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To: Corporate Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Subject: KCC Website Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report updates Members on progress to date and future plans for the KCC website – www.kent.gov.uk.

1. Introduction

A major programme of work began in 2009 to redevelop web services for both the public and staff. It is designed to meet the increasing demand and expectation for full online access to services and information, as well as offer ways to interact and express views.

Continuing to improve the website is also important if it is to fulfil its role in the council's Channel Shift Strategy, making it the default channel for all our services so that it can improve public access no matter what channel people use and contribute to the savings set out in the Access & Assessment programme.

The public website (www.kent.gov.uk) had not had any significant sustained investment since 2005. The priority, therefore, was to improve it so that people who prefer to use it to contact us could:

- find a wide variety of rich information (including video content)
- interact with the website (search databases, use maps and news feeds)
- apply for services or report problems
- have their say (start a petition, respond to a consultation)

The first phase of this programme was completed with the re-launch of the website in December 2009, and there have been a series of improvements to the site throughout 2010.

In 2010, the Kent TV pilot ended but the council retained an element to run a Kent digital service. All video content produced promotes council services and

initiatives, as well as video content promoting tourism to the county. It is now hosted on www.kent.gov.uk/digitalkent, which shares the same brand as the website. This video content is also embedded within the main kent.gov.uk site where appropriate and the video content is also distributed across the web to other sites such as You Tube. Between April and November 2010, Digital Kent videos received 145,562 plays.

Digital Kent acts as an internal commissioner of films for KCC. If a video needs to be made by an external film company, Digital Kent will work with the relevant film company and KCC service commissioning the film to make sure they are getting best value for money and adhering to industry and organisational standards.

The Digital Kent team also run the popular What's On events listing (www.kent.gov.uk/whatson), which includes events from Visit Kent, KCC services and those organised by communities who can upload details of events to the website themselves.

2. Background

More and more people are using the internet in the UK - in 2010 more than 44 million people were online and around 70% of households had broadband.

What people in the UK do online and how they divide their time there is shifting. Email, research and shopping are still popular, but this year's standout increases have been social networking and video viewing. To put this in context, people are watching 2 billions videos a day on YouTube (a worldwide video channel) and uploading hundreds of thousands of videos daily.

Ways of going online are also proliferating, thanks to more wireless availability and the wide range of mobile devices available such as smartphones and tablets. People are also using games consoles, such as Wii and XBox to go online.

Consumers are increasingly engaged with brands and content on their mobile devices. In October 2010, almost 27 million people (56% of mobile phone owners in the UK) had used mobile media such as apps or downloaded data onto their handsets.

The council's medium term strategy *Bold Steps for Kent* sets out the commitment to improving frontline service delivery. It will expand the Gateway principles to include a single Gateway website and telephone number.

As the council faces tough financial challenges during the next four years, it will be even more important to make better use of online channels and use technology to automate back office processes.

Research by the Society of IT Managers shows that the difference in cost of web, phone and face-to-face channels is huge:

- Face-to-face: £4.83 to £9.62
- Telephone: £3.21 (average call cost via Contact Kent is £2.50)
- Online: £0.22 to £0.56

However, their research suggests that if the web transaction is done badly, the costs of failure will be much higher as customers try other, more expensive channels to resolve their problems. Poor usability may prevent people using online services.

The website will play a central role as KCC changes its shape to support the aspirations set out in *Bold Steps for Kent*. It can be the foundation for the proposed single Gateway website, offering people access to services provided throughout the public and voluntary sector in Kent and nationally.

Continued investment in online services will also contribute to the savings indicated in a new simpler approach to access and assessment. It is cheaper to put an online form on the website which talks directly to a back office system than it is to make this available in a physical Gateway location or by the Contact Centre. The Access & Assessment programme has identified potential savings of £14million over the next few years and using the website as the default channel can help deliver some of these savings.

But, providing usable and accessible online services and making sure they are fully automated is a must if we are to encourage more people to use what should be our cheapest contact channel – and save money. The new shape of KCC to support Bold Steps for Kent will give us the much-needed opportunity to reorganise our approach to digital services and respond to the changing needs of the public.

A Channel Shift Strategy commissioned as part of the Access and Assessment programme will be making recommendations for how the council can realise the potential savings opportunities that the web offers and how it can support the other contact channels. It recommends that the website becomes the default channel for all our services because it can then be used by Contact Centre and Gateway staff to support public access to these services.

3. Web development within KCC

3.1 A more stable, accessible website

The priority for the web redevelopment programme was to improve the customer experience of the website.

