MANAGEMENT BOARD

ICT Infrastructure introduction paper

Note from the Director of Parliamentary ICT

Purpose

1.   Parliamentary ICT has four primary areas for development over the next three years. These are:

    1. mending the infrastructure to provide a reliable ICT service
    2. improving the Procedural and Publishing applications to make information more useful
    3. continuing the development of corporate application packages to gain leverage from investment to date
    4. and continuous improvement to customer services.

    The accompanying paper (MB2009.P.5) "renewing and improving the ICT infrastructure and Administration desktop" relates to the first area of focus.

2.   Over the past 3 years PICT has formed and organisation, audited the systems supporting the current ICT service and planned for new technology to provide the foundation stone for improved resilience, flexibility and new functions in ICT. This is based on common standards and principles across the infrastructure and based on Microsoft platforms. The work to implement this solution has now begun. Much of the work of the programme is invisible to users, relating as it does to the core tin and software behind the service. However the desktop work is entirely visible to and affects users in the key areas of emails, MS Office products and, in the new development, also includes collaboration products that users have been asking for.

Action for the Board

3.   The accompanying paper proposes an interactive approach for developing the new desktop, engaging a representative user group to help steer the detailed design features that will be possible with the new desktop.

    •   The Board is asked to note the approach for engaging with users in design of the new desktop environment
    •   The paper outlines in paragraphs 13 and 14 three core approaches for implementing the desktop and asks for a Management Board steer on which option is most appropriate.

The Options

4. The first option, a unified style of implementation for each House with a clear requirement to justify exceptions, implies a firm measure of control at the desktop and might colloquially be known as a "locked down desktop". This is the approach taken by many corporate organisations as it has the advantage of predictable working, breaks down less and is quicker and easier to fix if it does break. It however requires a high degree of firm direction from management and restricts the user individuality even when this is required by the job. This indicates that this option will need to allow for exceptions from time to time, even if under controlled conditions.

5. The second option, a more federal style in which the tone is set by departments or large directorates/offices, is more or less what we currently have in Parliament. This is the middle ground option, a concession to too much control, but does imply a degree of firm control by management and carries the risk that solutions to problems take longer.

6. The third option, a loose overall framework which allows for significant variation between teams and individuals, is the most flexible for users. It does have benefits for users in terms of allowing individual experimentation and creativity in the development of collaborative solutions, but it also holds the highest risk of failure of service and costs for support as well as implying risks for the management of data unless the organisation can control the information management policies firmly.

Recommendation

7. I do not recommend option 3. Evidence shows that large corporate collaboration solutions need some controls and structure to avoid chaos and breakdown in the technology. 90% of Sharepoint implementations using a "free" approach have failed. It may be counter intuitive, but the organisations where this approach works are likely to be more highly structured and organisationally cohesive. In an organisation such as Parliament, where individual creativity flourishes, it is unlikely that self-control alone will allow cohesive development to happen. It is more likely that collaboration will fail as a large number of creative solutions fall into disuse.

8. Option 2 is a compromise version of Option 3. This option is much less clear in its definition and scope and in reality scope creep is likely to happen and we end up with Option 3 with its inherent risks of failure.

9. From a strictly ICT professional point of view, I would like to recommend Option 1, however I doubt that this option will meet the highly diverse nature

of the businesses and requirements of Parliamentary staff unless there is also the capacity to allow controlled exceptions to the rule from time to time. The solution therefore that I recommend is Option 1 with the addition of the capacity to introduce a strictly controlled number of variations that should be trialled in the first instance. This is on the basis that it is better to open up options than to start with too many only to then have to reduce the scope of the flexibility provided.

10.   In real terms this means that:

- The desktop will be a standard product set, albeit that variations for loading and use of personal software (as opposed to network based software) will be available for individual users.
- The Sharepoint (collaboration software) scope is set at a single core standard to start with and by exception there will be a low number of variations for specific business requirements which can be tested for impact before further variations are added.

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