

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2014

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF INFORMATION, CUSTOMER AND
PARKING SERVICES

WEBSITE ONE YEAR ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS AND CLOSURE
REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To provide an update on the Council’s website action plan for scrutiny.
- To present the continuous improvement actions now transferred to the Information, Parking and Customer Services Service Plan.

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

(A)	The Council’s achievements under the Website Action Plan be reviewed and Members consider the actions detailed within the Service Plan; and
(B)	The Executive be advised of any recommendations.

1.0 Background

1.1 The web team commissioned an independent review of the website in October 2012 and used it to the establish the Website Action Plan approved by Corporate Management Team on 19th November 2012 and scrutinised by Corporate Business Scrutiny on 19th March 2013.

2.0 Report

2.1 Our On-line Aims

East Herts 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.

2.2 Measuring Use

The Council measures task completion; so that customers can easily and quickly complete their top tasks. Measuring the number of page views and visitors gives an idea of how many people view website pages, but not what they are doing (or trying to do).

2.3 Top Tasks

2.3.1 User Identified Tasks

Analysis of the most common activities on the website indicates the top tasks users want to complete, as shown below:

	(Jan to Apr) 2012/2013 : 130,426 total visits*		(Apr to Mar) 2013/2014 : 456,979 total visits	
Task Rating	Task	Visits	Task	Visits
1	View Planning Applications	32,142	View Planning Applications	55,499
2	Contact the Council	7,285	Contact the Council	19,859
3	Job Search	6,894	Pay Online (General)	14,805
4	Pay Online (General)	4,456	Pay Council Tax	14,218
5	Pay Council Tax	3,683	Job Search	12,287
6	Online Benefits calculator	1,810	Pay/Challenge PCN	10,051
7	Pay/Challenge PCN	1,445	Online Benefits calculator	3,765

*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.

2.3.2 Commonly Expected Tasks

The Council monitors the tasks identified in the Society of IT Managers' (SOCITM) as "commonly expected", used to grade council websites.

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)

In 2013, the tasks were changed by SOCITM, but the outcome was a significant improvement on 2012:

- Arrange collection of an old bed using online forms (Unable to Complete)
- Apply for a job (Successfully Completed)
- Object to a planning application (Successfully Completed)
- Find swimming pool opening times (Successfully Completed)
- Find Councillor details (Successfully Completed)

2.4 Website Size

In 2012, the Council's website contained over 7000 pages. By the end of 2013 this had been reduced by 2000 pages that had not been viewed by the public in over a year, and were causing the search engine to slow down, and return pages of unwanted links as results.

2.5 Page Content

Heads of Service are responsible for content and its production. The challenge is to support services publishing content less than one day a week, to do it to a high standard. The web team continues to review the top ten top content pages for each service, proposing improvements to quality and reducing the quantity of

information.

2.6 Accessibility

The 2013 SOCITM review (including report from the Royal National Institute for the Blind) continues to rate the East Herts website as accessible.

2.7 Video on the Web

The web team offer filming, editing and video deployment on the web for as a no cost service. This is a growing area of work, with a large number of video projects featuring Councillors and their work planned for 2014. Work completed in 2013 included:

- Recording, edit and broadcast of meetings held in external venues (such as Development Control meetings held at the Charis Centre and Football Club in Bishop's Stortford).
- Filming community project events, for example the 3Music event, using a multi camera set up with a volunteer crew.
- Filming marketing assets, such as the Love Your Market event, and the recent Community Leadership clips.
- Creating training assets, such as the Community Health video suite
- Commercial industry quality motion graphics and video effects including a suite of "virtual tours" to promote the venue hire business activities at Hertford Theatre.

2.8 Search Engines

In 2012, 69% of visitors used a search engine to find the Council's website; in 2013 this was 63%.

Top 10 Search Terms Used on External Search Engines

	Keywords (<u>Jan – Apr 2012</u>)	Visits	Council Google Ranking	Keywords (<u>Apr 2013 – Mar 2014</u>)	Visits	Council Google Ranking
1	east herts council	18,400	1	east herts council	20,972	1
2	east herts planning	4,297	1	east herts planning	6,087	1
3	east herts district council	3,362	1	east herts district council	5,532	1

4	east herts	3,228	1	east herts	3,443	1
5	www.eastherts.gov.uk	1,945	1	www.eastherts.gov.uk	2,807	1
6	eastherts	1,064	1	eastherts.gov.uk	1,517	1
7	east herts council tax	937	1	east herts council tax	1,493	1
8	east hertfordshire district council	817	1	recycling@eastherts.gov.uk	954	1
9	ehdc	760	2	http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/	891	1
10	East herts council planning	738	1	eastherts	822	1

2.9 Home Page

In 2012, 37% of visitors came in via the Home Page. This fell to 21% in 2013. The remainder use links and the specific service related links offered by search engines.

