



EXECUTIVE

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE TO BE HELD IN THE PRINCIPAL COMMITTEE ROOM, THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON ON WEDNESDAY 10TH JANUARY 2007 AT 18:15.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 6 December (attached)
3. Public Question Time
4. Declaration of Interests
5. Risk Management Strategy
Report of Head of Environment and Leisure (attached)
6. Improving Services in Somerset (ISiS) Programme Update
Report of Strategic Director and Programme Manager (attached)
7. Provision of IT in Development Control
Report of Development Control Manager (attached)

G P DYKE
Member Services Manager
03 January 2007



Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion. Lift access to the main committee room on the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is a time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, please contact Greg Dyke on:



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Website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk (Council, Executive, Review Board & Review Panel Agenda, Reports and Minutes are available on the Website)

Executive – 6 December 2006

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Cavill, Clark, Garner and Hall

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director),
Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director), Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic
Director), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mrs E Collacott
(Principal Accountant), Mr S Rutledge (Corporate Property Manager)
and Mr G P Dyke (Democratic Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Bowrah, Henley, Stuart-Thorn and Wedderkopp.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

96. Apologies

Councillors Leighton and Mrs Lewin-Harris.

97. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 November and 15 November 2006 were taken as read and were signed subject to Minute 91(ii) (15 November) being amended to read "Councillor Garner confirmed that there were no further VAT implications on service charges.

98. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley, as a member of the public asked the following questions:

- (i) the campaign by the Council to persuade residents of the benefits of building affordable homes at Gay Close, Wellington had gained little public support. In this connection, Councillor Henley presented a petition, which had been promoted by local residents, objecting to the proposed scheme. In view of this opposition he asked if the Council would consider dropping the scheme.

Councillor Garner accepted the petition and stated that he was comfortable with the way this proposal was being handled. Councillor Williams added that it was the Council's responsibility to work with local residents to overcome any fears and concerns.

- (ii) there were ongoing concerns in relation to the planned disposal of Council owned land at Highfields, Stoke St Gregory. The building and land had not been sold at auction as it failed to reach its reserve price. He asked what the reserve price had been, how much was the highest bid, who submitted it and were negotiations ongoing with the same bidder. Councillor Henley acknowledged that this information was

exempt and stated that in the circumstances he was happy to receive a written reply.

Councillor Williams reminded Councillor Henley that this information had been reported to a recent meeting of the Review Board. Councillor Cavill added that this was, indeed, exempt information and that he would provide Councillor Henley with a written reply.

99. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Mrs Bradley, Clark and Stuart-Thorn declared personal interests in Concessionary Travel as holders of concessionary bus passes.

100. Savings Delivery Plans

Reported that the Heads of Service had, as part of the budget process for 2007/08, produced savings delivery plans which would enable the forecast budget gap to be closed to within £131k. Details were submitted of the targets issued to the Heads of Service and the proposed level of savings that had been identified by them. The detailed delivery plans were submitted for consideration.

The Review Board had considered the savings delivery plans at its meeting on 30 November 2006 and details of their comments were submitted.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the updated budget gap for 2007/08 be noted; and
- (b) the proposals outlined in the savings delivery plans be agreed and included in the draft 2007/08 budget.

101. Fees and Charges 2007/2008

Consideration was given to the proposed fees and charges for 2007/08 for Waste Services, Cemeteries and Crematorium and Licensing. Details were submitted on the proposed charges for each of the above services. The recent public consultation "Your Council, Your Views" had clearly indicated that the public preferred to see increases in the fees and charges rather than in Council Tax as a way for the Council to raise income. Therefore, where possible, fees had been increased to take these views into account.

With regard to Waste Services, the Somerset Waste Partnership had agreed these charges as the harmonised charges that would apply during 2007/08 in preparation for the integrated service contract.

The Cemeteries and Crematorium service fees had been largely increased by RPI. An exception to this was an additional increase in the cremation fee. The increase in the cremation fee would be used to fund an increase in the grounds maintenance budget of the Crematorium. The total additional income generated from these increases would be £44,000.

A summary of the Licensing fees and charges was submitted. With the exception of those fees that were set by statute and set nationally, income from the proposed increases in fees was expected to generate an additional £6,700 in 2007/08.

