

REPORT TO CABINET

Title: "OUR LOCAL LIFE"
Date: 25 February 2010
Member Reporting: Councillors Maxwell and Kellaway
Contact Officer(s): Anthony Kemp – Strategic Director Resources
Jonathan James – Head of Customer Management
Wards Affected: All

1. SUMMARY

The council through BMG research recently ran a number of focus groups across the borough, the subject being perception of electronic communications. The feedback covered a number of concerns from residents on the council's web site, which will be acted upon as part of the continuous work on the site.

- In addition there was a request for more simplified on line facilities
- More transparency
- More of a local focus
- Opportunities for residents to be consulted
- A lack of a sense of place and a focus on council not borough

Our local life is the solution to these concerns. It will provide a website which is borough focussed, with the ability to look at activities, concerns and transparency at a local level extending down to parish and ward level.

It will also provide additional, enhanced on line services for electronic council tax billing. Fault or concern reporting (i.e. there is a hole in my road), on-line benefits, parking permits, the ability to feed into consultations and assessment forms to name just a few.

For those who want it there will be the ability to personalise the space with the things that are important to them. This will be possible at no extra cost to the council. This will promote community engagement and cohesion, a sense of local belonging and will start to build a dialogue with residents around their locality.

2. RECOMMENDATION: That:

- a) The introduction of the new service to residents "Our Local Life" to be launched in April 2010**
- b) 5 randomly selected residents will receive a cash prize equivalent to the value of their council tax bill as an incentive to join the paperless Council tax scheme.**
- c) As part of sharing service, the design and process of Our Local Life be offered to other councils for free.**

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

The council's web facilities will become tailored by residents to deliver what residents want without the need for the council to spend a large amount of time and money. We will deliver transparency at a local level. There will be increased on-line services for reporting, 24hrs a day. The take up of on-line services will, over time, reduce the cost within the council for handling customer enquiries.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Optimising self-service

Work is continually undertaken to develop and enhance the borough's website but the comments from the focus group strengthen the argument to launch "Our Local Life" which will have greater flexibility, community involvement and direct connection to our existing customer service operation to provide seamless reporting.

- 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, therefore 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.
- Text reminder services, text payment services and instant messaging services.
- Residents will be able to access and customize 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.
- Improved search capability on the site.
- 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.

By encouraging 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 have the ability to develop content relevant to their lives and their community.

The e-billing self service module 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. Members will be ineligible for the offer.

SMS and MMS to provide residents with the ability to subscribe to a text message alert service via the web or by mobile phone.

- These services will allow residents to log issues via text message to include pictures (MMS), if appropriate whilst out and about. This project would be live by July 2010.

From a business perspective, the more we can do to encourage residents to use on line services, the more we can look at reducing our customer services costs, a key element to making potential savings is the reduction in phone calls and visits. Council tax is an area where we receive lots of queries and incur substantial costs in posting out statements, in order to reduce this particular cost we are offering the incentive, which will cost the council £5K, to kick start the migration away from paper billing.

Financial impact

Item	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Build costs IT	12,000	3,000	1,000
Design work	9,000	1,000	0
Incentives	5,000	0	0
Ongoing support costs	0	0	0
Print and Post savings assuming 20% uptake year 1 and a further 10% year 2	23,000	11,500	11,500
Staff savings (reduce call volumes) 0.5 fte		15,000	15,000
Net savings	-3,000	22,500	25,500

Ongoing support absorbed within existing web and digital media teams

4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	Accept the recommendations in this report	Delivering services to the residents they have asked for, improved transparency, better self service capability leading to reduced costs This is the recommended course of action	Revenue – net savings in 2010 (see table) Up to 5k for Council Tax incentive prize draw.
2.	Do not accept the recommendations of this report	We would not be responding to residents feedback, we would not have the opportunity to reduce are costs.	Revenue – possible increase if call volumes continue to rise. Capital - none

4.2 Risk assessment

Residents will be able to post comments on the site along side their own content, e.g. a picture of a pothole. This will only be allowed through authentication, and in doing so the resident will agree to our T&C's.

5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

Non Specific but the BMG report was used as feedback on existing services. These focus groups will be invited to help develop the services and feedback on what it delivers.

6. COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

The Panel endorsed the proposals to develop and enhance the Borough's website but suggested that the element relating to the setting up and the monitoring of on-line discussions/blogs be deferred pending the production and further consideration by the Panel of a governance policy and procedure as to how any data and information captured by that utility was to be used by the Council.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

Financial	Legal	Human Act	Rights	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
	√	√			√	√