

Report to Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 15 November 2011

Portfolio: Planning and Technology

Subject: Epping Forest District Council Website

Responsible Officer: Tom Carne (01992 564039).

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1) To note progress towards the implementation of the new Epping Forest District Council Website;**
- (2) To agree revised Website performance indicators:**

Executive Summary:

Basic performance of the Epping Forest District Council Website is monitored by Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel. The current website has been largely developed over the last ten years using the Punch Content Management System. With the objectives of reducing costs and improving quality, officers have undertaken research into alternative platforms. Officers have identified Joomla, a free open source Content Management System suitable for migration of the website and will present a demonstration of development to date to the Scrutiny Panel.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To endorse the development of the new website, financial savings, and redefinition of performance indicators.

Other Options for Action:

To continue to utilise the Punch Content Management System and not to continue with the development of the new Joomla based website.

Report:

1. Members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel have previously requested an update following a down-grading of the Epping Forest District Council website in the Better Connected survey produced annually by the Society of IT Managers (Socitm). The quality of the Council's website, as measured by the Better Connected survey is reported by an annual Key Performance Indicator. While an analysis of the Better Connected survey has been

undertaken by staff, Members of the ICT and PR sections have mainly been focused on the production of a new Joomla based council website.

2. Joomla offers a number of advantages over the current Punch Content Management System. The software is available at little or no cost and used very successfully by organisations ranging in size from small businesses and voluntary groups up to central government in both the UK and the United States of America. In addition to the main application, Joomla has many additional modules that can be 'bolted on' for additional functionality.

3. Punch by comparison is provided under licence at an approximate annual cost including support of £16,000. Since its development in the late 1990s many of its original clients have migrated to other content management systems, making further significant product development unlikely. In the view of council officers, Joomla is a more powerful, flexible alternative. It is easier and more efficient to use, and represents a significant potential long term financial saving to the council. It is already being successfully used as the Council's new intranet platform.

4. The development of the Joomla based website requires the transfer of information from the old platform. It is an opportunity to review both content and structure. Officers propose significant alterations. Focus will shift from a website built around the Council's organisational structure to a website based around access to services from a customer perspective. It is also intended to streamline and remove unnecessary and obsolete information, focusing resources on fewer areas but providing better levels of information and service.

5. Joomla also presents an opportunity to refresh the look and feel of the website which has not been updated since 2006, partly as a consequence of the rigid coding structure of the old content management system.

6. During development of the Joomla website, officers are also putting experience into practice in terms of technical issues such as the supporting file structure and editorial management. Utilising another free open source application called Wordpress, news releases and other content is being tagged. Not only will Wordpress make the updating of the website much faster and simpler. It will also allow for better search facilities.

7. For content management and maintenance purposes the new website is effectively split in three. The main Joomla elements are designed to be as static as possible for minimum maintenance and updating. All, 'news' will be entered using Wordpress and designed to display automatically in the main website. 'Events' will be managed through an associated Joomla module. While Public Relations will retain control of Joomla content, Directorates will have access to update their content through Wordpress and the events module.

8. The replacement website has functionality which will allow it to pull relevant data from other Epping Forest District Council web enabled systems that produce RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds. For example, webcast meetings from the Public-I system can be made more easily available direct from the main website.

9. The proposed schedule for the first phase of the replacement of the website and future development is as below:

- October 2011 - Implementation of Wordpress to replace News functionality of Punch CMS
- November 2011 - Commencement of Joomla implementation – Design and implementation of structure and installation of components
- December 2011 – Content creation for Beta Testing

- January – April 2012 – Content creation for Live
- May 2012 – Final testing
- June 2012 – Website go live – decommission Punch CMS

10. Once initial development is complete, officers have identified a number of further potential opportunities to enhance the website and make additional savings. Among the opportunities identified are:

- Online Mapping
- 'Shop Local' site
- Move existing externally hosted sites to new system (Favourite Trees, Museum Education, Jobs)
- Replacement of Achieve Forms

11. A frustration of the current website has been the continuing unreliability of visitor numbers, as reported by KPI 01 ('Visits to the Council's Website'). The council used a monitoring tool called Sitestat for which an annual payment of approximately £3,000 was made. This tool has already been dropped in favour of Google Analytics, another free open source application. It is clear that previous monitoring over-estimated the number of visits to the website. Officers now believe that on a like for like basis, annual visits to the current website average around 600,000 per year compared to the previously reported 800,000. However, direct comparison between the newly structured Joomla based website and the old Punch based website can only be estimated. It is possible that as the new site concentrates on doing fewer things better, the number of visits may decrease.

12. An additional complication, which has been identified by officers, is the implementation of the EU 'Cookies Directive' which will impact on our ability to collect website visit data using existing tools. In basic terms, the Directive requires us to gain the permission of users before placing the cookie (a small text file) which is in this case used for analytical purposes, without this cookie the visit will not be recorded.

13. Providers of these tools are investigating alternative solutions which will operate correctly within the requirements of the Directive, but if such a solution is not available to us by the time the Directive is to be enforced (May 2012), it is likely that recorded site visits will drop by a large margin.

14. Sites such as the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) which have implemented compliant solutions, which effectively disable the placement of tracking cookies unless explicit permission is given by the user, have experienced drops in recorded traffic of 80-90%. Officers are actively investigating alternative analytic solutions which will be compliant, but even these may give less useful detailed data. In addition, advice given by the ICO is still evolving and as such the impact of the Directive may yet be lessened.

15. Despite the inherent limitations of the current Punch based website, exit survey results generated through the Socitm supplied application 'Insight', seem to suggest that most users have been satisfied with the current website. Analysis is broken down by various criteria and assessment levels ranging from 'Very Dissatisfied' to 'Very Satisfied'. Although the Epping Forest District Council website appears to perform well on the basis of assessing the most satisfied indicator, officers believe an amalgamation of 'Very Satisfied', 'Quite Satisfied' and 'OK' provides a larger and more statistically robust measurement of actual website performance. It is therefore proposed to amend the definition of the website satisfaction performance indicator (KPI 02 'User Satisfaction With The Council's Website') introduced from the current year, which is currently averaging around 80% satisfaction, accordingly.

16. It is also proposed to cease the Better Connected indicator (KPI 03 'The Quality Of The

Council's Website') as a KPI from 2012/13, as this measure is based on the single Socitm opinion and criteria that change from year to year and is not therefore considered to be as relevant a performance measure as the website satisfaction performance indicator (KPI 02).

Resource Implications:

Continuation of the existing Punch Content Management System licence and support services costs in the region of £16,000 per year. Deployed as a replacement for the Website and Intranet ICT has estimated Joomla can produce a saving over a traditional vendor supplied solution in the region of £30,000 to £40,000. Total external expenditure up to 12 October 2011 amounts to 59 Euros.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Consultation Undertaken:

Background Papers:

Impact Assessments:

The Epping Forest District Council Website provides an accessible means of obtaining council services. It is available 24 hours a day, providing content in a range of visual and audio formats to meet needs of all residents including those with disabilities. An added advantage of Joomla is the ability to quickly and simply apply translation services to text. Interactive services such as online payments and reporting of repairs alleviates the requirement to phone or visit the council in person. The Website forms a crucial element in the council's emergency planning response mechanisms.