Meeting:	**AUDIT COMMITTEE**
Date:	**17 March 2009**

DATA SECURITY UPDATE

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1   PURPOSE

1.1   To inform the Committee of work completed and planned to tighten information security controls.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   That the Committee notes that the work required to deliver the security standards set out by the Department of Work and Pensions for joining the Government's Secure Information Network (GCSx) will be sufficient to protect the Council against unauthorised access to or accidental loss of personal records.

2.2   That the Committee notes that the Department of Work and Pensions are satisfied that the Council's plans comply with their requirements and are on schedule to achieve compliance by 31st March 2009.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   A report on the "Secure Exchange of Electronic Data" was submitted to the Audit Committee in January 2008. The report set out a generally positive view of electronic security in the Council and identified areas where more work was planned, including a decision on whether to participate in the Government's Secure Information Network (GCSx). GCSx is in effect an e-mail system used by the Government, the police and other public sector organisations for the secure exchange of confidential information.

3.2   Since the previous report, use of GCSx has been made compulsory by the Government and responsibility for the project has been passed to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP have set out a stringent and lengthy list of requirements which local authorities must adopt before joining the GCSx network. This requirement has become a de facto standard for the Council.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The standards set out by the DWP in their Code of Connection document are broad and detailed. They require the Council to adopt new security policies, update a range of procedural documents and to implement changes to the way that the Council's ICT network is managed. They also require (the initially small number of) GCSx users to be trained.

4.2 The most significant changes to the infrastructure and network that are being implemented are:

- introduction of dual factor authentication for remote users. This will require a randomly generated number to be entered alongside a user's network password. Dual factor authentication will apply for all GCSx users, all Revenue Services staff who work remotely and all ICT staff with administrator access to the network, infrastructure and revenues system.
- introduction of a capability to maintain a log of users accessing the network remotely
- a requirement to carry out regular penetration tests on the network
- a requirement for an annual health check for the network
- updates to the Council's firewall

In addition to the above, there may be a number of restrictions imposed upon the use of devices that pose a security threat, such as memory sticks. In the future all memory sticks will be provided by the Council and data will be encrypted to guard against accidental loss.

The Council's response to the most common type of security threat is set out in the table at Appendix A.

4.3 The other significant change is that DWP policies mean that staff with access to GCSx and the Revenues system will no longer be able to use their own equipment when accessing the Council's system from home. By using Council equipment we can ensure that the equipment is properly protected against viruses which present some risk of infecting Council systems if the viruses are new and not known to the Council's anti-virus software. The Council is also able to lock down the use of the equipment to prevent sites being accessed that have a heightened risk of containing viruses. At present this policy only applies to a small number of staff.

4.4 The DWP have indicated in writing that they are satisfied with the Council's progress and plans and expect the Council to meet the 31st March 2009 deadline to connect with the GCSx network.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications. The costs of GCSx are being met from existing capital budgets.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: - Current & Future levels of Security against Common Security Threats