www.eastherts.gov.uk Top Entry Pages

Jan – Apr 2012 top entrance pages	Number of Entrances	Apr 2013– Mar 2014 top entrance pages	Number of Entrances
Home Page	49,073	Home Page	88,661
Online Planning	5,581	Planning and Building	20,452
Council Tax	4,830	Planning Decisions	18,896
Jobs and Careers	4,293	Council Tax	17,173
Housing	3,325	Waste and Recycling	10,690
Planning and Building	2,682	Housing	9,193
Contacting the Council	2,567	Contacting the Council	8,981
Waste and Recycling	2,475	Jobs and Careers	6,628
The Planning System	2,296	Bishop's Stortford Car Parks	5,700
Bishop's Stortford Car Parks	1,467	Electronic Payments	5,339

A new front page was deployed in 2013. The number of clicks taking users of the top content subsequently fell, making for quicker

journeys from the front page. E.g. Visitors seeking planning applications from the home page require only 1 click to access the on-line planning application page instead of 3.

The core service level pages were rebuilt, replacing pages of text with quick links to the most commonly used pages and links for more information set below them. This has also cut the journey (in terms of clicks). E.g. the parking services landing page offers the link to view or pay a penalty charge notice as the top link, reducing the number of clicks from 4 to 1.

2.10 Navigation

The search engine behind the Council's website was re-built in 2013 to provide a faster response, and a new method tracking the actual words people were using in their searches. This, combined with the removal of 2000 pages from the website, has resulted in a vastly improved search function. The work of re-writing content and tracking search keywords is reviewed every month to continuously fine tune performance.

- On average, 18% of visitors to our site use the search engine.
- 7% of visitors use the search box on the Home Page rather than use any other navigation option.

Search Words 2013

Words	% of Searches
Council tax	3.88%
Planning	3.77%
recycling	0.86%
housing	0.84%
building control	0.64%
parking	0.62%
local plan	0.60%
planning policy	0.49%
pay council tax	0.47%
pcn	0.43%

2.11 Web Action Plan Summary and Status:

- New Home Page – deployed and complete
- Search Engine re-write – deployed and complete

- Markets Video content – complete and launched
- Service level top 10 pages review - complete
- Service level dormant content cull – complete
- GovDelivery key pages identified and tagged – complete (with ongoing review)
- Deep content review and cull – ongoing monthly work task
- Search Engine keyword monitoring – ongoing monthly work task
- Customer Feedback monitoring and actions – ongoing monthly work task
- Key Landing Page optimisation – ongoing monthly work task
- SOCITM report review and associated actions – complete
- Usability report review and associated actions - complete

2.12 Service Plan Actions 2014/15

An excerpt of the Information, Parking and Customer Services Service Plan is presented in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

2.12.1 Accessibility Review

The website team will commission an expert agency, working with users with a wide range of physical, visual and cognitive impairments, to conduct a review of the website to assure compliance to the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2 and specific user experience of the site. The review will cover published content, as well as other web content delivery platforms held on the East Herts network (e.g. maps, forms, Planning Online and ModernGov/Committees and agendas).

2.12.2 Intranet Development

The work undertaken to simplify and better organise content for customers needs to apply to the intranet, supporting all staff. Support services need to have landing pages focused on key tasks to ensure quick and efficient completion of any administrative or internal functions. The web team will manage a comprehensive review of Intranet use, staff requirements and an analysis of potential developments and efficiencies. An intranet action plan will be developed with internal/support services to improve the digital provision of internal and support services.

2.12.3 Member's Extranet

The Member's extranet is a key tool for distributing information to elected members. It is hosted within the same content management environment as the public website, but not connected to it. Committee Agenda and Minutes functions are handled via the ModernGov application hosted on the network, accessed via a web browser. Use of the Member's extranet is low, with small amounts of traffic to the training and pages offering service level information.

The web team will undertake a review of use, content and potential tools available working with members to address their concerns, wishes and ideas for the extranet. A Members' extranet action plan will be developed with Democratic Services to improve the digital provision of services for Members.

2.12.4 My East Herts

Many services are location based and customers may wish to search for or be informed about information relating to where they live e.g. customers may wish to see information about all planning applications submitted where they live. This will be branded as "My East Herts".

2.12.5 Customer Service Strategy and Action Planning

The Council will revise its Customer Service Strategy in 2014, looking at the challenges faced by our communities and their expectations, prioritising the response to these drivers of change.

An action planning phase will follow to support all services in responding to the approved strategy and developing service delivery to be fit for purpose for the next 5 to 10 years. This includes digital provision of services via the Council's website and other digital service channels such as mobile devices.

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

Corporate Business Scrutiny Report – Website Update and Acton Plan 19 March 2013.

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