Nottinghamshire County Council

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

DIGITAL FIRST UPDATE:
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY & NEW WEBSITE TESTING

Purpose of the Report

1. To update elected members on the new website user testing phase (beta) and to seek approval for a new strategic approach for the use of Social Media.

Information and Advice

2. In April, Policy Committee agreed that regular updates would be brought back to update members on progress with the Digital First project that sits within the Customer Access and Digital Development Programme in the Redefining Your Council portfolio.

3. Two of the key work streams of the Digital First project are the delivery of a new, customer-centric website and a more strategic usage of social media. Both of these are due to deliver by September 2015.

4. Policy Committee in February 2015 approved the creation of a Member Digital Champion in order to help keep members up to date on digital developments through a variety of means including the Digital First blog https://digitalfirstnotts.wordpress.com/. As Cllr Darren Langton is the lead for ICT on the Finance and Property Committee, he has been asked to take on this role.

The New Website

5. The new website will use responsive design, so that the design adapts to the screen size, and have the user needs at its heart so that they can undertake a variety of transactions. Social media and digital engagement channels will be used to bolster, support and deliver the customer journeys and help to provide a seamless digital experience.

6. Three distinctive website prototypes were developed and tested with users who matched each of the digital personas (developed to represent the different user types). This result informed the design and thinking of the beta version of the website that has now been released into the public domain.

7. The objective of the beta phase is to build a working prototype of the website that can be tested with real users in a live environment. This then allows a process of continual improvement until ready to go live in September.

8. The existing website will remain operational during this phase but users will be invited to try out the beta version so that feedback can be gathered to allow constant improvement.

9. Content will be improved and moved over from the current version of nottinghamshire.gov.uk into the beta site over the summer. Users will be guided towards the new content as it approaches its "go live" version.

10. An analytics package, called Hot Jar, is being used to collect feedback through polls, surveys and other tracking devices to find out where users go on the site. Newer versions of the website will be released on a regular basis with additional content as and when it becomes available. These updates will reflect the feedback from users as the site continues to be iterated.

Social Media

11. Social media is a broad term which refers to a range of digital media. It should be used for two-way communication and can encourage audience participation, interaction, delivery, sharing and creation of user-generated content. This includes: networks e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; bookmarks eg Digg, Reddit; publishing eg blogs, news; customer service; streaming e.g. Flickr, Vimeo

12. Policy Committee approved the Council's first social media policy in December 2012. Its main focus is the safe and legal use of social media. This policy needs to be expanded (to reflect current practice and opening up of social media access to all employees) and updated to reflect a more strategic approach that supports the delivery of corporate objectives.

13. A recent national survey, Direct Message, by accountancy firm BDO UK found that two-thirds of councils now use social media and 77% of these believe it leads to cost savings if used correctly. Councils identified that they saw a reduction in telephone calls and face-to-face contact.

What are we trying to fix?

14. An audit of the current use of social media revealed that there were a large number of accounts that were managed by services and a small number of corporate accounts managed by the digital team. The audit showed an approach that was, in the main, unco-ordinated and non-strategic. It is unclear how social media currently supports the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives.

15. The Council currently has 61 Facebook pages, 20 Twitter accounts and a presence on a range of other social media channels including Flickr (photo site), YouTube, LinkedIn and Google+.

16. The accounts that have been managed well (regular and relevant postings, good response times to customer queries etc) have witnessed some impressive growth with significant followings (20,000 on the corporate Twitter account and 16,000 likes on the corporate Facebook page). The ones that have been unmanaged or not maintained on a regular basis, unsurprisingly, have not fared so well.

17. A week-long snapshot, between 19 and 26 November 2014, was used to monitor use of social media to find out the level and type of activity. The audit revealed the following:

- Fewer than half the Council's social media accounts were active during this week
- For the majority of the accounts there was a low level of engagement due to a lack of a customer-centric approach
- Content, tone and frequency of posting varies enormously and often depended on individual administrators – content was also frequently duplicated and rarely visual
- Lack of consistency and structure – reflects the lack of any strategy
- Social media usage is mixed
- The link between a lot of social media usage on the accounts run by services and the Council website was weak
- The main drivers of traffic to the Council's website from social media are in order of the highest: Facebook, Twitter, WordPress (blog site), LinkedIn, Trip Advisor and Blogger - there was no identified traffic from Google+, Flickr or Pinterest. It is worth noting that some of the traffic from Facebook came through advertising which might skew this picture slightly.

What is the new strategic approach?

