

**e-GOVERNMENT TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00 pm on 15 OCTOBER 2003**

Present:- Councillors V J T Lelliott, R M Lemon and A R Thawley.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs L Bunting, J K Mercer and Mrs N Wittman.

Also present:- Dr S Willoughby.

EG6 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Apologies were received from the Director of Resources.

The Chairman declared an interest in agenda item 5, Saffire Grant Funding, in that he knew Dr Willoughby personally. He would leave the meeting for the item and take no part in the ensuing discussion or decision.

EG7 MINUTES

The notes of the meeting held on 18 August 2003 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EG8 BUSINESS ARISING

Minute EG4 – Replacement Members' IT Services

The Chairman referred to the use of hyperlinks for Committee papers instead of email attachments which took time to download. The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services said that, presently a new version of CIMIS was awaited and had to be installed before this option could take place.

EG9 PRESENTATION FROM DR S WILLOUGHBY – AUTHOR OF THE SAFFIRE WEBSITE

Dr Willoughby gave a short verbal report on the current Saffire website. The website as it stood had proved to be a great success and had received a good response from the local community with a great deal of positive feedback. However, it had now been concluded that the site required updating. He went on to describe his ideas for the new website and gave a short visual presentation. At the conclusion of the presentation, Dr Willoughby put forward his request for continued support from the Council.

The Chairman thanked Dr Willoughby for his presentation after which Dr Willoughby left the meeting. The Chairman also left the meeting before any discussion took place on grant funding.

EG10 SAFFIRE GRANT FUNDING

The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services reported that, over the past two years the Council had invested heavily in its own website. Further substantial

development work was taking place during 2003/04. Despite the advances made, the website still scored poorly in surveys, mainly due to the difficulty in locating basic information about the Uttlesford district. This problem was partly due to shortcomings in the design of the Council site, which was being addressed. However, it was also because a lot of this information was held on the Saffire website. Consequently, all Council-related information was being transferred from Saffire to the Council's website. This included:

- (a) What's On in Uttlesford (this is an electronic version of guide published by the Tourism Service).
- (b) Walks around Saffron Walden (data provided by Committee Services).
- (c) Accommodation (electronic version of guide published by the Tourism Service).
- (d) Parish data (collected by the Tourism service).
- (e) Uttlesford Agenda 21 (provided by Planning Services).
- (f) Air Pollution reports (provided by Environmental Services).

When this work was complete, the existing Saffire website would be, to some extent, depleted of content. This raised questions about the value of continued Council funding. Consequently, a review had been carried out to determine the future funding options available to Members.

Three options on the way forward were put to Members and discussed.

Option 1 - Cease to provide support to Saffire

With much of the existing content of Saffire being transferred to the Council website, it was questionable whether continued Council funding was required. There would be savings of £10,000 per annum should grant aid cease. Conversely, if funding was withdrawn from Saffire, the site would probably cease operating. It had been identified that the following areas would be lost, as they are unlikely to be replicated, at least immediately, on the council website:

- (a) The Business Directory.
- (b) Clubs and Societies database. However, the IT Section has recently produced an online version of Council for Voluntary Services, Uttlesford's Elderly Persons' Directory. The directory gave details of clubs, societies and organisations providing services to elderly people in the Uttlesford area. It could be possible to extend this to include a wider range of clubs and societies.
- (c) Latest news - to some extent, this duplicated information on some of the local newspapers' websites.
- (d) Discussion forums - It was likely that the Council would develop some form of discussion forum in the future.

Consequently, the amount of community information that would be lost was relatively small.

Option 2 - Update Saffire website, with continued Council funding

Discussions had been held with Dr Willoughby regarding the possible future direction of Saffire. He proposed a complete overhaul of the site's design, the introduction of content management technology, and the following new content:

- (a) Car share scheme – the use of interactive databases to match those offering journeys to those seeking them.
- (b) Improved business directory – the introduction of search facilities and electronic access to businesses in the directory.
- (c) Supporting home workers (teleworkers) – provide online facilities to enable local home workers to get in contact with each other and form teleworking groups (to overcome the isolation often felt by lone workers).
- (d) LETS (Local Exchange Trading Schemes) and Time Bank schemes – LETS use a system of community credits, so that direct exchanges do not have to be made. LETS credits were earned by providing a service, which could then be spent on whatever was offered by others on the scheme: for example childcare, transport, food, home repairs or the hire of tools and equipment. Time Banks were similar to LETS: Such schemes can be managed through a website, such as Saffire.
- (e) Citizen's Initiatives – Extending the use of Saffire to promote community initiatives through the use of message boards, polls, surveys, closed user groups and file sharing.