In previous years the proposed fees for the Land Charges Service had been considered at this time. However, the Department for Constitutional Affairs were currently consulting on several significant changes to the way in which local authorities could charge for land charge services. The revised guidance on these changes was awaited and therefore it was not possible to make a recommendation on the fee levels.

The Review Board had considered the proposed fees and charges at its meeting on 30 November 2006 and details of the comments were submitted.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the fees and charges for 2007/08 in respect of Waste Services, Cemeteries and Crematorium and Licensing be agreed.

102. Capital Strategy 2006/09

Submitted for consideration the draft Capital Strategy for 2006-2009. Although there was not a requirement for the Council to prepare a Capital Strategy, in terms of setting direction for use of the Council's capital resources the strategy was seen as a "must have" document. This was borne out by the Capital Strategy being regarded as a key document in the CPA Use of Resources self-assessment.

The revised draft Strategy for 2006-2009 had been updated from last year's version by incorporating new developments being undertaken by the Council and refreshing the financial data included within the document.

The Review Board had considered the draft document at its meeting on 30 November 2006 and details were submitted of the comments made at that meeting.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the Capital Strategy for 2006-2009 be agreed.

103. Asset Management Plan 2006 and the Performance of the Property Portfolio

The Asset Management Plan for 2006/2007 had now been completed and was submitted for consideration. The format of the report had been changed from that submitted in previous years. It was now viewed as a living document installed on the Internet and amended whenever there was a change in the Council's assets.

Generally, the Council's buildings were in reasonable condition with only 4% exhibiting major defects and not operating as intended. The Plan had been

submitted to the Review Board at its meeting on 30 November 2006 and details of their views and comments were submitted.

As with the Capital Strategy there was no requirement for the Council to prepare an Asset Management Plan, however it was also considered as a key document in the CPA Use of Resources.

RESOLVED that the 2006/2007 Asset Management Plan be noted.

104. Council Tax Base 2207/08

It was reported that the Council Tax Base, which was calculated annually, had to be set between 1 December and 31 January each year.

The Council tax base was the Band D equivalent of the properties included in the Valuation Officer's banding list as at 30 November 2006, as adjusted for voids, appeals, new properties etc., and the provision for non-collection.

The Band D equivalent was arrived at by taking the laid down proportion of each Band as compared to Band D, and aggregating the total. The approved base had to be notified to the County Council, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority, and to each of the parishes.

Adjustments had also been included for new dwellings and for initial void exemptions for empty properties. The Council Tax Base for 2006/07 was 39,358.90 and the recommended base for 2007/08 of 39,786.35 represented an increase of 427.45 or 1.07%.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the report of the Financial services Manager for the calculation of the Council Tax base for the whole and parts of the area for 2007/08 be approved;
- (b) pursuant to the Financial Services Manager's report, and in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Taunton Deane Borough Council as its Tax Base for the whole area for the year 2007/08 shall be 39,786.35 and for the parts of the area listed below shall, for 2007/08 be:-

Ash Priors	74.00
Ashbrittle	88.39
Bathealton	80.85
Bishops Hull	1,079.90
Bishops Lydeard/Cothelstone	1,919.98
Bradford on Tone	278.16
Burrowbridge	203.46
Cheddon Fitzpaine	643.95
Chipstable	119.73

Churchstanton	308.21
Combe Florey	122.31
Comeytrove	2,088.55
Corfe	130.16
Creech St Michael	943.89
Durstun	57.64
Fitzhead	123.31
Halse	143.54
Hatch Beauchamp	256.79
Kingston St Mary	460.80
Langford Budville	215.56
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	198.30
Milverton	593.29
Neroche	246.02
North Curry	717.91
Norton Fitzwarren	696.58
Nynehead	153.26
Oake	329.74
Otterford	166.26
Pitminster	454.24
Ruishton/Thornfalcon	620.40
Sampford Arundel	131.54
Staplegrove	711.86
Stawley	120.43
Stoke St Gregory	384.75
Stoke St Mary	210.55
Taunton	15,914.40
Trull	1,022.07
Wellington	4,576.12
Wellington (Without)	297.40
West Bagborough	157.33
West Buckland	405.03
West Hatch	141.36
West Monkton	1,111.64
Wiveliscombe	1,086.71
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Total	39,786.35
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105. The Legal Form of the Somerset Waste Board

Reported that the Somerset Waste Partnership was working towards the creation of a Somerset Waste Board that would manage the disposal and collection waste functions across the whole of Somerset. This would include the new integrated waste collection contract for the whole of Somerset that was currently being procured. It was expected that this arrangement would lead to increased efficiencies and improved service delivery.

