

IT Strategy 2009

Web Strategy

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1. VISION

The Council aims to fully utilise digital channels (web, mobile and social media) to provide customer-centred information and services, to engage and empower citizens and to support more effective and efficient ways of working within the organisation and with partners.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. National government drivers

The Priority Outcomes of the eGovernment agenda in 2005/6 set out a requirement for local authorities to enable a number key services and activities be delivered online. Since then a number of White Papers have been published which have focused on efficiencies¹ and service transformation². To achieve these outcomes there is a reliance on moving service delivery online, in the form of the provision of timely information and online transactions such as payments, applications and bookings.

More recently the white paper Communities in Control (October 08)³ looked at how local communities can better engage local communities in decision making using the web and social media. The working paper Customer Insight in Public Services⁴ proposes that local authorities better understand their customer's needs in order to deliver customer-centred services.

The Power of Information Taskforce report⁵ (February 09) provided some key recommendations around data and information provision including the importance of information management, the “unlocking” of government data for use by third parties to create innovative applications and access to social media by government employees.

All these papers impact on web delivery, as the web will be one of the key enablers to help deliver these agendas.

The Lord Carter Digital Britain Report (April 09) proposes that by 2012 all Britain will have access to free broadband.

2.2. Customer trends

The Office of National Statistics report Internet Access 2008⁶, shows a strong growing trend in Internet usage.

¹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/efficiency_programme_finalreport.htm

² http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/prebud_pbr06_varney.htm

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>

⁴ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/corp/assets/publications/delivery_council/pdf/cust_insight_primer061128.pdf

⁵ <http://poit.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/poit/>

⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0808.pdf>

In the UK, 16.46 million UK households (65% of households) had access to the Internet, a rise of 1.23 households since 2007.

In the East of England, the figure is slightly higher with 70% of households with access, an increase of 3% from the previous year. 78% of households receiving digital TV channels.

33.9 million adults (71% of the population) accessed the Internet at least once, within the 3 months that the interview for the report was conducted. 69% of that audience use the Internet at least once a day.

Key activity conducted on the Internet is emailing (87%) and finding information (84%).

There is also a growing trend for the use of more advanced services, such as:

- communications services - instant messaging (29%), reading weblogs (21%), chatting on forums (20%), webcam(12%)
- audio visual – downloading music (38%), listening to web radio (34%), uploading self-created content (images, text, photos) (24%)
- mobile – browsing the Internet (11%), reading emails (6%)

Ofcom's Spring 2009 interim report into UK adults' media literacy shows that 3 out of 4 UK adults use the Internet at home or elsewhere, 38% of these have a social networking profile and 26% comment on other peoples' blogs.

2.3. Contribution towards organisation's strategic objectives

The Web Strategy contributes towards the following corporate priorities:

Creating opportunities for greater community participation and involvement

To create opportunities for greater community involvement and participation at the most local practical level.

- Involving communities in key issues and giving them the opportunity to have their voice heard before decisions are made.

A responsive and efficient council

Delivering services in a responsive, efficient and focussed manner to meet the needs of Cambridgeshire.

- To enhance efficiency and increase value for money;
- To effectively communicate with the public.

3. OVERVIEW

3.1. Definitions

- The corporate web presence includes Cambridgeshire.gov.uk, social media channels e.g. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and various 'microsites' for children and young people). See Appendix 1 for outline strategy of how the Council web presence will be developed between 2009 – 2011.
- The corporate web channel is Cambridgeshire.gov.uk
- The community focused, partnership channel is Cambridgeshire.net
- The staff intranet is Camweb
- 'Mobile services' can encompass services provided via SMS or Internet and/or GPS enabled devices e.g. 3g or 'smart' phones.

