet been addressed such as strategies for providing support of certain shared systems, how the authorities will work together to provide a shared solution, the financial model for such services and how each authority will withdraw from joint arrangements in line with implementing independent solutions. Some progress has been made on identifying a way forward for the SWIFT system, however appropriate governance is now required to ensure that the identified tasks are undertaken. Effective collaboration will be required to ensure that there are no adverse effects on service delivery.
- There is not yet an adequate understanding of whether the new CBC ICT organisation will have adequate skills and capabilities to meet the needs of the Council. Furthermore, the transfer of staff from the County Council may not

adequately address the skills and capability gap, necessitating recruitment or hiring of temporary resources.

1.3 Recommendations

Our review has identified that the CBC ICT Team have undertaken extensive work to understand how ICT can support the new Authority. However we have identified that the Team now need to communicate more effectively, particularly in focusing the strategy on the critical requirements for Vesting Day and how aspects of the solution will be delivered on a shared basis, at least in the short term. The Strategy also needs to ensure that transition and future operating model costs are transparent to facilitate the prioritisation exercise.

It is therefore recommend that the following mitigation strategies are addressed:

1. Clarify and challenge the critical ICT requirements for Vesting Day based on an understanding of service area requirements, feasibility of delivery and financial and resource constraints. A fully costed IT programme will enable the new authority to make appropriate decisions whilst also allowing greater challenge and scrutiny.
2. With urgency, ensure that suitable programme management support is acquired and deployed to coordinate activities across the different ICT projects and manage engagement with Service Areas. In particular, the programme management support should focus on the critical systems for Vesting Day and planning of the critical systems.
3. Ensure appropriate challenge is given to the Vesting Day solution and explore alternative and lower risk options where possible. This is not to say that viable alternatives can be identified, but it will help to ensure that the solution is accepted and the decisions become more transparent.
4. Work with the newly appointed CBC Service Directors to resolve any outstanding requirements from Service Areas for ICT. This will be particularly key in areas which the existing Mid and South Bedfordshire authorities do not currently provide the service, e.g. social care.
5. Now that a Director of Corporate Resources is in place, provide executive leadership and sponsorship to enable faster decision making. This should be combined with the use of experienced support to help expedite a design around the joint solution and the arrangements for managing it. This process should adopt a similar methodology used in transferring an ICT service between suppliers, and ensure that appropriate consideration is given to:
 - The financial and commercial aspects of any shared or hosted arrangements. Transparency will be required on the costs involved and the commercial model will need to be robust and agreed by each party involved. In some cases, negotiation may be necessary.
 - The new authority should ensure that any Service Level Agreements created are in the best interests of users and that appropriate operational and commercial controls are put in place to support any issues or disputes which may arise.

- A service management approach should be adopted to maintain an appropriate level of service to users. Aspects such as the Service Desk will need to be considered for example, to ensure a seamless service can be provided to users despite their being more than one party involved.
- A due diligence exercise should be conducted to ensure that the current levels of service provided by the County Council can be maintained or exceeded post Vesting Day.
- A skills and capability mapping exercise should be conducted to ensure that the new authority will have the appropriate resources to support the ICT service.