In order to affect the proposed changes, Dr Willoughby would require additional one-off development funding from the Council, calculated to be £8,000. In return, and in recognition of the lower workload resulting from the introduction of content management, he would reduce the annual charge to £6,500 per annum.

Option 3 - Develop a community related area within the Council's website and cease funding Saffire.

This option would be to create a stronger community 'channel' within the Council's upgraded website, due to be launched within the next two months. The channel could be used to bring together community-related initiatives taking place across the Council. For example, it could pull together work being done in areas such as the Uttlesford Youth Forum, the Saffron Walden initiative, the Dunmow Town Strategy Group, as well as any initiatives arising from the recent appointment of a Community Development Officer.

It was estimated that development costs would be in the region of £10,000 to £15,000, dependent upon the scale of work required. The only significant drawback with this approach would be the loss of the independent community 'voice' that Saffire enjoys. Input from the local community would therefore need to be encouraged, possibly through the development of a 'community forum', drawn from interested volunteers and local community groups. Maintaining a community channel would also be an additional workload that could not be absorbed by existing staff. It is estimated that about 15 hours a week would need to be spent on this work. A part-time member of staff would need to be recruited to carry out the work, at an estimated cost of £9,200 per annum.

Conclusions

Saffire had proved to be a popular community website for a number of years and if it was to continue then it required development of new content and an overhaul of the site's design and the introduction of new technology.

The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services asked Members for their views. All three options were discussed and both Councillors Lemon and Thawley considered that option 2 would serve the Council best on the proviso that the scheme be revisited in two years for evaluation. An agreement would need to be produced and the Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services would also have to work closely with Dr Willoughby on the new Saffire site.

It was then

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 option 2 be put before the Resources Committee for the budget setting process, and
- 2 that this option be revisited in two years' time for evaluation.

EG11 **PROGRESS REPORT 2003/04 – IT PROGRAMME**

The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services circulated a progress report on the various projects within the 2003/04 IT programme. It was reported that several projects were currently in progress, including a number of specifically related e-Government schemes. For example, the e-payments scheme which would allow payments, such as council tax, NNDR, car parking fines and housing rents, to be made online. This facility would go live by the end of October 2003.

A target had been set of 60% of Council services to be made available electronically by 31 March 2003. Considerable progress towards the target had already been made in the first six months of the financial year, although further substantial development would be required during the remaining six months.

EG12 **DRAFT E-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY 2003 TO 2007**

The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services had circulated copies of the draft Strategy to Members' for their comments. A revised draft strategy would be produced once work on both the Corporate Plan and the Initial Point of Contact review had been completed.

EG13 **GUIDELINES FOR UK GOVERNMENT WEBSITES: FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Chairman commented on this document and its impact on website development. The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services said that it was an extensive document which must be read in detail and all its implications investigated. The guidelines would however shape the development of the Council's new website, due to go live within the next two months.

EG14 THE LOCAL CHANNEL

The Chairman explained that the concept of The Local Channel website was to help parishes councils to construct their own community websites. It was not considered to be the Council's responsibility other than to possibly offer advice and encouragement if required.

EG15 BROADBAND AGGREGATION PROJECT

Councillor Thawley referred to this item. He said that the Government had appointed a director to set up task groups to cover nine different regions over the country. The aim was that public bodies should form the infrastructure for citizens to obtain Broadband. The Head of IT and Anti-fraud Services said that the current estimate was 50% of the District would be covered by Broadband by the end of the year.

EG16 SMARTGOV REPORT – EXPANDING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT FOR IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

The Chairman referred to this report, which had been published by iSociety. The report examined new ways to use electronic methods to reform public services. The report also suggested ways that citizens could be encouraged to use e-enabled services.

EG17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was decided that, as the IEG statement was due to be submitted by 10 November 2003, a meeting would be held during the first week in November to discuss the final draft. A definite date would be confirmed in due course.

The meeting ended at 5.35 pm.