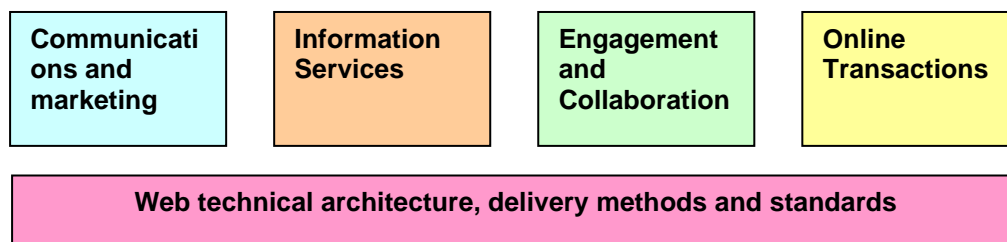
3.2. Principles

- All Council services will be available on the County Council's corporate web channel Cambridgeshire.gov.uk and designed around customer, rather than organisational, needs⁷.
- The corporate web presence will provide timely, accurate and relevant communications, supporting the Communications Strategy.
- Customers and staff will be able to use self-service transactions which are consistent with (but more cost effective than) transactions accessed via telephone, face to face and post.
- The corporate web presence will provide quality and up to date information about Council services, written in plain English, which adheres to corporate information management and web standards.
- Customers and staff will be able to engage with the Council, participate in consultations and feedback on services.
- Mobile information and services will be provided where they offer the most value to the customer, for example SMS updates about school closures or fault reports.
- Cambridgeshire.net will support the dissemination of information about community and voluntary sector organisations, events, activities and adult education courses.
- Community and voluntary groups should be encouraged to promote themselves on Cambridgeshire.net.
- Communities will be able to engage with the Council, Councillors and partners on Cambridgeshire.net, influence local decisions and service design and delivery, supporting the Community Engagement strategy.
- The intranet (Camweb) will support effective staff collaboration and cross-service team working.
- All corporately owned and managed web sites and applications will:
 - Comply with legal and industry standards, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

⁷ An exception to this may occur, whereby a partnership arrangement is in place e.g. Recap, or the service has a requirement to target a specific audience type, for example children or young people. In these instances, the partnership or service can commission a separate web site, or use social media, but must maintain a consistent customer experience, by enabling customers to link between Council web channels.

- Be developed using technologies that are core to the corporate IT Strategy.
- Be developed with sustainability and value for money as guiding principles.
- Have a high level of availability and resilience.

The corporate web presence has four key functions which are underpinned by the technical infrastructure, processes and standards.



4. STRATEGY

4.1. Communications and marketing

Moving forward there is a need to support digital communications delivery more flexibly, catering for both short term and longer term messages. Where possible communications will be targeted to different audiences, delivered in the customer's preferred context and method (this may include exploring the possibility of using email alerts, SMS, RSS feeds and social media).

The use of corporate blogs will be explored to enable the Council to communicate with customers more effectively. The possibility of enabling customers to comment on communications will be explored, which would provide immediate feedback to the Council on key messages and campaigns. Partner and local community web sites will be able to publish communications relevant to their local area within their own web sites (by filtering and publishing Council blog RSS feeds).

Where possible the applications used for publishing web communications will be rationalised, rather than using disparate systems which are inefficient and result in duplication of effort by the Communications team. The corporate Communications team will be responsible for overseeing all communications delivery on the web.

A comprehensive social media policy, guidelines and strategy will be implemented. All social media accounts created by the Council will be linked from the corporate web site to ensure that citizens are aware they are official channels.

The use of social media monitoring tools will be explored, to ensure the Council can identify opportunities when it is appropriate to engage customers.

The corporate branding guidelines will be extended to apply to all web-based media.

New channels for internal communications will be explored, building on the success of the Chief Executive's blog and utilising existing applications such as Microsoft SharePoint.

4.2. Information Services

Information delivery on the corporate web channels will be based on customer needs. The Web team will use customer insight and user centred design techniques (including web site analytics data, customer feedback, contact centre data, customer profile data, usability research and evaluation) to inform the design and delivery of information and content.

The Web team will also utilise search engine optimisation techniques to ensure that Council web pages rank highly in search engine results (as 60% of all visitors to the corporate web site access low level content pages from search engines rather than accessing the web site directly).

The Web team will be responsible for maintaining a limited number of key 'landing' pages on the corporate web site and the site search, to ensure that the channel is continually optimised for search engines and delivers the best possible customer experience. The web team will continue to provide training, support and advice to services to ensure that they publish high quality, customer focused content.

Data that is held by the Council which is suitable for public release and meets customer needs will be made available on the corporate web site (i.e. if there are no data protection, confidentiality or licensing restrictions). Where possible, data will also be made openly available for re-use by third parties and partners to enable the development of high utility applications for mobile devices and third party web sites by citizens and local social enterprises. The corporate GIS systems will be exploited and the interactive mapping interfaces on the corporate web site will be updated to meet customer expectations. Data from third parties and partners will be provided alongside Council data where appropriate (enabling 'mash-ups') to improve the customer experience, for example providing the Police crime statistics alongside Council data about a neighbourhood.

All information and content provided on the corporate channels will adhere to corporate information management and web standards.

