ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	20th October, 2010
3.	Title:	6 Month Review of the Council's Website
4.	Directorate:	Financial Services

5. Summary

The Council's refreshed website went live on 6th January 2010 following a successful implementation project, led by the Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Team. This included the purchase and roll out of a new Content Management System providing a flexible, cost effective and engaging way for customers to access Council services online.

This report provides an update on the implementation of the refreshed website in its first six months between January and June 2010.

6. Recommendations

- **Cabinet are asked to note progress on the implementation of the refreshed website.**

7. Website Refresh

The Council website is a significant customer access channel for the Council. In the first six months since the website was refreshed, an average of 59,000 unique visitors have visited the website and have viewed an average of almost 2.4 million website pages every month. It is therefore crucial to have a website that is capable of accommodating this level of activity and also providing an online experience that meets customer requirements.

In order to deliver on these requirements and address some issues with the previous website, the Council website was successfully refreshed in January 2010. Over 3,500 pieces of content have been reviewed for accuracy and relevance and rewritten where appropriate. Content has been migrated to an improved Content Management System; this is the software that powers the website and allows any authorised user to update and amend content. Additionally, the Council has launched a number of interactive features which allow citizens to engage with the Council in new and innovative ways.

7.1 Benefits of the new Content Management System

The new Content Management System which underpins the refreshed website is a cost effective solution, which has provided a number of benefits for both customers and the Council over the past six months. These include:

- The provision of an improved 'Google' powered search function allowing citizens to find information more quickly and more accurately.

- The ability to develop online forms and online customer questionnaires quickly and cost effectively. Fifty additional forms have been developed since January enabling customers to transact with the Council at a time which suits them. Citizens are able to track the progress of their service request online. These forms were developed in-house at no charge. Using the previous website, these would have incurred significant expense in the region of £1,000 per form.

- The Content Management System is quick and easy to maintain. The system can be updated by PC or mobile phone, providing employees with the ability to work agilely and providing increased business continuity for the website during times which previously would have prevented officers updating the website, such as the floods in 2007.

- Employees responsible for website maintenance are extremely positive about the new content management system. It has saved officers significant time and effort by having a modern Content Management System.

- Improved stability and resilience has been achieved through external hosting of the website servers. This means that the servers are physically located away from Rotherham. The company hosting the website stores copies of the website in several different locations, providing additional

guarantees of uptime. There has been no unplanned system downtime since the Council website was refreshed whereas previously this was a regular occurrence.

7.2 Website Usage

A further benefit of the new website is the ability to collect detailed, accurate information about website usage. The old website had a very limited ability to collect usage information.

Table 1 shows the number of unique visitors to the website in the first six months of 2010. There is no comparative information for the same period last year prior to the refresh as the old website did not enable this particular data to be collected.

Table 1: Council Website Unique Visitors January – June 2010

Month	Unique Visitors
January	66,618
February	60,557
March	59,748
April	51,196
May	59,942
June	56,618

Table 2 shows the number of page views per month for the first six months of 2010 alongside the figures for the same period in 2009. This shows a significant increase in the number of monthly page views every month. The particularly high increase in May was due to the high number of visitors viewing election information.

Table 2: Council Website Page Views January – June 2009 and 2010

Month	2009	2010	Difference	% Increase
January	929,207	1,789,979	860,772	92.64
February	965,464	3,024,816	2,059,352	213.30
March	755,469	2,810,001	2,054,532	271.95
April	547,281	2,166,582	1,619,301	295.88
May	508,851	2,518,789	2,009,938	395.00
June	533,365	2,006,266	1,472,901	276.15

Customers using the refreshed website have been able to provide information, apply for services, report problems and provide feedback using a range of online forms. In addition to increases in the number of page views, there has also been an increase in the number of transactions completed online since the launch of the refreshed website. Table 3 shows figures for the most

popular online forms submitted between January and June 2010 and figures for the same period in 2009.

Table 3: Online Forms Submitted January – June 2009 and 2010

Form Type	Online Forms Submitted (January – June 2009)	Online Forms Submitted (January – June 2010)	% Increase
Key Choices form – allowing customers to bid for council housing.	9,982	12,079	+21%
Street Pride form – allowing customers to report issues and request Street Pride services.	331	840	+153%
Council Tax Direct Debit form – allowing customers to set up a direct debit to pay their council tax bill.	596	763	+28%
Customer Comment form – allowing customers to give feedback to any Council department.	326	440	+35%

In total, between January and June 2010, there were 16,579 online forms submitted through the Council website, an overall increase of 11% on the same period in 2009.

Customers can also pay for goods and services using the Council website. There has been an overall increase of 20% in the number of payments being made online in 2010 against the same period in 2009 as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Number of Online Payments January – June 2009 and 2010

Month	2009	2010	% Increase
January	1,784	2,110	+18.3%
February	1,248	1,579	+26.5%
March	1,379	1,598	+15.9%
April	1,926	2,321	+20.5%
May	1,972	2,360	+19.6%
June	1,928	2,359	+22.4%

These website usage figures demonstrate that good progress is being made against the Council's Customer Access Strategy objective of increasing web transactions by 20% during 2010 -11. It is important to note that these significant improvements have been achieved without any major promotion of the new website, which was given a soft launch initially. There will be an increase in the proactive marketing of the new website over the remainder of 2010/11 which should drive up website usage even further. This will play an important role in reducing demands on more expensive customer access channels.

