

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-057-2020/21
Date of meeting: 21 January 2021



Portfolio: Finance and Economic Development – Cllr. J Philip

Subject: Digital Gateway for Place

Responsible Officer: Houston John Houston (01992 564094).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the work undertaken by officers in relation to the development and implementation of a digital platform for the district; and**
- (2) That Cabinet considers the proposals and options for creating support for local businesses to trade successfully online and makes recommendations on the preferred way forward.**

Executive Summary:

The Economic Development team have been tasked with the development of a digital platform for the district that will create a single online point of access for a wide range of information and services catering for the needs of residents and public and private sector organisations plus links to EFDC and other public sector websites and information.

This report therefore provides an overview and update for Cabinet on work carried out to date.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To give guidance and approval for the site and its initial design, development, construction and approval for purchase of the Maybe* support/training package.

Other Options for Action:

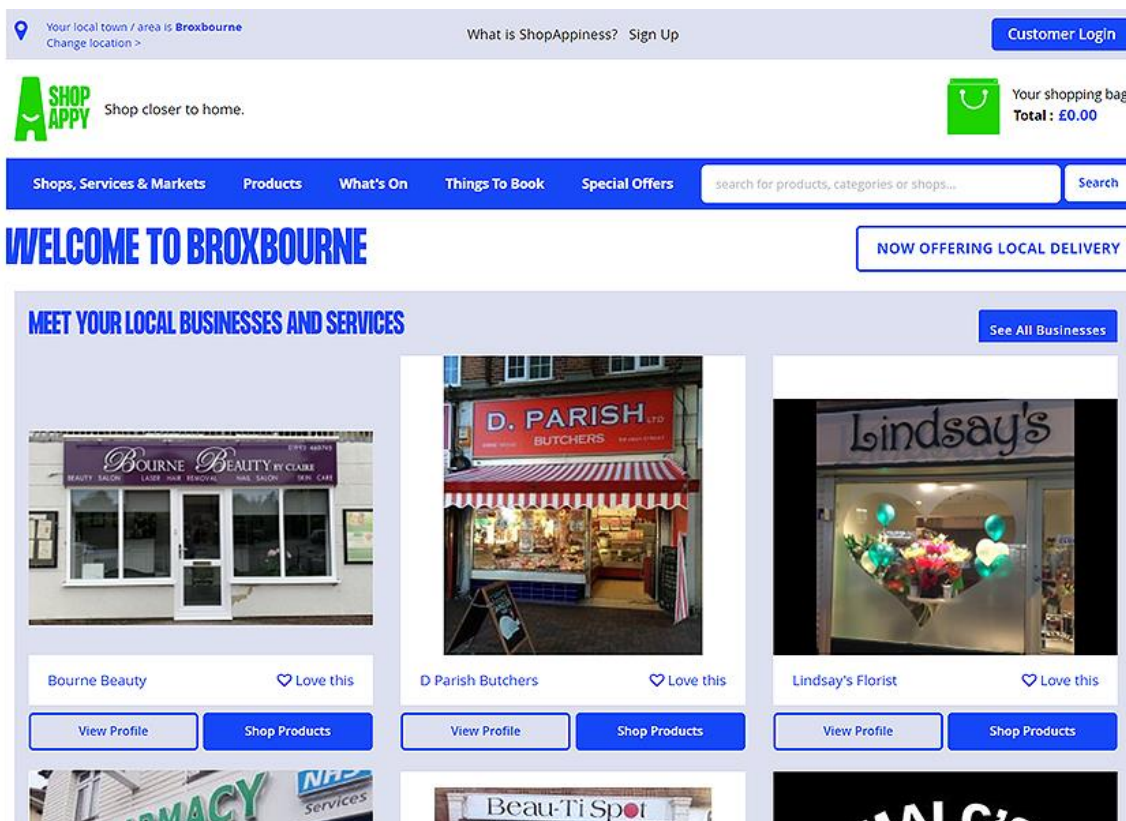
N/a

Report:

