

PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2004/05

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides details of the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) for 2004/05 and outlines the key areas where the grant can best be targeted in Rochford to enhance the Planning Service.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July 2002, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Government was making an additional £350m available to Local Authorities as a 'Planning Delivery Grant' over the 3 years from 2003-2006.
- 2.2 In its first year, the PDG scheme distributed £50 million out of the £350 million total. All Local Authorities have received a minimum payment of £75,000 with additional payments being related primarily to performance in development control in the period June 2001 to June 2002.
- 2.3 In the second year of the scheme 2004-2005, the total amount of grant being distributed has risen to £130 million, though there is no minimum payment to authorities. Grant assessments are now based on a wider range of factors, including development control performance, progress in preparing an up to date development plan and whether an authority is located in a growth area.
- 2.4 The ODPM has suggested that the additional resources available might be used to :
- complete reviews of Local Plans and prepare for the new Local Development Documents;
 - further develop IT systems;
 - obtain assistance from Consultants;
 - outsource certain Planning Services;
 - increase Staffing levels;
 - provide more training for Staff and Councillors;
 - support mediation services;
 - encourage a more diverse workforce; and
 - provide bursaries to train Staff.
- 2.5 Taking account of Rochford's performance in meeting development control targets between October 2002 to September 2003, together with the First Deposit of the replacement Local Plan and Rochford's

position in the Thames Gateway, the Council has been awarded a grant of £280,654 for 2004/05.

2.6 In the first year of the grant scheme, the following initiatives have been implemented in accordance with the agreed scheme:

- Public access to planning information is due for implementation in 2004
- Planning Portal has been brought fully on-line
- Arrangements in place for the transfer of historic planning data
- Staff enrolled on post-graduate planning courses
- New IT systems are being developed, including a document management system
- Additional temporary staff have been recruited and part-time contracts extended to full-time for key members of staff

3 PROPOSALS FOR 2004/05

3.1 The key to making best use of the PDG must be to help develop the capacity of the service to continue to deliver a high level of performance to the benefit of the customers and thus generate a further reasonable level of funding for this service in the 3rd and final year.

3.2 With this in mind, it is considered that the grant should continue to be used to develop the service in the following broad categories:

A. Public Access and Document Management

The implementation of document management will ensure the widest range of information about planning is available to residents and customers.

B. Historic Planning Information

The three-year project to input planning history to the computer system will continue, with the aim being to provide a comprehensive on-line resource to all applications submitted to the authority from 1948 onwards. In addition, it is proposed to archive planning enforcement records.

C. Training

The training programme for both Members and Officers on planning and planning related issues will continue to be developed.

For Staff, training might include the offer of a bursary to undertake additional training in a planning related subject, or to obtain a management qualification.

For Members, more training sessions will be provided that seek to delve more deeply into planning and planning related matters.

D. Planning on the Web

The Planning Portal now provides applicants with an opportunity to make planning applications on-line without the need to fill-in a paper application form.

Further development of the planning homepages on the website will enable all representations to the development plan to be submitted through on-line forms. In addition, on-line forms will be introduced to provide broader options for people wishing to submit queries about planning, enforcement complaints, etc.

E. IT Equipment

The provision of additional IT equipment will enable the full implementation of public access to planning information. PC's for public use will be available in Receptions.

Some additional IT equipment has been provided for the Local Plans Team; as work towards the local plan inquiry continues, further equipment is likely to be required.

The public access systems need to be widely available across the district: it is proposed there be consideration given to the provision of a small grant to Parish Council's to ensure that planning information can be easily transmitted between authorities. This item could be considered by the Parish Liaison Sub-committee.

F. Staffing Issues

There is no doubt that some authorities have used PDG to provide staff retention bonuses or to increase salary payments. Recruitment of suitable qualified planning staff is no easier now than this time last year. Retention bonuses may be an option to consider, though most staff have remained in post over the last year.

It is proposed that the Delivery Grant continues to be used to continue to provide full-time hours for selected part-time posts within the Division.

In addition, additional opportunities will be investigated to recruit new staff on short-term contracts, particularly on the basis of family friendly arrangements, to help build capacity in the Division.

The emergence of 'Local Development Documents' to replace Local Plans will provide a significant resource challenge for the Authority. The use of Consultants to provide an input to the process would certainly be useful and help to pave the way for the change.

G. Policy Development and Surveys

The completion of the review of the local plan and the preparation of the Local Development Framework are key tasks for the next 3-4 years. The LDF is very different from the current local plan and whilst there will be an opportunity to carry forward policies and proposals, there is a requirement to undertake extensive survey and analysis work, and this will need to be kept under regular review. With this in mind, the delivery grant offers the opportunity to undertake new surveys and to update existing information. For example, there is a need to provide updated information on local wildlife sites and on urban capacity.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Planning Delivery Grant offers the opportunity to build capacity in the delivery of a quality Planning Service.
- 4.2 It is proposed that the broad programme of initiatives for the service continue to be developed over the period of the grant from 2003 - 2006. Further reports will be brought to Members as the programme develops, to explain the detail of the initiatives being developed and to monitor progress.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The provision of the Planning Delivery Grant is an additional resource made available by the Government for the period 2003 - 2006. The level of grant paid in 2004 - 2006 will be dependent upon maintaining and, if possible, improving current levels of performance in development control and the delivery of an up to date development plan. The PDG for 2004/05 is £280,654.
- 5.2 The proposals are structured so that, where possible, expenditure matches resources available and that this additional funding does not lead to significant long-term financial commitment for the Authority.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That approval be given to the broad programme of initiatives outlined in the report for the Planning Delivery Grant. (HPS)

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Background Papers:

Letter from Keith Hill, MP., dated 8th March 2004.

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