

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Report of the Strategic Director – Cabinet to Policy Development Review Panel 2 – 27 November 2008 (Author: Lisa Hilton, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer (Acting))

REVIEW OF COUNCIL WEBSITE

1. Purpose of Report

Review of and Improvements to the Council's Website.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. This report is received.
2. The continuous improvements for the website are noted.

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3 Background

3.1 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 Livelink and 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.

3.2 The web site has been subjected to independent scrutiny by a company called Sitemorse. Sitemorse, an online testing service for websites throughout the country's public services and government, carries out monthly checks in the sector, evaluating websites against four sets of criteria: function, accessibility, performance and quality of code. The company provides a monthly assessment of public sector web sites. This approach develops a score, which is used as a means of ranking each local authority. Our Sitemorse score in March 2008 ranked the website 135 out of 460. The Council had a six month trial of the software and a business case is being drafted to enable us to utilise the software on a permanent basis.

3.3 In addition since 1999 the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) has conducted an annual survey of all local authority web sites. The results are published each March in a report called 'Better Connected'. A team of reviewers carry out a structured survey with 95 questions for local authority websites, followed by seven shorter surveys on specific topics. This research has been supplemented by seven other separate surveys, using our partner organisations. The structure of the report follows the criteria for high-quality local authority websites that develop the ideas that websites should be 'useful, usable and used'. The feedback has been very positive - please see Appendix A. The website has been given a 'standard' ranking, however with the developments we have made to the site we should achieve 'transactional' ranking after next year's report.

- 3.4 The purpose of this report is to communicate the improvements that were recommended and that have been made to the Council website in the past 6 months.

4. Review and Improvements to the council website

4.1 'Better Connected' identified that Breckland's web site was capable of improvement and the report also identified the Key Messages to authorities on each aspect of the website. It was acknowledged however that an improvement plan should not be too broadly based as this approach would place too great a demand on the Authority's resources. The alternative strategy of applying this effort to a smaller range of initiatives was more likely to achieve sustainable long term improvements.

4.2 This is a summary of some of the improvements made in the last 6 months:

- i) Website Statistics are current and up-to-date monthly statistics are available from our home page.
- ii) Lagan has been implemented for use as a case management system, we have fixed SLA's for work completion time – priority 1 requests are 1 day SLA, priority 2 are 5 working days.
- iii) We have enhanced a training programme for web editors in order to promote better and clearer web communication.
- iv) We have an enhancement register to document the list of future improvements planned.
- v) A test database has been created for the Internet which enables us to try out new ideas and templates before they go live.
- vi) Improvements from SOCITM recommendations as follows:
 - o Truancy, Cemeteries and Flooding information added to the A-Z.
 - o Information on nearest recycling tip and opening times published to website.
 - o INTRAN on the homepage – wording changed to "Translation Services" as feedback through the contact centre confirmed that people did not realise that INTRAN is a translation service.
- vii) Web Trends monitoring software used to gauge popularity of individual pages helping us to ensure that these pages cover the most relevant and up to date pages.
- viii) Lagan will be moved to a virtualized environment in Dereham, to free up space on the brec-app01 web server for increased performance from Livelink. The content management system will be much quicker, shortening the time to publish content.
- ix) We have reviewed the information architecture for some sections of the website. For example, the Do it Online section has been divided into six sections, Life Events; Environment; Make a Purchase or Payment; Council Tax and Benefits; Planning and Building Control; and Comments, Compliments and Complaints. Therefore making it easier for the user to read and find what they are looking for.
- x) There is a feedback facility at the bottom of the Do it Online page. For example, see "Can't find what you're looking for? Tell us about it".

4.3 Regular activity

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.

- 4.4 We regularly check what people are looking for on our search facility to ensure they can find what they want on the site.
- 4.5 Each service area in the Council has a web editor who is responsible for editing and publishing pages onto the web relating to information on the service they provide. We have found in the past that a web editor has left the council and the role of editing has not automatically been passed on to another member of the team. This could mean that some information can become out of date. We have implemented a register of web editors which we check against leavers information received from Human Resources each month. If a member of staff is leaving the council who is also a web editor we contact the service manager to ensure that another member of the team is able to take on the responsibility of updating and publishing pages on the website.

5 Recommendation

- 5.1 This report is received.
- 5.2 The continuous improvements for the website are noted.

6 Risk and Financial Implications

- 6.1 Risk
- 6.2 At present there is a risk to service area pages becoming out of date as Web Editors leave and a replacement isn't automatically selected by the relevant manager.

6.3 Financial

- 6.4 No financial implications, report for information only.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 No legal implications linked to this report.

7. Other Implications

- a) Equalities: None
- b) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998: None
- c) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006: None
- d) Human Resources: None
- e) Human Rights: None
- f) Other: [e.g. Children's Act 2004]: None

8. Alignment to Council Priorities

- 8.1 Breckland's Website is one of the principal vehicles through which Breckland communicates to residents how it is delivering against all Council priorities.

9. Ward/Community Affected

- 9.1 Affects all wards.

Appendix A

Background Papers

None.

Lead Contact Officer:

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Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

This is not a key decision.

APPENDIX A

Socitm Feedback	Progress
<p>“This looks like a very interesting and well designed website. The home page is full of interesting news, useful links and also identifies visitor types, so I can click the link to say I'm a resident, business etc. There seem to be a few transactional features. Looks good!”</p>	
<p>“There's lots of useful info about waste and recycling but the order form for replacement bins was in the Do it Online section and there was no link to it from relevant pages about bins and collections. The info about the recycling centres (which appear to have facilities for leaving bulky waste items) doesn't state opening hours.”</p>	<p>Link to the Do it Online page published onto the recycle page.</p> <p>Information relating to opening times clearly stated on the web with a link to Norfolk County Council's recycling information.</p>
<p>“Some useful info available, particularly about private housing. The housing section includes a range of information relating to all types of housing.”</p>	
<p>“Couldn't find a summary of council's budget or any mention of the Valuation Office in relation to advice about CT banding. However I can view details of my CT, business rates or benefits online - which is great!”</p>	<p>All information on the website.</p>
<p>“The tone of the site encourages participation but there aren't the transactional elements to deliver it. E.g. the consultation finder (which covers the whole of Norfolk) is great for finding out about consultations, but doesn't enable people to fill out online questionnaires etc which is rather disappointing.”</p>	<p>We have an online questionnaire relating to our website and consultation links into Norfolk consultation finder. We have added a consultation link to our Do it Online pages “complaint, compliment and comment”.</p>
<p>“This site has lots of really good, well organised content. The AZ is comprehensive, the search functions pretty well. I liked the facility for giving a view of the site by audience type i.e. presenting most useful links for visitors, businesses and residents. There just aren't very many transactions on the site. There are a handful of online forms in the Do it Online section, but this section doesn't mention the other relevant transactional facilities available on external sites such as ability to view CT, BR and benefits balance/status online, online payments, planning apps on the planning portal, view consultations on the Norfolk wide consultation finder. I really enjoyed my visit to the site, but didn't think there were quite enough well presented transactions available to give it a Transactional ranking.”</p>	<p>Do it Online pages have been improved and many transactional services have been added.</p>