

 Executive– 18th March 2009		Agenda Item No.
Title	Website development	
For further information about this report please contact	Michael Branson	
Service Area	Revenues and Customer Services	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	N/A	
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	Yes/No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	Yes/No
Key Decision?	Yes/No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes/No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
With regard to officer approval all reports <i>must</i> be approved by the report author's relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director	27 th Feb	Bill Hunt
Chief Executive	27 th Feb	Chris Elliott
CMT	27 th Feb	All
Section 151 Officer	27 th Feb	Mary Hawkins
Legal	2 nd March	Peter Oliver
Finance	27 th Feb	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	2 nd March	Les Caborn
Consultation Undertaken		
Please insert details of any consultation undertaken with regard to this report.		
Final Decision?		Yes/No
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report requests funding to develop and improve the website with the aim of improving ease of use for customers, increasing usage and impacting on the number of phone calls the council receives.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Executive approves funding as outlined in the attached business case so that work can start on reorganizing the entire website (Microsoft Content Management System (CMS)) based on the customer perspective at a cost of up to £65,000, as outlined in sections 2.1 and 6.1 of the attached business case.
- 2.2 The work on the website of up to £65,000 is funded from the Spend to Save budgetary provision.
- 2.3 The staffing levels in the Customer Service Centre are reviewed after the improvements to the website have been undertaken.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 We want to increase usage of the website as it is the cheapest access channel. Research shows that a typical enquiry costs the council £16.20 face to face, £1.55 by phone and 12p on the web. We want to encourage people with internet access (over 65% of the population) to access the information and services that can be delivered online, via our website. Currently around 15-20% of our local population use the website to access our services so there is scope for increasing that figure (some district councils have 25 -30% of their local population using their website).
- 3.2 The website is currently structured from a government perspective and not a customer perspective as a good website should be. To increase usage we need to reorganise the website so that it is easier for the customer to use and easier for them to find information. The best way to do this is to carry out work with our users to completely restructure the site. It is well established that improving the ease of use of a website leads to increased usage of that website.
- 3.3 Because of the way the website is structured, up to 30% of our web users currently fail to find what they want on the site. This means they then go to the more expensive access channels and/or don't return to the website in future. Many comment that whilst the site contains a lot, it is difficult to locate information. Satisfaction ratings for the website are average or slightly above average when compared to other council websites.
- 3.4 Research carried out by the Customer Service Centre suggests as many as 25% of phone calls come from people who have previously attempted to find information on the website but have failed to do so. Much of this information is on the website – they just couldn't find it due to the current structure. There is the potential to reduce the number of phone calls we have to deal with i.e. reduce avoidable contact, by improving the website.
- 3.5 A 5% reduction in phone calls would equate to over 15,000 fewer calls a year - a 10% reduction leads to 30,000 fewer calls. Roughly speaking a full time member of staff is required for every 12,000 calls per year. There are plans for the Customer Service Centre to take on calls for other service areas in the future. Without

reducing current call volumes, these additional calls will require extra staff or lead to a decline in service standards.

- 3.6 There is already evidence that improving the website leads to a reduction in the number of phone calls we receive. Council tax phone calls have decreased steadily over the past 2 years since an online council tax service was added to the website. Overall the number of calls to the council has decreased, as web usage increases.
- 3.7 In the event that the council moves its website to another technology platform (e.g. Sharepoint) in the future, this piece of work to improve the ease of use of the website would still be necessary. Any changes made now can be migrated to Sharepoint so an investment now would reduce the amount needed for any future project.
- 3.8 This proposed piece of work ties in with the Business Improvement Projects and the associated systems thinking philosophy. It is entirely about seeing services from the customer perspective in order to improve access to them.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 We can carry out work to improve the site at a lower cost than outlined in 2.1 above. For £35,000 - £40,000 we can carry out user testing and follow up improvement work but to a lesser degree. User testing is an iterative process. By reducing the amount of iteration, we could reduce the amount of work required. Spending £55,000 – £65,000 will lead to more robust results than spending £35,000 – £40,000. The latter would be the lowest figure at which we could carry out all activities to some degree but there would be an increased risk that improvements would not be as significant.
- 4.2 We can continue as we are, adding services and making continuous improvements to existing areas of the site. The website has improved in many ways over the past few years by following this approach and usage has increased significantly.
- 4.2 Simply by adding services and information we are not addressing the issue that the website has outgrown its existing structure. By continuing as we are we will have to accept that some of our customers will continue to struggle to find what they want and will then phone us, visit us or email us. Website usage will not increase as much as it could.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 The website development of £65,000 can be funded from the Spend to Save funding of £1,033,000 that was agreed as part of the 2009/10 Budget report. Further allocations totalling £104,000 from this budget are being recommended in the Budget and Improvement Programme report.
- 5.2 A capital investment now – as outlined in the attached business case - has the potential to release ongoing revenue costs by a reduction in staff resource required in the Customer Service Centre. The business case suggests that it may be possible to save £20,000 (1 FTE) if customer demand and service standards remained as now.
- 5.2 However it is difficult to be definitive about the relationship between investment and saving given the likely demand on many council services over the next 2 years as

the council tackles the consequences of the economic slowdown. It will be necessary to review the staffing levels in the Customer Service Centre once the website development has been completed.

6. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 6.1 The report supports the Council's corporate strategy objectives,
- *To improve the efficiency of service delivery to the council's customers*
 - *The extent to which customers find WDC services easy to access and use to be 80% in 2011."*

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 See attached business case