

Forward Plan reference number: 'Not applicable'

Report title: Essex.gov.uk technology replacement	
Report to: Councillor Christopher Whitbread - Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	
Report author: Ben Unsworth – Director, Service Transformation	
Date: 24 th February 2022	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: 'All Essex'	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Achieving the commitments in the Everyone's Essex plan for Essex will rely on trusted, high quality online information and the delivery of effective end-to-end service experiences that meet people's needs and expectations.
- 1.2 Our web publishing platforms provide the foundations for delivering more accessible information and services online. This report proposes we establish a new operational approach to web publishing that provides a single flexible, cloud-based publishing capability that will meet the needs of both service users and the business in the long term.
- 1.3 The proposed approach will better place us to help both residents and businesses to find and navigate the information, advice, and guidance that they need. This will support ambitions around inclusion, early intervention, and the effective management of demand.
- 1.4 Well-designed online information and services will also mean a more efficient web estate and reduce the need for unnecessary travel to services. This will help to reduce the financial and environmental impact of ECC services.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to the drawdown of funds from the Technology Solutions Reserve totalling £297,400 in 2022/23 and £207,200 in 2023/24 (£504,600 over two years) to replace the current technology underpinning the web publishing platform, Essex.gov.uk and establish a new approach to web publishing.
- 2.2 Agree to run a mini competition and call off from the Digital Outcomes & Specialists (DOS) framework for the value of £285,000 over two years to appoint a supplier to:
 - work with the Service Transformation and Technology Services teams to migrate Essex.gov.uk to the [LocalGovDrupal](#) platform
 - host and maintain the Council's core [LocalGovDrupal](#) platform
 - carry out development work on templating and feature implementation

- 2.3 To delegate to Executive Director of People and Transformation to approve the award the contract(s) following the mini competition.

3 Background and Proposal

- 3.1 The Council has committed to improving its online services, to ensure the needs of residents, businesses and communities are met as efficiently as possible. Currently, it is not possible to quickly and easily make changes to the council's main website Essex.gov.uk and this is limiting the ability to develop and provide online delivery of council services.
- 3.3 The Council has in the region of 100 websites which have an inconsistent approach to technology for publishing platforms and a lack of consistent design standards. Users often need to use multiple platforms, with inconsistent user interactions that cause confusion. This confusion results in failure demand, which reduces user satisfaction and increases cost.
- 3.4 There is no single solution that will solve this problem instantly. The Council needs to commit to an approach that brings consistency, builds capability, and strengthens governance. It is proposed that ECC replace the current technology underpinning the web publishing platform, Essex.gov.uk and establish a new approach to web publishing. By committing to a new web publishing platform for the future and consolidating a large proportion of the Council's websites, this project will form a first step in the delivery of the technology and digital strategy, by providing a single flexible, cloud-based publishing capability that will meet the needs of service users in the long term.
- 3.5 The Council's main website was developed and launched in 2018 and delivered a significant improvement in user experience. At that time, technology decisions were made based on the organisational and sectoral knowledge. The applications to run the website are hosted on ECC cloud infrastructure and managed by Technology Services. The strategy at the time was to increase the in-house software development and operations capability to support the platform. This did not happen, which means the website has not had any significant development since the launch.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the Council move its web publishing technology to the [LocalGov Drupal](#), platform an open source publicly owned asset, built and maintained by a community of developers, designers and digital leaders in the UK and we will benefit from:
- being part of a project in active development, with multiple local authorities contributing new features and updates
 - a healthy supplier market to host, maintain and support the website.
 - growing our internal capability and capacity to provide strategic direction and continuous improvement to the main essex.gov.uk website and other microsites
- 3.7 The Council will carry out a mini competition and call off from the Digital Outcomes & Specialists (DOS) framework to appoint a specialist supplier to:

- work with the Service Transformation and Technology Services teams to migrate Essex.gov.uk to the LocalGovDrupal platform
- host and maintain the Council's core LocalGovDrupal platform
- carry out development work on templating and feature implementation

- 3.8 The contract will cost £285,000 over two years (see section 6.2.1). Supplier bids will be evaluated as part of the Digital Outcomes & Specialists framework which involves a two-stage process against Quality and Price 80%:20%. The quality element is made up of technical and culture. Technical accounts for 60% and Culture 20%. The contract period will be up to 2 years to allow for effective contract management and iterations of strategic approach depending on organisational context. Following completion of a mini competition it is proposed that the decision to award to the winning bidder will be delegated to Executive Director of People and Transformation
- 3.9 Moving to a managed service model aligns with our Technology strategy, increasing our resilience and reducing dependency on expensive skills and in-house teams. To ensure the new web platform is implemented as expected, a team comprising of employees from Service Transformation, Technology Services, and Transformation Delivery will need to be established for the full two-year duration of the implementation phase. Whilst most of the cost for this team (see section 6.1.5) is funded by existing staffing budgets, some new staffing costs constitute the remaining £219,000 requested within the drawdown of funds from the Technology Solutions Reserve.
- 3.10 It is proposed that a total of £504,000 is drawn down to cover the cost of the contract to be procured and the new staffing costs set out in 3.9 above

4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 Achieving the commitments in the Everyone's Essex plan for Essex and the aims of the Essex Vision will rely on trusted, high quality online information and the delivery of effective end-to-end service experiences that meet people's needs and expectations.
- 4.2 This work will build a core capability for delivering better web publishing and accessible information and services. This will better place us to help both residents and businesses to find and navigate the information and advice that they need. It will also help them to find and connect with the support and guidance that exists within their communities more easily.
- 4.3 Well-designed online information and services will also mean a more efficient digital estate and reduce the need for unnecessary travelling. This will help to reduce the environmental impact of ECC services and contribute to our transition to becoming a net zero council.

5 Options

- 5.1 Option 1 – "Drawdown funding from the Technology Solutions Reserve to replace the current web publishing technology underpinning Essex.gov.uk and establish

a new approach to web publishing – this is the preferred option. This involves migrating Essex.gov.uk to LocalGovDrupal and procuring a third-party specialist supplier to host and maintain the platform on the council's behalf.

5.2 Establishing a centralised, well managed web publishing approach will provide the foundations for future digital service delivery and enable us to:

- remain compliant with relevant legislation and best practice, improve customer experience and avoid future costs on accessibility
- enhance our reputation for delivering high quality digital services meaning we are better able to attract and retain digital talent
- actively improving the core essex.gov.uk website to create better, faster, cheaper, and accessible services
- reduce dependency on expensive skills and in-house infrastructure teams
- provide a consistent approach to microsites maintained by the council
- The project is a key dependency for reducing the number of costly microsites operated by the council, and the migration of sites from SharePoint so that SharePoint can be decommissioned

5.3 This work is being delivered in the context of the brand guidelines and content strategy which bring clarity to the governance and management of our web estate's look and feel and content management approach.

5.4 The key risks associated with this option are:

- Content migration is not possible or difficult to achieve using automated methods. This will be mitigated by hiring junior content designers to manually migrate content.
- LocalGov_Drupal is unable to meet the requirements of the council. This will be mitigated by additional investment in development to build the necessary functionality.

5.5 Option 2: “Do Nothing” Requiring no drawdown of funding. Doing nothing will not deliver the best outcomes for users or the business and is not financially sustainable. The key risks associated with this option are that nothing will change, the essex.gov.uk website will continue to deteriorate without development, and the council's web estate will continue to grow through increasing demand for additional websites and online services

5.6 We have investigated the option of moving the existing platform technology Essex.gov.uk uses to a 3rd party for hosting, support, and development. Whilst this is a possible mitigation, an independent technical discovery has evidenced that this would be expensive and deliver less value than moving to a more standardised web publishing platform developed for local government. Analysis by MadeTech, a local government digital technology agency, estimated that at least £500,000 would need to be invested in the platform alone to bring it up to feature parity with LocalGov Drupal and other web publishing platforms.

6 Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 To migrate the Essex.gov website to the new LocalGov Drupal platform and for the provision of on-going hosting and maintenance activities, ECC will need to procure an external company through a competitive bidding process.

6.1.2 The table below estimates the potential cost for migrating to the new platform, and for on-going hosting and maintenance activities. These costs have been estimated using benchmarking information provided by several local authorities currently using LocalGov Drupal, including Cumbria County Council and Croydon Council.

Activity	2022/23	2023/24
One-Off:		
Theming, initial development, and implementation	£50,000	
New feature development	£60,000	£120,000
Content migration	£15,000	
Ongoing:		
Hosting and maintenance	£20,000	£20,000
	£145,000	£140,000

6.1.3 It is proposed that the cost of this investment will be funded from the Technology Reserve. Currently the Technology Services Roadmap and People and Transformation Roadmap have allocated a combined amount of £1 million to complete the work on the migration of Essex.Gov.UK and migrating the intranet and Education Infolink away from SharePoint (the latter must be completed by November 2022). Work on those projects will be informed by this migration but do require relatively urgent attention. If the total of those projects exceeds £1m in costs, then Transformation Delivery and Service Transformation will work together to jointly reconsider and reprioritise other roadmap requirements in order to free up the funding required to complete this essential work. Please note, that may lead to other work having to be postponed or not picked up.

