

## **7.9 Website Annual Report 2017/18**

### **Abstract**

Launched in May 2017, the City of Boroondara's new website was co-designed with our community to transform the Boroondara online customer experience.

Responding to the feedback we received as part of our customer research, we re-imagined our new website to deliver a seamless, convenient and empowering experience for our customers.

Our website underwent a significant transformation including rewritten and refined content, new guides to help customers complete complex Council tasks, updated design and structure and improved access to many of our online services.

With our website's first anniversary, this report provides Council and the community with advice regarding its first year of operation and its progress against the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/2015 and Boroondara Community Plan 2017-27 objectives.

### **Officers' recommendation**

That Council resolve to receive and note the Website Annual Report 2017/18.

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**Responsible director: Marilyn Kearney  
Corporate Services**

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## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update regarding the first year of operation for Council's redeveloped website and its progress against the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/2015 and Boroondara Community Plan 2017-27 objectives.

## **2. Policy implications and relevance to community plan and council plan**

This report marks our progress against the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/2015 and Boroondara Community Plan 2017-27.

## **3. Background**

The City of Boroondara's new website is delivering on our vision to create a seamless, convenient and empowering online experience for our community.

Launched in May 2017, our new website and associated online services are achieving our core strategic objectives as set out in the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy and Boroondara Community Plan.

## **4. Outline of key issues/options**

### **Boroondara Community Plan 2017-27**

The Boroondara Community Plan sets out the 10-year vision for our future based on the values, aspirations and priorities the Boroondara community told us were important to them.

One of the key strategies of the Boroondara Community Plan is to 'ensure that ethical, financial and socially responsible decision making reflect community needs and are based on principles of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and consultation.'

Our strategy to achieve this is to deliver enhanced online services to our community, placing the customer at the centre of everything we do with a focus on making Council services more efficient, effective and accessible on any device by our customers anytime and anywhere they choose.

### **Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/2015**

Launched in 2014, the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy provides a roadmap for:

- understanding how customers want to engage with us
- preparing for a future where more engagement takes place in a digital environment
- helping us provide the best value for our community.

Through the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy we aim to give the community easy access to services - both online and in person that are responsive, accessible and efficient.

We are working towards this vision using six strategic objectives, almost all of which are being addressed by the transformation of our online presence.

CEIS Strategic objectives	Council's new website
<b>1. We will improve our online information and services</b>	Website content and information navigation model has been refined, re-organised and rewritten with the customer in mind. We have also introduced 68 eForms, making access to our services even easier.
<b>2. We will align and improve our customer channels</b>	The new website has been established as the source of truth and streamlines the information we provide to customers.
<b>3. We will improve our customer interaction</b>	The new website was co-designed with the community to improve their online customer experience and ensure that each transaction with us and aspect of design is simple, convenient and in line with community expectations.
<b>5. We will streamline our customer touch points</b>	Information on our new website is carefully written to ensure that customers have all the information they need without having to 'cross channels' and use other methods of contact (such as an email or phone call).
<b>6. We will develop a culture of evaluation</b>	Our website is routinely evaluated for accessibility, search engine optimisation (SEO) and writing for the web best practice to ensure content is up to date and meets the needs of our customers.
<b>7. We will simplify and clarify our customer processes</b>	Content on the website has been specifically written in plain English to reduce jargon and help simplify complex Council processes. We have also developed a range of online Guides to assist our customers to understand the steps involved in complex application processes.

### Key achievements

1. The Digital team co-designed the new website involving over 2,000 members of our community.
2. Customer access to online services has improved with 68 eForms available online.
3. PDFs have been reduced by around 90 per cent (excluding Council papers), with content instead appearing on pages for easier access and better online experience for our customers.
4. The Digital team has managed more than 2300 internal content requests since launch.
5. We had almost 4 million page views on our new website in the last 12 months (1 July 2017 - 30 June 2018).

**8. Consultation/communication**

Extensive community consultation was undertaken in the development of the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy and in the co-design of the website.

