

CABINET

DATE	20 September 2023
REPORT OF	Councillor Stephen Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources & Assets
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Sharon Wroot, Executive Director, Places & Resources
SUBJECT	Investing in a Modern and Cyber Resilient Web Platform
STATUS	Open - Appendix NOT FOR PUBLICATION – contains Exempt Information within Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 09/23/06

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The recommendations support the aims of the ICT and Digital Strategy by optimising, securing and enabling technology to support the organisation. This also extends to our legal obligations around accessibility.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks approval from Cabinet for the required capital and revenue investment that will enable us to improve the security and functionality of our website (www.nelincs.gov.uk). The website was developed internally several years ago and is hosted locally on the Council's infrastructure. It is an important asset that allows 2-way information and reporting for our customers, residents, businesses, and investors.

A key principle of our ICT strategy is to move to cloud-hosted platforms to improve stability, resilience, and security. Appendix A (closed) includes further information relating to the risks that this proposal aims to mitigate. The proposal to move the website to a cloud-hosted platform also affords us an opportunity to make improvements that will meet on-going user expectations, particularly relating to the speed of loading website pages, and accessing relevant and up to date information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves the capital and revenue investment detailed in Section 5 (Financial Considerations) that is required to improve the security, accessibility, and functionality of the council website.
2. Approves the commencement of the procurement of relevant software solutions and resources during implementation of the project.

3. Authorises the Executive Director, Places and Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources & Assets. to commence the procurement exercise and deal with all ancillary matters reasonably arising from and leading to and including the award of contracts and the development of the new website.
4. Authorises the Assistant Director Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to complete and execute all legal documentation arising from the above recommendations.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The decision allows the Council to deploy the relevant technology and expertise to provide a secure and functional website.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 The Council website requires a considerable amount of modification and one of the pending upgrades must be carried out imminently. This is a continual exercise given the prominence of cyber threats and technical innovations. Improving our resilience and security is the key driver for this proposal.
- 1.2 The Council main website operates alongside 20 micro sites. We plan to migrate as many sites as we can into the one main Council website as part of this proposal.
- 1.3 We are already in the process of improving our customer portal, and the supplier technology already procured includes the software we can use to build a new website. This assists with strategic plans to deliver a seamless experience between the customer portal and our website.
- 1.4 Response times on the current website do not meet modern expectations. Moving to a cloud hosted environment will improve the speed by which website pages are loaded.
- 1.5 As the current website has been in place for several years, there are issues relating to both response times and out of date content. It can be difficult to find information, and some pages may not be fully up to date. The creation of the new website will provide the opportunity to ensure that all content is relevant, up to date, understandable, and meets all government accessibility standards.
- 1.6 A more modern platform will also enable us to capture website usage, for example, viewing trends, interactions and user feedback that will inform the future development of services, and equip us with intelligence to improve future content.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 Through investment in Microsoft E5 and active monitoring we have so far mitigated potential security vulnerabilities., Further an unforeseen technical

failure that resulted in a large volume of enquiries and complaints, has reemphasised the importance of the Council website.

- 2.2 This proposal supports the ICT and Digital ICT strategy aim to move away from legacy applications to software architecture that is more flexible to meet future needs.
- 2.3 Cyber-threats are a prominent threat to all organisations. Recent and successful cyber-attacks at other Councils have highlighted the devastation caused by these attacks. Reviewing our digital offer and moving to a supplier hosted solution helps manage the associated risks.
- 2.4 The implementation of a new website provides a range of opportunities to improve our offer to residents, visitors, businesses, and investors, and in turn, improve our ability to understand what is most important to all of these users and shape our offer accordingly.
- 2.5 The Council website would also be a key channel for communicating in the event of a cyber incident, so enhancing its resilience is critical.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1. An integrated digital platform that links many individual tools together, although retains a fragmented approach to service delivery models.
- 3.2. Migrate the Council website to mitigate imminent risks, although retain vulnerable technology unsuitable for modern digital requirements.
- 3.3. Do nothing. This is not practical due to the issues noted throughout this report.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. The impact of a successful cyber-incident would have significant repercussions for service delivery, finances, reputation, people, and safeguarding.
- 4.2. The implementation of the recommended move to a cloud-based platform for the website would enable the Council to restore a key source of information within a short period of time in such an event.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The technology and expertise required for this proposal will be funded through a mixture of capital and revenue budgets.
- 5.2. The proposal will deliver improved value for money through an overall reduction in the number of websites and as a consequence reduce time required to be spent on maintenance and administration.
- 5.3. Further assurance of value for money will come from the market exercise we undertake to procure the technology and expertise.
- 5.4. The Council's estimated whole life spend is £728K over the next five years.

This consists of £455k capital spend for resources to deliver the improvements and transformation over a four-year period to 2026/27, plus a further £273k revenue cost for hosting and software costs over a five year period to 2027/28. The costs will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

A more modern and user centric website focusing on well-designed customer journeys and content will improve our services for children and young people, as well as parents and carers, and make it easier for them to find the information they need. With a growing reliance on mobile and tablet devices, providing engaging content that is always available online, fast loading, and accessible for all audiences that is more responsive will future-proof our offer.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. We have been measuring our carbon usage on the Council website and we are aware there are more efficient steps we can take to help achieve our Net Zero Carbon Roadmap.
- 7.2. We have used a Website Carbon Calculator to find out our carbon footprint using the current technology. We found that the Council website produces 0.81g of CO₂ each time a user loads a web page, ~3 tonnes of CO₂ per year.
- 7.3. The supplier of our customer portal achieves a net zero residual emissions level for operations, achieves 100% renewable energy and invests in high quality carbon credits to help offset the remaining emissions and are committed to the shared, global goal of achieving a just and equitable transition to net zero emissions, in line with a 1.5°C future.
- 7.4. They focus on six sustainability priorities: emissions removal, carbon removal, trillion trees and ecosystem restoration, education and mobilisation, innovation, and regulation and policy.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

Not applicable.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. As outlined in section 5, the proposal will require capital investment estimated at £455k over 2023-27 that would require funding through borrowing.
- 9.2. There will also be ongoing revenue requirements of £53k per annum from 2024/25 onwards that will need to be reflected within the future Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-27.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The procurement exercise will be conducted so as to comply with the Council's policy and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the

Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and supported by relevant officers.

- 10.2. The delegations sought are consistent with an exercise of this nature.
- 10.3. Officers should note that an award constitutes a further decision and will be subject to completion of an Officer Decision Record. Where key decision criteria are met such Officer Decision Record will be subject to call in. Award and implementation timelines should accommodate this.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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