6.1.4 There is expected to be a saving from a reduction in Azure hosting costs (c.£7,200 per annum), and not having to renew licences for software, such as Contentful (c.£34,500 per annum) and Cluedo (c.£7,100 per annum). These licences are assumed to be no longer required when the Essex.gov website has migrated over to LocalGov Drupal. The estimated on-going annual hosting and maintenance costs should be offset by this saving.

6.1.5 To ensure the new web platform is implemented as expected, a team comprising of employees from Service Transformation, Technology Services, and Transformation Delivery will need to be established for the full two-year duration of the implementation phase. The size and cost of the team is outlined in the tables below.

Essex County Council Delivery Team – Proposed FTE:

Project Support (Internal)	2022/23	2023/24
Service Transformation	4.2 FTE	4.2 FTE
Transformation Delivery	1.5 FTE	1.0 FTE
Technology Services	1.9 FTE	1.3 FTE
Internal Resource Requirement:	7.6 FTE	6.5 FTE

*FTE (full time equivalent) represent the average amount of time/ resource that will be required to support the project. 1 FTE is equivalent to 37 hours of support per week.

Essex County Council Delivery Team – Estimated Cost:

Team	Funding Source	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Service Transformation	Existing Budgets	£244,800	£260,600	£505,400
Transformation Delivery	Existing Budgets	£48,000	£49,200	£97,200
Transformation Delivery	Technology Solutions Reserve	£24,000	£0	£24,000
Technology Services	Existing Budgets	£6,000	£6,000	£12,000
Technology Services	Technology Solutions Reserve	£128,400	£67,200	£195,600

6.1.6 In addition to the hosting and maintenance costs, the council may decide to invest further money and/or resource into the LocalGov Drupal platform post-implementation. The council has no obligation to continue investing into the platform, however there are agreed developments that organisations can collaborate on to improve the functionality of the platform.

6.1.7 This business case allows some investment in feature development, to successfully migrate essex.gov.uk and introduce features to support future rationalisation and migration. There will be additional business cases and funding required to support redesign and migration of some of the more complex legacy digital services.

Total Project Costs:

Implementation Activity	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Development	£110,000	£120,000	£230,000
Content Migration	£15,000	£0	£15,000
Hosting & Maintenance	£20,000	£20,000	£40,000
Employee Support - Service Transformation	£244,800	£260,600	£505,400
Employee Support - Transformation Delivery	£72,000	£49,200	£101,200
Employee Support - Technology Services	£134,400	£73,200	£207,600
Total Implementation Cost:	£596,200	£523,000	£1,119,200

Funding	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Existing Staff Budgets – Opportunity Cost	£298,800	£315,800	£614,600
Technology Solutions Reserve	£297,400	£207,200	£504,600
Total Funding:	£596,200	£523,000	£1,119,200

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 The Council's financial regulations state that all drawdowns from reserves must be approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 6.2.2 Drawing down of money from reserves does not authorise any expenditure that is a key decision or any significant changes to ECC services or funding which must be authorised by the relevant Cabinet Member
- 6.2.3 ECC is a Contracting Authority within the definition of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (the "Regulations"). The Regulations require Contracting Authorities to undertake a competitive process to award contracts with a value in excess of £213,477 (inclusive of VAT).
- 6.2.4 The use of a Framework Agreement established by Crown Commercial Services is a legitimate route to market permitted by the Regulations.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

8 List of Appendices

- EqIA

9 List of Background papers

N/A

The 'sign off' boxes below are deleted for cabinet reports but not for CMAs.

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Councillor Christopher Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	18.03.2022
Pam Parkes Executive Director People and Transformation	21.03.2022

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Councillor Christopher Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	18.03.2022
Pam Parkes Executive Director People and Transformation	21.03.2022
Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer) <i>Please send to your Head of Finance/Finance Business Partner who will arrange S151 sign off.</i>	14.03.2022
[Oliver Taffs on behalf of] Nicole Wood	
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	04.03.2022
Laura Edwards on behalf of] Paul Turner	