

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 4 May 2000

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE VISUAL INFORMATION SYSTEM IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD (VISION) AND AYRSHIRE ELECTRONIC COMMUNITY (AEC) PROJECTS

Report by the Director of Corporate Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members of current progress in respect of the Vision / AEC Projects.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. VISION Project

2.1.1. East Ayrshire is widely regarded a very forward-thinking authority. IT Services identified that the Internet, electronic mail, ICT and the associated technologies have a major role to play in making the Council business more efficient. To this end, IT Services have been instrumental in the development of the Council WAN, Internet and Intranet, which makes information and services available to the public via Information Points in public libraries, council offices and other sites. Staff also benefit from being able to access information via desktop PCs.

2.1.2. Industry analysts predict that in the near future the majority of commercial and government organisations will increasingly be using the Internet to improve the way they do business. This practice will afford the Council significant advantages. Already the Internet is a challenge to the traditional postal, telephone and business communication industries. The Internet allows users to access and contribute to a world wide pool of information, including -

- A tool for research – to learn about new developments or products, companies we deal with;
- A tool for communication – to support correspondence with the public, suppliers or staff e.g. by electronic mail;
- A tool for electronic commerce – for delivering information to the public on a global, 24 hour basis;
- Gathering feedback on Council services via our Website and public information points.

2.1.3. The VISION project (which also encompasses the AEC project) is built upon this basis of electronic delivery of Council services and information by the use of Internet and other ICT technologies. This includes use of the World Wide Web, the Council's Intranet system, e-mail and the provision of information and access points (such as touch screen kiosks). Information and services provided by other Ayrshire and national public and private organisations, can also be accessed via the system.

2.1.4. The target audience of the system includes Council staff, communities, residents, businesses, and other public organisations. For example, Council staff have access

from their desktop PCs, to information and services affecting them as individuals, as members of a particular service or department, and on a corporate basis.

- 2.1.5. Communities and residents have access to the Council's Intranet via the extensive range of access locations as detailed in Appendix 5. The Council's web site can also be accessed by individuals with their own PC.

2.2. **AEC Project**

- 2.2.1. The AEC project provides the basis to support the delivery of a programme of proactive social and economic development for the 5 CED areas of Cumnock and Doon Valley, North Kilmarnock, North Ayr, Girvan and the three towns of Stevenson, Saltcoats and Ardrossan in Ayrshire. The project aims to ensure that the capacity, support and access mechanisms are set up to enable the benefits of the information society to be applied to those targeted areas.

- 2.2.2. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) related capabilities for the provision of information, services and on-line support are now regarded as fundamental to the creation of an Information Society. With this, there is increasing demand from businesses and communities to have access to and fully participate in this activity.

- 2.2.3. Analysis of the impact of such information society initiatives within Ayrshire and subsequent discussions with CED area community groups and associated partner organisations has identified the need to ensure that the CED areas are not further disadvantaged. A lack of adequate infrastructure capacity and the realisation that geographic and economic factors will delay any commercial provision, has led to the conclusion that the needs of businesses, community organisations and residents in the disadvantaged areas of Ayrshire must be positively addressed if they are to fully participate in any future Information Society. This project has been formulated to build the capacity to both respond to and deliver the requirements of that future to the 5 CED areas in Ayrshire.

- 2.2.4. Those needs will be addressed by developing an electronic community within the 5 Ayrshire CED areas consisting of an integrated infrastructure with a wide range of access points and a network of Support Centres, Learning Centres and Youth Centres, all with ICT and full application capability. This is designed to not only offset the lack of available or projected access provision but to act as a vehicle for the delivery of a extensive range of economic and social support services that will contribute to the development and well being of the targeted areas.

- 2.3. Additional background information on the VISION and AEC projects is as detailed in Appendix 1.

- 2.4. The Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 23 April 1999 agreed to approve the funding in respect of the Council's Year 1 contribution to the VISION/AEC project. Year 2 contribution was approved on 28th March 2000.

- 2.5. The AEC project is supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and was approved for matched funding by the Strathclyde European Partnership (SEP) Management Committee at their meeting on 27 May 1999.

- 2.6. The AEC Partnership currently consists of the organisations as defined in Appendix 2.

