MEETING	Audit and Governance Committee
DATE	17 June 2021
TITLE	Corporate Website Self-service Project
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT	Report on the project's developments since it started in 2016
AUTHOR	Councillor Nia Wyn Jeffreys
ACTION	To accept the report

1. INTRODUCTION

This report is submitted to the Committee in response to a discussion held at the Scrutiny Working Group held on 10 May. The report outlines the efforts made since 2016 to increase the interactive provision on the website and to make it easier to contact the Council about a number of matters 24 hours a day.

Comments from Members on the project developments thus far are welcome, as are any desires for future development.

2. SELF-SERVICE PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The Self-service Project was established for the corporate website in 2016, with the purpose of enabling the public to self-serve on the Gwynedd Council website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and offer a more cost-effective way of contacting the Council for a service.

2.2 Customers have been able to create a self-service account on the Gwynedd Council corporate website since 2011, and submit some requests for services e.g. Planning enquiries, using that account. Developing self-service on the website was part of the day-to-day work of the Website Team at the time and, therefore, the developments were slow, with comparatively low numbers of customers using it, as there were insufficient resources and time to develop and promote it fully.

2.3 The ambition of the current project is to give more choices to customers in terms of how and when to contact the Council and increase the number of customers that submit requests for services on-line, in order to realise savings for the Council.

2.4 Several systems that could be bought from external companies were researched, in order to introduce more self-service on the corporate website, and analyse the Council's future needs. It was decided not to purchase an external system, but rather develop an in-house system which would allow us to receive and manage requests for service on-line, over the phone and face-to-face. This system would replace the system that Galw Gwynedd used to record phone contact with customers. The name of this in-house system is FFOS.

2.5   In March 2017, the costs of contacting the Council in order to order a Garden Waste Collection were analysed. The analysis showed that the contact costs were as follows:

Type of contact	Cost per request
Face-to-face at a Siop Gwynedd	£8.00
By phoning Galw Gwynedd	£3.90
Self-service on the Gwynedd Council website	£0.25

This confirmed that providing as many services as possible on-line, and encouraging customers to use those services, would result in much lower costs for the Council.

2.6   One of the main principles of the Self-service Project was that **a customer only needs one on-line account** to contact Gwynedd Council about any matter. Therefore, if one of the Council's Services was using a system other than FFOS to provide self-service, that system needed to be technically linked to FFOS. This ensures that the customer only needs to log-in once in order to access all Gwynedd Council's on-line services.

3.   MAIN SUCCESSES

3.1   The first on-line service was introduced following the establishment of the Self-service Project, in October 2016, namely **Ordering and paying for garden waste collection.**

In 2016-17, 33% of customers ordered and paid for the service on-line.
By 2020-21, 59% of customers ordered and paid for the service on-line.

3.2   By March 2017, the Gwynedd Council My Account was adjusted in order to allow businesses, as well as individuals, to create an account. This was developed in order to allow skip and scaffolding companies to submit **Requests for a licence to install a skip** or **Requests for a licence to erect scaffolding** and pay for them on-line. Almost 100% of the companies in the County use the on-line system by now.

There is significant potential to develop the account for businesses on-line, in order to facilitate transactions between the County's businesses and the Council, and reduce internal administration to process requests and payments.

3.3   The Gwynedd Council My Account was officially launched in November 2017. The main services that were available at the time were promoted, and customers were encouraged to submit on-line requests rather than the more traditional means of contacting. Galw Gwynedd also had a campaign to encourage customers that were phoning them to submit requests via self-service the next time they needed to get in touch.

The main services that were available on-line by then were:

i.   Paying for school meals
ii.   Paying for a school breakfast club
iii.   Paying for other school services (swimming and instrument lessons etc.)
iv.   Ordering waste/recycling equipment
v.   Ordering and paying for garden waste collection
vi.   Reporting missed waste / recycling collections
vii.   Ordering and paying for bulky waste collections
viii.   Submitting a waste/recycling enquiry/complaint

3.4   By July 2018, apGwynedd, the Gwynedd Council app, had been developed and was available to be downloaded from the "App Store" and "Google Play".

The app allows customers to submit requests for on-line services and find information about a specific address e.g. waste collection day.

Since August 2019, the app also allows customers to buy and pay for a seasonal/annual 16+ Travel Pass (which is a bus/train travel pass for children aged 16+ who are studying at one of the County's schools / colleges). It is possible to opt to buy an e-ticket rather than a plastic ticket, and the e-ticket is available within apGwynedd on the pupil's phone, to be shown when going on the bus. By now, approximately 33% of the tickets bought are e-tickets.

3.5   In December 2018, a texting service for customers was introduced. This means that customers who have a self-service account can register to receive a text (as well as an e-mail), about new on-line services being introduced, changes to the Council's services (e.g. waste/recycling collections over Christmas) and receive a reminder when it is time to make a request for some services (e.g. Garden Waste Collection, Annual Parking Permit).

3.6   During 2019, the Self-service Project assisted Galw Gwynedd to establish a webchat service which was initially available for the Garden Waste Collection service on the Council's website. By now, the webchat is available for the 16+ Travel Pass and Ordering a Recycling Centre Slot also, and is another useful way for customers to be assisted with some services without having to pick up the phone.

3.7   By April 2020, the FFOS system had been developed sufficiently to allow us to dispose of the old system that Galw Gwynedd used to record requests for services. This resulted in a saving of £23,300 per annum for Galw Gwynedd.