No external community consultation has occurred in the preparation of this report however the website provides opportunities for comment and participation. This information is used to inform and improve information and services through the website meeting community needs.

**9. Financial and resource implications**

There are no financial or resource implications in the preparation of this report.

**10. Governance issues**

No conflicts of interest were identified during the conduct in the preparation of this report and it is compatible with the Human Rights Charter.

**11. Social and environmental issues**

No issues were identified.

**Manager:** Gerardine OSullivan, Principal Digital Strategist

**Report officer:** Trier Murphy, Digital Content Specialist



# **Boroondara Council Website Annual Report 2017/18**



## Introduction

The City of Boroondara's new website is delivering on our vision to create a seamless, convenient and empowering online experience for our community.

Launched in May 2017, our new website and associated online services are achieving our core strategic objectives as set out in the Boroondara Community Plan 2017-27 and the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/15.

## Our community and stakeholder co-design approach

In developing the Boroondara Community Plan and Customer Experience Improvement Strategy, Council conducted extensive research to better understand customer expectations in their engagement with our online services and evaluate how well our online information and services were meeting customer needs.

Through this research it became evident that Council's existing web presence could not deliver the level of service our customers expected and Council resolved on an ambitious project to transform the way in which we interact with our community online.

To ensure the transformation of our website and online services was well informed and well guided, a collaborative design approach was adopted involving our community and key business stakeholders.

Between 2015 and the end of 2017, we conducted 17 activities involving more than 2000 members of the public.

Our research activities included:

Activity	Purpose
Online surveys	To understand customers' objectives and to highlight their pain points
eKiosk surveys	To capture views from the community across the municipality
Councillor survey	To capture views of our Councillors
Staff survey	To capture staff views
Focus groups	To explore the main issues raised in the online survey
Interviews	To capture views of local businesses
Feedback session	To test creative design feedback
Focus groups	To identify levels of interest in location-based services and customer online accounts
Testing	To test the existing website structure
Testing	To test the usability of wireframes
Testing	To test the effectiveness of content
Testing	To test if our information grouping is meaningful to the community
Pre-launch usability testing	To test the usability of our new website
Benchmarking	To evaluate comparable Council websites
Content audit	To provide a baseline measure from which to improve the quality, relevance and usefulness of our information
Accessibility audit	To provide a baseline measure to improve accessibility
Post launch content audit	To evaluate improvements from pre-launch content audit

## What we learned

Through our research with the community, we learned that customers found our former web presence “difficult to use, too wordy, with poor online service capabilities and large blocks of hard to locate information that is often difficult to understand and often irrelevant, as well as inconsistent design and fragmented processes for common user tasks and services.” (*Website User Research Report 2015 - Executive Summary*).

## What our customers said

Our customers told us that they:

- have a poor experience when interacting with Council via the website due to poor search, ineffective navigation, old and incomplete content
- expect more online services such as the ability to book and pay for services and events
- want personalised functionality such as an account for tracking interactions, applications and payments, and an easy method for searching for local services, facilities and events.

*“I would like to see simple straightforward instructions that help me achieve what I came to do - I'm tired at night and I have better things to do than get lost in the council maze.” (Online survey)*

*“[I wish] search results were more timely, not returning events that were years old.” (Online survey)*

*“It is unclear from the many fact sheets which fitted our situation and I have given up.” (True Intent)*

*“I couldn't find a solution to my question.” (True Intent)*

*“PLEASE make it easier to get straight into the library area where catalogue searches and borrowing can happen.” (True Intent)*

## Our new website

Responding to the customer feedback we received as part of our research, our website presence underwent a significant transformation with the consolidation of eight separate websites into one.

The transformation included rewriting, refining and reducing content, creating new guides to help customers complete complex Council tasks, updating the design, improving the structure of information and improving access to many of our online services such as booking hard waste collections.

