

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 02 MAY 2006

E-PLANNING EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT BID

Report by Executive Director of Development and Property Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Scottish Executive Planning Division is leading a bid to the Efficient Government Fund for financial assistance to improve the electronic delivery of planning services in Scotland.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to advise on the details of the bid, the implications for the Council and to seek authority to participate in the e-planning programme to improve existing services within East Ayrshire Council's Planning, Development & Building Standards Division.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scottish Executive E-planning compact was published in 2003 and was endorsed by the Deputy Minister for Communities. The compact sets out targets for development and delivery of "a high quality and citizen focused planning service... fit for the 21st century".
- 2.2 It has been recognised that there would be many advantages to a common approach to the delivery of online planning services throughout Scotland. Accordingly, and given its unique position, the Scottish Executive Planning Division has taken a central role in co-ordinating a funding bid submission to the Efficient Government Fund (EGF) to implement a national e-planning project on behalf of all Scottish Planning Authorities. The submission requests EGF funding to provide financial assistance for Councils to implement online systems to meet the objectives of the E-planning compact.
- 2.3 SAIC Consultants, appointed by the Scottish Executive, have in consultation with each Council examined potential efficiency savings and development costs for the project to provide a business case model for inclusion in the bid. Overall SAIC predict efficiency savings will be £27.6m nationally over 10 years against £12.2m project start up costs.
- 2.4 The funding submission to the EGF is made up of five key areas. These are listed below.
 - Online Submission of Planning Applications and Appeals
 - Online Access to Planning Casework Information and Electronic Document Management Systems (eRDM)
 - Online Expert Systems – Do I Need Planning Permission?
 - E-Consultations on planning applications
 - Online Development Plans (Local Plans)

3. EAST AYRSHIRE E-PLANNING

- 3.1 The Planning, Development and Building Standards Division are currently working toward meeting the objectives contained in the e-planning compact but the funding submission, if it is successful, gives the opportunity to accelerate the process. E-planning supports the customer service focus within the Division's Service Plan for 2005/06 in accordance with the Council's 'Customer First' Initiative.
- 3.2 Overall, the EGF project is seen as an opportunity to develop the required IT systems at reduced cost to the Council, to offer an improved service to the public, and to re-engineer processes to maximise efficiencies within the Division.

4. EGF BID DETAILS

- 4.1 If the bid is successful, it is anticipated that all Councils will receive up to 75% of funding for development of online planning systems. The Scottish Executive has requested that each Council make up the difference and make a financial contribution based on 25% of the overall system costs.
- 4.2 To support the bid a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been prepared by the Scottish Executive. This sets out key elements of the project, estimated costs, requirements for matched funding and project governance. The MOU is not a legal document and does not commit the Council to funding but it was felt necessary to inform Councils and all parties of their roles and responsibilities and demonstrate to the EGF the extent of support for the project. On this basis the MOU has been signed.
- 4.3. Within the MOU, the estimated costs that would need to be met by the Council if the project is to go ahead is detailed. Based on the project specification in the MOU the total cost of the project (before contingency) is estimated as £328,000. Based on a 75% grant being received, from the EFG the Council's contribution (including a contingency) would be £98,000. However, if staff currently employed by the Council implements the project, 75% of staff costs can be reclaimed before the end of the financial year. In total, therefore, the net cost to the Council to implement the project is estimated to be £60,000.
- 4.4 The MOU states that the project will be governed by a central e-planning programme management board which will include representatives from Planning Authorities. The project overall will require to be managed in accordance with operational plans and procurement arrangements to be adopted by the Project Board. A single point of contact in each Council will be required to work with the Project Board to pull resources together and form local project teams.
- 4.5 A set of output targets to monitor efficiencies over the ten year period have been agreed and a monitoring report showing progress against output targets will be required to be submitted to the Scottish Executive on an annual basis by the Council.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The MOU allows the Council flexibility to identify its approach to implementing the project at the local level. It is anticipated that no additional staff will be required and the project can be implemented by staff currently employed by the Council.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications at present as the Memorandum of Understanding is not a legal document. However, if the bid is successful the Council will be expected to take part in all or at least some of the key areas listed above and in the subsequent joint procurement process.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Estimated costs are outline in paragraph 4.3 above based on the Council taking part in all 5 key areas of the bid, utilising existing staff and receiving a 75% grant from the EGF. 75% of staff costs can be claimed back if the Council utilises existing staff to work on systems implementation.
- 7.2 The net contribution on this basis will be £60,000 (assuming a 75% EGF grant) and can be accommodated from the departmental balances.

8. COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The EGF E-planning project is consistent with the aspirations and objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee;
- (i) agree to East Ayrshire's participation in the national e-planning project;
 - (ii) approve in principle the allocation of £60,000 for the Council's 25% contribution to the programme; and
 - (iii) note that a future report will be submitted to Committee once a decision on the EGF bid has been secured.

James Lavery
Executive Director of Development and Property Services
21 April 2006
MH/SA - FV

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (1) The E-planning Compact – Deputy Minister of Communities, 2004
- (2) E-Planning Efficient Government Programme - Business Case, Scottish Executive Planning Division - 31st March 2006
- (3) Memorandum of Understanding – Scottish Executive Planning Division - February 2006
- (4) The Pendleton Survey - Peter Pendleton Associates

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