

KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting to be held on Tuesday 22nd February 2005

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON E-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP – PROPOSED CONSTITUTION

1. Introduction

The purpose of the report is to introduce the concept of a joint committee comprised of representatives from the local authorities in Wiltshire, to make recommendations concerning the Council's membership of the joint committee, and to seek approval in principle to the constitution of the joint committee.

2. Financial and Manpower Implications

There are no manpower implications arising directly from the report. Membership of a joint committee will involve a contribution towards project management costs of £20,000 per annum, but this will be offset by very significant procurement savings and savings arising from shared expertise and resources.

3. Background

For over a year the Council has been a member of a Wiltshire and Swindon e-Government Steering Group involving the local authorities in Wiltshire. Its purpose has been to work together to deliver a programme of work under the "Customer First" banner. That programme of work is given as Appendix A to this report.

The steering group developed out of a "Pathfinder" steering group charged with developing e-government solutions as part of Government-sponsored research and development into the application of e-government within local authorities.

The Council's Leader and the Council's e-Government Champion have been representing the Council on the Steering Group.

The steering groups' programme coincides with the Council's own work on customer access, also known as Customer First. The programme of work will assist the Council in meeting many of its national priority e-government outcomes.

4. Advantages of Working in Partnership

There are many advantages in working in partnership; access to knowledge and experience of partners, increased purchasing power, shared and thereby reduced costs, mutual support and assistance, being the most important.

A good example of partnership working is the recent acquisition of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The very considerable procurement effort was minimised for each partner and the procurement cost was very significantly lower than would otherwise have been the case because the same system was acquired by all the partners. Furthermore, having the same system means that the partners can provide each other with mutual help and support, share training costs, and develop the system to more easily allow a cross-authority service to the public.

5. Advantages of a Joint Committee

Working with a partnership based on a joint committee offers all the advantages of partnership working, but also adds a number of improvements.

The Joint Committee would have powers delegated to it by each of the local authority partners, (strictly circumscribed by the joint committee's constitution) that will allow improved, i.e. faster, decision making. This is important when trying to deliver a multi-faceted, complex e-government programme.

Perhaps more importantly, the joint committee model gives each partner the assurance that when it is incurring costs as its contribution to the partnership programme those costs will have been agreed and will be met by partner organisations, and vice versa. A good example was Kennet's experience when leading on the procurement of a Content Management System (CMS) on behalf of the partnership under the Pathfinder initiative. The Council had to commit to significant costs on trust, and at one stage it appeared as if that trust might be misplaced. Potential problems were resolved, but the problem would not have arisen in the first place if the work had been carried out under the auspices of a joint committee as now envisaged.

Forming a joint committee is perhaps the ultimate constitutional expression of a statement of intent to work co-operatively. The proposed joint committee for e-government may indeed form a model for joint working in other areas, possibly those related to the "Gershon agenda".

6. The Proposed Constitution for the Joint Committee and the Protections it Affords

The draft constitution for the joint committee (The Wiltshire & Swindon Customer First Management Board – W&SCFMB) is attached as Appendix B to the report. Although the draft will not now change very much it is still subject to minor changes.

The main protections offered by the Agreement to the member authorities are:

- a. Costs can only be incurred on the e-government programme matters set out in the Agreement and shown at Appendix A to the report.
- b. Costs can only be incurred on project support costs, (by definition limited) or on project research and development costs, but NOT on implementation of any arrangements in respect of the e-government programme. The latter would have to be subject to a separate agreement.
- c. Budgets for project costs have to be agreed before they are undertaken, and an estimate of project and support costs, and the share of those costs for each member authority, has to be agreed in advance of each financial year.
- d. No budget shall be exceeded by more than 5% without the prior approval of the joint committee.
- e. A member authority can effectively use a power of veto in respect of "Fundamental Decisions", including those likely to have a significant impact on any member authority's revenue or capital expenditure. In short any authority can opt out of aspects of the programme where it considers it to be in its interests to do so. The other partners then know where they stand.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

To their credit the local authorities in Wiltshire have been working together for some time to jointly develop electronic services for the benefit of the people of Wiltshire, and have proved that partnership working in this field has significant financial and other advantages.

To improve decision making and provide greater certainty for partners, especially financial certainty, the next natural development would be to place the existing partnership on a more formal footing by the creation of a joint committee.

It is there **RECOMMENDED THAT:**

- 1. The Council become a member of a newly formed joint committee called the Wiltshire and Swindon Customer First Management Board.**
- 2. The Council approve in principle the draft constitution for the Board and give delegated authority to the Director of Resources in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council to agree any minor drafting changes to the constitution.**
- 3. The Leader of the Council and the Council's e-Government champion be appointed as the Council's representatives on the Board.**

Director of Resources