Customer led transformation programme

Case study – South Staffordshire

My place, My say

21/58

Contents

About South Staffordshire

A predominantly rural district boasting 80% green belt land, South Staffordshire is nestled between the urban conurbation of the Black Country; home to the industrial centres of Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley to the east; urban Stafford and Cannock in the north; commuter-town Telford to the north-west; and rural Shropshire to the west.

South Staffordshire Council (SSC) serves a rural district of 106,000 people. It has no central market town, but has scores of villages and hamlets within its 27 parishes. Some of the larger villages are Wombourne, Kinver and Codsall. The village of Penkridge is also steeped in history and is home to a weekly farmer's market which draws in crowds from across the region.

Around 4.5 per cent of the population is from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background which is low compared to the regional and national average.

The district is quite affluent and is the least deprived in the county. The proportion of people that are economically active is higher than the national average at 86.4 per cent, with only 3.5 per cent of the population claiming Jobseekers Allowance. Average weekly earnings in 2006 were £467, higher than both the regional and national averages of £430 and £459 respectively.

The average house price is higher than the regional average and national average at £223,400 (2008). A relatively low percentage of the population live in low income households, 8.1 per cent compared to the regional and national average of 12 per cent.

Home to the annual V Festival, the district is served by major infrastructure networks including the M6 and M54 motorways. However, rural isolation is an important issue and parts of the district fall within the 10% most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation for housing and barriers to services with 14% of households having no access to a car and 41% have only one car. In particular, access between villages, the surrounding towns and other public services such as hospitals can be difficult.

South Staffordshire faces the biggest increase in the proportion of people aged over 50 in England[1] and this will lead to increased vulnerability and demand for health services. Currently transport is a key barrier to the transfer of services from hospitals into GP practices.

Funding viable, sustainable transport solutions in areas of low demand when budgets are reducing is a significant challenge.

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1   As cited in the Audit Commission's 2008 report 'Don't Stop Me Now'

The Customer Led Transformation Programme

South Staffordshire Council's work has been funded under the Customer Led Transformation programme. The fund aims to embed the use of Customer Insight and Social Media tools and techniques as strategic management capabilities across the public sector family in order to support Place-Based working.

The Customer Led Transformation programme is overseen by the Local Government Delivery Council (supported by the Local Government Association).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between local authorities and their partners focused on using customer insight and social media tools and techniques to improve service outcomes. These approaches offer public services bodies the opportunity to engage customers and gather insight into their preferences and needs, and thereby provide the evidence and intelligence needed to redesign services to be more targeted, effective and efficient.

Background

Accessing public transport and public services in the district can be exceptionally difficult and is a particular problem for those that have no access to their own transport. The situation has been exacerbated because public transport routes change sporadically and therefore are not seen as providing a reliable service.

The council has previously offered a very generous, and popular, travel token scheme. This meant that every resident aged over 65 received £40 worth of travel tokens every year which they could use on local buses and taxis.

However, this system did not necessarily provide good value for money because it was not means tested. This scheme did not include children under the age of 17 who, of course, could not drive and therefore were another major group facing travel problems. Furthermore, with an ageing population the council considered that this offer was no longer a sustainable.

Together with the county council, the health service and other public and voluntary sector groups the council formed the South Staffordshire Rural Transport Partnership (SSRTP). SSRTP was convened to help explore new ways of delivering better access to public transport for those in most need.

This work included a process of consultation with the people of South Staffordshire. As part of this consultation process the partners began to look at new ways on engaging with young people about their experiences and needs when it came to public transport. The council had previously not used social media and this project was seen as an opportunity to pilot its use through the use of the MyPlaceMySay (MPMS) web site.

The council did some extensive work with the IDeA in 2007 and 2008 to help develop a locality working model. This model has effectively created 5 'localities' within the district. This has enabled the partners to improve the focus of their services and has allowed them to develop their customer insight. The forums on the MPMS project mirror this locality model and allow people to comment on their specific area.


Objective

The project set out to address a number of broad objectives after initially piloting the approach by focussing on transport issues:

- to expand the range of opportunities for residents to influence the transformation of transport provision across the district

- to give residents the opportunity to vote on proposed changes to service delivery methods so that the best solution, in terms of local need, could be adopted for each locality

- to improve satisfaction ratings by the better use of public funds by giving opportunities for influencing the improvement of local service design.

