

ANNEXE 'A'

REPORT TO:	Environmental and Development Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 12
DATE OF MEETING:	27 th May 2003	CATEGORY: DELEGATED/
REPORT FROM:	Deputy Chief Executive)	OPEN PARAGRAPH NO: N/A
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	John Birkett (5742)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Disbursement of Planning Delivery Grant 2003/04	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: ES

1.0 Reason for Exempt (if appropriate)

1.1 None.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the proposed expenditure up to £75,000 set out in paragraph 4.5 be agreed and made available for those purposes

3.0 Purpose of Report

3.1 To consider how to spend the Planning Delivery Grant 2003/04 to best effect within the planning service.

4.0 Detail

4.1 The above grant in the sum of £75,000 announced on 10 February should be paid to the authority by 10 April 2003. Continuing grant in 2004/05 and 2005/06 will be available on the basis of improvements in performance against "various measures of the planning service. The amount will depend on the change in performance against the chosen measures. The Government has announced about the relevant criteria for next year. These are that the status/progress of the Local Plan will be one measure and improvements in the speed of delivery, particularly of major applications another. Increasing attention is also being given to the quality of outcomes. This is likely to be expressed as a function of customer satisfaction locally.

- 4.2 The grant is not ring fenced but will no doubt be dependant in future years on performance improvements over current published performance rather than a comparison with other Local Planning Authorities, although poorly performing authorities will be expected to make greater strides than effective ones.
- 4.3 Morale in the planning service is reasonably high because of expectations that additional resources will be devoted to match the high achievement. The deployment of additional staff already secured as budget developments is critical to the success of maintaining the service at current output. However, the space to accommodate these staff is simply not available. Staff already works in overcrowded conditions relative to virtually all other staff in the Council. Their furniture, fittings and general surroundings are dilapidated. The office reception area is also congested and uninviting to customers.
- 4.4 Equipment needed to deliver ongoing requirements for duplicating microfilm and digital information to paper output is broken down and mal-functional. Archiving of record requires a substantial overhaul to meet customer expectations, particularly from the e-Government point of view.
- 4.5 There is a requirement to conduct a customer satisfaction survey to meet the Government's Best Value PI. This will entail considerable administrative and computing/analysing input. It would be prudent to contract the work out and officers have been exploring the issue with CIPFA, which offers a precise service to this end. In addition it would be prudent to consider employing a contract/
- 4.6 To meet these concerns the following proposals are made.
- Archiving of historical records – registers of decision notices and historic files scanned to CD and indexed. This would be put out to an agency on a cost per page/record basis. Cost around £20,000.
 - Alterations to the offices to accommodate additional staff and to make access to facilities for customers easier and more conducive. Cost dependant upon specification not yet drawn up.
 - Replacement of worn out furniture and fittings and provision of additional IT related equipment. Cost around £10,000
 - Replacement equipment for plotting digital images up to A0 and for photocopying large scale plans +Microfilm reader/printer. Cost around £40,000. The first two of these items are of corporate and, hitherto at least, of widespread use across the Council. The cost should not fall to Planning alone.
 - Contracting out the customer care survey for Planning. Cost dependant on specification not available yet
 - Overtime for existing staff and/or temporary employment of agency professional or retired planners. Cost around £5,000

4.6 The priorities for these options are the office accommodation, staff overtime, furniture and refitting, replacement of reprographic equipment and archiving. Therefore the suggestions are made in the expectation of receiving funding for most if not all of the items in para 4.5 on the basis of need.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 As set out above. Costs are approximate following very preliminary investigation.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Delivery of the Local Plan and customer satisfaction is a critical factor in the Corporate Plan as are other factors relating to the economy and environment, heavily influenced by the service.

8.0 Community Implications

8.1 Customer satisfaction is a key requirement for Best Value improvements identified by inspectors as needed to make the service come up to standard. This is dependent on increased staff deployment.

9.0 Conclusions

9.1 Whilst the additional receipts occasioned by this grant should theoretically be weighed against overall needs and priorities of the Council, the above requirements are crucial to delivery of indicators that will be used to allow the Council to draw down future allocations. Prudence dictates deployment where this can be achieved, as suggested above.

10.0 Background Papers

10.1 Letters from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister dated 10th March and 9th April 2003.

