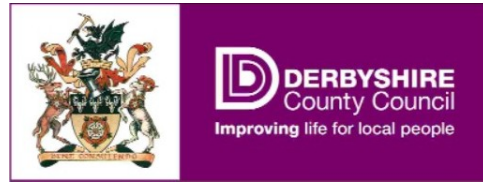


**Finance, Management  
and Regeneration  
Improvement and  
Scrutiny Committee**



# **Website Review 2010**

## **Final Report**

### **July 2010**



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## 1. Introduction

In 2009<sup>1</sup>, 18.31 million UK households had internet access, representing 70% of all households, 63% (16.5 million) had a broadband internet connection and 37.4 million adults (76% UK adult population) accessed the internet in the three month period January to March 2009 (key activities carried out on the internet include e-mailing, 90%, and finding information 78%).

As the growth on online communication continues to rapidly develop we need to ask ourselves why people visit DCC's website. Does the visitor journey meet the needs of our 'customers' or is it merely a channel by which the Authority can push information out. Most visit with a clear purpose in mind; they want to carry out a transaction or find a specific piece of information and for many the website is a convenient way of 'doing business' with us. The most popular journeys should be the shortest and easiest to navigate and be a route to increase customer engagement and satisfaction.

This Review will explore the concept of channel migration, reflecting the growth in online communication and the need to capitalise on potential financial savings that can be realised by increasing the number of transactions carried out via the web. The cost differential between the three principle channels of communication (face to face, telephone and web-based) is significant and the potential benefit for the organisation by promoting 'self-service' will be explored later in this report.

The objectives of this Review are to assess the:

- Customer journey;
- Quality and accessibility of information;
- Efficiencies that could be generated via the website; and
- Potential for development.

### Review contribution to organisational strategic objectives.

This Review and its desire to help improve website provision will also contribute towards the achievement of the Council Plan (2010-2014) priorities of leading the ways (better choice, more of a say and doing things better – open to doing things differently) and making good use of public money (services that provide excellent value for money).

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<sup>1</sup> Internet Access Households and Individuals 2009 - Statistical Bulletin - Office for National Statistics

## The Working Group

The Working Group conducting this Review was made up of Cllrs Blake, MacDonald, Wharmby, Western, Gillott and Pickering. Cllrs Blake and Pickering left the Working Group following the re-organisation of the committee at full Council April 2010, with Cllr Pat Murray becoming Chairman of the Finance, Management and Regeneration Improvement and Scrutiny Committee and joining the Working Group. In conducting this Review the Working Group met with the Assistant Director (Customer Services), Director for Communications and Access to Services and staff from the e-content team. Evidence for this Review was also received from members of the Equalities Practitioners Group and the Senior Policy Officer (Equalities).

## 2. Background

There are currently 15,000 active pages on derbyshire.gov, Derbyshire County Council's (DCC) external facing website. In a typical month the website gets around 118,000 individual users visiting and around 650,000 page views (in external traffic), with just over half the visitors coming to the Authority's site via Google, 15% by directly typing in the web address and with the remainder being linked from links on around 1,500 sites<sup>2</sup>.

The most popular pages in March 2010 were:

- 1 Homepage (always number 1)
- 2 Contact Us
- 3 Schools admissions (seasonal peak – school places are announced in March)
- 4 Libraries
- 5 Library Renewals
- 6 Blue Plaques (a recent campaign)
- 7 Public Transport Timetables
- 8 Library catalogue
- 9 Term Dates
- 10 Schools names and addresses

The last major development of the County Council's on-line electronic information and transaction communication channels took place in 2002/3 and was part of the 'Putting People First' Change Management programme. One of the primary objectives of this programme was to increase access to services for local people. In the intervening period there have been both significant technological advancements and an increasing acceptance by society of electronic communication. During this period new communication channels such as Facebook (launched in 2004 now with approximately 24m<sup>3</sup> UK users) and Twitter (launched 2006 with 5.5m UK users<sup>4</sup>) have emerged and are now an everyday part of the communication landscape.

The website has been operating in its present form since February 2005 and has two elements; its infrastructure (managed by the e-content team) and content (supplied by departmental authors, but checked and published by the e-content team).

The team is made up of:

1x E-Content Development Manager (2x Part Time)

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<sup>2</sup> E-Content Department

<sup>3</sup> Neilson online

<sup>4</sup> Guardian

4x E-Content Officers (2x Technical, 2x Content)  
3x Temporary Posts working on the Blueprinting Project (in partnership with Northgate Information Solutions); all 3 posts are due to end by September 2010 and are currently funded by the Transformation Directorate).  
2 x Web Development Assistants working on the Derbyshire Net for Learning (also known as Education extranet)

The team's overall budget is £367k (£50k paid to Transformation Services for hosting the website and salaries of approximately £270k with the remaining spent on equipment, software etc); this forms part of the Communications and Access to Services Directorate budget which for 2010/11 is £4,577,958 and is split between:

Public Relations	1,679,659
Call Derbyshire	2,530,399
Website	367,900

The e-content team currently manage 15 additional websites, including 3 District Councils (South Derbyshire, Derbyshire Dales and Erewash), Derbyshire Sport and ParkSmarter) which generates a total of £24k in income (£6k from each of the districts).



### 3. [derbyshire.gov](http://derbyshire.gov)

DCC's external customer facing website ([derbyshire.gov](http://derbyshire.gov)) is judged to be a well performing county council site - the website currently has three stars and has also received a good reviewer rating in the latest Socitm (Society for Information Technology Management) annual survey<sup>5</sup> of all local authority websites. This assessment sets out to provide an informed view of the quality of experience that members of the public are likely to have when engaging with local government through a website. It is carried out by examining how well each site deals with common queries and situations via a structured survey with 120 questions, followed by 5 shorter surveys on specific topics. All sites are measured using 15 criteria looking at the usefulness of content and usability of sites. The report highlighted DCC's performance in a number of areas:

- Speed of responses to e-mails – replied with an answer that was rated very good within two days;
- Search engine – how easy is it to find a topic from a specific word or phrase; the display of prominent results which were easily identifiable and with recommended links was commended; and
- Navigation – how easy is it to find your way around the site with consistent navigation which was judged to be clear, consistent and with short meaningful labels.

