

Web Strategy 2009-11: Greater Insight, Better Service

Vision

The Council's website will continue to be a channel of choice for many customers, where information and services are easy to find and use. It will be delivered by Officers who are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their role – with the outcome that we continue to achieve consistently high levels of customer satisfaction.

Contribution to the Council's Corporate and Strategic Framework

The Council has many roles, but to achieve the aims and objectives in our corporate plan, Growing Success, we are committed to consistent and sustained customer service. Using the Council's website to provide accessible and high quality services will contribute to many of these objectives, and later in this document this is explored in more detail.

In addition to the objectives in Growing Success, a series of strategic policies, including the Corporate Equality Policy, Customer Service Strategy, Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Communications and Marketing Strategy, all contain objectives and activities which require effective use of the website and/or contribute towards the approach adopted within this strategy.

These strategies and policies are mutually supportive and are inherently connected in terms of the objectives they are seeking to promote.

Background

Where are we now?

The Council has had a website since April 1999. Initially a promotional site giving basic details about the council and its services, it developed into a comprehensive set of pages and services. There are now over 2000 pages of content on the website managed by over 140 web authors and editors from across the Council. In addition to this content, applications such as Public Access (for planning, building control and licensing) or Modern.gov (for committee minutes and councillor details) allow customers the option of 'self-service'.

There are 49 HDC and 29 non-HDC services (e.g. links to the County Council or NHS) available from our 'Online Services' pages. We've had some significant successes; we were amongst the first authorities in the Country to go live with Public Access, allowing customers to follow the progress of planning applications on line. We have also been cited as an example of best practice for accessibility of information, and have consistently performed amongst the top 20% of District councils in the national SOCITM¹ Council website survey.

We know a great deal about what our customers think of the website, and we are developing new ways to find out more, for example:

- We ask customers at our Customer Service Centre for their views on the web and we've found many wanted easier access to our online services, but didn't want to read press releases.
- By conducting a survey of telephone callers who hadn't used our website, we were able to find out that the main reasons for not using it.

¹ SOCITM – the national body for public sector IT, over 1900 members from 550 different organisations including 98% of all UK local authorities

Two major reasons came to light – either they didn't have access to the internet or they preferred to use the telephone.

Every day nearly 2000 people use the website, and 80% of them (data from our online feedback survey) are satisfied with the service they receive. In the last Annual Residents survey the website achieved the highest level of satisfaction of all customer service channels (89% at fair or above for access to services). From a humble beginning, only 9 years ago, the website has become a highly effective and popular way for our customers to access Council information and services.

Where do we want to be?

Having made these achievements and having regard to increasing customer expectation and good practice in this field the time is right to update our strategy.

The strategy will have a life of approximately three years and includes a broad action plan required to achieve its objectives. It reinforces existing good practice and performance already present across the Council.

Knowing our customers better - Customer Insight

The Customer Service Strategy highlighted the need for the Council to develop a deeper understanding of its customers. To do this, it needs to get maximum value from the information it gathers, and be able to bring different information sources together to build a richer, more comprehensive, picture of its customers. This is Customer Insight.

The website is a key customer service channel. Therefore the Web Strategy, and how it is delivered, must be driven by knowledge of our customers. Each customer facing service must consider the needs of its customers in terms of the website, both as part of strategic and day-to-day activity. The Web Team will support this activity by providing data relating to the website, allowing services to prioritise effort and deliver information and services that customers want to use.

Encouraging customers to use the Website

The Council will find ways to encourage relevant customers to switch to using the web. By doing this we actively encourage greater access to services, at a cheaper cost to the Council, and free resources to deliver services to those customers most in need. This encouragement will take the form of campaigns, and each customer facing service will be responsible for delivering campaigns to help make this happen, supported by the Communications & Marketing Team. Each Service will need to be clear about the impact of the website in service delivery.

In order to increase the use of the website the Council will seek to provide innovative new services via the website – especially where there is a clear impact on the objectives of Growing Success. We will also need to be careful our website is not duplicating information or services provided by other organisations.

Whilst some examples of how the website could be developed are provided below, the delivery of these new services sits best with individual services, supported by the technical expertise of IMD, and the marketing advice provided by Policy & Strategic Services:

- ***A clean, 'green' and attractive place*** – We could expand existing content to do more to promote the Environment Strategy, ensuring consistent messages are present across the entire site. We could also allow customers to report fly tipping or vandalism using online forms that feed direct into our business systems.
- ***Safe, vibrant and inclusive communities*** - The Council could introduce new ways for customers to take part in representative and democratic activities or to encourage citizens to become Councillors. Increasing the use of forums to give customers the ability to ask questions, debate and comment on HDC Plans and policies.

Getting more right first time

Ensuring we answer customer enquiries first time is important. It means the customer receives an excellent level of service, and the Council does not spend effort dealing with avoidable and repeated customer contact. For the website this means training our staff to provide information and services that meet customers needs – underpinned by a strong level of customer understanding.