There are a number of options that could be used to establish the legal form of the Somerset Waste Board. Consideration was given to the various

options. The Somerset Waste Partnership had been advised by its external legal advisors on the preferred option for the legal form of the Board and its legal sub group had recommended that the Somerset Waste Board adopt the Joint Committee with administering authority model in the short term with a view to the creation of a joint authority as the long term solution.

In order to ensure the Somerset Waste Board had an appropriate legal form in the short and long term and having regard to the need to mitigate risk and resolve these issues in a timely cost effective manner it was RESOLVED that:

- (1) in the short-term the legal form of the Somerset Waste Board be a Joint Committee with Administering Authority;
- (2) the Somerset Waste Partnership apply to create a Joint Waste Authority using:
 - (i) the powers that are expected to arise from the Local Government Bill following the recently published White Paper; or
 - (ii) the Local Government Act 1999 powers.
- (3) having regard to the balance of risk, cost and time the option of using a joint committee with company structure be ruled out.

106. **Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper**

Submitted report previously circulated which dealt with the issue raised in the White Paper of unitary status and two-tier partnership models, including pathfinders. The report did not seek to analyse these options but sought direction on the various options available. These options were:-

- To support Unitary Authorities for Somerset.
- To support a formal pathfinder bid for Somerset.
- To support enhanced two-tier working across Somerset.

The White Paper set out a series of reforms which were designed to empower citizens and communities, create stronger more visible leadership and put in place a new framework within which local authorities and partners could work to improve their areas. The Paper included an invitation to councils in shire areas to bid for unitary status or enhanced two-tier working. The report dealt solely with this proposal. Detailed discussion took place around the purpose of this invitation, its terms, the criteria for unitary structures and the recognition that in the majority of county areas the Government recognised that reforms would take the form of enhanced two-tier working.

It was reported that Somerset County Council had agreed a motion at its meeting on 22 November 2006, which instructed officers to work on a bid and prepare a submission for the creation of a Unitary Council for the existing area of Somerset. This was to be further considered at a special meeting of the County Council in January 2007.

This Council had made great strides towards delivering much of the White Paper agenda and was at the forefront of improving its performance across all tiers of government. It was considered that this Council's direction of travel accorded highly with the White Paper and that a bid to further enhance two-tier working across the whole of Somerset was the way forward.

With regard to the bid for unitary status for Somerset, concerns were expressed regarding:

- Loss of democratic representation;
- The size, particularly of a single unitary;
- The loss of local identity;
- The loss of local ability to be responsive and make decisions and deliver on behalf of local communities;
- The real ability to pay back transactional costs and to delivery business case projections;
- The distraction that reorganisation would cause to service delivery.

There were other options for Somerset and Taunton Deane which included the possibility of two unitary authorities for Somerset or a Pathfinder bid.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the decision of Somerset County Council to work on a bid and prepare a submission for the creation of a Unitary Council for the existing area of Somerset be not supported
- (ii) further work be undertaken by officers of Taunton Deane on enhancing two-tier working across the whole of Somerset.

107. The Wellsprings Centre

Submitted report which gave details of all the issues that had arisen out of the recovery of the project to build the Wellsprings Centre. These had at long last been effectively resolved and the Council's claim against its original contractors, Mr R W F Warner, trading as Warner Group, had now been settled.

The report also provided details of the overall costs of the project and recommended how a small underspend on the approved budget set aside for its completion should be dealt with.

Details were submitted of the history of the project, together with the Council's subsequent claim against Mr R W F Warner. A financial summary of the costs involved in this contract were also submitted.

The report also summarised some of the significant lessons that had been learnt and the far reaching changes which had been put in place following the experience of this project. This involved recovery project control and reviews and scrutiny arrangements. Although one or two minor items still remained to

be resolved within the Centre, it formed an important and successful element of the leisure facilities being managed by Tone Leisure. The facility was a popular one and trading well providing a valuable resource for both the adjoining school and the community of north Taunton.