3. BENEFITS, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. The following defines the benefits, aims and objectives of the VISION / AEC projects

- Establish the appropriate infrastructure within the target areas, through the refurbishment, replacement and extension of current equipment and networks and by the introduction of additional key requirements, system connection points and the provision of a communications hub.
- Develop the applications and systems to enable the delivery of services into the targeted areas and to allow direct access from those areas over the established infrastructure.
- Set up 14 Support Centres within the East Ayrshire area to allow organisations, businesses and residents to gain access to, become familiar with, and interactively use the system.
- Realign and set up 5 Learning Centres within the East Ayrshire area (initially where appropriate by upgrading existing capabilities from previous initiatives e.g. Focal Centres) to provide support services and on-line training through direct access to Further Education establishments and other training agencies.
- Develop existing and/or set up dedicated 2 Youth Centres within the East Ayrshire area, with direct access to the system and through it, the Internet and a multimedia development capability for Web content production.
- Replace and extend the current Public Access Systems to provide access by residents and organisations at 9 strategic points throughout the East Ayrshire area.
- Enable direct interaction through the creation of E-mail and on-line systems for communication and direct connection to support agencies, other organisations, businesses and residents.

3.2. The project is also designed to accomplish the following:

- Build the infrastructure and delivery platform within the target areas, and thus to provide a networked access and response capacity that will allow full participation in the information society.
- Encourage and empower the target areas through the application of technology.
- Facilitate awareness, learning and use of technology by businesses, organisations and residents through access to networked training and support.
- Develop the internal capacity to sustain the initiative by establishing a long term support capability.
- Enable the provision of information and interactive services.
- Connect businesses, residents and community organisations within the target areas directly to all of Ayrshire via an integrated Intranet communications hub and indirectly to areas outside of Ayrshire via channelled Internet connections.
- Deliver / create 370 square metres of new training premises; 320 square metres of existing training premises refurbished; 340 square metres of new community development premises; 360 square metres of existing community development premises refurbished; 55 new training places; and 190 SMEs assisted in ICT development.

4. PROGRESS TO DATE

4.1. General

To-date the project has delivered 85 square metres of new training premises; 105 square metres of existing training premises refurbished; 121 square metres of new community development premises; 105 square metres of existing community development premises refurbished; and 56 new training places created.

Support, Learning and Youth centres development is as detailed in section 5.

4.2. Public Access Terminals / Town Pages

4.2.1. As a supplement to the VISION/AEC project, significant progress has been made towards implementing a network of Public Access "Touch Screen" Kiosks within the Council area and in this respect the formal launch of 7 new kiosks took place on 27th April 2000 at the Galleon Centre, Kilmarnock. A further 5 kiosks will be installed in the following months.

4.2.2. The kiosks will be connected to the "Town Pages" communications infrastructure with links to the East Ayrshire Council Internet site, and to other Internet sites therein and as prescribed by the Council (e.g. Health Board, Benefits Agency, Schools etc.).

Further information is as attached in Appendix 3.

4.3. "Web" Sites

4.3.1. The Council's revised Internet and Intranet Web sites continue to be regularly updated following the re-launch of the sites on 14th September 1999. These sites contain improved facilities and increased information provided by the Service Departments.

New developments which are now operational include ;

- Contact and department / service information for all Departments and Services
- Links to other Ayrshire information and service sites;
- Local Community projects such as the Auchinleck Living Memory Group and the Irvine Valley Regeneration Partnership;
- Roads and Lighting faults notification;
- Job Vacancies and Application form requests;
- Council Minutes,
- Employee access to Personnel Services circulars, health and safety notices and training schedules;
- Employee news pages and bulletin boards;
- AEC Web site at www.e-ayrshire.co.uk
- AEC Email facilities

Future planned developments include ;

- Revised Council A-Z of Services;
- Schools Web sites;
- Council News releases;
- Library Catalogue access via the Internet and Intranet

4.4. Staff Access

All Council employee's PCs, connected to the Council's Wide Area Data Network (WAN) can access the corporate Intranet.

4.5. AEC Staffing

The AEC project formally commenced in August 1999 and a total of eight staff have now been recruited to form the AEC Programme Team and are in post and situated at Ayr College East, Cumnock Annex.

Maureen Walker of Administration Services has been appointed as the AEC Programme Manager.

Management arrangements for the AEC project are as defined in the following section

4.6. Monitoring & Steering Groups

- 4.6.1. Within the Council, a Project Monitoring Group has been established and continues to meet at regular intervals.

The purpose and remit of this Monitoring Group is to ensure that the Council obtains value for money in relation to funding contributions, and that the Council's objectives are met by the Project. In addition the Group is tasked to ensure that as lead agency in the AEC Project, the overall objectives are met, the Strathclyde European Partnership (SEP) monitoring objectives are met, and a clear audit trail exists and is reported upon.

