

Agenda Item No:

Report No:

Report Title:

Locally Sorted – a digital platform for collaboration in Lewes District

Report To: Cabinet

Date: 24th April 2014

Cabinet Member: Cllr. R. Blackman

Ward(s) Affected: All

Report By: Nazeya Hussain, Director of Business Strategy and Development

Contact Officer(s)-

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Purpose of Report:

To request Cabinet approval to develop a digital platform for Lewes District to provide a simple-to-use forum for residents, community organisations, businesses, Councillors and staff to participate in democratic activities and community engagement. The working title for the platform is “Locally Sorted.”

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1** To authorise a procurement process to invite tenders to co-develop the digital platform with the community and the Council;
- 2** To note that the costs of developing and implementing the platform cannot be accurately estimated at this stage of the project, as explained in section 9 of this report;
- 3** To note that a further report to Cabinet will recommend whether to proceed to award the contract, based on a cost-benefit analysis of the tenders received.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 1** To support the localism and community engagement elements of Programme Nexus and the [Principles of Local Participation](#) adopted in November 2012 by providing a digital platform to enable networking by users (including the Council), fostering opportunities for collaboration, community engagement and wider participation in democratic activities.

Information

2 Programme Nexus

- 2.1 Programme Nexus sets a strategic framework in which the Principles of Local Participation can become embedded in our developing culture of innovation, openness and networking.
- 2.2 One of the three promises that the Council made through Programme Nexus was to connect with our workforce and partners to inspire exceptional contribution. This involves a new approach to citizen participation and community engagement.
- 2.3 In considering the Nexus Programme – One Year On report of 13th February 2013, Cabinet acknowledged that Programme Nexus will change the way the Council does things; changing its mind-set and becoming an outward-looking and customer-focused organisation (Minute 138).
- 2.4 On 6th January 2014, Cabinet agreed seven principles to guide the transformation programme and move to a new model of working based on end-to-end customer service (Minute 106.1). Principle 4 is to take a proactive approach to reaching out to customers across the district using a variety of networks and working with other organisations, to ensure that the Council is inclusive. The proposed digital platform would enable such networking and support the work of the Director of Business Strategy and Development and the other Directors.

3 Principles of Local Participation

- 3.1 In adopting these Principles in November 2012, the Council acknowledged that “creating the environment and culture to promote localism is one of the key goals of Programme Nexus. The Council’s strategy looks to devolve decisions and funding to local communities and citizens where possible. An essential element of localism is the creation of good structures for participation. Localism without good participation can decrease the accountability of services, and reduce the ability of citizens to understand how and why decisions are being taken,” (Minute 98).

4 Democratic Conversations

- 4.1 Cabinet decided at its meeting of 30th May 2012 to adopt a Democratic Conversations Action Plan (Minute 21) as part of its commitment to promote new forms of democratic and civic conversation in our area, so we keep in touch better with local people.

Locally Sorted

5 Proposals for “Locally Sorted”

- 5.1 It is intended to develop a digital platform for Lewes District to provide a simple-to-use forum for residents; businesses; community groups;

councillors and the Council. It will enable networking by users, fostering opportunities for community action and wider participation in democratic activities.

- 5.2** The platform will facilitate democratic activities such as discussions; surveys and consultations, and has the potential to support community engagement activities such as crowd-sourcing; publicity for local events and highlighting opportunities for getting involved. The platform could also foster entrepreneurship in the area by supporting networking and highlighting local business opportunities.
- 5.3** Users (both individuals and organisations) will be able to create a profile, and the aim is that the platform can personalise content to suit their interests and geographical location.
- 5.4** The site will have its own brand identity but will feature links to useful sites such as lewes.gov.uk. The platform could be expanded to signpost other service hubs such as ESCC, gov.uk, NHS, Volunteer Centre East Sussex and town and parish council websites, and to inform participants of a wide range of elected officials and how to contact them in the future.
- 5.5** It is intended that the platform will be hosted separately to the Council's existing website and future digital service hub. The specification for the development of the platform will include a requirement for an agile approach and W3C open standards. (The World Wide Web Consortium, W3C, is the main international standards organisation for the World Wide Web.) This approach will mean that the platform is developed in collaboration with potential users and that design decisions will not preclude future updates and growth.
- 5.6** An inaugural workshop was held in Seaford on April 9th 2014 to enable public participation from the earliest stages of the design of the platform. The project will be run in accordance with principles set out in the draft Ambition document (Appendix A). A final version of the Ambition will be prepared, taking into account feedback from the public at the workshop.

6 Relationship to other initiatives

- 6.1** This is an innovative project and so it has not so far been possible to find parallel initiatives in the UK. However, there are examples of sites that perform some of the functions that could be incorporated into "Locally Sorted." For example, York City Council posts policy challenges online at [Genius York](#) for local residents to discuss and suggest amendments; [Better Reykjavik](#) enables residents to post their own ideas for service development; and [Write to Them](#) is a site that connects constituents with their elected representatives.
- 6.2** The digital platform will be co-developed with residents, businesses and the voluntary and community sector at every stage, in order to ensure that it provides added value; is simple to use; avoids duplication and complements rather than replaces existing initiatives and networks.

