**Shaping our future
web strategy**

1. introduction

This document is the council's web strategy for 2012-15. It sets out how our web presence will be developed in line with the council's transformation programme, focusing on four key areas – the desired outcomes from the customer management work stream, the business and customer needs arising from the remaining work streams, improving the customer experience, and improving the web as a communications tool.

As its main objective, the strategy will aim to deliver a web solution that encourages our existing customers to make web their channel of choice when transacting or engaging with the council, reducing costs associated with more expensive forms of customer contact and delivering efficiency savings as part of the **customer management** element of transformation. The strategy will also ensure the web presence supports the remaining work streams, acts as a key communications tool for the council, and delivers significant improvements to the customer experience on our website by **'putting customers at the heart of everything we do'.**

'Putting customers at the heart of everything we do' is one of a set of guiding principles that are in place to ensure the transformation programme delivers improvements to services as well as efficiency savings. These guiding principles will be followed through the development and delivery of the web strategy.

1.1. guiding principles

- put customers at the heart of everything we do
- make sure services are always value for money
- be ambitious and continue to improve
- use information and evidence to shape services our customers really need
- simplify and strengthen our processes and share them with each other
- make sure every enquiry that can be resolved first time is resolved first time
- support councillors as the strategic leaders of our organisation
- recognise the importance of staff and support them as we change
- listen to our customers and staff and learn from what we hear

2. our vision

Our website will become **the** place to find information and access services, making it the channel of choice for our customers

3. the background

The council's Shaping our future transformation programme will deliver better services for our customers and substantial efficiency savings.

The customer management element is expected to deliver around £17m of savings over ten years, both by simplifying the processes the council uses when engaging with its customers, and by encouraging customers to channel-shift to the web.

Therefore, the development of the council's website specifically to encourage customers to self-serve rather than use more costly face-to-face or telephone contact is a key part of the transformation programme's customer management work stream.

The average cost of a web transaction is around 39p, compared to £8 for an average face-to-face contact, and we currently manage more than 100,000 customer contacts a year without using the web. The potential for savings is clear.

Current trends tell us the web can be the channel of choice for a significant number of our existing customers. The 2009 MORI residents' survey found 81% of Portsmouth residents have access to the internet. The council website had more than 800,000 unique visitors in 2010/11.

Although it has become common-place in the private sector to force customers to use the web, the council has no intention making it more difficult to contact us in other ways. Instead, the strategy will encourage customers to choose to engage online by developing the web presence so it offers easy access to information and services, and supporting that development with a marketing strategy.

Investment in development of the web to deliver savings associated with channel shift was approved by Full Council in October 2011, as part of £2m investment in the first stage of the transformation programme.

4. overall objective

The overall objective of the web strategy is to deliver an improved web solution that encourages more customers to engage and transact with the council online, providing greater choice and flexibility, while delivering the target savings identified as part of the customer management element of the transformation programme.

SMART objectives will be included in the attached appendices.

5. customer management, customer experience and communications

The strategy is broken down in four key areas.

5.1. customer management

The primary objective of the web strategy is to support the customer management element of the transformation programme, delivering savings by encouraging target numbers of customers to engage with the council via the web rather than through more costly face-to-face and telephone contact.

Work will be undertaken as part of the customer management work stream to review existing data, identify high-volume non-web transactions, consult with existing and potential customers and services, and develop solutions to ensure as many transactions as possible move to the web.

Further detail is included in Appendix A, and in a detailed project plan at Appendix B.

5.2. putting customers at the heart of everything we do

Although delivering efficiencies is the main objective, the web strategy also plays a key role in supporting the organisation's guiding principles by improving service for customers. While our existing web site is structured around our services, the new web solution will have customers at its heart, focusing on simple easy access to the right information and services at the right time.

The strategy will ensure customers have a consistent experience when they transact or engage with the council via the web. The new solution will deliver a single seamless journey for the customer, regardless of the internal service(s) they are transacting or engaging with.

Individual customer profiles based on demographics and patterns of online behaviour will enable the site to deliver relevant and related content forward so it's easy to find. And customers will be able to choose their favourite content, creating a customised home page with all the information and services they use most often. Creative use of design will ensure pages are attractive places where customers want to spend time.

Creating an intuitive, attractive, easy-to-use, accessible web solution will help ensure customers channel shift to the web, supporting customer management objectives.

Further detail is included in Appendix A, and in a detailed project plan at Appendix B

5.3 communications and reputation

With more than 800,000 unique visitors a year, the council's website is our shop window as well as a key customer access channel.

The website is an important communications tool with an essential role to play in pushing information out, ensuring audiences are well-informed about the council and its services.

