

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE – 30 SEPTEMBER 2013

REFERENCE FROM GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 23 JANUARY 2013

IT Disaster Recovery – Report of the Director of Customer Services and Business Transformation

The Panel received the report of the Director of Customer Services and Business Transformation, which set out the current arrangements and position regarding IT disaster recovery. She explained that she had not attended the previous meeting because she had not known the item was to be discussed, as it had featured in a much longer report.

She defined disaster recovery (DR) and described the varying levels of preparation that could be put in place to ensure the security of data and systems in the event of major disruption. Level 1 was the most basic and involved the regular copying and storing of data in a separate and secure location; the Council had always practised this level of DR. Level 2 has 3 options, (hot, warm and cold), as detailed in the report.

When Capita took over delivery of IT in 2010, officers had considered the potential for increasing DR capacity as this would now be Capita's responsibility, and represented a significant performance indicator within their contract.

Services had been consulted as to their individual risk and DR requirement, and their responses had informed the current DR capacity, with telephony, Frameworki and the internet identified as the priority areas; all three now had DR in place which has been user tested.

The original intention had been to locate a primary data centre in Capita's West Malling site with a secondary data centre in Laindon, which would place all the risk and responsibility for DR with Capita, but at a cost. However, the continuing financial situation and budget constraints had led to a proposal to retain the primary data centre in Harrow with the secondary data centre in West Malling, which would reduce costs but also return an element of risk (as landlord and 'host' of the centre) to the Council.

A Member observed that the report, as it stood, did not enable him to understand or discharge his role as a Member of GARMC in monitoring risk management in this area. Without more detail on accepted industry standards, benchmarking with other, similar authorities, and an assessment of comparative data, he could not establish if Harrow's current practice was satisfactory, or provide meaningful comment. He proposed that the Committee refer IT Disaster Recovery to Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee for consideration.

Members discussed the levels and types of risk across services, and how to balance optimum levels of DR against costs.

The Director of Customer Services and Business Transformation pointed out that many of the issues raised related to Business Continuity (BC) rather than DR and suggested that a further report on BC rather than DR might be beneficial. It was agreed this was the case.

The Corporate Director of Resources described the cost / benefit spectrum, and the difference in dynamic between the private and public sector. In general, local authorities were not as reliant as the private sector on sophisticated IT systems to deliver income streams from a cash-flow perspective following a disaster, but required data and communications to support vulnerable individuals and groups and to meet statutory obligations.

A Member enquired if CIPFA provided advice on suitable mechanisms to assess acceptable levels of risk and proportionate costs. The Director of Customer Services and Business Transformation explained that 'SOCITM' was the industry organisation; benchmarking information would be available in 6 to 8 months time and she agreed to submit a further update report to the Committee.

RESOLVED: that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a further report on Business Continuity be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (2) the matter of IT Disaster recovery be referred to Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee for consideration.**

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Minutes of the Governance, Audit and Risk Committee of 23 January 2013

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