WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 14 NOVEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

TRANSACTIONAL WEB

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report is in response to the Cabinet on 6 September 2007 requesting a report on progress with web transactional services and how they compare with those services expected by the Government to be transactional.

1.2 It outlines progress in web enabled services and explains how the web access channel is part of the overall Customer Access Strategy. It sets out the current position and identifies how I intend to develop the website into an efficient cost effective channel that meets the transformational government recommendations.

2. **BACKGROUND**

2.1 In 2005 the Cabinet Office issued the Transformational Government Report, which looked at how Local Authorities could conduct their business via more cost effective access channels.

2.2 The Varney report, which further supports the transformational agenda, was issued in December 2006 and analysed the actual savings and improvements that could be made by streamlining customer facing services and shifting demand to cheaper access channels such as the web.

3. **BASELINE POSITION**

3.1 In April 2007, the new website was launched which is built using the Documentum web publishing system. This website is an improvement over the previous site, and has made substantial inroads into tackling subjects such as:

- Usability
- Accessibility
- Corporate look and feel
- Consistent navigation
- Relevant and accurate content.

3.2 From a transactional viewpoint, the system allows customers to request 87 different Council services (see appendix 1). This is a simple system with limited functionality which in many cases still requires the customer to download the form and post it. The technology to deliver this service has been

produced on an ad hoc basis in-house. In order to produce a fully transactional website, an on line forms product has been procured and a cross departmental working group is being established to take this forward.

3.3   Whilst this site is an improvement, there is still substantial work to be done before it can be classified as a strong foundation from which to develop a major access channel and become fully transactional.

3.4   A new development on Council Tax and Housing Benefits is due for implementation and testing in late 2007. This will provide the ability for customers to perform a number of requests around these services offering truly transactional features such as checking tax bands, current statements or reviewing how your housing benefit claim has been calculated and how much you are entitled to claim.

4.   **GOVERNMENT EXPECTATIONS**

4.1   The Transformational Government document encourages Local Authorities to embrace more effective use of IT, to recognise the shift in how customers expect to interact with their Council and to open up and exploit the efficiencies of a web access channel.

4.2   The Varney report took this view one step further, investigating the cost savings that could be made by exploitation of the new channels with particular reference to the web as being the "opportunity to deliver high quality public services at a relatively low cost. To bring Council services online has been encapsulated in the word "transactional".

4.3.   The term "transactional" is vague and has been the subject of much debate. However, the most recent developments within the nationally recognised Electronic Service Delivery Toolkit, has broken the term down into five broad interactions that a Council would make with its customers:

- Providing Information
- Application for Services
- Payments
- Booking venues
- Courses and resources

4.4   In order to identify real targets that fall under these categories, there is much information available, such as:

- SOCITM "Better Connected" Document
- ESD Toolkits
- North West e-Government Group (NWEGG)
- Public Sector Forums

4.5   Each document and community recommends a number of different approaches that are in constant development. The challenge for Wirral is to

assess all of the information, then select the best approach for the particular circumstances and that are relevant to each discreet service.

4.4   The National Take-up Campaign, launched in March 2006 which ran until September 2006, developed a shortlist of online services to be promoted nationally and regionally. This was extended and re-publicised in the summer of 2007. The services, picked out with the help of local authority stakeholder groups, are the most commonly available informational and transactional services, e-enabled by the Local e-Government Programme. This required Local Direct Gov links from the Government website appropriately linked to local pages to help with the campaign. Wirral has successfully provided all the online services that were identified. These were:

- Finding out about before and after school childcare;
- Renewing a library book;
- Finding out about school term dates;
- Finding out about school holiday schemes
- Finding out about school admissions
- Information about how to pay parking fines;
- Reporting an abandoned vehicle;
- Finding out about domestic refuse collection;
- Finding out about disposing of garden waste;
- Reporting fly tipping/illegal rubbish dumping;
- Reporting a graffiti problem;
- Reporting a pothole;
- Reporting a problem with a street light;
- Reporting a problem with a pavement;
- Information on ways to pay Council Tax;
- Applying for a job;
- Reporting a noise nuisance problem
- Information on Planning Applications.

5.   SOCITM REVIEW

5.1.   Since the launch of the new website the Transformational Change Team has conducted an analysis to identify if the SOCITM recommendations have been addressed in the new site. It found that there are key improvements in its look but work on functionality and content consistency is still required.

