

# **SUFFOLK PARTNERSHIP**

  

## **IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT STATEMENT**

*Babergh DC*

*Forest Heath DC*

*Ipswich BC*

*Mid Suffolk DC*

*St Edmundsbury BC*

*Suffolk Coastal DC*

*Suffolk CC*

*Waveney DC*

*Suffolk Health Authority*

*Suffolk Learning & Skills Council*

*Suffolk Police*

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## **1 SUMMARY**

This joint statement has been produced by the Suffolk Chief Executive Group (SCEG) to reinforce our determination to pursue a partnership approach for Suffolk wherever possible in 'implementing electronic government'. Suffolk's commitment builds on SCEG which was formed over 3 years ago, and whose membership includes the County Council, all District Councils, Suffolk Police, Health Authority and the Learning and Skills Council.

There is a strong ethos of delivering services that are customer-led, backed by consultation, surveys and groups such as 'Suffolk Speaks', our citizens panel, which is a joint initiative to ensure input from a representative group of Suffolk residents. This ethos is being carried through into IEG.

Each council has produced an individual IEG statement in the comprehensive form required by DTLR, so this document is designed to complement those statements. We focus here on clear-cut issues:

- Enhanced Service delivery, especially the gains possible from close cooperation
- Added Value. Projects that enhance service delivery or cost benefits beyond those achievable by individual councils
- Achievable projects, not too distant or technically demanding as to be a drain on resource or with a low chance of succeeding
- Projects that build on services that business and citizens value, not that put valued services at risk. E-Government is complimentary to existing channels of communication, not a substitute
- Projects that provide a foundation for further cooperation, maintaining our strategy for integrated services where possible. We wish to attract and work with other partners including the voluntary and private sector, and neighbouring authorities.

This document reflects the intention of the councils involved to make a joint bid for additional funding, where this benefits the citizen rather than individual bids for money for individual councils. It is also made on the understanding that the financial positions of the councils involved vary, and that the DTLR will, therefore, make funding available on a constructive and flexible basis that takes this into account.

## **2 SUFFOLK OVERVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Suffolk is a largely rural region, with some urban areas and one of the busiest seaports in Europe. The county attracts a lot of tourism and visitors, many for specific attractions such as Newmarket races, Constable country and the Aldeburgh festival. Industry is well represented although the cross-county road and rail infrastructure is not conducive

to heavy industry other than in parts of Ipswich, Lowestoft, Newmarket and Felixstowe. Agriculture provides a substantial base for employment and land use. A unique feature of the County is that Forest Heath is home to thousands of US service personnel based in England.

Although in the past the County has relied on a range of traditional industries, including agriculture, shipping and engineering, in recent years technology has become very significant within the local economy. The development of the Cambridge to Ipswich Hi-Tech Corridor has provided a spur to local growth within the technology industries. This has been complemented further by the promotion of the county town, Ipswich, as "IP-City". The IP-City branding and development has benefited the county as a whole as it challenges the general perception of the county as a backwater, confirming that the county has a role to play on the national and international stage.

Another perception that must be challenged is the assumption that a rural county such as Suffolk provides an idyllic lifestyle for its many local communities. Whilst the quality of life in many parts of the county is very good, this is in stark contrast to the deprivation that exists alongside. There are wards within Ipswich that are classified as suffering the equivalent to inner city deprivation. Equally, in some rural areas local communities suffer deprivation from few local job opportunities, combined with limited accessibility and service availability. These accessibility problems, in both the rural and urban context, curtail the opportunities for skills and learning development, community engagement, and the service provision to minority and disadvantaged groups.

Accessibility is perhaps the key challenge for the county, and this has prompted the Pathfinder bid to address accessibility in rural areas. As a reflection of this the County Council, Ipswich BC and Babergh DC have jointly submitted a successful Pathfinder project bid to explore the use of digital TV technology and kiosk service points. This bid starts to tackle issues of social exclusion for those not equipped with the equipment or skills in the home or place of work to engage with new modes of electronic service delivery.

It is interesting to note that the satisfaction levels of our residents in Suffolk are amongst the highest levels in the country (source MORI/Suffolk Speaks).

It has been agreed at Chief Executive level that a coherent, multi-authority approach to the modernising agenda will benefit all authorities but more importantly will move towards better service delivery at lower cost to all citizens in Suffolk.

## **2.2 Efficient, Seamless Service Delivery**

In establishing this joint IEG statement we recognise that many citizens do not know who provides local government services, or how. It should not matter to them how a service is structured or provided, but only that they can request, receive and monitor that service. A number of major projects are expected to address this from both the citizen's and business's viewpoint. In achieving this, we recognise that each local authority has unique attributes and identities that will persist.

In terms of efficiency, each authority can benefit from pushes towards common standards of information exchange, and industry standard technology interfaces. New projects and tenders can be jointly commissioned to bring together common processes and procedures, and reduce costs through economies of scale. It is also anticipated that

service providers will be able to attune more closely to coordinated specifications of requirements, not only for Suffolk but elsewhere in the country. At the heart of our vision is a requirement to provide concrete benefits to our citizens and businesses.

