

**Committee:** E-Government Task Group  
**Date:** 15 January 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 5  
**Title:** Government Funding Applications  
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### **Summary**

- 1 This report seeks Members' confirmation of a bid that has been submitted to the Government's E-innovations Fund. It also seeks approval to submit three IT-related bids to the Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund.

### **E-Innovations Fund**

- 2 The E-Innovations Fund is part of a new programme of 'Support for e-Innovations', part of the wider local e-Government Programme. The Government has allocated £14 million to the Fund for the next three financial years. The purpose of the Fund is 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'.
- 3 A bid has been submitted to provide advisers at local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) with access to the Council's back-office systems. These systems contain much of the council-related information needed by 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. The bid has the backing of both the local and national CAB offices and also has the support of Harlow, Epping Forest and Braintree District Councils and Colchester Borough Council. The bid is for £78,000 and if successful, would fund the purchase of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, at a cost of £40,000, which is presently included within the budget for the proposed First Point of Contact project. A copy of the bid is attached as Appendix One. Deadlines for submission of bids was very tight and therefore it was not possible to seek Member approval before the bid was submitted.

### **Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund**

- 4 The Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund was 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 has been set-aside over a three year period

and the DWP are inviting bids from Councils, based around a number of key themes and priorities. The Revenues & Benefits Best Value Review carried out during 2003 identified a number of potential improvements in ICT provision which were included in the approved Service Improvement Plan. Most of these areas are suitable for funding under the DWP initiative and therefore the following IT-related bids have been prepared:

(a) 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 will enable certain routine tasks to be automated, deadlines more closely monitored & any problems escalated.

(b) Home Working – funding to enable up to 10 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 is to aid staff retention and recruitment and improve productivity & output.

(c) Purchase and installation of a replacement Unix server – the existing server is unable to cope adequately with the requirements of iWorld, the latest version of the SX3 Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Business Rates system. A larger server, with a faster processor, would significantly improve the efficiency of Revenues staff and would enable them to provide an improved service to the public.

Copies of the bids are attached as Appendices Two to Four. Total funding of £55,000 is being sought from the fund.

- 5 As a top quartile performing Council, Uttlesford's call on the fund is probably weaker than many more poorer performing Councils. Consequently to strengthen the case, the Council have 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 contains an element of 'peer support' for Bromsgrove. Such support is one of the key criteria by which the DWP will assess eligibility for funding. Bromsgrove also use the same Anite Public Sector Ltd document imaging system as the Council and therefore Anite have been able to assist in preparing the bids.

It is recommended that the Task Group:

1. Confirm the actions of officers in submitting a bid to the E-Innovations Fund and

2. Approve the proposed bids to the Housing Benefits Performance Standards Fund.

Background Papers:

Support for e-Innovation – guidance issued by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit Circular S6/2003 – guidance issued by the Department of Works and Pensions