

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 8TH MAY 2002****‘BETTER ACCESS TO BETTER SERVICES’ INITIATIVE****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****PART A****Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Commission’s views on:
 - (i) the Better Access to Better Services Initiative (The Initiative).
 - (ii) the Policy Statement on ‘Better Access to Better Services (The Policy Statement).

Decision of the Cabinet

2. The Cabinet on 23rd April:
 - (i) Approved the principle of the Better Access to Better Services Initiative as an alternative approach to improve access to services and information.
 - (ii) Approved the Policy Statement on ‘Better Access to Better Services’ to provide the framework for the Initiative to progress.
 - (iii) Approved the initial list of possible projects for the Initiative, and in particular those projects identified as ‘Flagship Projects’ with deliverable benefits in the first year of the Initiative.
 - (iv) Agreed to open discussions with District Councils and other partner bodies to jointly develop the Policy Statement and projects, together with proposals to develop an inter-authority group to progress this further.
 - (v) Noted the setting up of an internal officer group to provide suitable programme management arrangements for the implementation of the Initiative.
 - (vi) Agreed to receive further reports regarding progress on the development of the Policy Statement and progress of the Initiative.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The commitments identified in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy and the findings of the Rural Services Review that relate to access and information demonstrate that the proposed Better Access to Better Services Initiative justifies a high priority within the future work programme of the County Council, largely as a result of:
 - (i) The demands placed on local government to deliver all services that are capable of being delivered electronically by 2005.
 - (ii) The commitments made in County and District Councils Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statements to work together to implement the delivery of services that are capable of being delivered electronically.
 - (iii) Opportunities to discuss and develop service co-ordination with partners through the emerging Local Strategic Partnerships and other partnership activity.
 - (iv) The opportunity to address outstanding matters relating to the Library Review which dates back to 1999.
4. The Policy Statement is intended as a starting point that will provide a basis for discussion both within the County Council and with other partner bodies in recognition of these demands and opportunities to work with partners.
5. The Policy Statement will provide the framework for an approach that would enable work to begin on a series of projects to address a range of access and information issues to ensure that improvements are identified and implemented as quickly as possible. This Policy approach is intended to replace the previously proposed best value review of access to services and information. The Statement:
 - (i) Starts from the recognition of the need to work in partnership.
 - (ii) Sets out a vision that builds upon the Medium Term Corporate Strategy.
 - (iii) Identifies the need to use methods which reflect the public's preferences when accessing services.
 - (iv) Recognises the need to exploit ICT as part of this process.
 - (v) Recognises that a range of activities already contribute to achieving better access.
 - (vi) Identifies the basic principles that underpin the work required.
 - (vii) Will facilitate the bidding process which the County Council has to engage in for a number of one-off special funds that are available from the Government.
6. An internal officer group will ensure that there are suitable management arrangements in place to take the Initiative forward and provide a framework for co-ordinating a range of inter-related projects that contribute to improving access to services and information across the Council and with other partners.

Timetable for Decisions

7. The will be implemented over a number of years and will be the subject of progress reports to both Cabinet and Scrutiny.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

The Medium Terms Corporate Strategy 2001-2005

8. The strategy sets out the Councils commitments to achieve its aim of ensuring that services help Leicestershire people by bringing services closer to where people live and improving access to them, so that they are available to all groups in the community. This will be achieved by delivering services that provide value for money and which examine a mix of public, private and voluntary sector options to provide effective, efficient and economical services, and introducing new and improved arrangements to co-ordinate service delivery with other agencies.

Implementing Electronic Government Statement

9. The County Council and District Councils each submitted their Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statements to the DTLR in July 2001 to provide a framework of how they intend to achieve the 100% target specified in the Best Value Performance Indicator 157 over the next 4 years.
10. Each of these statements sets out a joint commitment between County and District Councils to work in partnership towards implementing e-government targets as this cannot be achieved by a single Local Authority alone.

Best Value Implications

11. The approach outlined in this report is intended to replace the previously proposed Best Value Review. As such the Best Value Inspection Service is taking an interest in the work. A formal inspection of current services and plans for improvement will be made towards the end of the financial year.

