TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET AND POLICY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 28th May, 2024

BRIEFING NOTE
COUNCIL WEBSITE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Councils website was fully rebuilt in 2016. At that time a range of improvements were made to navigability, format and content. These were subsequently updated to reflect the need to meet website content accessibility guide lines (WCAG) which principally require website accessibility to be 'perceivable', 'operable', 'understandable' and 'robust'. All Councils (including Town and Parish) should have a WCAG 2.1AA rated website in situ.

1.2 Currently the Council is as compliant as it can be with WCAG 2.1 and it is investigating the extent to which it is/is not compliant with 2.1AA (although this is now being superseded by events – see below). However, it should be noted that one of the reasons for not being wholly compliant is the inclusion, on the website, of information in relation to major projects and programmes (such as the THI or Guildhall) which are not capable of being made WCAG 2.1 compliant.

1.3 In those particular cases the operational decision was made that the benefit associated with having such information in the public domain, for those who were able to access it, outweighed the disbenefit of removing public access to all. It is hoped to continue this practice, albeit reserved for exceptional circumstances, and subject to review of any items which no longer fall within this priority category to minimise any potential non-compliance.

2. CURRENT POSITION

2.1 The reason for a review of the website at the current time is associated with the decision of the current platform infrastructure provider 'Drupal' to withdraw support for its platform (TTC's website provider (Cosmic) used 'Drupal 7') from January next year.

2.2 In the circumstances that provides the Council with two options:

i) To transfer to the current version of Drupal (10) by remaining with our current provider and in doing so also take the opportunity to upgrade the accessibility rating[1];

Or, in the alternative

ii) To undertake the necessary procurement exercises to engage:
  - A company to review need, and develop a specification for tender (and potentially provide technical support during the tender process and during development);
  and then
  - A company to provide a new website.

3. REVIEW

3.1 It is anticipated that the current allocated budget provision of £10,000 is insufficient to meet the second option which would, in addition, require considerable organisational resource to help inform and shape.

3.2 The Councils current website is, as indicated above, largely WCAG compliant. In any event either option listed above would address those requirements (note very few Council websites are fully compliant eg even WDBC has two errors on the landing page). However, whilst WCAG compliance is not the only factor to be taken into account for a website it is a material consideration and, it is submitted, this opportunity should be taken to do so.

3.3 In addition, and following the enhancements made at the time of the last review, there are some other areas which have been identified your where further improvements could potentially be made (whichever option is progressed) such as:-
  - Facility for the Council to upload all documents and photographs itself (in particular a small number are currently only able to be posted by the provider);
  - Improved ability to position text and photos upon the web page;
  - Facility to upload documents larger than the current 2mb maximum;
  - Opportunity to reduce the number of web pages to improve navigability (currently there are in excess of 100);
  - Inclusion of a spell check function within the website;

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[1] *Note (alternatively Wordpress is also available but the advice received is that it is somewhat less suited to functionality of the service related areas (like Pannier Market or Town Hall) than Drupal)*

- The possibility that some drone footage of the Town might provide an attractive and engaging backdrop to the front page;
- Potential to upload QR codes for Council venues;
- Review and in some cases remove historic videos.

3.4 Again these are substantially achievable under either option (ie whether migration or replacement were progressed).

3.5 Regarding the current website status feedback suggests it is more easily navigable than many other Council websites, provides a good overview of the Town for residents and visitors alike, and includes useful information for signposting and it has been used as a source of ideas for other websites in the area.

3.6 It also has the facility for up to 4 visible 'News' items at any one time and the 'Meetings' section makes it easy to both upload agenda/reports etc and to view them in a way that is not always the case when looking at other Town and Parish Councils.

4. SUMMARY

4.1 The website is one potential strand of the communication and engagement workstream which the Council has recently initiated and this report has been brought forward at this time by way of highlighting the available options and, in particular, seeking some direction as regards whether to consider to 'upgrade' existing or 'procure' new. It also acknowledges continuing progress in discussions with the present provider and a developing view from your officers that, as matters now stand, replacement by migration (not procurement) represents the more cost effective and efficient option in all the circumstances. Furthermore it does not rule out the potential for additional future functionality on an incremental basis.

4.2 As outlined above there are benefits and drawbacks associated with both options. That said full procurement (replacement) is a potentially resource and time heavy commitment. Furthermore, it is unclear that full procurement would lead to a materially better product than we currently have (subject to adjustment - as both options give facility to include the improvements listed in para 3.3 above). Drupal 10 is guaranteed support for 2 years and it is understood the current versions are more easily adapted than previous (ie not expected to require major migration, only routine upgrading).

4.3 In the circumstances, and provided there is a material cost benefit, it is suggested on balance that the Council now consider staying with the existing provider and transferring/migrating the current website

subject to the necessary improvements to accessibility being achieved, together with such other improvements (para 3.3 refers) as can be economically delivered.

4.4   That leaves open the facility for a more informed, measured and longer term approach as/when appropriate/when there is a material business case for different functionality and substantial change.

4.5   If the Committee and Council are agreeable to this course of action a formal cost proposal will be sought from the Council's provider for transfer. An indicative indication of migration cost will be available at the meeting.

4.6   The instructions of the Committee and Council are sought.

CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
MAY 2024