

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 22 FEBRUARY 2001

MODERNISING GOVERNMENT FUND

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

0.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise the Committee of the successful bid for support from the Modernising Government Fund led by East Ayrshire Council and to outline the next steps in the implementation process.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In April 2000, the Scottish Executive invited bids from central government, local government, and other public sector agencies to access a new Modernising Government Fund (MGF).
- 1.2 The fund was established to help take forward projects that involved innovative provision of improved public services and contributed to the progress of the Modernising Government agenda within Scotland.
- 1.3 The council made an outline bid in May (which was approved at the Emergency Powers Committee on 15 May). It was successful in this initial stage and the council's Emergency Powers Committee agreed on 28 September 2000 to make a detailed bid for support.
- 1.4 One hundred and four projects from public agencies across Scotland competed in the initial round for support from the fund. Of these, 36 were eventually offered support.
- 1.5 East Ayrshire council has been awarded £592,000 to support a 'Closing the Digital Divide' project. The overall cost of the project is £1.334M.

2.0 CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- 2.1 East Ayrshire Council led the partnership bid for MGF support. The project is designed to deliver easily accessible public services, delivered electronically. It aims to increase and improve access to all levels of government and public services within all areas of Ayrshire. It combines investment in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and innovation with support and training for local people.
- 2.2 Specifically, the bid to the Modernising Government Fund was for support to :
 - Install new ICT infrastructure in 18 local and area offices;
 - Provide video conference links to government agencies, health services, and all council departments;
 - Take the first steps towards developing a user-friendly interface to provide seamless interaction with all council business systems, and

- Provide support and training through 13 new centres and 7 access and information points to those people who are currently excluded from, or at the risk of being excluded from, the information society.

2.3 The project builds on the progress that has been made in certain communities locally through the Ayrshire Electronic Community project.

3.0 PROJECT PARTNERS

3.1 The council has forged strong partnerships to help realise the project. Sixteen public and voluntary sector organisations are committed to providing content and information for the project. However, we have also secured financial contributions to the project from Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, Microsoft Limited, Ayr College, Kilmarnock College and the Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust.

3.2 The project will make a significant difference to both the quality and quantity of local and national government information and services that are available to the public. There will be increased co-ordination of government services, increased access to services, and increased support for people who wish to take advantage of electronic services in East Ayrshire.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 East Ayrshire Council is the lead partner in the project and will be the funding recipient. The council is responsible for agreeing, and then auditing and evaluating an implementation plan for the project.

4.2 The project will be lead by the council's Head of Corporate Development and Communication supported by the council's IT Business Strategy Manager.

4.3 A Project Steering Group will be established with the representatives of all of the partners and an Implementation Group will be established to take forward many of the detailed implementation arrangements.

4.4 The first stage in the project is to continue investment in the council's local area network and wide area network to ensure high bandwidth between council and local offices. This part of the project will also be to link other organisations to the council network through a communications hub that has been established by the Ayrshire Electronic Community. Initially, these links will be to the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust.

4.5 Thereafter, video conference links between government agencies, health services, and council departments will be implemented across this broadband network.

4.6 The council and its partners must also identify those communities who are most in need of the new support and learning centres that the MGF Fund will support. An assessment of community need will be undertaken as well as an audit of the existing ICT projects, a technical assessment of available premises and proximity to network points, before further proposals for the exact location of this investment are agreed.

- 4.7 As part of this assessment, the council and its partners will wish to identify the opportunity to link this funding to other possible sources of external funding to bring added value to any investment.
- 4.8 It is the overall intention that the new centres and access points will be outwith the coalfield area, which currently benefits from direct support through the Ayrshire Electronic community.
- 4.9 The final element of the project involves detailed research with technology companies on the issues that will require to be addressed by this and other councils in providing seamless user-friendly access to all council systems through a common internet browser.

5.0 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The funding for the overall project comprises of the following elements:-
- Modernising Government Fund contribution - £592,000
 - East Ayrshire Council contribution (Capital Plan) - £555,900
 - Partner contribution £186,000
- 5.2 The funding partners are Ayr College, Kilmarnock College, Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care Trust, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, and Microsoft Limited.
- 5.3 While the bulk of the investment is in capital expenditure, it is anticipated that the investment will generate revenue savings in excess of £150,000 which will help to meet the revenue cost of the project. Other resource implications for the council and its partners relates to the staffing costs associated with implementing such a major project. However, this will be a matter that will be subject to early consideration by the Project Steering Group and it is anticipated that any additional short term project related staff that will be required can be accommodated from within the overall MGF project budget. Any new posts will be considered through the Personnel and Property Sub-Committee as necessary.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil arising from this report.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Modernising Government Fund project is an important part of delivering Social Inclusion across the whole of East Ayrshire. In addition, the training and support in new technology skills will have a positive impact on the marketability of the local workforce and the piloting of e-health services will help to increase opportunities for good health.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The committee is asked to:-
1. Welcome the award of £592,000 by the Scottish Executive to the East Ayrshire Council led bid for its 'Closing the Digital Divide' project.

2. Note the general arrangements for securing implementation of the project as detailed within the report.
3. Agree to receive detailed proposals on the location of the support and learning centres and access points at a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, following a comprehensive assessment of the needs and opportunities within local communities.
4. Otherwise note the content of the report.

Fiona Lees

Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

16 February 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to the Emergency Powers Committee of 15 May 2000, Modernising Government Fund.
2. Report to Emergency Powers Committee: 28 April 2000, Modernising Government Fund: Final bid.
3. Closing the Digital Divide – 21st Century Government in East Ayrshire. A bid for support from the Modernising Government Fund to increase the accessibility of public services and expand ICT training and support opportunities for local people. Submitted to the Scottish Executive September 2000.

For further information on this report please contact Douglas I Campbell, Head of Corporate Development and Communication on (01564) 576165.

AGENDA