This assessment provides an indication of where the website is performing well and identified areas for further development. One key area the Better Connected 2010 report highlighted, was the need for local authorities to expand and develop the provision of self-service for customers, which for many is a more convenient way of interacting with the Authority, especially for simpler higher volume transactions, freeing up more costly channels of communication to deal with the more complex and resource intensive solutions. These incidents of avoidable contact are a drain on the Authority's resources and reductions here will achieve better value for money from scarce resources and will be explored in section five of this report.

The Working Group are pleased with Socitm's assessment that DCC's website is performing well, however, the Group feel that the look of the home page could be improved to be more customer focussed, structured around the headings, do it, find it, report it and get involved. Information here also needs to be prioritised; for example detail of the

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<sup>5</sup> Better Connected 2010 – Socitm Insight

work of the Derbyshire Partnership Forum (DPF) and its thematic boards is not instantly identifiable or easily accessible. The Group would like to see this displayed clearly on the home page, reflecting the strategic importance of the DPF and the impact on services and outcomes for residents of its work. The Working Group would also like to see the development of mapping capabilities to support the use of postcode/street name searched to identify local services and allow local amenities to be displayed enabling individuals to tailor their DCC page to their local area. Developing the web-infrastructure to allow individuals to track the progress of their interaction (such as reporting a faulty street light), would be a development that the Working Group would welcome.

The Blueprinting Project has recently caused some delays in updating routine information. This project has been working to enhance content and code sharing around the sites that DCC manages, ensuring that when information is published it can be linked to any or all of these sites, rather than having one piece of information held in 15 different locations. This resulted in some documents and information becoming out of date – work is currently being undertaken to address this.

Departmental authors of whom there are approximately 70-80 are responsible for the creation and accuracy of information on their areas (the e-content team do not check the accuracy of the information they are asked to upload onto the website); in some cases sections and pages have a contact identified. The Working Group would like to see a 'responsible' person identified and linked to appropriate pages, with authors being trained in 'junk management' and required to check their pages of responsibility on a three monthly basis to ensure there is no out of date, irrelevant information and exercising basic housekeeping.

The Working Group had a number of concerns regarding the organisation of information, particularly in relation to children's services. Here titling of some children's and educational services still use names and phraseology that fails to take into account the re-organisation of social care and education within the county and impacts on the ease of access to information. Children's services information on the website is structured according to local government category lists and the web team have agreed to look at the home page listing, including headers and content to see if any improvements can be made.

Local Government Chronicle and a recent IDeA report on social media<sup>6</sup> (Local by Social) used DCC's real time local government election

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<sup>6</sup> Local by Social – How local authorities can use social medial to achieve more for less. IDeA March 2010

coverage in 2009 as an example of good use of web services, particularly the use of a combination of text and video content which made use of both Facebook and Twitter as two way communication channels with citizens. During the Local Government Elections 2009 Derbyshire County Council (DCC) had its highest ever number of visits to its website in one day, including more than 19,000 visits to its election section alone.

**Recommendation 1:** The home page design is updated to make it more customer focussed.

**Outcome:** Improved customer journey, increased rates of customer satisfaction.

**Recommendation 2:** Departmental authors to be highlighted on relevant pages and to be trained in the management of electronic information within their areas of responsibility.

**Outcome:** Better quality and up-to-date information, increased user satisfaction, ease of access to information, greater customer satisfaction.

**Recommendation 3:** The titling and organisation of information relating to children and education services is reviewed and updated within 3 months.

**Outcome:** Better quality of information, improved ease of access to information and improved customer journey

#### 4. Dnet

Dnet, the Authority's intranet<sup>7</sup> site has 20,000 visitors per month making 750,000 page views per month. The most frequently used areas of Dnet are:

- 1 Homepage
- 2 Core Systems – workplace home page
- 3 Directory (telephone numbers)
- 4 Working for us
- 5 Learning and Development EPDR centre
- 6 Resources
- 7 Job Vacancies
- 8 Forms
- 9 Learning and Development
- 10 Policies and Procedures

It is widely accepted that dnet needs significant development and the Working Group feel that consideration needs to be given to:

- Is Dnet meeting the needs of its internal customers - a significant number of the Authority's employees do not work in offices or have access to workplace computers – are they missing out on a certain level of support?
- What level of investment is required to improve functionality and what are the costs of simply maintaining the site in its current form?
- Improving the search facility?
- Would scarce resources be better deployed in improving the externally facing derbyshire.gov site?
- Would it be more cost effective, user friendly and inclusive to have a secure employee only area on derbyshire.gov?

The developments required to improve the intranet are acknowledged by the Working Group as considerable; however this will only be achieved at a cost and the Group endorses the view that stretched resources should be directed to further developing the external website, improving the visitor journey and capitalising on any efficiencies that maybe derived from developments here. The Group feel that exploring the possibility of a staff portal on derbyshire.gov would allow those who are not office based to have the opportunity to access employee focussed information, support the Changing the Way Derbyshire Works initiative and prove to be a more cost effective means of communicating electronically with employees. The Working Group believes that a

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<sup>7</sup> A private communications network; in this instance for staff use only.

review of the current communication strategy would help in the identification of priorities and resource allocation and this will be addressed in section 10 of this Review. Dnet is one tool of internal communication and any review will need to take into account other forms of internal communication and how these can be developed and improved.

**Recommendation 4:** That consideration is given to how to improve electronic communication to staff in any revisions to the communication strategy.

**Outcome:** Maintenance of current levels of performance of intranet site, identification for a strategy for improvement of internal and electronic employee communications.

### Dmaps

Dmaps is DCC's mapping and information systems and provides users with access to numerous datasets held by the Authority and commercial organisations and is free to use by council employees and Elected Members whilst undertaking their normal duties.

The Working Group feels this is an untapped resource that is not user friendly, recommending that this is more fully integrated into web provision. Socitm in their assessment also identified at this as an area of the website that needed further development. The Working Group are pleased with the decision to position the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team within the website/e-content team and hope to see significant developments here in the coming months.