The failure of the original construction contract with Warner was extremely damaging to the Authority and to the local community. Its recovery had required considerable resources in both financial and people terms to get the project completed.

A range of lessons had been learned and implemented as set out in the report and those lessons had made a considerable impact on the way that the Council's procurement management now operated.

The budgets approved by the Council to ensure the completion of the project had not been fully exhausted and the sum of £246,000 remained. It was felt that this sum should be returned to unallocated General Fund reserves.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the report be noted and the underspend of £246,000 be returned to unallocated General Fund reserves.
- (ii) in view of the importance of this project, the report be submitted to the February meeting of Council for information.

(The meeting ended at 8.27 pm)

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEETING – 10 JANUARY 2007

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

(This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Williams)

Executive Summary

The Risk Strategy, Policy and Procedures document has now been updated .
These will be distributed to all senior Mangers as a reference for managing risk.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To ask the Executive to formally adopt as Council Policy the “Risk Management Strategy , Policy and Procedures” document as circulated.

2. Report Summary

- 2.1 Following extensive research using the documents listed in the Biography together with newly devised tools for managing risk the “Risk Management Strategy Policy and Procedures” has been completely rewritten and updated.

The document has been assessed by the Audit Commission during the latest “Direction of Travel“ audit and was considered to be an example of best practice.

The Corporate Management Team have been consulted on the document and endorse it.

The Corporate Governance Committee have scrutinised the document at the December meeting and have recommended that the Executive adopt this document as the Council’s Strategy and Policy for the Management of Risk.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Executive adopt this document as the Council’s Strategy and Policy for the Management of Risk.

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TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE 10 JANUARY 2007

**Report of Strategic Director (Shirlene Adam) and Programme Manager
(Jill Sillifant)**

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor T Hall)

IMPROVING SERVICES IN SOMERSET (ISiS) PROGRAMME UPDATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress with the ISiS programme and how TDBC is preparing for its implementation, and summarises the anticipated next steps in the procurement process.

1. Background and Introduction

- 1.1 Members of the Executive last considered progress on the ISiS Programme at its meeting on 5th April 2006. At that meeting, Members received a presentation and in particular reviewed;
 - The Outline Business Case
 - The selection of shortlisted bidders
 - The options appraisal undertaken
 - Consultation arrangements
 - The next steps
- 1.2 All Members have since had the opportunity to hear from the shortlisted bidders directly (presentations at the Old Municipal Buildings and the PCR in July) and to hear a presentation on project progress at the December Members Briefing.
- 1.3 This report presents an update on the overall ISiS Programme, and in particular:-
 - The procurement process so far (including the ITN, evaluation, and programme to closure).
 - An update on the position of Avon and Somerset Constabulary.
 - An update on Programme risks.
 - An update on the external view of ISiS.
 - The arrangements for managing the change process within TDBC.
 - And finally, the Programme budget position.

3. The Procurement Process So Far

3.1 Issuing of the ITN (Invitation to Negotiate)

After short-listing the three potential bidders in March, the two Councils further refined their requirements for the Partnership, including setting out clearly the benefits they expect the Partnership to deliver to the two councils and their wider communities. These requirements and the benefits we expect the Partnership to deliver are set out in the formal “Invitation to Negotiate”, which was issued to bidders in June and is the specification the bidders must address in submitting their bids.

3.2 Bid Submission

All three bidders submitted their bids on the due date of 28 November. These bids fall into two categories:

Standard bids

These indicate how the bidders will help us run the “in scope” services within our current affordability limits (ie the investment levels and the corresponding savings proposed in these bids are based on the current budgets for running the in scope services).

Variant bids

These show how the inclusion of services beyond the scope of those specified for the Partnership can deliver wider, strategic benefits (and savings) for the two councils and their communities.

3.3 The Evaluation process

Both standard and variant bids are currently in the process of being evaluated. The evaluation model is complex; but necessarily so for a programme of this nature. The process includes assessments of how the bidders plan to operate (and improve) the services that will be run by the Partnership, as well as evaluating the wider economic, social and financial benefits that prospective partners indicate they can bring to the councils.

The evaluation process is in four stages:-

Stage 1 – Services

Review of service stream proposals by service managers from both Councils, together with “buddies” from out of scope service areas. This stage will be completed by Christmas 06.

