
Meeting: Business Transformation Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 3 September 2009

Subject: Website Transformation Project

Report of: Assistant Director, Communications
Assistant Director, ICT and Property

Summary: To provide members of the committee with an outline of the ambitions of the Web Transformation Project in order that Members can consider whether they wish to get involved in scrutinising this work, or engaging with the proposals for improvement.

Contact Officer: Georgina Stanton, Assistant Director, Communications

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Executive/Council

Key Decision No

Reason for urgency/
Exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To accept the two phased approach to web development.

1. Our current website

Central Bedfordshire Council developed its current site using only existing resources and within a very short timescale (between December 2008 and March 2009).

The result of this endeavour is a site that:-

- amounts to around 92,000 pages, images and documents
- is based on the nation standard navigation structure for local council sites (the Local Government Navigation List)
- includes simple search and A-Z and search features
- has hosted more than 165,000 visitors since 1st April, who have collectively viewed more than 1.75million pages.

However, the site has serious limitations:-

- Although it is rich in content, the routes to find the information are not as intuitive as they could be.

- Because much of the content was based on legacy authority sites, it continues to bear the identity of those institutions in many cases.
- The content management system on which the site is based is problematic.

Critically, the site is seen to be rich in content but less interactive than it could be.

As a result, customers are able to transact with us on line in a very limited manner, which means we are offering less efficient and accessible customer service than we could.

The site also fails to make the most of communication opportunities. The best local authority sites are making use of social media tools such as web chats, discussion forums, on line polls and blogs to enable more effective dialogue between the council and the public.

2. **The future**

In 2008, 16 million households in Great Britain (65 per cent) had Internet access. This is an increase of just over 1 million households (7 per cent) over the last year and 5 million households (46 per cent) since 2002.ⁱ

We must embrace the technology available in order that we drive customer efficiencies and improve customer service through the website. Our vision is that the web is the number one platform for self service and customer communication. We have implemented online transactional functionality with council tax, non domestic rates and housing and garage rents payable available through the site.

Online payments serve the customer at the front end and also offer back office savings – imagine a council which took all payments electronically.

An “Excellent” website

We want to be a leading website, one which sets the standard when it comes to visual look and feel, transactional functionality, online interaction, drag and drop menu options and personalisation.

Consider some of the leading “Excellent” local government sites from the 2009 SOCITM Better Connected report. Councils such as Redbridgeⁱ and Brentⁱⁱ have been pioneers of web development in recent years and it is the SOCITM Excellent classification which we must aim to achieve over the coming 5 years. Having said that, it is our customers who we want to view us as excellent, and this will be driven by how we interact online.

In recognition of these challenges and opportunities the Central Bedfordshire Management Team has commissioned a Web Development Team to review our presence and develop an improvement plan.

The Team comprises service users from all Directorates, the Head of Customer Services and the Head of Brand and Channel Management. It is jointly chaired by Georgina Stanton (AD Communications) and Caroline Carruthers (AD ICT & Property) who are the Senior Responsible Owners of the project.

3. **Strategic context**

National Policy NI14 The indicator aims to reduce ‘avoidable contact’ between the community and local authorities. Examples of ‘avoidable contact’ include calls from citizens to chase progress on service requests. Such calls are usually of little value to either the citizen or the local authority. However, they can often represent a significant proportion of contact volumes.

Customer Services Strategy 2009/2011 The aim of the strategy is to ensure that residents have better access to its services through a Multi Channel Access Strategy. This includes improving access to services online and the allocation of the new 0300 number. We want to offer high quality, reliable, flexible and responsive services and resolve queries at the first point of contact.

Our Customer Charter sets out our website customer service vision which is to make it easy for customers to find the information they want at a time that is convenient to them – this highlights the information and transactional needs of the 24 hour society we all live in.

Business Transformation objectives clearly illustrate the need to drive effective cost savings over the next 5 years. The website is integral to this as we seek to increase online payments and web self-service, thus reducing back office costs via the telephone and also face-to-face contacts. The SOCITM Better Connected Report 2008 illustrates the estimates costs per transaction as:

- Online 17p
- Telephone £4.00
- Face-to-face £7.80

Communications in local government are not longer limited to press releases. There are a variety of interactive channels available to communicate to a range of audiences including Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, WordPress, Blogger, Bebo and Flickr, to name a few.

Self-service channels are already available via the website, but there are a lot of areas which could be exploited e.g.