This entailed:

- jointly procuring a new web content management system with Medway Council in March 2009
- consulting members of the public on what they wanted from the website and using this feedback to improve the content and design, making popular information more prominent, creating a feed from the popular What's On website that was previously on Kent TV, providing a more comprehensive A to Z list of council services and embedding video content on the website
- training staff not only how to publish web pages but also how to write good web content and organise and present it in a usable and accessible way
- reviewing content and publishing information that met new quality standards
- creating a more contemporary and accessible design

Following the re-launch, we encountered some technical difficulties affecting the way the website worked - in particular the search, the ability to consume news feeds from other websites and the display of embedded videos. To resolve the problems, ISG needed to replace the web servers. This was a six-month project completed in September 2010 and has resulted in a more resilient and robust website.

3.2 Improving content and interactivity

The next phase of the redevelopment programme started in 2010 and consisted of more than 30 projects to improve the content and interactivity of the website. Some of the technology-related developments were delayed until the new web servers were installed in September.

Below is a highlight of some of the projects completed or scheduled to complete by March 2011:

- news feeds (for council news releases and the ability to consume news feeds from other websites)
- automatic display of service-specific events on the relevant parts of the website (e.g. library events on the libraries pages)
- a new consultations directory with ability to subscribe to consultations of interest
- trial of e-newsletters (to replace some printed material) for people interested in finding out news about libraries and the coast and countryside
- analysis of the services and information most requested on both the website and via the Contact Centre to improve access to the most used content on the website and inform design changes (in progress)
- improvements to the site search (in progress)
- events booking and payment system for countryside parks (in progress)

- implementation of new Google-style maps and a new Find your nearest public service/facility (in progress)
- interactive diagrams showing how much KCC spends on providing its wide range of services, as well as information on senior management jobs roles, salaries and out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed
- a new open data page that points to a range of data available on the website.

During 2011, work will also start on providing a single customer log-in to the website, which people will be able to use to track the progress of services requested or issues reported or use it to personalise their experience of the website.

3.3 Digital Kent

Digital Kent has begun to integrate more seamlessly within KCC's online provision, providing a video channel branded as part of the KCC website. It also provides the popular What's On in Kent Local events section (www.kent.gov.uk/whatson), branded in similar terms with the KCC website.

In addition to providing a video service within KCC, filming events and issues in coordination with the wider Communications Team, Digital Kent has begun to provide videos to support public and internal staff communications. For example, the team produced a video message to staff by the Group Managing Director on her first day in post, one of several films by communicating her messages direct to staff. They also filmed a series of 'head and shoulders' short videos for the transparency initiative, as well as a series of brief video CVs of Cabinet Members.

In addition to the 80-plus films that Digital Kent has made so far, it has also begun to sell its expertise to the wider community. They were commissioned to make a series of films for Emergency Planning's private sector partners 'Resilience' that have won widespread acclaim from their clients.

Further internal commissions to produce films have come from Clean Kent, Kent Drug and Alcohol Awareness and the Reward Management Team. They have also been working on improving the search rankings for the Grads Kent website.

What's On in Kent has continued to flourish with 34,337 visits between April and November 2010 and building up a unique film-based archive to nearly 100 films. There are currently 7,362 events on the system.

Digital Kent now has 7,300 followers on Twitter - more than any other organisation in Kent (including other KCC departments) - while What's On has more than 2,500 Twitter followers.

4. Supporting the vision for frontline services

As previously mentioned in this report, KCC has made a commitment to improving frontline services and putting web at the heart of these.

This will be in the context of less money, more digital channels, increasing public demand and expectations to be able to personalise their experience, the need to open up government data and the socialisation of the web. These changes will influence the way in which the website can support how we deliver services and continue to be relevant and of value to the public in the future.

It is not just our website that will play a vital role in connecting people and services - how we use other digital channels such as mobile internet and social media will also be important.

It will be important to make sure what is available on the web and other digital channels can both improve customer experience and save the council money.

During 2011, further work will be done to:

- use customer insight to make sure that new online services are usable and accessible and right first time, supporting the aims of the Access & Assessment programme
- develop the means for the website to become the default customer contact channel to support the Gateway Channel Shift Strategy and Access & Assessment programme, capable of enabling people to do things for themselves with no unnecessary staff intervention, while supporting the other channels in helping people access services and information in the way they prefer to do so
- actively encouraging people to switch where appropriate to do so to using the web instead of other contact channels, supporting both the Gateway Channel Shift Strategy and the government's Race Online initiative
- consult, plan and implement the single Gateway website, as set out in *Bold Steps for Kent*, making the most of the existing investment made to the KCC website.

5. Conclusion

The web and other digital channels such as the social media and mobile will be at the heart of KCC's multi-channel access strategy, the Gateway frontline service delivery model, access to information, transparency agenda and the way we engage with the public. They will play a vital role in helping the council to make significant savings through the Access & Assessment programme.

Members of the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.