## **5. Income Generation and Efficiencies**

Financial pressures and the demand for increasing efficiencies on public services make it inevitable that all public service organisations will have to reassess the way they do things. Whichever service area is re-designed, a greater emphasis will inevitably be placed upon the website as a channel for service delivery.

The potential efficiencies that can be generated by encouraging the use of the website are significant as demonstrated by the latest figures from the Channel Benchmarking Service<sup>8</sup>.

Face to Face	£8.23 per visit
Phone	£3.21 per visit
Web	£0.39 per visit

These figures take on additional resonance when assessing the level of efficiency savings the Authority has committed to achieving in its latest Five Year Financial Plan and the constraints to be place on public finances in the coming years by dramatically contracting public spending. It is clear that Council's who find ways to move business online will quickly save money.

There exists with derbyshire.gov a huge potential to generate efficiency savings by migrating 'low level' transactional activity to the website. This will also enable the Authority to meet individual's desire to self-serve booking and paying online. However DCC's web infrastructure is at present not sufficiently developed to support this. Key here will be the acquisition of event bookings and small payments facilities to enable transactions such as booking and paying for adult learning courses online; in 2009/10 there were 32,000 course enrolments made by 26,000 learners. Acquiring this facility was added to the Transformation Project list several years ago, however it appears that this has not been driven forward. The Working Group would like to stress that they believe the implementation of this facility is essential to allow the promotion of self-service and produce a number of 'quick win' efficiency savings. The Group would like to see this facility enabled and implemented within the next 12 months and for service directorates to exploit the efficiencies that can be generated by self-service and online transactions.

**Recommendation 5:** An events booking and online payments business case plan is to be formulated with a target implementation of 12 months.

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<sup>8</sup> Socitm Insight (December 2009)

**Outcomes:** Promotion of self-service, more efficient cost effective and customer focussed provision, releasing of Call Derbyshire staff to deal with cases requiring human interaction – improving customer service here.

This facility is essential to promote a positive modern image of the authority, providing a self-serve option for those residents wishing to use this and to recognise that valuable human resources (e.g. those in Call Derbyshire) are being tied up processing course or event bookings and payments, and could be better deployed in dealing with more complex enquiries that require human interaction and empathy, creating more capacity and increasing customer satisfaction. When applying the Channel Benchmarking figure, the efficiencies that would be generated from processing even 50% of adult learning course bookings and payments are too large to ignore. Service directorates need to be aware of the benefits and the departmental/corporate efficiencies that can be generated here and this needs to become an integral part of projects such as the Derbyshire Literature Festival. There also needs to be a degree of work undertaken to assure directorates that e-enabled services will not be of a lesser quality and may lead to greater customer satisfaction.

The development of online payments and bookings will make a valuable contribution to the change in the way services are delivered and support the thinking behind the corporate Changing the Way We Work, as well as recognising that there are national plans to phase out cheque payments by 2018.

To facilitate the achievement of greater corporate efficiencies by maximising the website's capabilities the Working Group would like to see the development of a 'channel migration' strategy and implementation plan, which seeks to generate service improvements and maximise the savings that can be achieved by moving services such as event booking to more cost effective channels. The Working Group believe the costs of under resourcing or under developing the website will be significant as customers continue to use more expensive channels to engage with the Authority. However, they would like to stress the need to retain a blended offer, recognising that not all Derbyshire residents have access to the internet and that not all incidents of communication are best dealt with electronically.

DCC's web team currently manage 15 additional websites (including 3 district councils, Derbyshire Sport, Safer Derbyshire, ParkSmarter) which generates a total of £24k of income (£6k from each of the 3 districts). The potential to expand income generation here is dependant upon having staffing capacity. The Working Group would like to see this

potential explored fully including an assessment of the costs that may be incurred and the impact on the maintenance and development of the sites DCC currently manages.

**Recommendation 6:** Development and implementation of a channel migration strategy, which includes increasing the volume of traffic being driven towards the website.

**Outcome:** Improves transactional capability on website, transforming the way services are delivered, generating efficiency savings, meeting customer demands, making more time for Call Derbyshire to deal with complex issues therefore providing users with a better more efficient service.



## **6. Adverse Weather**

The winter of 2010 was one of the most severe for decades and provided a test for services from all departments of the Authority. The website proved to be a key channel of communication during this period.

The home page was cleared and the news events section provided ongoing updates on the situation with the snow, road and school closures, using information drawn from the Met Office, police and the Authority's own Environmental Services department. Within the headlines there were deep links to pages giving information about gritting routes and other weather related issues.

The information posted on the website was backed up by the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook; spikes in website traffic often followed 'tweets' being placed. During this period and the unsurprising increase in visits to DCC's website, there was also an increase in the variety of mobile devices used to access information, demonstrating the need to ensure content is available in multiple formats that users can easily access. As the mapping capability of the website is expanded it should be able to provide residents with information such as gritting routes, real time gritting updates via twitter and even map the location of grit bins, allowing residents to, in a couple of clicks, report missing bins and those that need filling up. Following the period of bad weather the home page message was changed to focus on the reporting of damage caused by the bad weather (pot holes, frost and snow plough damage).

To allow the flow of information out to residents during periods of emergency the Working Group would like to recommend the team be supplied with an 'on-call' laptop, a duty mobile phone and VPN (Virtual Private Network<sup>9</sup>) access, as well as remuneration in-line with existing policies for providing out of hours/on call coverage. By contracting the team to provide out of hours coverage on a rota basis - which the team supports - this would ensure a consistent approach to electronic crisis communication, preventing the reliance on the team's good will and commitment to do this in their own time. It would also enhance the timeliness and accuracy of information provided to residents during periods like these.

The website should, during periods of emergency, display prominent links to the Derbyshire Prepared website (dedicated site of the Derbyshire Resilience Forum, made up of local authority partners,

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<sup>9</sup> A network that uses the internet to provide remote offices or individual users with secure access to their organisation's network.

emergency services, health and organisations such as the highways and environment agencies). However, derbyshire.gov should remain as DCC's primary source of electronic communication during periods of emergency.

