

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 JANUARY 2015**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

11

**TITLE: INFORMATION NOTE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP
ON THE NHDC WEBSITE - UPDATE**

INFORMATION NOTE FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

1.1 Recommendation 1: The Council should aim for a simpler, more user friendly website, with clear up to date messages on the home page.

The project to develop a new website and content management system for North Hertfordshire District Council is underway, with an anticipated completion date of end March 2015. The style of the new website is based loosely on the Gov.UK website, with minimal images and clearer navigation. The homepage is structured into more user-friendly sections with 'top tasks' taking prominence at the top of the page. The design features a prominent search bar and a self service log in facility which will allow customers to track the status of any issues they have reported online. The website will also be optimised for mobiles and tablets.

A latest new section will feature on the homepage of the website, alongside the latest from the Council's Twitter feed. There will also be the ability to display urgent / alert messages at the top of the homepage of the site.

1.2 Recommendation 2: The website's vocabulary should be reviewed and if necessary reworded using language that visitors to the site can easily identify with.

1.3 Recommendation 6: The existing web content should be reviewed; and the approval system for new material managed more closely to ensure pages contain concise, accurate, up to date information, consistent with the Council's corporate identity.

As part of the process of developing the new website, thorough content reviews are taking place between the Communications team and relevant service areas, to ensure existing content is simplified and streamlined. The Communications team are responsible for editing all of the existing content, including vocabulary used, to ensure it is more customer focused.

In line with the Council's website strategy, a new system for approval of content for the new website will be introduced. Technical authors from each service area will still be responsible for drafting content, however all approvals will now be carried out by the Communications team. The team will be responsible for editing content so that it is consistent, easy to read and user friendly. To ensure pages are kept up to date, the new content management system will send regular reminders to authors to ask them to review and update their pages.

To ensure the new approvals process is firmly embedded, responsibility for the website now sits within the Communications team rather than IT services. Upon completion of the project to create a new website, an editorial board will be set up comprising representatives from Communications and Customer Services (with other service areas co-opted as necessary) to ensure regular reviews of the site are carried out.

1.4 Recommendation 3: The Council's website should be easier to search so all the website's content can be accessed by way of a single search; and the results sorted more effectively by relevance and date.

As the Council's website actually contains several sub-sites which are externally hosted e.g. the Planning applications facility and the Committee reports section, it is not straightforward to ensure that the search for those sites can be incorporated into the main site search. However, the feasibility and cost implications of doing so are currently being investigated.

1.5 Recommendation 4: Navigation around the website needs to be easier and shorter with more use of drop down menus and key information available with no more than three clicks.

Navigation has been made easier by breaking the website content up into smaller sections with more user-friendly headings, based around the most requested services. All pages have been streamlined and re-written to make them shorter, clearer and easier to read.

Drop-down menus for navigating the site are not being implemented as they were deemed unnecessary, once the navigation had been simplified to focus on the top customer tasks. The left-hand menu navigation menu has been removed as it is no longer needed, which makes pages easier to read and use, particularly on mobile devices.

Key information should be available within three clicks now that all major services can be found from the front page, and more content brought to the surface under each heading.

1.6 Recommendation 5: The website should have a postcode-address facility which would allow users to search for information and services available in their areas.

A 'Find My Nearest facility' for the website is to be introduced as an extension to the planned upgrade to the Council's CadCorp mapping facility. This will be introduced later in 2015/16. Separate to this, the Council will be embedding Google Maps of car parks, parks and open spaces, polling stations etc on relevant web pages to enable people to easily locate relevant facilities. By using Google Maps, customers will also be able to get directions to the various locations.

1.7 Recommendation 7: Any website development should be informed by a clear understanding of both users and the Council's needs. The Council should in particular try to engage with and seek the views of harder to reach customers, for example older people, younger people and the less literate.

User testing of the existing website has been carried out – both through utilising data that is contained in the pop up website survey which asks users for feedback and through carrying out some user testing in the Customer Services centre. Customers were asked to complete a series of tasks to see how easy they found it to complete them using the existing navigation.

The results from the user testing alongside Google Analytics data and information on customer interactions into the Customer Services Centre were then used to frame the structure of the site. Once the project to create the new website is complete, regular user testing will be build into the Website Manager's on-going work programme.

1.8 Contact

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