Resources Implications

12. A growth bid of £100,000 has been agreed as part of the budget for 2002/03, to supplement existing budgets and £200,000 ongoing for future years for access to services. Growth proposals have also been identified for e-government of £245,000 in 2002/03 and £265,000 ongoing.
13. Detailed costing of the projects that are included in the Initiative will need to be carried out. The actual work done will need to be constrained within the existing resources available including growth.
14. The Local Government On-Line submission to the DTLR may result in additional partnership funding from the Government. If so it will considerably improve the pace at which the access projects and the Government's e-government targets can be achieved.

15. Comprehensive implementation of the Better Access to Better Services project will inevitably have significant long term resource implications, both revenue and capital.
16. At this stage it is not possible to quantify these costs or identify exactly how much Government funding will be made available. Experience of the initial proposals should help to give a better idea of potential costs. Reallocation of existing resources as well as opportunities for external funding will need to be examined including the option of some form of private sector partnership (possibly PFI) to help fund some of the considerable capital investment which is likely to be required, primarily for buildings and I.T.
17. The resource implications will need to be considered in the context of any medium term financial plan and the budget/capital programme processes for the relevant years.
18. The County Treasurer has been consulted on this report and his comments incorporated.

Officers to Contact

<u>Officer:</u>	<u>Telephone:</u>	<u>E-mail:</u>
Bill Nichols	0116 265 6010	bnichols@leics.gov.uk
Andy Robinson	0116 265 7017	arobinson@leics.gov.uk
Sean Beeby-Smith	0116 265 8015	sbsmith@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

19. The Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/02 proposed a Review of Access to Services and Information. The Best Value Review would have examined the current position that the County Council has reached in developing access arrangements and the actions that could be taken to improve this position. This process, however, would take at least 12 months to complete, based on previous experience of major cross cutting reviews.
20. The commitments identified in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy, the findings of the Rural Services Review, and the Government requirement to deliver all services that are capable of being delivered electronically by 2005, suggest the Council should take a more pragmatic approach. This approach would enable work to begin immediately on a series of projects to address a range of access and information issues. This approach would help to ensure improvements are identified and implemented as quickly as possible and opportunities for collaboration are maximised.
21. This is particularly relevant when this is considered within the context of the development of Public Service Agreements and discussions around service co-ordination for emerging Local Strategic Partnerships in Leicestershire.
22. In addition, the proposed approach coincides with the launch of the draft National Strategy for Local E-government that has been put forward to Local Authorities for consultation by the DTLR on April 8th 2002. Consideration of the linkages with the Better Access to Better Services Initiative and any future funding opportunities arising from it will be considered in setting up and establishing the Initiative itself.

Proposals

The Better Access to Better Services Initiative

23. The Better Access to Better Services Initiative is intended to provide an approach to enable work to begin immediately on a series of projects to address a range of access and information issues in areas such as e-government, access centres, public relations, and web sites.
24. This approach would help to ensure that improvements are identified and implemented as quickly as possible during the life of the Initiative up to (and beyond in certain cases) the year 2005. In particular it would ensure that the findings of the Rural Services Review that relate to access and information issues are addressed in a broader context across Leicestershire, through a series of implementation measures, rather than simply referred on to a further review.
25. Officers have identified an initial list of projects that would be included in the Initiative, including, in particular, those projects that are intended to demonstrate deliverable benefits in the first year of the Initiative.

The Policy Statement

26. The starting point for the Better Access to Better Services Initiative is a policy statement that will provide a basis for discussion both within the County Council and with partner bodies. The Policy Statement on 'Better Access to Better Services' is attached at Appendix A.
27. Within the framework of this policy a range of projects need to be identified and developed to improve access to services and information. These projects can be categorised within the following broad themes of the Initiative:
- (i) Access Points
 - (ii) Customer Care
 - (iii) Information Management
 - (iv) ICT Infrastructure
 - (v) On-line Information and Transactions
 - (vi) Organisational Development
28. Collectively these projects will be set against and considered within the broad context of the Policy Statement in terms of how they will each contribute towards meeting the basic principles contained therein, namely:
- (i) The Needs to Leicestershire People.
 - (ii) The Location of Delivery.
 - (iii) The Times of Availability.
 - (iv) The Method of Delivery.
 - (v) The Opportunities for Joint Delivery.
 - (vi) The Effective Use of Assets.