The use of the internal dnet site during this period has been identified as an area where improvements could be made; in particular by ensuring the communication of a consistent message to staff, especially in the case of the application of the adverse weather policy, specifically the timing of the message to send staff home in extreme cases. The plan in the future is to issue regular timed bulletins to staff with latest weather updates and advice from the Environmental Services department about the state of the road and the best time to travel.

### School Closures

Details about school closures due to bad weather have historically been 'pushed' out via local radio stations, with individual school Head Teachers contacting their local station to inform them of whether the school would be closed or not. This system has proved to be a particular burden to some schools due to the potential for long waiting times for calls to be dealt with, or those whose catchment's area is covered by a number of stations.

For the future it is felt that DCC should hold and provide the authoritative version of school closures throughout the county; this list will be populated and updated through use of the secure schools' extranet with existing software taking updated information and posting it directly onto the website. DCC are also able to provide local radio stations with real time updates via a RSS<sup>10</sup> feed where individual stations draw information directly from DCC's website. Accuracy of information will be ensured by schools having to take positive action listing closures on a day by day basis. All systems and software are currently in place and the e-content team wait the issuing of instructions to schools from Children and Younger Adults (CAYA) to begin operating this system, which can be used to report any emergency school closure.

The extension and improved accuracy of web-based provision for the communication of 'routine/transactional' messages such as details of school and road closures will free up Call Derbyshire staff to deal with calls of a more serious nature.

**Recommendation 7:** The e-content team to provide out of hours coverage, be supplied with VPN access, appropriate equipment (laptop

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<sup>10</sup> Really Simple Syndication – A family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works.

and mobile phone) and appropriate on-call remuneration in line with existing staffing policies.

**Outcomes:** Greater responsiveness to crisis situations, more efficient and effective communication, increased accuracy and relevance of information, increased effectiveness of team and greater customer satisfaction.

## **7. Digital Inclusion**

It would be remiss not to briefly consider the digital divide and the need to raise the digital skills of residents to prevent them from being excluded from the opportunities that the web presents, not just in access to information and services provided by DCC, but to employment and learning opportunities. We can not forget that many of our service users do not have access to a computer and one way of addressing this is the provision of computers and internet access through the County's library network (nationally 5% of adults have accessed the internet via a public library<sup>11</sup>).

All of Derbyshire's 46 static libraries have free public access computers linked to the DELTA<sup>12</sup> network. Three of the Authority's largest mobile libraries have a public access laptop in each, (also connected to DELTA) and public access computers account for a significant amount of activity in the county's libraries, with over 500,000 sessions taking place in the last year. The growth in internet usage and web-based technologies does not appear to be abating. This raises the question should DCC become the local digital champion? The impact of not keeping up with developments and ensuring that comprehensive broadband coverage (especially when seeking to attract new businesses to the county) will be felt by citizens, communities and businesses throughout Derbyshire.

The Working Group have chosen not to make any specific recommendations here, but feel that the Authority should highlight the need for high-speed broadband coverage to be rolled out to all areas of the county, ensure the maintenance of existing levels of free public access IT equipment throughout the county's library networks and preserve the existing levels of IT related adult learning courses.

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<sup>11</sup> Internet Access Households and Individuals 2009 - Statistical Bulletin - Office for National Statistics

<sup>12</sup> A high speed multistage interconnection computer network

## **8. Social Media**

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of mediums such as Facebook and Twitter as a means of communicating and engaging with people. DCC currently has 1289 followers on twitter and although it does not have a corporate presence on facebook, the team have set up pages to promote the Local Government Elections 2009, the Literature Festival 2010 (149 friends) and ongoing library services (232 friends).

The e-content team have won, for their digital promotion of the Local Government Elections 2009:

- Gold for Digital Excellence In Communications at the CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations) Awards 2009
- Silver Award for the Midlands Region of the CIPR Pride awards for Excellence in Communication; and were
- Short-listed for a LGA-LG Coms Reputation Campaign Award 2010 for 'Promoting the Reputation of the Authority: Digital and Social Media' as a result of the work they carried out around the Local Government Elections in June 2009.

Key features of this work included:

- Creating a dedicated election section on the website with a full list of candidates and polling station information;
- On election day our website, Twitter and Facebook were used to remind people to vote until the polling stations had closed; and
- On results day the website was changed to reflect the results as text and interactive graphics. Visitors could choose how they saw the results on our website or through a social network.

The variety of methods used to access the internet continues to increase.

<b>Mobile Internet Connections<sup>13</sup></b>			
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>All</b>
<i>Per cent</i>			
Mobile phone via GPRS	21	15	18
Mobile phone via UMTS, HSPDA (3G,3G+)	11	5	5
Handheld computer (palmtop, PDA)	7		5
Laptop via wireless connection away from home/work	29	23	26
None of the above	54	66	60

<sup>13</sup> Internet Access Households and Individuals 2009, Statistical Bulletin. Office for National Statistics.

As a result the Authority needs to ensure its web provision is suitable for these differing platforms and that the opportunities these present are explored fully. Brighton and Hove City Council have recently launched a free app for the i-phone quickly identifying your location and places of interest, doctors surgeries, recycling facilities, education sites, transport information as well as information about restaurants. The continuation in the growth of people using differing platforms to access the internet can not be ignored and every effort should be made to capitalise on the benefits that these can offer.

**Recommendation 8:** That the development of communication via social media is included in any revision of the communication strategy.

**Outcomes:** Provides an alternative way of engaging with citizens, especially the young or those experiencing poor broadband coverage.

## **9. Equalities Considerations**

DCC's website has a crucial role to play in communicating and delivering services to all sections of the community, providing a means of opening up information and services for those disenfranchised by traditional forms of communication and service delivery.

DCC website and intranet have a number of accessibility features (discretely located along the bottom of the home page) and includes options such as:

- Access keys for those that can not use a mouse;
- The ability to change the font size of text; and
- Read Speaker – software that will read aloud content and links of a web page including documents in pdf and word format.

