



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

West Oxfordshire District Council

Name and date of Committee	Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee Thursday 25 November 2021
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 7
Subject	Re-use of IT equipment
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Jane Doughty - Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery Email: jane.doughty@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Phil Martin, Group Manager, Business Support Services Tel: 07764352360; Email: phil.martin@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To further consider the Notice of Motion regarding re-use of IT equipment referred to the Committee by the Council and to submit comments or recommendations accordingly.
Annexes	None
Recommendation	That the Committee recommends to Council that they donate their 'end of life' laptops to Oxford IT Bank as this is a local organisation that supports charities and individuals in Oxfordshire and continue to use the existing arrangements for all other ICT Hardware.
Corporate priorities	Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. At the meeting of the Council held on 28th April 2021, the following Motion was proposed by Councillor Andy Graham and seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, namely:-

“This Council notes that The Covid-19 lockdowns have shown how vital technology is to keeping people connected, in particular the vulnerable in society, many of whom have been confined to their homes and unable to see loved ones, and that according to Age UK 51% of digitally excluded people are over the age of 65, while refugees and the homeless also face worrying levels of digital exclusion.

This Council calls for:

- 1. The Council, public bodies in West Oxfordshire, and local businesses to reform their procurement policies by donating IT locally to those in need rather than scrapping it, using schemes such as the Laptops for Homeless and Vulnerable Initiative;*
- 2. A local re-use and recycling centre to enable SocialBox.Biz and its charity partners to collect and distribute old technology to those in need in West Oxfordshire; and*
- 3. Direct council suppliers to support the SocialBox.Biz initiative and, together with the Council, to proactively take part in sponsoring and promoting the SocialBox.Biz message to local businesses, through traditional media and social media channels.”*

- 1.2. The Chairman advised that he was not exercising his discretion for this motion to be debated in accordance with paragraph 11(e) of the Council Procedure Rules, and after it had been proposed and seconded it was referred to the Economic & Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and advice.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The ICT service currently has arrangements in place with a specialist disposal company, who both recycle as well dispose of redundant and broken equipment. The company provides the Council with the required paperwork to comply with Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and Data Protection Regulations.
- 2.2. Due to the nature of the information that the Council holds and uses, the ICT team wipe laptops / computer hard drives / discs to minimize the risk of data loss.
- 2.3. Since the start of the pandemic mobile devices such as laptops have been in high demand with the majority of Council staff working from home during the lockdowns. Unsurprisingly the supply of new laptops was affected world-wide so the team have re-deployed and repaired all serviceable laptops to ensure officers have the equipment they need.
- 2.4. The Council only deems laptops / computers ‘end of life’ when they have suffered from a physical component failing and the repair / the parts are uneconomical / technically unfeasible. The ICT will also replace a laptop / computer when its processor speeds / capability are no-longer able to support the software that the Council use to provide services to residents and businesses and/or accept the security patches required.
- 2.5. Currently the Council have 50 laptops / computers awaiting disposal.
- 2.6. If the Committee wished to donate the Council’s old IT equipment for potential re-use by local residents and charities then it could consider the following options:

OPTION 1.

- 2.7. Approach SocialBox.Biz, who are a business 2 business consultancy and discuss how the Council would set up an ICT recycling programme for West Oxfordshire as well as getting their existing suppliers to use and help promote this.
- 2.8. As part of the set up the company offers a service where the Council would pay them to come and help set up a donation programme, which would involve them providing specialist advice on securely wiping the data from devices and using open source software to provide a platform which you can then donate safely on.
- 2.9. Whilst Oxfordshire County Council are responsible for disposal of waste and operate the Household Recycling Centers the feasibility of using the Dix Pit site for the collection of donated equipment is questionable as the ICT Team would need to be able to easily access the equipment to ensure the data was completely wiped from the devices. This would mean that storage for both the Council's equipment as well as donated IT equipment would need to be found within the Council Offices.

OPTION 2

- 2.10. The Council could donate their 'end of life' laptops, computers and phones for re-use to either the Oxford IT Bank or IT Schools Africa.
- 2.11. Both organisations ensure all data is wiped from the machines using specialist approved software and can provide data erasure certificates upon request so providing the Council with assurance that the risk of data loss / breach is addressed.
- 2.12. The Council could continue to use their existing supplier to disposal of equipment such as monitors and other business related hardware in an environmentally compliant way, which the Oxford IT Bank / IT Schools Africa currently doesn't take, without incurring disposal costs.
- 2.13. The Council could also pro-actively encourage its suppliers and promote the scheme to local businesses, through traditional media and social media channels.

Oxford IT Bank

- 2.14. The Oxford IT Bank have recently teamed up with SOFEA in Didcot as part of the Getting Oxfordshire Online initiative (www.gettingoxfordshireonline.org) which supports local schools as well as working with local charities to help them provide better online services and provide laptops to local families and vulnerable people (all donations go through the charities, so the end user gets support from a trusted partner).
- 2.15. The Oxford IT Bank will upgraded donated devices with new parts to run the latest operating systems as well as recycling broken machines to help ensure the new owners have a safe and usable device.
- 2.16. The Oxford IT Bank is currently supporting a range of organisations including Oxford Community Action, Asylum Welcome, Routes and ADAPT who are charities that are helping communities and vulnerable people get online to access education and employment.
- 2.17. The Oxford IT Bank is a small scale organisation, so consideration needs to be given to their resilience if key individuals were to leave. Their association with SOFEA will help the organisation scale up its activities as well as helping with the logistics of collecting devices.

IT Schools Africa

- 2.18. IT Schools Africa send refurbished computer equipment to schools in Africa and are based just outside of Cheltenham
- 2.19. The organisation is registered with the Environment Agency and is fully compliant with WEEE regulations so mitigating any associated risk to the Council.
- 2.20. IT Schools Africa collect donated equipment free of charge and where possible send all working equipment to Africa, however for equipment that is not suitable, is damaged or has missing parts they recycle or resell this in the UK, the proceeds from this are then used by the charity to further develop its work in Africa.
- 2.21. Recently Cheltenham Borough Council made the decision to donate all their 'end of life' laptops to IT Schools Africa, the ICT Teams worked closely with the company and experienced no concerns or problems.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The current arrangements in place provides the Council with a safe, compliant and free disposal service for broken and redundant IT equipment, which is also collected free of charge.
- 3.2. If the Council were to move away from this arrangement and chose option 1 the organisation offers a service providing specialist advice on securely wiping the data from devices and using open source software to provide a platform which we would then use to donate safely on.
- 3.3. The cost of this service starts at £600 per day, however this does not include the cost of the resources required for undertaking the work nor the day to day running of the programme, which is difficult to quantify at this point in time as would depending on potential take up levels but we could be looking at a day per week, which would cost approx. £8,000 pa.
- 3.4. Both charities that have been identified in Option 2 will collect the Council's end of life laptops and undertake the work involved in wiping the devices free of charge so there are no additional costs associated with this option.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. As part of the disposal process the ICT team perform a low level format and zero out the disks of laptops to minimise the risk of data loss to comply with data protection regulations. It is essential whatever option is chosen the Council is provided with assurance that any risks from data loss is fully mitigated against.
- 4.2. Any solution going forward must also be compliant with Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment (WEEE).
- 4.3. The Council Microsoft licenses are not transferable to a 3rd party, but every effort would be to return the laptop to the Microsoft Windows license obtained via the manufacturer when the device was originally purchased.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The main risks associated with the proposed change are:
 - The donated devices will be running unsupported software such as Windows 7 so there is an increased risk of the new users being hit by malware / computer viruses as well as experiencing incompatibility issues with other software / hardware. A recent article highlights this specific risk –

https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/21/malware-reportedly-found-laptops-children-england?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

- The Council could still be at risk from data loss / breaches from not only their own devices but donated equipment if it runs its own recycling programme as whilst the ICT team will wipe the discs, an expert may still be able to recover some data. This risk is currently mitigated by the existing service provider who guarantee that every single hard drive they collect and strip out of devices is fully audited, wiped to NCSC Infosec Level 5 HMG approved standards and documented for our records, totally free of charge.
- The Council could be liable if the device was the cause of a fire, however this would be mitigated by the agreement with the provider and insistence on pat testing of all devices before they are re-deployed.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1. The Committee could choose to either continue with the current arrangements or adopt a hybrid approach which offers both the social benefits associated with recycling / donating relevant devices to be re-used whilst also ensuring it can safely dispose of other IT hardware in a cost effective and compliant way.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1. None.