

Website Review Document (summary)

Goals and Principles

The primary goal of the TMBC website is to provide website visitors with a digital front door to TMBC council services. The user experience should be of such high quality that website visitors would not wish to access TMBC services by any other means. By default, this should also represent the most efficient and cost-effective means of council service delivery.

A strong website management structure will ensure that the website continues to develop but does so in a manner confluent to the requirements of both TMBC and website visitors. The management group should set goals and standards, planning how these will be achieved whilst ensuring that appropriate resourcing is available. As well as sanctioning new developments the group should also oversee testing (especially user testing) of these developments and sign them off when deemed fit for purpose. The management group must also undertake performance (uptime, availability) and infrastructure monitoring setting goals (usability, service uptake, etc) and where necessary addressing deficiencies.

Website visitors must be able to find services easily; intuitively, using conventional navigation or easily using website or external search. This should be achieved through practical website structure, well-honed content and metadata and strong internal search engine.

Content should be brief, succinct and written in a tone that is consistent throughout the entire site. Jargon should be eliminated and the site should make sense to website visitors with the most basic of website and browser skills.

The website should have sufficient flexibility to adopt new web technologies and new standards as and when they materialise.

Need for change

The website was last redesigned in August 2015. The mobile first project introduced responsive design giving precedence to website visitors looking to transact with the council using their phone or a tablet. At the time the brief for this project was cutting edge. However, the discovery, design and approval stages for the project took over a year and implementation and testing took an additional year. Since launching the new design little has changed, development momentum has been lost, development has stagnated. It is important that website design and redesign are no longer created as a discrete project, that there is a strategy in place that ensures the continuous development of website design so that it can utilise evolving technologies, new web standards and adopt new design features.

During the last makeover the design and navigation were dictated by the components with which the original Matrix website had originally been created. This has produced anomalies that would not have arisen had a bottom up design approach been adopted or indeed some of our self-imposed rules been relaxed (LGNL). It is imperative that any new design is undertaken with regard for the requirements of the website visitor not the constraints of the components from which the website is built. Content categories should be reviewed, content must be restructured with regard to the recategorisation.

Added to the search box is an additional navigational aid 'I want to ..'. Using predictive text this facility is designed to assist website visitors in pin pointing content/services. However, after implementation its efficacy was not been measured, furthermore the recent SDS usage study suggested that website visitors either do not like it or are simply not aware of it. This feature needs replacing. Also, replacement of the default Matrix search engine by Apache Lucene was agreed some years ago, although scheduled for implementation this piece of work is still on the back burner. A review of TM website search engine is now essential.

On the point of third party suppliers there is a need to further integrate a number of peripheral systems. Not only is branding out of step with the main site but a good deal of content on systems such as Modern Gov and Public Access is poorly integrated into the main site. Users are unable to access content on these systems due to poor signposting, weak linkage and inability to index content into search.

A number of older ebase online forms do not have the same branding as the rest of the website. Although a generic ebase template has been developed to ensure transparency between the main system and online forms it has yet to be fully implemented.

Historically there has been no budgetary provision for website development. TM have been fortunate in procuring open source software in the last two iterations of the website and ad-hoc developments have been covered as one-off costs. It is important that a business case is prepared and that appropriate funding made available. Where possible development will be undertaken in-house, if necessary external resources may be brought in to undertake discrete projects.

TM need to devise a schedule of service reviews identifying business processes that are suitable for transformation. As well as streamlining existing practices these reviews will identify service areas that are suitable for online processing.

The website must be as inclusive as possible. This no longer means achieving AA WC3 accessibility levels and covering as many browsers as possible, the site must provide transactional services to users with assistive software and other special requirements. TMBC failed this years Better Connected accessibility report not for technical reasons, but because there was no online form to apply for disabled parking.

The TM website must focus on service delivery only. There are myriad alternative specialist digital channels for specialist content (statutory documents, news, imagery, etc). It is important for the council to decide which channels they use for which content. It is even more important that the public understand which channel is appropriate to the content they wish to consume.

What we need to achieve

The way forward has several threads.

Before any further work takes place, a governance group should be convened with a remit to develop a strategy, schedule and implement a workload and put in place markers to identify both strategy and schedule progress. The strategy will identify the overall website development direction and themes, the schedule should be prioritised from existing known tasks and augmented with new suggestions and work stemming from the SDS and Better Connected reports.

It is largely up to the study group to plan the way forward. Although restructuring the navigation as part of an overall redesign would provide a strong foundation on which a new site can be built.

Transition from information site to transactional is incomplete

Most news and corporate media related items have moved from the website to the Council's social media streams. There are still a number of information type content items that need to be moved before the T&M website can be categorised as truly transactional. Moving the council's news pages from the main website to social media will consolidate content and should be considered a priority.

Set of forms at single location

The previous iteration of the current website housed its online forms in area titled "Do it now". The current website has no equivalent. A good deal of visits to the website are undertaken with a view to completing an online transaction. The TM site requires sign posting to a single location from which all forms can be accessed.

Repository for documents

The council has a good deal of statutory and legislative documents that are made available online for reason of convenience rather than practical content presentation. These tend to fall into two categories, advice and guidance that assists in undertaking a transaction with TM and statutory and legislative documentation that have to be publicly available. In very much the same usability issue that online forms need to be located somewhere immediately accessible, a well sign posted document repository is required.

These documents tend to be in PDF format a large number of which are out of date, not accessible and contain personal contact details likely to be in contravention of GDPR. PDF files in general require a more stringent management regime.

Pare down content

In recent years there has been a reduction in the number of website pages and their verbosity, further works is required. This could be greatly assisted by providing a page template that places a call for action at the top of page followed by a brief service description and lastly any detailed explanation. There is also a need to introduce a one service one page approach providing clearer content.

Best practice examples

12 shire district authorities that have achieved a four-star rating in this current Better Connected report.

SDS involvement

The council subscribes to SDS and should look to engage them in further projects. The TMBC governance group should participate in SDS meetings and workshops.

Existing interactions and future developments

The recent SDS study and Better Connected report tested a number of existing interactions identifying areas of potential improvement.

The waste services CRM system has now been integrated with phone, it now has an acceptable level of back office utility. This system should form the bedrock of future online systems development allowing future online developments to incorporate an element of task status that can be relayed back to individuals making service requests.

The .gov/notify SMS service has now been implemented at TMBC allowing push messaging. Such developments as bin collection notification should prove a reasonably straight forward development. There are many additional uses for this technology.

Study group made up of members and officers

Formation of a website management group is essential in ensuring a strategic approach to website development is devised, executed and realised.

Council officers should be involved in actual transformation projects within their service. They should be digitally aware and understand the overriding digital corporate imperative rather than that of their service. They need to be empowered to make things happen, they must have time not only to attend meetings but to assist with the website development plan and assist in implementing it.

The group does not require representation from every service, should have some senior management involvement and if at all possible some digital natives.

Officers must be able to see service delivery as a corporate imperative, that their own service area delivery is only a small part of a very big picture.

Formation of a study group should happen before any further development commitments are made and should happen as soon as possible.