Stage 2 – Organisational criteria

This stage is the core of the evaluation and looks at the five main evaluation criteria (Price and Affordability, Deliverables and Quality, Contract and Risk, Governance and Compliance, and Culture and Partnership). Five separate “segment” panels will establish scores for each bid using these criteria, and will complete this work by mid-January.

Stage 3 – Site Visits and Further Review

This stage involves visits to at least two reference sites for each bidder and their principal subcontractors. These visits will pursue lines of enquiry raised by the previous two stages. Two site visit teams will be making their visits in late January 07.

Stage 4 - Plenary Panel

This comprises the chairs of the five segment panels and will review the evaluation scores in light of the additional information gleaned through Stage 3. The Panel will make draft recommendations to the Joint Programme Board and the Joint Members Advisory Panel; in turn these recommendations will form the basis of advice to Taunton Deane Borough Council's Executive and full Council.

3.4 Programme To Closure

It is expected that the process should by March 2007, be able to offer the authorities a choice around either:-

- Announce the Preferred Bidder; or
- Require further tendering (BAFO); or
- Abandon the process.

The detailed negotiations around financial closure will take around another three months. It is hoped it will be possible to enter into an interim service contract with the Preferred Bidder to start some services running straight away.

4. Avon and Somerset Constabulary

- 4.1 Members will be aware that there is a possibility that the Constabulary may rejoin the ISiS Programme. The Constabulary is working on its own business case and services specification, for review by the Police Authority imminently. Both Councils are negotiating terms of entry for the Constabulary to the programme. A verbal update on this will be provided at the meeting.

5. Programme Risks

- 5.1 There is a rigorous process of programme and contract risk identification and mitigation in place for the ISiS Programme. This is reviewed monthly by the Joint Programme Board.

6. The External View of ISiS

- 6.1 The framework arrangements for the Partnership were drawn up so that other public sector organisations in the South West could also join, or benefit from the services that the Partnership will offer. To date, over 30 local authorities have expressed an interest in joining the arrangement. This particular initiative is being supported and developed on a regional basis through the South West Centre of Excellence.

6.2 Further national interest is also gathering a head of steam, including interest from the Cabinet Office, at whose request a case study article has been written and published in their national Shared Services Bulletin. A copy of this article is attached at Appendix A.

7. Preparing the council for change At TDBC

7.1 Staff who fall within the scope of the ISiS Partnership and who will move to the Joint Venture arrangement need to be properly prepared for, and supported through the significant change that lies ahead. Work is already taking place within the corporate services headship to ensure there is a smooth and successful transition to the new arrangements and that staff and managers are properly prepared for this new environment.

7.2 This work is being supported by the 4Ps, who are taking a keen interest in our plans and see our programme as a potential national model for establishing good practice.

7.3 Planning and preparation for change will not however be confined purely to these services that are “in scope” – setting up the Partnership is intended to help the *whole* Council transform the way that customers access and receive their services.

7.4 Front line services therefore also need to be prepared for, and involved in the significant change that the Partnership will bring to the council’s ways of working. The planning work referred to above therefore covers the preparation we need to make across the council as a whole, to ensure we optimise the benefits that this new Partnership can bring.

8. The TDBC ISiS Programme Budget Position

8.1 We are currently predicting that the overall ISiS Programme budget will overspend. TDBC’s share of the overspend (approx 20%) is forecast to be £92k.

8.2 This is based on “best estimates” of expected costs (staff and consultancy) needed to bring the programme to closure by 1st July 07.

8.3 TDBC can part fund this predicted overspend from some funds that were earmarked over 18 months ago to fund a new financial management system. This will no longer be required as the ISiS Programme will deliver this for the Council.

8.4 The expected position is therefore:-

	£'000
Predicted Budget Overspend on ISiS Programme (TDBC)	92
Less/ Funding Earmarked for New Finance System	47
Latest Forecast of Expected Overspend	45

8.5 This overspend will be reviewed again when the final terms of entry have been agreed with Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Members are requested to note the updated position on the ISiS Programme.