- Given the limitations from funding and urgency to develop the initially envisaged full digital platform, a decision was taken to progress a more limited brief with the intention of quickly offering practical help to enable local businesses to trade successfully online. This is the option also being taken by a number of neighbouring authorities to support the businesses most impacted by Covid 19 restrictions and in support of beleaguered high streets and town centres. This support has two main strands, an easy to use online portal that allows businesses to promote their businesses and make online sales, and online training to understand how to match the online offer to changing local customer needs and generate traffic to the site and sales.
- It is recommended that Maybe* is the proven development tool purchased to support the council and local businesses to effectively engage with the local marketplace via social

media to create, promote and build local online sales. The proposed package includes support packages for 500 local businesses giving the council the ability to monitor and measure local online growth by town centre and benchmark this against neighbouring areas and national best practice. The Maybe* package also includes the ability to run a local shopper loyalty rewards system. More details are attached in the Maybe* proposal document including a cost breakdown.

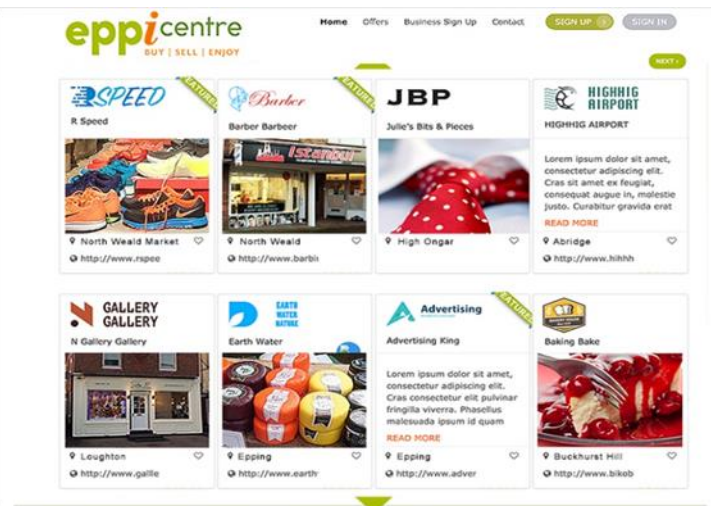
3. For the provision of an online portal, two options are available. The first is to buy an off-the-shelf package and the second is to create our own platform. The benefits of the first option are speed of delivery, a proven system and no design and development costs. The benefits of the second option are a system tailored to our specific needs on a platform that can be expanded and therefore form the starting point for a more integrated digital platform as initially envisaged.
4. The marketplace for off-the-shelf online portals have been investigated and two products are available to suit our needs. The first is ShopAppy and the second is Click It Local. ShopAppy was created four years ago in the town of Saltaire to provide local shops with an online shopping portal featuring a click and collect/delivery service. ShopAppy allows businesses to create and manage their own online shop and customers to select purchases from across a range of local outlets into one basket with one payment for all the goods. The purchases are gathered together and placed in a collection point for customer pick-up or delivered to the customer's home. There is a variable weekly charge to the businesses in the scheme although this is currently waived during the pandemic. An additional charge applies to the customer for home delivery and there are time limit restrictions on collection for fresh goods.



5. Click It Local is similar to ShopAppy but a more recent commercially developed product that is more sophisticated in look and operation. As with ShopAppy it is primarily a click and collect offer with delivery courier partners included. There is no joining charge for businesses but a levy on transactions. In both cases, the system provider generates awareness and business sign-ups in new areas plus promotion of the site to customers. However, the speed of population of businesses and quality of content generated by the businesses themselves, is limited with an expectation that the local authorities resource input can accelerate the process.



