South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee 16 January 2014
LEAD OFFICER: Executive Director, Corporate Services

SCDC Website – Annual report

Purpose

1. To review the performance and usage statistics of the Council's website for 2013.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the report be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

3. The Council's website has been live for one year. Establishing, building on and modernising the website has supported a new public web presence and a new internal intranet (In-Site) using a shared technology platform.

Background

4. In October 2012, the Council was advised that its incumbent web provider (Tagish) was to go into administration. Through that process, Tagish was bought by another company trading as 'Orange Bus'. Orange Bus subsequently served notice on the Council of its intention to cease the service provision within 8 weeks.

5. In looking to ensure a continued service and take advantage of newer technologies, a new website was quickly commissioned via internal resources. Built around the premise of 'task based' actions, the new web format also gives the opportunity to help improve the site through feedback options on each page.

6. Given the hurried start, the web team has done a good job of establishing, building on and modernising the website despite the many challenges that always come with creating something new and at the same time, moving to open source technology.

7. While the software itself is free to use, there has been a steep learning curve. New skills and ways of working were being well developed when the service was impacted by the departure of the Council's Web Officer. Despite this set back and difficulties in recruiting to the role, progress continues to be made, albeit at a slower pace than otherwise intended.

Review

8. The internet site (www.scambs.gov.uk) receives around 39,000 visits a month with Monday being the busiest day, often exceeding 1800 visits and Saturday generally the lowest with 500 visits.

9. In supporting our drive for channel shift and changing customer behaviours through improved understanding of user needs, a key task has been to improve the analytics on the use of the website.

10.   Combining the analytics detail with the feedback results provides us with excellent management information that will be used to help us plan and further improve the service in the coming year. (See **Appendix A**)

11.   To date there have been 400 feedback submissions ranging from simple corrections to spelling, to detailed suggestions on what else needs to be added. Feedback has been generally positive and helpful with a number of good suggestions for the future development.

12.   The website infrastructure is provided by our hosting partner (JDi consultants) who also provides the same for Cambridge City Council. By developing the strategic 'alliance' in this way, future options for shared resources and web site management can be developed. We are currently in discussion exploring these options and strategic direction.

13.   Website availability (99.95%) and general site security has been good. We did however experience two unmanaged incidents relating to Distributed Denial of Service attacks. Mitigation action has been taken to protect the site and no further incidents have been recorded.

14.   In addition to developing both internet and intranet sites we have tested, added and now use a number of e-Forms. At the time of writing, the Council Tax form has been completed and submitted 5621 times. A Business Improvement and Efficiency Programme project is to report on and provide a prioritised list of additional forms to be developed in 2014.

15.   In conjunction with building the 'corporate' web platform, the team has started to rationalise the Council's other existing web offerings with a view to reducing the number of sites.

16.   In bringing sites together there is a need to improve access to information and resources. Part of this involved a rigorous process of 'pruning' the old site – it had grown in a somewhat unmanaged way and a large number of pages had become out of date. The rationalisation of the site supports the process of developing comprehensive facilities to search across all sites. This work is underway with an intention to upgrade these facilities as site development continues.

17.   It is hoped this work will reduce ongoing costs, improve compliance, data protection, functionality, security, accessibility and overcome concerns of information being left unmanaged and out of date.

18.   Recent government advice has indicated that 'data transparency' will be an enforced requirement in 2014. Having understood that this was likely to happen, we included options to support these initiatives. Consequently, we have already made significant progress in these areas. Final testing is underway on new web modules for Open Data, Freedom of Information and additionally, we are creating a new Jobs Portal to provide us with an on-line presence once the 'JobsInCambs' service ceases later this month. These developments will go-live shortly and will support 'smarter' working and help bring further services on line.

19.   2013 has been a year of building with solid progress having been made but still with much to be done

Actions for 2014

20.   A full review of both website and intranet.

21.   Ensure all planned enhancements and new functions are made available at the earliest opportunity.

22.   Expand on and enhance working arrangements with the Customer Contact Centre. There are opportunities for the web to be more proactive based on live feedback from the contact team. Web chat will be launched shortly and will improve further our engagement with residents.

23.   Improve working relationships with partner organisations. In particular, ensure benefits from sharing technology systems with Cambridge City Council are reviewed and opportunities developed.

24.   Ensure wider communication and engagement with all stakeholders to promote web use within service areas.

Options

25.   Scrutiny and Overview Committee is asked to note this report and support the intentions of a review and any associated actions.

Implications

26.   In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial
27.   There are significant budget pressures for 2014/15 and beyond – improved and increased use of the website will help customer facing services provide a better service at lower cost.

Staffing
28.   The impact to staffing will be evaluated in line with service area plans.

Risk Management
29.   As the website develops, opportunities for it to become the first point of contact will require a robust and resilient provision. Inclusion within the corporate risk registers will provide appropriate oversight and identify mitigation measures.

Equality
30.   Equality considerations are key in the ongoing development of the provision, regular assessments are conducted in line with any improvement / change.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – We Listen and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure that we delivery first class services and value for money

31.   The Council's website provides its residents, businesses and visitors a 24/7 service provision enabling easy access to council services and information.

Background Papers: None

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