Argyll and Bute Council
Comhairle Earra Ghaidheal agus Bhoid

Customer Services
Executive Director: Douglas Hendry

14 February 2011

SUPPLEMENTARY PACK

I enclose herewith an updated report in regard to Agenda Item 7.

In addition, Agenda Items 11, 12 and 13.

Douglas Hendry
Executive Director - Customer Services

BUSINESS

6.   **VIDEO CONFERENCING - ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL, CUSTOMER AND SUPPORT SERVICES**(Pages 1 - 4)

11.   **RATIONALISATION / PARTNERSHIP LINKAGES TO LOCAL AREA COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP - ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL, GOVERNANCE AND LAW**

12.   **MAKI LOCAL AREA COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP AREA PLAN - ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL, GOVERNANCE AND LAW**

13.   **CONSULTATION DIARY - ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL, IMPROVEMENT AND STRATEGIC HR**

MID ARGYLL, KINTYRE AND THE ISLANDS LOCAL AREA COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP

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Argyll and Bute Community Partnership

Mid-Argyll, Kintyre & The Islands Planning Group

Date : 2nd March 2011

Council Development of Videoconferencing

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an overview of the video conferencing facilities currently supported by the Council in the Argyll and Bute area. The plans to develop these facilities over the next few months are then outlined. Finally, some background is provided on the deployment of a new type of capability.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Group note the contents of the report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 **Description of Current Facilities**

3.1.1 The present provision consists of 16 rooms at 14 town or island locations which contain fixed camera and microphone equipment . Nine of the rooms are in the MAKI area - a list of these and the others is shown in the Appendix. At the moment these rooms communicate with each other via rented high capacity BT lines dedicated to this type of use (ISDN lines) . So if a video conference was to be run between two of these rooms , participants in one room would 'dial into' the other and the resulting 'call' would last for the length of the meeting (i.e. until one of the rooms 'hung up ')

3.1.2 Booking of rooms for video conferences is via the Service Desk run by staff in the Council's ICT function. Where a video conference needs to involve three or more sites then the simple 'one room calls another' model cannot work . Instead, each room calls a central number which is the access route to a bridge. The bridge is not a room with human participants   - it's a piece of equipment which can simultaneously deal with a number of incoming video conference 'calls' in a way which allows the meeting to progress with participation from more than two sites. In our case we use a commercial external bridging service rather than owning and operating our own bridge equipment .

3.2 **Development of Current Facilities**

3.2.1 The camera and microphone equipment in 8 out the 16 rooms is old and technically limited. Subject to confirmation of budget provisions , it's intended to replace equipment these rooms with new units - these will offer a better quality of image and sound .

3.2.2 Deployment of these replacement units will also allow the Council to use its own network to connect the video conferencing rooms as opposed to relying on ISDN lines . This should improve the reliability of communications during video conferences . It will also produce savings in running costs (removal of local ISDN lines will cut line rental and call charge payments to BT).

3.3 **New Capabilities**

3.3.1 The Council is now starting to deploy a new type of capability to its office-based staff. This will allow participation in video conferences via desktop PCs and laptops - the only requirements being that the PC or laptop is connected to the Council network and has an in-built or attached web camera. In this way individuals, each sitting at a different location, will be able to conduct a video conference with screen , camera and microphone facilities all provided by their own PCs or laptop.

3.3.2 This capability will be extended to all the Council's office-based staff and Members by September 2011.

3.3.3 During this type of videoconference participants will be able to view presentations and documents on-screen. They will also, if desired, be able to apply and agree changes to a document during the session without a requirement for subsequent email circulation of a revised version.

3.3.4 At the moment most Council Members and some staff can access the Council network from their homes to use a variety of systems . In principle the same people would be able to participate in this type of video conference from home . The only qualification to this relates to the requirement for reasonable broadband links to the households in question - this is dependent on the availability of commercial broadband packages from telecommunications suppliers at particular locations in the Argyll and Bute area.

3.4 **Using Video Conferencing - The Council Experience**

3.4.1 The Council has used conventional 'fixed room' video conferencing for several years . Some of the island sites listed in the Appendix are not conventional 'Council offices' but are run in partnership with other local organisations - the Council's contribution to this partnership working

has included the provision of the video conferencing technology and expertise.

3.4.2 Experience has shown that a range of types of meeting in the Argyll and Bute area involving both Members and officers can be conducted using video conferencing - with obvious benefits in saved travel time , travel costs and less re-scheduling of meetings due to travel disruption. Similar benefits can be obtained when the technology is used to participate in meetings with other organisations based elsewhere in the country .

3.4.3 A range of meetings involving Members have been conducted via video conference (Community Planning Groups , Policy & Performance Groups, Thematic Groups and pre-agendas for various committees). A key feature of these meetings is that they operate by consensus and therefore motions or amendments are not moved, challenges to standing orders are not made and votes are not taken. On the other hand, full Council and committee meetings must constitutionally include these features . These factors represent an as yet untested challenge to the use of video conferencing for these types of meeting.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1.1 The general approach outlined above sees the current number of room-based video conferencing units being retained . This is subject to the continuation of viable partnership arrangements at some sites. Old equipment at some locations will be replaced to keep pace with current technical standards and offer improved image and sound quality. Replacement of ISDN lines with connections to the Council network will reduce external telecommunications costs.

4.1.2 The greatest area of potential development lies with the deployment of PC/laptop based voice & image communications. Significantly, this makes use of technology facilities already provided to users - PCs and laptops, the Microsoft Office/ Outlook software running on them and connection to a network.

5.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – List of Council VC Locations and Venues in Argyll and Bute

For further information contact:

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Council-supported Video Conference Locations and Venues

Location	*Venue*	*MAKI ?*
Campbeltown	Burnet Building	yes
Colonsay Service Point	Meeting Room	yes
Dunoon	Hill Street	
Helensburgh	GWITC – Training Room	
Isle of Coll	Development Coll Office, Arinagour	
Isle of Gigha	Development Trust Office	yes
Islay Servicepoint	Conference Room	yes
Islay Servicepoint	Meeting Room	yes
Jura Servicepoint	Meeting Room	yes
Lochgilphead	Kilmory – Housing Meeting Room	yes
Lochgilphead	Dalriada – Conference Room	yes
Mull	Breadalbane Street, Tobermory	
Oban	Corran Halls	
Rothesay	Union Street – Meeting Room	
Tarbert	Argyll House	yes
Tiree	Business Centre	