6. Currently, locally ShopAppy is being offered by Broxbourne and Enfield and Click It Local is being offered across all the Uttlesford town centres and in talks with Chelmsford and Brentwood. There is a possibility that if Uttlesford, Chelmsford, Brentwood and Epping Forest all take Click It Local, there could be benefits in some form of linkage, especially around promotion and delivery and benefits to businesses that have customers or outlets across the geography.
7. For the own developed site option, the Economic Development Team have created a site proposal with a private company that has undertaken similar work for the council in the past. A draft site name and domain has been worked up to illustrate a brand style. An initial skin and sample pages have been produced for evaluation with an off-line beta site being created to test functionality and navigation. The site would offer the same benefits as the off-the-shelf products plus additional local functionality with direct linkage to other existing local information.



8. In summary, Maybe* gives officers the tools to monitor and measure the performance of local online markets and the ability to directly support 500 local businesses to successfully extend sales online and create customer loyalty rewards. Off-the-shelf websites can provide fast portals for local businesses to start trading online with no design and development costs or delay for build. A purpose-built site would be council owned and tailored to our specific

requirements including the ability to expand in line with the vision for a more comprehensive digital platform.

Timescales and milestones:

Maybe* and ShopAppy / Click It Local are available off-the-shelf and therefore could be live within a matter of days. The Maybe* dashboard would need to be cleared with IT for installation and access within the Council's IT system. For the own-site option, some of the initial development work has already been done on a speculative basis. It may take up to four weeks for the site to be fully ready for businesses to access and trade. However, the site would not be officially launched until a plausible representative cross section of local businesses was featured on the site, although direct marketing to local businesses for sign-up would commence as soon as the site was commissioned. Likewise, building a customer base would commence with the launch to businesses of the Maybe* support package. It is envisaged that a populated and functioning portal would be operating within eight to ten weeks of go ahead. Timescales, milestones and costs here

Resource Implications:

For Maybe* the dashboards need IT input to be placed and operational within the council's system and then be monitored and acted upon where necessary within the appropriate departments. This is a resource that can be shared across all relevant council departments. The Economic Department will be responsible for allocating, distributing and supporting the 500 local business memberships and monitoring and measuring ongoing performance. The Economic Department will be responsible for coordinating and implementing local loyalty reward programmes.

For an off-the-shelf local online business trading platform, the Economic Team would be responsible for negotiating a suitable package and work with the provider to sell-in to businesses, establish a plausible spread of local businesses across the district and build awareness and buy-in across the relevant customer base. In addition, for the own-site option, the Economic Team would be involved in the design and development of the online shopping portal and any additional functionality added.

Costs identified are:

Maybe support package (EFDC plus 500 local businesses) including Local Rewards package - £7,353 for first year.

£10k marketing: business sign-ups and public awareness for online trading portal.

For own-site option: £10k site development, build and populate to level suitable for launch and £10k for first year hosting, web mastering and maintenance.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None at present.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None at present.

Consultation Undertaken:

Development work on the own-site option with a private company that has undertaken similar work for the council in the past.

Background Papers:

Maybe* proposal attached

Risk Management:

N/a

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details
Your function, service area and team: Economic Development
If you are submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: N/A
Title of policy or decision: Town Centre Regeneration
Officer completing the EqIA: John Houston Tel: 01992 564 Email: jhouston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Date of completing the assessment: 20/11/20

Section 2: Policy to be analysed	
2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? This is an information item only.
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): This report provides an update on work undertaken to support Town Centres across the district. What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? It is anticipated that detailed reports will be produced for each of the Town Centres that will set out a set of recommendations for action by the Council.
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service users • employees • the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? None at present Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? Not at present
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? Not at present
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? The work referred to in this report substantially contributes to Corporate Objectives.

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified? N/a
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? N/a
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: N/a

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	N/A	
Disability	N/A	
Gender	N/A	
Gender reassignment	N/A	
Marriage/civil partnership	N/A	
Pregnancy/maternity	N/A	
Race	N/A	
Religion/belief	N/A	
Sexual orientation	N/A	

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Julie Chandler

Date: 20/11/20

Signature of person completing the EqIA: John Houston

Date: 21/11/20

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.