

## **Organisation Scrutiny Committee**

**01 February 2022**

### **MINUTE EXTRACT**

#### **OSC/ Scrutiny Review**

**50/2**

**1-22**

Members conducted a series of interviews with Officers and representatives from Citizens Advice as part of their Scrutiny Review into ICT and Transformation.

#### **Interview One with Citizens Advice**

The Committee welcomed Gillian Sladen (CEO of NED Citizens' Advice) and Liz Holt (CA Mid Mercia) to the meeting to discuss the Digital Connect Project which was provided by Citizens' Advice and delivered by CA Mid Mercia).

Members heard that the pandemic had highlighted a digital divide between generations and communities. Because of this, a digital skills project had been established to help level up and strengthen skills in the community, reduce digital exclusion, reduce social isolation and have a positive impact on mental health. Four Derbyshire Citizens Advice organisations were collaborating on a number of projects and had been able to establish good referral pathways.

The Committee was informed that the project had supported clients over the age of 50 throughout North East Derbyshire through a person centred 1:1 approach that included a tablet loaning service.

The Representatives stated that 131 face to face sessions had been completed and that a majority of referrals to the project had been self-referrals. Members heard that 100% of clients felt more confident after the sessions and 89% of clients had expressed reduced social isolation and increased connectivity. There were also plans to extend its community based venues to Killamarsh, Dronfield and Holmewood.

Members discussed the Digital Connect Project at length and enquired as to the level of funding that the project received. Members heard that the project received £59,903 of funding and that more volunteers were needed so that more people could be supported. The Strategic Partnership Coordinator stated that they would look into the possibility of advertising the project within the next addition of the Council magazine.

Members invited Citizens Advice to attend local residents groups and meetings so that they could promote the project.

The Strategic Partnership Coordinator clarified the Council's relationship with Citizens Advice for Committee and that the project was not funded by the Council.

Members noted that DCC Library Services could offer support completing online forms and Rykneld also provided a certain level of support to their residents.

## **Interview Two with the Communications Marketing & Design Manager and the Improvement Officer**

### **1. What Progress has been made towards full digital service?**

The Communications, Marketing & Design Manager informed Members that the Council's online channels had been increasing. At the time of the meeting, 7,500 residents had signed up to receive emails from the Council. This included 4000 residents that had signed up to receive email updates on bin collections.

Committee also heard that the Communications Team assisted other departments and services to deliver new digital initiatives.

The Improvement Officer told Committee that Equalities were constantly improving services and making them more digitally accessible. This included the addition of a number of virtual forms such as the Reasonable Adjustments and Hate Crime forms. Digital services were promoted across a number of channels.

Members discussed the Interviewees responses and sought assurances that residents were not being left behind.

Committee noted that in-person channels would remain open as digital services increased and that digital services had only recently been implemented but they were being actively promoted.

### **2. How easy and intuitive are the services we have introduced?**

Members heard that in 2020 a new website was delivered that was mobile and tablet compatible.

The Officers stressed the importance of using plain English and infographics where possible. The website was assessed and had a reading age of 11, and the entire site was 92% accessible, this was in the top quarter of all Councils nationally.

Committee noted that the digital services underwent a constant improvement cycle to ensure the services were as intuitive and accessible as possible.

### **3. How do we promote digital services and how are we measuring the customer experience?**

Committee heard that a wide range of communication channels were used in order to reach as many people as possible. Website and YouTube links were included on the News that is sent out to every household in the District. Customer experience was continuously monitored via satisfaction surveys.

The Council was also signed up to the BSL Charter and had a video relay service with a BSL interpreter that residents were able to utilise.

#### 4. How are we ensuring that all customers can access digital services, and what are we doing to help those can't?

The Officers stated that the Council's printed publication; The News, was distributed to all houses in the District. This was a vital channel for residents who could not or would not access digital services.

They also suggested that various "how to" videos could be created to show residents the ease of accessing and using the online services. In addition to this, targeted advertisements could be used to increase engagement from certain demographics.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring that residents were not left behind. They heard that the number of residents that had indicated they would not use the digital services had decreased and was now only six out of a surveyed 130 residents.

Equality impact assessments were also used to ensure that residents were not being left behind. Data from the census would be made available in March and this would feed into equality impact assessments.

#### 5. What are the costs of implementation?

Members heard that the proposed "how to" videos would not incur any cost. The Communications team would be making changes to staffing management in order to benefit the Council as a whole. This would include assessing content sent to them by other Departments in order to ensure it was uploaded to the most suitable location.

The Improvement Officer informed Members that the video relay service was a pay as you go service and that the charge was to the Council and not residents. This service was not being used much at present and required increased promotion as well as case studies to assess its effectiveness.

#### 6. What are the barriers to success?

Committee heard that some of the barriers to success included the confidence of residents and a willingness to engage with the digital services. This could be resolved by engaging with the community on a more personal level.

The Improvement Officer noted a reluctance of some residents towards using the various services. This was remedied by having the video relay service promoted by deaf residents. The Deaf Forum also attended the Meet the Council event.

Members enquired as to the budget made available for these services and if there was a breakdown into the residents that did not want to access these services.

Committee noted that there was a Council wide social media budget of £500. A breakdown of residents that did not want to access the digital services was not possible at the present time but data could be gathered by interacting with the Community.

Officers stated the importance of ensuring that progress continued to be evidence led.

7. Do you have any other opinions/suggestions to improve digital services?

Members were informed that Staff were constantly attending various training courses, this included a recent accessibility awareness course.

It was noted that guidance had been made available on the extranet for other Council Departments on how files should be sent to the Communications Team.

The Communications, Marketing & Design Manager suggested using a suite of laptops to demonstrate digital services to residents.

The Improvement Officer stated that an equality impact assessment should always be the first consideration when establishing a new service. It was also important to ensure accessibility through the use of subtitles on videos and other reasonable adjustments such as sending out extracts of The News in braille.