The organisation needs the web to provide high quality, consistent information to ensure staff are sufficiently well-informed about the council to respond to customer enquiries, and act as ambassadors for the organisation.

Our customers – residents, businesses, visitors to the city – need high quality, timely information so they can make choices about the service available to them, so they understand how we spend their money, and can take part in the democratic process. The requirements of the Government's transparency agenda will be incorporated by making relevant council data easily available.

Well-documented MORI research tells us well-informed residents are more likely to be satisfied with the council as a whole – the standard measure of reputation. The research also tells us well-informed residents are more likely to think we offer good value for money.

As well as playing a part in ensuring audiences are well-informed, effective web communication, including easy access to information and to the answers to frequently asked questions, reduces costly methods of contact as customers find the answer online, first time.

An attractive and intuitive web solution is also essential as part of marketing campaigns designed to encourage behaviour change, from car seat safety checking to foster care recruitment and retention.

Further detail is included in Appendix A, and in a detailed project plan at Appendix B

5.4 business requirements

In addition to delivering channel shift to the web as part of the customer management work stream, the web solution will be developed to meet the business requirements of the remaining transformation work streams.

Further detail will be included in the appendices

6. working towards a web solution

The following sections outline how a new web solution will be researched, developed and delivered. More detailed explanations will be included in the **appendices**.

6.1. understanding what our customers need

As some data has already been gathered about our customers and services, a review of the information already held will be undertaken as a first step.

This comprehensive review will look at research undertaken as part of the customer access strategy and research done specifically around the web in 2010. It will also look at data already collected by the customer management work stream and by the city helpdesk. The review will provide a clear picture of what we already know about our existing and potential customers, and highlight any gaps in our understanding.

Where research is needed to complete the picture, this will be done as part of the customer management work stream.

6.2 understanding business requirements

Work will be prioritised to ensure the web requirements of the remaining transformation work streams are effectively captured. Solutions will be proposed and resource implications investigated. Wherever possible, the business needs of the remaining work streams will be incorporated into the web solution being developed.

6.3 infrastructure review

A review of the web hardware and software, including the technical environment, will be done in the initial stages also.

This review will focus on ensuring the infrastructure is scalable, with capacity to manage the planned increase in demand generated by more customers engaging and transacting with the council online and the scope to accommodate emerging technologies, including enabling the web solution to run on a range of devices from PCs to smart phones.

The review will also look at costs ensuring web infrastructure delivers value for money.

6.4 content

Content on our existing website is created by authors and editors out in services and, as a result, is structured around those services, rather than customers. The site provides a vast amount of information, not all of which is either written to meet customer needs, or effectively monitored and updated.

As the new solution is developed, the way information is structured will focus primarily on ensuring customers have easy access to the information and online tools they need to encourage them to choose the web and deliver the required efficiencies as part of customer management.

A business case will look at whether site improvements and additional savings could be realised by creating a centralised web content officer post.

As customers will be at the heart of the new web solution, the quantity, content and structure of information will be based on what they tell us.

An improved search engine will be included.

To make life easier for customers and encourage channel shift, the site will create individual profiles based on basic demographics and patterns of behaviour and will automatically push relevant content to the surface so it can be found easily. Customers will be able to personalise the site by marking favourite content, so it's available next time they visit.

Whether they are renewing a library book, reporting a missed bin, paying a bill, submitting a planning application or making a complaint, the site will be developed to ensure the customer has a seamless experience.

6.5 design

The design of the new web presence will focus on highlighting the elements of the site needed to deliver channel shift. It will be based on customer research, and will ensure the council's web presence can be accessed on a range of devices, from a PC to a smart phone or tablet.

Strong images, colour and graphics will be used to engage customers and encourage them to spend more time on the site, increasing the chances of them transacting online, and being better informed about the council and its services.

7. marketing

The web strategy will be supported by a detailed marketing strategy with a clear objective to deliver the channel shift required to make efficiency savings as part of the customer management work stream.

Customer research will be used to identify and segment target audiences. An effective range of communications will then be used to encourage key groups of existing customers to channel shift to the web.

The marketing strategy will also encourage new customers to engage with the council online, aiming to increase how well-informed people feel about the council and the services we provide.

The web marketing strategy will be included as appendix C.

8. the bigger picture

Increasingly, councils are being positioned as the lead organisations on a local level and are taking on additional responsibilities, such as public health.

This web strategy recognises creating a web presence that provides our customers with easy access to council information and services is potentially just the beginning.

So, within the resource constraints, the web solution will be designed to be future-proof, with potential to pull-in content from other relevant organisations.