

Website Project: Discovery Report

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Executive Summary

Context

The website project falls under the council's ICE transformation programme which aims to deliver modernisation and improvement across the organisation. The overall outcomes from the programme which the Website Project aims to contribute towards include "Improved and modernised core business", "Consistently excellent customer service" and "Enable efficiencies, delivered savings and generate income".

Project approach

This discovery project aims to understand our website users' needs and produce recommendations for a prototype phase of website development. The project management approach is Agile with a fixed schedule and budget, flexible scope and sprint-based planning. Discovery is an iterative process in which finding answers also uncovers new questions and new areas of research. When the project moves beyond the initial discovery phase, ongoing user research work will ensure we continue to understand and meet user needs.

High level findings

'High level' findings have been drawn together after reviewing findings from all research streams within the discovery.



The wording of sections, services and information in the site could still be improved to aid search engine optimisation and the user's journeys within the site.



Navigation is excessive, confusing and out-of-step with how users currently find information on the website.



The site is burdened by the large volume of content and pages, many of which see relatively little use, with impacts on both users and support staff.



Some services have clear, predictable patterns of usage responding to knowable events/triggers.



Website design should be responsive to changing customer needs.



Site style and design needs to be modernised.



There is a clear expectation that the site will signpost to other organisations and authorities without wrongly drawing users to our site in the process.



The GOSS platform will present design choices and potential restrictions that will have mid-term implications for our website offering and the user experience.



There is a lack of understanding across the organisation of website performance.



The website should be providing more end-to-end services for customers.



There is widespread recognition of existing issues with the current devolved method for managing content.

High level recommendations

Based on the findings at this stage of the discovery, we make the follow recommendations:

-  The wording of content, navigation and services should reflect the language users use and the user's context to improve both SEO and the in-site user experience.
-  Simplify website navigation and design around observed user behaviour and preferences, where appropriate, responding to service specific patterns of behaviour.
-  Take a holistic approach to helping users find information and digital services that treats the website as part of a wider system of digital platforms.
-  Further research how dynamic content and platforms, such as digital news articles and social media, affect website usage.
-  Site pages and content should be minimised and organised to avoid negative impacts of volume on user experience and site management.
-  Website design investigates how service users' online experience can be improved by responding to known patterns of usage and trigger events.
-  We should have more continuous engagement with service customers and site users to understand change needs and improve our website offering.
-  We should seek to involve users through website improvement work and build in user need fulfilment measures into any data capture approach.
-  The site's visual style and design should be modernised.
-  Investigate improvements to signposting, both of users directed from our site to other organisations but also of users redirected from other government sites to our own.
-  Take an agile approach to development of new website capabilities and ensure we have mid-term tactical view of our technology to support short-term decision making.
-  Discover what the Services and the Web Team need to know about the performance of the website and how those needs can be meet.
-  Explore expectations with service users to understand their digital needs. Be clearly sighted on how the new website will integrate with back end systems and portals and explore alternative digital media options when a user need is identified.
-  The approach to content management and the amount of editorial control required, should be reviewed.

Research Planning

Project Team & internal stakeholders

The core project team conducted stakeholder analysis identifying internal groups and individuals that Discovery would likely engage collaboratively or in support of the project.

Team:

- Project and Improvement Manager
- Website Manager
- Business Analyst

Collaborators:

- Head of Customer Experience
- Communications Manager
- Process Redesign Project Manager
- Software Developers

Supporters:

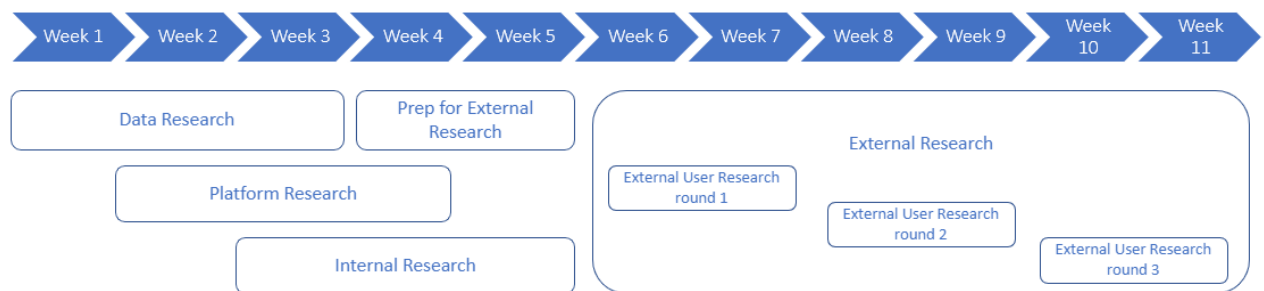
- Communications team
- Design team
- Customer Service Manager
- Content Management Software (CMS) and Portal suppliers
- IT Technical team
- Geographic Information System (GIS) team
- Executive Director and Portfolio Holder

Research plan

The team developed a research plan identifying an initial set of questions and resources for research. The plan divided these into four research streams:

- Data discovery | Addressing questions and gathering data on current website usage to inform the design of our user research.
- Platform discovery | Identifying aspects of the GOSS platform that may shape discovery research and user interaction.
- Internal user discovery | Exploring internal needs and views of the website and its use by service users.
- External user discovery | Exploring the experience, views and behaviour of Council Service users in relation to the website.

Roadmap



Whilst the project has progressed through the research stages above as planned, COVID-19 significantly delayed completion of the Internal Research and External Research.

Research streams

The report structures findings from each of the four research areas, there is cross over in the findings discussed. However, some consolidation has been carried out to identify combined findings and recommendations.

Data discovery

The 'Data discovery' research stream focused on exploring our existing Google Analytics datasets with a view to answering the questions posed. This involved interrogating the data 'as-is' rather than configuring Analytics for focused data capture designed around the research. Analytics presents its full data set as a representative sample. The findings and analysis below are based upon a sample comprised of data captured between 1 Jan 2019 to 31 Dec 2019 including 1,730,395 page views from 448,230 users in 807,639 sessions.

Research Questions

The Website Manager provided questions exploring the use of the website for investigation (see Discovery Questions Summary.doc). The team also posed question expanding on these and investigating specific site features, such as navigation. The initial set of questions were as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| What content is most/least viewed? | Who is / isn't using the website? |
| What is the ROI in maintenance? | Where / when do people use the site? |
| What do people use the website for? | What patterns or clusters of usage can be seen? |
| How do people find information on our site? | How does the site perform technically? |
| What feedback do we have about the site? | What does customer feedback tell us? |

The questions guided data research and any findings and observations were made where the data allowed.

Approach/tools

This research consists of statistical analysis of the Google Analytics data set with supplemental information derived from the content management system or supplied directly by the Web Manager.

Findings

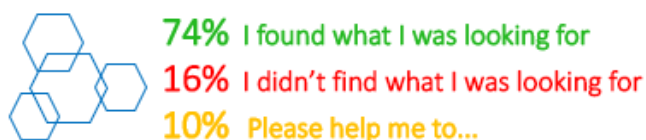
Finding: *The current Google Analytics data capture is not measuring user satisfaction. Data capture could be improved to that end but there is a limit to the effectiveness of the data capture approach.*

It should be stressed that Google Analytics provides a record of most of the site activity, but not all, and tells us nothing certain of the user's satisfaction with the activity. Analytics has proved a valuable tool in providing detailed site usage information during this research. Whether activity observed in data is an effective/successful journey for users is outside of what the data can tell us.

The analytics platform provides a range of features to build a clearer data view of user journeys, behaviour and ultimately the satisfaction or efficacy of the site. Such features are not currently used as extensively or targeted as they as could be to provide clearer data. However, this platform is not designed with local government website users in mind. Only by speaking to users can we confirm if our interpretation of data is correct, as our external user research has been able to in many areas.

“just because a metric is based on objective criteria and can be quantitatively measured, it doesn't necessarily mean those measurements are useful.” ~ Philip Walton, Google

Finding: *We do not have a substantial understanding of how well we are meeting user needs.*



Currently there is one method of collecting customer satisfaction, through a “did you find what you were looking for?” survey. There is no correlation between usage and feedback, for example the second highest visited page during 2019 was /planning search, during the same period Planning received only 19 pieces of customer feedback. In addition, the top 10 visited pages during 2019 attracted around 436k views, they received 459 pieces of customer feedback. Whilst the quantity of feedback is low, it is mostly positive. Where customers struggle to find information, there was a clear theme around customers seeking to find out how and if they could recycle specific items, for example “can I recycle my food waste?”.

Finding: *There is a clear concentration of usage in a small number of pages.*

From carrying out a sample analysis of the top (most viewed) 390 website pages from 2019, it is clear there is a concentration of usage. The sample of 390 pages received over 1.1 million views during 2019, 43% of this traffic was received by the top 20 pages. In average terms this works out at each page, within the top 20, receiving over 25k views each, in comparison to an average of around 1,800 for the remaining 370 pages.

