

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	Cabinet
2. Date:	27 April 2011
3. Title:	Annual Review of the Council's Website
4. Programme Area:	Commissioning, Policy and Performance

5. Summary

The Council's refreshed website was launched on 6 January 2010 following a successful implementation project, led by the Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Team, who are now part of the new Strategic Commissioning Unit.

This report summarises the annual performance of the website and provides details of some of the key activities which will be undertaken during the 2011 – 2012 financial year.

6. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to:

- 1: Note the performance of the website.
- 2: Support the key activities for the 2011 – 2012 financial year, which will strengthen the website Customer Access channel and will support reduced costs for service delivery.
3. Support the requirement for Service Managers to review and develop their web content, supported by the Commissioning, Policy and Performance teams.

7. Background

The Rotherham Council website was refreshed in January 2009.

Over 3,500 pieces of content have been reviewed and migrated to an improved Content Management System, which is the software that powers the website and allows authorised users 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. 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, 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.
- The Content Management System is quick and easy to maintain and can be updated by PC or mobile phone. The system supports improved employee efficiency, provides the ability for employees to work agilely and also provides the Council with increased business continuity. Employees responsible for website maintenance are extremely positive about the new 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 business continuity. There has been no unplanned system downtime since the Council website was refreshed whereas previously this was a regular occurrence.

7.2 Customer Usage of the Website

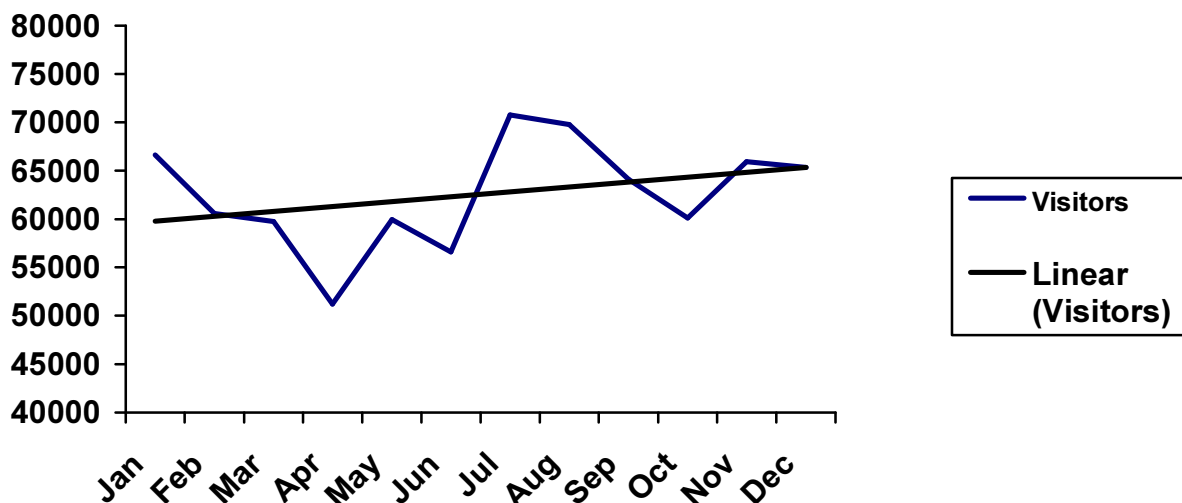
The Council uses the website to provide a wealth of information for customers in a cost effective manner. Information can be accessed 24 hours a day and customers can complete online forms which enable them to transact business with the Council. This access channel allows customers to contact the Council at a time and place which suits them.

An average of 62557 unique visitors per month visited the Council's website during 2010.

A unique visitor is a statistic which describes someone who has visited the Council's website at least once during the month. Any visitor who returns to the site during the same month will not be counted again. In addition, this figure excludes Rotherham Council staff members that use the website for information.

Graph 1 shows the number of unique visitors to the website on a monthly basis throughout 2010.

Graph 1: Council Website Unique Visitors 2010



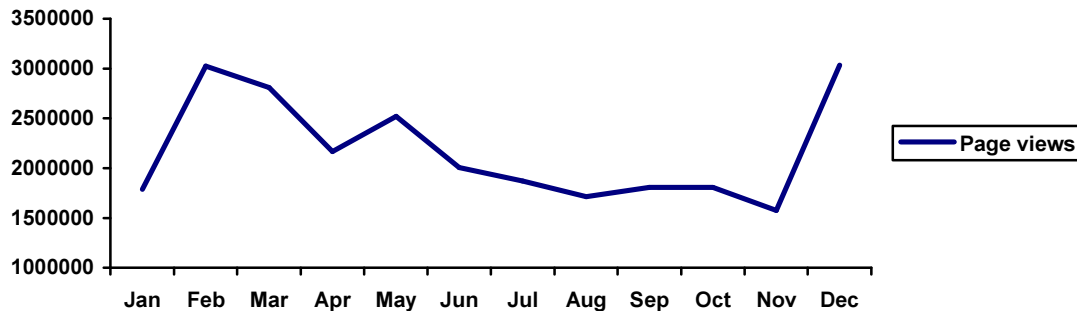
The linear trend line shows that customer usage for the website channel has steadily increased during 2010.

