TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

23rd July 2014

Report of the Director of Finance & Transformation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1. T&MBC WEB SITE DESIGN UPDATE

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 This report updates Members on the planned improvements to the Council's web site designed to ensure that it remains fit for users' purpose as user preferences and technology changes.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Members will recall that the current web site went 'live' over 2 years ago and, before that, it had been in 'production' for at least 18 months.

1.2.2 During that time there has been significant change in computing technology and in user preference for mobile internet access (smartphones and tablets). According to a recent (April 2014) OfCom (independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries) report, overall internet use rose from 79% of adults in 2012 to 83% in 2013, and nearly two-thirds (59%) of people accessed the internet through a mobile phone (53% in 2012), and use of tablet computers to access the internet among adults has almost doubled from 16% in 2012 to 30% in 2013.

1.2.3 98% of users aged under 35 are on-line and the proportion of people aged over 65 that are accessing the web reached 42% in 2013, which is a 27% increase over the year mainly due to an increase in the use of tablet computers by people aged 65-74.

1.2.4 The graph at Attachment 1 shows that, next year, the use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets is expected to overtake use of PC's.

1.2.5 The growth of internet usage continues and users, of all ages, appear to prefer to go on-line using mobile technology.

1.3 The T&MBC website

1.3.1 T&MBC's site is responsive (screen resolution and layout changes to fit the devices' screen size) to a degree but the site was designed for PC's and then made responsive. In order to ensure that the site remains fit for purpose and,

more pressingly, that it becomes a preferred method of contacting the Council for as many people as possible, we need to ensure that it will present itself to mobile technology first and foremost.

1.3.2 The site was also developed to embrace the Top Task approach, giving users 'short cuts' to the most popular services, and this continues to be a focus for most recently designed local government sites (Manchester, Birmingham, Harrow, Kent, Lambeth) many of who have followed the Gov.uk 'look' – minimising content to allow clarity of navigation through the site; an aspiration for any modern, user-focussed site.

1.4 The focus for a re-design

1.4.1 The T&MBC site should be one that:

- users **choose** to use over other forms of contact.
- is **easy to access** irrespective of the preferred technology.
- focuses on the services that **users want** to access.
- is underwritten by a Digital Inclusion initiative to **assist and support** as many citizens as possible to go on-line.

1.4.2 We hope that this can be achieved by:

- having a design that is **simple** (in order that any mobile devices can be used to access services quickly) **and easy to use** (so that users get where they want to get to without the necessity to ring or email for assistance).
- ensuring that users can achieve a task quickly and simply so that they will choose to use that channel again.
- ensuring that the user gets an improved service by transacting through the web site.

1.4.3 The challenges will be to:

- ensure that navigation is made as simple as possible and that it works first time.
- recognise that the user's opinion is paramount to the success of the design if the site is to become the preferred way to access service delivery.
- allow this to be an on-going project that will facilitate change to the design over time.

1.4. A concept to start the re-design process

1.4.1 The first step is to address the issue of site navigation that gets the user to where they want to be as simply and quickly as possible.

1.4.2 Having considered modifications to the existing 'Search' facility (which was found to be an unrealistic idea due to the resource required to program it) and

the possible confusion of having at least 4 different ways to navigate from the Home page, we felt that what the user required, quite simply, was the opportunity to state what they wanted to do or find.

1.4.3   The next step was to consider if we could take a leaf out of Google's example and give the user a box into which they could type what they are looking for, receive prompts or suggestions from which to select (as Google provides in a drop down menu) and be taken from there direct to the web page/task that they have specified. Unlike Google, where you are presented with a list of search results, this innovation will take you to where you want to be with one click.

1.4.4   This is a rudimentary development at present to demonstrate a concept which will be at the core of a wider re-design which will emerge over time, and the visual design will follow. We are confident that we can have this initial 'tool' up and running by 1st April 2015.

1.5   The user perspective

1.5.1   Having sought Management Team's approval to the approach, the concept was first shared with the staff and then with groups of external users drawn from subscribers to My Account, the result of which is that, at the time of writing, all have given positive feedback on the concept.

1.6   Summary

1.6.1   In the face of overwhelming evidence of change in internet technology and use, the current web site needs to be re-designed to meet user expectations if the site is to be their preferred channel for transacting with the Council in the future.

1.6.2   The concept of providing a means for the user to navigate quickly and simply to exactly where they want to be appears to be well supported and is achievable both within existing budget provision and in a reasonable timescale.

1.6.3   The challenge which will emerge, assuming this concept is successful, will be to ensure that, having navigated quickly and easily, the user finds a service/content that works for them and that they will choose to return to.

1.6.4   The ultimate aim of having a site that users choose to access Council services through will be supported by digital inclusion projects in order to allow as many citizen's as possible to transact with the Council in this way.

1.7   Legal Implications

1.7.1   There are no implications.

1.8   Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1   Since the major part of the implementation of this initial design concept will be undertaken in house and a provision for external consultancy of £2,000 has been identified from existing web development budgets, there is no financial implication beyond the existing budget.

1.9   Risk Assessment

1.9.1   Risks identified are limited to reputational risk in the event of web site 'downtime' caused by any design implementation but these have been assessed as minimal.

Background papers: contact: Charlie Steel
Nil

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