

Agenda item 5

For decision – a new IT server for Frome Town Council

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Summary

This report provides some background to FTC's current internal computer system and server, a proposal for a new server replacement and information on alternative quotations obtained.

Please let me know if you have any particular questions requiring further research before the meeting at williamss@frometowncouncil.gov.uk.

Frome Town Council's 23 staff use mainly laptops, two PCs and sixteen mobile phones. Our central document storage and email handling software is held on a server sited at the Town Hall, which was purchased in 2012 and is backed up to the cloud daily. As it is now nearly seven years old, the server is not covered by our warranty with our IT support company iTEC, as the hardware was already too old when they took on our monthly IT support contract in 2017 (contract up for renewal in 2020).

Primarily we want to reduce the risk of having our entire work-flow stored on one server as, given that it is seven years old, it may one day 'fail' and whilst a new server is being installed (estimate at least a week's downtime), we would have no access to either our docs or our emails.

The first thing we can do is move our emails to the cloud using Office 365 (currently we are on MS Exchange on the server). This reduces the risk of downtime in the event of a server failure as we would be able to continue to access our emails wherever we have an internet connection.

The second thing we have considered is renewing the server. I obtained a quote from our current IT support company iTEC (Bristol) and attempted to obtain one from two other local companies (Frome). A second quote came from a Frome IT company but would have been more expensive than our existing provider and the third company wanted to do a full specification before quoting for a new server, which we felt was unnecessary.

One side benefit of a new server will be to bring all users onto the same version of Microsoft software. Another side benefit of having all our email boxes in Office 365 is that all new Cllrs will be able to access their FTC email simply in a web browser (via 'webmail') and therefore avoid using personal email addresses for FTC business – the preferred option for GDPR purposes.

iTEC's quoted cost to replace the server is:

- lease purchase over 60 months @ £191 mthly = £11,460
- cash purchase = £9,446

Both the leasing or cash purchase options include a 5-year next-day business warranty on the server and six days of a computer engineer's configuration time. Much of the configuration time would be spent migrating all our email accounts to the cloud.

The other purchasing options we looked at were:

- Lease purchase server and leave emails on the server. This would be more costly than the proposal and less flexible as emails would be left on the server in Exchange. It represents the same risk as currently with *all* docs and emails being on one server.
- Cash purchase server and leave emails on the server. This would be cash purchase amount of £24k required upfront as both server and MS Exchange (new) would need to be purchased at the same time and would still be risky with emails left on the server in Exchange.

When we originally budgeted for 2019-20, we felt that we should spread the cost of purchasing a server and moving the emails to the cloud, hence the leasing option having been budgeted for. However, if we are able to source the cash purchase funds from forecast underspends in 2018-19, we will save £2k over five years and is the more cost effective course of action. As a result, it is proposed to make the decision on the new server once we know for sure what the year end position will be. Even so, it is proposed to move the emails to the cloud regardless.

Recommendations

Cllrs are requested to approve:

1. The purchase of a new IT server- leaving the decision on lease purchase or cash purchase up to the RFO in consultation with the Finance Sponsors.
2. Moving all FTC email address holders onto the Office 365 platform as soon as possible.