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**CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT - CARDIFF COUNCIL WEBSITE**

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**Reason for the Report**

1. To provide Members with background information regarding Cardiff Council's website and the work which is ongoing to refresh the website as part of the Council's wider changes to its approach to customer management.

**Background**

2. The Committee's terms of reference provide for it to consider the Council's approach to both Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and communications. The Committee agreed to consider this subject as part of its work programme for 2012/13, but there was insufficient time to consider the website prior to this meeting.

**Issues**

**Customer Management Strategy - 2012**

3. In January 2012 this Committee considered Cardiff Council's draft Customer Management Strategy, which aimed to set out a corporate vision for how customers will be managed across services. It also gave an approach for the development and management of customers' access channels to the Council, including the Council's website. While the Strategy made it clear that the Council aimed to design access channels with the needs and preferences of customers in mind, it also endeavoured to encourage the greater use of the most cost-effective contact methods. Indicative figures contained within the Strategy showed that the cost of handling an automated transaction carried out via the web was 25 pence,

as opposed to an estimated £4 for a telephone interaction, or £15 for an interaction via post.

4. In terms of the Council's website specifically, the Strategy's aims at that time are set out below:

We will provide a single, comprehensive, easy to access and up-to-date web site that allows anyone to transact and interact with the Council 24/7. This will include a customer self service account that will allow access to more sensitive services that require customer authentication and/or validation.

We will:

- Improve the presentation and functionality of the Council's website to make it:
  - Attractive to look at
  - Easy to navigate and use
  - Easy and effective to search for items in the website using terminology that the general public is likely to use (e.g. 'rubbish' instead of 'refuse')
  - Structured in ways that align with citizens' needs, rather than in the way that the Council is organised
  - Capable of allowing customers to undertake the majority of transactions and service requests online, using authentication of customer identity etc where (but only where) necessary via a customer self service account
- Actively promote the website as the main access point for the Council's services for information, transactional services and service requests, emphasising its benefits to citizens
- Ensure that all web content is written in plain English/Welsh and is easy to understand
- Review and shape the website in line with developments in web technology and based on consultation with citizens and analysis of site use and customer journeys
- Promote channel shift towards the Council's preferred channels

- Provide intuitive map-based interfaces to support information provision and transactions (e.g. reporting a problem at a particular location)
- Integrate all online transactions directly into back office and other front office systems to avoid the need for double entry of information (e.g. if a customer reports a problem online but chases it up via phone)
- Ensure that all Council leaflets and literature are made available via the website in order to reduce printing, cost and environmental impact
- Ensure that all communications activity is replicated on the Council's website.

### **Web Refresh project**

5. Members may already be aware that a project is now underway to update the Council's website. The project's emphasis is on delivering efficient, citizen-focused services across a range of channels through which the people of Cardiff expect to be able to engage with the Council. The project has recognised that the current version of the Council's website has reached the end of its shelf life and that the technology used is now outdated. It has been stated that this limits the Council's ability to develop its online presence and to build a quality online service.
6. Communications around the project have recognised the need to deliver savings in the medium term as well as to consider the resources and governance arrangements around the management and maintenance of the website. Currently service areas are largely responsible for updating their own content on the Council's website.
7. At the end of April 2013 all pages of the website were locked for a five month period to allow the Web Refresh project team to audit the Council's current website content and revise it to make it more fit for purpose. Service Area access to the editing and creation of content on the website has been suspended, apart from some areas of the website which fall under an exception list. These include areas such as the Council's meeting calendar, ensuring that the Council's

statutory obligations are met and impact to the business of the Council is minimal.

8. Work is also underway to implement new technology to give the Council a framework which will give it the necessary framework to support the website's functionality. The same technology is being used to deliver a number of other aspects of the Customer Management Strategy as well as Document Management.