As the refreshed website has been in place for 12 months, comparative monthly information is now readily available and will be used to show the percentage increase of customers who are using the website as an access channel for

information and to transact business with the council. This data is publicly available on our website and will be reported regularly to the Website Strategy Group, chaired by Councillor Wyatt, Cabinet Member for Resources and Commissioning, on an ongoing basis.

Graph 2 shows the number of page views per month during 2010

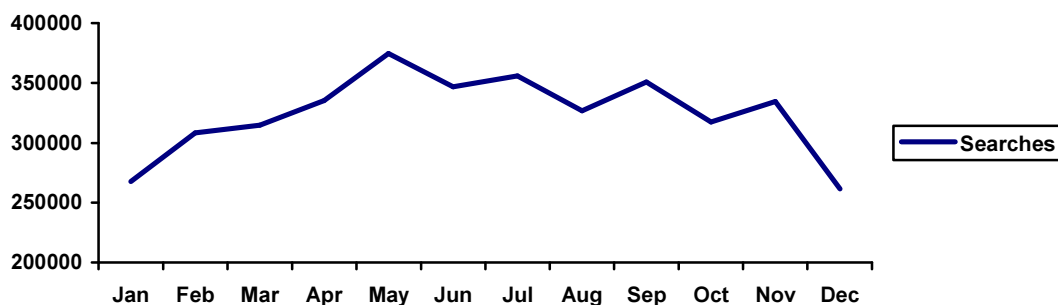
Graph 2: Council Website Page Views 2010



The refreshed website now employs Google hardware to search content and the main home page encourages customers to use it. Customers are regularly using the search function to find information, with an average of 320,000 searches completed every month. The downward trend in page views shows that customers are finding the information they need first time and are having to spend less time browsing for information. The spike in page views which can be seen in the data relating to December shows that customers regularly used the website to find out information relating to the adverse weather we were experiencing.

Graph 3 shows the number of searches per month during 2010

Graph 3: Council website searches 2010



In emergency situations, the Council has the ability to place a banner on each page throughout the website. This allows customers to see important information quickly and efficiently. This banner was successfully used to provide adverse weather information to customers and to provide information relating to elections in the borough. Positive feedback has been received from customers when this function has been activated.

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. There has been an increase in the number of transactions completed online since the launch of the refreshed website.

Table 1 shows figures for the most 4 popular online forms submitted 2010 and figures for the same period in 2009.

Table 1: Online Forms Submitted During 2009 and 2010

Form	2009	2010	Increase
Keychoices form	22,666	23,860	+5.5%
Streetpride form	623	1,724	+177%
CTAX Direct Debit form	864	1134	+31%
Customer Comment form	620	1068	+72%
Total online forms	31,343	37,667	+20%

During 2010, there were 37,667 online forms submitted through the Council website. This was an increase of 20% on customer usage in 2009

The website channel is a cost effective channel for service provision and encouraging customers to use this channel will result in cost savings for the council. Average costs for website transactions are £0.32, in comparison to £3.01 for the average cost of RMBC telephone contact. Use of the online channel during 2010 has resulted in potential cost avoidance of £98,310.87, assuming that customers would have telephoned the council to obtain information.

Customers can also pay for goods and services using the Council website. There has been an overall increase of 22% in the number of payments being made online in 2010 against the same period in 2009 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Online Payments January – June 2009 and 2010

Online cash transactions	2009	2010	Difference
January	1784	2110	+18.3%
February	1248	1579	+26.5%
March	1379	1598	+15.9%
April	1926	2321	+20.5%
May	1972	2360	+19.6%
June	1928	2359	+22.4%
July	2072	2437	+17.6%
August	1928	2383	+23.6%
September	2000	2459	+22.9%
October	2053	2504	+21.97%
November	2089	2631	+25.95%
December	1742	2301	+32.09%
Totals	22121	27042	+22.25%

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 during 2011 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 three independent bodies during 2010.