5.2.   The SOCITM report "Better Connected 2007" scored Wirral low in a number of key categories;

- A-Z of services – Looking at specific entries on the web and how they linked to anticipated relevant other pages
- Site Navigation – Ease and consistency moving around the site
- Map and location information – Available maps of facilities and services
- Site search facilities - Marked on performance against set queries and overall results presentation

5.3. The report also helped highlight areas where early work is required such as service home page contact information, revisiting page links which have altered from the changeover and accessibility issues for non-English speakers and those who have sight or hearing disability.

5.4. These will be responded to as part of the business and technical challenges being addressed in improving the web site as detailed later in this report.

6. **DEVELOPING THE WIRRAL WEBSITE**

6.1 In Wirral, development of the corporate website to encourage Self Access through transactional facilities is an integral part of the Customer Service Agenda.

6.2 As part of this commitment in September 2007, a Web Services Manager was appointed, whose role will be to lead on implementing an effective customer access channel via the web. This will be achieved through a rolling three year Web Strategy, which will be reported to Members in due course.

6.3 The Web Services Manager's initial priorities and short term strategy is to ensure the website has the foundations that are capable of withstanding the demand that a major customer access channel will attract.

6.4 The issues identified below will not stop Wirral becoming transactional but if not addressed they will hinder the process and not allow delivery of a high quality transactional website that will stimulate customer take-up.

7 **BUSINESS CHALLENGES:**

7.1. Author publishing
To establish and communicate exactly how departments place information onto the websites.

This will be achieved by identifying current issues via a process model, then creating a new simpler model that fulfils the necessary criteria and is acceptable to all users.

7.2. Identify clear roles and responsibilities
Everyone involved within web publishing must be clear on their role;

This will promote efficiency within the web publishing system and ensure that any customer contact is dealt with by the correct person within set service level agreements. Clarity will be achieved via the author publishing model.

7.3. Comprehensive Content Provision
Ensuring that the web provides accurate and up to date information that covers all services. This would also impact on how often content is reviewed and / or updated.

This is currently achieved by content migration staff based across the

organisation, and will be supported in the future by the author publishing model.

7.4   Transactional Team Approach
To take a paper based form through to the desired electronic end state; there must be effective cross departmental collaboration.

An on line form will have an owner within a department. The owner will work closely with the Customer Service Development Team (CSDT) and the Transformational Change Team (TCT) to establish the requirements and model the flow of information. This model must then be re-created on the web systems by IT Services. This collaborative effort will then test the form to ensure that all aspects of the workflow function smoothly and bring efficiency.

7.5   Resource
If Wirral is to produce a major access channel via the web, it must have sufficient resources to operate effectively.

Whilst acknowledging that resources to support the website is limited, options do exist to increase resources by re-evaluating current provision and reducing the number of websites the Council operates. Resources can then be channelled into developing the remaining sites. Standardisation of training and support packages will also free up resources.

8.   **TECHNICAL CHALLENGES:**

8.1   Web Content Management System (WCMS)
Confirm that the web content management system will allow the website to be developed to the extent required, within realistic timescales and budget.

Confirmation will be sought from existing authors, IT support teams and the Content Management System industry. This information will be compiled into a report and presented to the Web Management Group.

8.2   Author Interface
The WCMS interface through which authors will publish information must be simple and straightforward to use, requiring minimal training and promoting maximum efficiency.

To achieve this, the interface will evolve with experience and be developed through IT collaboration with the system users. If forecasting reveals this to be an expensive approach when other less expensive 'out of the box' systems exists on the market, then these options must be explored.

8.3   Web Page Construction Methods
Ensure use of best practise methods of page construction with particular reference to the computer code used.

This will be achieved through keeping pace with industry standards through benchmarking, SOCITM and Government guidance plus a number of Local

Authority Web Groups.

8.4   Accessibility
        Provide a website that meets accessibility standards and is rated highly within
        Local Government rankings.

        Improving website accessibility will come through close ties with the
        Accessibility Officers, Web Industry standards and guidance by organisations
        such as RNIB. A by-product of good accessibility and usability will be a
        natural rise in ranking, which will also be helped by an increase in
        transactional services.

8.5   Transactional Software
        Wirral acknowledges that for the Council to operate transactional services, the
        front of house must be able to communicate with the back of house in a
        reliable and consistent manner.

