IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT (IEG 2) - UPDATE

1   SUMMARY

1.1   This report contains an update on the implementation of the Council's IS/ICT and e-government strategies.

2   INTRODUCTION

2.1   At the meeting of this Committee on 23 July 2002, the programme of projects for implementation from the 2002/03 IS/ICT budget and the first IEG (Implementing Electronic Government) grant of £200,000 from the Government were approved.

2.2   On 22 October 2002, the Committee recommended the submission of the IEG 2 Statement to Government. This contained an explanation of how e-government projects were being taken forward in the organisation, how the original 2002/03 grant was spent and proposals for how the 2003/04 allocation would be utilised if the Statement was satisfactorily assessed by the Government.

2.3   The Government has completed its assessment of the IEG2 submission and has found that this Authority "has a sound strategy for implementing e-government" and that the Council has met the quality threshold to qualify for a further £200,000 IEG capital grant in 2003/04.

2.4   This report sets out detail of the progress being made in the implementation of e-government and IS/ICT projects.

3   DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

3.1   **Progress in 2002/03**

       The IEG funding in 2002/03 has been used to

       (a)   implement an on-line payments system which enables -

              • Payment of Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR), parking penalty notices, housing rents and general invoices on line via debit or credit cards. This system went live at the beginning of February.

- Viewing of the Council Tax banding of any property or the rateable value of business premises.

- By 1 April 2003, subject to registering on the Council's website for a personal identification number (PIN), residents will be able to view their own Council Tax or NNDR account and personal bills, and housing and Council Tax benefit recipients and landlords will be able to access details of their accounts.

- The software will introduce some e-forms for example, to notify change of address details.

(b)   implement a system that enables direct debit instructions to be given over the telephone by a local resident to a member of staff, without the need to complete a paper form.

(c)   provide a CAPS UNI-form Spatial Version 7 module for environmental health, extending the use of the corporate land and property database across the Authority. Already included are development control, building control, local plans, land charges and estates management, and this will be extended to tree preservation orders by June/July 2003.

(d)   the Authority is working on the implementation of "map access," which is a system that provides layers of maps of e.g. planning applications, tree preservation orders, historic buildings etc. This is still being developed, with the intention that it will be widely available for all Members and staff via the intranet and eventually to the public on the internet.

(e)   the Council has achieved level 2 of connection to the National Land Information Service, which enables the Council to receive land charge searches electronically. It is intended to achieve level 3 during 2003/04 which will allow both the receipt and return of completed land charge searches electronically.

(f)   Implement minor system improvements such as "Prrompt" software to record and monitor letters and complaints within the organisation.

(g)   The Council has also been participating in the Essex on-line partnership, which has recently submitted a bid for funding of £1.1 million for e-government projects to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. One of the key projects already approved by the partnership is an Essex-wide approach to e-

procurement, using the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) 'Marketplace' software.

The Council is piloting e-procurement for the acquisition of central stationery and the IEG 2 Statement indicated that the Council would consider the introduction of e-procurement across other activities, but that such a development should not impact on local traders, often small businesses, who provide services for the Council.

Participation in the Essex on-line partnership has lead to the commission of a free independent consultants' business case for the introduction of e-procurement in Rochford. This indicates that expenditure on the introduction of the system should be re-couped over 3 years by a combination of cost savings and back-office efficiency savings as a result of the replacement of the current paper based ordering process.

The opportunity exists to implement this system at a greatly reduced fee through the partnership as one of 6 Essex Districts participating in this initial phase of the project, supported by Essex County Council in the implementation phase. (Essex County Council is already using the solution).

The e-procurement system will initially be used to streamline office-based systems and provide management information on the Council's suppliers. Over time the system can be developed to link with the financial management system to enable direct commitment accounting, and to enable electronic trading with suppliers.

The opportunity offered through the Essex on-line partnership will enable the Council to move ahead more quickly in this area than anticipated. It is unlikely that the Authority would have been able to implement e-procurement cost-effectively in any other way. The discount achieved has allowed the system to be ordered from the remaining monies within the current year's grant.

3.2   The above use of the grant has allowed the Council to make considerable progress towards the e-government target for electronic provision of service by 2005 without impacting on the Capital Programme.

3.3   **Proposals for 2003/04**

Proposed e-government developments for 2003/04 as highlighted in IEG2 are:-

(a)   Development and implementation of a virtual private network, which will result in quicker, more effective links between the Civic Suite, Council Offices and other sites, thereby enabling home-working and remote access, giving Councillors with PC access the facility to link to the system, as well as the public from key sites. This will be the subject of a report to the meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee on 8 April 2003. It is then intended to consider the options to enable all Members who so wished, to be connected by PC to the Council's network.

(b)   Introduction of document image processing as part of a document management system to provide significant benefits in work flow and records management and meet various other requirements such as the Freedom of Information Act, Local Plan deposit process, etc.

(c)   Links to the national planning portal and implementation of the CAPS public access module which will enable residents, consultees, Parish Councils and Members to obtain information about the progress of planning applications on line. This is also the subject of a report on the use of the Planning Delivery Grant to the meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee on 8 April 2003.

(d)   Improved website software and design, which will include a search engine, and facilities for access by people with disabilities.

(e)   Public access to Committee, Minutes, Agendas and reports online.

(f)   Introduction of a "touch tone" payment system which will provide the capability to accept payments from customers who have access to a touch tone telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

(g)   The Council is also awaiting a response from the Department of Work and Pensions to the bid for funding to improve the delivery of the housing benefit service by the installation of a PC in each of the Council's Sheltered Housing Schemes. This will enable staff to take the service to the client and develop "drop in centres" where applicants can check the progress of their

housing benefit claim, and Council Tax Payers can review the position of their accounts.

3.4 IS/ICT developments in 2003/04 are likely to include:-

(a) Upgrading of the Comino/Saffron housing management and repairs and maintenance software.

(b) Implementation of a homelessness database solution.

4   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 It is intended that the projects identified in the report will be implemented through use of the £200,000 IEG capital grant, the Planning Delivery Grant, funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to improve homelessness services, resources available from the Essex online partnership and the Council's I.T. budget provision.

5   RECOMMENDATION

5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** -

To consider and endorse the progress made towards implementing the IEG 2 and IS/ICT strategies.

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Background Papers:

Business case for e-procurement

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