

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services

Planning Committee : 7 February 2007

Subject: E-Planning Efficient Government Programme

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To update the Committee on progress with the Scottish Executive's e-planning efficient government programme and to seek authorisation for a temporary post of e-Planning Project Manager.

2. Background

- 2.1** A report to Planning Committee last April advised of the Scottish Executive's e-Planning Efficient Government Programme. The Committee endorsed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between this Council and the Scottish Executive to deliver a step change in planning service delivery and drive forward efficiencies in the planning system.

- 2.2** The new CAPs Uniform software has now been successfully introduced to both Development Management and Building Standards. This forms a solid base for the development of the five further work streams which make up the Executive's initiative. These are:

- online submission of applications and appeals – a single shared service that provides a consistent and easy to use form to submit planning applications online, including online location plan production, online payment of planning fees and integration with back-office e-planning systems.
- online access to casework information and electronic records and document management – locally installed systems that allow citizens, agents and consultees to view and track planning applications online and to view all the drawings and associated documents online.
- expert system that answers common questions such as “Do I need planning permission?” and sends an official e-mail confirming the outcome, when appropriate.
- online local plans – introduce best practice in online local plans, including the development of interactive local plans that allow address based querying of local plan policies and proposals maps.

- e-consultations – systems to improve consultation process between planning authorities and their internal and external consultees, includes the development of standards for electronic consultation requests and facilitating the transition from paper to electronic based consultation.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The Executive has appointed Deloitte as their main consultants/advisers and considerable progress is being made towards implementing the initiative. Each Council has to appoint an E-planning Project Manager. This post cannot be undertaken within existing staff resources and it is intended that it will be filled in the near future, on a temporary basis, initially for two years. The salary grade for this post would be AP5 to P02-05.
- 3.2** The funding for the project has been simplified to the extent that West Dunbartonshire Council will now receive £281,000 to pay for all software and hardware costs in implementing the five work streams. West Dunbartonshire Council (as all councils) has only to cover any staff costs – in our case the salary of the temporary e-planning Project Manager. This could be done initially from the £40,000 included in the current capital programme for this e-planning project, rolled forward into next financial year. A commitment to funding in 2008/2009 would also be required.
- 3.3** The intention is that the bulk of the development will take place in financial year 2007/8 with completion in the early part of 2009/10. The need to extend the period of employment of the staff member and the accompanying funding commitment beyond the initial commitment to March 2009, could be required depending on progress.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** The post of e-planning Project Manager is being carried out on an interim basis by the Planning Services Manager but this is not sustainable and the project needs a full time project manager to succeed. This should be done on a temporary basis, possibly by secondment.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** A total of £281,000 is being made available to West Dunbartonshire Council for this project on the basis that appropriate arrangements are in place and any staff costs are covered by West Dunbartonshire Council. Provision for staff costs has currently been made in the capital programme but commitments will need to be carried into 2008/09 in the first instance.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** Successful implementation of the Scottish Executive's initiative is dependent on the early appointment of an e-planning Project Manager. Without proper resource arrangements there is a risk that the full £281,000 funding will not be forthcoming and this one-off chance to embrace modernisation could be lost.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1** Successful implementation of the e-planning initiative will allow improved service delivery and will make many aspects of planning more accessible and efficient for all users of the service, including, for example, applicants and objectors. This is a one-off opportunity to access considerable central funding to allow progress to be made.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1** The Committee is asked to note the content of this report.
- 8.2** The Committee agrees to the temporary appointment of an E-Planning Manager for a an initial period of 2 years on a salary grade of AP5-P02 to P05.
- 8.3** The Committee notes that £40,000 funding is presently available to cover the year 2007/08 and agrees to commit a further £40,000 from the General Services Capital Budget of 2008/09 to meet the costs of this appointment.

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Appendix: None

Background Papers: Report to Planning Committee on 5 April 2005

Wards Affected: All