IS/ICT AND e-GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

1   SUMMARY

1.1   This report updates Members on the Council's IS/ICT and e-Government strategies and proposes the programme of projects to be funded in 2002/03.

2   INTRODUCTION

2.1   The Council's IS/ICT strategy 2001/02 to 2005/06 was noted at Full Council on 24 April 2001. Section 5 of the strategy was submitted to the then Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions as the Council's Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement in May 2001.

2.2   The IEG Statement was assessed by the Government as being satisfactory subject to two areas where improvements were required. These related to a need for greater detail on implementation of the strategy and information about participation in national projects.

2.3   As a result of the satisfactory assessment, a £200,000 capital grant for e-government projects has now been received. This report sets out proposals for the utilisation for this funding, together with proposals for use of the Council's IS/ICT budget for 2002/03.

3   DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

3.1   The Council has made considerable strides in the implementation of its IEG statement. In respect of national projects, the Council has made progress in implementing both the National Land and Property Gazetteer and the National Land Information Service.

3.2   The implementation of the uniform/CAPS system for planning and land charges scheduled for August 2002 will bring on-line planning and land charges a step nearer. The website and intranet has also been relaunched during this year.

3.3   The Authority has also participated in the Essex Online partnership bid for Local Government Online Funding. The partnership has recently been awarded £300,000 for shared delivery initiatives with a further £50,000 to assist in developing and supporting the partnership. There is the potential for a further £300,000 in 2003/04. The Council will be working with other authorities in Essex to identify suitable projects to be implemented with this funding.

3.4   At the previous meeting of this Committee on 20 June 2002, a
        response to the e-gov@local consultation was agreed and this has
        been submitted to the government. Again, this shows that the Council
        is participating and responding to national projects.

3.5   The Council's Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Plan, which
        was approved by the Council on 27 June 2002, contains clear targets
        for the delivery of IS/ICT systems. The Plan commits the Council to
        use new technology to develop the following in 2002/03:-

        • Improve the website to provide information about Council services

        • A one stop notification process to enable the residents to inform
          change of contact details once rather than telling each department.

        • Links to the National Land Information System enabling local land
          charge searches to be made electronically .

        • Linking planning applications to the GIS (Geographical Information
          System) so that residents can look at planning applications on line.

        • Setting up systems to enable residents to pay Council Tax on line.

        • Setting up document imaging to store more information
          electronically.
        •
3.6   In addition, the Plan commits the Council to achieving in 2003:-

        • Access to Committee agendas, reports and minutes on line.

        • e-procurement across the Authority.

3.7   The Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Plan also commits
        the Council to achieving by 2005 the delivery of services electronically,
        wherever possible, to those who wish to access them in this manner, in
        line with central government targets.

3.8   On the basis of the projects identified in the Corporate Plan and Best
        Value Performance Plan, the requirements of the IEG funding, and the
        needs of individual services, the following list of priority projects is
        proposed for implementation in 2002/03:-

        • Planning and Land Charges on line
        • Council Tax/National Non-Domestic Rate/Benefits on line
        • Auddis (Paperless Direct Debit System)
        • Environmental Health replacement system

- Housing – system upgrade or replacement
- Virtual private network (to enable quicker, more effective links between the Civic Suite, Council Offices and other sites)
- Members PCs
  (including fax machines for Group Leaders and Committee Chairmen)
- Document Image Processing (to store information electronically)
- Customer feedback project/management software
- PRROMPT software (to record letters/complaints)
- Internet/Website development

3.9   Other initiatives which have been identified for implementation, funding permitting, include:-

- E-procurement
  (possible County-wide initiative)

- Homelessness package

- Academy decision support (to enable reports to be more easily produced)

3.10   It is suggested that a separate report on options for electronic communication by Members is submitted in the next cycle of meetings for detailed consideration.

4   LOCAL LAND CHARGES

4.1   To enable the Council to progress further in implementing the National Land Information Service requirements, the Authority is required to implement a differential fee to ensure that the electronic land charge service offered by the National Land Information Service is attractive to users, rather than using the traditional means of submitting searches. The Government suggests that a minimum 18% differential is set with the over the counter, or non-NLIS searches being more expensive. This matter was highlighted in the report to the previous meeting of this Committee on the review of fees and charges.

4.2   To maintain income levels while providing an 18% differential the government propose that search fees should be increased by 3.75%. This figure is based on a projected figure of 20% of searches made through NLIS in the coming year. For Rochford this means an increase in the standard search fee of £5 from £135 to £140. NLIS searches would then be charged at £114.80 (£140 less 18%).

5   IEG 2 STATEMENT

5.1   There is a requirement for the Council to produce its second IEG Statement by 7 October 2002. This must demonstrate progress in implementation of the first Statement together with a list of projects for achievement in 2003/04. A further allocation of £200,000 of e-Government funding will depend on its successful submission. However, at the time of writing this report, the Government guidance on the production of IEG 2 Statements had not yet been produced.

5.2   Members are therefore asked in considering the proposals in this report to also agree them as the basis for the submission of the IEG 2 Statement by 7 October 2002.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   The total funding available for IS/ICT and e-Government initiatives in 2002/03 is as follows:-

- £200,000 e-Government capital grant from the government
- £70,000 within the Council's existing revenue estimates
- £30,000 within the Council's existing capital programme
- £20,000 provision for website and intranet development within the existing revenue estimates.

6.2   Both the Council's existing requirements and the funding for implementing electronic government will be used together to ensure effective implementation of the proposals in the report.

7   RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to recommend to Council -

(1)   That the proposals in the report be adopted as the basis of the Council's IS/ICT and E-government implementation plans for 2002/03.

(2)   That a further report on options for electronic communication by Members be submitted in the next cycle of meetings.

(3)   That the differential pricing proposed for land charge searches received via the NLIS system be approved.

(4)   That the proposals in the report be approved as the basis for the submission of the Council's IEG 2 Statement.

Sarah Fowler

Head of Administrative and Member Services

Background Papers:

IS/ICT Strategy 2001/2002.
e-Government Strategy Update report to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee on 13 November 2001.

For further information please contact Sarah Fowler on:-

Tel:-   01702 546366 (Ext 3800)
E-Mail:-   sarah.fowler@rochford.gov.uk