To achieve these outcomes the project aimed to create a web-based solution (MPMS) which would allow residents in each locality to receive information and start discussions about their area.

Initially MPMS would be piloted as part of the transport review with the intention that the partners could then use MPMS as a general engagement tool and a platform to allow local people to vote on specific projects – and ultimately be involved in the design of projects.
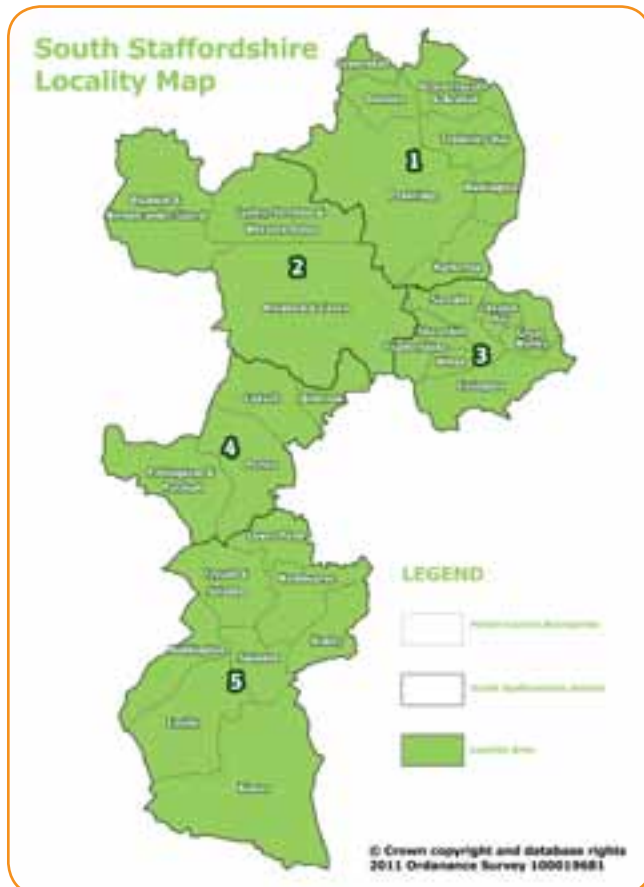
Approach

Customer Insight

The South Staffordshire Partnership (SSP) worked to build data profiles for each of the 5 localities within South Staffordshire. To achieve this, they undertook a number of actions:

1) Collection of data

Locality Data Profiles, based initially on Mosaic and Acorn data, have been produced and are continually being updated. Partners have also begun to break down their own data into localities and they are feeding this information into the profiles. A good example of this would be the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which was produced jointly by South Staffordshire PCT and the Social Care and Health service within Staffordshire County Council as required by the Health Act 2007, and is intended to provide a firm foundation for commissioning that improves health and social care provision and reduces inequalities.

The Locality Profiles generated from this Customer Insight work, which included a section on Transport, were used to underpin this project's research providing a structure for resident engagement that encouraged a rich discussion on local issues. The profiles will also allow the council and its partners to better target resources as their knowledge of customer insight increases.

2) Consultation

Initial consultation for the rural transport project as a whole was undertaken through traditional methods including seeking feedback from local councillors, parish councils and various community groups. The council also commissioned a postal survey undertaken by the council's own residents' panel.

The panel is statistically representative of the district and although it produced some interesting and useful data, it became clear that for those with access to transport, the issue of accessing local services was less of a problem. Therefore the council needed to look at difference ways of identifying and consulting with its audience.

One way it achieved this was by holding a series of focus groups, again recruited through its residents' panel but with stricter categories allowing them to identify those with less readily available access to transport.

It also became apparent that one segment within the district was not being readily consulted – younger people, especially those under the driving age. As a result the council looked to the MPMS project as a way of engaging with a notoriously hard-to-reach younger audience and promoted the site through workshops run during Local Democracy week. There are more details about how we did this in the Communications section on page 20.

3) Member Forums

Member forums were also held within the localities. The forums brought together elected representatives from across all three tiers of local government to discuss the data profiles and build in their on-the-ground anecdotal knowledge. It is intended that this will result in more informed decisions about service provision.

Village Agents

Together with their partners in the South Staffordshire Partnership the council has been helping to fund and support local Village Agents.