As part of the research for this Review members of the Equalities Practitioners Group were asked for their comments and feedback on the website, identifying that:

- Some people who use screen readers may have difficulty in accessing information that is loaded onto both the intranet/internet in PDF format.
- The Authority should consider the extension of use of BSL videos for key documents and services. Cost implications – the Working Group advocate a selective approach focussing on key documents only. Also ask users how useful is this facility?
- Equality in employment pages are seen as very useful;

In conclusion the members of the practitioners group felt that we need to look further than just doing the minimum required, exploring the potential presented by new technologies to allow the Authority to meet the needs of all sectors of the community.

Translation Services are currently provided by the use free browser based translation through packages such as Babel Fish and Google. However the translations provided by these online packages are only literal and not intuitive, although the development of free web-based translation packages has created a saving of £6,000 per annum to the Authority.

If there is to be an expansion in electronic communication and the number of services delivered online it will be important to ensure accessibility of these web-based services are retained. A blended approach is advocated, supporting a shift in emphasis but not closing down alternative avenues of engagement (e.g. telephone or face to face)

Any revisit of the communications strategy should capitalise on the expertise that exists within the local BME forums, and any developments of the website and online communication need to ensure the involvement of equality practitioners and users to ensure site content and framework is accessible, inclusive and user friendly.

**Recommendation 9:** Equality considerations to be included in any revision of the communication strategy and internal/external practitioners to be consulted in its development.

**Outcome:** Greater access to online services, increase inclusiveness, contribution to achievement of excellent rating in new Equality Standard.



## 10. The Future

### Resources

The opportunities that further developing the website and increasing the number of transactions it handles are considerable; however in order for these to be capitalised upon there needs to be a degree of investment in both staffing and software. The Working Group is fully aware of the challenging financial times the Authority is operating in at present and is not seeking additional resources allocated to this, but rather a re-prioritising and re-allocation of resources from the existing Communication and Access to Services directorate budget. The Working Group believes there is a strong business case for this re-focussing and the potential efficiencies that may be realised for the Authority are considerable.

The Director of Communications and Access to Services highlighted in discussions with the Working Group that the focus for communications will continue to shift towards digital first; historically print was the first media of communications, however it was acknowledged that digital is more cost effective and for an increasing number of people their preferred method of communication.

The Working Group would like to highlight the level of drive and commitment shown by the e-content team and in particular by those team members who are on temporary contracts due to expire by September 2010. The Assistant Director reported to the Group that there is no funding in his base budget to retain these temporary technical staff. Without retaining these specialist skills, the capacity to develop the website will be severely limited; resulting in a standstill position which the Working Group feels is unacceptable.

**Recommendation 10:** The three temporary posts to be placed onto staffing establishment and these posts to be made permanent using existing resources from within the Communication and Access to Services Directorate budget.

**Outcomes:** Capacity to develop website and existing levels of expertise retained, adequate base from which to explore further income, generating opportunities and improve the transactional performance of the website leading to the achievement of greater efficiencies.

### Communication Strategy

The Working Group unanimously agree that the current communications strategy (appendix 1) should be updated to reflect the

changes to the communication landscape that have occurred since 2007 when it was first produced in preparation for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment that year. Key to this will be the need to formalise DCC's communication vision, identifying how this will be implemented corporately and in service directorates. The revised strategy will also need to acknowledge the magnitude and rate of change required, identifying how this will be implemented within the prevailing culture within the Authority. This cultural change may be one of the largest challenges that any new strategy will need to address.

The Group have identified the following areas for particular attention:

- Implementation of an online booking and payments system;
- Production of a channel migration strategy, recognising that e-enabled services and transactions can potentially deliver big efficiency savings;
- Allocation of resources from within the directorate to the web/e-content team;
- Feasibility of generating additional income; and
- The continued growth in social media and variety of ways of accessing internet especially through portable devices – smart phones, net-books, i-pads.

**Recommendation 11:** Communication Strategy to be updated reflecting the changing communication landscape and the increasing importance of multi-media and e-communication within 6 months of the conclusion of this Review.

**Outcomes:** Strategy reflects the growth in online communications, provision of a framework within which to increase the transactional activity on the website, increased customer satisfaction, consistent corporate approach.

## 11. Conclusion

What has become apparent to the Working Group conducting this Review is that current web provision is adequate; however it has become evident that the potential that exists for enhancing the quality of e-communications, providing transactional based services online and the scope for efficiency savings that may be generated throughout the Authority is considerable. The Group have identified several critical success factors:

- Updating the Communications Strategy and production of a channel migration strategy;
- Balance the communications spend to reflect the increasing importance of e-communication;
- Capitalise on the lower transactional costs of electronic communication, in particularly the necessity to have online booking and payments facilities;
- Increase the understanding within directorate of the improvements to services and the achievements of efficiencies that can be delivered by the web; and the need to
- Build on the current foundations and expertise.

The Working Group recognises that it would not be appropriate to force all communication transactions to the website and the Authority will need to retain a 'blended' offer to its customers. The Group believe there are an increasing number of transactions that can be carried out on the web, benefiting from the lower unit costs here and if carried out effectively could lead to an improved customer journey and generate considerable savings for the Authority.

The transactional costs provided by the Channel Benchmarking service starkly highlight the level of efficiency savings that may be generated by migrating appropriate transactions to the website; in a time of financial austerity it becomes increasingly difficult to argue against pursuing this agenda and in particular the implementation of online booking and payments facilities.

## **12. Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** The home page design is updated to make it more customer focussed.

**Recommendation 2:** Departmental authors to be highlighted on relevant pages and to be trained in the management of electronic information within their areas of responsibility.

**Recommendation 3:** The titling and organisation of information relating to children and education services is reviewed and updated within 3 months.

**Recommendation 4:** That consideration is given to how to improve electronic communication to staff in any revisions to the communication strategy.

**Recommendation 5:** An events booking and online payments business case is to be formulated with a target implementation of 9-12 months.

**Recommendation 6:** Development and implementation of a channel migration strategy, which includes increasing the volume of traffic being driven towards the website.