        To provide this level of communication, the Authority is faced with the
        challenge of providing a technical solution that is simple enough for customers
        to operate, but must be sophisticated enough to 'communicate with back
        office systems including the CRM.

        This issue is currently being addressed by the web development team within
        IT Services. The Customer Service Development Team in conjunction with
        the Transformation Change Team is providing the business requirements.

        Many other Local Authorities face this challenge, indeed many are further
        advanced, and this does provide an option to contact these authorities, learn
        from them and, if possible, procure their solution.

8.6   Bandwidth

        The Wirral IT network currently allows a limited bandwidth for all usage. It is
        already acknowledged that Council systems operate slower over the
        lunchtime period; which is due to bandwidth being used to access the internet.

        IT Services are currently reviewing the Wide Area Network but it is felt to be
        broadly adequate for now and the next two years. There would be an
        additional cost to increasing band width now when in two years the costs
        should be lower and the technology alternatives greater. The connection to
        the Internet Service Provider, which is what the public will use for self service,
        is being increased from 4mb to 10mb which will help address the bandwidth
        issues.

        As transactional government websites become commonplace, customers will
        expect to see all services online. The initial challenge is to provide these
        facilities. If they cannot be provided in a fast and efficient manner, then
        customers will lose faith in the service and return to more traditional methods.

        If the Wirral website is to be a major access channel attracting large numbers

of visitors, the current networks may struggle to provide services in a fast and efficient manner. To resolve this, the Authority needs to identify what services we intend to provide and in what timescale, then identify the network size that can handle this demand, and secure the resources to provide this facility.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 To provide a successful access channel it is necessary to strengthen the core web brand, which will be achieved through a number of strategies tying in with one another. The Communication Strategy, the Wirral Corporate Identity Guidelines and the Customer Access Strategy will all play a major part in strengthening and streamlining the message, funnelling customers through into a limited number of informative, relevant and transactional websites.

9.2 The Council now has a Web Services Manager. This role represents a new approach for Wirral Council based on best practise. A dedicated individual who will identify and create strategy, drive change based on industry developments and ensure that the Web Access Channel works in harmony with other access channels.

9.3 Once the challenges set out in this report have been addressed, the teams involved in web development will have the ability to produce fully transactional websites that will positively impact on how customers interact with the Council and should start to meet the expectations of customers to interact with a Council.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are none arising from this report.

11. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are none arising from this report.

12. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. There are none arising form this report.

13. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

13.1. There are none arising from this report.

14. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are none arising from this report.

15. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are none arising from this report.

16. **PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

16.1. There are none arising from this report.

17. **LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

17.1. There are none arising from this report.

18. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

18.1 Transformational Government: Cabinet Office: November 2005

18.2 Varney Report: (Service Transformation: A Better Service for Citizens and Businesses, A Better Deal for Taxpayers): Treasury Office: December 2006

18.3 Better Connected: SOCITM: March 2007

19. **RECOMMENDATION**

19.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/279/07

Appendix : Online Services

The list below represents the services that can be accessed through the "Do it Online" link on the corporate website.

1. Abandoned vehicle - Apply online for an abandoned vehicle to be removed

2. Abnormal loads - Suggest a route for abnormal loads online

3. Access protection marking - Apply for access protection marking online

4. Access to information - Enquire online about council, cabinet or committee meetings

5. Advocacy and advice services - Request an advice service online

6. Benefits Calculator - Use our benefits calculator

7. Bridges - Report damage to a bridge online

8. Bridge strengthening - Apply online for a bridge to be assessed

9. Business rates - Use online forms for business rates applications

10. Cable laying - Complain online about cables that have been laid by a private company

11. Car parks council - Report a problem with a car park online

12. Car sharing - Request more information about car sharing online

13. Certificates - Apply to obtain copy certificates online

14. Child protection - Apply for the child protection service online

15. Coastal protection - Report a problem with coastal protection or sea defences online

16. Complain about Wirral Council - Make a complaint online about one of our services

17. Council tax online forms - Fill in your Council Tax form online

18. Council tax errors - Complain online or submit a request online for written information of how your benefit was calculated