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 survey has reduced the Council website rating to 2 stars in this year's assessment. A 2 stars rating ranks the Council website as performing 'satisfactorily'. A number of areas of development have been highlighted in the survey, for example:

- Some of the website content has been identified as being out of date. Our website offers a facility to date stamp content and reminds content authors when pages need to be reviewed, but this is not being widely used throughout service teams.

- It is recommended that the news value of our website can be strengthened. This includes ensuring that features are lively, engaging and in touch with local stories.
- Customers are not actively encouraged to participate in council business via the website. The council is recommended to develop a consultation area on the website and to consider providing news content about recent council decisions on our councillor pages.
- Our use of location maps can be developed to help customers find information from a map or postcode. Simple instructions should be provided so that customers know how to access the information easily.

In addition, the 'business content' and 'highways content' on the website have been identified as requiring improvement.

These recommendations will be specifically targeted and addressed by August 2011. The Online Services Manager, will work with content authors, and staff within the Commissioning, Policy and Performance teams to deliver these improvements.

The transactional area of our website has been rated as good. In addition, the website has achieved good ratings in the survey for our use of social media, including blogs and good ratings for our speed of response for email requests. Transactional developments which are planned during 2011 – 2012 will continue to ensure this section of the website achieves strong results.

7.3.2 RNIB accessibility test

The website has been assessed for accessibility by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), who has reported "there is a good deal of accessibility best practice used in the site, making it very nearly fully accessible, except on isolated pages." The assessment has indicated that accessibility levels have improved since 2010. Work will be completed with the website usability group to identify the isolated pages which are not accessible, and take action to ensure the site is fully accessible. This action will be completed by October 2011.

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. The Council website was ranked 27th (from 430 local authorities) at the end of 2010 in the league table. Work continues to ensure that this improvement continues.

7.4 Customer Registration

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

At the end of 2010, 2100 customers have registered with the website, and regular marketing emails are being issued to these customers. Promotion of this facility will continue throughout 2011. As registration numbers increase, this facility will allow the Council to target information to customers more quickly and cost effectively.

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 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".*

- *"What is the point of having an information website when most of the searches point to pages asking the user to contact you"*
- *"Make it easier to find the correct forms"*
- *"I don't like having to download individual properties. I would like to be able to see all in first place"*
- *I would like more information on the news page and easier to find info on important things such as road works"*

75% of customers are happy with their overall website experience. The customer satisfaction survey will continue during 2011 to ensure we continue to capture customer feedback and address areas of customer concern.

Negative comments which are raised by customers are reviewed by the Directorate Editor Team, and where funding allows, improvements are scheduled into the forward plan. 'You said...we did' information is about to be introduced, to inform customer of the actions we are taking following their feedback.

Additionally, a customer usability group has been established to provide ongoing feedback and help improve the customer experience.

7.6 Website developments

During the second half of 2010, the Council has updated the website to enable us to:

- Add the facility to market stories and information via our home page
- Introduce e-Petitioning
- Introduce an online budget consultation
- Market and promote other services throughout the site
- Publish all expenditure over £500
- Publish senior salaries

7.7 Future resource requirements for the website

The number of staff members within Directorates who have the skills to develop and approve website content has reduced significantly, following the completion of a number of service reviews.

If the website is to remain current and fit for purpose, it is important that service managers are able to take responsibility for the review and maintenance of web pages and have the opportunity to develop innovative uses for the site. This will require training and ongoing support from staff members within the Commissioning, Policy and Performance area.

7.8 Key activities for the 2011 – 2012 financial year

A Website Development Plan has been developed and progress against this plan will be monitored by the Web Strategy Group.

Some of the key activities for ongoing website development in the 2011 – 2012 financial year include:

- Enhancement of the facility to pay bills online
- Introduction of an e-Shop for miscellaneous items such as books and maps as well as paying for services such as pest control upfront
- Upgrading the website mapping system, to improve accessibility and usability of the planning area on the website
- Enhancement of the Key Choices housing section, by implementing the Abrisas system
- Development of online licensing information
- Development of an online consultation area on the website
- Development of the website to provide greater accessibility for mobile phones
- Development of additional transactional processes, which will support the delivery of financial savings for the Council. This will be taken forward via the Customer Service Consolidation programme which is underway.
- Given reductions in funding likely to be available for marketing activity, eg community publications such as Rotherham News, development of online resources as a cost-effective communications channel. This will be supported by the transfer of the Online Services Manager post to be part of the restructured council wide Communications and Marketing team.

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, Members, businesses 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 as previously agreed by Cabinet.

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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