**Recommendation 7:** The e-content team to provide out of hours coverage, be supplied with VPN access, appropriate equipment (laptop and mobile phone) and appropriate on-call remuneration in line with existing staffing policies.

**Recommendation 8:** That the development of communication via social media is included in any revision of the communication strategy.

**Recommendation 9:** Equality considerations to be included in any revision of the communication strategy and internal/external practitioners to be consulted in its development.

**Recommendation 10:** The three temporary posts to be placed onto staffing establishment and these posts to be made permanent using existing resources from within the Communication and Access to Services Directorate budget.

**Recommendation 11:** Communication Strategy to be updated reflecting the changing communication landscape and the increasing importance of multi-media and e-communication within 6 months of the conclusion of this Review.



## Action Plan

<b>Recommendation</b>		<b>Lead Member/Officer</b>	<b>Time Scale</b>	<b>Report back to FMR I&amp;S committee</b>
<b>1</b>	The home page design is updated to make it more customer focussed.	E-content team		
<b>2</b>	Departmental authors to be highlighted on relevant pages and to be trained in the management of electronic information within their areas of responsibility.	E-content team		
<b>3</b>	The titling and organisation of information relating to children and education services is reviewed and updated within 3 months.	E-content team	3 months	
<b>4</b>	That consideration is given to how to improve electronic communication to staff in any revisions to the communication strategy.	Assistant Director (Customer Services)		
<b>5</b>	An event booking and online payments business case is to be formulated with a target implementation of 9-12 months.	Assistant Director (Customer Services)	9-12 months	
<b>6</b>	Development and implementation of a channel migration strategy, which includes increasing the volume of traffic being driven towards the website.	Director of Communication and Access to		

		Services		
<b>7</b>	The e-content team to provide out of hours coverage, be supplied with VPN access, appropriate equipment (laptop and mobile phone) and appropriate on-call remuneration in line with existing staffing policies.	Assistant Director (Customer Services)		
<b>8</b>	That the development of communication via social media is included in any revision of the communication strategy.	Director of Communication and Access to Services		
<b>9</b>	Equality considerations to be include in any revision of the communication strategy and internal/external practitioners to be consulted in its development.	Director of Communication and Access to Services		
<b>10</b>	The three temporary posts to be placed onto staffing establishment and these posts to be made permanent using existing resources from within the Communication and Access to Services Directorate budget.	Director of Communication and Access to Services	ASAP	
<b>11</b>	Communication Strategy to be updated reflecting the changing communication landscape and the increasing importance of multi-media and e-communication within 6 months of the conclusion of this review.	Director of Communication and Access to Services	6 months	

## **14. Appendix – DCC Communication Strategy**



# DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the heart of everything we do. Not only is it key to strengthening links with local people, service users, partner organisations and staff, it is crucial to ensuring we deliver our vision and priorities.

We are committed to providing high quality, planned and sustained corporate communications. But good and clear communication is the responsibility of everyone employed by the county council.

We have invested in effective channels to communicate complex, sensitive and statutory information. These include an award-winning mix of corporate publications, promotional campaigns, website and media relations activity. We use them to deliver our messages to local people, our employees, partner organisations and special interest groups.

It's vital, that we talk, listen and respond to local people's needs - shaping services when necessary and our messages so everyone is informed and empowered. We try to take every opportunity for people to tell us what they think. And we change things when we get it wrong.

Good quality internal communications is crucial. We value the contribution made by each of our employees. We're committed to making sure they are well informed so they understand our key priority – to improve life for local people. And we actively seek their ideas and views on how we can improve services and become an even better employer.

Our communication strategy is intended to provide a consistent approach to what we say, how and when we say it. In addition, it helps us to set a clear direction for communications and highlight the importance we place on good communication. At the same time it aims to:

- Protect and enhance the authority's reputation and ensure high quality communications are an integral part of the work of all staff
- Identify communication as a priority activity for the council and ensure it is reflected in service plans throughout the organisation
- Provide a focus and sense of direction for all council communication activity in line with our core values
- Prevent confusion and help ensure the council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity
- Ensure effective two-way communication with all our key stakeholders
- Improve access to and information about the county council's services - including hard to reach groups
- Establish a framework for clear, timely and appropriate communication for all employees.

Communication is not an afterthought at Derbyshire County Council – it plays a vital role in everything we do.

Councillor John Williams  
Council Leader

Nick Hodgson  
Chief Executive

## **SECTION ONE: OUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

### **KEY PRINCIPLES**

- We recognise that good quality communication is essential for the effective delivery of our services
- We are keen to be as transparent, open and accountable as possible
- We will ensure information is shared, accessible and meets equality standards
- All our communication - spoken, written and electronic - will:
  - Be honest, accurate, timely and up-to-date
  - Be clear, using plain English and easily understood
  - Be consistent and suitable for the audience - including hard to reach groups
  - Meet the corporate style and be clearly identified with Derbyshire County Council
- We will monitor and measure our effectiveness in communicating
- We will ensure that our work complies with relevant legal requirements and conforms to the Code of Conduct on local government publicity.

### **KEY AIMS**

- To ensure the fullest take up of services and benefits by local people
- To create a better understanding between the authority and its various audiences
- To deliver key messages about the council and its services making full use of all appropriate channels of communication.
- To provide open access to information about the council and the full range of council services and activities
- To support councillors in their work as elected representatives
- To improve accountability by ensuring accurate, timely and accessible information is easily available to the public - including hard to reach groups
- To monitor public perception and views about current and future services
- To help staff deliver services effectively, efficiently and to the best of their ability

### **KEY MESSAGES**

It is vital to the organisation that we all know why Derbyshire County Council exists and what it is trying to achieve. The Council Plan identifies the council's vision:

#### **"To improve life for local people"**

To deliver this agenda, the council has a set of 9 identified goals:

- **To listen to local people and deliver high quality, value for money services**
- **To help all children learn, succeed and live happily and healthily**
- **To improve the health of local people and help them live independently**
- **To improve our roads and provide good public transport**
- **To look after Derbyshire and create environmentally friendly communities**
- **To strengthen the local economy and tackle poverty in our communities**
- **To create safer communities and tackle antisocial behaviour**
- **To improve opportunities for leisure, learning and culture**
- **To promote Derbyshire as a great place to live, work and visit**

### **RESOURCES**

We will make resources available to create effective two-way communication between the authority and all our stakeholders to inform and listen to the views of local people, local businesses, partner organisations and agencies and our employees.