### **Society of Information Technology Management local authority website review**

9. Each year, the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) undertakes a survey of local authority websites. In its 'Better Connected 2013: a snapshot of all local authority websites' report, Socitm gives the findings of its review of over 450 websites.
10. The review rates the websites from one to four stars, following an assessment based on the performance of ten 'top tasks' which members of the public might regularly complete. These include finding out the opening times for the local tip; applying for a Council job; reporting a pothole and finding out about local councillors. Websites are also tested for their usability in terms of ease of navigation to perform the top tasks; the use of their search engine; the use of their A to Z; and their accessibility.
11. For the first time this year, Socitm has also reviewed local authority websites based on a test of access via mobile devices, such as smart phones. Many more people are accessing Council services using mobile devices; it is estimated that up to 20% of visits to Council websites are made using mobile devices. Despite this very few sites (only 15%) met Socitm's standard in this regard. Among 13 councils which met the standard only one in Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf, was stated to offer a good mobile experience.
12. This year Cardiff Council's website has been given an overall one star rating ('poor'), down from three stars last year. Generally Wales' websites are rated more poorly compared to those in other parts of the UK. Six other Welsh councils

are rated at one star, eleven at two stars; and three at three stars. Of the 37 websites given four star ratings across the UK, only one was from Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (CBC). One website rated as four star, is equivalent to 18% of all Welsh websites, as compared to 70% of English shire councils, and 58% of Scottish councils which are rated as four star. Socitm notes that Welsh websites face the additional resource challenge in terms of support bilingual web content.

13. Socitm rates Rhondda Cynon Taf's website among the top twenty websites across the UK overall. Other Welsh sites which were well-rated this year are Caerphilly CBC, Conwy CBC and Newport City Council, all rated as three stars. Newport City Council's website is highlighted in the report as having made some significant improvements to the accessibility of its website with very little budget following the arrival on a new e-access development manager.
14. Socitm also provides a website take up service which assesses feedback from people visiting council websites. In 2012, the survey had an average of over 25,000 responses each month (or just under 150 per website). The council which had the highest satisfaction rate from visitors was Caerphilly County Borough Council, at 55.39%. Caerphilly Council's website also had the lowest failure rate in finding information, at 14.04%.
15. The Socitm Review makes a number of general recommendations for councils in improving their websites:
  - i. Get the customer journey right (for example ensuring that entry points to completing a task or looking for information are easy to find from both the home page and search engines).
  - ii. Make sure third party services work for the customer  
Ensuring that customers are sent to the most relevant page of a third party website if they are sent there to complete a task; and cherry-picking elements of what suppliers have to offer, rather than taking on a whole package that does not suit.
  - iii. Be ruthless about jargon

Stripping out unnecessary words, avoiding confusing terms, not making assumptions about what customers already know about a service, and avoiding links which will not mean anything to the user.

iv. Do not re-invent the wheel

Make use of national sites, while explaining what they are for.

v. Be really transparent

Improve pages relating to democracy and councillors in particular.

### **Previous scrutiny**

16. Although this Committee membership has not considered the Council's website specifically, during the consideration of items on its 2012/13 work programme, Members have made a number of comments and recommendations which are relevant to this item:

- When considering the Council's Connect to Cardiff service in November 2012, Members were given brief details of the Council channel shift strategy which aims to promote web-access as the preferred method for contacting the Council. Members were concerned that the Council should avoid a 'two-tier' contact system which favours those with easy access to the internet.
- When it considered the Council's Internal Services Strategy and Technology Framework in July 2013, the Committee was informed that one of the key challenges facing the Council in terms of its ICT was the issue of access to information. The Strategy states that 'we shall ensure that our data is as open to the public as possible by working towards a "publish unless we cannot" default view. This will help reduce the burden created by FOI requests and increase the confidence of our citizens in our delivery'.
- During its consideration of Information Management in March 2013, the Committee again queried whether the Council could forestall information requests by aiming to make as much information as possible available on the Council's website.
- As part of its Public Engagement with Scrutiny inquiry, the Inquiry group made a number of comments about the extent to which the Scrutiny section of the Council's website supports public involvement in Scrutiny and local democracy.

## **Way forward**

17. Sarah McGill, Director of Communities, Housing & Customer Services and Ross Maude, Chief Enterprise Architect, will be in attendance to give Members details of the Web Refresh project in the context of wider and longer-term changes to the way in which the Council manages its relationship with customers. Mike Davies, Head of Scrutiny Performance and Improvement will also be in attendance in his role as senior manager for Information Management.

## **Legal Implications**

18. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers of behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

## **Financial Implications**

19. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is recommended to:

- (i) Consider the information presented in this report and at the meeting; and
- (ii) Consider whether it wishes to relay any comments or observations for consideration by the Cabinet.

## **MIKE DAVIES**

Head of Service

Scrutiny, Performance & Improvement

30 May 2013