Table 1: Top 20 pages based on views during 2019

Web Page	# unique views
/home	114,838
/bincollections	64,152
/planningsearch	28,361
/lido	27,031
/rubbishandrecycling	23,585
/crematoriumdiary	23,193
/paycounciltax	21,917
/planningapplications	21,262
/article/2508/household-wast...	21,010
/contact us	20,108
/council tax	18,439
/fireworks	17,923
/bluebinrecycling	17,714
/farnboroughcarboot	15,521
/parkingfine	14,031
/planning	12,614
/crematorium	12,564
/electionresults2019	11,440
/article/9742/planning-applic...	11,090
/jobs	9,728

Finding: Customers regularly visit pages that provide a mix of information and transactional services, whilst others simple aid navigation (menu pages).


Of the top 20 most viewed pages from 2019, 10 were menu pages providing navigation options for customers. Of the remaining 10, five provide information only (Lido, HMRC, Fireworks, Farnborough Car Boot and Crematorium Diary) and five provide an element of transaction for customers (bin collections, planning search, paying council tax, blue bin recycling and parking fines).

This information on its own does not expose user need or satisfaction, without speaking to customers we do not know if they were satisfied with information only pages providing just information or how well the transactional pages function. For example, customers visiting the information pages on the Lido may have been looking to buy tickets etc. Whilst its clear these pages are popular with customers; more exploration is required to understand how well they are meeting user needs and expectations in terms of the website as a platform.

Finding: Most 'navigation' of the site happens before the user arrives at the site.

Around 10% of all website traffic 'lands' on the homepage, the other 90% landing on pages across the site. Looking at all these 'landings', over half result in the user leaving without interacting with the page. These two observations together suggest that, specific pages aside, the most common user journey is for a user to arrive on the website at a page that

90% of traffic
does not hit
the homepage
& customers
do not interact



is not the home page and then to leave without interacting further with that page. Such journeys do not use in-site navigation or search features.

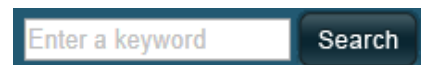
The top source of traffic is search engine results with 73% of traffic 'landing' on pages after clicking on a result on a search engine results page. This traffic is overwhelmingly from Google sources. 90% of this traffic again 'lands' on a page that is not the home page, however, over half of 'landings' then interact in some way with the page. So it the other traffic sources that have a higher rate of users exiting with no interaction. 63% of traffic from referrals and 57% of direct traffic exits without interaction.

This suggests that where users arrive from significantly effects how they interact with the website. We cannot conclude which sources are more effective at getting users where they want to go, as we cannot be sure an 'exit' means the user's need was met.

Looking at how users move between pages on the site after arriving, we see that, overall, in 7 out of 10 visits, users go no further than the page they arrived on. This movement is different to 'interaction' as users can interact with the website without moving to another page within the site. With only 3 out of 10 visits seemingly moving between pages on the site, it appears that in-site navigation and search is, in effect, used less to find information than external search engines. Statistically we could then say that Google acts as the primary navigation and search tool for users of the website.

Finding: *Most users do not use the in-site search feature but where it is used it reflects general site usage.*

In-site search is used in less that 5% of visits. Where site search is used, search terms are reflective of general demand for content across the site. If search use reflects general site usage, we might ask why the other 95% of visits didn't need search to find the same content?



Finding: *Complicated subjects result in complicated journeys for users trying to find information.*

Both the ambiguity of the term that refers to a subject/topic and the simplicity of associated pages (i.e. number of pages) appear to impact the user journey. Where the term(s) by which subjects or topics are referred to are clear, well known or easily guessed, the user journey is much more likely to be concise and precise; this is believed to be denoted by a direct arrival at the relevant page with high bounce and exit rates.

This also applies to the number of pages related to the subject, fewer being better. Where the site has many related pages on a subject, such as council tax, or where the form of words referring to the subject are uncertain, it appears the user journey is less succinct. It cannot be said however how much this is down to a user struggling to find information first time, vs a user content to browse pages related to the issue readily offered in the navigation.

This can be seen in the extreme by contrasting the simply named and structured pages for fireworks (/fireworks) with the pages connected with election results.

Finding: *Navigation / site structure does not provide consistent access to transactional pages / services.*

There are a range of transactional pages/portals accessible within the site. Throughout the site navigation there are links purporting to led to transactions, including the /home page's 'Top Tasks' and 'Do it online' navigation features. Some of these links, however, lead to information only pages,

rather than a page with a transaction option. Conversely some transactions are not represented in these navigation features as they do not fit the feature context. Sometimes a transaction is available but the navigation description does not describe them obviously as tasks.

Examples include commenting on a planning application doesn't fit with the 'Pay/Apply/Report' feature so is not listed despite being something that can be 'done online'; the 'Council Tax' top task link does not go to /paycounciltax, which is among the most viewed pages on the site and the starting point of the primary task: making a payment. Instead, the task link goes to /counciltax which offers more navigation but no specific task initiation. Contrast this with the 'bin collections' link which does reach its most popular related page (/bincollections). Another top task listed is 'Planning' which is not of itself a task and links to the planning page generally.

While these navigation features appear to have inconsistencies, it is unclear how this impacts the user experience.

Finding: Device usage patterns have significant differences highlighting some specific device-oriented use-cases.

Mobile users generated the most visits over the year with the breakdown as follows:



- At least two clear event related peaks were driven by mobile user activity: early morning and evening viewing of election related information on 12 Dec and afternoon viewing of fireworks information on 2 Nov.
- Mobile usage is usually a greater component of usage of the site out of office hours. Mobile usage is always higher at weekends. This suggests more desktop/tablet usage comes from work/office settings.
- In the top 100 pages, bounce and exit rates were 10% higher for mobile users.
- Some specific services/activities had clear user device preferences. Viewing plans for instance was predominately desktop based.

Finding: There appear to be some frequently used services with smaller, regular audiences.

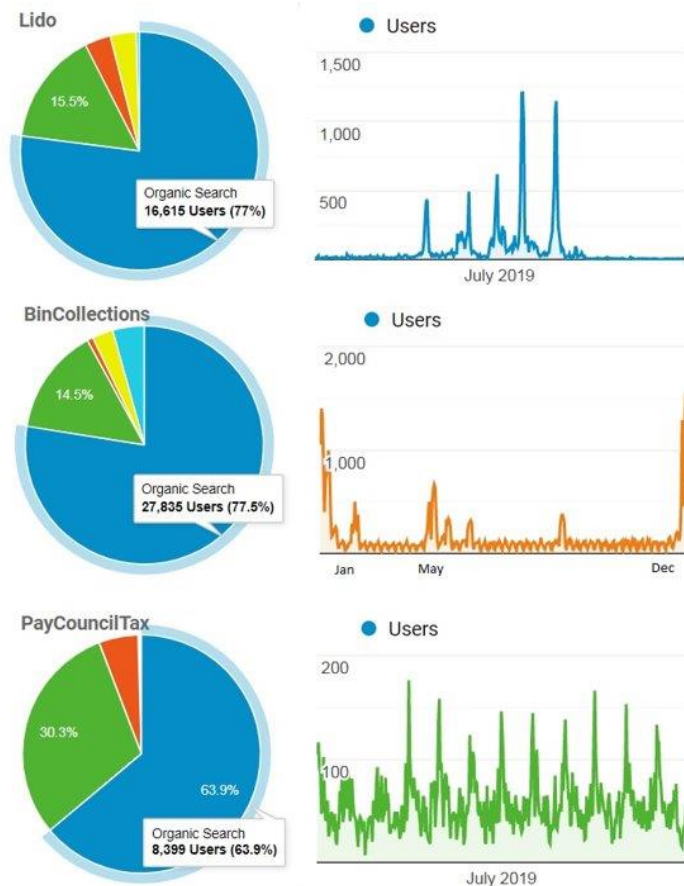
Frequently returning users were identified based upon the number of sessions they generate over the year. This showed:

- The /crematoriumdiary page has the highest number of views from frequently returning users (Segment: 30+ sessions), with double the number of 2nd place /planningsearch.
- /bincollections had the highest number of views from users in the 20+ sessions segment.

Finding: Specific services / topics have distinct patterns of usage, suggesting specific service-oriented use-cases.

User behaviour and journeys are specific to page subjects, suggesting different needs and experiences of the site according to the purpose of the visits. Groups of users connected by their use

of specific service or amenity-oriented pages demonstrated patterns of behaviour.



Creating visitor segments based upon a specific page viewed showed clear patterns of behaviour that varied depending on the page concerned.

The Lido segment showed highly seasonal usage, mainly from arriving from mobile organic search.

The bin-collections (issues and queries) segment showed peaks around service disruption with significant mobile use at weekends.

The council-tax-payments segment showed regular use on the first Monday of the month with a significant increase in direct access - users who clearly know our website address

This suggests a better understanding of specific needs giving rise to these behavioural patterns could lead to different priorities or approaches in page/service design.

