

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19 MARCH 2013

REPORT BY HEAD OF INFORMATION, CUSTOMER AND PARKING SERVICES

7. WEBSITE UPDATE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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**Purpose/Summary of Report:**

- To provide an update on the changes underway to the Council's website.
- To present the website action plan to the Committee for scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE That:**

(A)	The Council's Website Action plan be scutinised; and
(B)	The Executive be advised of any recommendations regarding the action plan now detailed.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Structured development of the website has been ongoing for the last 4 years, with continual reference to statistical and behavioural analysis to inform updates of the structure to the dominant uses.
- 1.2 The web team commissioned an independent review (**Essential Reference Paper B**) of the status of our website in October 2012 against the key criteria used by SOCITM in assessing the status of Council websites. This was used to validate the establishment of a Website and Digital Media Action Plan ('Action Plan' enclosed as **Essential Reference Paper C**).
- 1.3 Corporate Management Team (CMT) approved the Council's outline Website and Digital Media Development plan on 13 November 2012. CMT agreed that each Head of Service (HoS) must take responsibility for their services' website content (size and quality) and on-line service offer (top tasks).

- 1.4 A presentation was given to Senior Management Group (SMG) on 6 December 2012 to highlight the key issues and priorities.
- 1.5 CMT received a further update report on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013. This updated CMT on the progress of the 'Action Plan' and provided a more detailed breakdown of actions and milestones led by the Web Team.

## 2.0 Report

### 2.1 What is a Council Website?

2.2 A council website is primarily a channel for the delivery of services. East Herts Council's site is structured to allow the majority of it's users to reach the most commonly used goal pages as quickly and cleanly as possible, while maintaining a logical framework.

2.3 The website is also a valuable electronic medium for the storage of information about services and democratic processes.

2.4 The website is also a medium for keeping updated about the Council and its services. This includes changes to services due to adverse weather conditions through to initiatives and services to benefit the district and its community.

### 2.5 Our On-line Aims

Council services must:

- Ensure customers can quickly and easily complete their top tasks, the things they want to do on-line.
- Make decisions about website content and services based on evidence and facts from customer use not opinions.
- Identify our customers' top tasks based on what they do, not on what they say they do.
- Keep content as concise and simple as possible.
- Act on customer feedback and behaviour.

### 2.6 Measuring Use

It is important to focus on task completion; so that customers can easily and quickly complete their top tasks. Measuring the number of page views and visitor numbers give an idea of how many

people are viewing, not doing. The East Herts Action Plan is prioritised on top tasks.

## 2.7 Top Tasks

## 2.8 User Identified Tasks

2.9 Analysis of the most common activities on the website gave a clear indication of the top tasks users want to complete. These are:

Task Rating	Task	Visits (Jan – Apr 2012)
1	View Planning Applications	32,142
2	Contact the Council	7,285
3	Job Search	6,894
4	Pay Online (General)	4,456
5	Pay Council Tax	3,683
6	Online Benefits calculator	1,810
7	Pay/Challenge PCN	1,445

(130,426 total visits Jan – Apr 2012)\*

2.10 \*After this time the European Regulations for monitoring web use changed creating a gap in user information, guidance from the Information Commissioners' Office has subsequently been amended to allow us to monitor use, this was re-established in February 2013.

## 2.11 Commonly Expected Tasks (SOCITM Annual Review)

2.12 The Council also monitors tasks identified in the Society of IT Managers' (SOCITM) Better Connected review as "commonly expected". These tasks are used to grade council websites.

2.13 In 2012, the outcome was:

- Object to a planning application (Unable to Complete)
- Apply for a job (Unable to Complete)
- Find refuse collection schedules (Successfully Completed)
- Find swimming pool opening times (Unable to Complete)
- Pay Council Tax (Successfully Completed)

2.14 The council commissioned an independent report using the SOCITM "Better Connected" criteria and methodology (ERP B). The report confirmed the approach to website development as appropriate. The recommendations are included in the website

action plan.

## 2.15 Service Efficiencies (Self Service on the Web)

2.16 Delivering services via the web, with direct integration to back office systems, is a method of delivering service efficiencies. However, achieving integration with existing systems to unlock efficiency often needs significant IT resources. Where a business case is identified by a Head of Service for a web self service project, the web team provide support as required to the IT development team. The team also support and advise on the evaluation of the opportunities for efficiencies and the production of the business case.

2.17 There are opportunities in the procurement of new systems to ensure that web self service is an integral part of the specification, assessment and evaluation of solutions. The web team provide advice and support on the evaluation of the self service opportunities provided.

2.18 On 15 May 2012, CMT agreed an endorsement of a report on self service at East Herts. The report described a vision of self service opportunities and proposed a priority for addressing and investigating such opportunities. The web team support services in their developments to achieve on-line service delivery and continue highlight to CMT the priority areas for such development based on customer information.

## 2.19 Website Size

2.20 The council's website contains over 7000 pages, over 5000 PDF's (Portable Document Format; a downloadable, human readable, file format e.g. flyers, leaflets, published reports) and over 1000 Word documents.

2.21 In a commercial, corporate environment, this would be unheard of. For example, the support website for Microsoft Office Excel, one of the largest software support sites on the web, has only 1000 pages, including step-by-step guides and 'How-To' tutorials. Most commercial websites have pages numbering in hundreds.

2.22 Some council services have a profile the size of a business in their own right and could easily occupy their own website. Planning for example, spread across Planning Policy, Development Control and

Building Control, produce 467 pages of content.