Contact officers:-

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Jill Sillifant, Chief Personnel Officer

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Background Papers:-

Executive 24 May 2005 – “Joint Venture Arrangements For Corporate Services”

Executive 22 June 2005 – “Joint Venture Arrangements For Corporate Services”

Executive 20 July 2005 – “Joint Venture Arrangements For Corporate Services”

Executive 24 August 2005– “Joint Venture Arrangements For Corporate Services”

Executive 5 April 2006 – “Improving Services In Somerset – Business Case Update”

Improving Services in Somerset

Cabinet Office – Shared Services Bulletin - Case Study

The Improving Services in Somerset (ISiS) programme was originally developed as a response to the multiple challenges faced by local government in particular, though it has resonance for the wider public sector in general. ISiS is a public private partnership which, amongst other things, includes the development of a shared service infrastructure which could potentially span all public agencies in the South West region.

ISiS has a number of unusual features:

- It was originally developed by two tiers of local government (Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council) – these councils will be the founding partner councils in the partnership
- Avon and Somerset Constabulary are currently seeking to join the partnership – subject to police authority approval of the business case in December. If successful this will be the first multi-agency shared service environment in the public sector
- The contract has been advertised as (and will be let as) a framework arrangement which can be of benefit to other agencies in the South West.
- It is envisaged that the delivery vehicle for ISiS will be a Joint Venture Company, with the founding public sector agencies being significant shareholders.

One of the key strands of ISiS is the creation of a shared service infrastructure. One of the issues common to the founding ISiS partners was recognition that, despite being well run organisations, future financial settlements required a quantum shift in resource alignment and management, including the need to improve the efficiency of the back office functions. The service areas being considered for the partnership are: human resources, finance (including procurement), ICT, property services, facilities management, design and print, customer contact and, for Taunton Deane only, revenues and benefits. Across the two councils some 800 staff are employed in these service areas and the net contract value is estimated to be £360 million over 10 years. The inclusion of police business could increase the contract value to £500 million.

The ambitions of ISiS are, however, greater than shared services. ISiS is about providing an infrastructure and capability to transform the public sector roadmap over the next decade. At the heart of the ISiS philosophy is an absolute commitment by the public sector partners to putting the customer first. That means three things

- creating a customer service infrastructure which allows easy and timely access to the widest possible range of public services – with the majority of interactions being completed at the first point of contact
- using property and IT assets as enablers across the whole spectrum of public services – including shared office accommodation and mobile working for staff and the creation of a whole range of conveniently located, multi-agency face to face contact points which, by virtue of their cross-cutting nature, will provide a more cost effective way to retain a public service presence in rural communities .
- creating a capacity and culture which puts customer need at the heart of service design and delivery and which continually seeks to improve public services

The public sector partners recognised that these ambitions would need investment, skills and capacity which they did not have. The formal procurement to secure a private sector partner was commenced in December 2005. After an initial longlisting process, three shortlisted companies were invited to submit bids. These companies are BT, IBM and Capita and the bid submission date is November 28, 2006. It is anticipated that a preferred bidder announcement will be made in the spring of 2007, with service commencement shortly thereafter.

The South West Centre of Excellence has been actively involved in the programme, initially providing advice and support funding and, latterly, agreeing funding for marketing the programme across the region.

For further information contact **Sue Barnes**, ISiS Programme Director (SCC)
01823 356904 or sbarnes@somerset.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE

PROJECT TITLE: Provision of Information Technology in Development Control

Lead Officers: Tim Burton & Tracey-Ann Biss

Executive Member: Councillor Cliff Bishop

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To help the Council in meeting objectives outlined in the Gershon Review and E-government initiatives this reports seeks approval in principle to:

- ★ Replace the current in-house software package for planning application recording, monitoring and historic data retention.

Subject to a successful bid, our anticipated costs in replacing the Development Control software application would be approximately £80k. Annual revenue costs for licence fees, software and hardware maintenance are likely to be around £15k

1. Project Description

This report seeks agreement in principle to replace the current in-house planning application recording, monitoring and historic data retention software with an established external software package, e.g. Acolaid, CAPSUniform or MVM. Members will be updated throughout the process as necessary.

