

PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2006/07 - UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on planning delivery grant expenditure in the current financial year, as requested by the Policy, Finance and Performance Committee (Minute 186/06).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The planning delivery grant (PDG) is provided to local planning Authorities to assist service development and performance improvement. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) suggest that the grant be used to help prepare the new development plan documents, develop IT systems, obtain assistance from consultants and provide training.

- 2.2 The broad areas for expenditure in Rochford were agreed as being:-

- Public Access and Document Management
- IT enhancements
- Training
- Staffing
- Policy Development, Surveys and Community Consultation
- Processing major applications.

3 PROGRESS

- 3.1 In the current financial year to date the following items have been progressed:-

A. Public Access and Document Management

- New web server to run the public access database – the aim is to ensure the system runs as quickly as possible and suffers minimal downtime.
- Arrangements are in hand to scan all remaining paper planning files (back to 1999/2000) into the Comino document management system.
- Initial investigations underway to introduce bar coding for planning and building control applications and development plan representations.

B. IT Enhancements

- New software to enable representations to development plan documents to be submitted electronically, with all information being automatically collated in the back office – it is anticipated this software will significantly reduce the amount of time spent by officers processing representations.

C. Training

- Assistant planners continue their postgraduate planning studies.
- Member training in affordable housing.
- Planning tour in October 2006.

D. Staffing

- Temporary (initially 18 months) enforcement officer appointed to assist with on-site investigations in particular.

E. Policy Development, Surveys & Community Consultation

- Strategic Environmental Assessments completed for draft Core Strategy and 8 supplementary planning documents.
- Conservation appraisals and management plans for Rayleigh and Rochford (have been prepared and are nearing final approval). Plans for the remaining conservation areas are being prepared.
- Work in hand to commission an update of the Urban Capacity Study – a crucial element of the development plan evidence base.

F. Major Applications

- Officers have attended a training session with the Planning Advisory Service.
- A guide for developers has been published, together with checklists of documents required when applications are submitted.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The provision of the planning delivery grant is an additional resource made available by the Government to all Local Planning Authorities. The PDG for 2006/07 is £229,900. A further PDG is expected for 2007/08, though qualifying criteria are likely to change with more focus on the delivery of new housing.

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- 4.2 The proposals for expenditure of PDG 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. 25% of the PDG must be spent on capital items.
- 4.3 Expenditure and commitments to date on the various items in the plan are as follows:-
- A. Public Access and Document Management - £35,000
 - B. IT Enhancements - £20,000
 - C. Training - £10,000
 - D. Staffing - £25,000
 - E. Policy Development, etc - £42,000

No significant expenditure has, as yet, been required to introduce new procedures and processes to the arrangements for dealing with major applications.

5 RECOMMENDATION

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

That subject to comments from Members, progress on the various planning delivery grant initiatives be noted.

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Background Papers:-

None

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