

Norwich City Council

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BRIEFING PAPER for meeting to be held on 12 June 2008

Submissions of E-Petitions to the Council

Background

1. On 13 March 2008, Scrutiny Committee considered whether it would wish to recommend the Executive to pursue the suggestion for the establishment of an e-petition site on the Council's website at the present time. This would involve the purchase of specialist software and the development of a backoffice database.
2. Options for making provision for people to submit e- petitions to the Council by either a stand alone website or as an add on or an integral part of the Council's website were discussed. A website refresh is due under the Norwich Connect Contract for 2009 and, depending on the software package chosen as the preferred option, this functionality may be built in.
3. It was resolved to ask for a report to the June meeting with information about the costings, resource implications and timescales for the alternative options for providing for the submission of e-petitions to the Council.

IT Costings, resource implications and timescales

4. Further investigation has identified that It would be possible to implement the E-petitions software currently used by "No. 10" on the existing Council website.
5. Software and Hard ware costs – E-petitions is opensource software, which means there is no procurement cost. The additional software that Steria understands is required to ensure this E-petitions software works is also available at no additional cost. Steria are also confident that no other hardware will be required to host this, so no costs there either.

6. Build / Implementation of software - Norwich City Council can potentially use Development Days resourced within the Norwich Connect Contract to account for the local Steria resource effort required to build/implement this. However, these will need to be prioritised against existing projects. The Council has a limited number of Development Days per annum. Although Steria do not believe specialist consultancy skills will be required, this may become necessary, but costs can not be estimated at this stage.
7. Support costs - As far as any additional support costs for this service are concerned, until we go some way down the path of more detailed investigation, it is something that is impossible for Steria to quantify.
8. Security aspects - There are obviously several checks required once a decision has been made to definitely go ahead with this, not least the security aspects of how to ensure we protect the NCC network from any accidental or malicious intrusions/attacks etc. However, Steria do believe this is a viable solution.
9. In summary, the only charges Steria can see that may be generated as a result of this work are: some specialist consultancy as part of the design/build and potentially (not necessarily a certainty), ongoing support costs to cover time required to keep this saved, patched and up and running etc.
10. Timescales - until Steria know exactly how Norwich City Council want this to be developed and are able to carry out a more detailed investigation of the software, they can not definitely commit to timescales. However, assuming all the requirements are clear, and all necessary resource is appropriately skilled and available uninterrupted (i.e. in an ideal world), it should be a matter of weeks rather than months.

Further issues for consideration

11. If the facility to allow e-petitions is provided decisions be required as to how the Council will deal with/respond to petitions and resources would be required to project manage the implementation. Staff resources would need to be allocated to monitoring the e-petitions. Also, consideration would need to be given as to whether all e-petitions would be responded to or whether, for example, a minimum no of signatures would be required (and if so, how many).