19. Culverts - Report a blocked or littered culvert online

20. Cycle Training - Request information on cycle training

21. Dangerous road junctions - Report a dangerous road junction online

22. Dead animals - Submit an online request for the removal of dead animals from the road

23. Demonstrations and parades - Apply for a road closure online

24. Dropped kerbs - Request permission online for a dropped kerb

25. Erecting a hoarding or scaffold on a public road or pavement- Apply online
26. ERIC service - Request the ERIC service online. (Bulky waste collections)
27. Event hosting permissions - Request permission online to host an event
28. Event in a Wirral Park - Submit an online request for further information on events in Wirral Parks.
29. Excavation - Request permission online to do an excavation
30. Fly Tipping - Report instances of fly tipping online
31. Garden waste collection service - Search online for your Garden Waste Collection date
32. Graffiti removal - Report an incident of graffiti online.
33. Grass cutting - Report a problem about the grass cutting service online
34. Highway Enforcement - Report an enforcement issue online.
35. Household waste (assisted collections) - Apply for an assisted bin collection online
36. Household waste (collections) - Search online for your bin collection day
37. Household waste (missed collections) - Notify us online of a missed bin collection
38. Housing benefit fraud referral - Report a suspected housing benefit fraud online
39. Jobs- Search and apply online for a job with Wirral Council
40. Library book renewal- Renew a library book online
41. Licenses for animal movement – Apply online for a license applications for animal movement
42. Licence application forms - Licensing Act 2003 - Apply online for a premises license
43. Obstructions- Report an obstruction to roads or pavements online
44. Parking Appeal- Appeal against a parking ticket using an online form
45. Parking Permits- Request a parking permit online
46. Pavement crossings- Apply online for a car crossing on the pavement
47. Pavement parking- Report a problem with regards to a pavement parking online
48. Pavements (dangerous)- Report a dangerous pavement online

49. Pay Online - Make an online payment to Wirral Council- pay your Council Tax, Parking Fine, Business Rates or any other invoices

50. Pedestrian crossings- Report a problem online at a pedestrian crossing or enquire about pedestrian facilities at traffic lights

51. Performance indicators- Request details online about our performance indicators

52. Personal injury- Report an injury online

53. Pest control- Apply online for a copy of the customer satisfaction questionnaire or more information

54. Planning application forms download page- Download planning applications and forms

55. Pollution Control- Complain online about pollution

56. Rails (pedestrian)- Report damaged roadside buildings online or request the installation of railings

57. Recycling- Request information online or tell us what you think of our recycling service

58. Refuge Islands- Make an online request for a refuge island

59. Road Signs- report damaged or missing road signs online, or request additional road markings or traffic signs

60. Roads and Highways Enforcement - Apply online for further information about roads enforcement

61. Salt (Rock salt purchases)- Request online to buy rock salt for private use

62. Schools crossings patrols- Make an online request for a school crossing site

63. Skip Permit- Apply online for a skip permit

64. Speed limits- Request a new speed limit online, or comment on an existing one

65. Street care and cleansing- Report any problems about street care online

66. Street Furniture- Report a problem with an item of street furniture online

67. Street Lighting- Report faulty or damaged street lighting, illuminated bollards or signs online

68. Street litter bins- Report a bin that is either broken or overflowing online, request additional bins, relocate a litter bin or comment on our litter bin service.

69. Street name plates- Report a damaged/missing street nameplate online, or let us know what you think of our service

70. Street parking-fines- Make a complaint online

71. Street parties- Request permission online to host a street party

72. Street seats/ furniture- Report a damaged/ missing street seat online or let us know what you think of our service

73. Sunday trading- Apply online for Sunday trading details

74. Temporarily Road closures- Comment online about road closures

75. Traffic calming – Comment online about a traffic calming scheme, or request a new one

76. Traffic lights- Report a fault with a set of traffic signals online

77. Traffic management- Comment online about our traffic management service or send us your comments about a proposed traffic scheme in your area

78. Traffic Schemes- To request information, Apply for a review of a particular traffic problem or request a new scheme

79. Travel plans- Request further information online

80. Trees- Report a fallen tree online or report a hedge that is overgrown on the road or the pavement

81. Verge maintenance- Report a problem with verge maintenance online

82. Walking- Request further information online or comment about walking in Wirral

83. Walls- Enquire online about retaining walls or report a problem with a damaged or dangerous wall

84. Websites – accessibility- To tell us what you think online about our website and services

85. Weight limits – Report a problem online

86. Winter maintenance- Report a problem online with regards to winter maintenance

87. Yellow lines- Request an area that should have yellow lines online, or comment on existing yellow lines