



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 10TH NOVEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: EXPANSION OF CITIZEN SERVICE ACCESS CHANNELS

**REPORT BY: HEAD OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY AND
PROPERTY SERVICES.**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to advise Members of the development of a pilot scheme providing an additional facility to allow citizens to access a set of council services via digital television and mobile telephones.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The ICT and Property Division has been assessing the potential to offer citizens an opportunity to access information and services via digital televisions and mobile telephones. This is being undertaken as part of a collaborative exercise with four neighbouring councils namely Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen County Borough Councils. The report highlights how the service would be delivered, a summary of the content proposed for inclusion and the potential of the medium to improve service accessibility.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The provision of new, more cost-effective and convenient service access channels for the citizen is a key element for ICT to underpin the service improvement and efficiencies agenda of the Authority.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The citizens of Caerphilly County Borough have a number of options through which they may access information and request services. Each of these channels has a different level of cost associated with their provision and the maximisation of a shift from more expensive to relatively low-cost channels is desirable in the current economic climate. A customer portal accessible via a digital television and mobile telephone is such a relatively low-cost channel and would offer the benefits of a system that is accessible 24 hour per day, 7 day per week.
- 4.2 The pilot is based upon a facility owned and managed by Kirklees Council. The service has been adopted by over 80 local authorities in the UK with participating organisations given the choice of administering their own content or subscribing to a bureau service where Kirklees Council runs an update service for the information supplied to them. Caerphilly would subscribe to the bureau service with its staff authorising and quality assuring all content prior to publication.
- 4.3 The content to be provided to the citizen would be cut-down versions of a sub-set of services and information, as detailed in Appendix 1, derived from our existing website assessed as

being the most appropriate for delivery via this medium following analysis of Caerphilly website usage and research of similar services provided by other local authorities. This approach will minimise the work required to maintain the service, maintain consistency across the access channels whilst maximising the potential impact of the service. Once live, content will be amended on a monthly basis although urgent changes will be applied with immediate effect.

- 4.4 Kirklees Council will provide management information regarding take-up and usage of the service on a monthly basis. This information would be used to assess the impact of the service and whether the sub-set of services and information needs to be revised to improve take-up and usage.
- 4.5 In addition to the Caerphilly-related services a number of national plug-ins including Job Centre Plus, Transport Direct (live bus and train times), GP Appointments (although Caerphilly has only one participating surgery thus far) and Community Legal Services. Such content is managed centrally and would have no resource impact upon Caerphilly.
- 4.6 The service will be made available based upon a soft launch ensuring the affected service areas were aware of this new channel limiting the initial publicity of the facility until the service has bedded in. Following this short quality assurance period an external marketing operation would be planned to maximise the use of the channel.
- 4.7 Kirklees Council has completed a draft based upon our specifications and this is available for demonstration. It is estimated that the necessary changes to bring the site up to date and incorporate any requested minor changes could be completed in three weeks.
- 4.8 Although the majority of funding is provided by WAG and the service provided by Kirklees Council, the site has been designed to ensure that as far as the public is concerned, Caerphilly CBC is delivering the service.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The pilot is being majority funded directly by the Making the Connections Team of the Welsh Assembly Government with each of the councils expected to contribute £2,000 per annum for a two-year period. At the end of this period there is a possibility that WAG will fund the project throughout Wales if the pilot proves to be successful. If this is not the case, each council will have the option to fund the service themselves thereafter with the estimated annual cost being £12,000.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no personnel implications to this report.

7. CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 Consultation has taken place and comments have been reflected in this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 It is recommended that the contents of this report be noted.

9. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To expand the options through which citizens may access Caerphilly County Borough Council services and information in a cost-effective manner.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Sample Screenshots Outlining Proposed Content