Finding: Cross platform data analysis is required to better understand spikes in arrivals from email and social media sources.

Spikes observed in email and social media sources demonstrate significant user interaction with these sources but the data lacks context. Typically, two thirds of users arrive via organic search. High profile events promoted via these other channels coincide with significant increases in referral traffic from these sources, to the point at which organic search share drops to just over half of arrivals. To understand the value of these sources would require further research and for such analysis to be enabled by design, i.e. by coordinating data capture across platforms.

Finding: There is no strong correlation between the maintenance of pages and page views.

There is no apparent prioritisation of maintenance aligned with usage. Due to the decentralised approach to maintaining the website, there does not appear to be a consistent, approach to ensuring the pages receiving the most views are monitored more frequently than pages with less page views.

Comments on progress

At the time of writing, the following work or questions that have not been completed or answered:

- Data analysis of website portals to have a more complete picture of online transactions and so give more content to what can be seen in the analytics.
- Demographic data on those who are and are not using the website has not been enabled for capture by analytics at this time. Enabling this capture has privacy implications for users of this form of capture. Capture of this data would require further consideration of our approach including a data privacy impact assessment and user controls on the website. Enabling this would not provide a historical dataset to match that used in this research. This research has not therefore made this a priority.
- Some data on where and when customers are using our site is available, but this discovery has not invested the considerable time required to mine the data.

Platform discovery

Platform discovery consisted of discussions with people familiar with the GOSS platform and general web domain along with analysis of platform documentation. Researchers met with Rushmoor BC software developers and members of the Publisher Team and spoke to GOSS staff and other local authority GOSS platform users.

Research questions

The Website Manager provided questions exploring the current Content Management System (CMS) for investigation (see Discovery Questions Summary.doc). The team also posed question around the future platform's functionality, limitations and the needs it should address (See appendix LINK).

Approach/tools

Insight into questions related to the current and future platform have been gathered from:

- Workshops with internal staff exploring the current user experience.
- Discussions with internal developers.
- Research of platform documentation and discussion with the platform provider (GOSS).
- Contact with other local authorities via interviews and online forums.
- Internal reports and data derived from 3rd party assessments of the website.

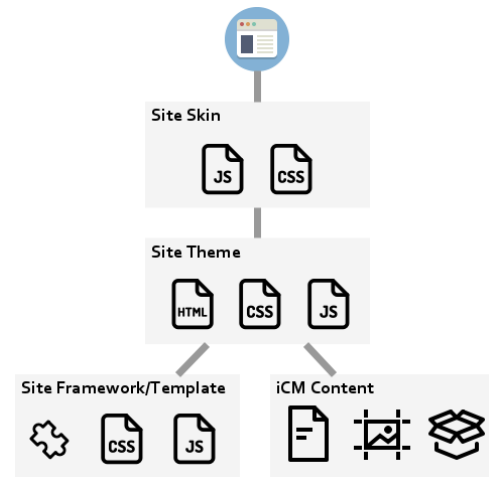
Findings

Finding: *RBC will need to select a 'Site Theme' and tailor it if necessary, with a 'site skin'. If significant variations in page appearance / design are required, this may be accommodated in additional subsites.*

The Content Management System (CMS) 'GOSS iCM' discusses presentation of website content in terms of (web) 'pages' and 'articles'. A page can contain just one article, just a part of a one article, or many articles. The structure of a page, including the layout of articles and presence of features such as page headers, site utilities or related content, is determined by the page template. A range

of page templates are available information and initiating service request to supporting account functions and authentication.

The aesthetic of the site, the site layout and visual styling, arise from the 'Site Theme'. This Theme may be further customised with a 'Site Skin'. This styling applies to the entire site. GOSS iCM supports multiple sites (each site referred to as a 'subsite'), allowing the use of a different 'Site Theme' for each. Content may be shared across sites, but this separation is typically reflecting very different site purposes and so separate/different content. GOSS offers five 'Site Themes', one of which must be selected. If the gap between the styling RBC require and the selected theme is significant, so too will be the work to create a site skin.



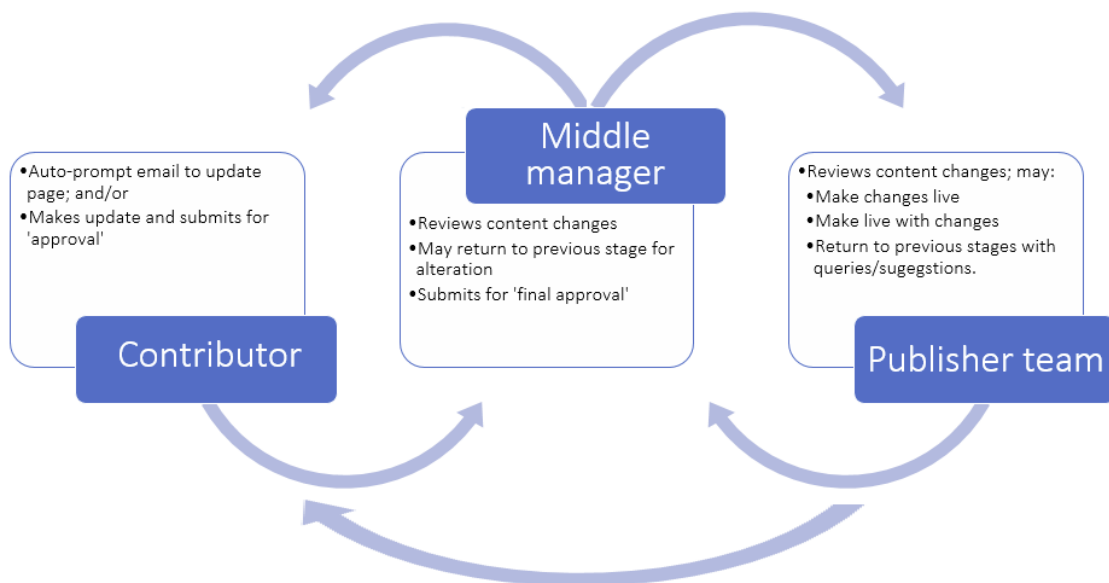
Finding: A long term view is required when investing resources in significant developments to provide novel functionality and/or integrate other systems with the platform. This view should consider both cost/benefit of developing platform integrations and the potential 'lock-in' implications of the investment.

Complex integrations between the GOSS platform, enterprise and line-of-business systems, plus any bespoke development necessary to provide additional functionality, will carry overheads and increase risks associated with the platform's constraints and limitations.

Finding: Content management responsibilities across the organisation are not consistently aligned with the current content approval process.

As of February 2020, there were 57 internal staff members (hereafter referred to as 'content contributors') using iCM across the organisation, excluding the 'Publisher' team. This Publisher team includes three to four members drawn from the Web and Communications teams, varying throughout this work due to staffing shortages/vacancies. Some content contributors provided content for multiple teams. Some teams had no current content contributors (such as Legal). Some teams had no middle manager and so escalated changes directly to the Publisher team.

Content approval and editorial control are, in principle, delivered through review of content changes via middle managers and finally the publisher team (see diagram below). This is maybe a cyclical or iterative process as content may be reviewed, passed back and re-submitted. In practice there is deviation from this to reflect circumstances of the team and changes involved.



Finding: Editorial controls can be circumvented where 3rd party systems bypass the iCM CMS content release controls (I.e. ModernGov).

In the case of ModernGov, users can publish content via ModernGov that is immediately 'live'. This in effect bypasses the content approval process as documents/content may be published via that portal directly. This is a potential risk wherever a solution presents information directly to the web and allows users to alter page content (beyond feeds of data that are effectively static in their scope).

Finding: Many Local Authorities have aligned themselves with the GDS Service Standard, in which content is approached as a part of holistic service redesign, built around the user needs of the specific service. The standard aims to make the user experience consistent across central and local government digital services.

The UK Government Digital Service (GDS) Service Standard has been adopted by over 200 councils (as of Feb 2020). The standard advocates a user-centred approach where content is shaped by the user's needs and user experience of that content. The GDS Service Manual makes many recommendations that affect content. Recommendations include:

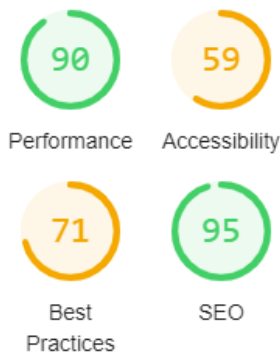
- Service redesign activities include skilled content designer and creator roles as part of a multidisciplinary team. This may be a dedicated role, or a role taken on by a member of the service – in similar style to Rushmoor's Content Contributors.
- Service web pages make use of 'design patterns'. These are visually and functionally consistent web page components regularly found in online services, such as address lookups or 'start pages'. The 'patterns' are the result of continuous development and testing with users. Design patterns are used to make the user experience across all online services more consistent and familiar to users.

