ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 20 NOVEMBER 2001

FINANCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2001

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ICT INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS

JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

ABSTRACT

This report outlines proposals to procure file servers for Angus secondary schools to improve network performance.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee approve the contents of this report.

2. BACKGROUND

Reference is made to Report 286/97 which approved the purchase of Phoenix software and associated hardware to improve administration in secondary schools. Reference is also made to Report 482/01 (implementation of National Grid for Learning in Angus Schools) approved by Education and Information Technology Committees at their respective meetings of 24 April 2001 and 1 May 2001. That report set out proposals to augment the number of computers in secondary schools, and outlined progress in developing high speed high capacity telecommunication links as part of the angusnet project.

All Angus secondary schools have extensive networks which allow access to a number of facilities including internet access. With the exception of 2 Arbroath schools (who utilise RM Connect) internet access is currently through the corporate network. The 6 schools not using RM Connect each have two file servers, (one of which supports Phoenix software) which are heavily used to perform a number of tasks including support of school e-mail; intranet; user authentication; internet requirements; file and print sharing etc.

Demands on these servers continue to expand as illustrated by the requirements of New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training for teaching and school librarian staff. Part of the training involves, at specific times large numbers of teaching staff (up to around 80 per secondary school) requiring access to the internet at the same time. Once teachers have completed the training it is expected that there will also be a growth in the number of pupils using the internet.

However at present access to the internet can, at times, be slow due to the number of concurrent users over the Council's wide area network, and the current available network bandwidth. This problem will be assuaged in due course when schools have access to broadband technology. It is expected this will be available in Spring 2002.

However it is important to improve performance in the short term, not least due to the needs of NOF. In the medium to longer term, as the use of internet by teachers and pupils further increases (in particular as teachers begin preparing teaching materials/lessons through the internet), there will be a requirement to cater for continuing growth. Accordingly there is a requirement for upgrading existing servers. The introduction of caching fileservers will allow the most frequently used internet pages (once accessed) to be held within the fileserver at the school thus reducing the need for internet/intranet searches to go outwith the school area network. This will also enable teachers to direct pupils to sites which are cached rather than undertaking a general search of the world wide web.

These fileservers will cater for users within the secondary school as well as associated primary schools who are directly linked to the secondary school for their access to the Council's wide area network.

There is also a growing concern in secondary schools regarding the current Phoenix fileservers which are almost 5 years old and are coming under increasing pressure to cope with the high demand now being placed upon them - in particular implementation of the latest Phoenix modules, with still more to be implemented.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 Caching Fileservers

It was always intended to purchase caching fileservers to improve performance at school level. However it is considered beneficial to have these installed prior to broadband technology becoming available to schools in Spring 2002, it is proposed to purchase an additional 6 caching fileservers (for non RM Connect schools) in the current financial year at an estimated cost of some £70,000.

It was originally envisaged that this investment would be undertaken in financial year 2002/03 and £70k was identified within the Financial Plan for the caching servers within the Information and Communication Technology equipment allowance.

3.2 Phoenix Fileservers

It would be preferable from operational and cost considerations to replace the Phoenix fileservers in all 8 secondary schools at the same time.

The combined action would considerably improve services for schools, eg. file and print sharing, reduce disruption and produce potentially worthwhile economies of scale. The existing Phoenix Fileservers can be transferred to larger primary schools and will therefore provide a continuing benefit.

The Director of Information Technology will arrange this through the IT framework agreement which was approved by Angus Council at its meeting of 28 June 2001 (report no. 775/01) and ensures all computer procurement is in accordance with European directives.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that the total cost of these proposals are £135,000 and given the importance of this facility it is proposed to procure the equipment in the current financial year.

It is proposed to advance £70,000 of the £90,000 provision in the 2002/03 ICT capital budget into 2001/02 to fund the procurement of the caching servers. Discussion with the Director of Finance has confirmed that this additional £70k spend in 2001/02 can be managed within the overall General Fund composite funding for the 2001/02 Capital Programme.

In addition the Education Department carried forward an Education specific revenue underspend of £70,000 (in line with the Council's budget flexibility rules) from 2000/01 to 2001/02 and it is proposed to utilise £65,000 of this available funding to allow the procurement of 8 new Phoenix servers.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no Human Rights implications arising directly from consideration of this report.

6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Law & Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JIM ANDERSON   ANDY GREENHILL
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION   DIRECTOR OF IT

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.