

WRS Board: 1st October 2020

Information Report – IT Update

Recommendation | **Members are asked to note the report.**

Background

Worcestershire Regulatory Services IT support and infrastructure is provided by Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC) under contract. A small number of elements of our 'IT' remain with Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) where there was little benefit or actual negative impacts in moving it to the contract with WFDC.

When WRS was created in 2010 we were using 14 different databases to store and manage our information and workload. In 2013 we started using IDOX UNIFORM database and migrated historical records across. The UNIFORM database has a linked electronic document management system (EDRMS) and case management system (Enterprise).

We have 2.2 FTE supporting the wider WRS cohort with management and delivery of all digital and electronic systems and equipment. All significant demands or scheduled works are prioritised in line with the principals followed by all WRS teams in managing resource and conflicting demands.

Report

The current work programme lists 18 projects of which the more significant are outlined below:

Reliable and secure digital management systems and infrastructure

As reported in a previous Activity Report, we have regularly upgraded our Oracle Database which is the underlying platform on which UNIFORM and the EDRMS are built. Our next update will be this month.

The WRS records are cleansed in line with the WRS retention and disposal policy every quarter with the actual policy itself being reviewed every six months for appropriateness. In May 2019, our EDRMS system was included in this process.

A programme for updating our IT equipment was commenced in late 2019. At that time a large number of our laptops were from 2013 with the remainder from 2015. A trial of UDC laptops (effectively 'dumb' terminals linking directly to the network) where appropriate was completed. Whilst it was identified that UDC laptops are not suitable for staff who regularly present or attend webinars for example, where appropriate they were significantly cheaper than replacement new laptops and resolved security issues of remote staff not synchronising their passwords following prolonged breaks from the office. Therefore, the proposed programme for replacement of 2013 laptops was a mixture of migrating 2013 laptops to UDC mode or a new laptop depending on officer need, and for the 2015 ones



either again a UDC re-build or retain the laptop and upgrade it to the Windows 10 operating system. The conversion of 2013 laptops to UDC devices commenced and was completed by early 2020. The next phase of upgrading 2015 and replacing the remaining 2013 laptops with new ones was put on hold in March due to Covid.

Remote working capabilities

Prior to March the majority of our workforce were able to work remotely, but there was a proportion who were not able to do so without changes to processes and equipment. The IT equipment updating programme was suspended in March to enable our IT Host to focus on enabling remote working (from home) for the remaining officers. This was eventually achieved by a combination of new laptops, recycling redundant equipment and use of CITRIX Connect links on Officer's personal equipment. This situation continues currently, although plans are in place for a full equipment revamp, which we will come on to.

One of the last groups to be enabled to work remotely was the five Duty Officers, usually based in Wyre Forest House. The stumbling block was access to the Bromsgrove payment system to take payments for stray dog release, WRS commercial work and supporting the District teams with licensing and permitting payments. A simple but inconvenient workaround has been achieved to enable payments to continue to be.

In 2019 Bromsgrove and Redditch Borough Council upgraded their Microsoft licence to include Microsoft Office 365 and enable access to Microsoft Teams. WRS had remained on Bromsgrove and Redditch's Microsoft Office licence even after we moved to the Wyre Forest network. Unfortunately, Bromsgrove and Redditch did not include WRS in this licence upgrade. This was further complicated by Bromsgrove CMT indicating that internal meetings should only be conducted by Skype or Teams without WRS staff necessarily having access to these.

However, the Service can make decisions not to follow the host's corporate policies where it does not support service delivery. As a consequence, a combination of using personal equipment, Zoom, Skype App, Teams App, telephone conference software, WhatsApp video and one to one telephone calls has been used to ensure each staff member is in communication with at least their Line Manager regularly since March. This situation was further complicated by the roll out of UDC devices as they have no camera function or desktop to which a remote camera could be attached.

To bring clarity to the situation and because it is becoming clear that Covid controls will likely be in place for an extended period, WRS has now purchased its own Microsoft 365 licence via Wyre Forest IT for installation on all the new laptops and, because UDC laptops cannot be used for video conferencing, these will now also be replaced by new laptops. In addition, as a number of the 2015 laptops scheduled to be upgraded have also begun to fail, we are replacing all of these with new kit. Microsoft Teams will then become the method of communicating effectively across the WRS workforce.

The new laptops have been tendered and secured. They are due to be configured and delivered to staff during October 2020.

Website Development

The WRS website is currently built on an older version of the Umbraco software platform. A decision was taken last year to upgrade to Umbraco version 8, which would enable



significantly more functionality. In May 2019 work commenced on arranging digital certificates to make our website https in readiness. A working group was set up last October to identify the requirements of our website, review other examples and consider options for enhancement.

An outline of our agreed requirements was drawn up and provided to Wyre Forest IT who agreed to assist with the initial set up. A background structure to the new web site in Umbraco 8 has been completed with training notes and an agreed WRS style guide. Unfortunately, Umbraco 8 is significantly different to our current version and Covid 19 has meant that familiarisation/training has been slow and difficult for the two Officers leading on developing the first few pages.

In the meantime, focus has shifted to our current website to enable compliance with the new accessibility regulations for public service web sites that came into force on 23rd Sept for both new and existing web sites. Whilst the new website is under development we will continue with the existing website and so have fixed all the straightforward accessibility issues as far as possible and issued an accessibility statement to highlight where we are not compliant and provide a timeline for migration to the new website.

Lead Officers from within WRS are invited to attend a training session on Umbraco 8 this month to formulate a detailed project plan. Following this, a decision will be taken by managers as to whether outside support will be necessary to make the new website as good as it can be.

Integration with BDC Finance project

WRS were notified in 2019 of the intention by Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils to change their finance system. As Bromsgrove District Council host WRS, we use their HR, procurement and finance system. Unfortunately, direct access to the current system is not possible for WRS staff from their Wyre Forest Citrix working environment. Where necessary, officers access the internet based system either from their laptop/desktop or one of two dedicated PCs in Wyre Forest House.

As reported at Joint Board in June, the new Finance Project was due to go-live in October 2020. That has now been pushed back to November. WRS Managers were invited to participate and be involved with the project working group in September to ensure that our requirements are satisfied by the new set up and enable WRS Officers to continue working in their Wyre Forest Citrix environment but still take payments, approve requisitions and authorise invoices.

WRS will continue to contribute to the development of the project to ensure our processes are included and can be used effectively.

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