7 Benefits expected from the project

- 7.1** Councillors will benefit from greater democratic participation; easier communication with constituents and early identification of issues that are of concern to residents, voluntary and community groups and businesses.
- 7.2** All participants will benefit from networking, enabling users to come together to discuss and resolve issues; share resources and ideas and obtain information about opportunities and services.
- 7.3** Residents and businesses will benefit from signposting of services; information about local issues; easier opportunities to input into the development of services and policies and enhanced awareness of opportunities for community engagement.
- 7.4** The voluntary and community sector will benefit from the opportunity to share expertise and highlight opportunities for volunteering or support.
- 7.5** The Council will benefit from an interactive means of communication with residents, businesses and the voluntary and community sector from which to gain feedback on existing services; ideas for innovation and opportunities to facilitate community initiatives.

8 Timescale

- 8.1** A procurement exercise to appoint a partner organisation to deliver the project in collaboration with the Council and the community will be undertaken. The most economically advantageous tender will be sought.
- 8.2** The results of the procurement process will be subject to a cost-benefit analysis prior to a Cabinet decision being taken whether to proceed to award the contract.
- 8.3** The aim is to produce at least a first module of the platform by March 2015.

9 Financial Appraisal

- 9.1** The cost of the inaugural workshop has already been funded through the Strategic Priority Fund.
- 9.2** Due to the collaborative nature of the project, it is difficult at this stage to estimate costs. There may be both capital and revenue costs (the latter to cover ongoing site maintenance, development and potential licensing costs). As part of the tender process, tenderers will be expected to demonstrate how they will seek to attract external funding to ensure the sustainability of the project. At this stage, it is not anticipated that European Union procurement thresholds will be exceeded.
- 9.3** The tender process will define the costs of developing the digital platform and the community engagement work associated with it. A recommendation will then be made to Cabinet about whether to award a

contract to any of the tenderers, based on an analysis of the costs and benefits of the platform.

10 Legal Implications

10.1 The Legal Services Department has made the following comments: “The procurement process should be carried out in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules (Part 4 of the Constitution). Where the proposed contract is likely to exceed the EU threshold the procurement must follow an EU compliant process. Legal Services will advise on the correct process.”

11 Sustainability Implications

11.1 I have completed the Sustainability Implications Questionnaire and there are no significant effects as a result of these recommendations.

12 Risk Management Implications

12.1 A detailed risk register has been prepared for the project, and will be subject to ongoing review. Below is a summary of the main areas of risk and their mitigations.

Risk	Mitigation
Wrong technical choices for the platform will add costs to future developments.	The Head of IT will advise on the specification for the platform, which will follow open standards.
LDC information security will be compromised.	The platform will be hosted externally and will initially not exchange information with LDC systems – only a link to the website will be provided. Any future developments will comply with statutory and regulatory requirements, and ensure that customers’ information and the Council’s website and internal systems are protected.
Contractor does not meet contracted service standards.	Contract management procedures to be put in place.
Loss of or unauthorised access to personal information stored within the digital platform.	The Head of IT will advise on the specification and approach to building the platform.
There is a lack of engagement with the project from residents, businesses and the voluntary and community sectors.	The contract for the project will include engagement work which will build on existing links with all sectors of the community. Multiple forms of communication will be used to maintain momentum, including workshops; an online discussion forum; Twitter and email. The platform will be developed using an agile

	approach so that there are opportunities for collaboration at every stage.
Some residents will be excluded from participation because they are not digitally connected.	Digital connectedness in the District is currently 88%. The Equalities Officer will advise the project on inclusion, and the digital platform will supplement rather than replace traditional methods of consultation and community engagement. It is hoped that the digital platform will widen participation for some groups whose needs are not well met by traditional methods e.g. younger people; commuters.
The detailed specification will be difficult to develop because the project has an evolving vision; timescales are challenging; not all requirements have yet been revealed and assumptions have been made.	Consider a phased approach to procurement and develop the platform module by module.

13 Equality Screening

13.1 An equality analysis screening report has been completed and the issues it identified have been addressed through the collaborative approach to the project and steps to mitigate the risk of some residents being excluded because they are not digitally-connected.

14 Background Papers

Report to LDC Cabinet, 7 September 2011, Democratic Conversation in Lewes District (Report 144/11)

Report to LDC Cabinet, 30 May 2012, democratic conversation in Lewes District: outcome of public consultation and proposed action plan and budget for 2012-13 (Report 91/12)

Report to LDC Cabinet, 20 November 2012, Principles for Local Participation (Report 190/12)

Report to LDC Cabinet, 13 February 2013, Programme Nexus – One Year On (Report 30/13)

Report to LDC Cabinet, 6 January 2014, Proposals for restructuring to provide a customer focused organisation (Report 3/14)

15 Appendices

15.1 Appendix A – Ambition document (draft)