## **RESPONSIBILITY FOR DELIVERING THE STRATEGY**

- **Senior management team**

Communication is a priority activity for the council's senior management team (the Chief Executive and chief officers). The team will identify external and internal communication issues and opportunities as an integral part of individual service plans.

The team will communicate key corporate decisions to their divisional and section heads and other staff accurately, clearly and speedily so they can be shared with all employees as appropriate.

- **Public relations division**

Day to day management of the authority's communication function is a key responsibility of the Public Relations Division of the Chief Executive's Office. However, all our employees share responsibility to communicate effectively. The division is responsible for leading on all corporate communication issues and on media relations. In addition, the division can advise services about best practice and provide appropriate support.

- **Divisional managers/Section heads/Team leaders**

Divisional managers, section heads and team leaders all have responsibility for creating awareness of and implementing the communications strategy among their teams. They also have responsibility for establishing two-way channels of communication with all members of their teams. This will ensure employees are aware of key council and service decisions and, importantly, provide opportunities for feedback from employees to the senior management team.

- **All employees**

Each and every council employee has some responsibility for communicating with the public. It is important that our key principles for communication are followed. This will help ensure accurate, honest, appropriate and timely information flows openly from the organisation at all levels. It is also vital that our employees are kept well informed about the council's key themes, targets and performance.

- **Elected members**

The county council's politically elected representatives are a vital channel of communication between the authority and local communities throughout Derbyshire. Elected every four years, they set the council's policies and spending priorities and are accountable for them. They hold regular surgeries in their council ward to provide local people with the opportunity to raise issues of concern. As well as being informed about events and services in their local ward, members also need to be kept up-to-date with major corporate projects/events/issues which could affect council tax payers.

## **MEDIA CONTACT POLICY**

All media enquiries - made to officers in their professional capacity - should be referred immediately to the council's press and public relations officers. The only exception is when the answer to a question is contained in factual published information which would normally be available to the press and public.

The decision to issue a comment, press release, statement, or grant an interview will be taken by press and public relations officers after consulting the relevant chief officer (or other officer with delegated authority) and Cabinet member.

Officers of the authority should not agree to speak as a representative of the council at public meetings without the approval of the appropriate chief officer. The exception to this rule applies to officers who, as members of professional bodies, are asked to speak at meetings or conferences on technical issues associated with their profession.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

**Strategic Aim:** To create a better understanding between the county council and the people it serves.

### Key Principles:

- We will ensure open, honest and clear channels of external communication are the common standard throughout the council.
- We will reflect the “human face” of the county council and we will:
  - Explain the reasons for the council's actions
  - Admit and apologise for any mistakes we make
  - Respond to constructive criticism.
- We recognise the value of the media as partners in communicating information to the public and will be proactive in our dealings with them. We will:
  - Never lie
  - Never knowingly mislead.
- We will comply with the law and codes of practice surrounding local government publicity.
- We will not promote the views or policies of individual political parties.

### Key Objectives:

- To increase awareness of and take up of our services.
- To improve accountability by ensuring accurate, timely and accessible information is easily available to the public - including hard to reach groups
- To actively promote Derbyshire County Council as an "excellent" authority and provider of high quality local services
- To secure wide coverage of our decisions and activities in the local, national and specialist media
- To ensure Derbyshire County Council has a strong and coherent identity
- To create a better understanding of our policies, services and achievements
- To identify and develop new and creative communication opportunities
- To ensure Derbyshire contributes to the national local government agenda and secures greater influence at local, regional and national levels.

### Key measures

To ensure we are delivering good quality, efficient and effective communications, we monitor and question everything we do by:

- Including feedback opportunities in all corporate campaigns and publications
- Regular media monitoring and analysis of coverage and enquiries
- Commissioning independent media analysis
- Carrying out annual client satisfaction surveys with key stakeholders
- Tracking public opinion through MORI surveys, the Derbyshire Citizen Panel and the Youth Forum
- Holding regular employee attitude surveys and listening to the views of our employee panel.

### Corporate external communication tools

- **Derbyshire Insight** - is a key channel of communication between the county council and the people it serves. It is written and produced by staff in the public relations division and is circulated on a quarterly basis to the Derbyshire's 330,000 households. The full colour

tabloid newspaper balances news and features about the authority with useful contact numbers and advice.

- **[www.derbyshire.gov.uk](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk)** - is the county council's corporate website and is an important channel of communication with local people. The site now has more than 6,000 pages and is constantly growing. Our public relations team:
  - Manages the website
  - Manages and edits the website content
  - Draws up and implements the website development programme.Individual services are responsible for ensuring the content of their pages is up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive.
- **Call Derbyshire** - Derbyshire County Council's contact centre opened on 2 January 2001. Initially, the call centre provided the public with 'A - Z' type service information and a direct response to straightforward enquiries from Derbyshire people. Now it offers more than 230 services to the public. Our on-going expansion and development programme helps us to:
  - Provide a readily identifiable 'one stop' point of contact for the public
  - Provide a customer-focused approach and improved quality of service
  - Improve our speed of response to calls
  - Extend our opening hours for public access to our services
  - Provide a uniform local rate charge to people who call us
  - Ensure we respond to all website email and text message communications from the public
  - Develop a joined up contact point with other councils for all enquiries
- **Governor Newsletter** - Derbyshire school governors have a key role in the running of the county's 425 schools. The authority is keen to offer good quality advice, news and information to help them in their task. The 12-page full colour newsletter is posted to the home addresses of more than 5,000 school governors each term. The content ranges from corporate news stories and individual school successes to analysis of recent publications and a quick guide to new legislation affecting their role.
- **b\_line Magazine** - is a 32-page magazine for b\_line student travel and discount card holders. 60,000 copies are distributed through the county's secondary schools to approximately 90% of Derbyshire's young people aged between 11 and 18 years of age. The publication - produced by the Public Relations Division - includes news and information about relevant council services, competitions, the latest businesses to join the b\_line discount scheme and the celebrities supporting the scheme.
- **Derbyshire Gold magazine and website** - free 36-page magazine for Gold Card holders – some 220,000 older people and disabled people. The magazine is published twice yearly and made available through libraries.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

**Strategic aim:** To improve and maintain strong two-way communication throughout Derbyshire County Council that encourages team work, trust and loyalty.