18. The new strategy will be designed to make sure that the right messages are delivered to the right people at the right times. This will require a more targeted approach that segments the market by geographical area, age or activity. It will also make sure that messages are more closely aligned to support the specified outcomes that are underpinned by the core values in the Strategic Plan: Treating People Fairly; Value for Money; Working Together.

19. Messages will also be designed to increase satisfaction with the Council by targeting the main drivers: keeping residents informed, supporting the value for money message and showing people how they can influence decision making.

20. The strategy will be monitored and evaluated by using a social media solution that will also allow greater control and visibility of messages being delivered from multiple accounts. This will support the devolved model but in a more controlled way that allows individual postings but there is increased confidence that message content meets the necessary standard and is timed appropriately.

21. The aim will be to show rather than tell and encourage people to join a conversation through engaging and appropriate content. For example, messages will reinforce the notion that this is a safe county to live as opposed to simply telling people that this is the case. Another way of doing this could be by using an infographic of the crime statistics or by a video showing the before and after of a crime prevention measure. This makes the message implied rather than explicit.

22. Another key element of the strategy will be consider how social media can be used to find out what matters to residents and their thoughts on matters that are being consulted upon. This has the potential to engage with a demographic that has traditionally been very difficult to reach.

23. Consideration will need to be given to how we record feedback from social media in any consultations, how we respond, and, critically, how we show residents that their response is being listened to.

24. Another increasingly important area is the way that social media is used in crisis or disruptive situations. In recent times, this has been the medium that people have used to both communicate about events and also find live updates on often fast-moving and changing situations, such as floods.

Shift of emphasis

25. The current focus of the social media approach is on the organisation i.e. the Council and the proposal is that this shifts to being more about Nottinghamshire as a community (people, culture and place). This will provide our social communications with more of a sense of drive, local identity, and create a sense of pride and build belonging and connectivity in to everything that we do as an authority.

26. All the social media sites will remain clearly branded as Nottinghamshire County Council so that users know that it is the official site. This will also fit in better with the main website which already uses the web address nottinghamshire.gov.uk while also adopting the established branding.

27. Underpinning this new title would be the creation of a new hashtag that would seek to capture the values of the Council but be more conversational to encourage engagement and stimulate discussion. A hashtag is an easy way for users to tie together related content into one feed in Twitter and other social media. This would not only help to tie the messages and channels together but it would also allow the Council to communicate a united and powerful statement about who we are and what we represent.

Summary

28. This report presents a more strategic approach to the use of social media that will be further developed over the next few months. The new approach will ensure that meaningful and relevant content is delivered to the most appropriate audience using the most suitable social media channel in a timely fashion.

29. At the heart of both of these work streams is the drive to involve customers, or users, throughout the discovery and development phases. This represents a shift in the approach to the traditional roll-out of technology. The new approach will be mirrored in the way other roll-outs are managed within the Digital First project.

30. The new approach will help to drive online transactions, support calls to action, allow the authority to communicate effectively in crisis or disruption situations, encourage local democracy with a greater engagement in consultations and support customer service and feedback. Ultimately the true test of success will be the feedback from the users and whether the online delivery of services is so good that they choose to use this means rather than other more costly routes such as telephone or face-to-face meetings.

31. This will be evaluated by taking baseline measures that demonstrate the volume and cost of the delivery of services currently and contrasting this with the online delivery.

Timelines

32. The new beta version of the website will remain live for the next few months before it becomes the official site in September 2015.

33. In terms of social media, this will also be implemented by September 2015 so that it can support the delivery of the new website. Beforehand there will be a phased approach to delivery:

Other Options Considered

34. To continue with the current website and usage of social media – both of these options were ruled out due to the need to support the delivery of savings through a customer-centric website and social media strategy.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

35. To deliver online services that are so good that those that can will choose to use them.

Statutory and Policy Implications

36. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

All expenditure attached with these work streams will be contained within existing budgets. Any divergence from this position will be brought back before Members.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that Policy Committee

1)   Notes the progress made and approach to delivering a new customer-centric website
2)   Approves the strategic approach outlined regarding Social Media
3)   Agrees for a social media delivery plan to be developed and put into action with regular progress reports on the Digital First blog
4)   Approves that the current social media policy is updated to reflect the new strategy and is brought back to Policy Committee in October 2015
5)   Approves the relaxing of restrictions on social media access for employees

Alan Rhodes
The Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Done/Clare Yau

Constitutional Comments (HD 27/05/15)

37. The recommendations fall within the terms of reference for Policy committee.

Financial Comments (SES 27/05/15)

38. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All