REPORT TO: PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE – 24 MAY 2004

REPORT ON: THE E-PLANNING COMPACT

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION

REPORT NO: 306-2004

1   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   The purpose of the report is to seek the agreement of the Committee to the adoption of the E-Planning Compact by Dundee City Council. The E-Planning Compact has been prepared by Scottish Executive as the basis of a common approach to modernising planning service delivery in Scotland through the use of the Internet. The report also outlines the resources required to enable Dundee City Council to commence the strategy outlined in the Compact.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   It is recommended that Committee

       a   Confirms the E-Planning Compact as the basis for modernising the planning service delivery in Dundee City Council through the use of the Internet.

       b   Approves the purchase of the software and hardware necessary to commence the implementation of Internet based service delivery at a cost of £175,000.

3   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1   The estimated cost of purchasing the software and hardware necessary to implement the E-Planning Compact is £175,000. This sum will be met from General Fund Balances in 2004/05. The annual licensing fees will increase from the current sum of £30,420 by £14,584 to £45,004 and this will be met from the Planning & Transportation revenue budget for 2004/05.

4   LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The delivery of the planning service through the internet will contribute to the key themes of Local Agenda 21 relating to community participation in decision making and giving access to knowledge and information.

5   EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Internet delivery of service will increase the opportunity of every citizen to participate in the process by increasing the availability and access to information.

6   BACKGROUND

6.1   In 2001 Dundee was at the forefront of electronic delivery of planning services. The E-Planning Compact raises the expectations in respect of electronic service delivery and Edinburgh and Stirling Councils have acted as pathfinder authorities. In meeting the expectations of the e-government agenda, this could be done relatively quickly by borrowing from the experience of these pathfinder authorities and by upgrading existing software systems.

6.2   With the background of the First Minister's vision for electronic service delivery, the Executive published its paper *Information Age Government in Scotland: A Common Framework*. This paper outlines the consistent standards and guidelines which the Executive expects to be adopted and followed by the public services across Scotland. The aim is to deliver better public services through the implementation of the modernising government agenda. In the

sphere of planning and building control, the Scottish Executive Development Department Planning Division has actively engaged with planning authorities to produce the E-Planning Compact.

6.3   Within the context of efficient public services being citizen facing allowing for greater choice and convenience of access, the e-planning compact sets out the elements of a high quality planning service. It extends to development plans, general advice and policy information and the processing of planning and related applications and appeals, along with other important elements of the planning service. The compact describes the actions expected of local authorities. These actions are consistent with the Council's ICT Strategy and the Council Plan. (Copies of the Compact are available in the Members Lounges.)

6.4   The E-Planning Compact provides an agreed strategy to develop effect high quality and citizen-focused Planning Service delivery, fit for the 21st Century. It describes three key aims as:

♦   To enable people to get involved in planning
♦   To increase openness, efficiency and effectiveness
♦   To arrange the delivery of Planning Service to meet the citizens' needs

A range of specific tasks has been identified through the Compact with the current programme of action which identifies short, medium and long-term targets against each of the partners in the Compact.

♦   Each local authority in Scotland is required to deliver through this programme of action the following:

–   Focus the delivery of the Planning Service on the needs of citizens.

–   Look at the scope and quality of planning related information which they hold and consider the most effective ways of sharing it and making it widely accessible.

–   Set out a strategy for the use of information technology and delivering the Planning Service involving staff at all levels and making links with other land and property related functions in the local authority eg building control, environmental health and transport.

–   Drawing on key elements in the programme of action, set milestones for the delivery of a high quality and effective electronic Planning Service by 2005 ensuring access to Planning Services and information by a range of communication channels.

–   Make use of GIS for development plans and in linking statistical and spatial information with planning applications data to inform policy and decision making.

–   Work towards greater consistency in Planning authority home pages in line with recommended standards and targets.

–   Make their development plans available on-line.

–   Work with others where possible to achieve economies of scale and prevent duplication.

♦   This commitment by the Scottish Executive marries with the Dundee City Council's commitment to E-Government as originally set out in its ICT Strategy document.

6.5   The Planning and Transportation Department use a software application called Uni-form 2000 to carry out planning and building control processes and to manage their related database. Caps Solutions Limited, the supplier of Uni-form have advised the Council that as of Spring 2004 they will no longer support the Uni-form 2000 platform. It is not feasible to run an unsupported application for core functions such as planning applications and building warrants. Therefore, the status quo is not an option.

6.6   It will be the necessary update of the Uni-form 2000 to Uni-form Version 7 as a consequence of the withdrawal of support for Uni-form 2000 and the need to maintain current functionality. Operating a supported version will be necessary in order to receive any enhancement designed to comply with emerging e-government initiatives. The inclusion of the "spatial" element of Version 7 will provide the planning and building control services with a mapping tool making it possible to plot information geographically and to retrieve data by reference to the appropriate map. Ultimately it is intended that integration with any future Graphic Information System (GIS) will enable the public to make use of this feature.

6.7   Document management software is essential for capturing and indexing documents and graphic images for linking with the Uni-form data and making them available via the internet. At present i-dox is the application which is employed for this purpose and has been proved to be satisfactory. It is proposed to acquire the latest version of i-dox which comes complete with an integrated workflow facility allowing the creation of electronically accessible files. One significant advantage of this will be in the area of consultations which often hold up applications and which would be speeded up through the use of workflow.

6.8   If the requirements of the e-government and the E-Compact are to be met, data will require to be uploaded to the Council website and accessed through the Uni-form software. Caps solutions offer an add-on utility to Uni-form called Public Access to do this. It is already in operation satisfactorily in both Edinburgh and Stirling Councils.

6.9   The total cost of upgrading both Uniform and i-dox together with the addition of Public Access, necessary hardware and staff training is estimated at £175,000. There will be an increase in the annual net licensing fees of £14,584.

6.10   The implementation of this proposal will enable the customer to enter the Council website and access all publicly available information relating to a planning application including the associated plans. In other words they will be able to do over the Internet what it would be necessary to visit the Council offices to do at the moment. In addition, as the system developers, they will be able to download application forms, monitor the progress of their application and exchange information with the case officer. The case officers will be able to carry out their consultations electronically and these will be attached to an electronic application file which can be accessed over the net. Ultimately, it should be possible to accept the electronic submission of both planning and building warrant applications.

6.11   This proposal has integrated within it the purchase of gazetteer management system software which is required as part of the corporate DNAS (Definitive National Addressing for Scotland) initiative. Therefore, part of the expenditure may be eligible as match funding in the MGF3 (Modernising Government Fund) bid.

7   CONCLUSION

7.1   The E-Planning Compact has been prepared jointly by the Scottish Executive and representatives of local planning authorities. It sets out what is expected of local planning authorities in meeting the targets of e-government in respect of the delivery of the planning service. As such it represents a valuable route map for authorities such as Dundee City Council to follow.

7.2   The imminent withdrawal of support for the current version of Uni-form makes it essential that the department upgrades to the latest version. This gives an opportunity to update and expand on the associated applications to enable Dundee City Council to progress toward e-government targets and the requirements of the E-Planning compact which is aimed at providing an improved service to the customer. The package will enable the public to use the Council website to submit or track applications, find out what is being proposed and to make objections or observations. The use of workflow will allow these inputs and other consultations to be managed more efficiently and effectively.

8   CONSULTATIONS

8.1   The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance), and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

9   BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1   None.

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