

Appendix A - Review of electronic services (self-service) at Cheltenham Borough Council

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The purpose of the review

The Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested a review of electronic services that includes

- current provision and gaps
- demand, take-up and measurement
- benefits
- satisfaction rates
- development programme and drivers

with the intended outcome to ensure:

- the council gets best value through economies of scale.
- customer satisfaction in the delivery of services through self-service channels
- electronic services are aligned with customer need, and
- best value for its electronic services by maximising take-up.

The review is limited to strictly self-service, automated, non-mediated outward facing channels.

The review is to be considered by the committee in July 2007.

What is an electronic service?

For the purposes of this review the term electronic services is limited to strictly self-service, automated, non-mediated outward-facing channels, such as automated telephone payments and the councils internet sites. It thus addresses those automated channels that require no human intervention at the point of delivery and includes the simple unmediated electronic provision of information.

The review excludes mediated services and internal services.

Customer access strategy

The original strategy for delivering customer-focussed services was published in April 2002. The programme of actions that flowed from the strategy was in part funded through the national Local Government Online (LGOL) budget. The strategy was built around local needs and priorities but in 2004 the government moved the focus through the publication of an onerous list of national priorities for electronic government for completion by April last year. With the end of the government-funded programme there was a need for a new local strategy to build upon and consolidate the achievements to date. The strategy, approved by Cabinet on 28 November 2006, has the twin objectives of:

- streamlining service delivery processes ,and
- attracting customers to use more cost-effective and convenient self-service channels in preference to the more traditional mediated channels.

The strategy embodies the principles of:

- right first time every time (namely that services are streamlined to meet expectations of the customers ensuring a consistent quality of services and the elimination of failure demand), and
- first time fix (namely that a high proportion of all enquiries should be solved at the first point of contact, whatever the medium of contact is (personal visit, telephone, electronic).

The strategy tackles the challenge of meeting the rising demand in customer service without further additional resources provided through match-funded government grants.

The key to this is in the corporate adoption of a business re-engineering technique known as '**system-thinking**' in which part of the capacity created from increasing the efficiency of business processes is reinvested in further change. This concept is thus self sustaining. As each service is streamlined it will be engineered for delivery through the most appropriate channels, including the e-service channels.

The prioritisation of services to be subjected to '**system-thinking**' is to be directed by the Bridging the Gap programme.¹

¹ The Bridging the Gap programme is chaired by Chris Huckle. The objective of the programme is to eliminate the budget deficiency over the next five years through process improvements and strategic procurement of services.

Drivers

Comprehensive spending review

'Gershon' cashable savings are an ongoing requirement. As automated self-service eliminates the human element it is potentially the most efficient and cost effective channel for service delivery as the following transaction costs² demonstrate.

Channel	Cost per visit
Face to face	£14.65
Customer call centre	£1.39
Self service: website	£0.25

Strong and prosperous communities

The local government white paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, published in October 2006, states that the government must accelerate the adoption of good practice [for moving customers to the most efficient service channels], building on the national momentum created by the 'Take-up Campaign' to boost the number of citizens and local authorities using the new channels for service delivery. See *Partnership and collaborative working* on page 5.

Government Connects

GovConnects is the central government proposal to join up all government services using common authentication arrangements and secure transmission of data enabling a single customer account for all government services and interactions. This national project has been beset with problems from the start (both technical and organisational). It is still far from clear what impact it will have, if any, on our electronic services.

Transformational government agenda

The Transformational government strategy published in November 2005 made a commitment to shared services in addition to emphasising the importance of e-government services to external customers.

NeSDS

The national e-service delivery standards (NeSDS) were formalised in July 2006. They were created by a national e-government project and have now been approved by the DCLG. They provide a series of national standards across a number of local authority work streams, including customer service. They provide best practice and guidance and are designed to assist local authorities to benchmark the e-efficiency of the services they provide to their customers and to help develop a consistent level of customer service nationwide.

Adoption of the standards is optional at present but may in the future be associated with external reviews of the authority. The requirements of the national standards may conflict with, or distract from, local priorities. Caution will need to be applied in considering their adoption.

² Typical transaction costs for 2004/05 as reported by the Local Government Chronicle in February 2006. Local figures are not available.

Partnership and collaborative working

Partnership and shared service opportunities in the field of the development of electronic services had been driven locally by the Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership (GEP) in recent years. However this organisation was frozen in October 2006 and the Customer Services Group established to continue the non-technical aspects of the work.

A common approach to inter-council working across the old e-government agenda has yet to emerge. However, the government white paper, **Strong and Prosperous Communities** (October 2006), has emphasised the need for closer working between all tiers of local government. To this end, the councils in Gloucestershire have set up the Joint Improvement Board (JIB). This new group comprises the leaders and chief executives of all the councils. Their programme will have seven strands:

- **shared services** – to establish the true costs and benefits of establishing shared services concerning both 'front' facing and 'back office' functions (including direct services e.g. Waste) based on a robust financial analysis to be undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers, and a debate on what is politically acceptable to all parties. Based on this, JIB have agreed a programme of individual service reviews:
 - ICT
 - Legal Services
 - Waste
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Planning
 - Public Protection
 - Procurement
- **concurrent functions** – to identify opportunities for seamless services where they are concurrent or related.
- **procurement** – to join up procurement in a more effective way to achieve significant savings through greater purchasing power.
- **asset management** – to establish the criteria by which asset sharing and rationalisation can take place, including the co-location of customer information services where practicable and the co-location of county and district services and establish the financial costs and benefits.
- **income generation** – to agree service areas where new income streams can be generated
- **customer first** – to improve links between district/county front of house services (telephone, website, customer intelligence), and
- **community engagements** – to develop a programme of shared approaches to community engagement and community leadership.

The JIB has yet to announce specific projects but it is clear that most, if not all, strands may have a direct impact on customer service and hence the delivery of electronic services.

Clear direction from the JIB regarding cooperation on web-services has yet to be issued. In the meantime, the work that is being done in partnership with Gloucester City Council to procure a new website content management system is progressing well. It demonstrates that there is potential for significant savings and efficiency gains through collaboration without

loss of independence or identity. All other Gloucestershire councils are being kept informed and involved in the procurement process through the Webmasters Group to maximise opportunities for extending the collaboration and meeting the objectives of the JIB.

Understanding the customer - demand, take-up and measurement

A good understanding of customer satisfaction and trends in customer expectation in terms of council services is essential to ensure that electronic services are closely aligned with customer need.

The last representative survey of attitudes to electronic service delivery based on random attitudinal survey techniques was commissioned by the Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership in 2002. See *Mori poll* on page 7.

The council published its consultation strategy in May 2004. However, the council has no corporate mechanism for community consultation:

- The Citizens' Panel has been terminated. (See Citizens' Panel on page 8 for details of the last survey on web services.)
- The council is required to conduct a sample-based best value customer satisfaction survey every three years but it is too infrequent and too inflexible to be of use in tracking customer attitude to electronic services.
- There is a stakeholder database that is used for consultation on the community plan and local development framework. However, it does not represent the general customer³ and there may be some data protection concerns about using this database for consultation on other issues and topics.

Thus the council has no means of conducting statistically-representative sample-based surveys of its customers' attitudes or opinions. Information must be obtained from low or nil cost ad hoc exercises such as exit surveys at council receptions or online surveys on the council website. That is not to say that such exercises are not useful as they can provide very useful perspectives on the customer. As an example, throughout Customer Service Week in October 2006, staff from the web team conducted an exit survey in the foyer of the Municipal Offices. It was found that the great majority of visitors did not have access to the internet at home or at work. Few had any intention of purchasing a computer and would not have considered accessing the internet at their local library. Some of these customers were elderly and later generations may be more comfortable with technology but the survey pointed to the existence of a segment of the community that did not have internet access for socio-economic reasons and for whom face-to-face meetings will always be the preferred means of the delivery of services.

MORI poll

The 2002 MORI survey produced invaluable findings that informed the development of the electronic government programme. It found that the take-up of new communication technologies (mobile phones, text messaging, digital television, world wide web, email) in Cheltenham was the highest of any district in Gloucestershire and significantly higher than the national averages. At the time of the survey 62% of our residents were saying that they expected technology to make it easier for them to contact the council (compared with 55% across the county).

Around a quarter of those interviewed did not find our office opening hours convenient. However, the survey demonstrated that those expressing this view were those most likely to

³ The stakeholder database comprises representatives of community and voluntary group, local pressure groups, local businesses and public service agencies.

use new communications technologies and have home internet access. Electronic services have great potential to serve those who cannot conveniently contact us by other means.

When respondents were asked how they would prefer to find information on local services, such as recycling or leisure services, 29% of respondents said the internet (rising to 47% when counting only those with internet access at home). Yet only 15% of those asked had actually visited the council's website indicating the opportunity for meeting the demand for services through our online services. There are no updated figures to show the actual growth since the survey.

MORI's conclusions from its survey included:

- the council should be encouraging technology usage among local residents bearing in mind a digital divide exists particularly for older residents and those less well off
- the high use of technology by Cheltenham residents did not match their use of our electronic services
- the council should seek to migrate its customers to the new channels rather than force them to move as traditional channels (telephone and face-to-face) were trusted and well-regarded
- willingness to use electronic channels declines as their complexity increases (even for those who were already internet users)
- the business case for internet solutions must be examined carefully bearing in mind who is expected to use them, and
- the council should market its self-service channels well, focussing on those that will have the greatest impact and looking at how channels can complement one another.

Citizens Panel

A Citizen's Panel survey in 2004 included questions concerning internet access and usage of the council's website. It must be born in mind that that the panel at the time did not represent a typical cross-section of the community (84% of respondents were over 40 and 47% over 60). Yet, reflecting the MORI finding that there is a higher than average take-up of new communications technologies in Cheltenham, 65% of respondents said they had internet access at home (48% at work). Of those without internet access at home 21% thought they would in three years time (2007).

37% of respondents stated they had visited the council's website though few visited it frequently (just 3.5% visited at least weekly).

The majority that had visited the site found the speed to be okay (97%), the accuracy to be okay (94%), the content to be okay (96%) and the site easy to use (92%).

Geodemographic data analysis

As stated above, the council has no current means of conducting representative sample-based surveys. However, third-party geodemographic classification services can provide an alternative source of comprehensive information on local demand for products and services.

Probably the most widely used of these are provided by **CACI**. It has two services that are most relevant in this context and are widely used in both the private and public sectors to target the marketing of goods and services:

- **ACORN** – analyses communities by postcode combining census data with a wide range

of sources of consumer and socio economic data.

- **PeopleUK** –segments the population into one of 50 consumer types based on their life stage, family composition and wealth, describing each segment in terms of hundreds of different lifestyle variables, including income, housing and leisure activities.

A similar consumer segmentation product, **Mosaic UK**, is available from the Experian Group. **Mosaic UK** classifies all 24 million UK households into 11 groups, 61 types and 243 segments, resulting in a classification that describes UK consumers in terms of their socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour.

The council is a member of the **MAIDEN** Partnership, a service that provides online analysis of social, economic and service data about the communities of Gloucestershire for public services in the county. It builds upon the neighbourhood statistics dataset provided by the Office for National Statistics using data from local sources. It is designed to assist in the better targeting of services and collects data on:

- population and demographics
- health and social services
- indices of deprivation 2004
- income levels and benefit claims
- access to services
- education and learning
- arson and road safety, and
- crime and community safety.

The MAIDEN project also has user licenses to access to both **ACORN** and **Mosaic** products and can correlate this data with the locally sourced data to provide unique and invaluable analyses of our community. This service will be exploited to assist in the targeting of electronic services. Wider promotion of the MAIDEN service may encourage applications in the management and targeting of other services; for example other local authorities using this service have found applications in the development of the local development framework and waste analysis for refuse collection route planning. As such it may be considered for consideration as a cost-effective corporate service-planning tool.

Members' questionnaire

A survey was conducted at the end of April 2007 to determine the views and attitudes of elected members on electronic services.

- 11 councillors responded and all confirmed that they used the council website (www.cheltenham.gov.uk) in their role as a ward councillor.
- Two thirds (64%) of respondents stated they used the Report it! online reporting system to alert officers to problems in their ward. However, it appears that few councillors have extensive experience of the internet in general and few contribute to weblogs, online forums or social networking websites.
- Only two councillors reported that residents or businesses in their ward had commented on the council electronic services within the last 12 months.
- Half of the respondents (55%) said they actively promote the council website in their work as an elected representative.

- The elected members were reminded that the council's customer access strategy is to retain the full range of service delivery channels (receptions, telephone, electronic) as long as there is adequate customer demand. It is not the council's intention to drive customers to use delivery channels simply because they are cheaper or more convenient for the council. 10 councillors supported this strategic aim.
- The majority (64%) were in favour of the council doing more to promote its electronic services, but the majority felt that this promotion must not be at the expense of the promotion of other services and delivery channels.

Business continuity and service level assurance

As the council places increasing reliance on its electronic services their resilience becomes of increasing importance. The council is developing a business continuity plan in place to reinstate business following any crisis giving continuity of service to customers.

It is not only business continuity that is of importance but routine service levels must be guaranteed. In terms of electronic service, particularly online services, must have acceptable response times and guaranteed availability.

The site is hosted currently on council servers. The ICT division has recently increased the bandwidth our internet bandwidth connection from 2MB to 6MB and provided a second connection to provide backup in the event of connection failure. Furthermore, a spare firewall is now available to provide further resilience.

Currently, the third-party website-availability service that monitors the corporate website reports high availability although generally below the 99.99% uptime guaranteed by most third party hosting services. The website is now a core business system for the council. External hosting is currently being considered as part of the project to procure a new content management system.

Benefits of delivering services electronically

- *convenience to the customer (service delivery independent of time and location)*
- *delivery of services to a higher standard*
- *a faster and better response to enquiries and needs*
- *first-time fix for most enquiries*
- *choice and improved access of access for customers*
- *cashable and non-cashable savings*
- *responsiveness to trends in consumer preferences*
- *sustainable use of new technology where appropriate.*

Current provision

Fully automated self-service electronic services are deployed at Cheltenham Borough Council through:

- the council's websites, the most significant being the corporate website
- digital television

- automated telephone call handling, and
- mobile telephone.

The council does not currently deploy public information kiosks or a managed SMS (text messaging) service.

Web services

The council's main corporate website, *cheltenham online*, is managed by the service development team. It comprises over 2,500 pages and applications. It is built using a content management system that enables devolved content creation by nominated officers across the council. The interactive and transactional services featured on the site are a mixture of third party and in-house applications developed by the ICT business development team.

A project is in preparation to replace the content management system. The website has outgrown the current system:

- it no longer matches the functionality of modern systems
- it cannot deliver webpages that meet modern standards for public websites
- it does not provide the management information that is essential for the efficient running of a large site, and
- content management software is not the core business of the current supplier.

The council is working in partnership with Gloucester City Council to procure the system. The councils will also work together to develop and maintain the corporate sites that are built using the new system. This will add efficiencies (e.g. in procurement costs) and resilience (e.g. both councils operate their web services with the minimum of staff; partnership will enable emergency cover during periods of absence or illness).

Corporate website e-service highlights

'Deeplinking' search and dynamic A to Z

The site search engine and A to Z of services is provided in partnership with all the Gloucestershire councils – searches provide access to all the sites improving access to all local government services without the visitor having to know which tier of government is the provider. Administration of the facility enables easy adaptation of the service and the creation of recommended links.

See information on common search terms below.

Do it online

The homepage provides a prominent link to Do it online - a step towards the delivery of joined-up government through a gateway to hundreds of online services provided by the council, the county council, the government and many others

Report it!

Report it! is the council's online reporting and service request webform tool that provides users with a numbered receipt and, through a managed custom-built back-office system, delivers reports direct to the relevant service. It is a popular service with 1,390 reports being made in the period from April 2006 to March 2007.

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
86	122	121	126	161	119	134	134	108	131	111	127

The nature of the reports reflects seasonal demands with the peak in August being predominantly due to noise complaints and the rise in October is largely due to reports about parking and broken streetlights.

Cheltenham is one of just two local authorities in the country featuring a link to a new free service called NeighbourhoodFixIt⁴.

NeighbourhoodFixIt is an alternative to our own online reporting tool (Report it!) and we are asking our online customers to test the new service. It is simple and quick to use - to report a problem the complainant is asked to click on a map to show the location and submit a few details. The council team responsible for taking action receives an email, takes action, emails the complainant to confirm the action taken and puts update on the online map for all to see.

To see the activity so far simply:

- visit www.cheltenham.gov.uk
- click on Report it!
- select the NeighbourhoodFixit
- type 'cheltenham' in the text box, and
- click on Go.

Elected members may also find NeighbourhoodFixIt to be a useful way to report problems on behalf of their ward resident.

Website electronic payment

An electronic payments service is available on the website. As the table below demonstrates use of the service is growing consistently. A transaction requires an input of a reference number (from an invoice, parking fine notice, housing rent card or council tax bill).

	1 July 2004 to 31 December 2004	1 Jan 2005 to 30 June 2005	1 July 2005 to 31 December 2005	1 Jan 2006 to 30 June 2006	1 July 2006 to 31 December 2006
Number of transactions	1834	2401	2832	3008	4120
Total paid	£178,3333	£208,267	£261,383	£293,103	£403,958

End to end planning services

The council achieved full Planning Development Grant through the comprehensive range of planning services on the website. The services have been recently upgraded to provide fully-integrated functionality including building control. The inclusion of licensing services in the project was shelved due to lack of funding.

Database applications

A number of database applications featured on the site enable the visitor to interact with the

⁴ (NeighbourhoodFixIt is provided by MySociety - a group of mostly voluntary web developers working to 'give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives'. They are the people that provided WriteToThem, also featured on our website, that enables people to easily contact their councillors, MP and MEPs - all the resident needs to know is their own postcode and the communication is directed automatically to the correct elected representative.)

site and find, for example, sports clubs, important council publications and a resident's bin collection day.

The most widely used of these applications is the fully searchable database of the councillors, council meetings diary and all agendas, reports and meetings

Website development

Content management system

The council has a number of websites in addition to the corporate site. The tourism, crime reduction and local strategic partnership websites are all created using the corporate CMS. The owners of these sites have been informed of the project to replace the CMS and understand that the old CMS will be decommissioned within one year. They will have to fund the creation of replacement sites and have been encouraged to merge with the corporate site.

There are clear benefits from all the sites being built on a single CMS:

- economies of scale in procurement and support of a single CMS
- economies of scale in website hosting
- economies of scale in the provision of technical support, and
- ensured consistency in compliance with accessibility and other public service website standards.

The festivals and entertainments website was created as part of the e-government agenda and introduced electronic ticket booking. In response to the migration of festivals management to a trust, the management of the tourism and entertainment division has funded, and launched, a new and independent site basing its business case on the following arguments:

- the Town Hall is operating in a very specialist and competitive field and e-commerce plays a large part in this market.
- concern that the previous website 'was not working' for the venue
- the disbanding of the Festivals and Entertainments division of CBC made it a matter of urgency to move the marketing of the venue apart from Festivals and to create its own identity
- it was cost effective to use a web company with a great deal of experience within Gloucestershire arts venues
- a cost reduction from £370 per month to £62.50 per month ongoing hosting costs for the new site, and
- the Town Hall has always had a site independent of CBC so the new site was seen as a continuation of this policy rather than a decision to go alone.

The current Cheltenham Borough Homes (CMS) website is built on the corporate content management system and hosted by the council. CBH are interested in sharing the new CMS and recognise potential advantages both in financial terms and in order to build a seamless solution for the tenants. CBH have supplied their requirements to the CMS project team and are involved in the tendering process.

Online booking

Electronic booking of events and festivals tickets has been available since the completion of the festivals and entertainments website. Work has now recommenced on online booking for

sports facilities. However, progress on this development is currently blocked by a supplier that is unable to provide resource and the launch of the service is on indefinite hold.

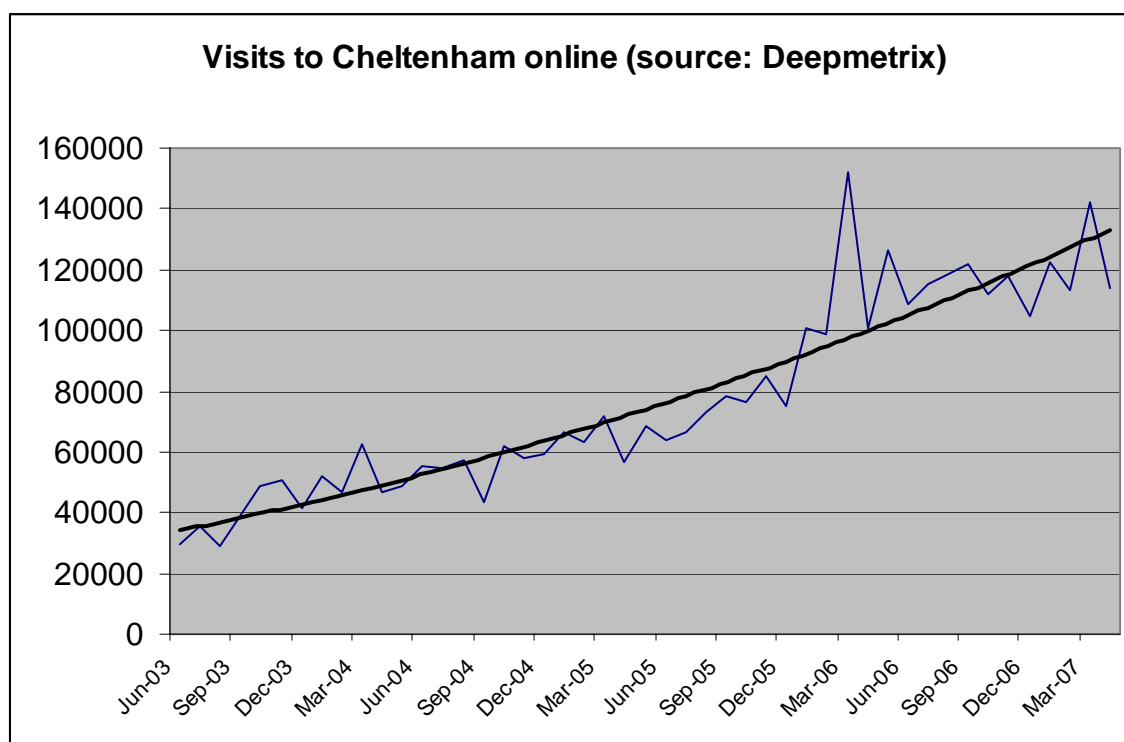
Webforms

Throughout the website there are service email addresses to encourage contact with the council. Whilst this reflects openness and wish to engage with the customer, it has the downside of attracting rogue applications that roam the internet to harvest email addresses to create mailing lists for junk mail (spam).

The customer access strategy includes an action to eliminate all email addresses from the corporate website and replacement them with webforms by the end of March 2008. Completion of this task should be earlier, as the requirements specification for the new content management system includes webform creation functionality. The replacement of all email addresses should thus be completed with the completion of the new website.

Demand, take-up and measurement

The statistics for the corporate website, as reported using the Deepmetrix web statistics application provided by the current CMS supplier, indicate that by the end of 2006/2007 there will be in excess of 1.5 million unique visits a year⁵.



Most popular searches are currently (October statistics) (in order of popularity):

- jobs, vacancies

⁵ The council has recently started to also use the free Google Analytics to monitor site usage. This is indicating lower visitor numbers (41,715 visits for October) than Deepmetrix. The sourcing of a quality assured web statistics package is an essential required for the replacement content management system project.

- planning, planning applications
- tax, council tax
- Christmas, Christmas lights, Christmas market
- fireworks
- map, maps
- housing
- town hall
- recycling
- cabinet agenda

This demonstrates the seasonal and topical nature of demand. Typically, at other times of the year searches for sport and swimming would be in the top four searches

Google Analytics is providing valuable data on the location of the visitors to our site:

- 87% of our visitors come from the UK.
- roughly a quarter of the UK visitors (24%) are from Gloucestershire.
- of the Gloucestershire visitors, over a half (55%) are from Cheltenham.

The usage of the corporate website continues to outstrip all predictions and last year (2006/2007) the site received 1,403,386 visits. This was 408,132 more visits than in the previous year. (The previous year the number of visits grew by 312,275.)

Based on national figures⁶, it is estimated that the increase in the number of visitors to the site this year, based on the Deepmetrix figures, will equate to around 160,804 visits by local residents. 83,940 of these would have visited in person or phoned the council if they had not found the information online.

This increase in visits can be interpreted in terms of a cash efficiency gain. Each request for information might take an average of two minutes of officer time to answer. This is equivalent to the time estimated it would take a customer service officer to deal with an average enquiry using CRM - this calculation concerns information that is already readily available online and thus can be dealt with without further referral to the back office. Over the year this would amount to 2798 hours and using direct staff costs of £14.22 per hour (an equivalent figure was used in the exercise to calculate the return on investment for CRM), **the council can claim an efficiency gain from increased use of the website this year over last year of £39,788.**

Digital television (digiTV)

A pilot project to provide council services on cable and satellite television has now terminated. The service was launched in October supported by an extensive publicity campaign. It was a countywide project paid for through the funds of the (now disbanded) Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership (GEP). It was originally funded for two years during which time the demand and usage were to be clearly established and a decision to be made upon whether to continue with the service. Overall responsibility for DigiTV passed to the

⁶ The recent report 'Building usage of council websites' (Socitm, August 2005) based on a common exit survey of 27 council websites across the UK found that local residents are the largest group of council website visitors (39.4% of all visitors). The survey also shows that 52.2% of website visits would have resulted in a contact with the council if they had not found the information online.

countywide Customer Services Group (CSG). The full annual cost to the council after the first two years would have been, at current prices, £10,000 per annum.

The Joint Improvement Board absorbed all the remaining GEP funds and declined to pay for the second year of the DigiTV project. All councils were asked to fund the second year of the pilot project if they wanted to continue the service. The suppliers of DigiTV offered to provide a county portal serving all the councils for £15,000 (in the first year) in an attempt to make the service more affordable. However, the usage statistics (see below) in the first half year of operation showed very low levels of visitors and no trend that might indicate repeat visits or a developing base of customers. Taking this into account there was a unanimous decision at CSG to cancel the project.

The DigiTV service was comprised of simple menu-driven text-based information and forms that are accessible via the user's handheld remote device. The technology is extremely limited and is closer to teletext than web technology. The principal aim was to provide news, simple information and contact details in an A to Z of our most frequently contacted services and forms for service requests and reports. The forms generated emails sent direct to the relevant service but the technology did not allow us to link this with the internet Report it! service.

The service was not intuitive to find. Even knowing how to find our pages it took over a minute and 15 button presses on the remote to navigate to our home page in the *Looking Local* section. Some councils have paid a premium rate to have their pages hosted in the *Your council* section and thereby halved the number of button presses that are required. Completing forms using the handheld is tedious and finding the keyboard screen is not intuitive for the first-time user (select the text box and press OK).

The DigiTV service is a product of a national e-government project now owned and managed by Kirklees Metropolitan Council.

Demand, take-up and measurement

DigiTV is unlikely to appeal to anyone with ready access to an internet connection. However, it does provide an alternative to those without internet access or unused to computer technology. DigiTV, using the familiar 'red button' of the digital television handheld, has potential to make council services more accessible to potentially disadvantaged groups, including the homebound and elderly. Before the launch of our pages, the suppliers had published a form encouraging viewers from Cheltenham to say whether they would use a service from us. The total number of respondents was low and did not show any discernable trend. CBC had just 17 forms submitted via DigiTV between the launch of the service in October 2006 and March 2007:

Customer satisfaction

Unknown.

Automated telephone services

The new telephony system provides the technology to introduce automated call handling. The new customer access strategy includes an action to provide callers with a short recorded message promoting the use of the website (and other channels as they become available) with a short menu selection prompting rapid access to:

- our help-lines for the most frequently requested services
- recorded information messages reflecting more frequently asked questions e.g. pool times
- self-service telephone electronic payments

The potential to frustrate customers with the use of this technology is recognised. The service will be carefully monitored to ensure it remains intuitive, relevant and fast to use.

Demand, take-up and measurement

The automated self-service telephone electronic payments service has been operational since 2002. There is a consistent rise in the amount paid to the council through this service.

	1 July 2004 to 31 December 2004	1 Jan 2005 to 30 June 2005	1 July 2005 to 31 December 2005	1 Jan 2006 to 30 June 2006	1 July 2006 to 31 December 2006
Number of transactions	1883	2207	2529	2438	2873
Total paid	£165,368	£191,352	£205,765	£209,662	£248,960

Customer satisfaction

Unknown at present

Mobile phones

The services developed for digital television were also available on WAP and 3G-equipped mobile phone. This service has ceased with the cancellation of the digital television project.

The access path for a 3 Mobile handset was:

- Services
- Websites
- Look up Stuff
- Looking Local, and then navigating through the menus presented.

WAP phone users could access our pages by typing the URL- <http://www.digitv.gov.uk/digitv/cds/LookingLocal/3/home> and navigating through the menus.

Demand, take-up and measurement

Total revenues for the mobile telecoms industry now exceed those of fixed-line calls and access as consumer usage of mobile increases, encouraged by price reductions and the emergence of new services. As partners in the countywide digitv project we are able to take advantage of this growth in demand. DigiTV report that access to the council services that they host via mobile phones now outstrips access via digital television sets.

There is potential for growth in demand for this service with appropriate targeted promotion. Much of the council's work is location-based – a mobile phone offers the opportunity for residents to report problems immediately they are seen at any time of day.

However the usage statistics provided by DigiTV demonstrated no usage from mobile phones. This is unsurprising as the marketing has concentrated exclusively on digital television so as not to confuse the message. This will be kept under review. However, no budget is available for developing the service.

Customer satisfaction

No data available.

Gaps in provision

SMS managed service

Whilst there is experience of using text messaging to contact council tax debtors on an ad hoc basis, no moves have been made to date to introduce a managed SMS service.

A feasibility study and business case for text messaging management facility building on current limited experience of use within the authority will be completed in June 2007.

The most likely solution would be the iTex system that was developed by the national e-government project on mobile working. It is a free (although the cost of the text messages themselves would be subject to negotiation with a mobile services provider) and built to meet the needs of local government that would integrate with the website enabling:

- customers to sign up for service alerts, and
- messages to be sent to individuals or groups of customers
- messages to be sent by customers and received as emails.

It is potentially a rapid and affordable channel for communicating with selected groups of customers, particularly targeted at younger residents.

If the feasibility study leads to a project to implement a service, the target will be to achieve 1000 local residents signed up for targeted text messaging services by end of March 2008.

Public information kiosks

The council ran a pilot public information kiosk project. The kiosks were situated in the Municipal Offices reception and the tourist information centre. The intention was to gain experience in kiosk technology by placing machines in a safe environment where usage could be closely observed. The tourism manager requested the machine be removed after a trial period as it was not attracting sufficient usage to justify the space that it occupied. Usage in the main reception was low and there were frequent problems with both hardware and software. Customer feedback from users of the kiosk in the main reception indicated:

- the technology (touch-screen, keyboard and roller ball) was difficult to use for even experienced computer users
- kiosk 'pages' need to be custom built and the information presented kept as simple as possible.

There was dialog at the time of planning the pilot project with Adshel concerning the 'free installation' of i-Plus kiosks on the street around the town centre. The council had already benefited from a deal with Adshel that provided the new bus station. Any further benefits, such as i-Plus kiosks would only be provided in association with an agreement to all Adshel to install a number of free standing illuminated advertising panels in the town centre.

Gloucester City has deployed a number of i-Plus kiosks in the city centre. The kiosks feature a range of syndicated content in addition to limited information-based content from the council (i.e. no bookings or payments). Usage of the site remains static and users tend to be young people. Use is highest at the bus station where the kiosk provides diversion for those waiting (news, games and email).

Prioritising of services for delivery through electronic channels

The customer access strategy sets the framework for the prioritisation of the services to be delivered through electronic channels. The strategy focuses on the use of the *system-thinking* method to ensure customer satisfaction in the delivery of services whilst streamlining services and eliminating waste.

The customer access strategy must be seen in the context of other factors that are driving the development of service delivery, principally:

- the need to identify savings to meet the predicted budget deficiency identified in the medium term financial plan, and
- the shared service agenda (see Partnership and collaborative working on page 5).

The situation is complex; the goals may be incompatible within the timescales and the available capacity to deliver change. The *system-thinking* approach cannot be guaranteed to deliver the scale of efficiency savings required to meet the deficit, therefore if it is the short to medium term fiscal demands that are given the highest priority, the available capacity may need to focus elsewhere.⁷

At this stage any service could be considered for any one of the following options (subject, of course, to statutory obligations):

- status quo
- stop or reduction in scale
- system-thinking review
- shared service
- system-thinking review prior to negotiation of shared service, or
- outsourcing.

Resources and capacity for implementing the customer access strategy are limited. An assessment will be carried out to prioritise those services that might deliver the greatest gains both in terms of service delivery and cashable efficiency gains. As outlined above there are many pressures on the council and any prioritisation must be viewed in the context of the bigger picture. This may delay progress. On 23 January the board of directors:

- agreed its strong commitment to the systems-thinking approach as the key management tool for the council to support change management and the implementation of the customer access strategy, and
- recognised the danger of doing nothing for want of certainty in the strategic procurement of services.

The board believes that there is a need to start the implementation of the customer access strategy in order to gain practical experience that will sustain the work in the future. The

⁷ The office accommodation may be that which offers the greatest potential for achieving significant cost savings. This project linked with Civic Pride proposes the vacation of the Municipal Offices and a move to purpose built accommodation elsewhere in the town together with consideration of new ways of working (hot-desking, homeworking, mobile working), office layout (open plan flexible space, break out areas, ICT), proximities (which sections are located close to which other sections to maximise efficiency).

systems thinking approach has been successfully applied to the Lifelines Service. Building on this experience the work will now be expanded to cover:

- Processing of invoices
- Customer Service (main, planning and depot reception areas, telephony and on line reporting).
- Planning/Building Control Services

In order to make progress it has made the pragmatic decision to direct that the system-thinking approach will be applied to:

- trade waste, and
- lifeline services.

The managers of both these services are keen to be involved and they are selected as work on service improvement is already in progress.

In order to make best use of the council's limited resources and to ensure systems-thinking is embedded within the organisation as quickly as possible, service within the business plan which are subject to radical change for other reasons (change in legislation etc) will also be included in the programme of activity.

Subsequent to the board decision above, the South West Centre of Excellence has approved a countywide application to the LIFT SW programme⁸ that included funding for system-thinking training. The Joint Improvement Board has appropriated this funding and a working group is looking at the options.

Promotion and take-up

A structured approach to the marketing of electronic services is essential to ensure best value for its electronic services by maximising take-up.

The county council take-up campaign

Last year, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) produced and implemented a marketing plan for its website. The plan outlined the approach to attaining a 25% increase in visitors to the county website and driving take-up of e-services over the following year. The aim was to increase online contact as a preferred method of contact over telephoning, writing or visiting and raise awareness of 24/7 access to services.

This was to be achieved by running a general campaign in the first part of the year, followed by two specific e-service campaigns (for reporting potholes and faulty streetlights) at the end of the year.

Implementation of the **general campaign** started in February 2006:

- advertising hoardings at Cheltenham Town Football Club and Gloucester Rugby

⁸ LIFT SW is designed to support local public services in the region to raise their game. The funding is based on the premise that with stronger support and a shared sense of purpose, determination and pride, individual authorities will achieve more.

Football Club.

- an advert for the county website in the 'Your Guide' council tax leaflet
- posters and bookmarks were distributed across the county.
 - o all parish councils were issued with posters for their parish notice boards
 - o posters were displayed at bus stops around the county
 - o posters and bookmarks were distributed to all schools, hospitals, doctors' surgeries, pharmacies, job centres, leisure centres, district offices, libraries, register offices, farmers markets and weekly markets, various road shows and events and local voluntary and community based groups
- fleet vehicles were fitted with current branding and the website address
- banner adverts were run in five of Gloucestershire's newspapers, and
- in the last two weeks of April daily ads were run on local radio station Severn Sound.

Additionally an internal campaign was rolled out to GCC staff making use of the intranet, newsletters, PC desktops and various corporate communications.

Specific campaigns for street lighting and potholes ran from October to December 2006:

- o roadside advertising across Gloucester and Cheltenham.
- o four park and ride buses were fitted with onboard and back panel advertising, and
- o two radio ads (one for street lighting and one for potholes) were aired on Severn Sound during daily drive time slots over a two-week period.

An initial budget of £20,000 was available and the final spend was just over £15,000.

A target of a 25% increase was set for the period 1st January 2006 to 31st December 2006. The results show an actual increase of 41% with peaks during May and October/November 2006 when the campaigns were running.

Over the same period, the trendline in unique visits per month to www.cheltenham.gov.uk shows a annual growth rate of 33% per annum without the benefit of a marketing campaign (see chart on page 14) indicating that if usage of the county website grows at the same overall rate, the site visits experienced by the county over the period of its campaign may simply be explained by the 'natural' growth in site usage. Similarly the peaks may be attributable to other causes – for example, the peak in October may be a coincidence with school transfer.

The national take-up campaign

A national take-up campaign to encourage more people to use effective and efficient online council services was launched by Department of Communities and Local Government on 8 May 2006 and ran through to July 2006 with a £3.4 million media spend.

Under the strap-line of *Connect to your council* the Campaign was designed to raise citizen awareness that they can access a wide range of council services online, from finding information on rubbish collection, to applying for school places, or paying bills.

Advertising was placed in national media for the first month, followed by a month in regional

media, before individual local authorities were invited to continue with local campaigns using the same creative work to emphasise the most relevant online services in their area.

Cheltenham did not use this creative work, as

- the photography supplied in toolkit clearly does not relate to Cheltenham
- the material has already been used nationally and it could be confusing to re-badge this as a local campaign, and
- Photolink Creative Group, the marketing company that is working with the DCLG to promote the use of the toolkit, quoted £65,000 for a targeted local campaign promoting two online services.

The national advertising reached an estimated 85-90% of all adults in England, and was recalled by 38% of this group. Pre-and post-campaign research by TNS market research agency confirmed an increase in awareness of council services in general and in those available online. However, the Society of Information Management (Socitm) reported that there is 'little evidence that the campaign led to a great surge in numbers of new visitors coming to council websites' (Building usage of council websites, 2006). The graph of visits to the council's website show a peak in March 2006, possibly attributed to the National Hunt Festival, but during the period of the national campaign there is little evidence of any increase usage of *Cheltenham online*. There was a peak in May but there was a similar peak in the previous May.

Local promotion

The council actively promotes the council but without any media spend and generally using ambient marketing⁹:

- o the website address is quoted on all correspondence, media releases and publications
- o there is a link to the corporate website on all related council websites
- o an advertisement for online services is printed in the annual council tax booklet
- o customer service officers are trained to encourage callers and visitors to use online services
- o online services were actively promoted during the customer service week in October 2006 principally through engaging visitors to the main reception in conversation and demonstrating the website
- o posters and bookmarks promoting the website have been widely distributed to council satellite offices, CBH area offices, neighbourhood centres and community one stop shops
- o bookmarks were distributed at the 2006 Literature Festival and at local bookstores.
- o the website address is part of standard vehicle branding under the council logo

⁹ Ambient or place-based marketing is an effective means of pushing a brand message in front of consumers and can develop better top of mind recall within target audiences than other advertising. Ambient marketing surrounds the target audience with things that they may not really notice, but they'll pick up on as they go through their day. Hence it equates with displaying website address at every opportunity, including vehicles, buildings and publications. The message becomes part of the environment – it becomes part of the 'background hum' and works subliminally to raise the awareness of our electronic services.

- the website address is displayed on the front of the Municipal Offices and on the blinds to the cash desks along with the message 'pay online at...'
- the web address is included on all business cards and on the standard email signature.

Development of promotion activity

Conventional advertising

It appears, from the evidence presented in this report, that short-term media campaigns *may* deliver a peak increase in visits to online services, but do not appear to have a long-term impact. Yet every year the number of visits to the council's website grows dramatically and the rate of growth also increases. What drives this growth? To an extent it may be the low level ambient promotion described above. However, the principal driver would appear to be the growth in all online services. Today, all organisations from the corner shop to 10 Downing Street are expected to have a website. It has become the norm. Furthermore, conventional advertising is generally unnecessary - one does not need to know the address as everything is quickly accessible through modern search engines – to 'google' is now an accepted verb. The exception to this may be to:

- stimulate early interest on the launch of new services, and
- raise awareness of specific electronic services to targeted audiences rather than broad awareness of the website.

However, there are many in the marketplace with far higher advertising budgets than the council competing for our customer's attention. The media spend that would necessary to have impact is likely to be prohibitive. A more innovative approach is required than the conventional blunt and expensive weapon of traditional advertising.

Viral marketing

Viral marketing might be considered. This involves the promotion of a service or product by using existing customers to pass along a marketing pitch to friends, family, and colleagues. This is frequently seen in the sharing by email of quirky, clever or amusing photographs, video clips or Flash games, and in doing so the brand message reproduces and spreads. The development of a viral campaign would require creativity and originality. Almost inevitably it would involve some expense to develop. There is no known precedent of a local authority deploying this technique and its use could prove to be controversial.

Ambient marketing

As detailed above, ambient marketing is the council's principal tool for promoting its online services – further opportunities will be explored including:

- printing the website address on the standard franked mail
- embossing new wheelie bins with the website address in addition to the council's logo.

Build a better mousetrap

Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)

Several years ago, the number of visits per month to the council website was fairly constant; then the number dramatically increased and has been increasing ever since. The cause of this event is unknown but it is believed that a certain critical mass of content had been achieved – there was sufficient on the website to make it worth visiting and worth revisiting. If a website is good, word gets about and the visitors come. However, it is not all about attracting visitors to the site, it is also about what the visitors find when they get there. The continued enrichment of the content and online services is required to make the site a 'better

mousetrap'. Not all content needs to be of serious intent as an entertaining site is more likely to be visited than a purely worthy one.

- The breakdown of the Promenade webcam has attracted more emails about the website than anything else. Its replacement has become a priority for the web team
- Frequently changing content such as the homepage news and novel serial content such as 'tree of the month' in the parks and gardens section encourage regular visits
- Building richer media into the site such as images, video and audio helps to sustain interest in the site. (The website now features its first podcast.)

Engaging the visitor

The large commercial dot com sites have known for a long time that it is not simply the number of visits that generate sales, it is the act of engaging the visitor, making sure they follow the path you want them too, providing them with a sense of belonging, creating a community, making sure that they return and providing good after-sales contact so they enjoy the whole experience (and also tell their friends).

Consider Amazon.com as an example and think of the purchase of a book as akin to a service. The use of one service prompts the visitor with other services that may be of interest. Each visitor is presented with a customised home page, the site is personalised to their needs. Visitors are contacted when new services are added or with specific service promotions. One of the interesting things about this model is that a service is not seen in isolation. It is a unit that can be linked and re-grouped in a thousand combinations, sometimes led by the marketer and at other times led by the customer themselves.

Engaging new audiences

Manufacturers are constantly seeking new markets to exploit, new populations to sell their product to. Sometimes a new population is simply a different generation. As the generation grows older, so the product grows with them. To capture a customer for life must be the absolute goal.

Take the BBC's successful web presence in the form of cbbc - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/> It is a friendly brand that provides entertainment and education. It engages the visitor, it makes them feel special, it makes them feel a part of things and it instils loyalty.

Of course, the council's corporate website will never appeal to young audiences. However, we should be aiming to attract new audiences particularly the young. Yet there is much that we do that serves the needs of young audiences, for example:

- recreational spaces including the skateboard park
- holiday play and sports schemes
- arts activities
- sports facilities

If we engage a young audience then we get two spin offs:

- an audience that grows to become an adult audience, and
- a young audience that enthuses an older one.

There may be an opportunity to create an alternative informal social networking site for the youth community that is the antithesis of the corporate site – see *Exploiting the way the internet works* below.

Exploiting the way that the internet works

The early internet was designed as a repository of information, a few clever people connecting together their ideas with hyperlinks.

Today the web connects people, and technical expertise is not required to participate. We create social networks where we share, trade and learn.

A website is not a book or magazine, it is potentially a community, and the more interconnected the community the stronger it becomes.

We are in the fortunate position of having a family of websites, each with its own audiences. If we provide better linkage between the sites we offer greater opportunities to share audiences and the whole will become greater than the sum of its parts.

We can also grow further by looking at key communities elsewhere. We can exploit social networking sites like MySpace and Wikipedia, use Flickr the photo sharing website and YouTube the video sharing website.

Conclusion and recommendations

The electronic services review group noted the progress made to date with regard to electronic services and the planned developments. The group concurs with the majority view expressed by the elected members in the recent survey that electronic services compliment existing channels of service delivery. However, not all members of the community have access to the internet, or are comfortable using new technologies, and thus the more traditional channels must continue to be made available whilst there is a demand for them.

The review group made the following conclusions:

1. Whilst noting the ongoing problems frustrating the work to provide online sports booking, the project team are requested to give this work the highest priority to expedite the completion of the work.
2. The review group believe that due to the range of services it provides and customers it serves, the replacement corporate website should enable users to personalise the site and customise the presentation of the content to best serve their needs.
3. Public consultation is an essential element in the work to design and develop the new corporate website particularly with younger people. The project team should engage MAD to work out how best to develop our website offerings to the youth audience.
4. Whilst noting that both licensing and council tax services are planning to use a managed text-messaging service, the review group recommends other divisions to further consider the use of managed SMS to promote and deliver their services.
5. ICT should consider VPN to allow access to the intranet from non-council machines, for elected members and to facilitate flexible working by officers.
6. Funding for web-casting of council meetings should be reconsidered at the next budget round.

Appendix - Electronic services – results of survey of elected members

Do you use the council website (www.cheltenham.gov.uk) in your role as a ward councillor?	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	100%
Comment	-	-	-	Found the planning difficult to use, not been successful yet in bringing up an application	-	I use the website but find it is sometimes hard to navigate. In particular the search function isn't very good.	but not often	Use for various things but most often to look up old committee minutes and check current/past planning applications			but not often, prefer the phone		
Do you use the Report it! online reporting system to alert officers to problems in your ward?	n	y	y	y	y	y	n	y	n	n	y		64%
Comments	-	Yes, extremely useful tool. It would be helpful though, if members could be told when someone in their ward has used 'report it', to prevent them going over the same ground.	Sometimes it seems as if it has gone into the black hole.	Have found it very good until it went to Glos Highways, they acknowledge and then do nothing!	-	It normally works well	-	Only used occasionally as mostly chasing up problems already reported to the council, so usually check details of current situation direct with relevant council officer.	I prefer the personal touch	-	But not always aware of what action is taken as rarely get follow-up contact.		
Do you regularly read, or contribute to, a weblog (blog)?	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	n		9%

Have you ever contributed to an online forum (such as you may find on the BBC or newspaper websites)?	n	y	n	y	n	y	n	n	n	n	n	27%
Comment		Tortuous experience. It is not made easy to interact with the BBC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Have you ever visited or contributed to any social networking websites (such as YouTube, MySpace or Flickr)?	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	n	n	9%
Have any residents or businesses in your ward commented on the electronic services we deliver within the last 12 months?	n	y	y	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	18%
Examples	-	Report it and general information especially on planning matters. Both favourable comments.	The last one was on a planning application which was taken off and they wanted to know why, and what happened to it. There was no explanation	-	-	-	-	i	-	-	-	
Do you actively promote the council website in your work as a ward councillor?	n	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y	55%

Examples	-	Encourage use of the service when out and about, also through parish council contacts	-	Occasionally at parish meetings.	If appropriate.	It's not something I've really thought about promoting.	-	Informing people verbally and in leaflets that they can now look up details of planning applications online.	-	-		
Have you visited our DigiTV pages?	y	n	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	n	n	18%
Comments	I do not have time to use it.	-	-	-	-	-	-	Can access pages but limited value as can't enter details from my handset (eg Report it)	-	-	-	
Are you in favour of retaining the full range of service delivery channels?	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	91%
Comments	Yes, but it requires additional time which I have not got	I am in favour of a proactive encouragement of the use of e services.	As long as it goes side by side with other services. The 'more convenient for the council' worries me.	Only because I am not sure of what it is or how it works.	-	In favour, as long as the full range of channels retained, even if just a few (EG some OAPs) wish to continue using them. I would not like to see a situation like the one with pensions and benefits where OAPs are being forced to use technology they are uncomfortable and unhappy with.	The web is obviously the way forward, but it will be many years before the country is totally online. You've probably got the right approach at the moment.	The council is here to provide services, so while we should encourage people to use the most efficient methods of access, we have to provide the ones they actually need.	As many of my constituents are 'mature', most do not have access to a computer	-	-	

Do you want the council to do more to promote its electronic services?

No y y y n p y y y n y 64%

If yes, how would you like to see this done?

Not yet

Reduction in the cost of services. -

Promote through partnerships and their distribution links. Advertise in local paper every six months or so? -

Those people with access to, and who are comfortable with using the electronic services are likely to look online eg Google search. Sponsoring a Google link when the keyword 'Cheltenham' is inputted may be one way to make it easier for people to access and a good way of promoting the service.

Perhaps by offering rewards for using it?

Don't think we should go for more advertising as such, just that the best form of promotion is an ever improving website that people will want to come back to.

Should do more to promote services generally and not just eservices -

Yes - as long as this is not done to the detriment of the other service delivery channels. However, as long as the resident is computer literate have internet access they will tend to find and use our services.

Comments	-	Also looking forward to ideas being generated by the members' group.	Again, as long as it goes side by side with other services. Remember, some people do not use computers, and they are among some of the most vulnerable.	-	-	-	-
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