

E-GOVERNMENT TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00 pm on 15 JANUARY 2004

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

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

EG23 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence had been received from the Director of Resources.

The Chairman declared an interest in agenda item 5, Government Funding Applications, because of his directorship with the local Citizens Advice Bureaux.

EG24 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2003 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EG25 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute EG19 – Business Arising - (i) Members' IT Services

Arising on a question from the Chairman, the Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services reported that the new version of CMIS was now up and running. Some further development to the search facility was required.

(ii) Minute EG19 – Business Arising – (iii) Broadband Aggregation Project

The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services reported that broadband availability in the District was growing rapidly. He was therefore waiting to find out which areas of the District were left without access once the current programme was completed. These would be the areas where the Council should be concentrating its attention.

(iii) Minute EG20 – IEG 3 Statement

The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services reported that the IEG 3 Statement had now been submitted and he had received notification that it had been accepted. The Chairman congratulated the Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services on the success of the submission.

EG26 PROGRESS REPORT – 2003/04 IT PROGRAMME

The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services presented a report detailing several IT projects, which were currently in progress, including a number specifically relating to e-Government.

The main focus of work since the last progress report had been directed towards the development of the new website. The new website was currently available to Members and staff for comment and feedback. The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services reported that most of the additional development had now been completed.

Developments were still on target to have 60% of Council services available electronically by 31 March 2004. To achieve this target however, further substantial development would be required in the remaining three months of the year.

The Council continued to actively participate in the Essex Online Partnership (EOLP), and was leading a study into the registration and authentication of online transactions. However, there have been relatively few tangible outcomes from the various EOLP projects taking place during the current financial year. As a consequence there was an underspend of £16,000 of the £30,000 budget. It was proposed to allocate the remainder of the budget to the following projects:

(a) Change of Address service

The Council was proposing to work with Colchester Borough Council and Braintree District Council to register with the online Change of Address service. The service had been developed by Moving Technologies Ltd (MTL), who were 25% owned by Royal Mail. The need to deal efficiently with changes of address was regarded by the Government as a key online service development area. The MTL service would enable home movers to advise organisations of their change of address via a one-stop service interface. Home movers would access the service from the Council's website, the iammoving.com website or the website of any of the other participating organisations. These included utility companies, banks, TV licensing, Royal Mail, DVLA, the UK Passport Agency and around 40 local authorities. The partnership had negotiated a set-up fee of £5,170 per council, which was a discount of 73% on the normal cost. It was proposed to pilot the service for twelve months and re-assess its value at the end of this period. In subsequent years the cost would be £1,400, plus a charge per transaction.

(b) Development of online Revenue services

Web developers would be engaged to develop the following online utility:

- Business Rates – The ability for any member of the public to view the rateable value of any commercial property in the district, together with the current annual charge.
- Business Rates – The ability for any business rate taxpayer to view their account details.
- Council Tax – The ability for any member of the public to view the Council Tax band of any domestic property in the district, together with the gross amount payable.
- Council Tax – The ability for any Council Tax payer to view their account details.

The development would include an element of user authentication to ensure that access to personal information was restricted to the relevant taxpayer. The development would cost £12,000 and in order to be able to meet the cost in the current financial year it was proposed to vire £10,000 to the E-Services Development (General) capital budget.

RESOLVED that the Council register with the Change of Address service developed by Moving Technologies Ltd for a twelve month period, for a sum of £5,170.

It was agreed that the following recommendation be put to the Resources Committee at its next meeting.

RECOMMENDED that the sum of £10,000 be vired from the Essex Online capital budget to the E-Services Development (General) capital budget, in accordance with Financial Regulation FF3.

EG27

GOVERNMENT FUNDING APPLICATIONS

The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services presented a report which sought Members' confirmation of a bid that had been submitted to the Government's E-innovations Fund and also required approval to submit three IT-related bids to the Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund.

(a) E-Innovations Fund

The E-Innovations Fund was part of a new programme of 'Support for e-Innovations', part of the wider local e-Government Programme. The Government had allocated £14 million to the Fund for the next three financial years. The purpose of the Fund was to 'challenge and develop thinking about local e-government by seeking new and innovative approaches to joined up working, effective service delivery and community engagement'.

A bid had been submitted to provide advisers at local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) with access to the Council's back-office systems. These systems contained much of the council-related information needed by CAB advisers to provide an effective service to ensure that its clients were not excluded from the benefits of e-government. The bid had the backing of both the local and national CAB offices and also had support from Harlow, Epping Forest and Braintree District Councils and Colchester Borough Council. The bid was for £78,000 and if successful, would fund the purchase of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, at a cost of £40,000, which was presently included within the budget for the proposed First Point of Contact project. The deadlines for the submission of bids were very tight and therefore it had not been possible to seek Member approval before the bid was submitted.

