



Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

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The Future for Assembly ICT

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Purpose and summary of issues

To seek the Commission's direction on the way we provide future ICT for the Assembly.

Recommendations

1. That the Commission:-

- Agrees the recruitment of a range of expertise in the field of ICT through a reference group approach;
- Considers whether it is ready for a complete review of ICT contractual services,
- If so, agrees the appointment of interim adviser(s) to take this forward.



Discussion

Looking to the Future

2. The widest range of tools needs to be used to promote and widen engagement in devolution and the democratic process. Our application of new media is under constant development to help towards this goal, including the use of digital technology, easily accessible and searchable webcasting, e-petitions, a variety of e forums and interactivity. The Assembly has a strong reputation for being in the lead for its use of technology. To retain and build on this reputation, we need to use all the expertise available, making new thinking about technology integral to our communications.
3. We have various sources of new thinking available to us. We use in-house ideas and skills from Members and staff, engage with our main contractors (Siemens and the Merlin alliance, Barcud Derwen, IVC, BT), we can look outside to known and innovative sources of expertise from industry, the voluntary and regulatory sectors, academic life and specialist bodies like the Hansard Society and Ofcom. These sources can all give a wide picture about future areas for innovation which can be captured and regularly refreshed through use of a reference group of new thinkers, which we can use as flexibly and regularly as required.
4. The technology in the Senedd installed for use by Assembly Members, APS and the public, was, at the time of the design, considered cutting edge, but we need to sustain this momentum. Recent events, including the e-democracy conference hosted by the Assembly in January 2008, show that future initiatives in this arena are key to continued success. Plans for development of our education service in Siambr Hywel and the exciting project for the future of Pierhead can link with and inform the way forward for Senedd technology in the next phase of its development.
5. The more structured and consistent application of new methods to the ways we work, securing better and faster connectivity, allowing people to work remotely on a more effective basis, all link with the Commission's goal of working sustainably. More flexible working will help us to use our estate more efficiently and reduce the need for fixed office space. Our approach to accommodation is reflecting this for the future.

ICT Support Services

6. Innovation and new ways of working needs to maintain a reliable base for provision of technology. The ICT services contract was awarded to the Siemens alliance in May 2004. It will continue until 2014, unless terminated earlier. The contract owners are the Welsh Assembly



Government (the Government), with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the Commission, governing how the contract is managed on behalf of the Assembly. Before the 2006 Act came into force, it was agreed that the Assembly Commission would be able to give Siemens notice of withdrawal from the contract if it decided that it needed to take a different approach.

7. The overall issue we have identified in the way the ICT contract works is its size and inflexibility, meaning that the services provided for the Commission are a small part of a large whole. The service standards provided for Commission users are enhanced, but are clearly not sufficient to satisfy the particular needs of this organisation. There are other problems associated with being tied to current systems, including shared infrastructure and a requirement for APS staff to remain on the Government Secure Internet (GSI), which can be restrictive. However, there are benefits such as economies of scale and the protection provided by GSI.
8. There are a range of options for the provision of ICT services, which the Commission needs to consider to establish the balance its priorities, the likely risks and costs. These include:-
 - retaining the status quo, so that the Assembly continues to receive its services from Siemens via a Government - managed contract;
 - the Commission taking ownership of the contract for Assembly aspects;
 - a full procurement exercise to select a new provider; or in-house management with smaller, expert call-off contracts for elements of the service and project delivery.

The merits and possible pitfalls of each of these approaches can be explored by discussion in the meeting.

9. Unless the Commission is content to continue as things stand at the moment, it will be necessary to bring in external expertise to assist and advise on the options which will enable us to maintain reliable base ICT support, but be agile enough to adapt readily to current and future innovation. This expertise needs to balance the right skills, independence of approach and cost. The most appropriate course is likely to be through open competition for a form of interim management for a change project, so that advisers are working for the Commission and have its objectives central to the work they do.

Governance Matters



Financial implications

10. The reference group proposed is unlikely to be of significant cost, although day-rates for experts used more regularly and for longer periods will vary. The cost of a review of the contract using interim management resources will be significant, but investment will be needed to ensure value for money of the options selected.

Risk Assessment

11. The options set out above all carry a degree of risk and benefits which can be discussed at the meeting.

Compliance

12. The Commission is charged under the Government of Wales Act 2006 with providing facilities and services for the Assembly which will enable it to carry out its functions.