Possible Projects

29. A range of possible projects that would need to be developed within the policy framework during the life of the Initiative is included in Appendix B.
30. As part of the overall list of projects that have been identified so far a number of projects have been identified as 'Flagship Projects'. These are projects that can demonstrate deliverable benefits to members of the public within the first year of the Initiative and will help to drive its momentum. Appendix C contains an outline of these projects.
31. Some of these Flagship Projects are already underway. 'New Projects' will be developed as part of the development of the Initiative. At the end of the first year the Initiative will hopefully have achieved the following benefits:
- (i) Establish at least two new multi-agency centres.
 - (ii) Provide 20 additional access points through the Leicestershire Rural Partnership.
 - (iii) Establish at least two projects using Post Offices as access points.
 - (iv) Provide four ICT centres in Libraries.
 - (v) Ask the Public for their access preferences in Leicestershire.
 - (vi) Develop a charter for customer care standards.
 - (vii) Produce a combined A-Z of public services.
 - (viii) Improved translation and interpretation services.

- (ix) Develop at least 25 electronic transactions on-line.
- (x) Develop additional information on the web-site.
- (xi) New arrangements for highway network management that may include using the internet and single access telephone number for reporting.
- (xii) Web site for Leicestershire Care On-line launched.
- (xiii) Access to computers and the internet available in all Public Libraries.
- (xiv) Increase number of schools with broadband communications subject to funding.
- (xv) Include and promote the Better Access to Better Services Initiative and Policy Statement in training for customer services.

32. Subject to members views on this list of projects and any others that members might wish to include, this will be combined with the Policy Statement to provide a basis for further discussion with partner bodies to identify areas of collaboration.

Management Arrangements

33. In order to oversee the ongoing management of the Initiative and ensure that its strategic direction is maintained within the County Council, it will be necessary to establish an internal officer group to act as the Programme Management Group for the Initiative. The potential position of this group with that of other decision making groups of the County Council and other relevant bodies is illustrated in Appendix D.

34. This will be achieved for the most part by redefining the work of existing groups (and possibly membership). Key to the management of the Initiative, however, will be:

- (i) A Programme Management Group to develop the projects within the Initiative and co-ordinate the work of other internal officer groups that are connected with this.
- (ii) A Chief Officer to lead the work of the Programme Management Group and to positively promote the Initiative within the County Council and to partner bodies.
- (iii) A Cabinet Lead Member to oversee the Initiative with support from other members.
- (iv) Regular progress and monitoring reports to Cabinet Lead Members.
- (v) An Inter-Authority Partnership reporting to County/District Chief Executives and Leaders meetings to provide a focus for extending opportunities for collaboration as part of the Initiative and overseeing the management of jointly delivered projects. Such a body is proposed in the Local Government On-line submission.

35. In addition an inter-authority Local Government On-line submission has been made to the DTLR in response to its request to demonstrate how the statements on partnership working in approved IEG statements would work in reality. This has provided an important foundation upon which the building blocks of creating an inter-authority partnership can be developed further

and there is a strong correlation between the projects identified in the Initiative (Appendix B) and those included in the submission which include:

- (i) Portals – the user friendly front end to a number of community service web sites such as Charnwood On-line, the Learning Portal in Leicester, and the Welland Pathfinder Community Portals.
- (ii) MAGNET – ‘Multi Agency Geographic Network’ providing map based community information via the internet through point and click maps or from the input of a postcode.
- (iii) Infolinx – a database of community information on the internet.
- (iv) Transactions – public interaction via the internet or other electronic means for financial and non-financial transactions alike.
- (v) Information – a common understanding and approach to using and sharing information between authorities.

Consultations

36. Consultations have been undertaken with all Chief Officers of the Council and their comments have been incorporated within this report.
37. Initial discussions have also taken place at Leader level with District Councils. Further detailed discussions will take place with District Councils and other potential partners.
38. The first year targets include proposals to undertake consultation on service delivery and information requirements, taking into account the outcome of previous consultation wherever possible.

Equal Opportunities Implications

39. The Initiative will improve the accessibility of services and information provided by the Council, making these accessible to all groups in the community and responsive to people’s needs.
40. This represents a positive step towards tackling inequality and discrimination by improving access to services and information whilst building on our existing approach to equal opportunities. Access issues will also be an important element of the County Council’s statutory Race Equality Initiative.

Background Papers

1. Medium Term Corporate Strategy 2001-2005, Leicestershire County Council.
2. IEG Statement, July 2001, Leicestershire County Council.

List of Appendices

- (A) Policy Statement on ‘Better Access to Better Services’
- (B) List of possible project for the Initiative
- (C) Flagship projects with year 1 deliverables.
- (D) Organisation process diagram