

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 13th July 2020

Title: Digital Resilience

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Background

Witney Town Council enacted its business continuity plan during the Covid-19 pandemic but there were some areas where this could have been more robust. With further or local lockdowns, a real possibility, Officers have taken the time to review the Council's digital resilience in being able to provide continued service.

Current Situation

Remote Working - Telephone System & Homeworking

The Council's telephone system offers a remote office function for all users and was set up to divert to works mobiles prior to the lockdown. However, not all officers have mobile telephones so the Council trialled a service with its existing provider which enables a laptop to work as a phone, has a live chat facility and can direct switchboard calls to other mobiles, further enhancing remote office possibilities although this has not really provided any further benefits.

All office-based employees of the Council worked from home in the early part of the pandemic lockdown, by way of some form of remote VPN access to work computers. The number of officers able to work in the Town Hall due to social distancing measures has been reduced so homeworking will have to continue in some form for the foreseeable future.

Sales Invoices – for Hall Hire/Sports Pitch bookings/Burial Services

The Council has always issued paper sales invoices to customers due to the complexities of administering email invoices. Following an upgrade to the existing accounts software last autumn, officers now have the facility to email invoices directly from the package as they are created. Due to the on-going Covid-19 Pandemic, it would seem an opportune time to implement blanket emailing for invoices, unless a paper copy is specifically required. These changes will be implemented once services are back up and running.

Digitalisation of Burial Maps

For the burial function of the Council to be carried out, officers must allocate grave spaces at the cemeteries and provide these to undertakers and to the Works Team. The working maps for both cemeteries are situated on the wall in the Operations and Estates Office and on an un-synchronised paint programme and while paperwork, burial books and etc hold burial information, it is essential that maps are correct and easily accessible in being able to allocate grave spaces, especially if one or more officers are working remotely.

Tower Hill Cemetery was digitally mapped in 2015 but Windrush Cemetery has not been, and this is where most new burials are now taking place.

A quote is attached from Pear Technologies for the digitalisation of burial maps and records. The system uses land mapping software the Town Council already possesses and is fully interactive with the Council's burial computer software. On entering burial details on the latter system, it will automatically populate that the grave is used or reserved on the mapping software and be fully accessible to all members of staff who require the information.

As this integrates with two existing programme packages there is no comparable company to request quotes from.

Environmental impact

- These measures show a continued move to digital use rather than paper, therefore offering a reduction in the Council's carbon footprint.

Risk

In decision making, Councillors should consider any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

- Enables the Town Council to be more digitally resilient in continuing its services.
- There is currently no back-up of burial maps at Windrush Cemetery, by digitalising the mapping it reduces the risk of lost information due to unforeseen circumstances at the Town Hall.
- Instant population of grave spaces reduces the risk of mistakes in the administration of burials.

Financial implications

- The cost of the digitalised mapping is outlined in the enclosed quote.
- There is no budget in the current year 2020-21 towards digitalised burial mapping or for further purchase of additional equipment required for homeworking so, if agreed this would need to be covered from the Council's General Reserve.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Whether to accept the quote for digitalised mapping from Pear Technologies.
2. Resolving that Witney Town Council will no longer issue paper sales invoices to customer unless, they are requested (All customers would be written to, to advise of the change)
3. Agreement for further proportionate equipment (including laptops/works mobile phones) to be purchased for the purpose of continuing Council services while homeworking, delegated to the Town Clerk and Office Manager.