CABINET

21 December 2021

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Performance, Change and Transformation

Strategic Aim:	All	
Key Decision: No	Forward Plan Reference: 170921	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Councillor Karen Payne, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Performance, Change and Transformation	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS
That Cabinet:
1. Approve the project to procure a new website platform.
2. Approve option one for the delivery of a new website platform.
3. Approve the utilisation of earmarked and budgeted funding to meet the costs for option one as outlined.

1   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   To provide Cabinet with an overview of the current website position and to seek approval for the procurement of a new Council website.

2   BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

<u>About the current website</u>

2.1   The Council commission the existing website (Easysite) under a partnership arrangement alongside West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) and North Kesteven

District Council (NKDC) which has provided economies of scale and joint development support.

2.2 WLDCs contract with the website provider ends before ours and they require a new website to be up and running by March 2022. Consequently, they have begun a procurement exercise alongside NKDC to source a new provider away from the existing one.

2.3 In addition, the current website provider has indicated that they are looking to cease development of their platform. As a result, our website is likely to become limited in terms of its functionality and design capability and is unlikely to be fit for purpose in the future.

2.4 <u>Accessibility Regulations</u>

2.5 Under the **Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations** introduced in 2018 the Council is required to ensure that its website and online public services are set up to be fully accessible, including for those with disabilities. This means web pages and the content within must be designed and structured in a certain way.

2.6 The regulations have meant that the Council's website has needed to change as the requirements were introduced after the website launched. Although significant improvements have been made some content challenges remain and the existing website will continue to require further changes and regular content management and oversight in order to meet the regulations.

3 PROPOSAL

3.1 It is our intention to work towards a future model that enables us to manage the website and its content in an efficient way and more in line with the Accessibility Regulations. In order to address the issues outlined above it is recommended that the Council develops a new website platform.

3.2 Due to the number of other sites and the complexity of the main website it is proposed that the project will focus on the main Council website only. However, as part of the review, we will take the opportunity to consider how other sites can be supported and, where appropriate, incorporated within the main Council website e.g. Library, Rutland Information Service and Children Centre.

3.3 A new website will provide the opportunity to effectively start again and to reorganise content in a manner which is manageable and efficient for the Council. It will also allow the Council to better design the website to meet customer needs and accelerate a move towards web based transactions which has already begun with the launch of MyAccount.

3.4 This is a medium sized project as it will require the development of a new website platform, staff training and content screening and transfer. The project will be managed under the Corporate Project Framework and has been assessed as low risk.

3.5 Strategic Management Team (SMT) are the Project Board who will oversee decision making and a Project Team, reporting to SMT, has been established to develop the key deliverables and oversee implementation. The Project Team meets every two weeks and is working to implement a new website by January 2023. The Portfolio

Holder for Finance, Governance and Performance, Change and Transformation attends this meeting.

4   RECOMMENDED OPTION

4.1   Following a full options appraisal, the following option is recommended for approval:

4.2   **Option One: To implement LocalGov Drupal Publishing platform alongside our current partners WLDC and NKDC, (5 year cost - £85,500 plus £10,000 contingency).**

4.3   LocalGov Drupal is an open-source Content Management System (CMS) that is well established across the public sector and used by many Council websites. This system is based on templates that provide the building blocks for developing websites. Within the context of a public sector website this would include templates for News, Events, a Service landing page with a list of services, Service description pages etc.

4.4   Centrally funded the LocalGov implementation is a set of public sector specific templates that can be used within Drupal for Councils. There are around 20 Councils actively working to use and develop these templates. We believe that there would be significant benefits in adopting these templates for the following reasons:

4.4.1   Development: There is a clear roadmap to develop and extend the templates.

4.4.2   Expansion: There is already evidence that Councils are moving from their existing solution to the LocalGov solution, and this may become a standard across many Councils. This will then improve the ongoing development of the product.

4.4.3   Portability: Developing with this implementation will allow for future options to move partners if required as we will not be tied to a specific support partner or development partner.

4.4.4   Accessibility: These templates will be designed with accessibility in mind as the audience is the public sector where accessibility is already a priority therefore supporting the Accessibility Regulations.

4.5   This option would also mean that we continue to work directly with WLDC and NKDC to develop a website structure across all three Councils that can be branded to suit the corporate identity of each. Whilst there are some challenges in developing both a district council and a county council website, we are used to managing these discussions and we view very positively the current arrangements with WLDC and NKDC.

4.6   Although option one costs £2,500 more per year than option two outlined below (see point 6.1), it is the view of officers that the value of the partnership is worth significantly more than this. There are clear advantages in continuing to work with the established partnership, for example;

4.6.1   We enjoy access to technical web development resources at WLDC and this would continue.

4.6.2   WLDC and NKDC will be able to develop the Drupal Local Gov solution to meet our needs, reducing our development time and ironing out implementation issues.

4.6.3   For any specific development needs we can continue to access the partnership for this development and reduce costs by sharing.

4.6.4   This is an established partnership that has provided benefits to Rutland since it commenced around 4 years ago. Shared learning will aid website development and innovation.

4.7   Whilst we view the partnership as mitigating our risks around internal technical capacity, there are some disadvantages to consider. There will be some restrictions on developing one website for all three partners. In addition, we will need some involvement early in the project to set up the structure of the website, then a period where we are not involved as WLDC implement their new website and then further project work around our implementation. This start, stop, start model is perhaps not ideal but not a significant disadvantage and can be overcome through good project management.