2. Establishment of Need

- 2.1. The current Development Control processing software was installed in March 2006 and was anticipated to be the “next generation” of the planning application recording, monitoring and historic data retention which was initially developed in-house in 1985. The task undertaken by the IS Unit in producing the PARADISE system was a major challenge and we recognise the dedication of their staff.
- 2.2. With hindsight the in-house upgrade of the system was very adventurous. The national planning system is undergoing significant changes including E-government initiatives and new/upgraded legislation all linked to Best Value, Standards and funding.
- 2.3. In using the existing software, tasks are disjointed and time consuming and often need manual intervention. Management information is difficult to obtain and

interrogate. This includes basic statistical information which would greatly assist in monitoring/enhancing performance.

- 2.4. The quality of the service we are providing our customers has recently declined, not only due to the introduction of the PARADISE system which resulted in major time delay and backlog which is still being addressed , but also the reliability of the information retrieved. Complaints have been received and it is feared that the possibility of errors occurring and resulting in compensation has increased significantly.
- 2.5. Best Value Performance Indicators over the last three quarters have fallen largely due to delays caused by the PARADISE system. This has resulted in a reduction in Planning Delivery Grant received. At times it has taken three weeks to register an application, whilst our target is 2-3 days. This alone has dramatically reduced our ability to reach our overall time taken targets. From being one of the best performing authorities in the south west, we are currently in the bottom quartile.
- 2.6. To incorporate the necessary enhancement to make the system satisfactory to meet the current needs of the Officers and Administration it is anticipated that the time period required would be a minimum of 18 months. This timescale does not take into account new E-government initiatives or legislation changes. In meeting the needs of other services, the IS Unit have already had to delay vital work on the necessary upgrades of the PARADISE system.
- 2.7. The Gershon report is a Review of Public Sector Efficiency. The objectives are to release major resources out of activities that can be undertaken more efficiently, into front-line services that meet the public's highest priorities.
- 2.8. If planning application recording, monitoring and historic data retention software were supplied externally, it would allow the IS Unit to divert more of their resources to the Corporate Efficiency Agenda.
- 2.9. Our capacity to improve delivery of the Planning Service and link to the National Planning Portal will be greatly reduced if we remain with an in-house IT solution. If the current trend were allowed to continue there is a real risk of becoming a "standards" authority. The only other authority in the south west still uses an in-house system is Penwith District Council (one of the worst performing councils in terms of both performance indicators and their ability to provide information electronically).

3. Outline Proposal

The Audit Commission state:

"New technology offers perhaps the greatest opportunities - and the greatest risks. There can be unrealistic expectations that new IT will cure all the weaknesses in the department. But outdated IT is often part of the problem, providing poor response and access, unreliable service and inflexible outputs. Some systems are over 10 years old and cannot readily provide staff with help screens or cope with the full range of central statistical returns. And a profusion of small IT suppliers and in-house developments in the past has made continuing good service difficult to guarantee".

Simply by virtue of their size, external software providers can devote significant resources to improve or amend their software to meet legal and government initiatives before changes come into force.

There are a number of recognised suppliers of planning software packages, including Acolaid, CAPSUniform or MVM, although it is understood that CAPSUniform now supply 50%+ of the LPA software nationally, including a high proportion in this region.

This is an opportunity to get software that will not only allow for improved functionality but will:

- Allow ease of change with new legislation;
- Allow joint working with other Local Authorities as required by Gershon;
- Deliver flexible working in line with the modernising agenda;
- Deploy staff resources in a more efficient way;
- Ease recruitment and training of staff who are familiar with commonly used software packages;
- Give the ability to meet Best Value Performance Standards requirements;
- Give the potential to incorporate other areas, e.g. Building Control and Land Charges
- Meet E-government initiatives.
- Respond to the needs of our customers

4. Link to Corporate Priorities

4.1. The Corporate Strategy for 2005-2008 identifies four top priorities based on what matters to local people:

- Delivering Project Taunton
- Improving transportation and tackling congestion
- Reducing antisocial behaviour
- Promoting affordable housing

In considering the compatibility of this project with the strategic direction of the authority, the links are as follows:

4.1.1. Delivering Project Taunton

To deliver Project Taunton, we need to maximise available resources which requires modern software including the automation of work which minimise errors. It is important that Development Control has full confidence in its software, which is the foundation for providing an efficient, cost-effective service.

The need for manual intervention with current software leads to errors and delay. Our software relies on staff being vigilant and often double checking processes which should be automated.

