

## COUNCIL SEMINAR 19th November, 2013

Present:- Councillor Sharman (in the Chair); The Mayor (Councillor John Foden) and Councillors Ali, Atkin, Beaumont, Dalton, Ellis, Goulty, Kaye, Pickering, Pitchley, Read, G. A. Russell, P. A. Russell, Steele, Swift, Wallis and Wootton.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Hoddinott and Smith.

### THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE.

Councillor T. Sharman, Acting Deputy Leader, introduced Tracy Holmes, Head of Corporate Communications and Marketing, and Jon Ashton, On-line Services Manager, to the Seminar. Tracy and Jon had prepared a presentation in relation to recent and planned developments to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's website.

#### Website usage: -

Customer access strategy: -

- Face-to-face, telephone and internet methods of communicating with customers;
- JADU;
- Editorial guidelines, content strategy;
- **Costs of each customer access** – face-to-face - £15, telephone - £7, corporate website – 0.42p, therefore, a strong business case existed to increase the use and scope of the website;
- Press releases and social media.

#### High level statistics: -

- In 2010 the website got 60,000 visits per month, in 2013 100,000 visitors came to the Council's website;
  - Pages viewed each month – 2000,000 in 2013;
  - Forms completed – 2010 – 1000 per month, 2013 - 2,500 per month;
  - Property bids – in 2010 – 5000 per month, in 2013 – 8000 per month;

#### Using the website and searching and navigation: -

- Rotherham sought to organise its website with search terms preferred by customers – for example 'bin' rather than the industry's preferred term 'recycling receptacle';
- Using a search engine weighted to customer needs;
- Rotherham's website currently had 10,000+ pages of content;
- The industry standard was to make everything accessible with only three clicks;

- Rotherham's website had 11 'top level' categories, but employed a 'top task' based homepage. Searches on housing, bin collections and jobs accounted for 50% of traffic on the website;
- Central Government List was used to categorise the website and this could make it more challenging for customers to use than other websites;
- Where things were placed could be confusing for customers, for example, single person's discount information was not in the council tax section, but stored under benefits.

**Understanding customers and how they use our/any website and content strategy: -**

- Many High Street stores have gone out of business, but the brands with an on-line presence have managed to adapt and thrive;
- An on-line presence was very important;
- Innovate, adapt and deliver value via on-line;
- Did the website exist as a primary way of gaining contact details? The Council should not direct people away from the website once they had decided to use it;
- 'Content is king' – customer should drive content;
- Appropriate content in the appropriate place;
- Easy read – plain English should be used avoiding jargon and waffle;
- Short bursts of content – 'mobile first approach';
- Attention-seeking methods and layout;
- Links, bullet points, sub-headings.

**News and events and how we get good news out to people: -**

- News – including the Christmas light switch-on;
- News distributed by email on a Friday to 6,500 registered people;
- Town centre user group emails to a further 2,000 users of the Town Centre;
- Social media methods reach 7,500 (the tweet was 're-tweeted' 17 times);
- The news had reached 200,000+ users;
- This compared with 224 hits on website page relating to the lights switch-on.

**Future developments for the website: -**

- Website upgrade in March 2014;
- Your Account – would be a self-serve consolidation of the amount of accounts used, including reduction in the number of passwords required;
- Mobile content would be available, so the website view would be optimised for different methods of viewing the information, such as by mobile phone, tablet and so on;

- Community Map – a range of services would be accessible by a map, for example, surgery information, providing a link to partners, and police crime data;
- Integrated housing management;
- News and alerts – the Council would automatically email alerts, Twitter updates and Facebook updates, when it had been told that someone had an interest in a particular area, such as a school closure.

Discussion ensued and the following questions were raised: -

- **Can the website follow-up if people could not find what they needed via the website?** - Yes, each page has a link to comment on content. Data demonstrating where people cannot access what they need can be analysed but it is time- and resource-consuming.
- **Technology is good if it worked. Council laptops can be slow and frustrating. Was the website accessible for people with disabilities such as dyslexia?** The laptop in question may need to be refreshed. However, the website will be speeded up. 10,000 pages of content should be streamlined to 2,000. On every page there is an accessibility option at the top right hand corner to change colour, font size and so on. The website did not push towards this as many people used their own accessibility devices and software.
- **If spelling is not spot on searches could fail or be useless** – this should not be the case as the website's search engine is Google, which takes account of mis-spelt words.
- **The Planning section of the website was hard to use, especially searching and the maps** – This was noted by the Officers.
- **Were training opportunities available?** There was the ability to provide drop-in sessions if there was sufficient interest amongst Elected Members.
- **Would the new website have links to social media to 're-tweet', 'like' and 'share' with friends and contacts? This would be a useful way of sharing good news stories** - More channels would make it harder to manage content. The new website would have links to social media.
- **The general public - some people were very nervous about using websites, was there anything in place for people who needed additional help?** – Options including on-line web chat were being explored. The potential existed, but resources were needed to actually implement these ideas.
- **The website was brilliant compared to the previous one, but the telephone directory was often not up to date** - The 'Contact Us' page promoted the 'golden numbers', but it was the intention of the website to solve queries on-line, rather than directing to a telephone number. With regards to the intranet

phone directory, the Officers agreed to take the feedback back to Corporate Information Technology Service.

Councillor Sharman thanked Jon and Tracy for their informative presentation and contribution to the discussion.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared be noted.

(2) That the presentation slides be circulated to all Elected Members.