7.3 Independent External Reviews

The Council website has been externally assessed by two independent bodies during 2010. Significant improvements in website performance have been identified in both assessments.

7.3.1 SOCITM Better Connected

The Council website is assessed on an annual basis by the Society of Information Technology Managers (SOCITM), an independent body who review and report on all local authority websites across the UK. The SOCITM report, titled Better Connected 2010, provides feedback on Local Authority website functionality and ease of use.

Historical performance by the Council website in this assessment has been disappointing, with the site being categorised as 'Satisfactory' in 2008/09 against the following categories:

- Poor
- Satisfactory
- Transactional
- Excellent

In 2009/10, the Better Connected assessment categories have been amended to the following:

- 1 star (equivalent to Poor category)
- 2 stars (equivalent to Satisfactory category)
- 3 stars (equivalent to Transactional category)
- 4 stars (equivalent to Excellent category)

The Council website has achieved an improved 3 star rating in the 2010 Better Connected assessment. in The SOCITM rating puts the Council website in the top quartile for all metropolitan boroughs websites according to the overall assessment of the site's usability. In addition, the Council's online library section on the refreshed website has been highlighted as an example of good practice.

7.3.2 Sitemorse

Another independent company, Sitemorse, who benchmark local authority and private sector websites, also reviewed the Council website. Sitemorse specifically focus on the accessibility of local authority websites and produces a 'league table' based on their scoring.

In February 2010, Sitemorse assessed the Council website as the most improved local authority website and the site increased 301 places (to the top quartile) in the Sitemorse local authority league table immediately following the refresh. Work continues to ensure that this improvement continues.

7.4 Customer Registration

By registering their customer details, the Content Management System allows the customer to be kept informed about their specific areas of interest.

At the end of June 2010, 981 users had registered with the website, and regular marketing emails are being sent to those customers. As registration numbers increase, this facility will allow the Council to target information to customers more quickly and cost effectively.

In order that significant benefits can be achieved from the registration facility, an intensive marketing campaign will begin during September 2010, starting with the Rotherham Show where there will be a stall where people will be encouraged to register on the site .

7.5 Customer Satisfaction Results

Customers are able to provide comments on each website page and this facility is regularly used. Where customers have provided contact details, the Council's website editors make contact with customers to thank customers for their feedback and provide an update on the action they have taken.

Some of the customer comments which have been received are detailed below:

"*I just wanted to say….your website is probably one of the clearest council websites I've ever used – really easy to find what I needed and a cracking design – well done*".

"*I'm not sure you could improve, I haven't had any problems with it. Your old website would be a different story though!! The search engine is very good, it just works. Think you could use more pictures and photos*".

"*It's clean and clutter free, I like that*".

"*Really like the search, I found what I wanted straight away*".

"I find map search to be very useful to find information".

Initial customer feedback shows that the majority of customers are very positive about the website with 75% of customers happy with their overall website experience. The customer satisfaction survey will continue throughout 2010 to ensure we are capturing as much customer feedback as possible. Additionally, a customer usability group has been established to provide ongoing feedback and help improve the customer experience.

7.6 Website Forward Plan

A Website Forward Plan has been developed to ensure that the website continues to be improved and developed in terms of look and feel, functionality and transaction types available via the site. This is developed in conjunction with Directorates and the Head of Communications and Marketing to ensure that key communication messages and marketing campaigns are reflected on the website. The implementation of the Website Forward Plan is overseen by the Corporate Website Strategy Group chaired by the Cabinet Member for Resources and Commissioning.

8. Finance

The Jadu Content Management System has been funded by the ICT Capital programme. Initial set up costs were as follows:

Item	One Off Cost
Jadu CMS	£59,800
Hosting set up	£1,200
Google Search Engine	£2,495
Total	**£63,495**

Revenue charges relating to the previous version of the Council Website in 2008/09 were £83,395. This sum was made up of a combination of RBT support and maintenance charges and subscriptions to third party services, all of which were rendered unnecessary by the adoption of the new Jadu Content Management System.

These charges have been significantly reduced following the Transformation and Strategic Partnership Team's refresh of the website. Ongoing revenue charges are now as follows:

Item	Annual cost
Jadu CMS licence	£7,200
Hosting service	£9,000
Total	**£16,200**

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Delivery of an effective website as part of the Council's Customer Access Strategy is a critical element in ensuring the Council transforms its services for the benefit of citizens, businesses, members and staff in order to improve the customer experience, generate efficiencies and deliver customer service excellence. This will also form a key supporting access channel for consolidation of customer services.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Council's Customer Access Strategy aims to provide services to customers across a number of channels and seeks to increase the take up of the online channel. The performance of the Council website is therefore central to delivering this strategy.

The Customer Access Strategy will deliver key efficiency and value for money improvements and an effective website will be a significant contributor to this.

11. Background Papers

- Customer Access Strategy 2008-2011

12. Contact(s)

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