

PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2006/07

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides details of the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) for 2006/07 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 £350 million available to Local Authorities as a 'Planning Delivery Grant' over the 3 years from 2003-2006.
- 2.2 The Government has now identified a further £135 million to support planning services in 2006/07, reflecting the requirement for Local Authorities to achieve Public Sector Agreement 5 and 6 (Development Control Performance) by March 2007.
- 2.3 Grant assessment is now based on a range of issues including speed of determination of applications, e-planning services, housing growth areas, preparation of LDF annual monitoring reports and appeal performance.
- 2.4 The ODPM has suggested that PDG resources 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 in the year to June 2005, together with significant achievements in e-planning, Rochford has been awarded £229,900 for 2006/07.
- 2.6 Since the launch of the PDG, the following initiatives have been implemented in Rochford:-
- public access to planning – recently upgraded to enable application plans to be viewed through the website
 - Planning Portal to enable inline submission of planning applications

- staff enrolled on post graduate planning courses;
- employment of temporary staff and part time contracts extended to full time for key members of staff;
- new IT equipment provided to assist the use of the document management system;
- research work carried out to support the preparation of the LDF, including contributions to a strategic flood risk assessment; and
- new run of aerial photographs.

3 PROPOSALS FOR 2006/07

- 3.1 The key to continuing to make best of the PDG must be to help develop the capacity of the service to ensure we deliver a high level of performance to the benefit of the customers. It is also important to bear in mind that performance, particularly in relation to processing applications, is one of the main determinants of PDG allocation, and if the Government does decide to continue PDG, significant performance gains must be demonstrated to ensure maximum payments are achieved.
- 3.2 Disappointingly, along with a substantial number of other Authorities, the Government has decided that Rochford will not achieve the required performance target of processing 60% of major applications within 13 weeks by June 2006. Therefore, the Authority has been placed on measures for 2006/07, which means that performance on major applications will be closely scrutinised.
- 3.3 With these points in mind, it is considered that the PDG should continue to be used to develop the service in the following broad categories:-

A Public Access & Document Management

The implementation of Public Access and the display of application plans on the website is important information, but the Authority still has a significant amount of paper files in planning and building control that must be made available electronically. Only by continuing to transfer historic information can the electronic systems be made the prime source of planning information.

B IT Enhancements

Innovations in IT equipment and development of the Council's software systems mean that initiatives, including mobile computing, are becoming a reality, enabling case officers to carry electronic versions of files.

Increasingly systems are becoming available that enable customers to establish through an online 'expert' system whether planning consent is required. It is proposed to introduce such a system to Rochford.

Other IT enhancements will be provided to improve the quality of service to customers, including further developments to the advice and information on the website, development of the enforcement system to enable customers to track enforcement cases online, developments to the LDF process and greater use of options for electronic communication and consultation. A web cam system to broadcast live pictures of the development control committee is being investigated.

Finally, it is proposed to set aside a budget to enable an update of the aerial photographs to be provided in 2007/08.

C Training

The training programme for both members and officers on planning and planning related matters will continue to be developed.

The members' training programme merits particular attention with the likely introduction of mandatory training session for the development control committee.

D Staffing Issues

There is no doubt that some Authorities continue to use PDG to provide staff retention bonuses or to increase salary payments. Recruitment of suitably qualified staff is no easier now than it has been over the past few years.

However, the PDG has been used to provide additional hours to part-time posts and to provide some additional support resources, in policy planning for example. It is proposed that these arrangements continue and that options for additional staff resources be regularly reviewed.

The new LDF development plan documents have completely changed the arrangements for preparing policy documents and there is no doubt that there is a significant resource challenge for the Authority. The use of consultants to provide an input to the process has already proved to be important and the Council has been able to make cost effective use of the expertise available in the County Council to prepare conservation area appraisals, strategic environment assessments and other key pieces of work.

E Policy Development, Surveys and Community Consultation

The completion of the Local Development Framework folder of development plan documents is a crucial piece of work for the Council over the next 3-4 years (and beyond).

The LDF is very different from the current Local Plan and there is a requirement to prepare baseline survey information and then to assess

change in the district against this to determine the success of the emerging policies and proposals. Regular survey and review is therefore a key component of the new system.

With this in mind, as has already been mentioned, the PDG offers the opportunity to undertake the new survey work and to update existing information. For example, there will be a requirement for updates to the information on wildlife sites and on urban capacity.

Another element of the system is the expanded requirement for community engagement and consultation. The requirements will vary from one development plan document to the next and on the stage that has been reached. Nevertheless, part of the PDG can be used to fund the costs of consultation as required, certainly during this year and 2007/08.

F Processing Major Applications

Internal arrangements for managing major applications have been reviewed and adjusted in an effort to improve performance. The development of advice on S106 agreements, enhanced guidance to developers and implementation of other changes as may be required by the Government Office will be required to ensure that a significant improvement in performance is achieved and thereafter maintained.

- 3.4 It is suggested that the breakdown of the grant to each of these areas be as follows:-

A – Public Access and Document Management	£50,000
B – IT Enhancements	£30,000
C – Training	£15,000
D - Staffing	£44,000
E – Policy Development, Surveys and Community Consultation related to the LDF	£60,000
F – Processing Major Applications	£30,000

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Planning Delivery Grant offers the opportunity to continue 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. Further reports will be brought to members as the programme develops, to explain the detail of the initiatives being introduced.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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. It is not yet known whether further PDG will be paid in 2007/08 or beyond.
- 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. 25% of the PDG must be spent on capital items.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 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.

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Background Papers:-

None

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