## Key changes

Feature	Old website(s)	New website
Consultations	Consultations were partially centralised, partially located within organisational silos.	Centralised consultations register - meeting higher consistency and transparency standards.
Points of interest	The Community Directory was not managed and therefore out of date, providing significantly inaccurate information.	Integrated Near me tool provides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• searchable database of key points of interest, services and facilities across Boroondara</li> <li>• maps on all pages where a service has a corresponding location</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suburb-based popular features, such as markets</li> <li>• standardised template with eye-catching design</li> <li>• ability to cross-promote events throughout the site</li> </ul>
Events	Events were spread across half a dozen websites, and more than a dozen locations overall, based on which team was organising them.	<p>Central events calendar provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one search covering all events</li> <li>• filters to focus on particular suburbs, dates, audiences or categories of interest</li> <li>• consistent layout for ease of use</li> </ul>
Search	Search was fragmented across each website with no overall picture of our services and information.	A single search function looks at all web content and prioritises results based on what we know about user behaviour.
Accessibility	Our sites did not comply with minimum government accessibility standards and excluded members of our community with specific audio/visual and /or cognitive needs.	Website was given accessibility accreditation in December 2017, meaning it meets the international standard WCAG 2.0 level AA.
Usability	Usability for mobile users was very poor, due to the non-responsive templates of all websites and high reliance on PDFs.	Website is fully responsive for mobile phone and tablet platforms and PDFs have been reduced by around 90% (excluding Council papers), with content instead appearing on pages for easy access.
Information architecture	Structure was complicated, went to 5 or 6 levels in many sections, and reflected our organisational structure, requiring users to understand the structure in order to navigate information and services spread across different, unconnected silos.	Website is task and topic focused and reflects user input and preferences, with mega menus to allow quicker access into relevant areas.
Content	Content was wordy, covering all scenarios rather than prioritising common information. Language was often 'council speak' and unfriendly, making it overly complex and hard to digest. Many pages had hundreds of words of information plus numerous PDFs.	<p>Content has been simplified with a more conversational tone. Content Guides step the user through complex processes to avoid information overload.</p> <p>The Digital team has managed more than 2,300 internal content requests since launch. Content management and quality assurance is now more centralised.</p>
Tasks	Online tasks were few and far between and not prioritised on pages.	Content templates prioritise known top-tasks, on the homepage and through all levels of content, with 68 eForms now enabling customers to complete online requests.
Look and feel	Old website was outdated and clunky with poor use of home page real estate for the most common or 'in demand' services and information requests.	Website is simple and uncluttered, with key tasks prominently featured.

## Our progress against the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy 2014/2015

Launched in 2014, the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy provides a roadmap for:

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- preparing for a future where more engagement takes place in a digital environment
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## Highlights of the Year

The City of Boroondara's website is delivering on promises made to our customers and key business stakeholders 18 months ago.

- Boroondara's website was delivered on time - launching on the day it was promised.
- Sixteen planning and building content guides developed to support customers in completing complex tasks with Council.
- Over 30,000 eForms were completed from 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018. Ninety-three per cent of customers who left feedback on our eForms rated them as 'Very easy' or 'Easy'.
- Customer usage of our website remains the same, despite reducing our pages by half (4500 down to 2300). This means that our customers have easier accesses to required information and are not getting bogged down in irrelevant information.

- In December 2017 Vision Australia confirmed that our website satisfied all Level AA success criteria of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 specification.
- In June 2018 the Digital team audited the 125 most visited pages on the website since its launch in May 2017. The audit showed that the average quality score for these pages was 94 per cent.
- The centralisation of our website introduced tighter governance and quality control over published content.

## Our website's performance

Launched in May 2017, our new website is helping Council deliver on the Customer Experience Improvement Strategy and our commitment to improving our community's access to information and services.

To demonstrate how our digital transformation is providing value for our community and to ensure we track the return on investment, reporting is a key part of our digital governance model.

The Digital team gathers and monitors a range of metrics and produces regular and ad hoc reporting to:

- monitor the effectiveness of our digital channels and make incremental improvements
- demonstrate to the organisation the value of our model and approach
- ensure the voice of the customer is present in our decision making.

Our website is continuously evaluated against the following of key metrics.

Area	Type	What	Purpose	Frequency
Usage	1. Website analytics	Usage, bounce rates, sessions, search terms	Highlight content of high/low importance and value	Quarterly and ad hoc
Usage	2. Hub-specific analytics	Usage, bounce rates, sessions, search terms	Highlight content of high/low importance and value	Quarterly and ad hoc
Content	3. Customer ratings and feedback report	Usefulness of our content; customer suggestions for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable improvements to content facts, labelling and SEO, correct errors and inaccuracies</li> </ul>	Quarterly and ad hoc
Content	4. Content quality	Broken links, missing metadata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable improvements to content accuracy and findability</li> </ul>	Quarterly and ad hoc
Usage	5. Near me	Usage of different categories and filters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify high value content to target expanding categories</li> <li>• Evaluate effectiveness of categories</li> </ul>	Quarterly
Internal	6. BAU publishing requests	Volume, types, and originators of content and eForm request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify internal training/education opportunities</li> <li>• Monitor resource capacity and need for additional submission templates</li> </ul>	Quarterly
Compliance	7. Accessibility	Compliance against WCAG 2.0 AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet compliance level expected of local government</li> </ul>	Annually
Content	8. SEO/SEM	Effectiveness of content and metadata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure findability of content</li> <li>• Support commercial goals of Council, particularly in relation to Arts &amp; Culture</li> </ul>	Annually

## Key website statistics

The figures below relate to 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. The metrics were sourced from Google Analytics and, unless otherwise stated, refers to traffic from both staff and customers.

Approximately 9.5 per cent of our traffic is from staff. This has been included in this report as staff are likely to be using the information on our website to assist customers.

- Since 1 July 2017 our website has had almost 4 million (3,921,542) pageviews, from 679,924 users (83 per cent whom are located in Melbourne)
- Sixty-one per cent of customers access the website from a desktop computer while 39 per cent use a mobile or tablet device.
- Customers spend an average of two minutes, 44 seconds on the site and view an average of 2.72 pages per session.
- Search is the biggest driver to our website (52.9 per cent), followed by direct traffic (e.g. clicking a link in an email that takes you to our website) (37.8 per cent) and referral (e.g. Spydus library catalogue) (6.7 per cent).

## Top content

The most popular search queries people have used to find our website are:

1. 'boroondara library'
2. 'boroondara council'
3. 'boroondara'
4. 'city of Boroondara'
5. 'kew traffic school'
6. 'balwyn library'
7. 'hawthorn library'
8. 'kew library'
9. 'boroondara city council'
10. 'camberwell library'

Within our website the most popular search queries are:

1. 'permit'
2. 'jobs'
3. 'library'
4. 'careers'
5. 'rates'
6. 'Jobs'
7. 'asset protection'
8. 'tree removal'
9. 'Library'
10. 'library boroondara'

Our most popular webpages include:

1. homepage
2. libraries homepage
3. contact
4. pay a parking fine
5. review my parking infringement notice
6. view current job vacancies
7. payments
8. planning and building
9. recycling and waste
10. jobs and careers

Our digital team uses the news function on the website to better communicate with our customers regarding changes to Council services and unexpected events.

In the last 12 months the most read news stories were:

1. Council services during Christmas and New Year
2. Payment and other system outages 21-25 September
3. Scam letter about possums in the area
4. Changes to council services over Easter
5. Balwyn Library now open

## Focus on our hubs

As part of our digital transformation we combined eight websites into one website, which includes four distinct hubs catering to different audiences in our community.

1. Planning and building
  - 253,566 pageviews
  - 16 guides to help customers complete complex tasks with Council
2. Boroondara Arts
  - 110,220 pageviews
  - 13 arts venues for hire
3. For Business
  - 28,900
  - 8 news stories published targeting a business audience
4. Libraries
  - 553,086 pageviews
  - Online access to a range of eBooks, audio books, digital magazines and journals, online learning courses, languages and more

## Planning and Building guides: a case study

One of the common challenges our customers face is determining which permits they need for their building project. The permit requirements vary depending on what the customer is building, which overlays and zones affect their site as well as the design and location of their structure.

The planning and building guides on our website improve customer experience by providing a set of practical real-world checks and measurements that customers can perform themselves to determine which permits they need for their project. Each step ends with a simple “yes” or “no” question, so that there is never any ambiguity about as to whether a permit is needed.

The guides are written in plain English and in most cases include illustrations. They follow the customer’s journey from the planning stage to the building stage and provide links to information about other permits and approvals beyond planning and building.

As of June 2018, 16 Planning and Building guides have been developed. From 1 June 2017 to 30 June 2018, the most visited guide opening pages were *Replace or Build a New Front Fence* with **3033** pageviews, *Replace or Build a New Side or Rear Fence* with **2823** pageviews and *Demolish all or Part of a Building* with **2465** pageviews.

We will continue to expand our collection of planning and building guides in the next 12 months.

## Content audit 2018

In June 2018 the Digital team audited the 125 most visited pages on the website since its launch in May 2017.

Significant work has been completed across the website since its launch in 2017, which is reflected in the average page score increasing from 53% in 2016 to 94% in 2017-18. The focus on creating content that is easy to read, has a clear purpose and is relevant has resulted in customer-friendly website content that significantly improves the way we communicate with our customers.

This score also indicates that additional and ongoing content quality assurance processes, such as regularly reviewing and addressing customer feedback and using site auditing tools, ensure that this level of quality is maintained.

## Customer feedback and ratings

We encourage customer feedback about our content and online services.

At the bottom of each webpage is a feedback form where customers can leave a comment and star rating 1-5 (with 5 stars being the highest rating).

The Digital team reads each comment that is sent to them via customer feedback forms on the website and makes changes to improve our content based on that feedback.

Each comment is addressed in the Digital team's weekly feedback meeting and the merit of the feedback is evaluated. Where feedback is deemed constructive, the Digital team takes action to work with subject matter experts in the organisation to update the content on the website.

This responsiveness to the feedback of our community demonstrates our commitment to a customer centric approach and great customer experiences.

Over the past year, over 2300 customers have rated and left feedback about our website.

Rating	15 May - 31 August 2017	1 September - 31 December 2017	1 January - 31 March 2018	1 April-30 June 2018
Total number of customer ratings and feedback	671	613	526	527
Number of ratings that included comments about our content	252	508	421	432
Pages that were rated 4 and 5 stars	45%	60%	61%	52%

### What our customers are saying

*"What to do with a neighbours barking dog? A link to this would be handy as you have done for cats."* (website rating: 4) Action taken: a link was added to help customers with navigation

*"A contact telephone number is ESSENTIAL! My time is valuable too."* (Rating: 1) Action taken: phone number was added prominently to the page.

*"Great info on recycling. I was worried about the mattress going to landfill - thanks for providing helpful information."* (website rating: 5) Action taken: none needed

*"Why are your flags at half-mast? There is no info on your website."* (website rating: 1) Action taken: a news story was written and placed on our homepage

### Key eForm statistics

Over the past twelve months, Council has developed a range of online forms making it easier for our customers to apply, book, report or submit service requests without the need to visit one of our customer service centres.

As of June 2018 we had 68 eForms available on our website and 32,235 eForms have been completed between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018. Our most popular eForms are: Review my parking infringement notice, Contact Council and Report a bin problem.

Our eForms have been rated over 33,000 times and 93 per cent of our community has given them a rating of 'very easy' or 'easy'.

#### **What our customers are saying**

*"Everything was very simple and straightforward. I don't see any areas for improvement. Thank you very much." (eForm rating: very easy)*

*"Nothing, I was dreading the process and it turned out to be very easy! Thanks." (eForm rating: very easy)*

*"Form slow to load, otherwise well-designed layout. Easy to follow." (eForm rating: neutral)*

*"You already have all my details - all I should need to do is put in my Animal ID and microchip number - and that should be all you need... Thanks." (eForm rating: neutral)*

### **Upcoming projects and continuous improvement**

Our digital transformation continues to change the way Council interacts with our customers. We have a number of exciting projects coming up that will provide more convenience, more choice and more online services and opportunities for our customers.

#### **BAU content**

Our Digital team has actioned over 2300 requests from the organisation and has completed an estimated 1200 of hours responding to business needs in the organisation.

#### **Accessibility**

It is an ongoing effort to ensure Council meets our W3C Level AA accessibility standards. In addition to regular accessibility audits, Council has acquired a new quality assurance tool which will support the Digital team to monitor, address and report against web accessibility.

#### **Search engine optimisation**

Search engine optimisation is an integral part of the Digital team's business as usual work. The Digital team, as well as our Communications Business Partners and subject matter experts, will undertake further training to ensure we are producing search-friendly content.

#### **Dashboard project**

As part of our commitment to transparency and ongoing reporting to our community, the Digital team has developed a Digital Snapshot. Located on our website, the snapshot celebrates the website's one year anniversary and highlights key figures about our online services.

This report will be updated quarterly and will eventually become an interactive dashboard which displays live data.

#### **Over 55s (previously known as Active Ageing)**

As a City with a higher proportion of people at post retirement age than Greater Melbourne, we are focused on ensuring the wellbeing of the older residents in our community. Our online hub for older residents will make it easier for older residents to find health information, wellbeing activities and

services relevant to them. This new section of the website is scheduled to be officially launched during Senior's Week in October 2018.

### **Careers hub**

By September 2018 the jobs and careers section of the website will be reinvigorated to position City of Boroondara as a great place to work, with a range of opportunities to support the 150+ services we provide to our community.

This is being addressed as one of the 'Improving Community Access to Services' projects, delivered by the Digital team in collaboration with People, Culture and Development.

### **Interactive building model**

To complement existing and upcoming planning and building guides on the website, the Digital team is developing an interactive planning and building app to help customers understand whether or not they need a permit for their works.

Customers will be able to explore the elements of a house or other building to see whether a permit is required, and if so they will be connected to information that helps them with the process.

**Marilyn Kearney,**  
**Director Customer Experience and Business Transformation**

## Glossary of terms

### Co-design

Also known as 'participatory design', co-design is the process of involving stakeholders in the design and development of services, processes or functionality to ensure their needs and perspectives are taken into consideration. We do this through focus groups, individual interviews and even online surveys.

### Hub

A hub is a place or focal point of an activity. In a digital context, a hub is usually a distinct area in a website with a particular audience.

### Pageviews

Google Analytics defines pageviews as the total number of pages viewed during a time period.

### Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation. When we publish content, we want search engines such as Google to rank it highly in the search results. We focus on keywords, tweak phrases, use synonyms, and add invisible 'metadata' to boost our chances of appearing at the top of a results page.

### Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search Engine Marketing or SEM refers to paid advertising or placement to ensure a high result.

### Sessions

Google Analytics defines sessions as a group of user interactions with your website that take place within a given time frame. For example a single session can contain multiple page views, events, social interactions, and ecommerce transactions.

### Usability testing

Usually a term used for testing websites, 'usability testing' involves a user (could be a customer or a staff member) attempting to complete a series of tasks and providing feedback on how easy or difficult they find it. This can be done face to face or (less ideal) online to identify pain points or other problems that need to be addressed.

### Wireframe

In the early stages of a project before time and money are spent on development, wireframes can be paper sketches or basic online drawings - a bit like simplified architectural blueprints - that show where different pieces of content and functionality could be placed. These can be used in co-design or usability activities with staff and customers.