Scrutiny Review of Digital Optimisation – Communications & Web Teams

Consultations

How does the Council consult and engage with residents on changes to services, and how does it provide feedback on such consultations?

As part of the web development Phase 2 approximately 7 focus groups were held between Aug 14 and March 15. This was to engage with a range of residents and included panellists from the Councils Viewpoint as well as young people, those with disabilities and council colleagues. This was to gain feedback on layout / design and ease of use of the website, which included online services.

The responses were feedback to the Digital Service Group and changes to the web design were made as a direct results of these focus groups.

Since then, further improvements have been made, such as the introduction of the search bar and top tasks which was in response to recent SOCITM results but more so best practice examples from other authorities.

Working alongside Customer Services there are more developments planned and again residents will be consulted via a series of focus groups.

Marketing, Communications and Engagement

How does the Council find out why people aren't using digital services, gain an understanding of how they currently interact with services, and why they prefer non-digital methods?

As part of our work to better understand the 'customer journey' website analytics are used to determine where people 'drop off' (leave the website) and content is improved / scrutinised accordingly.

With regards to understanding why and how people aren't using digital services no specific consultation work has been commissioned from Customer Services yet.

How are the Council's digital services (including assisted digital support where available) being communicated?

Digital Services are being communicated through a campaign called 'Do it online'. Please see Communications Plan, Activity Tracker and examples attached.

This currently focussed on Bulky Waste but will be extended to Change of address and Single person tax applications. Activity includes print advertising (Stockton-on-Tees News and Gazette), online advertising, social media, point of sale (banners in the customer services centres, libraries etc) and contact centres telephoney system.

Activity has not yet been fully evaluated but anecdotal evidence shows an increase in the number of people accessing the bulky waste service during the same period with an increase in wagons to meet the surge in demand particularly over the Easter/Spring Bank Holiday periods.

No specific work has taken place on assisted digital support.

What has been done to engage residents with the Council's digital services, and what future plans are in place around the promotion/marketing of these services?

The Engagement Team within CCE haven't conducted any specific engagement activity. The Customer Service team have engaged with residents in Customer Service Centres in the libraries with tablets in the queue to encourage people to 'do it online' as well as the installation of kiosks.

Any learning from other Local Authorities regarding digital services communications?

Research took place as part of the 'Do it online' campaign planning with similar communications taking place across other LA's.

Website design and integration with customer self-serve.

Current offer and proposals for future development in relation to increasing the provision of digital services.

As previously mentioned there are improvement plans being developed in line with Customer Services to improve the online user experience.

How is feedback on the website sought, and how are the Council's digital services being tailored to meet the needs of the Borough's residents (i.e. personalisation of service)?

Feedback on the website is sought for SOCITIM results, focus groups (on topics such as redesign and user experience). Web analytics are used to track user journeys to help audit content. Personalisation of service is currently through MyStockton which is linked to from the website.

Assurance around website being able to cope with increased digital service demand.

This sits within Xentrall ICT Services who are currently working to move hosting of the SBC website onto Microsoft Azure Cloud. This is a scalable platform which increases 'on demand'

Social media offer and development.

We have several corporate accounts across social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. There are also other accounts devolved across the authority, for example libraries, children centres. These accounts are used to communicate and engage residents in several ways including severe weather incidents, school closures and gritting alerts as well as promoting council events and key campaigns such as big community switch.

We do receive messages from residents via these platforms reporting incidents (potholes, lighting, fly tipping, littering). These are currently dealt with by officers within the Communications Team in conjunction with services across the council and responded to as appropriate. Work is underway to introduce a dashboard to support the accounts and allow Customer Service Team to respond to the queries directly.

Any learning from other Local Authorities regarding web design (e.g. best practice/customer preference)?

As mentioned we have learnt from sites which are cited as best practice from the SOCITM reports which included more prominent placing of 'top tasks' and a more icon, rather than image, based approach which we have implemented.