

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 2 – 28 FEBRUARY 2008

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(Author: Lisa Hilton)

REVIEW OF COUNCIL WEBSITE

Summary: Review of and Improvements to the Council's Website

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Breckland Council has operated a website for a number of years and a major revamp was completed at the end of 2005-6. This revision was based on the content management software – Obtree – which was developed in conjunction with Amaze, a specialist website development company. At Breckland the operation and development responsibilities are distributed between:
 - ICT Service – for technical construction
 - Communications – for overall development direction
 - Individual Services – for content
- 1.2 Each month the web site was subjected to independent scrutiny by a company called Sitemorse. This specialist company provides a monthly assessment of public sector web sites. Their approach was to undertake an automated assessment using a special computer programme that submits the web site to a series of technical appraisals. This approach develops a score which is used as a means of ranking each local authority.
- 1.3 In addition since 1999 the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) has conducted an annual survey of all local authority web sites. Their results are published each March in a report called 'Better Connected'. The 'Better Connected' report is over 200 pages in length and provides detailed descriptions of the assessment methods used. The report also identifies examples of good and poor practice. The approach used by the 'Better Connected' team is to adopt the role of a mystery shopper and to follow a script of questions and topics to be explored. The main questionnaire is structured to provide Yes/No answers which are supplemented by a qualitative assessment (0 to 3) and comments from the reviewer.
- 1.4 The main thrust of 'Better Connected' is to provide examples of good and bad practice and key messages to authorities in general. The publication doesn't arrange authorities into a ranking but instead classifies them as Standard, Transactional or Excellent. The natural aspiration is for authorities to improve by migrating from Standard to Transactional and onwards to Excellent status.
- 1.5 Only 40 have achieved a classification of Transactional or Excellent rating. The approach used to complete the research behind 'Better Connected' means that the assessments are undertaken in November of each year in order to achieve a publication date of March. The 2007 issue of the document was reported to members with an initial summary of the document and its assessment of Breckland Council's web site in April 2007.
- 1.6 The purpose of this report is to communicate the improvements that were recommended and that have been made to the Council website since implementation of the improvement plan.

2. **KEY DECISION**

2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. **COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

3.1 The matter raised in this report indirectly falls within the following Council priorities:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well planned place to live which encourages vibrant communities
- A prosperous place to live and work

4. **MAIN BODY OF REPORT**

4.1 'Better Connected' identified that Breckland's web site was capable of improvement but did not single Breckland out for either praise or adverse comment and assessed the Authority as a 'Standard' site. The reviewers' gave their first impressions as:

"Nice home page. Easy to see what each section is about and geared directly to the general public. Good."

4.2 But then at the end of their assessment form the conclusion that:

"Initially this seemed to be a really good site. It is well designed and easy to use but soon it became evident that the content did not match the design standard. On 11/11 the A-Z only showed district items, on 15/11 the county ones were present too."

4.3 The detailed assessment by Socitm is a mixture of favourable, mediocre and poor assessments that are reflected in the reviewers' statements.

4.4 The favourable comments include:

- Use of A-Z – *"Seems comprehensive until one tries to find particular items! Didn't use the joint A-Z with the county on 11/11 but is now doing so on 15/11. Links to external bodies are indirect but give good explanations, so gave a Yes."*
- Navigation - *"Excellent"*

4.5 By contrast the mediocre and poor comments include:

- Search Engine – *"Too many pdfs but otherwise OK. Asked "did you mean graffiti?"*
- Links – *"Links generally there where needed."*
- Participation – *"Not clear if there would be online consultation as there are no current ones."*
- Maps – *"No interactive maps found."*

4.6 A summary of some of the improvements that were recommended by the previous Panel meeting and the progress report on improvements made to the website can be viewed in Appendix A.

4.7 We have been working towards our site being Transactional, ensuring that our site is customer-focused by increasing the number of transactions available. We have implemented an index for online forms named, "Do it Online". This enables residents to report a number of incidents including; abandoned vehicles, fly tips and full recycling bins. We are in the process of adding a "Do it online" form for registering a food business and explain the needs and benefits for doing so.

4.8 We have greatly reduced technical errors on the site improving the user experience; our monthly Website Statistics are up-to-date and available from our home page.

4.9 Consultations have a top link on the homepage to ensure visibility on the web site we are investigating the possibility of having consultations online enabling respondents feedback online.

- 4.10 Councillors are being encouraged to have and to use their own web pages as a way of communicating with their constituents and this is being achieved through modern.gov.

Regular activity

- 4.11 At the heart of our regular activity to continuously improve the website is our commitment to keeping the site up to date with relevant and timely content. We have a facility that lets us know where any broken links are on the site so that we can fix them. Every month we run the link checker across the whole website and our publications database to ensure residents can access what they need.
- 4.12 We regularly check what people are looking for on our search facility to ensure they can find what they want on the site - see our website statistics attached.

5. OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- 5.1 The Council accepts that without an increase in the resource available for Website development that enhancement to the website site will continue at the current pace and that this situation is monitored in order to identify any significant requirement to increase the pace of development.

6 RISK

- 6.1 I have completed the Risk Management questionnaire and this report does not require a risk assessment because the issue covered by the recommendation is not significant in terms of risk.

7. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 7.1 It is recommended that:

- (1) This report is received
- (2) The continuous improvements for the website are noted

This report has been checked for compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equal Opportunities.

28 February 2008

<p><i>The layout of the home page be reconsidered to ensure that it was not over-burdened with information whilst at the same time it is user friendly and clear for users.</i></p>	<p>We are currently in the process of changing the navigation tree to comply with LGNL making it easier for our users to navigate the site. We are revising the items under the left hand navigation based upon consultation with service managers and teams.</p>
<p><i>The website should adopt a “four click” approach to ensure that information can be found quickly and easily.</i></p>	<p>We have implemented a “2 click” approach to the planning searches page and to the majority of the site where possible</p>
<p><i>Information on the planning process should be bolstered on the website enabling the public to access pending planning applications and associated maps and forms etc.</i></p>	<p>The planning process has been bolstered on the website by adding to the link already provided on the left hand navigation. To make the search more user-friendly we have ensured that by using the search function user will be taken directly to the main planning search page.</p>
<p><i>A link is established with the Eastern Daily Press Events Page and action be taken to ensure that news items on the website are removed promptly once they are now longer current.</i></p>	<p>A link to the EDP Events page has been established. All news items are live on the site within 2 hours of being released to the press. Old news items are archived automatically enabling the user to search for old press releases.</p>
<p><i>Images are limited in size to obviate long download times, especially for dial-up users.</i></p>	<p>All images on the website are optimised before they are published onto the site. Web officer and Graphic designer hold this responsibility.</p>
<p><i>A link to “Frequently Asked Questions” is installed on the home page and this be updated on a regular basis to ensure freshness.</i></p>	<p>Link has been concurrent since site went live. FAQ’s updated to ensure all information is timely.</p>
<p><i>The role of web editors needs to be defined and clarified, in relation their general work commitments and job descriptions should be updated accordingly to take account of the role of web editors as this has such an impact on the site content being kept up to date.</i></p>	<p>The role of Web editors has been defined and we will be asking service managers to include the targets and commitment to web editing in future STP’s. All service areas have been asked a confirm the web editor for their team to ensure we have coverage on each of the services.</p>
<p><i>The Council continue to work with external organisations in order to ensure best practice is followed to ensure that the design and operational usefulness of the website is maximised.</i></p>	<p>Web team benchmarking against South Norfolk Council and are being evaluated by Socitm and SiteMorse.</p>