

Agenda Item	20
Report No	FHR/164/13

Website Development Update

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

Summary

The Customer Engagement Strategy sets out the approach to the development of the web as a customer contact channel. This includes expanding the delivery of services online and improving access to and quality of information available on the Web. The Council's current Web Content Management System (WCMS) needs to be replaced, this provides an opportunity to review and improve the website with a strong customer perspective.

The procurement of a new WCMS was the first stage of work, budget approval was given in July 2013 and an award of contract has now been made. The focus is now on implementation and maximising the benefits that an improved website can offer to the Council and its customers and the purpose of this report is to set out the aims for the website development and the work required achieving these.

1. Background

1.1 Customer Engagement Strategy

The Council's Customer Engagement Strategy was approved in November 2011 and sets out the aims for the future of customer service delivery which include:

- Increasing choice for customers in the way they access services
- That services will be designed on the basis of what the customer needs
- That services will be provided on a cost effective basis through the most cost-effective channel
- Providing an interactive self-service website
- Providing a service which is consistent, professional and co-ordinated

1.2 The Highland Council Website

The Council's website is central to the realisation of the Customer Engagement Strategy. It is already a significant customer contact channel and will continue to grow as the preferred contact method for a large percentage of the population.

Customer expectation has changed in recent years and is being driven by their experience with commercial organisations. The Public Performance Survey 2012 evidenced that in the last four years customers contacting us via the website from their own homes have risen from 8% to 22%. If the Council is to meet the needs of these customers and maximise the benefits of an improved website it is imperative it creates the environment in which customers can self-serve. This means both being able to do business with the Council but equally as important is the content, accessibility and structure of the information provided.

1.3 Benefits

The short term requirements for the Project are to support the delivery of the Customer Engagement Strategy, the defined savings within the Customer Contact Transformation Project and the Customer Services Review.

Post implementation the Project will be exploring opportunities to deliver additional savings which includes channel shift. This is the movement of customers to lower cost channels and has been happening for the past decade in the private sector. This has gained real momentum more recently across local government and represents a significant opportunity for Highland Council to reduce costs and improve access to services.

The work being delivered as part of the Customer Contact Transformation Project includes making more services available online. There are currently 30 services available online and this is set to double by April 2014. The Customer Service Team and Services are working to promote these online services and an enhanced website will improve the customer experience when using them. Customers are demonstrating that they want to transact with the Council via the web. The Apply For School Transport process went online in May of this year and 82% of applications since then have been through this channel in addition, the take up of the complaints process via the web is now at 73%. The development of online services offers real alternatives to customers who want to self-serve including those customers who want to do business with us when we are traditionally not open.

2. Project Progress

The key areas of focus for the Project are the design and content for the new website which are set out in more detail below. Having successfully completed the procurement stage the Project is now moving into the implementation phase working towards a launch in April 2014.

2.1 Design

The development of a new website represents a great opportunity to deliver a modern, customer focused website and the aspiration is to make the website the customer's channel of choice.

Design includes the look and feel of the website but more importantly how information is set out and how accessible information is. The annual Better Connected Report by SOCITM sets out best practice for Local Government websites and surveys all such websites across the UK. Websites are awarded a rating based upon factors such as ease of use, navigation and accessibility from one to four stars and the Project aims to deliver a four-star website. Websites achieving four-star rating centre the design on customer demand and this principle will be applied in this Project.

The Project is working with the Web Team and the supplier to determine the most important information for our web users. Initial results evidence that whilst there are over 5,000 active web pages on the current site, 80% of traffic is across 800 of these pages. Investigation is ongoing and the results will be used to give the Project clear direction on what is important to our customers and therefore significantly influence the priorities for the new website layout.

The Project will be working to develop an engagement plan with key groups. This will focus on customers and include parties representing disability groups and young people.

2.1.1 The Design Process

The supplier's design process follows a set procedure with a number of iterations of the website anticipated for review before final approval is given by the Council. The Project will engage with customers, the Senior Management Team and the Members through this to provide updates and opportunities for input and feedback as the design progresses. The first iteration is expected to be ready in January and workshops will be arranged at this point for Members and the Senior Management Team to discuss and review.

2.2 Content Classification

One of the frustrations felt by the users of the website is the inability to find the right information. This is as a result of a number of factors including the outdated search functionality on our current system and the volume of content. The approach to content migration will in part help to alleviate this as will the improved capability of the new system.

2.2.1 Treatment of Content

There is a large volume of content on the current website with the number of pages totalling over 22,000.

The content can be broadly classified into two content types: active and static. With a different treatment applied to the migration of each. An outline approach based upon best practice is shown below.

2.2.2 Active Content

This refers to web pages where there is an on-going requirement to review and maintain the integrity of the content. The most successful websites migrate little of this type of content choosing instead to review, reduce and re-author. This approach has seen other Councils effectively provide easier access to the right information and create a manageable volume of content that can be maintained going forward.

2.2.3 Static Content

Static content is defined as content that should never change; it is generally a record of something that has happened, for example minutes and agendas. Given this, the static content will be subject to an automated migration to the new website.

2.4 Content Governance

The quality and relevance of content on the current website is mixed. There are a variety of factors that have influenced this including the number of web authors across the Council and the sheer volume of content.

The Project will protect the integrity, tone and quality of content on the new website. All active web pages will be subject to an annual review by the Web Team to ensure content remains current and relevant. Best practice suggests that authoring direct to the web should be limited to specific groups such as Committee Services, the Press & PR Team and the Web Team. Services will still responsible for content with functionality within the new system providing for a workflow of required edits and differing authoring rights to be set. This will ensure, where required, that quality assurance can be built in prior to changes going onto the live site. Training on the new WCMS for Services will be provided and this will be co-ordinated through Service Reps.

3. Resources

3.1 Budget

The budget for the delivery of the Project is £154,000. This includes the purchase of the WCMS, the design and implementation, hosting and subscriptions over a four-year term and the staff required to undertake the content migration.

3.2 Web Team

The importance of the Web to our customers and to the organisation means that the Council needs to consider how it will be best placed to develop the Web. It is intended that the Web Team become part of Customer Services to develop the website alongside the Service Point network and the Service Centre. The detailed staffing implications will be dealt with in the report covering the Customer Services Review due to come to Committee early in 2014.

4. Legal Implications

None arising from this report.

5. Equality Implications

The Project is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

The Council has historically achieved a good accessibility rating for its website and it is a stated aim of the Project to maintain this and improve this in continuing to work to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Engagement will take place throughout the implementation process through the Citizens Panel and parties representing disability groups and young people to support this work.

6. Risks

All projects under CIP detail and maintain risks via a risk register, the most significant risk affecting the Project is as follows:

Content migration has been flagged as one of the major challenges in achieving the April deadline. The Project is working with the supplier and stakeholders to determine an approach to mitigate this risk.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Members note the progress in developing a new website and improving on-line delivery of services to customers.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive

Date: 18.11.13

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Background Papers – Customer Engagement Strategy