## **2.3 Customer Focus and Integrated Service**

Although each District Council has a population of, citizens, they share common issues at the boundary and also interact on a broad front with the County Council. Where possible the whole county can adopt a customer focus, which recognises the need for:

- A single point of initial contact
- Access to core information irrespective of the agency involved
- Access at a time and place convenient to the customer
- Multi-channel access, e.g. by telephone, email, or face-to-face
- Cooperation between agencies, rather than the customer having to coordinate joined up working.

It is recognised by each authority that 'customer' can mean a number of things, including:

- Council tax payers
- Residents
- Visitors and tourists
- Businesses
- Voluntary sector, e.g. Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Council members
- School Governors.

## **2.4 Managing Information as a Resource**

The key in many respects to all of the above is access to information. We recognise this as an enabling feature of future service delivery, with a strong need for unified standards and procedures. Among the projects anticipated in implementing the IEG will be a training and awareness scheme. Information will need to be obtained, maintained and managed within agreed guidelines if all authorities are to share data. Some of the challenges are at a national level, e.g. Data Protection, Freedom of Information, and Human Rights issues, whereas many basic steps can be taken locally to facilitate better levels of service based on good quality, timely information.

Some information will be confidential to one agency and can not be shared. The future scale of cooperation will recognise this spectrum of need and availability of information. However some information can be made available more quickly, such as office locations, opening hours, details of visitor attractions, and other 'stepping stones' to closer inter-working.

## **2.5 Transforming Business Processes**

In addition to driving down costs and seeking efficiency savings there are opportunities to introduce changes in the way services and organisations are designed and run, making the most of technology improvements.

We intend to work together, by analysing and developing processes aligned with e-Government, to identify further opportunities to provide better services for Suffolk. Change will develop more quickly and coherently if staff, managers and elected members appreciate what the modernising agenda can achieve. There has to be an increased awareness of what is possible for local government, and also an understanding of how the public can benefit. We know we will need to promote new processes and new service delivery channels, to encourage the use of more efficient ways of working where appropriate.

In many respects the effort and time required to improve understanding, to improve skills and to seek process changes are common themes for each authority, and there is an opportunity now to work together to improve joint working, challenge old assumptions, and raise skill levels across the board in the most cost-effective manner.

## **2.6 Top Level Involvement**

This joint IEG statement has been commissioned at the request of Suffolk Chief Executive Group (SCEG). An Executive Board will be tasked with implementing joint IEG initiatives, reporting to SCEG, and a brief summary of Executive Board roles is given in Appendix A.

In establishing this structure we are committing to a collaborative approach putting service delivery at the forefront. Membership of SCEG includes Suffolk Police, the Health Authority, and the Learning and Skills Council. The projects referred to in section 4 will be commissioned and controlled by the Executive Board under the auspices of SCEG to ensure the widest possible perspective and agreement between partners

## **3 COMMON OBJECTIVES**

The following five common aims and objectives have been agreed at Chief Executive level:

- Seamless access to services by citizens
- Economy of scale and savings
- Improving services
- Improving business operations
- Social inclusion.

## **4 MAJOR ISSUES AND PROJECTS**

A number of potential areas of collaboration have been identified and discussed. Work will be commissioned to explore these in more detail, including identifying:

- Third party service delivery – mechanisms for exploring these
- Risk management
- Prioritisation – county-wide agreement where practical, and local priorities
- Preliminary steps – how to advance some elements within existing resources
- Top-level project planning, funding options and resource sharing.

In future SCEG will provide a route for identifying and introducing new issues or areas of common interest for Suffolk.

### **4.1 Telephony**

Contact by telephone will continue as an essential channel for customer contact to any of the Councils, and we recognise this as currently our customers' preferred means of contact. Our vision is for improved enquiry handling, such that 80% of callers have a satisfactory resolution on their first call. To do this we require mechanisms and procedures to receive and identify the type of incoming call, access pertinent information, and connect to other agencies as appropriate.

Customers want a contact point without needing to know or understand who does what in local government. According to the feedback from 'Suffolk Speaks' key aspects include service provision that should be easily accessible, and part of a daily routine rather than a special trip to the relevant provider. Access to common information, such as may be published 'internally' and via Frequently Asked Questions, will help to deliver a better service. Any call centre approach should not remove the ability for direct-dial to a person or agency for an existing customer, for someone who knows exactly who they need to contact, or in appropriate sensitive or emergency situations .

### **4.2 Single Portal for Suffolk**

We envisage developing an internet web site (www) independent of the main contributors, which may become the preferred gateway for accessing local services, with links to the voluntary sector and relevant agencies. Visitors to the web site might arrive by a direct route or search, or by starting from one of the Council web sites. This portal will provide added value by including a full search function across the council websites, and may therefore present the region more comprehensively to visitors and business enquiries.

Each authority would maintain its own web site, with style, content and uniqueness as appropriate. Where possible, common standards, such as metadata, will be applied, for the common good. For example a 'search' facility at the Portal level would potentially draw upon information from any of the linked sites.