There are five village agents; one for each locality.

Village Agents are out and about in the heart of the rural communities giving advice, support and help to individuals, groups and organisations, and supporting customer insight, by identifying needs and helping organisations to deliver the right services to the people who need them the most.

Their main roles include:

- helping to set up community groups and get them involved in local community activities
- delivering targeted projects and programmes
- helping community volunteers to increase their skills and knowledge
- building better relations between the local community and bodies such as the council, the police and the health service.

Social Media

An online platform, MyPlaceMySay, was developed to consult with local residents, allowing customers to identify the solutions that best suited their locality. It also allowed local residents to engage in discussion with and inform each other, building cross community understanding and cohesion.

The website is accessible to all and mechanisms have been developed to feed the results to all public sector partners.

www.myplacemysay.co.uk

This public website was created using DotNetNuke, which is an open source content management system based on Microsoft, which fitted the specification required for this project and delivered a fully functioning user discussion forum 'out the box'. This is fully re-usable and could be fully modified to meet the requirements of the project. SSC used a lot of the functionality that came as standard in DotNetNuke when creating the MyPlaceMySay website but when new functionality was required, they created it in house and integrated it within DotNetNuke.

> **For more information on DotNetNuke refer to: http://dotnetnuke.com**
>
> DotNetNuke also known as DNN is a Web Content Management System built on Powerful Dot Net Microsoft Platform. DNN Application is ideal for creating and deploying projects such as commercial web sites, corporate sites, intranets and extranets, and online publishing portals. it is User-Friendly, Feature-Rich and Supported by its Core Team of developers and a dedicated international community. Through user groups, online forums, resource portals and a we specialize in DNN, support specially in UK as head office is here in Surrey.
>
>
>
> The Community Edition is the most widely adopted Web Content Management Platform for Microsoft .NET powering over 500,000 web sites and growing. Application has been in use for 8 years and with so many live sites it is getting better and improved with each version.
>
> The main USP for DNN CE or Community Edition is that it is Open Source – and it is built on the powerful Microsoft .net platform. DotNetnuke is licensed under a BSD-style agreement. It allows individuals to do whatever they wish with the application framework, both commercially and non-commercially, with the simple requirement of giving credit back to the DotNetNuke project community.

The project aimed to deliver a solution which would include:

- a central online hub to provide information about the project and how residents could get involved

- a facility allowing project participants to register an online profile for use across each of the sites

- an online debate platform to allow participants to debate, discuss and deliberate on project proposals with one another

- a secure (SSL protected) online voting platform (see below)

- provision of social media capabilities for site content, through technologies/platforms such as RSS, Google, YouTube and Digg

- 'active content' site areas, such as a blog or feedback page to provide regular site updates, project feedback and information on next steps

- a mapping feature which allowed users to plot locations for bus stops etc.

The online voting form used by MPMS:

Findings

Locality profiles have been built for each of the 5 localities and the published documents are available via the LSP website (see page 15 for links). These include details about demographics, customer insight, children & young people, community safety, economic vibrancy, environmental quality, health & wellbeing, housing and, of course, transport.

A sample page is shown below:

The information collected within these profiles confirms the first impressions that South Staffordshire is a relatively affluent area with a large number of commuters and an ageing population. However, the profiles provide a mine of useful data for anyone providing services in the area and identify a number of specific transport issues.

3. Customer Insight

South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust purchased Mosaic Public Sector 2009 software which uses information from a number of sources to categorise types of people living at different postcodes. This allows us to produce a generalised picture of the behaviours and motivations of groups of people living in particular areas.

The top five groups in Locality 1 are:

Careers and kids (12%)

Couples with young children in comfortable modern housing

Key features

Young couples
Well-educated
Experienced users of technology at work
Expectation of career development
Steady incomes
Leisure activity

Small Town diversity (16%)

Residents of small and mid-sized towns with strong local roots

Key features

Strong roots
Lower incomes
Varying ages
Home improvement
Traditional
Small businesses
Grandchildren

Professional Rewards (19%)

Successful professionals living in suburban or semi-rural homes

Key features

Suburban or semi rural
Executive and Managers
Small businesses
Senior positions
Significant equity
Married with children
Comfortable
Good education
Car ownership

Ex-Council community (12%)

