



AGENDA ITEM: 10

**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

19 FEBRUARY 2008

Report of: Assistant Chief Executive

Contact for further information: Chris Isherwood (Extn 5083)

SUBJECT: VOICE RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

District wide interest

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide feedback on the interest by Members in the use of computer based voice recognition software.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the contents of the report be noted.

2.2 That the commission agree to recommend to Cabinet that the Council adopt a policy of only offering voice recognition software to users with a disability or medical condition and that the protocol on the use of ICT by Members be updated accordingly.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At the Member Development Commission meeting on 2nd October 2007 the ICT and e-Government Manager explained the purpose and use of computer-based voice recognition software.

3.2 It was agreed that the ICT and e-Government Manager would contact Members to ascertain interest in using voice recognition software.

4.0 ISSUES

- 4.1 Members were contacted to assess interest in the use of voice recognition software. To date we have had interest from 3 Members.
- 4.2 Voice recognition software is not meant as a replacement for keyboard use and its most common application is to aid computer users who have disability or medical issues. In order for the software to be used it needs to recognise speech patterns from the user. This is done by the user reading several passages of text to 'train' the software. The software must be trained and used in a quiet environment with no background noise. Keyboard skills are still required to open and close applications and navigate around software such as the Internet, Intranet and Microsoft Outlook.
- 4.3 Our standard build for the Councillor laptops currently uses Microsoft Office 2000 (which does not include voice recognition software). To use the voice recognition software we need to upgrade Microsoft Office to XP (this will be happening on a rolling basis as we renew laptops). There are no costs associated with this upgrade. However, this does involve staff time and if significant number of Members wanted to take up this option, current work programme priorities would be affected.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Voice recognition software is a facility that could be used to aid computer users who have either disability or medical issues, but is not designed as replacement for keyboard use or improving keyboard skills.
- 5.2 It would not be possible to offer voice recognition software to all Members without affecting current priorities and therefore the Council introduce a policy to offer voice recognition software only for computer users with a disability or medical issues.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 There are no significant sustainability or community strategy implications arising from this report

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 If voice recognition software were to be used a microphone would need to be purchased at a cost of £12.45. There would be resource implications for ICT Services in upgrading the Councillors laptops to Microsoft Office XP and in training Councillors to use the software. There are no associated software costs.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 There are no significant risks arising from this report if the proposed policy is adopted.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups

Appendices

None.