

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

3 October 2024

Report by Director of Business Operations & Partnerships

INVESTMENT FOR THE FUTURE RESERVE - ICT INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report seeks Cabinet agreement for utilisation of the Investment for the Future reserve to undertake essential works arising from a review of ICT Infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees funding of up to £850,000 from the Investment for the Future reserve for essential works over the next 12-24 months as a result of the recent ICT Infrastructure Review.

BACKGROUND

3. In May 2024 Cabinet agreed criteria for utilisation of the Council's Investment for the Future reserve and the first tranche of projects to be allocated financial support. Beyond the initial agreed projects, it was noted that further reports would be brought to Cabinet for approval as new spending proposals were identified. ICT infrastructure was highlighted as one potential area.

4. The new Head of ICT and Resilience took up post in January 2024. In the light of two ICT outages in early January, caused by failures of key data centre equipment, a full review of the Council's ICT infrastructure and mobile device management environments was commissioned to ensure our infrastructure (hardware/software/configuration) is 'fit for purpose' and capable of providing a secure, reliable and resilient infrastructure for the Council.

ICT INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

5. Recent outages have been challenging to get to the root of and have involved diagnosis and repair by a mix of internal staff and technology partners. A more comprehensive review of the Council's ICT Infrastructure, coupled with an internal staffing restructure, to give more focus and strategic technical leadership on infrastructure, are key aspects of an ICT strategy which aims to build confidence and resilience in our ICT provision, founded on a sound understanding of current and future business needs.

6. The objectives of the Infrastructure Review, which was awarded externally in April 2024, were to:

- Review the Council network and storage infrastructure, with recommendations to improve performance, reliability and resilience (Phase 1).
- Review the Council device management environment to ensure it is 'fit for purpose'. (Phase 2).
- Provide options for 'Guest Wi-Fi' at Council sites (e.g. Council HQ and Eastwood House etc) whilst remaining compliant with required national Public Services Network (PSN) standards (Phase 2).
- Deliver a high-level remedial plan and timescales for all recommendations/observations identified within the above scope (Phases 1 & 2).

7. Both Phases of the infrastructure review will be completed by January 2025, with the findings and recommendations becoming the foundation of the ICT Team's service improvement plan for at least the next 12-24 months, focusing primarily on network performance, security and resilience.

8. This review is running in parallel with other key ICT service priorities including: migration to SWAN2; upgrading school Wireless Access Points (WAPs); installing City Fibre connectivity to our ICT estate; supporting the programme of building works to Council HQ; establishing a more dynamic cloud presence; training & skills development; building a plan for our Microsoft 365 tenancies; planning for Windows upgrades and continually improving engagement with departments and schools.

Phase 1 Conclusions

9. Phase 1 was a comprehensive review of all infrastructure hardware. This is the first time that the Council has had this degree of insight into the detail and "health" of its infrastructure & network configuration and as such, the conclusions must be treated as a priority. Several areas of improvement have been identified to ensure our infrastructure remains as secure, robust and resilient as it can be.

Phase 2 Scope

10. Phase 2 will cover:

- Phase 2.1 Virtual Server Estate – *review completed end September*
- Phase 2.2 Review options for "Guest" Wi-Fi – *review completed by end October*
- Phase 2.3 Microsoft M365 review - *review completed by December 2024.*

11. The Corporate Management Team will consider the conclusions and implications of the Phase 2 review early in 2025 and there may be further financial implications at that time.

12. In addition to these Phases, surveys have also been undertaken of the network cabling infrastructure at Council HQ to link in with the planned refurbishment. Initial conclusions from that survey suggest significantly ageing network cabling with a replacement cost in the region of £200,000. It would be prudent to replace this cabling during the planned works to HQ rather than through a separate exercise.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

13. Cabinet agreed 4 criteria for the Investment for the Future reserve:

- Proposals should be sustainable (i.e. there must be an exit strategy)
- Proposals should not reverse any previously agreed savings
- Proposals should be aligned to the Council's Vision for the Future (now 'Place to Grow')
- Projects should support Spend to Save (pay for themselves) or should support investing in and developing our people.

14. There has been a lack of capital investment and ICT Team capacity to undertake essential maintenance work in recent years, with the Team prioritising available investment and capacity on even older infrastructure as the immediate priority for replacement. The proposed remedial actions arising from the review of ICT Infrastructure and the current changes to the structure of the ICT team itself, fit well with the criteria above and will invest in this critical service and its staff to ensure the ICT service is fit for purpose and can meet the digital needs of a diverse workforce and 24/7 Council services.

15. To replace the identified hardware across the Corporate and Education networks will cost in the region of £465,000, with £100,000 of professional services from a Technology Partner required to augment in-house skills and capacity and complete the recommendations from both Phase 1 & 2 of the review. This will be Capital expenditure. The total cost arising from Phase 1 conclusions is £515,000, with further resources also required for Phase 2 and any unplanned implementation issues. In addition, the early estimates on network cabling costs for Council HQ are in the region of £200,000.

16. Whilst some works are required timeously, it is likely that not all spend will be in the 2024/25 financial year and will straddle into next year.

17. To accommodate the Phase 1 and 2 conclusions and allow for the current estimate on cabling costs for HQ, the request from the Investment for the Future reserve is in the region of £850,000 to be drawn down over the next 12-24 months. Given the complexity of the ICT environment, there is potential for further ICT resource requirements in future years.

18. Given the need for fundamental investment in our ICT infrastructure, and despite pressure on the Council's finances, it is not envisaged or recommended that any revenue savings will be possible from this service within the foreseeable future.

19. In addition, whilst yet unplanned, it is important that Cabinet note that the replacement of such core ICT infrastructure will require planned network downtime. Efforts will be made to minimise business disruption and there will be engagement with services prior to any work.

CONSULTATION

20. The ICT Service has been engaging with Head Teachers and the Council's leadership team through ICT Service maturity surveys and face to face meetings. We appreciate that ICT outages can cause significant business disruption and are frustrating for the Council's staff, customers and pupils, and it is a key priority to improve this experience.

21. The substantive proposals in today's paper were discussed with the Corporate Management Team and then the cross-party Budget Strategy Group in August 2024.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

22. The Council has recently migrated from the legacy SWAN (Scottish Wide Area Network) Framework to SWAN2, which will provide a compliant route to market for hardware replacement identified within this report. As part of this transition, a full network review and redesign is being undertaken (in partnership with BT who run SWAN2), which may influence hardware replacement recommendations.

CONCLUSION

23. In the light of ICT outages and stakeholder feedback, a review of ICT infrastructure was commissioned to give us unique and much-needed insight into our configuration, equipment, connectivity and resilience. Given challenges to investment and capacity in recent years, it was understood that this would bring important conclusions and potentially significant spending implications. The first phase of the review is now complete and concludes that we have some fundamental issues to address to avoid further business risk to network stability. This will be Capital spend, which is currently unplanned in 2024/25. Corporate Management Team has discussed potential funding routes and agreed that the Investment for the Future reserve would be most appropriate. This is all part of the journey to improve our ICT provision to meet the needs of 24/7 services in a stable and resilient manner across the corporate and Education networks.

RECOMMENDATION

24. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees funding of up to £850,000 from the Investment for the Future reserve for essential works over the next 12-24 months as a result of the recent ICT Infrastructure Review.

Director of Business Operations & Partnerships, September 2024

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BACKGROUND PAPER

[Investment for the Future Reserve – Initial Utilisation Proposals](#), Cabinet 30 May 2024
Scotland's Wide Area Network (SWAN) Contract, Corporate Management Team, 28 May 2024