Content, under the Service Standard, is thereby tailored to the specific needs of the service's users, while adhering to common standards, developed and improved over time, to ensure consistency and quality of user experience.

Finding: Conformance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 at the AA standard. Conformance is not guaranteed by the platform and must be 'built-in' during the site development process.

GOSS iCM provides a range of features to help conform with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 at the AA standard. General conformance and use of these features is not enforced or automatic within the platform and requires attention throughout design and lifecycle of the website. Platform documentation details (<https://icm10070.gossinteractive.com/article/4705/Accessible-Content>) features and advice in support of meeting accessibility standards. Conformance is not inherent to any feature added via the platform but instead requires active consideration during the design of both content and site features.

Finding: The site scores well in autonomous measures of technical quality/performance but these measures are no substitute for user centred metrics.



Automated testing by Site Improve from February 2020 rated Rushmoor.gov.uk above average on measures of Automated Readability Index, Accessibility and Responsiveness. Similarly, the open-source web page quality audit tool 'Lighthouse' rated the site as above average for performance/speed (fast) and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). Scores against the Lighthouse scoring system (image right) for Best Practices and Accessibility were average. These scoring systems rely on objective/machine readable measures. Poor performance will negatively impact the user experience quality of the site, but good performance does not guarantee the opposite. As noted in Lighthouse's documentation:

"just because a metric is based on objective criteria and can be quantitatively measured, it doesn't necessarily mean those measurements are useful." ~ Philip Walton, Google

Peer research

This research stream gathered information from other councils about their approach to their own website. It focused on councils using the same web platform product as Rushmoor (the GOSS Digital Platform) and their experiences in using it. It also explored related aspects of website delivery such as the make-up of teams involved in delivering online services to customers.

Approach / tools

Phone interviews were held with five current and former Goss clients. The interviews were typically 45 minutes to an hour in duration. They were conducted with the person in charge of the website, this is usually the Web Manager.

Findings

Finding: While all GOSS users make use of its content management module, there is great variety in the adoption of other modules as local requirements often led them to utilise other solutions.

GOSS offer several different optional modules that make up their platform including content management (iCM), assisted self-service, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and bookings. All councils used the content management module, but no council used all modules. The situation is similar at Rushmoor where we use the GOSS platform for content management and CRM. This selectiveness was attributed to local requirements not matching the modules offering and/or existing separate systems already providing the capability.

Finding: A key factor in what councils can deliver on their website is the extent to which they can integrate the council's chosen web platform with their existing line-of-business systems.

A widely acknowledged 'age-old problem' problem is that problems integrating systems often limit or complicate delivery of services or information on the website. This includes both the capabilities of the online services themselves as well as back-office/administrative functions such as implementing a simple login processes for staff (single sign on).

Finding: Councils have found that the devolved content model doesn't work for them and are moving away from this to a more centralised model.

RBC uses a 'devolved' content model for updating its web content. This is where individuals in services have been trained up to edit web content for themselves and they use iCM to edit and add pages to the website. With the Communications team providing final checks before the pages go live.

Across the board when asking about the model that our peers use to update their websites, all were negative about their experiences in this way of working. They felt that although they have trained up a number of contributors to their website, the quality of web content produced was not of a high enough standard for customers. The contributors may be an expert in their field, but they weren't experts on the web.

Councils have moved on, or are looking to move on, from a devolved content model. There were various solutions provided by the councils interviewed, but more generally they have moved onto a more centralised 'core' team that looks after web content updates.

Finding: Councils have a mix of hosting internally and with the cloud, but the direction of travel is towards the cloud.

RBC's website is hosted internally. To realise the benefits of the CRM, which is already in the Goss hosted cloud, it is assumed that we would move the website into the cloud.

When talking to Goss clients and former Goss clients, peers are moving their websites into the cloud or are looking at this as the next logical step. However, the message was received that Goss' cloud hosting environment was more expensive than peers' previous hosting.

In addition, a former client remembers having their hosting of their website internally, with performance issues and when it was moved to Goss' cloud, the performance issues were resolved.

Finding: The location of the Web Team is typically in a council's Communications team, however, good communication was needed to work with other services, as the website is larger than one team.

During the discussions with peers, Web Teams were either placed in Communications, IT or their Customer Services teams. The most popular choice was that the Web Team was part of Communications.

One peer when discussing why the choice was made that they were not part of Communications said that this was because their Communications team was not 'digital' focused enough.

Nobody interviewed was suggesting that the website could be looked after by just the Web Team. It was obvious that different parts of the organisation needed to be brought in to help out with this important channel for customers.

When looking at how councils worked together on transformation programmes, that the website will be a major part of, you can conclude that communication is key. Making sure that web teams are talking to developers, customer services, keeping management on board and any project/programme managers that are also involved.

Internal user discovery

This stream of research was designed to seek the views, needs and expectations of internal staff. In order to be sighted on the differing needs of staff providing varied roles, workshops were designed with middle managers, those responsible for maintaining the content and with the Web and Communications Team. A survey was also circulated to those working with the content management system iCM.

Research Questions

The Website Manager provided questions to explore the current use of iCM and the end-to-end process for maintaining and editing content on the website and some broader questions around work works well/not so well, what value the website could add and what this would look like. A full list of the questions can be found in Discovery Questions Summary document.

Approach/tools

- Three workshops were held to explore the views of 18 members of staff in relation to the current website and how well it enables service delivery for their customers. Furthermore, giving them an opportunity to think about their needs and expectations for a new website. These workshops will be referred to as "wider staff workshops".
- Three workshops were held to explore the views of 18 members of staff who are responsible for reviewing and editing content. Identifying how this currently works for them, what works well and what works not so well, these workshops will be referred to as "Content Contributor workshops".
- Three workshops were held to explore the views of 14 elected Members in relation to what their customers want and need from our website. These workshops will be referred to as "Councillor workshops"
- The workshops were designed to draw out the individual views of attendees and a voting method was used to understand how they would prioritise the output from their point of view.
- Two sessions were held with the Communications Team to understand:
 - their views on the purpose of the website and how it should be developed in the future to support customers – output from this session will be referred to as "Communications Team Discussion"
 - how well the current iCM system enables them to do their job as the "Publishing Team" – output from this session will be referred to as "Publishing Team workshop"

- A survey gathered 22 iCM users' views on the updating of the website, their support arrangements and future website improvements.

Findings

Finding: *There were strong similarities in the output from each of the workshops and staff largely shared views of what is most important for us to get right.*

Tables 2, 3 and 4 show the output from the workshops, there was some crossover in the groupings identified during the workshops and for the purpose of identifying high level themes, for this report, these have been combined in some instances.

Whilst there were 12 different themes raised in both the wider staff workshops and in the content contributor workshops, and 16 different themes raised in the Councillor workshops, when looking at the full data set it is clear some themes had greater discussion and more views attributed to them. As you would expect there was a strong correlation between the amount of discussion on a theme and whether it was prioritised.

Table 2: Wider staff workshop output

Theme	Frequency of theme	Prioritised
Self Service	3	2
Navigation & Style	3	2
Administration	3	
Integration	2	1
Quality Content	2	1
Promoting our brand	1	1
Interactive Features	1	
Reflects customer needs	1	
Tailored information for customers	1	
Visible information/tasks	1	
Automation/tools for us	1	
Providing Leadership	1	

Table 3: Content Contributors workshop output

Theme	Frequency of theme	Prioritised
ICM usability	3	2
Approval Process	3	2
Quality of Content	3	2
Reminders	2	
Style	2	
Understanding Customer Expectations	1	1
Web team support	1	1
Limited Access to design functions	1	
System Access	1	
Integration	1	
Content Management	1	
Site not tailored to customer	1	

Table 4: Publishing Team workshop output

Theme	Prioritised
Visual Editor Tools	Priority No.1
Finding stuff	Priority No.2
Workload Management	Priority No.3
System Admin	
Notifications	
Platform Control	
Familiarity	
Visual/Content Style	

Table 5: Councillors workshop output

Theme	Frequency of theme	Prioritised
Quality Online/Digital Services	3	3
Usability/Navigation	2	2
User-friendly/Visual Design	3	1
Engaging/Quality Content	2	1
Access to Service Information	1	1
Customer Service Account	1	1
Signposting/Related Services	3	
Online Assistance/Interaction	2	
Access to Council Information	1	
Interactivity/Engagement	1	
Search Engine Presence	1	
Site Speed	1	
Multi-platform presence	1	
App	1	
Accessibility	1	
Residents Feedback	1	

Wider Staff workshops: findings

Finding: *We do not know if we are meeting the customer needs with the current website.*

Managers felt they were not well positioned to understand how well the website is meeting their customer needs, some clearer measures would be beneficial with automated reports to inform the work and design. There was a view that the feedback they currently receive through the “did you find what you were looking for?” survey does not always provide quality feedback.

Did you find what you were looking for?

Yes

No

Submit

Finding: *All Services should, where appropriate, offer end-to-end digital services to their customers yet currently only high demand Services appear to be prioritised.*

There are already some services delivering great self-service options for their customers, reference was made to Payments, In my Area, and Waste related demands. However, there was a shared view that more should be available to customers digitally and a concern that smaller customer groups struggle to be prioritised for this development work.

Finding: *There is potential to improve how interactive the website is for customers.*

Some staff suggested that many digital tools are available that might improve user access or experience by offering interactive features or alternative media formats. Suggestions included webcasting, live chat and video briefings.

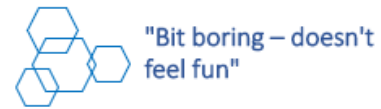
Finding: *The website should have good integration with back end systems to enable true end-to-end digital processes.*

Whilst staff recognised that the integration with back end systems is not visible to customers it is key in ensuring work is processed efficiently. Lack of integration can create processes that start online but require staff to re-key or re-work information, this ‘waste work’ could be removed with end-to-

end process integration. Integration limitations can also limit what the customer can do online, even if they are unaware of these limitations.

Finding: *The website's visual appearance is dated and finding information is difficult.*

Many attendees felt the website was very local government in appearance, with a suggestion that there should be more flexibility in the layout and look of the pages dependent on the user need. Largely, staff thought there was too much information on the website, and it is difficult to find what you are looking for; it is not intuitive.



Content contributor workshops and iCM user survey: Findings

These two feedback sources have been pooled due to the common focus and audience.

Finding: *The editorial process needs to be more transparent, wider staff need to be more informed with a clearer understanding to remove perceived inconsistencies.*

Many attendees were complimentary of the Publisher team, there was a clear appreciation for their contribution to the process of maintaining content and some clear understanding that under the current circumstances they do well with limited staff.



Staff raised concerns that the editorial process is not transparent, often changes are made to content without discussion with content contributors. This creates frustration, impedes learning of wider staff and can affect the content online therefore impacting user experience.

There was also a perception that some content by-passes the approval process and goes live without any input from the Publisher team.

Finding: *Lack of Publisher team availability impacting delivery of both higher and lower priority work.*

Staff are understanding of the Publisher team working with limited resources and perceive them as under-resourced. The associated delays in receiving support for new content, approval of updates etc, is frustrating for staff. Whilst this was a general issue identified by many workshop attendees there was a shared view that urgent, priority work is managed well and quickly. Some users responding to the survey however felt some urgent changes take too long.

Finding: *Attitudes towards content ownership and control varied with some preferring a centralised approach and others preferring greater freedom through decentralisation.*

There was wide recognition of the value of keeping the website internally consistent and that this is largely achieved at present through centralised editorial control. In terms of content ownership, there was significant variation in feedback. Some wanted more freedom and control over their content, suggesting they could do more web editing if they had the relevant permissions. Whilst others felt it would be more beneficial for someone else to take sole ownership and management of all content.



It was not clear whether the facility available to remind staff to update their content is being utilised effectively, many people felt the reminders were 'excessive' and frustrating at times.

Finding: *Whilst having quality content was consistently identified as a priority, there were varying views on how and if the current process enables them to deliver this.*

There was a clear message from staff that the measure of quality content should be linked to user needs, however there was a shared view between both the Publisher Team and wider staff that there are often difficulties in balancing communicating the right message/information in a way that is “customer friendly”. The wider staff suggested the simplicity applied by the Publisher team sometimes changes the meaning of the content and therefore loses its quality.

Some attendees liked that the content is structured in a very clear and uniform way which provides a consistent look and feel to the website, whilst others felt there needed to be more flexibility in the way content can be displayed in order to meet different user needs.

Some specific areas of the website were identified as having great content, such as parking fees and charges and in my area. The wider staff also appreciated the check by the Communications Team on grammar and punctuation.

Finding: *The iCM system is not user friendly, attendees feel frustrated by the process of updating their content.*

The iCM system was consistently described as ‘clunky’, the different interfaces for editing various types of content make it difficult for content contributors. In addition, staff had difficulties with specific design functions such as adding tables, links, pictures and documents - staff attributed this largely to their infrequent use of the system and therefore limited knowledge/practice. A small number of staff found it straightforward to use, especially formatting functions.



"Clunky and laborious process for updating content/editorial approval"

Finding: *Most iCM users feel they update content frequently enough, but this frequency varies from weekly updating to annual/bi-yearly updates.*

There is significant variation in how often updates are considered required, both between users but also between pages updated by the same user. The drivers of update frequency are not identical for all users. Some users handle information that can change rapidly and urgently, some have very static information and some a mix. The current pandemic is noted to have increased the rate of changes for many, but not all users.

Finding: *User and editorial priorities when using language are at times in disagreement.*

Users at times must communicate information where the form of words is crucial, such as concerning legal matters, and precise terminology is a higher priority than simplicity for the reader. This can be at odds with editorial objectives of readability for website users. This aspect of the editorial process is considered in need of improvement.

Finding: *Greater online interactivity and integration between systems was a common desire for the future.*

Many improvements in this area were suggested, all with the aim of allowing users to do more themselves online: save-able online forms instead of PDFs; improved access to service data; improved integration of the website and back office systems; improved flow of information between platforms, such as between the website and social media.

Communications Team Discussion: Findings

Finding: *The devolved model of managing content is flawed due to wider staff engagement and limited skills in web editing.*

The level of participation from wider staff varies considerably however there was a perceived lack of interest and non-prioritisation of web maintenance, this may be linked to a lack in confidence or skills however this lack of skill seems to be apparent immediately after staff are trained.

A shared view that the model would work well if there was engagement from staff, however there currently appears to be no clear concept on demonstrable practice of ownership and in some services the Web and Communications team manage the content, the team feel this goes unnoticed and is not respected.

Finding: *We have no clear standards in place to enable services to be held accountable for their responsibility to maintain content.*

The quality standards for content are not clearly defined in a way that allows services to be held to account. Instead, the Publisher team provides guidance and practice quality control to bring the content up to quality before release.

Finding: *The coordination of communications across multiple platforms is not understood by wider staff and therefore requests for support are not given the time and consideration required.*

It is important to consider the delivery of communication across multiple platforms and the website is usually the anchor for content to be distributed on other channels, such as social media. Whilst trying to deliver effective communication to customers using their best practices, the Communications Team are often left with limited time to do the best job or they feel they disappoint wider staff due to the requirement for 'excess' work.

Publishing Team workshop: Findings

Finding: *The iCM system does not provide effective functionality to find content.*

The iCM system has become cumbersome after 10 years of use and minimal maintenance, the Publishing Team often experience difficulties in locating content and the search facility is ineffective in supporting this process. This was prioritised as the most important aspect of a content management system to support their work.

Finding: *iCM provides some effective visual editor tools.*

The Publishing Team liked the use of WYSIWYG to visually see how the page will look on the website. In addition, overall the team were positive about the templates on offer through iCM and the system highlighting the content that has been edited in order to focus attention to only those sections is helpful.

Finding: *iCM offers some good functionality to help the Publishing Team with workload management however a broader understanding of the approval process across the organisation is required to support this further.*

The Publishing Team use the approval queue to help manage their workload and they find the approval notes very useful. There was a shared view that the approval process is not transparent to

all and often 'Approval Managers' add delay to the process which can then impact the context of the content.

Councillor workshops: Findings

Finding: *Customers want/need access to quality online/digital services.*

In all three Councillor workshops great discussion was held around the requirement for online services, all three workshops also prioritised this as one of the most important things for us to get right when designing the website. Councillors believe users want the ability to access services 24 hours a day, they are often looking to fulfil a transaction with us and we should be able to deliver that in one go.

Finding: *Customers want/need a website that is easy to use and navigate.*

There was clear consensus from Councillors that users want to find things quickly, with as few clicks as possible. Suggestions such as organising content in alphabetical order were made to improve usability along with a "Remember me" function to prevent customer input of details at future visits. There was a shared view that the website should be designed to facilitate navigation to the 'priority', highest used pages.

Finding: *The visual appearance/design of the website should be user-friendly.*

The visual design of the website was discussed in all three Councillor workshops, suggestions the website should be simple, engaging and clean, in order to enable customers to find what they are looking for easily.

Finding: *The website must effectively signpost to other related services.*

There was wide recognition that the website must signpost and link effectively to other authorities, partners and related services. Councillors expressed views that the split in responsibilities between the Local and County Council is not clear to users and the website should provide resources and links to help with this. In addition to this, Councillors believe users want to be signposted to other news and social media accounts where they are providing information specifically relevant to the area.

External user discovery

This area of discovery work will explore experiences and views of members of the public. Participant recruitment is primarily focused on those using the website and/or council services via other channels. Covid-19 and social distancing measures have required significant changes to the approach to external user discovery.

Research Questions

The Website Manager provided questions exploring the views of customers on their current experience of the website and their expectations for a new website (see Discovery Questions Summary.doc). The initial set of questions were as follows:

What do people want / expect from the website?

How easy is it for users to find what they need?

How do users look for information?

Why do people choose to use, or not use, the website?

Where / when do people use the site?

What do people find easy / hard?

What do people value about the website as a channel?

When does the navigation / search / layout work for/hinder them?

What do customers want from our new website? Focussed on design and functional requirements

Top things customers want to do on our website

Approach /tools

The initial research plan intended to seek out a broad range of research participants, with the aim of including not just existing website users but also council service users who preferred other channels such as phone or face-to-face contact. Unfortunately, social distancing unavoidably limited participation in this research to online or telephone channels. The research team offered a telephone only route throughout the process to include any participants for whom the online route was not an option.

The research approach consisted of:

- An online survey promoted via the website, social media, Arena magazine and community groups. This aimed to capture a large response with a mix of quantitative and qualitative data exploring the questions and themes set out above. This survey also provided an entryway to participation in research interviews.
 - 152 responses were received.
- 1-2-1 interviews with members of the public, recruited via the online survey or through telephone contact with Customer Services. These interviews came in two formats:
 - Via telephone in which a researcher would explore in-depth the participant's experience and feelings towards our website and online access to services in general.
 - Via an online Microsoft Teams meeting in which a researcher observed the user completing set tasks utilising the website. Each session aimed to cover 8 to 10 tasks. These tasks required the user to access the website and seek out information or reach the point of accessing a service. Researchers focused on understanding the participant's actions and decision-making, as well as capturing their general experience and feelings towards the website. (See list of online research user tasks in appendix II)
 - 25 online and 5 telephone interview research sessions were completed.
 - Telephone and online research interviews were consensually recorded; participants were remunerated with a £20 or £30 e-voucher respectively.

The following findings are based upon a combination of data captured, first-hand accounts from participating members of public and observations made by the research team while conducting user research sessions.

Notes on research participation

The research team recognised that public participation in the research would, by nature of the subject and methods, likely see a higher responses rate from some groups than others. For instance, anyone already choosing not to use the website was unlikely to participate, despite our desire to understand why that might be and how that might change. We were able to speak to participants identifying as having an illness, impairment or disability that affects their use of the web and others for whom English was not their first language but not in numbers that could be said to represent any group.

The data was reviewed for any obvious trends or groupings and any significant observations were reported as findings. Few such patterns appeared in the data. Two observations of note are given here as they give some context to the subsequent findings:

- There was notably higher response to the survey and interview stage from older residents:
 - Over half of survey and interview participants were over the age of 55;
 - Less than 10% of survey respondents were under 34;
 - 25% of interview participants were under the age of 34;
- Interview participants were asked if they'd used the services that they interacted with during the observed research sessions. Relatively few identified as service users:
 - In 147 observed tasks, in only 39 did participants identify as service users;
 - Nine participants used none of the services covered in the research.
 - Two participants used four services, this the most any reported using.

An overview of survey results is included in Appendix III of this report. Further results from user research interviews will be published in later supporting material.

Findings

The following findings have been grouped into related subsections.

Users

This section covers findings related to users themselves that impact their experience of the website.

***Finding:** The less people know about the council and its services, that harder it is for them to find things.*

Greater familiarity with the council, and thereby its structures and terminology, resulted in a more positive experience of the website. Unfamiliarity users were less likely to use effective key words in search and find the correct section of in-site navigation.

***Finding:** Users may not know which tier of Council, if any, deals with their issue.*

Many participants expressed surprise at information and services provided by the council. Similarly, many were at times unsure what was delivered at the district, county or central government or, it appeared, that these separate structures even exist. As a result, some user journeys took them to the gov.uk or hants.gov.uk sites.

***Finding:** Users need the keywords or navigation they are expecting and/or looking for to be worded from their perspective.*

Users think and search in terms of their own needs and context. At times the website does not describe what their looking for in such terms and so users 'miss' what they were looking for. For example, users wanting to 'tell the council about a change in earnings that might affect their benefits' did not relate to the correct in-site navigation option that read 'Changes that might affect your benefits'.

***Finding:** Users generally expect to have to do some work and even make mistakes when trying to find information online.*

Overall users self-reporting of satisfaction when trying to find things on our site was positive. When users were observed making navigation errors, such as passing through pages they did not want and/or having to retry navigation, they generally remained satisfied. When asked about this

apparent 'patience', users reported having an expectation to encounter such issues with websites in general.

Finding: *Individual circumstances, interests and preferences impact user's expectations, perceptions and contact with the website.*

While this research hasn't aimed to define what the site should do, it has found that views on this subject varied considerably amongst users participating in this research. Service users often saw the site as a first stop for service information and service contact details. Some users expected social media platforms, rather than the website, to provide news and changing service information. Some expected the site to be more of a community hub, regularly accessed for local news and group information such as volunteering opportunities. Some perceived the site and the Council as primarily functional and so never interacted with it unless some function/service was required. These perceptions are likely key in determining not just who frequently visits the site and why but also who voices views about the website.

Searching / Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

This section concerns the user experience using a search engine to reach our website. Search Engine Optimisation concerns designing/describing site content so that a search engine will select it as a top result for relevant user searches.

Finding: *The site SEO is effective in getting users to our site and users proficient with search engines generally had the most successful/positive outcomes with tasks.*

Nearly all users had the greatest success with any task when they searched with relevant keywords and were returned the correct pages from our site as top search engine results. The most successful users would also refine their searches when results didn't seem good enough.



53% of tasks starting with a search engine were completed successfully with no further navigation. (56 of 105 observed tasks)

Finding: *Where search results led a user to the home page of a higher-level hub page, rather than the destination page, the user experience was significantly more likely to be negative.*

While a rushmoor.gov.uk page results might have dominated a search results, many such results took users to pages from which they would need to navigation onwards to the page they needed. Once into the site and relying on in-site navigation, there was significant scope for navigation errors and poor user experience.



Tasked to find a specific contact number, all users landing directly on the right page has a positive experience. All users that needed in-site navigation had a negative experience.

4 out of 8 'change of circumstance' tasks were rated 'positive' and 'error-free'. All 4 reached the right landing page direct from the browser.

Finding: *Other sites signposting to rushmoor.gov.uk do not deliver users to the precise page they need and this typically gives a worse experience than coming direct to a specific page in our site.*

Gov.uk, for example, drew users in and effectively directed them to our site's homepage. Arriving at the homepage however was almost like being sent 'back to square one'. Their resulting journey navigating our site from the homepage led to a poorer experience than that of users arriving directly into the target page from their search engine.

Navigation

This section relates to the journey and experience of users on the website.

Finding: *Journeys where navigation goes via the homepage were notably worse than users landing on a hub or destination page.*

Where effective searching took users to a hub or destination page, users were more successful in locating the desired destination page. The navigation options available from the homepage were not as user-friendly and effective as searching, see more findings that refer to specific navigation tools.

Finding: *Main/top navigation and in-page links (including left navigation) were the clearly preferred means of navigation.*

Once on the website, users showed a strong preference to use the main/top navigation and in-page links over other navigation tools. Other navigation options were used rarely and largely as a fall back where the preferred means of navigation had failed to find them what they needed.

Finding: *Users are likely to dismiss/avoid options in the main/top navigation where it is not immediately apparent that it relates to what they want.*

As the previous finding explains, users generally look first at the main/top navigation (the dark bar shown right). If the wording of navigation options seemed irrelevant to their need, they may incorrectly dismiss them. For example, when looking for the Crematorium pages users did not expect to find these under the “Health and Support” section. Had they investigated the section, they would have found ‘crematorium’ listed (right).



After failing to locate the page using the top/main navigation, users were then likely to try other navigation options, such as site search or A-Z.

Finding: *Users’ choice of navigation was significantly influenced by its position on the page.*

Many users described the main/top navigation as being “within their eyeline” and “reading from left to right” therefore navigation located at the top of pages is more effective than for example the “Do it online” positioned further down the page. In addition, the left-hand navigation was more effective than the right-hand navigation and when the right-hand navigation was used, mostly as a last resort, the PDF/Buttons located at the top of this list were most effective.

Finding: *Users often go for what they find first that looks right, even if it is not the best choice on the page.*

Many users were observed to use the carousel due to its prominent positioning and the use of pictures, however in terms of what they were looking to find it was a red herring. For example, the “Managing your Rubbish” link does not take users to a page providing options for top tasks liked to rubbish, instead users are required to navigate further to their destination page.

Finding: *The right-hand navigation is ineffective, users often dismissing it assuming it is less relevant or contains external links/documents.*

Once on their destination pages, in general users were observed to scan down – customers often using it only when they have not located, quickly what they were looking for in the main body of text.

Finding: *Users value navigation menus that clearly display content so they can scan for keywords they are looking for, or spot key works they have not initially considered.*

Users were often positive where our site, or other sites, made it easy to see what came under a given navigation heading or ‘section’ of the website. While they may be unsure of the correct keyword to guide them, they valued being able to quickly review what a section of the site contained and determine a suitable step to take. Users felt this gave them transparency as to what was available, rather than fearing the thing they need may be buried under higher level ‘layers’ of the site.

Finding: *Buttons can be an effective navigation tool but positioning and usage is inconsistent.*

Users expressed clear preference for task buttons over in text links as they draw attention easily when scanning the page. There is no consistency with regards their location and usage, for example; the “How to pay your Council Tax” page features a button in the right-hand navigation and an in text link within the main body of text. In comparison, the “Parking fines” page for example, uses buttons within text and in the right-hand navigation. These inconsistencies mean users do not know where to look to find buttons.

Pay your parking fine online

You can pay your parking fine online by credit or debit card:

Pay a parking fine ▶

Setting up a direct debit

If you are the only person needed to authorise a direct debit instruction, the easiest way to set up a direct debit on your bank account is to use our [direct debit set-up](#) web page.

Visual design

This section concerns the impact of the website’s presentation on users.

Finding: *Most users were positive about the use of colour, images and the ‘formality’ of the site but felt it could be modernised.*

Survey proposition: *I like the way the website looks.*



Agree 45%
Neutral 39%
Disagree 16%

Strongly negative feedback on presentation in the survey concerned largely problems with navigation and content. During interviews a frequent comment was that the site ‘looked dated’.

Finding: *Buttons are an effective visual draw for users looking for an action, but their colour scheme added no value.*

Where users saw buttons matching their needs, they were confident that it would lead to an action (i.e. to make a payment, submit a request, etc). The varied button colour scheme however was not intuitive.

Finding: *Users liked aspects of the ‘clean, crisp’ design of the gov.uk and the ‘Check you are registered to vote’ elections page.*

While the gov.uk site was once described as ‘too clinical’, the visual design of these pages appealed to people by having fewer visual elements with clear context. Positive elements were the larger headers and clear, simple ‘Start now’ button.

Finding: *Dynamic page layouts were not effective on all screen types, resulting in some poor presentation/user experience.*

As the site attempts to resize and shape content for screens ranging from mobiles to widescreen monitors. Some presentations created overly long lists, such as where hub pages were compressed for mobile; also, expanses of ‘barren’ white space on widescreen/landscape monitors. Users found these frustrating and/or unattractive. Presentation of 3rd party systems, such as the payment interface, on mobile was particularly bad as pages failed to resize leaving key elements of screen.

Content

This section relates to users experience of pages presenting content and the content itself.

Finding: *Users have more success when the first content on a page clarifies what they can do or find on the page.*

When users arrived on a page that immediately made clear what that page was about, they were more likely to ‘stick with’ the page and successfully find what they wanted. Conversely, if they were unsure about the relevance of the page, they were more likely to skim or overlook the content they needed and leave the page. In other words, once a user believes they are on the right page they switch from ‘looking for the right part of the site’ to ‘looking for the right piece of content’. The inverse is also true: if the *wrong* page looks like the page they want then they are *less* likely to leave and find the correct page.

Finding: *Users scan content for links, buttons and quick navigation.*

Users would scroll through large bodies of text looking for keywords in links or buttons that might take them to the thing they want. This form of skimming was successful in helping users find/navigate to the action or page they wanted. Frequently this meant they would find navigation options within the text content that they had ignored/overlooked higher up the page in the right-hand navigation.

Finding: *Users expect the site to prioritise high use/importance content, but this should not get in the way of accessing other content.*

Pushed messages, such information on Covid, at times crowded the page to the extent that desired content was pushed down and off-screen, in at least one incident leading a user to dismiss the page. ‘Top tasks’, as noted elsewhere, were effectively just ‘clutter’ for users who didn’t need them. In terms of in-page content this could manifest as the content the user wanted being very far down a page; this may have been because it was not considered as ‘important’ or because the page had a different logic to ordering but the rationale was not always clear to the user.

Finding: *The inclusion of links/buttons in text and the right-hand column is not consistent across the site.*

In some pages, ‘task buttons’ appear in both the main text content and the right-hand navigation column; in other pages these buttons would only appear in the right-hand column; others still had

buttons in the main text but not in the right column; sometimes hyperlinks were used where a button would be expected. Also, the subsections in the right-hand column varied between pages. This content was not consistent for the user and affected where users expected content to be. Often this led users to focus on the main text/content and ignore the right column entirely.

***Finding:** Large amounts of information delivered in PDFs were unpopular.*

While no task required users to access a PDF, several users either encountered PDFs or commented on them independently. Their view on PDFs was much like their approach to the site: it should be easy to quickly determine if what they are looking for is in the thing they are looking at. To that end one user suggested providing a non-PDF summary of each PDF. Observing users who ventured into PDFs saw them skimming content in similar style to a site page.

***Finding:** Some users expect content via social media platforms and but find that a very mixed experience at present.*

Some social media users noted they would rarely ever get information from the website and would expect it via the social media platforms they use to follow the council. This includes information on service disruption and examples were given of effective communication of such messages via social media. There were also examples of ineffective communication, such as our posting links into Instagram where those links do not work.

Accessibility

Specific accessibility related findings:

***Finding:** The site failed a user utilising a screen reader.*

A visually impaired screen reader user attempted to use a carousel link as part of a task. The link on that carousel sets what the carousel displays without taking the user further. This meant the screen reader went on to read the adjacent 'news' articles on the page while leaving the user stranded neither at the page the link should have reached nor able to determine the problem.

Aggregate findings & recommendations

The following findings and recommendations are made based upon assessment of the findings of all research streams.

Finding: *The wording of the sections, services and information in the site could still be improved to aid search engine optimisation and the user's journeys within the site.*

The observed user experience was significantly better when users arrived on the right page of our site direct from the search engine. Key to this is that the form of words a user puts into their search engine being a good match to the wording used on the destination page in our site. Similarly, if the user's wording of their need did not match or relate well to our wording then the user's in-site journey would suffer. Good wording combined both picking out relevant keywords but also describing things from a user's perspective.

Recommendation: The wording of content, navigation and services should reflect the language user's use and the user's context to improve both SEO and the in-site user experience.

Finding: *Navigation is excessive, confusing and out-of-step with how users currently find information on the website.*

There is widespread comment and data suggesting the current navigation is often excessive, confusing, over-elaborate, redundant or un-used in practice. User observations showed users value a smaller number of effective navigation options over a larger array of options that are much more hit-and-miss. There is also clear evidence that users use multiple platforms and tools outside of our website to reach the website.

Recommendations:

- Simplify website navigation and design around observed user behaviour and preferences, where appropriate, responding to service specific patterns of behaviour.
- Take a holistic approach to helping users find information and digital services that treats the website as part of a wider system of digital platforms.
- Further research how dynamic content and platforms, such as digital news articles and social media, affect website usage.

Finding: *The site is burdened by the large volume of content & pages, many of which see relatively little use, with impacts on both users and support staff.*

The volume of pages and content was observed to have a range of impacts:

- The site navigation becomes more extensive and visually complicated, with clear impacts on the user experience.
- Content heavy pages, presented as large amounts of text, are off-putting for users who may as a result skim read and overlook information.
- Maintenance of pages feels less controlled and proportionate.
- The editorial approach is geared towards ensuring general quality and consistency at scale.

This 'burden' may be justified by value the volume of pages and content adds but a majority view was that the volume of pages and content should be minimised where possible.

Recommendation: Site pages and content should be minimised and organised to avoid negative impacts of volume on user experience and site management.

Finding: *Some services have clear, predictable patterns of usage responding to knowable events/triggers.*

There is clear data suggesting that service specific traffic increases and decreases in predictable patterns. These patterns are typically obvious to customer facing staff and respond to known events of cyclic or reactive nature (I.e. Council tax billing or bin disruption respectively).

Recommendation: Website design investigates how service users' online experience can be improved by responding to known patterns of usage and trigger events.

Finding: *Website design should be responsive to changing customer needs.*

Internal research and customer feedback indicated strong support for placing customer needs be at the centre of the website design and indicated that we currently are not sighted on how well we are meeting these needs. Customer needs cannot be discerned from the current levels and scope of day-to-day user-initiated feedback. Data research gave a similarly uncertain picture of satisfaction of customer needs. There are opportunities to improve the capture and analysis of site usage data to improve our understanding of user needs and changing demand.

Recommendations:

- We should have more continuous engagement with service customers and site users to understand change needs and improve our website offering.
- We should seek to involve users through website improvement work and build in user need fulfilment measures into any data capture approach.

Finding: *Site style and design needs to be modernised.*

There was clear consensus that the look and feel of the website is dated and has too much information.

Recommendation: The sites visual style and design should be modernised.

