

BEST VALUE REVIEW – DOCUMENT PRODUCTION

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is an interim report outlining the work undertaken to date by the Document Production Best Value Review Officer Group. Having carried out an initial survey of existing operations, this report outlines the Group's findings to date, advises Members of the options under consideration, and at this stage seeks Members' guidance on any other options or issues that Members might consider appropriate to include within the review context.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Review Group has been meeting since June 2000, with the objective of reaching a finalised report stage for Members consideration early in the New Year.
- 2.2 The Group is looking at the production of printed material and documents for electronic publication across the Council including:-
- Preparation of documents throughout the Authority.
 - Photocopying.
 - Offset printing (currently external)
 - Graphic design.
 - Print finishing (i.e. binding, laminating etc.)

3 PROFILE

- 3.1 In profiling the service, the Group is taking on board within the Review process:-
- The corporate aims relating to the service and the Council's environmental policy.
 - Service Vision and Purpose statements.
 - Existing Service Level Agreement (which sets out service scope and client/user responsibilities, including turn around times).
 - Current equipment and staff resources.
 - The current budget provision.
 - The IT contract and proposals for the Council's IS/IT strategy.

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- The Central Government's targets for electronic Government and the associated requirements for documents to be produced using appropriate language for website and intranet.
 - The current review of the Council's corporate identity and associated requirements.
 - The Government's Modernising Agenda and likely associated communication.

4 BENCHMARKING AND SURVEY WORK

- 4.1 As part of the Review, the Group has tested existing staff satisfaction levels and is examining work flow and paper usage issues.
- 4.2 The Review Group is also working with Wycombe District Council (who have already undertaken a major survey of 128 Authorities) to identify the structure, performance and expectations of other authorities in this area and has participated in a comparison of the print service against statistics collated by South Bedfordshire District Council relating to other Shire Districts.
- 4.3 The Group is also taking on board the recent work undertaken by the Audit and Process Review Unit in respect of print services, which has recently been reported to the Audit Committee.

5 INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The group has now reached the stage of its assessment at which some options have been identified for both printing and word processing. During the review process, the Group has also considered some aspects of the work of both word processing and print and suggested change (where no additional resource implications are involved) with the aim of improving the current level of service. A brief indication of these is set out below:-

5.2 Print

- Ensure clear priority turnaround time for work subject to statutory deadlines, including most Committee and some legal work.
- Ensure appropriate response time to meet the requirements of users.
- Investigation of possibilities for increasing the percentage of re-cycled paper used – whilst over 90% of paper purchased by the Authority made from re-cycled material, it is possible that further inroads can be made.

- The setting of specific targets aimed at reducing the quantity of paper used (particularly given that intranet and email are available for internal communications).

These are being taken up by the Head of Service.

5.3 Word Processing

- Ensure documents are produced in accordance with statutory deadlines.
- Exploration of the possibilities to input and process data received when external surveys are undertaken.
- Re-reinforcement of the need for adherence to the standard design layouts for letters and other publications.

Again, these are being taken up by the Head of Service.

5.4 Options

Printing

- 5.5 Whilst work is still in hand aimed at identifying the precise costs of the in-house printing service, the Group has recognised that reprographic services are commercially available and that the Council should be able to demonstrate that any in-house service provides a service of equal quality, effectiveness and cost to that which might be obtained from the private sector. Hence the Group will be undertaking market testing to establish if the private sector could meet some or all of the Council's printing requirements and the costs of such service provision.

- 5.6 Clearly, in the light of the information then obtained, the Group will be preparing recommendations on the options available for Member consideration

Word Processing

- 5.7 Based on the information obtained to date the Group has already identified four principal options for the future of word processing namely:-

- Maintaining the current service, with or without modification.
- Service withdrawal.
- Service externalisation.

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- Service decentralisation.
- 5.8 As with the print service, it will not be possible to reach any final conclusions on which of these is likely to be the best option until such time as costs have been identified for each option. These costs, together with performance, will then need to be compared with comparable information from other Local Authorities and, if possible, the private sector.
- 5.9 Taking each of the four identified options in turn, the Group has currently made the following observations:-
- 5.10 Maintaining the Current Service with or without modifications
- The staff survey shows that the unit is highly valued by users.
 - The survey of work undertaken by the central unit demonstrates a high degree of variance in work generated by divisions from week to week which can currently be absorbed within overall workload.
 - The central unit now undertakes more specialist work including spreadsheets, newsletters, forms and powerpoint presentations.
 - A resource would have to be identified for any future requirements for graphic design and web authoring.
- 5.11 Service Withdrawal
- There would be immediate savings in salaries and other operating costs associated with the unit.
 - The staff survey shows an expectation that current overall typing work loads within the Council will continue and in some cases increase.
 - The Group has not yet been able to identify surplus capacity within the organisation that could absorb the work presently undertaken.
- 5.12 Service Externalisation
- There are no longer many businesses in the private sector offering typing services.
 - None of the Authorities surveyed by Wycombe have externalised their service.
 - The survey has identified a need for increased graphic design and web authoring (the production of documents for electronic publication for the internet or an intranet). There may be

opportunities to seek involvement of the private sector in this type of specialist activity.

5.13 Service De-centralisation (break-up of the central unit and the re-allocation of staff to individual divisions).

- Individual Divisions would have greater control over their typing, particularly for work not produced to legal deadline which can be queued.
- May assist in making the cost of the service more visible.
- A decentralised unit does not allow work to be spread between operators still providing additional support and cover.
- The same equipment is used by more than one operator at present so there is likely to be a need to purchase additional hardware and software to facilitate decentralisation.
- The experience of other Councils which have decentralised their word processing unit suggests that the arrangements can be made to work but often result in increased staffing within divisions as the workloads and absences are dealt with.
- Decentralised word processing can result in increased departures from the corporate standards of document production.
- There is a need to consider how decentralisation would meet the additional requirements that have been identified to input graphic design and web authoring.
- There would also be a requirement for additional copies of software to be purchased. (costs)

5.14 To aid the Group's deliberations with its next stage, it would be helpful to receive any views of Members on the matters raised and any other options which might be considered relevant.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To note the progress of the work undertaken by the Document Production Best Value Review Officer Group to date and, subject to Members observations, the Committee await the finalised report in due course.

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Background Papers:

Benchmarking and survey paperwork

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