4.3. Community Engagement, Collaboration and Networking

As identified in the Communities and Local Government (CLG) White Paper 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power' there is significant potential to engage and empower communities through the use of social media and e-democracy tools. Digital engagement can range from commenting on Councillor and Council blogs, raising and discussing local issues, deliberation about local decisions, electronic petitioning and participatory budgeting processes. Digital engagement can be particularly effective for groups who have previously been hard to engage (i.e. because they are time poor or find offline methods less appealing and accessible).

Guidelines on engaging customers via the web are being developed and will be implemented during a pilot project running from October 2009 to May 2010, using project funding from CLG. Building on research into best practise in other local

authorities, our customer needs and pilot projects (such as the one funded by CLG) the online engagement guidelines will be updated on an ongoing basis. Social media will be used for engagement where it meets customer and service needs and supports the Community Engagement Strategy. Digital engagement must compliment existing, offline methods of engagement such as consultations, neighbourhood panels and boards and community fairs.

Existing applications such as SharePoint will be implemented in a standardised 'toolkit' via Camweb, to enable staff collaboration, cross-team working, improved communication and business networking within the organisation. The possibilities for developing a knowledge management strategy and integrating with the EDRM system will also be investigated.

4.4. Transactions and Customer Self-service

The table below shows a snapshot of usage of the corporate web site Cambridgeshire.gov.uk in May 2006 and 2009, representing the increase in customer usage and efficiency savings gained.

	May 2006	May 2009	% Increase	May 2009 efficiency savings
Web site unique Visitors	93,106	110,544	18%	
Payments	231	1026	344%	£1,432*
Form submissions	211	1557	637%	Compared to phone - £1,774.98 Compared to face to face - £22,713.80

* Average saving based on different transaction types

Online transactions include requests, applications, payments and bookings. The Council already has corporate applications for managing requests and applications (the iCaseWork Eforms system, which includes back office workflow) and online payments (an in-house developed application). Although some services already take online bookings, a corporate e-bookings system may be implemented if there is a strong business case which will realise further efficiency savings.

The online payments system will be integrated with the Oracle eBusiness Suite to reduce manual processing by Revenue and Benefits and enable an increased number of services to offer online payment for services.

To enable seamless customer service and a reduction in avoidable contact (NI 14) the possibility of a system that provides a view onto various customer facing systems will be investigated with the Contact Centre. This would enable staff to check the history or status of customers' web transactions and telephone interactions and potentially recommend services based on the information.

The Web team will use customer insight data and user centred design methods to analyse customer behaviour and inform the design of self-service online transactions, supporting the Service Transformation agenda.

4.5. Web Technical Architecture, Resilience and Availability

Channel roadmaps will be developed (based on this strategy, customer needs and the Application Strategy) to inform the strategic design, planning and implementation of the web technical architecture to support the Service Transformation and Community Engagement agendas.

The web architecture, applications and services must be resilient and available at the highest usage times (which can be determined by monitoring web analytics). The corporate website Cambridgeshire.gov.uk is used by the Contact Centre as the main knowledge base for customer service representatives and therefore must be available between 8 am to 8 pm, Monday to Saturday.

4.6. Approach to online delivery

There is a need to embed industry standard methodologies, tools and processes which can be used by the Web team to support the Service Transformation agenda and Community Engagement strategy. The traditional 'waterfall' approach to application development (where a comprehensive business requirements specification is developed up front) is unsuitable for web projects where technologies and stakeholder requirements change frequently. A more Agile approach to delivering customer and business benefits in short timescales with limited budget is required and Agile development methodologies will be investigated and trialled.

There is a need to retain and develop specialist Web project management skills to deliver web-based self-service solutions. To enable the Web team to deliver customer facing solutions, the Web team will implement user centred design methods and tools and front-end developer resource will be recruited to work within the Applications Development Team.

To ensure value for money, contract frameworks will be investigated for suppliers who provide web development services, e.g. for partnership web sites or microsites.

4.7. Web Standards

The Council aims to ensure all corporate web sites and applications adhere to web accessibility standards, to enable access by customers with disabilities and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Standards for website usability will be developed and implemented by the Web team. Standards for web content will be maintained and updated by the Web team.

Procurement guidelines will be developed and implemented, to incorporate all existing web standards.

4.8. Appendix 1 - Public facing web presence schematic

The diagram below illustrates an outline strategy for the Council's public facing web presence and demonstrates the potential for linking and data services between the Council, partner and 3rd party sites:

