PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject:	Improving Customers experience of interacting with the Council
Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	27 March 2012
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Richard Ball
CMT Member:	Adam Broome, Director for Corporate Services
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Ref:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Part:	I

Executive Summary:

This paper sets out a request for:

1 Capital Approval of £3.0 million to design and implement modernised ways of working to enable delivery of customer service improvements and financial benefits.

The challenge to continuously improve services, whilst utilising less resources, requires the Council to consider new, more modern, ways of working.

The primary objective will be to deliver a seamless, joined up council approach to service delivery, for example joined up records for our clients, transactional website with 24/7 access and more calls resolved at the first point of contact.

Members of the public currently make contact with the council in many different ways across the Council's departments and services. Due to this, the view of the citizen is not fully joined up or integrated causing some duplication and incomplete client information.

Benchmarking against other local authorities proves that traditional contact methods such as telephone or face to face meetings are significantly more expensive than using self-service and other electronic methods; the cost plummets from pounds to pence when swapping ways of working from people and paper centric methods to online electronic methods; and the customer experience is improved with quicker response times, fewer contacts and less repetition.

Through targeted investment and engagement, this programme will provide the means to introduce simple, consistent and automated ways of delivering services that will generate significant cost savings across the whole Council whilst freeing up staff to deliver more, better quality services to meet the increasing demands driven by the state of the economy and the demographics of the City, e.g. unemployment rates and the aging population.

The £3m capital investment will be funded through unsupported borrowing over a five year period. The revenue cost of this borrowing, of £0.640m per annum, will be funded by efficiencies delivered through reduced processing times, less licence costs and staff time savings. In addition, as part of the 2012/13 final budget setting, an extra delivery plan was set for £0.300m to move more services into the Council's Contact Centre. This investment will provide the platform to enable the faster achievement of this delivery plan.

Once fully implemented, sign up and commitment is required across the entire council in order to maximise the benefits of having fully integrated client records.

Corporate Plan 2010-2014:

This investment contributes to the following city priorities:

Value for communities:	Allows our customers more choice about how, where and when they interact, increasing their satisfaction and involvement with the Council. Reducing the cost of service delivery and combining systems into the chosen enterprise solution for Information Communications & Technology at a lower on-going cost.
Deliver Growth	Providing the opportunity to work effectively with partners across the Plymouth and provide the opportunity to introduce revenue back to the Council, and shared service provisioning
Reduce Inequalities	Ensuring better community contact and engagement with the Council and improving transparency on service delivery. 24/7 access will improve interaction with all of our residents.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:
Including finance, human, IT and land

£3.0 million capital investment is required to fund the tools (hardware and software) and implementation costs associated with the rollout, excluding the service area input to process improvement and change management.

The cost of funding unsupported borrowing to finance this project over an asset life of 5 years, is estimated at £0.640m per annum. This revenue cost will need to be met from all the Directorates, Departments and Divisions revenue budgets 2013 – 18 as they adopt the modern ways of working.

The implementation of the new systems and ways of working is planned for within the Council's Corporate Plan. This will include the transfer of staffing resources in to the Customer Services department for advice and information, and systems support and transactional work in to Finance, Efficiencies, Technology and Assets department. This will help reduce the overall cost of the workforce to achieve the £0.640m savings required and improve customer service responses. This will be reflected in the Council's Workforce Plan.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.

The modernisation of the customer interaction will improve access for all and will make the Council services more open and accountable.

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Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

That Cabinet recommend Full Council approve the addition of this £3m project to the Capital Programme over years 2012/13 to 2015/16.

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Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

Continuing the business in the same way, with many different access points into the council, will be become more challenging with increased client demand for our services and will restrict our ability to improve services and deliver further efficiency savings.

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Background papers:
CPDB Business Cases

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Sign off:

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Originating SMT Members: JP Sanders, Assistant Director for Customer Services Malcolm Coe, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Technology and Efficiencies											

1.0
1. Service benefits from investment

1.1 Plymouth City Council (PCC) has made significant investment already and is delivering new ways of working to support desk hopping exploiting a range of tools, such as introducing a virtual desktop and telephony that follows the user as part of the Corporate Accommodation Strategy. The opportunity exists to help PCC maximise their return on this investment and build upon it to drive out further efficiencies so that businesses and supporting services can benefit and continue to make considerable savings and deliver service improvements.

1.2 The Council has worked on providing excellent customer services through its Contact Centre. Customer response times and feedback has significantly improved as has our ability to respond to customer information request and complaints.

1.3 However, outside of the Contact Centre, there are still many separate points of contact that the public can have with the Council. These points of contact, built up through legitimate service demands, are often recorded on different systems in different formats.

