

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**17 June 2020**

**Report of the Director of Central Services**

**Part 1- Public**

**Delegated**

**1 ESTABLISHMENT CHANGE – MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**Summary**

**This report addresses the requirements for developing the Council’s new website in support of its digital strategy and post-pandemic reorientation. It assesses the current approach to online content management and proposes centralising responsibility in the Media and Communications team under a new post of Digital Content Editor.**

**1.1 Introduction**

- 1.1.1 The new Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council website forms a central plank of our digital strategy and goal of becoming a digital by default organisation.
- 1.1.2 While the coronavirus crisis has posed significant challenges, the recovery and reorientation process is set to add additional impetus for a more digital approach to service delivery which is both more efficient and resilient. Improved online tools will be critical to many of the objectives outlined in the revised Corporate Plan and to the Climate Change Strategy.
- 1.1.3 On 18 September 2019 the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board recommended a proposal to add a scheme for replacement of the website to List A of the Capital Plan, to be funded from the Transformation reserve. The report also highlighted the issues surrounding content management of the website (paragraphs 1.2.13 and 1.2.14) and how this was under review by Management Team.
- 1.1.4 For the assistance of Members, a copy of the report submitted to that meeting is attached as Annex 1. The recommendation was subsequently supported by Cabinet on 16 October, and approved by Full Council on 29 October 2019.
- 1.1.5 A tender process has been conducted and a contract signed with the successful tenderer (Jadu) to build the new site which will provide a more coherent structure and the ability to improve the user experience.

- 1.1.6 While acquiring a new technical framework is a critical step towards launching the new website, we now need to implement plans for re-designing our existing online content, populating pages and developing new digital services. This is a project of significant scale and duration given the existing website has more than 1,300 pages.
- 1.1.7 The current approach to creating and managing website content places responsibility in the hands of teams across all council departments. There are currently at least 90 staff with website publishing or editing rights.
- 1.1.8 This approach has some benefits but also creates a number of issues. These include:
- No single point of content oversight
  - Variations in approach, including design, tone and terminology
  - The creation of complex online customer journeys
  - Content written in specialist language
  - Out of date content remaining on the website
- 1.1.9 A similarly devolved approach is taken with the Council's social media channels which together have around 10,000 followers with posts being widely shared and reaching up to 30-40,000 accounts. Some 35 staff are able to publish social media updates or respond to questions received via Facebook and Twitter. This inevitably leads to significant variations in standards and consistency.
- 1.1.10 While it may be possible to continue with this devolved approach to our online communications, it poses challenges as we prepare to adapt existing web content and design new digital services, namely:
- Officers whose main role is delivering front-line services will have limited time for website development which may be de-prioritised leading to delays in the site roll out
  - A large number of content creators leads to inconsistencies in approach and a poor user experience, potentially replicating some of the issues which affect the current site
  - A lack of integration with the Council's other digital channels (e.g. social media) makes co-ordinated campaign planning more difficult
- 1.1.11 Creating a central point of control for website content will help overcome these issues and ensure the new site rolls out faster with simple, consistent and intuitive customer journeys.
- 1.1.12 This approach would also unlock time savings across services which would no longer be required to design web pages and write content. Over time, the creation of effective online services will further reduce pressure on services and deliver efficiencies in terms of back office functions.

- 1.1.13 It is therefore recommended that responsibility for website content is added to the Media and Communications portfolio. The team currently delivers a range of services spanning social and traditional media, corporate communications and consumer campaigns. Adding the website to its function will provide clear leadership in the complex transition process, ongoing editorial control and integration with other digital channels of public communication.
- 1.1.14 The team is currently staffed by two FTEs with no resource or capacity to undertake significant website projects. To provide the skilled resource and leadership needed for the transition to the new website and future content management, it is proposed to create a new full time role of Digital Content Editor, reporting to the Head of Communications. Structure chart at Annex 2.
- 1.1.15 The Digital Content Editor will lead on managing the creation of content for the new site in a phased roll out commencing this autumn. They will act as overall content manager, working with services and IT colleagues to develop the new site and manage its content thereafter. Job description at Annex 3.
- 1.1.16 It is also proposed that the Media and Communications team takes a greater role in managing social media content and to reduce the numbers of social media licences held across the Council. This will ensure consistent public messaging and reduce the risks associated with large numbers of people publishing content. This additional activity will be undertaken within existing capacity.

## **1.2 Legal Implications**

- 1.2.1 The post holder will be responsible for ensuring that the new website is compliant with legal requirements on public sector websites to meet accessibility rules - (Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018).

## **1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.3.1 The Digital Content Editor role as specified has been assessed by the HR team as suitable for SO grade. With employer's on-costs, the annual overhead at top of scale for the full-time post is £45,150. Digital Content Editor costings at Annex 4.
- 1.3.2 While this post is new, and therefore is unbudgeted, representing growth, it will be pivotal to delivering key elements of the Digital Strategy. The strategy has the potential to deliver significant long-term efficiencies and reduction of back office workloads. It will therefore be consistent with the values and priorities within the Corporate Strategy 2020-23 (under 'Achieving Efficiency'), namely that we target our resources to ensure we can deliver our services and invest in new technologies.
- 1.3.3 The transfer of parking permit renewals online earlier this year is just one example of the potential to significantly reduce time spent on administration. The new website will see a much wider range of services become digital by default. For

example, it will enable a move away from phone and email interactions towards automated online transactions and reporting.

- 1.3.4 It is therefore envisaged that the centralisation of website management into the Media and Communications Team will assist in ensuring the consistent delivery of such efficiencies. The introduction of new technologies and transformation to become a 'smart borough' is one of the key outcomes we aim to achieve in the current Corporate Strategy (2020-23).
- 1.3.5 Reducing the number of staff licenced to use the Council's social media management platform (Orlo) will deliver a saving, likely to be £5,000 - £6,000 pa, netting down the overall budget growth.

## **1.4 Risk Assessment**

- 1.4.1 Moving away from a devolved approach to website management will reduce the risks of a poor online experience for residents and increase the likelihood that the objectives of the Digital Strategy are delivered.
- 1.4.2 Centralising social media control will reduce the risk of mixed messages or content of variable quality being published.

## **1.5 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.5.1 Compliance with online accessibility rules will ensure our digital services are available to residents, including those with sight impairments.

## **1.6 Policy Considerations**

- 1.6.1 TMBC Digital Strategy
- 1.6.2 Updated Corporate Strategy - Coronavirus recovery and re-orientation
- 1.6.3 Climate change strategy
- 1.6.4 Corporate Strategy – Achieving efficiency

## **1.7 Recommendations**

- 1.7.1 It is RECOMMENDED that:
- 1) A new full-time post of Digital Content Editor is created at Grade SO within the Media and Communications team with immediate effect,
  - 2) The budget be updated accordingly

Background papers:

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Nil

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Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive

Background papers:

Annex 1: FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY,  
ADVISORY BOARD, 18 September 2019, Report of  
the Director of Finance and Transformation

Annex 2: Media and Communications structure chart

Annex 3: Digital Content Editor job description

Annex 4: Costings for Digital Content Editor role