THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL Resources Committee November 2015	Agenda Item	**24**
Unified Communications Project **Report by Corporate Improvement Programme Manager**	Report No	**RES/ 115/15**

Summary

This is an update for Members on the Unified Communications Project. The project aims to deliver communication technologies to enable effective ways of collaboration without the need to travel. An external review of the Pilot recommended that the technical approach should be changed. The redesign of the project will be concluded by the end of November with an aim of finalising any procurement by summer 2016. Project completion is targeted for early 2018. Since the last report to Committee, the sponsorship of the project has changed from the Head of Digital Transformation to the Corporate Improvement Programme Manager.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Unified Communications is the integration of a number of telecommunication functions that allow Officers, Elected Members and members of the public to communicate, take part in meetings or observe meetings without the need to travel. The systems and technology involved include:

- Telephony
- Telephone Conferencing
- Instant messaging (online chat)
- Presence (office attendance information)
- Video Conferencing
- Sharing computer desk tops

1.2 These technologies have significant advantages for an area as large as the Highlands and one that is relatively remote from the Central Belt and other centres of population, benefits will also include :

- Affordable replacement of ageing and failing telephone systems;
- Support for mobile and flexible working
- Reduction in the requirement for expensive phone lines;
- Reduction in call charges;

1.3 The Council's Unified Communications Project comprises three work streams:

- Schools Telephony
- Non Schools Unified Communications
- Video Conferencing

Progress and next steps for these are shown below:

2   WORK STREAM UPDATES

2.1   Schools Telephony

The chosen option for schools telephony is a conventional, but modern and functional solution from Avaya (IP Office). This solution fits the relatively fixed nature of telephony needed in schools. To date Avaya IP Office telephony solutions have been deployed to 43 Highland schools, with the priority given to schools with older and failing systems.   The project is currently finalising scope and any additional business requirements prior to remaining procurement and deployment of an Avaya IP Office solution to Highland Schools.

2.2   Unified Communications (Non Curriculum)

2.2.1   Lync Pilot

As a pilot, Microsoft Lync was deployed to approximately 350 users based in 3 offices in Dingwall (County Building, Ross House and Fodderty Way) and a small pocket of staff in HQ, Inverness. The pilot was supported and managed through a three way partnership between Fujitsu, Argyle and Bute Council and The Highland Council. The pilot met with a series of technical and support issues and took longer than expected to conclude. The original intention was to design for a full rollout of Lync and then to deploy across the Council area, having learnt lessons from the pilot rollout.

2.2.2   Review of Pilot

The very essence of a pilot is to learn and the use of pilots is a sound way of managing risks within projects. Accordingly at the end of the pilot period the Project Board (Now with the Corporate Improvement Programme Manager as Sponsor) commissioned an independent review, with a brief to look at a mixture of technical and support issues including:

- Network
- Security
- Data management
- Devices
- Design
- Engagement Process
- Management and support of IT

External IT and Telecoms consultants FarrPoint Ltd, were engaged to carry out an independent review of the entire Lync Pilot solution and deployment. They held workshops with Argyll and Bute Council, Highland Council and Fujitsu. From these workshops and further investigation, a Unified Communications report was presented to the project board with recommendations for THC.

It is important to note that in April 2015 five posts representing the Communications team from Fujitsu were TUPE'd to the council.   Therefore prior to FarrPoint reviewing the pilot the support arrangements for ICT had changed to a very significant degree. The team were TUPE'd to give greater flexibility and economy in deployment of telephony resources.

2.2.3 Decision

Following the review the more fundamental findings were:

- Support arrangements were complex and problem resolution overly difficult
- The technical solution had many points of failure
- The whole solution would benefit from the a review of underlying infrastructure
- The employment of the Communications team provided opportunities that didn't previously exist.
- There was a high risks of incurring increasing costs without the delivery of benefits
- There were too many different technologies with too many supplier management arrangements in place.

For these reasons the decision was taken to stop the previous technical approach.