### Key Principles:

- We will ensure all employees are informed of issues or changes that might affect them.
- We will consult employees through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practices and procedures.
- We will listen to ideas and opportunities raised by employees at all levels of the organisation.
- We will support managers and help raise communication skills across the county council.
- We will celebrate, thank and encourage the sharing of good practice.

### Key Objectives

- To improve employee understanding and commitment to our vision and priorities.
- To improve and create effective and systematic channels of internal communication.
- To raise the level of communication skills across the authority.
- To involve employees in the improvement of their own and other council services.
- To develop more opportunities for staff feedback.
- To recognise, appreciate and embrace the contribution staff can make in shaping council policies and in delivering high quality services.
- To create an environment of trust, honesty and openness at and between all levels of the organisation.

### Key measures

- Regular employee attitude surveys - all staff, divisional and team surveys
- Employee panel and focus groups
- Monitoring quality of communication and understanding through liP and IDRs
- Use of Dnet
- Workforce readership survey
- Employee suggestion scheme
- Levels of absenteeism, staff turnover, vacancies and response to recruitment advertising

### Corporate internal communication tools

#### • Workforce

Our "Workforce" newspaper has been published on a monthly basis since 1989. It is the council's key internal communication tool and is written by the public relations team. It has a print run of 18,500 and is distributed to all council offices, establishments and schools. The eight-page tabloid newspaper covers issues ranging from the Council Plan, service and management priorities to individual employee successes and competitions.

#### • DNet

Currently accessible to around 6,500 council employees. It includes large amounts of information, reports, key publications, news, telephone directories and many other features. It can provide a fast, cost effective way of reaching employees at their desks but is limited to those who have use of the council's computer network.

- **Clean Talk**

Produced three times a year for our 1800 cleaning and caretaking staff. A four-page newsletter includes technical information and best practise to help them in their jobs. We also use it to report training successes and staff development opportunities.

- **Home Front**

A quarterly four-page newsletter circulated to 5,000 home helps and staff working in our homes for older people

- **Change for Children**

Regular newsletter designed to explain changes in the Children Act. We circulate 10,000 copies to our staff and those from partner agencies who work with children.

- **Service Development Diary**

A council events and listings service circulated each month to all council members and chief officers. It covers council events, projects and schemes including dates, times and locations as well as budgets and contacts for further information.

- **Other**

- **Pay slip inserts/messages**
- **Email**
- **Notice boards**

## CONSULTATION

**Strategic aim:** To create and develop opportunities to effectively engage the public, our partners and staff to inform and direct the way we deliver services in our communities

### Key principles:

- We will consult internally and externally where appropriate.
- We will ensure all relevant groups/individuals including "hard to reach groups" can take part.
- We will communicate the purpose and scope of each consultation exercise and the reasons for it.
- We will only consult on those issues or activities which the council is responsible for delivering.
- We will use plain English, avoid jargon and offer alternative formats when needed.
- We will give sufficient time to respond to our consultation exercises.
- We will give clear, accurate and prompt feedback when the overall results are known and what actions or decisions we have or intend to take.
- We will consult in partnership with other local organisations where appropriate.
- We will use the results of all consultation exercises to inform political and managerial decision making and policy review.

### Key Objectives:

- To monitor our progress against our vision and key themes.
- To identify issues that are important to local people, partners and staff.
- To target individuals and key groups of service users to establish satisfaction levels.
- To direct changes to services and to service delivery.
- To prioritise our activity and make the best use of resources.
- To encourage participation and dialogue between the county council and our stakeholders.
- To secure benchmarking information to measure our performance against other councils.

### Key measures

- The number and types of consultations carried out.
- Response levels to individual consultation exercises.
- Policy changes resulting from consultation exercises.
- Performance comparisons with other local authorities.

### Corporate consultation tools

- **The Derbyshire Citizens' Panel** - is made up of 8,000 Derbyshire residents who broadly represent the make-up of the adult population of the county. It's a joint venture between the county council, the police and each of the district councils. Up to six surveys are sent to panel members each year covering a range of issues and proposals. Examples include: crime and safety, quality of life, transport and cultural strategy.
- **MORI tracking survey** - carried out on behalf of the authority every three years. Using a representative quota sample, MORI researchers ask residents a series of questions about the council, its services and the county as a place to live. The results measure satisfaction levels and priorities for current and future service provision.



- **BVPI** – a general council user satisfaction survey carried out across the country on behalf of the Audit Commission. Provides benchmarking information on customer satisfaction levels with services, communication and quality of life.
- **b\_line** - student travel and discount card has access to 60,000 young people aged between 11 and 18 years through the b\_line web pages, b\_line magazine and b\_line email and text alerts. So far young people have been consulted on issues as broad as the six term year, Freerider scheme, library and countryside service usage and services for young people.
- **Employee Attitude Survey** - is held every two years with a questionnaire for all county council employees. The aim is to monitor satisfaction levels and identify priority areas for action. Questions cover the council as an employer, job satisfaction, training and development, management style, communication and customer service. The questionnaires are confidential and are independently analysed.
- **Employee Panel** – a panel of 500 staff representing all levels of the organisation to take part in regular surveys and focus groups. Run by an independent research company to record and monitor staff views on proposed changes to council policy, organisation and other employee-related issues.
- **Other consultation opportunities**
  - **Youth Forum**
  - **Older People's Forum**
  - **BME Forum**
  - **Disability Forum**
  -