- Rather than book a meeting with a planning office over the phone, why not do it online?
- Offer a one-stop shop for information via post code search – a facility offered by Salfordⁱⁱⁱ, whereby you can find out who your councillor is, when your bin is collected, where your local schools, post offices and community centres are – all at the click of a button.

Community Engagement strategy The website is potentially a vehicle for consultation, for sharing information on and with our communities, for getting their feedback, and indeed for integrating with their own sites. It potentially increases the opportunity for involvement in the democratic process (for instance, we may "stream" council/committee meetings via the website, which may give people the opportunity to get involved in meetings they could/would not attend personally.

Customer Insight Programme – it is important to remember to develop a website **with** your community and not **for** your community. Another element of our Customer Services Strategy is our Customer Insight Programme which will use Customer Segmentation data to identify our customer groups. It is vital to remember that whilst around two thirds of customers now have web access, quite often it will be the other one third which is most likely to need our support.

4. **A Phased Approach**

The Web Development Team has met once in order to agree their terms of reference and to commission two pieces of work.

A short term review/improvement plan

External support from the national leadership group for Local Government information technology (SOCTIM) have been invited to undertake an audit of our current site and to make a series of tactical and practical recommendations for change which can be implemented immediately.

SOCTIM conduct an annual survey of all council websites, rating them on the quality of their information, their ease of use and their interactivity.

This process results in the publication of a "league table" of results from all local authorities each February.

It is anticipated that this swift audit, action plan and improvement programme will result in some short term enhancements to our on line presence within the current financial year.

A fundamental service review

The second phase of web improvement will be to conduct a wider reaching assessment of what our web presence should be in order to fit with the overarching business transformation strategy of Central Bedfordshire.

It is proposed that this review will:

Engage a wide section of stakeholders from inside the organisation and in the community so that their preferences, needs and expectations can be properly understood by the council.

Compare our on line presence and service with market leaders in both the public and private sector so that we are able to learn from the "best in class" organisations in developing our new site.

Analyse the costs and benefits of enhancing our website, particularly in the context of migrating customer traffic from other and more expensive forms of service to on line transactions.

In gathering this evidence, the project team will then develop options for web enhancements for wider consultation in the organisation in order to determine the preferred future model.

Once this is established an action plan to migrate our website from its current state to our future model will be developed and implemented.

5. **Timescales**

The Web Team have a workshop planned in September in order to turn this broad schedule into a more specific project plan. The intention is that the review and action planning will be concluded within this financial year so that the improvement programme can commence in 2010/11.

6. **Member Engagement**

Members have a critical part to play in the Web Development Programme and Business Transformation O&S Committee Members may wish to develop a task force to work with the officer team in both conducting the review and shaping the recommendations.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The aim of this website development ties in with the overall Customer Services Strategy, Business Transformation programme and Customer Charter website priorities all of which have over-arching aims to improve service to customers and deliver financial efficiencies.

Financial:

Invest to Save bid of £100k based on 2:1 return on investment - approved by PMO.

Legal:

National Indicator 14 (NI 14) is one of the 198 indicators against which local government will be assessed within the new performance management framework. This has been agreed between Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association (LGA).

The indicator aims to reduce 'avoidable contact' between the community and local authorities. Examples of 'avoidable contact' include calls from citizens to chase progress on service requests. Such calls are usually of little value to either the citizen or the local authority. However, they can often represent a significant proportion of contact volumes.

To meet the NI14 objectives, we must:

- 1) Ensure the website meets the information requirements in order that customers do not need to call or make a face to face visit resulting from inadequate information.
- 2) Increase the range of website transactions and ensure current transactions are user-friendly.

Risk Management:

The current site has serious limitations:-

- Although it is rich in content, the routes to find the information are not as intuitive as they could be.
- Because much of the content was based on legacy authority sites, it continues to bear the identity of those institutions in many cases.
- The content management system on which the site is based is problematic.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Staffing will not be directly affected by the website development initially. Medium to longer term, the objective will be to reduce telephone and face to face enquiries, thus allowing staff redeployment to other service areas.

Equalities/Human Rights:

N/A

Community Development/Safety:

N/A

Sustainability:

N/A

Appendix 1 – SOCITM

General information regarding SOCITM can be found by visiting

<http://www.socitm.gov.uk/socitm/About+us/default.htm>

Further information on SOCITM Consulting can be found at

<http://www.socitm.gov.uk/socitm/services/socitm+consulting/default.htm>

ⁱ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=8>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.brent.gov.uk/home.nsf/Pages/LBB-641>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.salford.gov.uk/online/yoursalford.htm>