Residents with sufficient incomes in right-to-buy social housing

Key features

Council tenants
Right to buy
Comfortable lifestyles
Few qualifications
Hard workers
Self reliant
Low anti-social behaviour

Rural solitude (12%)

Residents in isolated rural communities

Key features

Small villages
Strong sense of community
Owner-occupation
Low unemployment
Disposable income
Access to public services is difficult
Reliant on mobile services
Low crime

A sample of the transport pages from Locality
One follows:

10. Transport

This locality is characterised by very strong public transport provision running north - south between Stafford and Penkridge (onward to Wolverhampton via Brewood and to Cannock) and between Stafford - Huntington – Cannock.

The 880 and 75/76 buses provide valuable connections between Penkridge and Brewood (via Wheaton Aston and Bishops Wood in the case of the 880). Connections between Cannock and Stafford hospitals are also strong. A long-standing Taxi bus coverage is good with nine operators, two of which have one or more wheelchair accessible vehicles.

A long-standing and successful voluntary car scheme is in operation in the Penkridge area. Penkridge is also served by a St Johns' Ambulance Service.

Huntington and Hatherton are covered by the Chase Community Transport and Brewood Voluntary Car Scheme respectively.

However, smaller villages such as Bednall, Teddesley Hay and Coppenhall have low connectivity.

The table below shows current transport infrastructure in this locality as of September 2010.

Community	VCS	Taxi	Rail	Bus routes	First bus	Peak frequency	Off Peak frequency	Last bus	Weekend
Penkridge	Y	Y	Y	3/75/76/880	0556	Half hourly		2345	Sat/Sun
Bednall & Teddesley Hay	Y	Y	N	2	0905	One bus per day (Mon-Fri)		1320	N/A
Acton Trussell	Y	Y	N	880	0810	Hourly		1755	Sat
Dunston	Y	Y	N	75/76	0550	Half hourly		2355	Sat/Sun
Coppenhall	N	Y	N	77 Stafford Community link		Tuesdays only			N/A
Huntington	Y	Y	N	1/74/ 836	0800	20 minutes		2350	Sat/Sun
Hatherton	N	Y	N	T2	1038	Mon-Sat (Not Wed)		1306	Sat

VCS = Voluntary Car Scheme First bus = In any direction Last bus = Last return time

The map to the right shows the existing services that are running in Locality 1 as of 6th September 2010.

This product includes mapping data licensed from Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

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Key

●   Railway station in South Staffordshire

┼┼┼┼┼┼┼   Railway lines in South Staffordshire

▬▬▬   Services operating every 60 mins or better from Sept 2010

▬▬▬   Services operating less frequently from Sept 2010

▭   Penkridge & Acton Trussell Voluntary Car Scheme

▭   Brewood Voluntary Car Scheme

Community	Type	Internal connectivity (High/Med/Low)	Connectivity to next MSV	Extra-district connectivity	Notes
Penkridge	MSV	H	H	H	
Bednall	SSV	H	L	L	Small population numbers
Acton Trussell	OVH	H	H	H	
Teddesley Hay	OVH	H	L	L	Small population numbers
Dunston	SSV	H	H	H	
Copperhall	OVH	H	L	L	Natural connection lies with Stafford
Huntington	LSV	M	H	H	
Hatherton	OVH	H	M	M	Significant population – 532

Settlement hierarchy categories from the Local Development Framework:

MSV = Main Service Village, LSV = Local Service Village, SSV = Small Service Village, OVH = Other villages and hamlets

Key messages from consultation

- Evening and weekend services from Penkridge could be improved.
- Within Penkridge internal connectivity is an issue due to the location of the railway station, the GP surgery and the Monckton Centre.
- Within Huntington less mobile residents of the Cavan's Wood Mobile Home Park find it difficult to return home with shopping.
- The Voluntary Car schemes are struggling to find enough volunteers.

Full copies of the published locality profiles can be downloaded from the Local Strategic Partnership website:

Locality One

Locality Two

Locality Three

Locality Four

Locality Five

MPMS has proven to be a great success. It has in excess of 200 registered users which exceeded the initial baseline of 50. It has also had over 2,500 visits since the website was launched.

The timings of the rural transport project and the outcomes from those discussions didn't necessarily lend themselves to a straight 'voting option' However, despite this, the council successfully designed a robust voting prototype which it hopes to be able to incorporate into its own website in the future.