Tailoring the website

A greater understanding of the needs of customers is likely to increase then need to build services around those needs. This will reduce costs and lead to greater satisfaction. Consideration will be given to personalising the content for particular customers, such as businesses, residents or visitors (see Appendix 2 for how this may look). This may also extend to allowing customers to securely access an enhanced range of council services via the website (for example checking their Council Tax balance), and work will be instigated to develop these ideas.

Maintaining strong foundations

To deliver an excellent website the Council needs to have reliable IT systems. During the lifetime of this strategy the current Content Management System will no longer be supported by Microsoft, and a new system will have to be implemented. Improvements to the management of the servers that provide the Website may also be delivered; giving the Council better disaster recovery options should anything untoward happen to the IT infrastructure.

Allocating the right resources

Currently some services dedicate significant resources to the website, in others this is less so. Over the course of this strategy each Head of Service will ensure this is reviewed, and were relevant, job descriptions of Officers will be changed to ensure accountabilities for supporting the website are recorded. Similarly KPAs will be set for those Officers who support the website; ensuring good performance in this key area is recognised in appraisals.

As the website has grown there has been a subsequent increase in the amount of time spent supporting the website by the Web Team. This has started to restrict the amount of time to deliver new developments. Over the lifetime of this strategy, some elements of support work will be transferred to the IMD HelpDesk – thereby releasing resources to deliver new services via the website.

Meeting the needs of all

The Council has a duty to ensure the services it provides do not exclude any group of customers, and this remains a high priority. The website has a screen-reader function enabling access to blind customers or people who find

reading difficult. Web content is checked to ensure it is accessible, and our performance is assessed each year in a national survey. Our website also contains links to allow customers to translate pages into other languages.

Over the lifetime of this strategy the website will continue to have an Equality Impact Assessment, and the appropriate web content standards will continue to be met.

Sharing Service

The Council will explore the opportunity to share service delivery with other Councils. It may be that we can host websites on behalf of others, or we may be able to provide technical advice to them. This may produce some cost savings, as well as potentially increasing the resilience of service delivery by creating larger teams.

Generating Revenue

Members have approved the trial of advertising via the website. Over the lifetime of this strategy this will be delivered, and an evaluation made of the income generated, together with any impact on customer satisfaction.

Action Plan

This strategy is supported by a three-year action plan which will help to ensure a consistent approach across the whole of the Council. The Council's Head of IMD will be responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the plan and will work with other services to make sure this happens.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that we achieve the objectives. To ensure we are making progress we will monitor our performance against local (and national, if any) measures. We will also collect and publish evidence of good practice throughout the Council.

This strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually so that we can set specific targets for the future. A comprehensive review of the strategy will be undertaken every three years.

Resources required

Much of the work in this strategy can be delivered by existing resources. Indeed moving customer activity from channels such as face to face or telephone, to the website, should create efficiencies within the organisation. There are already examples of significant customer uptake of web based services such as online [Planning Applications](#), or customers choosing to apply for housing using the [Home-Link](#) service.

But there are more opportunities. Shortly the Council will be able to receive payments from customers via the website, and a campaign should be delivered to promote this new service – releasing resources within Customer Service to deal with other customer enquiries. Estimating uptake is difficult, but we know that currently 25% of advisor time in the Call Centre is devoted to taking payments over the phone – so the opportunity is significant.

Providing shared services may offer the opportunity to reduce the costs of providing the website, and if advertising proves successful this income stream could also serve to balance the costs of providing the website – although the amounts in question may be relatively small.

However some elements of this strategy may require additional resources. At this stage this is difficult to predict. However, once new and innovative ways to use the website are identified, additional investment would need to be presented and assessed in a business case.

Risks

The following risks are created by this strategy:

- Some services may struggle to support the delivery of this strategy. However the provision of support from relevant internal services should mean the change can be introduced.
- The Council serves a wide range of customers, tailoring the website to meet these needs may overcomplicate the website. Careful analysis should ensure this risk is minimised.
- Timing the delivery of change is important and it may be that resources could be overloaded. Careful management of change will reduce the likelihood of this happening.

As other risks come to light these will be managed.

Action Plan 2009-2012

Objective	Actions	Measures	Target	By Whom
Improve our insight into what customers want from the website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web team to supply data on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage and survey of customer satisfaction • Annual customer usability assessment • Annual SOCITM report • Accessibility Assessment • Services to improve understanding of customers needs 	<p>Web team to ensure all sources of data are available</p> <p>All Services to have attended a Customer Service Insight workshop run by Customer Service Department (a recommendation of the Customer Service Strategy).</p>	<p>By Mar 2009</p> <p>Mar 2010</p>	<p>IMD Web Team</p> <p>Led by Head of Customer Service.</p>
Encourage relevant customers to switch to this channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver campaigns to encourage targeted customers to switch channel (e.g. web payments) • Include a link to the Council's home page, or other relevant pages, in e-mails. • Include our website address in printed material. 	<p>% Of selected transactions (e.g. payments) completed online compared to other channels</p> <p>% Increase in amount of website use</p>	TBA – need to assess current level	Led by Services, campaigns supported by Policy & Strategic Services
Improve the quality of information and services provided via the web, especially by providing new and innovative services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing training to editors and authors to ensure the content they are responsible for meets customers needs • Services to review and respond to data gathered for web data collected for NI14 'Unavoidable Contact' • Each Service to be clear about the impact of the website in service delivery 	<p>% Of customers satisfied that web-based information meets their needs</p> <p>% of contacts that are avoidable (for selected services)</p> <p>Service Plans to have an objective for the web</p> <p>The content of the Service Plans will be collated into a single document, and presented to COMT</p>	<p>80%</p> <p>TBA</p> <p>80%</p> <p>Mar 2010</p>	<p>IMD Web Team</p> <p>All Editors & Authors</p> <p>Customer Facing HoS Head of IMD</p>
Increase the personalisation of our website (where our customer insight tell us to)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 'MyCouncil' – a framework that will allow us to develop content and applications that can be customised and displayed on the main page of the website 	Website to have content tailored to different users	Sep 2011	IMD Development Manager