This is a high profile project for Taunton and the software we use will be the foundation in demonstrating a professional Development Control Service which can provide accurate, relevant and quick information to the General Public, Developers and investing Companies.

4.1.2. Improving Transportation and Tackling Congestion

Software facilitating home and remote working will help us in tackling congestion. There is scope for staff to perform more tasks remotely and provide more efficient and responsive services.

In developing our services towards the e-Government agenda, we need to encourage customers to communicate with us electronically thus cutting down on motor transport to Deane House.

4.1.3. Promoting Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is delivered predominantly through the planning process and in particular s106 agreements. It is essential that Development Control Officers time is freed up to allow greater negotiation to achieve the affordable housing targets set.

5. Outcomes

- Accurate statistical returns to maximise income, forecasting and Best Value Performance Indicators;
- Automation of tasks currently needing manual intervention;
- Performance within top quartile of relevant BVPIs
- Pro-active approach to IT development to ensure software changes are in place and tested before legislation implementation;
- Decrease of Planning Admin staff involvement in IT development;
- Staffing savings through efficiencies achieved.

6. Risk Identification

6.1 *Current Risks*

6.1.1 Planning legislation is complex. The authority faces significant risk should it misinterpret or wrongly apply this legislation. Legislative changes prove labour-intensive for Development Control staff as they must interpret and specify how the IS Unit should change the software. If we buy software from a large external provider, we could minimise such a risk, as it would be reasonable to conclude any misinterpretation would be identified early on.

6.1.2 There is a very limited number of staff who are familiar with the whole PARADISE system which is an unnecessary risk.

6.1.3 Use of a standard Planning Application processing package would increase the potential recruitment of staff

6.2 *Future Risk if Project is to Progress*

6.2.1 Procurement of new IT and migration of data presents notable risks as well as opportunities for improvement. It is essential we manage the project effectively, as both the continuity and timing are critical to success.

6.2.2 The experience of the previous migration of data from the in-house system was damaging, both in staff morale and in a sharp decline in service delivery. If there is a decision to buy external IT software, the risks are as follows:

- The overall project will be subject to a financial constraint. Inadequate finance could mean the project would not go ahead or be delayed;
- Alternatively where incomplete finance is available it will mean the project will incur higher risk as staff will need to undertake more tasks rather than paying for external support;
- Suppliers fail to deliver any of the procured systems on time. The strength of the contract between all parties could lessen this particular risk. Any contract developed would have financial penalties for non-delivery;
- Implementation could be affected by lack of project resources. We would ideally employ external help for Project Management and software training, to mitigate this risk;
- Moving away from a fully integrated back office operation may create a drop in performance in on-line postings due to interfaces.
- Overall costs of in-house IT may not change in the short or medium term for the Development Control service, as support and hardware would still be required. However, staffing levels and knowledge of staff would have to be reviewed in line with new technology.
- IT costs for other services may rise as the income lost from Development Control would need reallocation.
- Potential backlogs during the changeover period.
- The loss of a flexible and adaptable approach towards improving existing IT - we would have to compete with many other authorities in user groups in getting software amendments.
- The cost of interfacing external IT with other in-house software. While external providers will give guide estimates for this, it is important we stipulate this area is stipulated tightly and release funds to an external provider only on successful completion to standards we determine.

7. Project Evaluation and Preferred Course of Action

The project would progress through initial stages in preparing detailed specifications and finding out accurate costs. Demonstrations will be arranged as well as site visits to other authorities using external IT provision. After demonstrations and site visits, various choices can take place.

7.1. Monitoring

Throughout the procurement and installation stage of this project regular monitoring will take including regular reports to the Head of Development and Members.

8. Resource Implications

The current PARADISE system relies on staff double checking many functions of the system – this increase the possibility of errors not being detected. We want the technology to allow well trained and experience staff to use their time efficiently and effectively. This would have an additional outcome of staff having a positive experience and increase moral.

9. Timescale

A detailed project plan and timescale will be developed with a target period of 4 to 6 months from purchase to full installation of system and staff trained.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. That agreement in principle to replace the current in-house software applications for planning application recording, monitoring and historic data retention is granted.
- 10.2. That full Council is requested to support a supplementary estimate from General Fund Reserves of £80,000. That the ongoing revenue costs be funded from within existing Development budgets.

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15 December 2006