(b) Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund

The Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund had been set up in 2003 by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) to help local authorities tackle the barriers to improved performance in the assessment and payment

of housing benefit. Total funding of £200m had been set-aside over a three year period and the DWP were inviting bids from Councils, based around a number of key themes and priorities. The Revenues and Benefits Best Value Review, carried out during 2003, had identified a number of potential improvements in ICT provision which were included in the approved Service Improvement Plan. Most of these areas were suitable for funding under the DWP initiative and therefore the following IT-related bids had been prepared:

- (i) Installation of workflow and upgrades to document imaging – to enable workflow-based benefit processes to be developed in a range of key housing benefit-related areas:-
 - a. 10% quality checks
 - b. Processing of new claims
 - c. Processing of renewal claims
 - d. Cancelling claims
 - e. Actioning a change of circumstances

Workflow software would enable certain routine tasks to be automated, deadlines more closely monitored and any problems escalated.

- (ii) Home Working – funding to enable up to ten benefits staff to work from home, either on a rota basis or for part of a week, depending upon the requirements of the post. The purpose of home working was to aid staff retention and recruitment and improve productivity and output.
- (iii) Purchase and installation of a replacement Unix server – the existing server was unable to cope adequately with the requirements of iWorld, the latest version of the SX3 Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Business Rates system.

As a top quartile performing Council, Uttlesford's call on the fund was probably weaker than many more poorer performing Councils. Consequently to strengthen the case, the Council had prepared the bids in partnership with Bromsgrove District Council in Worcestershire. Bromsgrove's performance in processing benefit claims falls within the bottom quartile. The bid therefore contained an element of 'peer support' for Bromsgrove. Such support was one of the key criteria by which the DWP would assess eligibility for funding. Bromsgrove also used the same Anite Public Sector Ltd document imaging system as the Council and therefore Anite had been able to assist in preparing the bids.

After discussion it was

RESOLVED that Members confirm the actions of officers in submitting a bid to the E-Innovations Fund and approve the proposed bids to the Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund.

2004/05 IT Programme. The basis on which projects had been prioritised was explained.

The proposed Development Programme for 2004/05 totalled £460,000. In addition a list of possible reserve projects totalled a further £56,000. The projects had been divided into three priority groups:-

- (i) e-Government developments – Specific projects that help achieve the Government target of having all local services available electronically by 2005.
- (ii) Corporate Plan Priority developments – Projects which would contribute to the targets within the Corporate Plan, approved by the Council on 16 December 2003.
- (iii) Core IT technical developments – Projects required to update the IT infrastructure, in order to cope with the growing and increasingly complex use of IT within the Council. Funding was also required to meet new legislative requirements regarding the public's right of access to information.

Each project had been prioritised in order to determine whether it was suitable for funding in 2004/05. Projects had been ranked between 1 (high priority) and 5 (low priority). A higher priority had been given to projects that directly contribute to either e-government or corporate plan targets, or were otherwise felt to be important, for example, for legislative reasons.

For the third year running, the Council had been required to submit an Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statement to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). In each of the previous two years the Council had received an additional £200,000 funding for e-Government development. The most recent IEG statement, submitted in November 2003, had been approved by the ODPM and as consequence the Council would once again receive additional funding. However, an announcement was still to be made advising of the amount to be received. Indications were that it would again be £200,000 and this figure had been used for the purpose of preparing the draft programme. If the actual figure differed significantly, a revised programme would need to be prepared. Further funding was being sought from both the E-Innovations Fund and the Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund.

In preparing the draft programme, it had been assumed that only projects with a priority rating between 1 and 3 should be progressed. On this assumption a programme of £460,000 would need to be funded, as follows:

	£
IEG Funding	200,000
Uttlesford Funding – General Fund	230,000
Uttlesford Funding – HRA	<u>30,000</u>
	£460,000

The majority of the items in the suggested programme had minimal or no net revenue budget implications. Nevertheless, there would be additional revenue costs of £25,840 per annum, to be financed as follows:

Growth items included in the draft General Fund revenue estimates	£17,000
Growth item to be included in the HRA revenue estimates	£ 8,840
	<u>£25,840</u>

After discussion, it was

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the proposed IT Programme be included in the overall General Fund Capital Programme for 2004/05,
- 2 a sum of £230,000 for IT developments be included in the overall General Fund Capital Programme for 2004/05, and
- 3 a sum of £30,000 for IT developments be included in the Housing Capital Programme for 2004/05.

EG29 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Changes to Members System

Councillor Thawley commented that some Members were not happy with the speed of the system. The Head of IT and Anti Fraud Services understood Members' frustration and felt that the system required Broadband to speed up connections.

EG30 **NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on a date to be agreed in early February 2004, commencing at 4.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm.