E-Innovations Bid from Uttlesford District Council

SUPPORT FOR E-INNOVATIONS – APPLICATION FORM

(Submit <u>by e-mail only</u> to: <u>localegov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk</u>)

E-INNOVATION THEME:
Local Authority E-Business

CONTACT DETAILS:	
Lead local authority	**Uttlesford District Council**
Name of Project Sponsor	**John Dickson**
Post held in authority	**Director of Resources and Officer e-Government Champion**
Sponsor's address	**Council Offices** **London Road** **Saffron Walden** **Essex** **CB11 4ER**
Sponsors phone number	**01799 510300**
Sponsor's e-mail address	**jdickson@Uttlesford.gov.uk**
Date Application submitted to ODPM	**18/12/03**

Summary of proposal (200 words max)
(Please provide a summary in plain English that explains the purpose of your proposed project and what innovation it offers) Uttlesford District Council (UDC) is proposing to provide advisers at local Citizens Advice Bureaux with access to its back office systems. These systems contain much of the council information needed by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) advisers to provide an effective service and ensure that its clients, some of the most vulnerable in society, are not excluded from the benefits of e-government. As part of the project, UDC will develop a first point of contact (FPC) system, incorporating query handling, to bring together client information from all its back office systems. Consequently, a CAB adviser will only need to use one application when dealing with clients' council-related enquiries. UDC will supply all 16 workstations, situated in the three Bureaux, with a scanner linked to its document image processing (DIP) system. This will enable CAB advisers to scan completed forms and supporting documentation, straight into the Council's DIP system. The project will also develop methods of authenticating CAB advisors and their authority to act on behalf of clients, when accessing council applications. Where current legislation provides barriers to joined-up working, these will be highlighted. This project will enable more enquiries to be dealt with at the first point of contact, and in a more joined-up way.

Estimated Cost of proposal

Please provide the estimated total costs of the project (using table one below) and a breakdown of how this funding will be used (using table two below). The information need not be detailed at this stage.

Table One - total costs:

Total Project Cost	£156,000
- Match funding available (list the source(s))	
from UDC	£22,000
from UDC IEG 2004/5	£56,000
= e-Innovations funding sought from ODPM (n.b. £50k min)	**£78,000**

Table Two – Breakdown of costs:

(List key items – e.g. project manager, software licences, dissemination costs, etc)

Software	£25,000
Licences	£38,000
Hardware/Networking	£24,000
Project management	£18,000
Consultancy	£6,000
Implementation	£30,000
Training	£10,000
Contingency	£5,000
Total Project Cost	**£156,000.00**

Key deliverables of proposal (200 words max)

(Please list the key deliverables for your proposal, e.g. products, routemaps, standards, etc.)

Products
1. Common method of authentication of Citizens Advice Bureau Advisers and customer to be devised.
2. Data sharing protocols between local authorities and the CAB and possibly other voluntary organisations.
3. Standard checklist for implementing joint local authority/CAB working in other regions.
4. Standard query handling system utilising outputs from the APLAWS pathfinder project.

Routemaps
5. Set up a project board comprising UDC, CAB and other local authority partners to develop common standards.
6. Purchase, install and implement new FPC software.
7. Purchase and install secure links to three Bureaux from UDC.
8. Purchase and install 16 scanners for Bureaux workstations.
9. Install scanning software, thin client software and FPC software for 16 Bureaux workstations.
10. Train 20 CAB Advisers.
11. Publicise new service within district.
12. Publicise new service within Essex using, for example, the Essex Benefits Forum and other suitable platforms.
13. Share experience and knowledge with other partners.

Standards
Standards for authentication and data sharing will take into account issues such as the Verification Framework, Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act.

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Partners to the proposal (100 words max)

(Please list the partners to the proposal, including whether they are fully signed up, or have merely expressed an interest in taking part, together with their contribution (whether financial or in kind) they will provide)

Partner	Interest	Contribution
Uttlesford District Citizen Advice Bureau	Fully signed up.	Will be fully involved in implementing the new way of working including time needed for training.
Citizen Advice central office	Fully signed up.	Will be fully involved in working with UDC to install network links.
Harlow District Council	Fully signed up to adopting this solution.	Provide member(s) for project board to develop common authentication and data sharing protocols.
Epping District Council	Ditto	Ditto
Colchester Borough Council	Ditto	Ditto
Braintree District Council	Ditto	Ditto

Main Text of the proposal (2,000 words max)

(Please explain in plain English the aims and objectives of the proposal, including how it meets the criteria set out in the guidance note and the innovation it offers)

Background Information

Uttlesford is the largest district in Essex. It covers 65,000 hectares and is sparsely populated. There are four main towns, Saffron Walden, Stansted, Great Dunmow and Thaxted with many small villages. At present there are three Bureaux, one in each of the main towns except for Stansted, although at present plans for a Bureau at Stansted are being investigated. The Uttlesford CAB helps 9,300 customers each year, many of which are the most vulnerable in the community. Often these customers require access to council services[*]. The geographical difficulties of the district mean that if the CAB is given the ability to offer customers improved access to council services then there are benefits to the Council as well as additional service delivery channels for the customer. Examples of the type of service where improved electronic access would be beneficial include applications for housing benefit, applications for temporary accommodation and information about council tax and rent arrears. At present, when a customer asks a CAB adviser for assistance, they will usually need to telephone the council offices for the information required or direct the customer to the main council offices in Saffron Walden. This proposed innovation would enable the CAB advisers to access all the necessary information from their own offices.

UDC is proposing to offer the advisers at the Bureaux in Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Great Dunmow access to relevant back office systems. UDC will need to buy, install and configure a new software system that will enable all the information regarding a customer to be accessed in one place. Information will be taken from the existing Housing Management, Revenue and Cash Receipting systems.

Accessing Council Information

As well as improving the access to information, this project will also address the need for a common method of authentication. The **Electronic Government Services Key Priorities for the Citizens Advice Service**[i] document states that

"CAB advisers can currently spend a lot of time confirming to government that they are phoning or faxing from a bureau and that they have the client's authority to act on their behalf. What is needed is a mechanism to authenticate bureau advisers and confirm client authority to all government departments and agencies."

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[*] In 2002-2003, Citizens Advice nationally dealt with nearly 6 million new problems. Around 30% of all the problems that CAB advisers help solve are benefits related.

At present, authorisation for Council staff to talk about a case with a CAB adviser is required from the customer. The customer signs an existing form, which is kept on record in case of future contact. An electronic solution using the DIP system, will be designed by the partners so that UDC Officers and CAB advisers are satisfied that the person they are dealing with is authentic and has given permission for their information to be accessed.

The information that CAB advisers will have permission to see will include:

1. All council tax, NNDR and tenant rent balances.
2. Council tax charges per property.
3. All council tax payments, discounts and reductions.
4. Housing benefit assessment details.
5. The current status of a housing benefit claim.
6. Housing Register information including the current status of a customer's housing application.
7. The Councils' Mutual Exchange Register.
8. All documentation that has been sent or received by a customer to the council as per the Freedom of Information Act.
9. All documents currently available on the UDC website.

The CAB advisers will be given direct, secure links to UDC using one of three different options:

1. Local Exchange using 2x 2.3 Gowide SHDSL routers.
2. Fixed Line from a telecom provider including 2 thin client servers to cater for small bandwidth.
3. Internet Option using local web hosting at the database end with adequate firewalls and anti-virus measures including VPN software and hardware.

Application For Services
UDC is, at present, developing electronic forms for all its council services. These forms will be available for a CAB adviser via the FPC system. The adviser will be able to help the customer complete a form either online or print the form and complete it on paper. As part of this project UDC are also proposing to supply all 16 workstations, in the Bureaux, with a basic scanner. The CAB advisers will then be able to scan the completed and signed forms straight into UDC's DIP system. This will save time, money and effort for the customer and for UDC staff, who would normally receive an application in the post.

The scanners could also enable advisers to scan supporting documentation straight into the DIP system, for example, in support of housing benefit claims. At present such supporting documentation needs to be verified by council staff as per the Verification Framework (VF) before it can be entered into the system. If this verification is done by an adviser (in accordance with bureau independence) this will also be of benefit to both customer and UDC staff. Adrian Pateman from the Housing Benefit Security Division said that

" nothing in the VF would prevent you from doing this. So if this works for you and you will continue to be responsible for the overall standard of verification, then we, from a policy point of view, have no concerns. If you would normally DIP these documents, and you are happy about probity or conflict of interest issues with the CAB, this would seem to be an ideal solution."

The CAB advisers will also be able to use query-handling routines to assist the customer with their enquiries. The Council, using the APLAWS pathfinder outputs, will develop these as part of this project.

In addition to providing access to customer information and documentation to the adviser, UDC will supply and support a standalone self-service workstation in the reception area of each CAB. This will allow waiting customers access to the Internet, including the UDC website, enabling them to pay bills online as well as search for additional information.

Training
Training and supporting the CAB advisers will be a large part of this project and will need to include:

1. Use of the FPC system.
2. How to determine what stage a benefit claim has reached.
3. How to explain to the customer the way the Housing Register operates and how an application can be moved up or down on the Register.

The innovation
This innovation will provide an important additional access for the customer to council services, saving them the need to visit council offices. It will benefit the council staff by allowing more enquiries to be dealt with at first point of contact by the CAB advisers. This joined-up working will enable more efficient working by the CAB advisers and quicker access to council services by the customer. It will also address the need for a common method of authentication. It fulfils the requirements in the **National Strategy for Local e-Government[ii]** document to

" *transform services making them more accessible, more convenient, more responsive and more cost-effective.*"

" *help improve the customer's experience of dealing with local public services, whoever provides them.*"

It also

" *provides electronic access to information and advice and tackles the back-office processes to simplify and link processes across agencies.*"

And recognises that

"Actively developing such a mixed economy of service delivery could help promote the health and vitality of the local commercial and voluntary sectors, as well as opening up government and promoting the take-up of electronic services"

This innovation will make a real difference to the experience of people dealing with all areas of local government. The **Electronic Government Services Key Priorities for the Citizens Advice Service[i]** document also states that

"*Advisers need the ability to make and track benefit claims. Giving advisers the ability to make and track benefit claims whilst acting on behalf of clients could save significant amounts of time and effort for both advisers and staff*"

It has synergies with the National Benefits Project, which seeks to

"Provide a "joined up", cross government approach to benefits enabling customers to quickly understand their entitlements and claim the relevant benefits available to them."

The new UDC Corporate Plan states that we will remove all organisational barriers to delivering equal access to services and to secure full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. We will maximise the effective use of ICT to deliver improved customer access to services with the help of our partner agencies. This proposal also complies with the council's benefit take-up strategy which states that we need to

"Develop links with the CAB to maximise take-up of benefit"

Monitoring Arrangements
We will measure the success of this project by:
• The staff at UDC and Uttlesford CAB jointly monitoring the arrangements. We will have regular meetings initially and develop performance indicators such as the number of benefit cases dealt with by the advisers.
• Counting the number of documents scanned into the back office system by CAB advisers.
• Using a customer satisfaction survey that reflects the ease of access and quality of the services offered.

- Feedback from CAB advisers.

Future Developments
UDC is committed to providing all its services online by 2005. The council's infrastructure and systems have been modernised and we have developed a range of online services linked to back office systems. For example we are one of only a few councils that can provide online access to current planning documentation live on its website. We are also leading a Registration and Authentication project for the Essex Online Partnership (EOLP). Once completed this will allow authenticated online forms to be submitted straight into a back office system. These developments will provide a better service to the customer either at home or when visiting an independent adviser like the CAB.

To be in line with joined-up working it is possible that specialist council staff could spend some of their time each week assisting the CAB advisers and vice versa. We currently have weekly Housing surgeries at the Great Dunmow and Thaxted Community Information Centres and daily access to Housing Officers at the Saffron Walden Council Offices. With this innovation in place the surgeries could be expanded and could also incorporate the outreach service with the use of laptops, telephone lines and portable scanners.

Support for the Project
There has been a great deal of interest in this project from other authorities within Essex who can see the benefit in working with the voluntary sector in this way. This interest has been demonstrated by the agreement of 4 of these authorities to actively partner with us on this project and to use our skills and experiences in their own implementation.

The Citizen Advice Central office in London has also taken a very active interest in this project and is very keen that this solution could be adapted for use in their Bureaux across the country. They have given permission for us to work with their staff in the implementation of this new way of working. Malcolm Taylor, e-Government Project Manager from Citizen Advice central office said

"Citizens Advice supports the innovative partnership working taking place in Uttlesford, helping to make e-government really work for citizens"

Steve Smithson, CABnet Development Officer from the national Citizen Advice central office said

"Citizens Advice is keen to work with local and national government to exploit IT for the benefit of clients. The East Region of Citizens Advice will provide support for the Uttlesford Bureau to help them use their existing IT infrastructure to link to the local authority systems and gain the maximum benefit for their clients from the project."

John Willoughby, manager of Uttlesford CAB said

"We are very pleased to be working with Uttlesford in this innovative way to improve the service to the residents of the Uttlesford district."

Dissemination, Shared Learning and Take Up (200 words max)

(Please explain how the deliverables for your proposal will be rolled out and taken up by other authorities and organisations and, in particular, how the project will build capacity within your own authority)

Dissemination
The project board will meet monthly to devise common methods of authentication, data sharing and query handling. It is envisaged that the Citizen Advice Central office will disseminate these products to Bureaux in other regions. Initially our partners in Essex will take up the new products. We will then seek to disseminate these products to other councils in Essex through the EOLP. Once this is complete the EOLP will help to encourage Partnerships in other regions to adopt the products.

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Shared Learning
We will use our partners in Essex to ensure that the products meet the requirements of as wide a range of local authorities and Bureaux as possible. We will publish the results of this shared learning initially on the secure EOLP website for all Essex authorities to view. Once roll out has been successful in Essex we will produce a Toolkit for distribution to other councils in the country.

Take Up
We will encourage and help our partner authorities in Essex to adopt this approach of joined-up working. We will also work with the Citizen Advice Central office to raise awareness and promote take up in other regions.

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[i] Document published by Citizens Advice July 2003
[ii] Document published by ODPM November 2002