2.23 The top 5 content areas by number of visitors are:

Rank	Content Area	Number of Visitors (Jan – Apr 2012)
1	Planning	72,700 (Top Task – View Planning Application 32,142)
2	Waste and Recycling	21,945 (Top Task – Find Collection Dates 1,126)
3	Council Tax	18,298 (Top Task – Pay Council Tax 3,683)
4	Parking	14,238 (Top Task – Pay/Challenge PCN 1,445)
5	Housing	13,699 (Top Task – Apply for Housing/Register 2,381)

2.24 The Council is focused on reducing the size of its site and every page is to have a maximum one year expiry date, such that its use and content will be reviewed against the value it offers to customers.

2.25 Page Content

2.26 Heads of Service are responsible for content and its production. Each service either uploads their own content or receives assistance from the web team to do so as their resources allow.

2.27 Maintaining content of value to the customer is a key priority of the web action plan. The challenge is to support services that are publishing content less than one day a week to do it to a high standard. It is also recognised that with a website of large size the volume of information can diminish its value.

2.28 The web team now reviews the top ten top content pages for each service to prepare suggestions to enhance customer value of the pages by raising the quality and reduce the quantity of information.

2.29 A monthly review of customer use and comment will be reported on the intranet. The web team will review pages to see if this information has been acted upon by services and recommend action when required.

2.30 Continuous improvement based on evidence from testing with real

customers is at the core of the web action plan.

### 2.31 Accessibility

2.32 Our website's style sheets and templates were reviewed for accessibility 3 years ago, and were found to be broadly industry standard for compliance with accessibility requirements, with some good and excellent features. These style sheets were updated to include recommendations from the review, but have not been substantially amended since then, maintaining the standard of accessibility.

2.33 Additionally, the SOCITM review includes a report from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and a Yes/No rating for accessibility. East Herts Council continues to be rated as accessible by the RNIB.

### 2.34 Video on the Web

2.35 The web team offer filming editing and video deployment on the web for a number of service areas as a no cost service which would cost thousands of pounds per project. Work includes:

- Recording, edit and broadcast of meetings held in external venues (such as Development Control meetings held at the Charis Centre in Bishop's Stortford).
- Live broadcast of planning hearings.
- Filming community project events, for example the 3Music event, using a multi camera set up with a volunteer crew.
- Filming marketing assets (such as promoting Summer Activity funding for the Community Projects team, promoting Hertford Theatre pantomimes and promoting Budget Consultations).
- Skills in motion graphics and video effects mean that such material is of a commercial industry quality including a suite of "virtual tours" to promote the venue hire business activities at Hertford Theatre.

### 2.36 How People Find Us

### 2.37 Search Engines

69% of visitors (96,157 visits Jan – Apr 2012) use a search engine

to find the Council's website:

2.38 Top 10 Search Terms (Jan – Apr 2012)

	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Visits</b>	<b>Council Google Ranking</b>
<b>1</b>	east herts council	18,400	1
<b>2</b>	east herts planning	4,297	1
<b>3</b>	east herts district council	3,362	1
<b>4</b>	east herts	3,228	1
<b>5</b>	www.eastherts.gov.uk	1,945	1
<b>6</b>	eastherts	1,064	1
<b>7</b>	east herts council tax	937	1
<b>8</b>	east hertfordshire district council	817	1
<b>9</b>	ehdc	760	2
<b>10</b>	East herts council planning	738	1

2.39 Home Page

2.40 Only 37% of visitors came in via the Home Page with the remainder using links and the specific service related links offered by search engines.

2.41 Top Entry Pages (Jan – Apr 2012)

Page	Number of Entrances
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more ( <b>Home Page</b> )	49,073
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/Planning and Building <b>/Online Planning</b>	5,581
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ <b>Council Tax</b>	4,830
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ <b>Jobs and Careers</b>	4,293
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling,	3,325

Parking, Community Development and more/ <b>Housing</b>	
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ <b>Planning and Building</b>	2,682
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ Customer Service/ <b>Contacting the Council</b>	2,567
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ <b>Waste and Recycling</b>	2,475
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ Planning and Building / <b>The Planning System</b>	2,296
/Home Page - Council Tax, Planning, Refuse and Recycling, Parking, Community Development and more/ Parking and Transport/ Parking/ Car Parks/ <b>Bishop's Stortford Car Parks</b>	1,467

- 2.42 The current interface (home page) for the website or home page; its colours, style and presentation, were designed approx 5 years ago. While this design is not unpleasant, the behaviours and expectations of our users have evolved, and there is an opportunity to redevelop to better accommodate them.
- 2.43 The Council's home page is important and the web action plan prioritises delivery of a simplified and customer configurable home page that will make it easier for customers to access services and information in the way they want to. This will be live by the end of May.
- 2.44 However, more important is the need to develop service interfaces (home pages), to act as the access points from links and external search provider results to provide clear and easy access to a particular service as this is what the users of our website are looking for. These will be implemented during the top page reviews across all services.
- 2.45 Navigation
- 2.46 A key challenge the East Herts website faces is for its search engine to be truly effective in delivering what customers are looking for. This is made difficult by the wide variety of services and quantity of content that is 'searched'.
- 2.47 The actions to reduce content (page numbers and size) and enhance quantity of information will assist the search engine.



2.48 The Council is also re-writing the code of the search engine so that we can monitor the words used to search for content and monitor the results given and content accessed. These search words will be indexed as keywords to prioritise the information offered in response to a search based on the actual use of the search engine.

### 3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report are detailed in **Essential Reference Paper A**.

#### Background Papers

CMT 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012 – Website Update Report

CMT 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2013 – Website Update Report

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