1.4 This approach is inefficient and sometimes provides an information risk to the Council through officers making responses or decisions on client services based on partial or incomplete client information without fully integrated systems. Shortcomings in existing practices include:

- ✓ **Income collection**: clients could owe us money through a variety of sources such as Council Tax, car park fines, planning applications, Housing Benefit overpayments, library charges, leisure usage etc. Failing to join up a single view of a client's debt could lead to more costly recovery action and missed opportunities for maximising income collection;

- ✓ **Registration notifications:** despite strong existing processes, upon notification of a death through registrars, there are no automated notifications to Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Social Care, Blue Badges etc

- ✓ **Taxable properties:** without automated information on taxable properties and businesses in Plymouth such as planning information, housing information, Council Tax data and welfare benefits we run the risk of not gathering all taxes due.

1.5 The customer experience when contacting the council can mean multiple contacts through multiple channels/Departments when a single, consistent contact could fulfil all their enquiries or service requests quickly, more professionally and more efficiently.

1.6 Joined up services are required to share data more effectively and securely, particularly to support initiatives in Children's Social Care around locality working and the Multi Agency Sharing Hub (MASH), and in Adult Social Care to support co-location with Health, Sentinel and Commissioning.   Sharing is easier when information is held within common formats and is available electronically as opposed to paper files.

1.7 Joined up data with one version of the client also reduces the risk of fraud. Currently, the council embarks on annual data sharing through the, audit commission run, National Fraud Initiative (NFI). Aiming to join up client information across public sector bodies in Plymouth will be a more proactive mechanism to detect any potential fraudulent activity at an early stage.

1.8 Outside of the Contact Centre, delivery against key customer indicators is, at best, inconsistent. For example, in some cases missed calls, not responding to clients within prescribed timescales and / or not responding to complaints in a prompt and efficient manner.

1.9 Despite significant improvements across the vast majority of our services over recent years, the public perception of the Council is still not as good as it could be. Developing an integrated client database and improving access to information and services will significantly help to improve our image.

1.10 The power of the technology will radically simplify how people can make contact and communicate with us. For example, through implementing this proposal, residents will be able to interact with the council directly through applications on their mobile phone, linking in directly with the correct service area that can respond to their service needs (e.g. reporting of fly tipping). We would also be able to use the technology to provide on line feeds on how we are performing and responding to resident concerns.

2. Financial benefit and efficiencies

2.1 Analysing the cost of transactional interaction with the council highlights massive differences in costs ranging from only 25p for an electronic transaction compared to up to as much as £65 for a face to face complicated transaction such as a complex housing benefit assessment.

2.2 Whereas it is clearly not possible to process all transactions electronically, there is significant scope for improvement with the right investment. The Council should focus on moving as much high volume, low complexity demands to electronic means as possible. Currently, only 3% of transactions undertaken with the council are done so electronically, on line compared to an average across all councils of 23%.

2.3 Moving forward, the demand for public sector services will continue to grow as a result of demographic changes, (e.g. higher demand for adult social care), the economic climate, (e.g. more people requiring support such as benefits), legislative changes and delivering the City's vision of targeted growth. Having better integrated, effective cost efficient systems, giving one version of client data, will be crucial in managing this increase.

2.4 This investment proposal will require the council to analyse, evaluate and modernise all of the existing processes for interaction with our residents. Through doing this, we will standardise processes around technology in order to stamp out duplication and wastage. For example, process challenge within just one service area, adult social care, has enabled us to reduce support costs by over 60% through the implementation of the Care First System.

2.5 We are confident that adopting smarter processing and reducing support costs will more than cover the cost of investing in the technology and deliver significant further revenue budget savings. Through the early stage of project development, we will undertake analysis of which service areas will benefit most from such savings and compile a full benefits realisation profile to support the investment. This is a corporate change initiative which is fully supported by the Corporate Management Team and, as such, will require co-ordinated effort and support across all departments.

2.6 Savings will be made through retaining less multiple data, reduced storage requirements for manual records, easier retrieval and reporting arrangements, supporting less software applications with corresponding savings in licence costs, less printing, postage and reduced staff numbers through having to undertake less face to face interaction for low complexity needs that can be met through adopting a 'self serve' approach on a modernised web.

2.7 The financial challenge faced by all public sector bodies across the country requires a radical rethink about how we manage and deliver our business. The Council is seeking to consolidate all existing core business applications onto a single platform to minimise the support costs, total cost of ownership and to improve the customer experience. The proposal to consolidate the tool kit around Microsoft has already been pioneered by several authorities.