- 4.6.2. In addition, a Project Steering Group consisting of funding and non-funding AEC partners and chaired by East Ayrshire Council as the lead Authority, has similarly been established and continues to meet at regular intervals.

4.7. Outputs and Targets

The overall aims and objectives are as previously defined in section 3. A detailed project plan is being developed and agreed to, by the relevant parties. This is outlined in draft format in Appendix 5.

4.8. Additional Outputs

In addition to the above, the following progress has been made –

- 4.8.1. Procedures are underway to investigate the constitution of the AEC partnership, as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Solicitor to the Council is in the process of investigating an adjustment to the terms of the agreement with the partner organisations, to form the basis of such a constitution

Discussions are ongoing with partner organisations regarding this constitution.

- 4.8.2. Significant progress has been achieved in gaining support from the Microsoft Corporation and British Telecommunications (BT) for the AEC project, particularly in respect of the provision of training and in the future sustainability of the project.
- 4.8.3. Discussions are ongoing with Microsoft, BT, COMPAQ, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and other organisations to secure sponsorship and funding for the promotional activities and formal launch of the AEC project.
- 4.8.4. In addition to the partner organisations defined in Appendix 4, discussions are underway with other organisations who have expressed interest in the projects, namely Paisley University and the Inland Revenue (Scotland).
- 4.8.5. Discussions are also underway between IT Services and other organisations and initiatives, such as WeSSNET (West and South of Scotland Network) which aims to provide a "gateway" to information and on-line learning via Universities and Colleges, and COSLA regarding the proposed data networking of Local and Central Government agencies. The former will provide access to such life long learning materials via the AEC Learning Centres.

5. AEC LOCATIONS

- 5.1. Equipment installations are underway at the following AEC Centres with target completion for May 2000 ;
 - Connected Youth Project / SIP at Barrhill Road, Cumnock;
 - New Cumnock Learning Centre, including the CONDUIT programme;
 - Cumnock Support Centre (Cumnock Library);
 - Dalmellington Support Centre (Dalmellington Library);
 - Dalmellington Local Office Video Conferencing link to the Benefits Agency;
 - Muirkirk Learning Centre within the former Local Office;
 - Saltcoats Learning Centre and Video Conferencing link to Benefits Agency;
 - Auchinleck Learning Centre (Auchinleck Community Centre);

6. FORMAL LAUNCH

The formal launch of the AEC project took place on 3rd May 2000 at Auchinleck Community Centre with the keynote speaker being Wendy Alexander, MSP, Communities Minister. Other invited guests included representatives from all the Ayrshire community and voluntary organisations, together with representatives from all the AEC partner organisations and sponsors.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Provision of £150,000 has been made in each year of the 1999 / 2000, 2000 / 01 and 2001 / 02 Capital Programmes as the Council's contribution towards the VISION / AEC project.
- 7.2 Claims are submitted to SEP on a regular basis for matched funding in relation to the AEC project expenditure.

7.3 The feasibility and implications of continuing the AEC project beyond the funding date of December 2001 are currently being explored.

8. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The AEC project is a sub-set of the Council's "VISION" project and as such supports the Council's established strategies in respect of environment, decentralisation, economic and equal opportunities. In particular AEC has been encompassed within the Community Learning Strategy and the Social Inclusion Partnership.

8.2. The matter of constituting AEC as a company limited by guarantee will be the subject of a future report to Committee.

8.3. In line with the aims and objectives of VISION (and the incorporated AEC) project, the Council will require to define a strategy for the development of matters relating to the *Modernising Government* white paper published in March 1999. This identified the potential for Information and Knowledge Age Government for better service delivery, procurement and more efficient working practices within government and public sector organisations.

The VISION / AEC project has made significant progress in achieving, or setting the foundations for, a number of the objectives identified in the white paper. There is a need however, to develop a long term strategy for the modernisation of the Council's business and services by utilising ICT.

This matter will be the subject of a future report to Committee.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. It is recommended that the Committee notes and approves the contents of this report.

Barbara Haughan
Director of Corporate Services

14th April 2000

Further information regarding VISION/AEC can be obtained from Graham Stewart, IT Services (01563) 576819.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.

The Appendices are available for inspection at the Members' Information Point

- Appendix 1 Background of the VISION and AEC Projects
- Appendix 2 Partner Organisations
- Appendix 3 Kiosks Progress Report
- Appendix 4 Public Access Locations
- Appendix 5 AEC Outputs and Targets

AGENDA