

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 17th September, 2018.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Louise Baldock(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Gillian Corr, , Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson,

Officers: Reuben Kench, Lorraine Dixon (CL&E) ,Jane Smith, Stephen Donaghy (A&H), Craig Willows (CS), Carly Dixon (HRL&C), Gary Woods, Marianne Sleeman (DCE)

Also in attendance: Alex Metcalfe

Apologies: Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Mick Moore, Katie Slack, Mrs Neelam un Kabir

**PEO
28/18** **Welcome, Evacuation Procedure and Recording of the Meeting**

Evacuation, audio recording and housekeeping procedures were noted.

**PEO
29/18** **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared

**PEO
30/18** **Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 19th February, 26th February, 19th March, 16th April and 23rd April 2018.

AGREED that the minutes of the meetings held on 19th February, 26th February, 19th March, 16th April and 23rd April 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**PEO
31/18** **Action Plan for Agreed Recommendations - Review of Mental Health and Wellbeing including Suicide and Self-Harm**

Members were presented with the Action Plan setting out how the agreed recommendations from the review of Mental Health and Wellbeing including Suicide and Self-Harm will be implemented and target dates for completion.

Members were reminded that the recommendations had been categorised into three sections relating to which organisations/services would be accountable for the proposed actions.

AGREED that the Action Plan be approved.

**PEO
32/18** **Scrutiny Review of Digital Optimisation**

COMMUNICATIONS & WEB TEAMS

Members received information from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Communication, Consultation and Engagement Manager which covered consultation, marketing and communications/engagement activity in relation to the Council's digital service provision, as well as website design and the current social media offer. Areas of note included:

- Focus groups had been held to engage with a range of residents, Council employees and young people to gain feedback on layout/design and ease of use of the website, including online services. As a result of the focus groups changes have been made.
- Digital services are being communicated through a campaign called 'Do it online'; the main aim of this campaign was to increase awareness of the range of Council services that are available online. This was initially focussed on Bulky Waste but will be extended to change of address and single person tax applications. Activity has not yet been fully evaluated but anecdotal evidence shows an increase in the number of people accessing the bulky waste service.
- No specific work had been carried out to determine why people are not using digital services.
- Ongoing development plans to improve the online customer services user experience.
- Feedback on the website was sought for SOCITM results. Web analytics are used to track user journeys to help audit content. The Council has learned from sites which are cited as best practice from SOCITM (used as the benchmark across all authorities) reports

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- Consideration was given to the criteria used to become part of a focus group. Members were informed that representation depends on what is being consulted upon, and appropriate groups would be invited (including panellists from the Council's Viewpoint).
- It was suggested it would be useful if Members of the Committee visit a Customer Service Centre to see how assisted self-serve works.
- Discussions took place around the difficulty of managing the online forms package on the website and the amount of information that needs to be delivered to all Council customers. Work was being carried out regarding website content which was moving in the right direction. It was also noted that those websites that work best often have a narrower focus – the Council however has an enormous range of services, customer types and volume of information to provide and process.
- Compatibility with mobile devices was key and should be at the forefront of thinking when developing digital services.
- Is there the potential for parents/carers to pay for school dinners online rather than by cash or over the phone (for fees payable to SBC)?
- Communications and web teams work closely with Customer Services and are represented in the Council's Digital Service Group.
- Bulky waste collections help avoid items being left at the roadside, and are part of the measures to reduce fly-tipping.
- Appears quicker to phone the Council rather than personalise My Stockton.
- Are we hampered by not having the most up-to-date technology? There had been a big improvement in the Council's digital capability in the last two years and a further update is forthcoming. Also looking at developing the search engine, undertaking content audits and use of chatbots.

The Committee requested the following further information:

- The top ten Council websites according to SOCITM

CARE FOR YOUR AREA

Consideration was given to the report on the use of digital technology within Care for Your Area (CFYA) Services which included:

- Overview of activity provided by CFYA, with the highest levels of customer contact involving waste and recycling collection, grounds maintenance and street cleansing.
- Levels of Demand: increasing percentage of contacts to CFYA are self-serve requests.
- Current Technology: GIS/Maps@Stockton was used regularly by staff to check land ownership, pinpoint specific locations (e.g. fly-tipping removal requests) as well as providing an asset register for a range of assets that the Council maintain. Use of handheld units was ongoing and had been extremely useful in increasing performance and efficiency.
- Future Plans: CFYA are committed to exploring the use of technology wherever possible across the service. The use of handheld technology was at the forefront of all plans and work currently ongoing to adopt new handhelds within the Highways Maintenance teams.

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- It was questioned how residents know if what they have requested has been actioned, and whether there should be a direct route back to the person who made the request (also allowing them to make any comments which could further improve the service). It was felt this was challenging due to the number of requests received and the limited employee resources which have declined over recent years. However, a feedback loop was being considered and built into any new services.
- Difficulty logging abandoned vehicles via My Stockton was noted – CFYA will look into this further. There are some issues where the Council would not advise residents to make requests online – would prefer a call to ensure it is dealt with quickly.

The Committee requested the following further information:

- Confirmation of the actual reduction in CFYA operatives.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Members received information from the Council's Environmental Health Service Manager on the volume and nature of transactions within Environmental Health, the current provision of digital services in this area, and key considerations in widening this:

- Number of services offered including pest control, animal welfare, animal health, public nuisance, food safety, occupational health and safety, and

environmental protection. However, only a very small percentage of requests are made via self-serve (majority are telephone contacts).

- Current technology used includes Civica to gather information, GIS and digi-pens for pest control.
- Future developments could include the increased use of social media to promote services and signpost residents to self-serve requests, and the implementation of an intelligent system that gets information direct to Officers to enable them to undertake their work.

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- It may not be intuitive for residents to report an issue under the right service if they are not clear what that service is made up of.
- Environmental Health sections on other Local Authority websites are either similar to SBCs or are so complex to navigate that users are likely to drop off as the customer journey is so poor. Need to ensure that any forms on the website are well designed as more work could be created if Officers have to seek clarification about a request.
- Consideration was given to the wording used on the website and how it has to be made simple residents to know where to look; clear web pages that give a clear overview of a particular service. Members acknowledged there was always going to be certain areas of work that require a telephone call or face-to-face communication, but a better usage of digital services was required.

DIGITAL SERVICES GROUP

Members received information regarding a new in-house Digital Services Group. The Group's Terms of Reference were presented which outlined the following:

- Core Group members
- Digital developments
- Governance
- Key roles
- Meeting structures
- Project delivery

The Group will have strategic Council-wide oversight of the development of digital services, systems, technologies and solutions, and will identify where resources should be spent in order to get the greatest value. Developing the workforce by building digital skills/capacity is another key feature. Feedback from the Digital Service Group would be offered intermittently.

LOCAL DIGITAL DECLARATION

Members were informed of the Local Digital Declaration, a joint endeavour initiated by the UK Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Government Digital Service (GDS), and a collection of Local Authorities and sector bodies from across the UK.

This declaration affirms the Councils collective ambition for local public services in the internet age and the commitments to realising it. It commits the Council

working on a new scale to:

- Design services that best meet the needs of citizens
- Challenge the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services needed.
- Protect citizens' privacy and security.
- Deliver better value for money.

It was noted that by signing up to this declaration, Councils are then able to access funding if they put forward a project that solves a problem within a year. SBC are intending to sign up, and are in the process of identifying an appropriate project.

AGREED that:

- 1) The information be noted.
- 2) The further information be provided as requested.

PEO 33/18 Work Programme 2018-2019

Consideration was given to the Work Programme. The next meeting is on Thursday 25th October 2018 (1.30pm), and Members were informed that a representative from Revenue and Benefits will be in attendance, along with personnel from Xentrall Shared Services and other Local Authorities, as part of the continuing evidence-gathering for the Digital Optimisation review.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

PEO 34/18 Chair's Update

The Chair had nothing further to report