2.8 Plymouth City Council's revenue budget for 2012/13 requires us to save an additional £0.300m through moving more services into the Customer Contact Centre. It would be difficult to manage this change without investing in ICT. Perpetuating many systems, many different client contact points and numerous overlapping processes is not an option as we continue to modernise our services.

3. What are we investing in?

3.1 We will be building on the existing Microsoft platform to provide an integrated tool kit to support the modern way of working. This will enable us to reduce our current support of 277 separate business software applications in a logical, structured way.

3.2 The total capital investment required is £3.0m which will, in summary enable us to purchase and implement:

- **A Customer Management System** -This will begin to provide the spine of our single-view of the customer, which will become the single record across the authority. This will enable us to improve our service to customers, anticipating their needs and improving how and when we communicate with and deliver services. It will enable users to access all the relevant customer information allowing us to better meet their needs at the first point of contact, leading to increasingly satisfied customers and staff.

- **A Transactional Website** - the means to deliver a new website that fully supports the customer journey to self-service by delivering a truly transactional web site. This will mean that many current processes can be automated so that customers can directly report, pay for or make an appointment.   This website will also form the heart of the contact centre operation providing staff with a single system to deliver the best possible customer service and also reducing the cost of delivering that service through a better, more detailed knowledge of the true demands on the service.

This same approach will provide staff with utilities and information, personalised by them for their role, directing information that is most relevant to them straight to their desk top. This will bring our working practices in line with the capabilities of the top companies and leading authorities.

- **An Electronic Filing System (EDRMS)** - Moving toward a paperless, mobile office. We store thousands of square feet of paper documents, without considering the expense of photocopying, these records can only be accessed at the point they are stored or indeed to those few who have direct access.   There is also the cost of providing off-site storage and couriers to retrieve and transport paper files across the City, often leading to delays that impact on the citizen and delivering services to them.

  The investment will help make it easy for departments to build their business cases to transfer their records into the new file structures and to re-engineer their processes to take advantage of secure controlled access to information.   This will enable the potential for widespread home/remote working. It will also provide clear audit trails enabling us to de-risk our information management and ensure we can be professional managers of data and information.

- **Information as and when required** - We have long sought better information to manage service delivery, performance improvement and inform strategic decision making and planning. There are tools available and need to be expanded across the whole Council that will allow this information to be presented in a variety of formats to suit the audience, e.g. dashboards for senior executives and members, with access for the right people at the right time.   We can then build our core competencies and share the knowledge base more easily with partners, e.g. Health, making for a much better informed collaborative working environment. It will also enable us to be better at how we forward plan our limited resources and more flexible about how we manage and target resources on a day to day basis to where they are needed most to provide the best possible value service to our customers.

- **Flexible working capability with remote access** – PCC staff have pioneered secure remote working and we are continuing to seek out the tools that help create a blend of ways that provide a modern, flexible work environment.   Information on the move, secure access to systems and client records away from the office, and the appropriate mobile kit, are all prerequisites to deliver a truly customer focussed service. Remote working means staff being able to meet more customer needs at that vital first point of contact and will reduce delays and errors created by having to bring details back to an office to service a customer need. It will also open up Libraries, leisure facilities, GP surgeries etc to become outposts for Councils to deliver cost effective service to customers and meet their ever changing needs and requirements.

3.3 The £3m capital cost of the project will be funded through unsupported borrowing on an 'invest to save' basis. The corresponding revenue cost of borrowing is calculated over a five year payback period. Capital repayment and interest payments will amount to £0.640m per annum. The implementation of the new technology and modernised ways of working will be closely monitored to ensure that tangible financial savings are delivered to meet this cost as well as deliver other required budget delivery plan savings.

3.4 The £3m does not include the opportunity cost, and capacity, of specific departmental staff who will need to embrace and adopt the new ways of working. Key financial savings will ultimately be achieved through moving more front line services into the Customer Contact Centre.

4. Governance arrangements

4.1 Full and thorough buy in across the whole council is required to obtain maximum benefit from this investment.

4.2 The Director for Corporate Services is the lead CMT officer for the scheme and will retain ultimate responsibility for implementation and benefit realisation. Progress reporting will be overseen by the Corporate Service Programme Board with formal reporting incorporated with all budget delivery plans as part of the quarterly performance and finance reporting process.

4.3 Efficiencies and financial benefits will primarily be achieved from three areas:

- Re-engineering processes and moving more front line services into the Customer Contact Centre;

- A single platform for contact centre staff to deliver all services in an efficient manner;

- A 'self service' platform for customers to interact quicker and more efficiently with the council, accessible on a 24/7 basis.

These benefits will be quantified and communicated through clear business cases as project implementation develops.