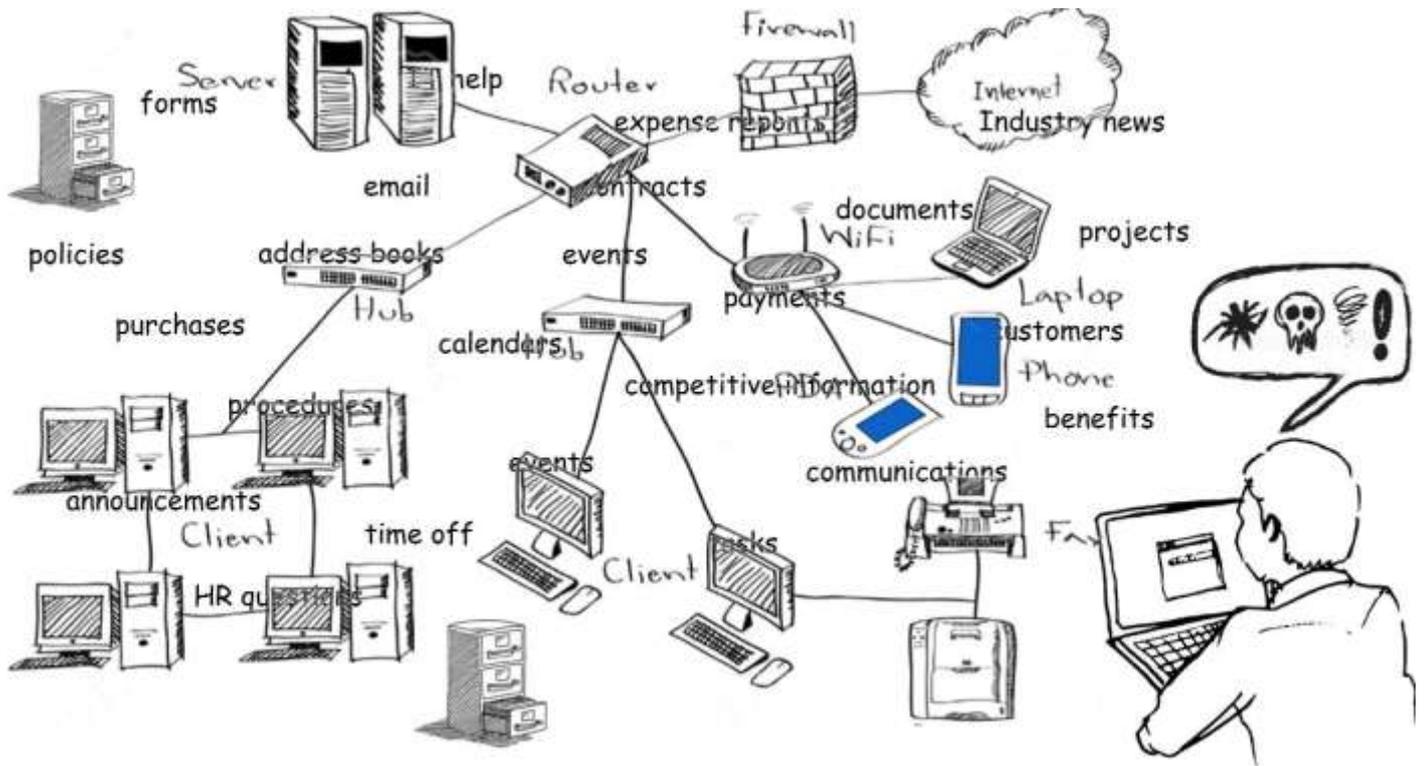**Spaghetti IT set to strangle Scottish local government !!!**

I am someone who has worked in IT for more than 30 years and specialised in supporting government transformation for those last three decades. However, I still was not prepared for what I found on the other side of the fence until I got elected to local government in May 2007!

For decades, Scottish local government has bought IT solutions on a siloed basis and this has now left most authorities in Scotland with a headache of their own making; a spaghetti of systems, software and LAN/WAN services that will strangle them well into the next decade if something is not done now! When most government IT departments want a document management system, they procure an EDRMS. When they want an email system, they procure an email platform and when they run out of disk space, far too many authorities in Scotland are still procuring more hard disks.

Some local government CIOs' when challenged will tell you their prime role is to keep the lights on and therefore they do not have the money, time or expert resources to plan a future for technology in their organisation. When it comes to the cloud, I also see too many government IT professionals running for the hills, petrified that the '*demon-cloud*' is coming to take their jobs away! To this day, I still cannot understand why far too many government IT people still hide behind the catch-all adjective: "*Security*" as the excuse to describe why they fail to modernise. We all know how important it is to keep personal and corporate data safe, however very few standalone on-premise organisations can afford to invest in the continuous updating of security provision that the major cloud service providers make.

I also accept that few councillors in Scotland come from a background in business, where technology has been used (and is still being used) to modernise, drive efficiency and provide better services and places of work. I believe in a world where the majority of us order goods on line and book flights online, and where approximately 85% of the public (my constituents) want to engage with their council digitally. This leaves our local authorities more time (and money) to support the vulnerable in within our communities. The challenge right now is a lack of vision from the elected members which has allowed IT departments to operate the way they have always done. Simply put, more councils must transform soon or the spaghetti of IT systems will strangle them. During times of austerity, this simply means: more services will get cut and more of the public will simply become more disillusioned with their government and politicians.

If local government is to stop cutting services in a bid to save money, then politicians and council officials have got to start looking to the world of business for inspiration. Money can be saved while at the same time delivering the level of personalised services the public expect. CIOs' across Scottish local government have got to start coming together and considering how they can work as a collective to drive down cost and improve efficiency through the intelligent use of technology. There are some fantastic examples of work going on right now in parts of Scotland but not enough is being done in the rest of the country to build technology platforms for the future, using the cloud as an enabler rather than an excuse for why local government fails to modernise! Progress is being made on collaboration through the Scottish Councils' Chief Digital and Technology Officers appointed in late 2016. However, by early 2018 less than one-third of Scottish local authorities have adopted the cloud for even email or storage, while even fewer are looking at BYOD (Bring You Own Device) or UYOD (Use Your Own Device) as an enabler to better council services. The Cloud has enabled businesses to modernise so why not government? For years now businesses have been sourcing modern technology platforms to bring together their employees and customers so why can Scottish local government not do the same to bring together council officers, council services, their citizens and communities. Government CIOs' and their IT staff therefore need to stop thinking in silos! They have got to build strategies that put in place technology platforms that supports better social work, improves education and builds better corporate services. Politicians have also got to play their part and support their councils do this by looking beyond government and that doesn't just mean the private sector but public bodies elsewhere in the UK and in other parts of the world.

Business Transformation doesn't have to hard or expensive! If done correctly, with the right technology as an enabler: councils across Scotland can transform for the 21st century; deliver the service the public want and support those in our communities who need a little extra help. As an elected member with nearly elven years' experience in local government, I fear that not enough focus is being spent on the art of the possible and MONEY & SECURITY remain the two main excuses of why not to modernise local government. Council IT departments should relish the opportunity to deliver better services through technology and use this as a catalyst to show politicians and the public alike why IT is an enabler to Business Transformation.

_____

Councillor Graeme Campbell
 South Lanarkshire Council – Ward 5: Avondale & Stonehouse.