2.2.4 Current Work

Since the decision to stop the pilot two parallel pieces of work have been proceeding. These are; To exit from the Lync Pilot and the service managed by Argyle and Bute Council and to design the future operating model for Unified Communications.   The design will also include inter-relationships with Video Conferencing.

2.2.5 Change to Times Scales

The Unified Communications Project was initiated in June 2013 and on completion of the Lync Pilot exercise would have been scheduled to commence a full UC solution deployment as of June 2014.   Revisionsto the plan now means that completion is expected at early 2018.

2.2.6 End of Pilot and Exit

A clean exit from Argyll & Bute managed services was achieved in September 2015 and the removal of Lync from the pilot users and the Highland Council estate was finalised by the end of October 2015. Pilot users now have an alternative telephony solution, and have been given Office Communicator as a replacement for Instant Messaging and Presence.

2.2.7 Design

Officers have carried out market engagement to assist with the overall design of a UC solution. The Council are finalising business requirements and undertaking a series of design workshops to agree the technical design.   The redesign is taking into account the infrastructure and devices which were purchased for the Lync Pilot. The design is due to be completed by 27th November 2015.

Following the design stage, the procurement phase will be undertaken with the aim of commencing a pilot of the new UC solution in late summer 2016. The wider rollout will take approximately 12 – 18 months from the completion of the pilot.

2.3 Video Conferencing

Following research, including market research, the Video Conferencing procurement will be incorporated into the procurement of the Unified Communications solution. This will give the Council a fully unified solution across desktop VC and room based VC equipment that will meet the council's requirements.

3 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

3.1 Design Principles

For all of the work streams involved in this project there will be an emphasis on placing the users, operators and beneficiaries of the project at the centre of the design process, by ensuring that:

- Schools representatives have and will provide information on current and potential requirements.
- Users and support staff are involved in the design of the telephone and unified communication solution.
- Staff, Senior Managers and Elected Members are involved in the design for Video Conferencing

3.2 User Involvement

Good design will follow good design principles and for all elements of this project the following standards will be adopted:

- Design will provide sustainable solutions
- Design and the solution will be as simple as possible
- Design will be based on the provision of services not technology
- Users will need to have confidence in solution
- Users and operatives of these services will be placed squarely in the design process
- The design will be complete and include support arrangements for individual users, roles and responsibilities for management and support

4. BUDGET

At the Resources Committee of May 2015 it was reported that the expenditure for the overall project is likely to be £308 k more than originally forecast with a revised overall cost of £1,823 k. This is due partly to increased pilot costs, including much higher Fujitsu project management and technical support costs than expected, and the need to revise the solution following the pilot review. As a reference, the cancelled Fujitsu telephony refresh project would have cost £2,385 k, so the in house solution still offers the Council an overall benefit.

As the project has been reviewing approach and redesign the spend has increased by approximately £100 k. These costs either relate to exit costs from the pilot or to purchases for ongoing services (that would be purchased anyway). These costs will be covered by the existing budget.

5   OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Resource Implications: Existing dedicated resource within the ICT Programme Management Office (Project Manager) is being utilised to manage this project with support from the Senior Project Manager. Business change management support is being provided from the Corporate Improvement Team.

5.2   Legal Implications: There are no legal implications at this time.

5.3   Equality Implications: There are no equality implications arising from this report.

5.4   Climate Change/Carbon Clever Implications: This project has minimal direct Carbon Clever implications, although the replacement of old telephony equipment is likely to result in modest power reductions. Unified Communications is however a key building block in the modernisation of the Council's work-styles and is a dependency for the full introduction of mobile and flexible working.

5.5   Risk Implications: Replacement of old telephony systems will reduce risk of failure and provide opportunities for more resilient arrangements to be put in place.

5.6   Gaelic Implications: There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

5.7   Rural Implications: The rollout of UC will enable a more flexible and mobile workforce, thus allowing employees to operate more effectively away from the main Council offices. This is dependent however on connectivity via WiFi or the mobile network, which is out of scope for this project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:
- Note the update on the Unified Communications Project to date
- Note the current Unified Communication Project budget;
- Note the position with regard to indicative timescales / next steps.

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