

eDemocracy Scrutiny Review – Interim Report

Background

1. At a meeting in July 2015 the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee (CSMC) considered a scrutiny topic proposed by James Alexander on the expansion of local democracy using digital means, and received detailed information on e-government transformation – see Annex A.
2. Furthermore the Committee were informed of work being undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to respond to Budget 2015's request for joint proposals from the sector for extending 'Government's digital ambitions to local public services'. The intention being for HM Treasury, DCLG, LGA and the Government Digital Service to collaborate with partners in local government, as the sector develops a set of proposals that will enable more customer-focused, digitally-enabled and efficient local services in time to inform future budget allocations.
3. Feedback from the Head of Democratic Services confirmed there was room for improvement here in York. She suggested there were technological improvements that could be made e.g. the introduction of on-line registration to speak at meetings and other improvements that would not require technological solutions e.g. the recent introduction of new rules to enable the free flow of questions to Executive Members from the floor during Council meetings, without the prescription of advance notification.
4. With this in mind, and in view of the authority having to find budget reductions, CSMC confirmed their support for the proposed review, suggesting it should include gaining feedback from residents on their experiences. They set up this Task Group to carry out the review on their behalf and agreed the following review remit:

Review Aim:

‘To identify the potential for improving public engagement and take up of services through digital means and the Councils ability to respond.’

Objectives:

- i. To understand City of York Council’s (CYC) current position in regard to online services, its current digital infrastructure and the resources required to enable it to function
- ii. To examine best practice by other Local Authorities and at parliamentary level
- iii. To establish CYC’s potential for development and the additional resources it would require
- iv. Identify the priorities for action in the short and longer term

Information Gathered to Date

5. Objective (i) - CYC’s current position in regard to online services, its current digital infrastructure and the resources required to enable it to function

At its first meeting in August 2015, the Task Group received a presentation in support of Objective (i) which included information on CYC’s current infrastructure and available resources – see copy of presentation at Annex B.

6. The presentation detailed the progress to date with replacing the Children and Adults systems in order to provide better integration between Children, Adults and Health.
7. Information was also provided on the formation of an interim Digital Customer Board, made up of officers from the office of the Chief Executive, ICT and Customer Services, set up to agree a wider programme brief for digitalisation of services within which the CRM implementation would sit. It was confirmed that the interim Board had been tasked with ensuring that all associated work was properly scoped with initial plans and timescales, ready for when a formal Programme Board is established to deliver the digital agenda. The first meeting of the interim Board was scheduled for early September 2015.
8. In considering the work of the customer centre, the Task Group requested some up to date performance information, in particular:

- Average wait time in the customer centre
- Performance of call handling Benefits
- Performance of call handling Customer Services

9. Data and graphs detailing these figures are shown at Annex C.

10. The Asst Director for Customers & Employees confirmed that the authority is in the process of initiating a project to implement a new Customer Management system (CRM), and that a suitable system had been identified. As Edinburgh Council uses the same system it was suggested that the Task Group members may like to take a look at Edinburgh's website, in particular at what their customers can do electronically e.g. set up a Direct Debit (something as yet not possible in York) and set up a 'my account' function which allows its customers to:

- Access and manage their account wherever they are, whenever they need to
- Use their online services to contact the authority quickly and simply - no need to visit or call
- Report a problem and receive notification as soon as it's fixed

11. Objective (ii) – Best Practice by other Local Authorities

As part of the presentation, the Asst Director for Transformation & Change talked through a number of example Local Authorities exhibiting best practice. These included:

- Brighton & Hove City Council
- Bristol City Council
- Manchester City Council
- Edinburgh City Council
- London Borough of Camden Council
- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

12. It was suggested that members of the Task group may like to look at those council websites to get a feel for the level of customer interaction they provide.

13. Additional information was provided on the security measures required to ensure personal data remained secure i.e. the different levels of verification required for different packages of services.

Initial Analysis

14. In regard to the new CRM system, the Task group agreed it would be useful to see what the new system looked like. And officers have therefore arranged for the supplier to provide a web demonstration/ presentation at this meeting.
15. The Task Group queried the timeline and funding for the replacement of the CRM and Children and Adults systems. In regard to the new CRM, they requested feedback on the first interim Board meeting (see paragraph 6 above), in particular governance arrangements, initial plans (service rollouts) and timelines, together with an update on the implementation of the new CRM.
16. The Task Group were surprised that contact services handled only 33% of the calls in to CYC, and were pleased to note that the introduction of more flexible technology would encourage a move towards a more flexible workforce and improved access for residents.
17. In noting that best practice generated 50% of requests for street based services via self service, provided improved signposting to partner organisations, and optimised the engagement of minority client groups, the Task group were keen to explore the opportunities for improved customer interaction. They queried how best to promote the forthcoming improvements across the city, and how best to encourage Councillors to use it.
18. Overall, the Task Group noted that whilst the implementation of the new CRM system and further/wider digitalisation would provide a means of easier, efficient and effective interaction with the council in an open way, it would not guarantee improved customer/democratic engagement.
19. In considering how best to make the city's democratic processes more open and transparent, the Task Group discussed the suggestions made in the presentation e.g. the introduction of webinars, interactive Q & A sessions, public participation via Skype etc.

Options

20. Members may choose to:
 - Arrange further task group meetings
 - Request additional information

- Spend time with Customer Services Officers
- Gather feedback for residents / interested parties / other Cllrs etc on their aspirations for accessing the council
- Analyse previous relevant complaints received to assess whether:
 - the new system will address the issues raised
 - the lines of communication are suitable for the number of demands arising

Recommendation

21. Members are recommended to:

- Identify any additional required in support of objectives (i) – (iii)
- Agree an additional meeting date

Reason: To enable the Task Group to identify the priorities for action in the short and longer term in line with review objective (iv), and conclude their work on this review.

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Report Approved



Date

18.09.2015

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes:

Annex A – Initial Information on eGovernment Transformation

Annex B – Copy of Presentation on CYC's current position in regard to online services, its current digital infrastructure and the resources required to enable it to function

Annex C – Customer Centre Performance Information from April 2015 to date