
INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report recommends the adoption of an Information Systems/Information Technology (IS/IT) Strategy. This Strategy will include the Council's Electronic Government Statement.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 When the Council re-tendered its IT facilities management service last year, it was agreed that an IS/IT Strategy should be prepared to guide future IT developments and expenditure. Although originally due to be prepared last autumn, the production of the Strategy was deferred so that it may take account of the new requirement on local authorities to deliver all services electronically by 2005.
- 2.2 The Head of Administrative and Member Services and the Vantagepoint consultancy have jointly prepared the suggested Strategy document attached to this report. Mr Steve Watson of Vantagepoint will be attending the Sub-Committee's meeting to present the Strategy.
- 2.3 There is no statutory requirement to prepare an IS/IT Strategy. However, the development of the Council's services requires investment in new technology. The Council is also required to submit an electronic government statement to the Government Office for the Eastern Region by the end of June 2001.

3 IS/IT STRATEGY

- 3.1 In common with all local authorities, the Council relies on information and communication technology (ICT) and information systems (IS) to support key business processes and to deliver public services. It is therefore important that the Council takes a strategic approach to the use of IS/ICT to ensure that it continues to provide services in the most effective and economic way.
- 3.2 This Strategy has been developed to set out a strategic approach to the use of ICT and IS in order to meet the key business requirements and aspirations of the Council. Importantly, it also seeks to address the IS/ICT support necessary to develop those initiatives proposed within the Best Value Performance Plan, Corporate Plan and individual service strategies such as those for leisure and housing.
- 3.3 The Strategy has been produced following consultation with Members, Heads of Service and the Council's new IT facilities management contractor, Securicor Information Systems. Particular attention has

been given to where further investment in systems and technology may generate future savings or significant improvement in the quality of the Council's services. Indeed, it is clear that if the Council is to continue to improve its current services, offer new services and still operate within budgetary limits, it must exploit the latest developments in ICT wherever possible.

4 ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

- 4.1 The Government has set Councils the target of delivering all services capable of electronic service delivery by this method by 2005. It also requires 25% of all services to be delivered electronically by the end of 2002. The Council is required to produce an electronic government statement by the end of June 2001 identifying how it will meet these targets.
- 4.2 The statement must also identify the steps that the Council will take to ensure that all businesses and residents are in a position to take advantage of the latest developments in technology. There is a specific requirement to address the needs of those who would otherwise be excluded from the benefits brought by new technology.
- 4.3 This Council is fortunate in that it has already made a significant investment in new technology in recent years that has resulted in considerable improvements in service delivery. Indeed, it is arguably this continued commitment to improve services despite the budgetary pressures facing the Authority that has resulted in its achieving the highest satisfaction rating amongst residents of all Essex Councils. The Council also has a good track record promoting initiatives that help to ensure that Rochford residents and businesses benefit from information technology.
- 4.4 Members will be aware that in the best value survey undertaken last December, 31% of Rochford residents identified a desire to deal with the Council by electronic means. With the continued growth in access to the Internet, there is every likelihood that this figure will increase in the future and it is important that the Council responds appropriately. However the Strategy also recognises the importance of continuing traditional methods of service delivery and communication for those who prefer to deal with the Council in this way.
- 4.5 The attached draft IS/IT Strategy therefore includes a suggested electronic government statement (Section 5) which takes account of Government advice published in February this year and indicates how the Council will achieve delivery of its services by electronic means. It is acknowledged however that the proposals will need to be updated each year when the IS/IT Strategy itself is reviewed.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council's crime and disorder reduction strategy recognises the importance of partner agencies sharing information in order to identify where each can best direct its efforts. The Strategy has been prepared with the need for information sharing in mind.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Increased use of electronic communications has the potential to reduce the need for travel by both Council staff and the wider community. It will also assist in reducing the Council's use of paper.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The continuing development of services that meet the requirements of local residents in a cost effective manner will require further investment in information systems and technology.
- 7.2 In order to minimise the future level of investment needed, the Strategy recognises the need to work closely with its public and private sector partners. As Members will note, the Strategy as presently drafted will require investment of £1.324m over 5 years and it is clear that additional central government funding will be essential if the Council's vision set out at paragraph 5.21 of the strategy is to be achieved. The Head of Administrative and Member Services has therefore made this point forcefully to Government in response to recent documents received on electronic service delivery.
- 7.3 Significant staff time will also needed to implement the strategy.
- 7.4 In response to concerns made by this and other Councils, Government has indicated that it will now make available funding over the next 3 years to assist with the implementation of electronic service delivery. In an initial consultation proposal, it has suggested that £250,000 be made available to District Councils in both 2002/2003 and 2003/04. However, this money will be dependent on a bid process involving the submission of an acceptable electronic government statement.
- 7.5 The cost of producing the attached strategy when staff time is taken into account is estimated at £25,000.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Strategy addresses the Council's responsibilities under data protection legislation. There are no other direct legal issues arising.

9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Strategy takes account of the Council's previous commitment in principle to communicate with Parish Councils and parish councillors by electronic means.

10 RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the attached draft IS/IT Strategy and in particular the proposals summarised at Section 9 of the Strategy and to recommend the adoption of a Strategy (including an electronic government statement), together with any comments or amendments, to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.
(HAMS)

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Background Papers:

Government consultation papers on electronic government

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