5   CONSULTATION

5.1   Consultation is not required as no changes to services are being proposed.

6   ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1   **Option Two:** To implement LocalGov Drupal directly with a private sector supplier and not within a partnership (5 year cost - £73,000 plus £10,000 contingency):

6.2   This would have some advantages in that we would be able to concentrate solely on developing our new website with the templates. There is some evidence that this could be a simpler approach than working with partners under option one.

6.3   However, a key reason why this is not the preferred model relates to technical website development and the associated cost of this. Currently we do not have any technical website development resource internally and it is likely that this would be a key risk during the implementation phase and on an ongoing basis. The website will require development, option two restricts us to either doing it ourselves or purchasing directly with the provider. To employ a dedicated technical officer would cost the Council circa £40,000 per annum.

6.4   The partnership model under option one seeks to minimise development by working collaboratively, going alone through Option Two would likely mean more work, and therefore costs, in terms of developing the home page and templates. The day rates for which are significant, £700 per day, meaning if we required more than four development days a year the cost would eclipse the cost difference between option one and option two. We believe this to be highly likely.

6.5   In addition, as outlined, this option would also mean we lose the associated benefits of the partnership and whilst not costed, outweigh any cost saved through option two.

6.6   **Option Three:** To carry out a formal tender for a new CMS:

6.7   As part of the tender process carried out by WLDC and NKDC suppliers have submitted tender responses that can be used for a soft market comparison.

6.8   There are significant costs to these solutions when compared to the open-source

Drupal Local Gov solution in option one. Quotes received through market research for a new website has identified this route as being more expensive, with a 5 year cost estimated at £116,000 plus £10,000 contingency.

6.9 In addition, there are disadvantages in that only one supplier can support their product and so we would be tied to the supplier and reliant on them for development and enhancement of their CMS. With only a limited number of public sector customers, there is a risk that the CMS is not developed and enhanced – for instance to achieve the ongoing accessibility standards.

6.10 This option will also require the Council to undertake a procurement process which will incur additional staff time and resource. Being part of the partnership under option one reduces the resource required significantly.

6.11 For these reasons this option has been discounted from further analysis.

6.12 **Option Four:** Continue to use the existing EasySite CMS:

6.13 To continue until such time as the product cannot provide the functionality we need, or the supplier withdraws the product. This is clearly the most cost-effective solution as we remove the initial set up costs and internal resource to develop a new website.

6.14 However, there are significant risks that Easysite will either not develop or indeed replace the CMS. If that were to happen option one, proceeding with the partnership would not be available to us and we would be left with the other options as described. In addition, this option will not allow us to address outstanding accessibility issues.

6.15 As the website is such an important channel for us it would make more sense to choose an option now rather than carry out more development on the existing CMS, knowing that there are risks of change even in the next three years. Due to the above this option is therefore discounted for further analysis.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A new website platform will incur additional costs for the Council. Implementation of **option one** will have an initial set up cost of £39,000, however it is recommended a further £10,000 of contingency funding is set aside to support any additional local development of the website. This contingency cost would be requested for any option although at this stage we are not anticipating that this will be required for option one. Total funding envelope for approval - **£49,000.**

7.2 It is proposed that the existing Customer Services Improvement Fund is utilised to meet this cost.

7.3 The annual maintenance cost for the website will also increase, currently this is £7,000 per annum but will increase to £9,300 per annum. This increase was always likely when the existing contract ended due to market forces, with the original maintenance contract representing excellent value for money.

7.4 The funding for this increase in maintenance has been planned for and can be accommodated within the existing IT budget.

7.5 Implementation of a new website will be managed around the existing contract to

avoid, as much as is possible, paying for maintenance twice. The current maintenance contract for the existing website spans until July 22 and the maintenance for the new website will occur once the website is live – therefore if go live is January 22 an additional cost of £3,500 will be required in total. This cost would span two financial years at a cost of £1,750 per year which can be met within the existing IT maintenance budget.

7.6 Having an overlap of websites, and the associated maintenance cost, for a period of time minimises risk to the project should there be a development delay or technical issue with the new website on launch, thereby enabling the Council to continue online services and publications.

7.7 If there are any significant changes which may impact on the project deliverability, including any financial implications above the funding envelope, Cabinet will be briefed.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council website is required to be compliant under the Accessibility Regulations 2018.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are no risks/issues to the rights and freedoms of natural persons within this report.

10 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 Adoption of a new website will provide an opportunity to ensure our website is compliant with the Accessibility Regulations 2018. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed for the project because no service, policy or organisational changes are being proposed.

11 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no Community Safety implications arising from this report.

12 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no Health and Wellbeing implications arising from this report.

13 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The current website is unlikely to provide us opportunity to develop into the future and our website partners are now seeking a new solution.

13.2 The existing website content hinders our ability to meet the Accessibility Regulations which came into force after our website was set up.

13.3 A new website allows us to effectively start again, to address the issues around content and to build a platform which can be managed efficiently into the future.

13.4 The recommended option, option one, maintains the partnership arrangements and associated benefits, using a platform specifically designed for the public sector.

13.5 For the above reasons it is recommended that Members approve the recommendations as outlined.

14 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 There are no additional background papers to the report.

15 APPENDICES

15.1 None.

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.