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Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

Title of meeting:	Scrutiny Management Panel
Subject:	Portsmouth City Council website
Date of meeting:	31 January 2012
Report by:	Head of Customer, Community and Democratic Services
Wards affected:	ALL

1. Requested by

Scrutiny Management Panel

2. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Management Panel with information about plans for the development of the city council's web presence.

3.   Information Requested

3.1.   Background

The council's website was launched in 2005 and has undergone a number of changes since then, including a design refresh, and a content and structure review.

However, in the face of rapid development of web technologies, incremental changes to our website are no longer sufficient to meet the expectations of customers who are used to the kind of functionality they get from sites like Amazon and eBay, or who expect to be able to access information and services through apps on their smartphone or tablet.

In addition, the council needs to make substantial efficiency savings if we are going to reduce our costs but maintain services for our residents. As big savings can be made by encouraging our customers to engage with us through the web rather than using more costly channels, the need to develop the council's web solution is clear.

3.2.   Transformation programme

Investment in development of the council's web presence to achieve efficiency savings is part of the customer management element of the transformation programme. Around £500K will be invested over three years in order to move between 20,000 and 30,000

customer contacts from more expensive channels such as face-to-face and telephone contact to the web. Achieving this objective is central to our web strategy 2012-14.

The council's web solution will be developed in line with the guiding principles that lead the transformation programme, in particular by ensuring customers are right at the heart of our new web presence.

3.3.   Web strategy

Our web strategy 2012-14 (attached as Appendix A) sets out how the web will be developed. The overall objective is to deliver an improved web solution that encourages target numbers of customers to channel shift, meets the business needs of the remaining work streams and the organisation, provides our customers with a better service, and maximises the communications potential of the web.

More detail about the four key areas is included in the attached strategy.

3.4.   Research

At the moment, the council website is structured around services rather than customers. In future, this will be turned around and the needs of our customers will be put at the heart of the new site. This means the design and content, the way the site is structured, and the way it works and what it can do, will be based on what we know about our customers and how they behave, and on what they tell us.

A review of information we currently hold is underway, and further research to plug any gaps in our knowledge will be commissioned/undertaken in early 2012.

Work will also be done in early 2012 to capture the business requirements of the remaining transformation work streams to ensure that these are fed into our implementation plan .

3.5.   Structure, content and design

A review of the web hardware and software will be done in early 2012 to make sure we have the right infrastructure to take the web solution forwards.

The information on the site will also be reviewed during 2012. Solutions will be proposed based on research to ensure content/structure meets our customer needs, whilst encouraging channel shift to the web. Detailed proposals will be developed once the customer research is complete. However, changes are likely to include improved searchability, and a simplification of online forms and payment options so the customer has a seamless experience on the site. It is also likely that simple individual profiles will be developed, based on basic demographics and behaviour on the site, automatically pushing relevant content to the surface so it can be found easily, and enabling customers to choose their own favourite pages.

Simple, eye-catching design will be used to engage our customers and we will ensure the design functions equally well on all devices (PCs, laptops, smartphones and tablets) and on all browsers, giving access to information and services anytime, anywhere.

3.6. Implementation

The web strategy will be implemented as part of the council's transformation programme, and predominately as part of the customer management work stream.

A web project board has been established to oversee the delivery of the web strategy 2012-14, and will work to a detailed project plan that is currently being developed.

Until the research element of the project is complete, we won't know precisely how the web solution needs to develop to meet our customers' needs and deliver channel shift, so precise timescales are not available at this stage. However, we expect to make 'quick win' changes that will begin the process of channel shift in 2012, and to have an improved web solution in place during 2013

A marketing strategy will promote the web to key target audiences as **the** way to engage with the council online, supporting channel shift and encouraging new customers to use the site, increasing the effectiveness of the web solution as a key communications tool. Work will be done with our city helpdesk, and with other services that have day to day contact with customers, to ensure customers are encouraged and assisted to use the web, where appropriate.

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Signed by (Head of Service)

Appendices: APPENDIX A: Web strategy 2012/14

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location