

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Audit Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	24 September 2014
<b>Subject:</b>	Public Services Network Compliance
<b>Report of:</b>	Tina Nicholls, Business Transformation Group Manager
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Mike Dawson, Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor M G Sztymiak
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	None

## **Executive Summary:**

Tewkesbury Borough Council currently uses Public Services Network (PSN) to exchange data electronically with other PSN-connected agencies. PSN connects together local authorities, government departments, the NHS, agencies such as the DVLA and Police authorities

To remain accredited to PSN the council must complete an annual assessment process. Failure to meet the required standards may result in the council's connection to PSN being withdrawn.

The council is authorised to connect to PSN until 2 October 2014, at which point it must prove compliance with the latest PSN requirements. Work is underway to seek approval to stay connected for another 12 months.

PSN compliance forms a key element of the council's ICT governance framework, hence the report to this committee.

## **Recommendation:**

**Members are asked to CONSIDER the information provided and AGREE that a further report be brought back to this Committee subsequently, to provide an update on the re-assessment process and results.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

To provide assurance that action is being taken on a risk-related issue involving external assessment of the Council's compliance with mandatory requirements.

## **Resource Implications:**

It may be necessary to invest in technical and policy enhancements to address cases of non-compliance with PSN requirements. Where necessary, these will be assessed and justified through a business case.

## **Legal Implications:**

There are no direct legal implications of non-compliance with PSN requirements.

## **Risk Management Implications:**

PSN provides a secure channel for sending and receiving data electronically, especially Government data which is classified as 'Official'<sup>1</sup>. Non-availability of the PSN due to failure to

comply with requirements could increase the likelihood of data protection breaches when exchanging data, with associated reputational, financial and service delivery impacts.

The risks associated with failure to achieve compliance with the PSN Code of Connection are being managed through a process managed by Cabinet Office and Communications and Electronic Security Group.

**Performance Management Follow-up:**

Reporting on the annual re-assessment process and result of this will be made to this Committee.

**Environmental Implications:**

None

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Local authorities, government departments, the NHS, agencies such as the DVLA and Police authorities have their own computer networks. More than 2,000 networks exist, used by 5.5 million public sector workers over hundreds of locations. PSN connects these together using a common set of standards. PSN is used mostly for information sharing, however, plans exist to increase the number of secured, shared applications across this network, to increase efficiency and reduce costs. The PSN is managed by the Cabinet Office with an annual Code of Connection compliance process involving the CESG (Communications and Electronic Security Group) based in Cheltenham.
- 1.2** Tewkesbury Borough Council currently uses PSN to send and receive data electronically with other PSN-connected agencies. Currently, the main users of PSN are Revenues and Benefits (electronic transfer of data) and Customer Services ('Tell Us Once' notifications). There is other ad hoc use for secure communications with Police, the NHS and Social Services.
- 1.3** PSN will enable the way agencies work together to be transformed, as it looks and feels like a single network. Security will become less of a problem for each organisation, as they have demonstrated through the compliance process that they are all working to the same standards.

## **2.0 THE PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION**

- 2.1** To remain accredited to PSN the Council must complete an annual assessment process, which includes an annual IT Health Check (of the ICT infrastructure). The PSN Authority validates all the information submitted by the Council. The Code of Connection is also checked from an Information Assurance perspective. Where the assessment team identifies issues, the application will need to be re-submitted with these issues addressed. There may be multiple re-submissions within a three-month period following the due date for re-certification. Failure to meet the required standards may result in the council's connection to PSN being withdrawn.
- 2.2** Internal Audit reviewed elements of the Council's submission in 2013/14, and made a number of recommendations, particularly around corporate information governance.

## **3.0 INFORMATION ASSURANCE**

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of information that is created or processed by the public sector.

- 3.1** The compliance requirements are wider than ICT. Every organisation connecting to PSN must demonstrate a corporate approach to information risk management and information governance. The Council must prove that it is taking the right steps to monitor, control and mitigate the risks around handling personal information, both internally and when the data is shared with others.
- 3.2** This means that the Council has to consider where data from the PSN is received, stored and managed and the systems and processes brought into the PSN compliance footprint. This could be manual systems, and physical solutions, as well as the more obvious ICT systems.
- 3.3** A notable requirement is that Councils must complete security checks for all staff who have access to PSN-level data. It is possible that this requirement may be extended to all Council IT users by 2015. This will have funding implications as each 'BPSS' check (Baseline Personnel Security Standard) costs a minimum of £25.

#### **4.0 COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- 4.1** There are a number of areas where Councils have had issues in meeting compliance requirements:
- restrictions regarding access to Council systems by employees using personal/home or other-non-council devices;
  - the extensive work needed to patch and upgrade IT systems;
  - issues that arise from completely separating some systems e.g. email into PSN and non-PSN variants (some staff must have two separate mailboxes);
  - legacy software and hardware where items can no longer be patched to a complaint level, for example Windows XP. This operating is still in use on computers that want to access Council systems;
  - an appropriate focus on information security;
  - funding the requirements for PSN, which has been estimated by some IT managers at between 10% and 25% of the annual IT budget.
- 4.2** The Council is authorised to connect to PSN until 2 October 2014, at which point it must prove compliance with the latest PSN requirements. A report will be brought back to this Committee subsequently, to provide an update on the re-assessment process and results.
- 4.3** Early indications following an external 'health check' just prior to the publication of this report suggests some areas for improvement which are now being addressed:
- setting, use and management of passwords;
  - internal security / trusted users; and
  - weak change management / patching policy.

More information will be provided to Members at the meeting.

#### **5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1** None. Being disconnected from PSN could mean that the Council is unable to fully carry out its public duties. For example, it would be unable to electronically exchange benefits data with the Department for Work and Pensions which is a mandatory requirements in

respect of housing benefits data.

## **6.0 CONSULTATION**

6.1 None.

## **7.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

7.1 Revenues & Benefits service delivery priorities

## **8.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

8.1 Cabinet Office and CESG - Public Services Network compliance and usage requirements

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

9.1 Significant ICT and HR resource required to maintain the PSN connection

## **10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)**

10.1 None

## **11.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)**

11.1 The PSN is key enabling technology for electronic Government. There is a cost to the Council of maintaining the PSN connection (met by ICT service budgets).

## **12.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

12.1 None

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**Background Papers:** None

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**Appendices:** None