Objective	Actions	Measures	Target	By Whom
	according to the needs of the customer			
Ensure the website continues to be delivered via a technically robust infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration of Content Management System to Microsoft SharePoint Server 2007. • Virtualisation of servers where possible to increase resilience 	<p>Availability of website - % uptime</p> <p>Virtualisation in place</p>	99.8%	IMD Dev Manager IMD Ops Manager
Improve the understanding of Officers about their role in creating and maintaining content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training to new authors and editors, and offer ongoing support to existing ones • HoS to make this skill part of relevant job descriptions • Managers to make this part of KPAs for relevant Officers 	% of Authors & Editors who feel their work on the web is recognised by their service`	50% by Mar 2010	Heads of Service and Personnel
Increase the amount of time spent developing the website and reduce the support load on the Web & Systems Development Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce support load by documenting and handing over support to the IMD HelpDesk. 	% time released to development through handover of support tasks	TBA	IMD Development Manager
Improve the accessibility of the website for all customers regardless of gender, race or disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the website meets the AA level for accessibility and that continued compliance is assured by undertaking regular audits • Ensure new software meets these requirements. 	<p>% of web Pages complying with AA</p> <p>Achievement of Equality Standard for Local Government</p>	<p>98%</p> <p>Level 3 by 2010</p>	<p>All Authors and Editors</p> <p>Head of IMD</p>
Explore the opportunities to host websites of , or provide web based services to, other Local Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach other Local Authorities to consult with them on options. • Investigate licensing issues, security arrangements and resource requirements 	Business Case produced	Mar 2011	IMD Development Manager
Develop the opportunities to create advertising revenue from our website, whilst maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial the use of outsource advertising, and if successful continue with it 	<p>Ratio of revenue versus cost</p> <p>Customer satisfaction remains high</p>	<p>Return outweighs cost</p> <p>80%</p>	IMD Development Manager

My Council – Draft Layout

Tabbed interface

Allows visitors to choose if they are a business, resident or visitor. This tailors the page to show relevant topics of interest.

News and Notices

News now takes up less space on the front page – customers want services more than news... Notices allow us to keep key messages on the front page for longer.

Service Directory A to Z and Quick Links

These menus remain as they are well used and provide navigation to the text based content of the site

My Services

This section gives links to services, simple reporting eforms, links to book services and to e-forums where customers can discuss topics

The screenshot shows the Huntingdonshire District Council website layout. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'Enter text' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar is a navigation bar with tabs for 'Residents', 'Businesses', and 'Visitors'. A 'Welcome Fred – not you?' message and a 'My Account' button are also present. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'Residents Services' with a list of categories like 'Online Services/Forms', 'Business', 'Community and People', etc.; 'News' with 'Story one', 'Story 2', and 'Story 3'; 'Notices and Campaigns' with 'Notice 1', 'Campaign 1', and 'Notice 2'; 'My Services' with options like 'Pay it', 'Book it', 'Report it', and 'Consultation'; 'Site Map' and 'A to Z' directories; 'My Links' with various service links; 'My Street' with a map and 'Choose Service' dropdown; 'Advertisement' with a 'Got yours yet?' image; 'Keep Up to Date - RSS Feeds'; 'Recommended Links' with 'Direct gov logo', 'NHS', 'Cams Police', and 'Cambridgeshire.Net'; and 'What's On?' with 'Huntingdonshire Food and Drink Festival 2008', 'Minibeast Hunting For Families (date)', and 'Get Fit Get Active Go Green (date)'. Arrows from the text blocks point to these specific features on the page.

Search

Search is moved to the centre of the page to make it more visible.

My Account

The “welcome” and “My Account” links allow customers to set a Visitor type preference, postcode and house number (if they have one) so we can tailor services

My Street

This section allows customers to view nearest facilities using a map based view. It allows access to view their bin collection calendar, nearby planning applications and details of their local councillor

Much of this information is available on the website at present but is spread amongst a number of pages

What's On?

This is an example of a MyCouncil “Web Part” – a block of content that in this case is relevant to Visitors and Residents but would not appear by default to Businesses.