A well-designed, informative portal has the potential to save costs in call handling, and could enhance the region's ability to attract visitors, tourism, businesses and inward investment.

### **4.3 Pathfinder Project**

3 Councils are involved in a DTLR Pathfinder project. Findings and results of the project on digital TV and kiosks will be pooled so that the benefits are shared with other Suffolk councils. This Pathfinder project is aligned with one of our listed objectives, to seek solutions that remove social exclusion.

### **4.4 Extended use of Broadband**

We see the use of Broadband technology as the way to use existing infrastructure, i.e. landlines, to overcome access difficulties for electronic services in rural areas. The concept extends to deploying cheaper new infrastructure elements for this purpose, as in the East of England Broadband Consortium (E2B) pilot. Again we are focusing on tangible benefits to citizens and businesses, looking at economy of scale, improving business operations and fostering social inclusion. Suffolk will not have a widely accessible cable infrastructure in the foreseeable future, but we are optimistic about partnering with suppliers to maximise the use of available broadband technology to good effect in rural areas.

Authorities may be able to interconnect through higher performance networks, but access e.g. to a drop-in centre, hosted access point or kiosk could be through the use of broadband in a rural community. Kiosks or access points could be positioned in pubs and clubs if the requirement and technology are confirmed.

Note that we use the term 'broadband' in this document to refer to any suitable technology that achieves medium to high-performance connection cost effectively to such areas. Any broadband solution would need to offer good performance to bridge the 'social exclusion' barrier for those not living in cabled areas.

### **4.5 Extranet for Suffolk**

An Extranet is a network embracing the elements of local authority Intranets, a secure link for local authority use, not accessible necessarily by the public.

This approach could provide an acceptable medium for authorities to share information without further, expensive security measures. There would only be access by authorised users, and each authority or partner will determine what parts of their information are available through their connection to the Extranet. We envisage appropriate gateway links to other partner organisations such as the LSC, police and health authorities.

We recognise the constraints imposed by Data Protection etc, and where appropriate we will encourage a cooperative, customer-facing view of data sharing in the interests of service and efficiency improvement. We will not compromise confidentiality.

Where feasible, information would be published in electronic form once only, and would be used in-house as well as being accessible via an intranet / extranet.

## **4.6 Standards**

We will seek to develop and agree a core set of standards. There might be data definition standards, agreed metadata for web pages, data interchange formats including EGIF, and standard procedures for passing on queries between authorities. Many examples will quickly emerge as cooperative projects get underway, and standards defined for wider e-Government initiatives will provide a basis for Suffolk councils. Standards for electronic authorisation and acknowledgement will be required to help us control and monitor call forwarding between councils etc.

We will only achieve this in its entirety across time as systems are upgraded, but the Executive Board will preside over the growing body of agreed standards for Suffolk.

## **4.7 Smart Cards**

Smart cards allow the card-holder to engage in activities such as payment, authorisation and proof of identity more readily than with conventional 'paper' methods. For example children can use smart cards to obtain services without handling cash. Typical uses in a community setting include smart card use with libraries, local transport, leisure services and car-parking.

Suffolk councils, led by Ipswich BC, intend to bid for an 'Electronic Identity' smartcard scheme under the 'Invest to Save' initiative. A Suffolk standard smart card would be of most benefit to the citizens and businesses in Suffolk, rather than fragmented schemes or mixed use of cards of different electronic standards. A successful pilot project would obviously inform the Suffolk vision and business objectives.

Any scheme should try to avoid people having to carry several different types of smartcard.

## **4.8 Training and Awareness**

We are committed to identifying cost-effective ways of delivering awareness and skills training across a broad spectrum of need. We will address issues of public understanding and engagement, staff training and member training. Our vision encompasses the award of a recognisable certificate for some types of training, as well as simply addressing barriers to social inclusion.

We understand and aim to avoid situations where new technology is available but still inaccessible to those with low levels of confidence or skills to drive simple kiosk-type access points. Innovative approaches to bridge social divides will be encouraged.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

The Suffolk Chief Executive Group (SCEG) welcomes the opportunity for partners to work together in Suffolk, and this document serves to reinforce our determination to use

the e-Government initiatives to improve service delivery for businesses and citizens in Suffolk.

Should you require any further details please contact John Raine, Head of Policy & Personnel, at Babergh District Council in the first instance on 01473 825724.

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## **A. EXECUTIVE BOARD ROLES**

- Commission joint projects
- Monitor and report project progress to SCEG
- Manage resources and priorities between joint projects
- Control and disseminate agreed standards
- Appoint Project Managers, Consultants etc as required for joint projects
- Manage fund holding for joint projects. Report budget and commitment information to SCEG
- Meet quarterly (or more frequently) to monitor and review the full programme
- Commission reviews, benchmarking, post-implementation reviews as required
- Handle supplier negotiations (or commission from a purchasing authority as required)
- Commission teams, work packages as required to comply with requests from SCEG.