



**PORTFOLIO AREA: STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE**

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**Date of Meeting: 18th February 2002**

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**Public**

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**Key Decision: No**

**Recorded in Forward Plan: No**

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**Inside/Outside Policy Framework**

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**Title: WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT**  
**Report of: Town Clerk & Chief Executive**  
**Report reference: TC 42/02**

**Summary: This report gives further details about options for developing the web site with new funding from April 2002.**

**Recommendations: To utilise the new funding to create a dedicated web design post from April 2002**

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# 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Following the council's recent decision to dedicate £18,000 of new revenue funding to developing the corporate web site from April 2002, this report aims to set out some comparable data from other local authorities, including information which looks at how sites have developed over the past two years, and also information of how web site development has been resourced and managed in other authorities.

## 2 The Importance of the local authority web site

- 2.1 The development of the internet provides the opportunity to deliver high quality services direct to citizens, in new ways at low cost, and at more convenient times. Web sites have moved rapidly into the mainstream of local government communications, with rising customer expectations.
- 2.2 Access to the internet is increasing not just through more people having PCs in their home but also through digital TV and mobile phones. The Local Government Association's *OK Computer?* report states that by the end of 2001 1 in 4 homes would have a PC, and 1 in 3 homes would have access to digital TV in the UK. Due to the high penetration of televisions in households of all social groups, the rise of this channel of connection to the internet could well be a key factor in overcoming exclusion to the internet.
- 2.3 At a national level, Government policy can be seen to be stimulating further supply of internet access with initiatives such as:  
All public libraries being online by 2002;  
All schools having access to ICT through the National Grid for Learning.
- 2.4 E government is not just about putting local services on line: it also involves local authorities engaging their own community. The duty to promote community well being in the Local Government Act 2000 gives local authorities new powers to contribute to the economic, social, or environmental well being of their areas or the people who live, work or visit there.
- 2.5 Combined with Best Value, the increasing need for community consultation and engagement, and the introduction of new political structures, there is a powerful

case for using the web site in a much more interactive way than traditional communications media.

### 3 Web site developments

3.1 Over 95% of local authorities now have web sites.

The Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) report *Better Connected 2001* found that out of 467 local authority web sites:

- 36% were classed as promotional only (a decrease of 13% on the previous year);
- 41% were classed as content sites (up 7%)
- 18% classed as content plus sites (up by 10%);
- only one site was classed as transactional site.<sup>1</sup>

3.2 The SOCITM 2001 report found that there had been significant advances in the number and quality of websites from the previous 12 months:

*'We can see that the results show a marked improvement with significant numbers moving up from the promotional status to content and content plus, including for the first time, one authority [Tameside MBC] moving into the transactional category.'*

3.3 It is now accepted that local authority web sites will not remain static or purely promotional tools but will be developed into dynamic, transactional sites to fulfil e government targets but also be used as a genuine source of local information and news, on line consultation, community engagement, and joined up government.

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<sup>1</sup> For the report, SOCITM uses the following classification system:

Promotional – basic promotional information, little scope for interaction, little use of e mail or online feedback;

Content sites- useful content and encourage some interaction, more sophisticated promotional information (eg searches, downloadable files);

Content plus – very useful content and some example of more advanced on line self service features, comprehensive information with widespread use of e mail, online feedback or discussion forums.

Transactional – essential content and self service values drive such sites, accessible, secure electronic payment transactions, widespread use of databases, downloadable forms and on line form filling.

- 3.4 The SOCITM report identifies numerous examples of innovation, new ideas and diversity but also states that *'in general council web sites are not yet properly exploiting opportunities to deliver community leadership and joined up government.'*
- 3.5 Among the key messages for supporting and developing web sites are that:
- The web site should no longer just be a provider of information but now encourage interaction with the visitor in every way;
  - The design of the web site should be focused around the needs of the visitor not the convenience of the organisation;
  - No group of people should be excluded from access to public sector web sites
  - The web site should be easy to use in every respect, encouraging repeat visitors.
- 3.6 The new funding which has been approved for web site development will enable Carlisle City Council's web site to be developed to ensure it adheres to these key points and together with the initiatives already identified in the IEG statement will help deliver e government for the council.

#### **4. Options for development.**

- 4.1 Local authority web sites are developing in varying stages and as such there is no one recognised recommended method of funding web site development. A number of other local authorities were contacted and have provided details of how their web sites are currently resourced. Responses showed that resourcing varies in terms of actual funding and human resources, but a number of illustrations are provided below as examples:

##### *Local Authority A*

Initial set up costs £15-20,000.

Site currently has content management system provided by an outside contractor. Also needs dedicated internal staff time.

##### *Local Authority B*

Hosted by an external company.

Currently looking to redesign – costs go 'from sublime to ridiculous'.

Communication officer spends 75% of time updating.

### *Local Authority C*

Designed 2/3 years ago with basic maintenance costing now £3,000 pa.  
Funding of £20k now set aside to revamp/ employ inhouse skilled person.  
Currently recruiting full time post.

### *Local Authority D*

First year costs were £5,000, but in second year were £20,000.  
Updates and ongoing development now done by a webmaster.

### *Local Authority E*

Spent around £15,000 set up costs (external) and ongoing £17,000 pa.  
Also have one member of staff who dedicates two days a week to updating.

### *Local Authority F*

At least £10,000 for set up costs of a simple site, and maintenance costs (updates and additions) of around £5,000 pa.  
Internal staff time spent on coordinating information for updating.

- 4.2 There is no obvious trend for only one particular method of resourcing web site development, although once a basic site has been set up it appears that many local authorities spend internal staff resources managing and maintaining that site whether or not it was originated externally.
- 4.3 Recent posts which have been advertised for local authority web designers seem to indicate that similarly there is no one accepted grade for this type of post and salaries currently being offered do vary. A full time post could be achieved out of the new funding revenue on a salary to the top of scale 4 (salary plus on costs would be £17,952pa maximum).

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 It is recognised that the web site is integral to the council's e government strategy and should also be seen as vital to the role of community leadership, and to community engagement and consultation.
- 5.2 The weaknesses in the current council web site, such as the need to be more user friendly, accessible, up to date, informative and encourage repeat visitors can be

addressed by a redesign of the site, which should also lay the foundations to develop it into a transactional site.

- 5.3 The council already has its basic site, so it is recommended that a full time web design post is recruited from April 2002 to tackle the immediate issues above and to work closely with the Head of Communications and Head of IT to develop the site into the interactive one essential for the council meeting e government targets.

## **2. CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 N/a

## **3. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS**

The Head of Personnel has seen the report and concurs with the information.

## **4. CITY TREASURER'S COMMENTS**

n/a

## **5. LEGAL COMMENTS**

n/a

## **6. CORPORATE COMMENTS**

n/a

## **7. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT**

N/a

## **8. EQUALITY ISSUES**

The web site will be developed to be inclusive and accessible and in line with good practice and national guidelines on accessibility.

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/a

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

N/a

**11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

11.1 To use the new revenue funding to create a dedicated web design post up to a maximum of Scale 4, SCP 21.

**12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The key priority for the web site is to be redesigned into a more user friendly, informative and accessible site. There are longer term development issues, such as ensuring the site can be used to help deliver e-government and community engagement initiatives which it is believed the appointment of a web designer would contribute towards.