Finding: *There is a clear expectation that the site will signpost to other organisations and authorities without wrongly drawing users to our site in the process.*

Users, members and staff all recognised the need and value of signposting where users already on our site require services provided by a different/3rd party. The research did not directly test how this works. However, user interview observations demonstrated users' difficulties at time in determining the correct organisation to visit and navigating signposting tools.

Recommendation: Investigate improvements to signposting, both of users directed from our site to other organisations but also of users redirected from other government site to our own.

Finding: *The GOSS platform will present design choices and potential restrictions that will have mid-term implications for our website offering and the user experience.*

Our aspirations for the website suggest we will use features of the platform we are as yet unfamiliar with. We also expect to use new and existing tools and systems in new ways. There is an expectation that this process will involve decisions with potential short to medium term implications that may have significant effects on user's experience of the website. These design choices and their implications are expected to affect what we deliver for our customers online and how flexible our website is for a number of years.

Recommendation: Take an agile approach to development of new website capabilities and ensure we have mid-term tactical view of our technology to support short-term decision making.

Finding: *There is a lack of understanding across the organisation of website performance.*

There is demand for understanding of our website's performance from both the support and service delivery perspectives. The success of user engagement across services and channels requires good data from our web platform. The web is also well suited to providing real time data on user contact and changing demand. There is scope for much greater leverage of the tools we currently use. There is a lack of clarity and prioritisation as to what the required outcomes and objectives of the current implementation.

Recommendation: Discover what the Services and the Web Team need to know about the performance of the website and how those needs can be met.

Finding: *The website should be providing more end-to-end services for customers.*

Some Services have digital services available for customers however there was a general feeling held by internal staff that this should be expanded, with greater integration with back end systems to avoid waste work, and potentially improving how interactive the website is for customers by exploring digital options such as webcasting and web chat.

Recommendation: Explore expectations with service users to understand their digital needs. Be clearly sighted on how the new website will integrate with back end systems and portals and explore alternative digital media options when a user need is identified.

Finding: *There is widespread recognition of existing issues with the current devolved method for managing content.*

It is clear the current editorial process has significant room for improvement, around aspects such as the transparency of editing, delay in approval and staff training. There are mixed views on how content should be managed in the future, some staff felt restricted currently and that they could do more given permission, whilst others would prefer to hand sole ownership to a Publisher team.

Peer councils spoken to have had similar experiences and are moving from devolved arrangements to centralised control.

Recommendation: The approach to content management and the amount of editorial control required, should be reviewed.

Appendices

Appendix I | Appendix Research questions posed by the team

Area **Data discovery**

Q's How do people find information on our site? (do people use the search?)

What content is most/least viewed?

What do people use the site for?

Customer Web Feedback

How accessible is the site at present?

With Google analytics; web manager; 3rd party portals(?)

Method Data mining & analysis

Output User behaviour; user groups / audiences; site performance; further questions

Area **Platform discovery**

Q's How is the new platform different to the existing?

What changes to the website does this platform require?

What constraints or obstacles does the platform present?

What aspects of the platform will impact the user experience?

Who supports the platform and what are their needs?

How does content management differ in the new platform?

With Web manager, Developers, GIS team, GOSS, other GOSS users

Method Interviews, workshops, desk research

Output User needs

Design considerations

Questions

Area **Internal user discovery**

Q's Questions (consider both perspectives of service providers and service users):

What does a successful website look like to you?

How do you / would you like to measure that success?
 What works / doesn't work now?
 What can / can't your users / service users do?
 How does / could the website add value?

With Comms, CS, Content providers, Service leaders

Method Workshop, interviews, task observation

Output User needs, business needs, digital needs, personas, processes

Area External user discovery

Q's Who is our site relevant to?
 What does a successful website look like to you?
 What works / doesn't work now?
 What can / can't your users / service users do?
 How does / could the website add value?

With Public groups / individuals.

Method Interview, observations, workshops, tools

Output User needs, access needs, personas, journey maps

Appendix II | List of online research user tasks

Scenario / task	Number observed
Find a contact for car boot sales	16
Find local planning applications	12
Recycling item query	12
Challenge a parking fine	11
Help with an unhelpful landlord	10
Find your local councillor	10
Setup a Council Tax direct debit	10
Check your bins collection dates	9
Report a change affecting benefits	8
Find Aldershot Regeneration info	8

Find TPO lists or local plan applications	8
Check the date of a funeral	8
Pay Council tax online	8
Find council job vacancies	7
Other (various)	5
Check your registered to vote	5

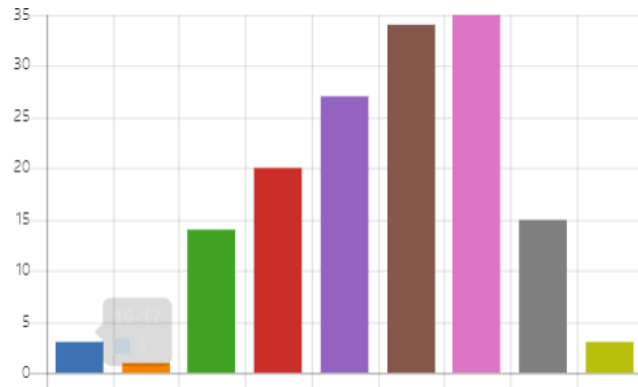
Appendix III | Public website user survey results overview

The graphics below cover a range of quantitative data captured in the public ‘Rushmoor Borough Council website research survey’:

What is your age group?

[More Details](#)

16-17	3
18-24	1
25-34	14
35-44	20
45-54	27
55-64	34
65-74	35
75+	15
Rather not say	3



Where do you live?

[More Details](#)

Aldershot	55
Farnborough	86
North Camp	8
Outside Rushmoor	3



Is English your first language?

[More Details](#)

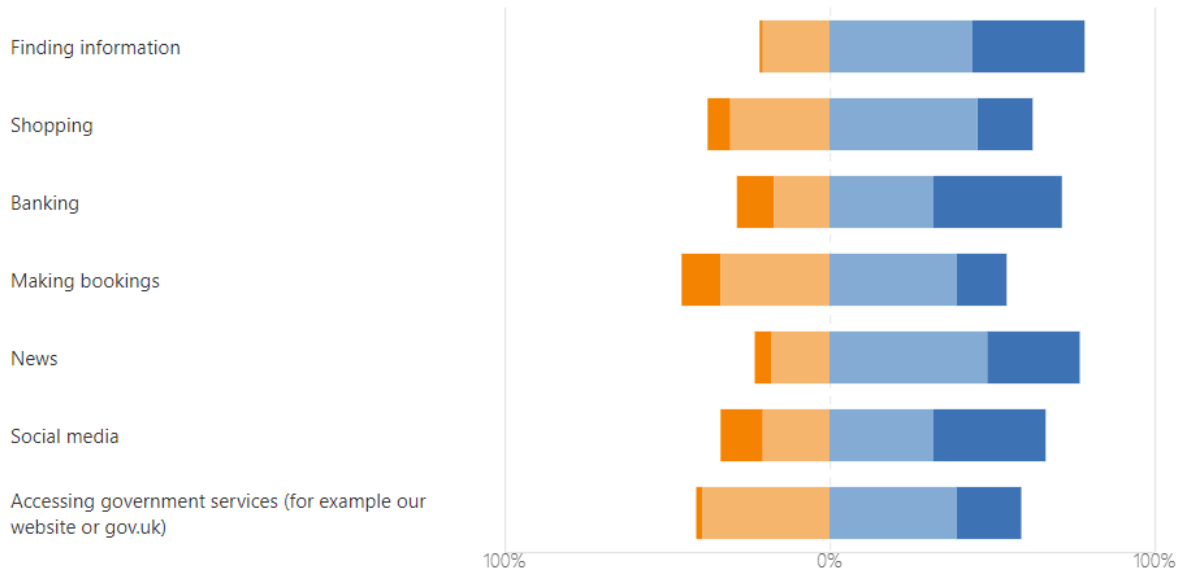
Yes	144
No	7
Rather not say	1



How often do you use the following types of online services?

[More Details](#)

■ Never
 ■ Sometimes
 ■ Often
 ■ Always



Do you have an illness, impairment or disability that affects the way you use the web?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	9
● No	139
● Rather not say	4



How often do you have contact with us? This includes visits to our website or offices and contact by phone or email.

[More Details](#)

● Daily	5
● Weekly	14
● Monthly	37
● A few times a year	90
● Never	6



Where do you use our website?

[More Details](#)

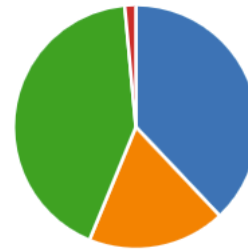
● At home	133
● At work	25
● Out and about	25



What device do you usually use to access our website?

[More Details](#)

● Mobile / smartphone	52
● Tablet	25
● Laptop / personal computer	58
● Other	2



Looking at following statements about our website, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with them:

[More Details](#)

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Don't know

