

REPORT TO CABINET

Title: **CUSTOMER PORTAL - SELF-SERVICE ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES AND "OUR LOCAL LIFE"**

Date: 24 September 2009

Member Reporting: Councillors Maxwell and Kellaway

Contact Officer(s): Jonathan James – Head of Customer Management

Wards Affected: All

1. SUMMARY

Access to a full range of features and interactive services will be offered to residents through the website using a secure authenticated locally focussed portal (as per on line banking). This will enable residents to do business with the council at a time and place convenient to them and enable residents to receive locally focussed content.

Registration is entirely optional but by doing so it will open up a number of improved benefits. As well as being able to personalise the website, residents will gain access to many exclusive features ("Our Local Life"), including management of their Council Tax account.

By encouraging personalisation and sharing of information on local events, groups and discussions, we aim to improve community engagement and cohesion, promote local belonging and build a dialogue with residents around their locality.

2. RECOMMENDATION: That:

- a) **The personalisation of the website for authenticated users be agreed**
- b) **Paperless billing be offered to residents through authenticated access and the 70k Capital bid to implement the scheme be approved.**
- c) **Council tax paying residents opting for e-billing by June 30th 2010 will be entered into a prize draw. Five entries will be randomly drawn and receive the cash equivalent prize of their Council Bill for 2010/11.**

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?

Residents, businesses and visitors will have access to a full range of interactive services through a secure authenticated web portal. Customers have 24/7 access, allowing them to conduct their business at a time and place that is convenient to them. Self service by residents will lead to back office savings and lower Council Tax bills.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Optimising self-service

Registration to the portal is entirely optional but by doing so residents will have a number of improved benefits and give them the opportunity set up their own personalised website. For access to Council information and services, residents will have to sign in only once. They will have access to a number of different services including Council Tax, Benefits, Libraries e.g. renew and request books, Leisure services including Advantage, Licensing, Car Parking, Transport e.g. real time bus information and Planning to name but a few. Residents will be able to select many exclusive features to suit their preferred uses including:

- Residents will be able to view and personalise their web pages to view neighbourhood based information on services, facilities and events - Our Local Life.
- If residents log in, their name and address details can be used to pre-fill any forms they want completed, saving customers time and effort.
- Residents will be able to set up direct debits, check council tax/business rates balances, pay and request paperless billing.
- Customers can report a problem; upload photographs and track issues online.
- By registering residents can take part in online discussions and surveys that are listened to by the Borough.
- Residents will be able to access and customise layers of data from online maps that can be viewed and interrogated easily.
- Customers can receive neighbourhood alerts e.g. planning application progress and decisions.
- Residents will be able to have access to numerous information feeds into one place giving them content that is of interest to them e.g. blogs, forums, Council performance and real time energy usage.

Allowing residents access to information is a fundamental right and will improve transparency and public participation. By residents owning their personal data they will have responsibility, citizenship, choice and local control.

Encouraging personalisation and sharing information on local events, groups and discussions we aim to improve community engagement and cohesion, promote local belonging and build a dialogue with residents around their locality. Residents can take a more active part in their neighbourhood by enabling them to see what local events are happening, upload photographs, review local entertainment and access local public documents related to topics such as planning, events and community newsletters. Residents will start to develop content relevant to their lives and their community.

A number of Councils across the country are using elements of the proposed functionality but the planned comprehensive enhancements and features will be wide ranging and innovative.

Secure authentication will be available from October with further functionality coming on line during November. The full enhanced web features will be launched in January 2010.

3.2 Paperless billing

Customers have higher and higher self-service expectations than ever. They want more control over their own accounts and activities and often prefer to have no human contact. They want to choose how and when they receive account information and perform sophisticated transactions without the need to talk to someone. They expect 24/7 availability and no constraints on access. Many commercial organisations already use e-billing and customers are increasingly expecting improved self-service interactions to make the user experience more convenient.

The Borough via the portal will have the ability to enable residents to pay their council tax on line, set up direct debit with on line bank checking and request paperless billing. The proposed improvements will allow residents to view personal information – including account balances, discounts, payments made, property details; available 24/7, 365 days per year from a broadband link anywhere. If residents sign up for e-billing they will no longer receive bills by post.

The benefits of e-billing include:

- Convenience - bills can be viewed securely at one or more locations, such as home, at work or on a laptop.
- Unlimited Access - You can access your bills 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Flexibility - While viewing your bill, you have the option of: printing a hard copy, retrieving an archived copy of the bill.
- Timeliness - e-bills are available almost the instant they are produced.
- Security - e-bills are available via your e-billing account. Unlike paper bills that could be lost, destroyed or temporarily misplaced, e-bills can be viewed securely online, 24 hours a day.
- Environmentally friendly - e-billing reduces the use of paper, envelopes, toner and inks along with the associated delivery and staff costs.
- Customer Service - e-billing is the first phase in a series of initiatives designed to further improve the level of service we deliver to our customers.

Subject to approval the e-billing self service module will be launched in March 2010 in time for 2010/11 council tax bills. To maximise take of the scheme in the first year, 5 randomly selected residents will receive a cash prize equivalent to the value of their council tax bill. This incentive will be offered to residents who join the scheme in the first 3 months only.

4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	Accept the recommendations in this report	Residents, businesses and visitors will have an improved customer service through the provision of web services which are more efficient	Revenue – Dependent on take up but 151,000 bills, reminders and adjustment notices per year with an average 75p cost each. With

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
		and deliver an improved level of customer experience. Customers have 24/7 access, allowing them to conduct their business at a time and place that suits them. This is the recommended course of action	20% take up in first year £23k savings would emerge in 10/11 and full affect in 11/12. Capital Prioritisation bid for Self service model – 70K Up to 7k for Council Tax incentive prize draw.
2.	Do not accept the recommendations of this report	Efficiency savings would not be made and customer would not have access to modern transactional services.	Revenue - none Capital - none

4.2 Risk assessment

Individuals will be able to authenticate themselves on the web site (as per on line banking) and be able to communicate securely with the authority and to personalise the site to their preferences. It is essential therefore that the authentication process is robust and secure before use. We are using known standardised technology in order to minimise the risks.

Marketing of the new e-billing functionality is essential to ensure take up is sufficient to allow payback of investment over 3 years. Marketing of the new functionality is essential for the enhanced web services to be a success.

5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

None

6. COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Comments from Overview and Scrutiny Panel via circular of emailed report: TBC

7. IMPLICATIONS

The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

Financial	Legal	Human Rights Act	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
25/08/09	3/09/09	√	3/09/09	√	√

Background Papers:

Capita Services quote for self service module August 2009