3.8   Throughout the period since starting the Self-service Project, a range of new on-line services have been introduced regularly. By now, 40 services have been introduced as part of the project. During 2020-21, there has been a substantial increase in the use of on-line services because of the pandemic, and by now, over 50% of the requests in half of those services are submitted via self-service.

Some new on-line services needed to be introduced as a result of the pandemic. One of the most prominent and successful, was Ordering a Recycling Centre Slot, which was introduced in May 2020. Between May 2020 and March 2021, 149,473

requests for a slot were received, almost 90% of which were submitted on-line.

See **Appendix A** for a full list of the services which have been introduced as part of the project, and the percentage of requests that are submitted on-line for every service.

3.9 Since the start of the project, there has been a consistent increase in the number of customers creating a self-service account. By the end of March 2021, 57,463 self-service accounts existed.

3.10 Since the start of the project, there has been a consistent increase in the number of monthly log-ins to self-service accounts. A substantial increase was seen during 2020, as the following graph shows:

Nifer mewngofnodiadau y mis
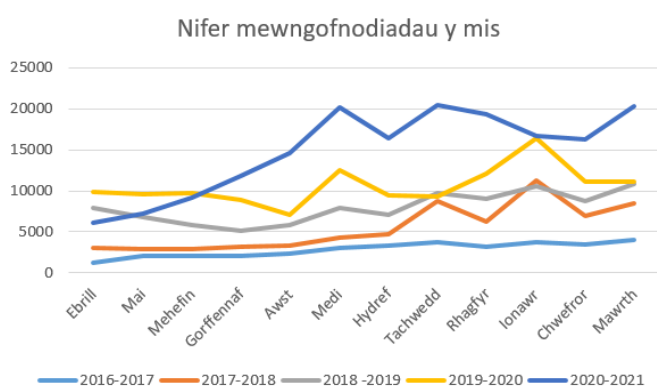
4. SUMMARY

4.1 Though the Self-service Project itself cannot claim any direct savings, it has assisted in making savings in other services e.g. assisting Galw Gwynedd to save £23,300 per annum by developing an internal system to replace the one they were using previously.

4.2 The Self-service Project has assisted the Council to avoid substantial extra costs which would have been incurred from having to introduce new arrangements e.g.

Ordering a Recycling Centre Slot
Total number of requests submitted between May 2020 and March 2021 = 149,473
Number submitted on-line between May 2020 and March 2021 = 133,897
If the on-line service were not available, 133,897 would have to have phoned the Council at a cost of £3.90 per call, a total of £522,128.

4.3 There has been a substantial increase in the number of requests submitted on-line during 2020-21, and we will need to ensure that this increase continues by introducing more on-line services that customers want and will use.

4.4 One of the project's challenges is to ensure that the customer care received by customers after submitting an on-line request is of a high standard, and is provided quickly. It is the on-line service that is criticised usually if the response is inadequate and, therefore, it is important that we continue to work with the various services in order to improve customer service.

4.5   The pandemic has led to the introduction of on-line services in fields where there were previously none, and has led to an increase in requests for on-line services generally. This has raised staff awareness of how self-service could be beneficial to their services. Consequently, many staff have been in contact with requests to develop new on-line services. This is very much welcome, and poses another challenge to prioritise all the requests in a way that brings benefits to our customers and the services in question.

APPENDIX A

A list of the on-line services which have been introduced as part of the Self-service Project, 2016-2021

They are listed according to the percentage of requests submitted on-line, with the highest first.

No	On-line Service	Total requests in 2020-21	Percentage of requests submitted on-line %
1	Storiel Appointment	57	100.0
2	Self-isolation support payment	255	100.0
3	Street Works Licence	487	99.8
4	Ordering a Recycling Centre Slot	149473	89.6
5	Lloyd George Museum Appointment	10	80.0
6	Graffiti/posters problem	43	79.1
7	Renewing a Gwynedd Parking Permit	245	76.7
8	Recycling Centre van licence	2749	75.6
9	Dog Fouling	505	69.1
10	16+ Travel Pass	792	66.3
11	Request for street cleaning	1228	63.5
12	Gwynedd Parking Permit	863	62.8
13	Fly-tipping	1134	62.2
14	Ordering Waste and Recycling equipment	19446	59.2
15	Garden Waste Collection	17123	59.0
16	Nappy Collection	1376	57.2
17	Change to a Gwynedd Parking Permit	11	54.5
18	Trip hazard	245	53.5
19	Local Parking Permit	217	52.5
20	Bulky Waste Collection	1985	50.1
21	Broken Street Lighting	525	48.8
22	Cemetery / crematorium enquiry	185	47.6
23	Problem with parks/open spaces	172	47.1
24	Problems with public toilets	118	45.8
25	Problems with road signage or markings	289	45.0
26	Pothole	1326	43.6
27	Fallen Tree	999	36.4
28	Missed Waste and Recycling Collection	9416	36.1
29	Flooding or blocked gully	1401	35.2
30	Residential Parking Permit - Visitors	69	34.8
31	Waste and Recycling Enquiry	6375	34.4
32	16+ Travel Pass enquiry/complaint	297	34.3
33	Faulty Traffic Lights	73	32.9
34	Problems with walls, bridges, fences	306	31.3
35	Snow and ice	183	30.6
36	Problems with gully covers	179	28.0
37	Parking enquiry/complaint	1070	24.6
38	Residential Parking Permit	146	24.0
39	Waste and Recycling Complaint	1271	23.1
40	Appointment to visit Siop Gwynedd	132	17.4

* Several grant application forms for businesses were created over the past year also. These were grants that were available for a short period of time. 100% of the applications for grants were submitted on-line.