Outcomes

Transport
Feedback on the MPMS web site has identified that real results and positive outcomes have been delivered in various localities by facilitating communications which otherwise would not have been forthcoming.

For example in Area 2 where local opinion, championed by the Village Agent and delivered via MPMS, changed the council's thinking with regards to bus routes:

"The council thought residents in Locality 2 wanted regular bus services to Stafford and Wolverhampton. However, the consultation through MPMS identified that residents wanted a service to Telford (i.e. outside the county). As a direct result of this the SSRTP caused a Saturday service to be introduced.

An unexpected side effect of this decision has been an increase in the number of people from Telford travelling to the Penkridge market."

Clodagh Peterson
Head of Policy and Partnerships reports

This service has been a great success and its popularity was reported via MPMS:

> "I am writing to say a big thank you for your help in getting the bus from Penkridge to Telford up and running I have been on it the last two weeks and must say it is very much like a day trip to Blackpool, the drivers are such comedians. Also the time allocation in Telford is just right, I have been there and back twice on the two early busses and they give plenty of time for a good look around including a sit down and a cup of coffee, also if you want to spend longer in the centre you could always come back on the 16.00 bus.
>
> Both weeks the bus have been full, in fact the first week we could have done with a slightly larger bus. Again, many thanks,"
>
> **Jan**, resident

Other examples of the outcomes from the transport review can be seen in Issue 50 of the South Staffordshire Review: http://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/pdf/REVIEW%2050%20%20-%20Autumn%202011.pdf

Social Media

In addition to the transport related outcomes delivered by MPMS, the project has led directly to the development of a Social Media strategy for the council. This strategy has allowed the council, for the first time, to explore the uses of social media and as a result it now uses Facebook, Twitter and FlickR as communication tools to tap into a whole new online audience.

> "Two years ago it was unthinkable that we'd be using Facebook, Twitter and FlickR as a strategic tool to engage with local people and businesses. But today, thanks to this project and the knowledge and skills it gave us, social media is very much a central part of our future communication plans".
>
> **Jamie Angus**
> **Communications Officer at South Staffordshire Council**

One example of this initiative influencing another service area resulted in the launch of the MPMS Business site in July 2011. This is an online portal for business users in South Staffordshire where they can chat with other local businesses, share their experiences and find out the latest business news and crime reports. The crime reports are linked by RSS feed allowing users to get up-to-date information. Since its launch the site has received nearly 100 visits per month.

For more detail go to: http://www.myplacemysay.co.uk/home/business/Home.aspx

A prototype mapping function, based on Google Mapping, demonstrating possible new bus routes was created for final phase of this project. This feature allowed users to plot changes they'd like to see on a map; for example where new bus stops should be placed. Although this wasn't heavily utilised during the pilot project the development is now being used on the council web site: for example, to allow members of the public to identify the location of fly tipping.

In time, the council are looking to utilise this function to allow users to use this mapping function to report instances of litter and fly-tipping in real time through their mobile/smart phones. When a member of the public uses the tool it records the coordinates of the point placed on the map. The system then presents this onto a map internally so the officer can see the location of the fly tipping. This is done automatically in the body of the email to the officer, which makes it fast and efficient for the officer - a management system is also available so the officer can see history of reports. As the coordinates are saved in a database rather than the map itself it is simple to display this information onto other mapping or GIS systems such as ArcGIS Server.

Facebook is also now being used by the Leader of the Council who is embracing the concept of social media for the first time:

South Staffordshire Council leader, Councillor Brian Edwards has launched a new Facebook page where people can hear more from him about his job as leader of the council.

"More and more people are looking to find out about what the council is doing online so I thought this would be a good way for people to find out more about what's going on and what my job as leader is all about".

"It's my first venture into social media but I'm excited about having conversations with local people about the issues which matter to them".

Brian Edwards
Council leader South Staffordshire

For more information go to: http://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/news/council_news/council_leader_enters_world_of.aspx

Visitor attractions in South Staffordshire, such as Baggeridge Country Park, are also using social media, for example:

The use of Facebook and Twitter has proven a great success and attracted numerous comments from residents and visitors, such as:

- "Steve (Head of the Park's Ranger Service) is a mine of information and this event was no doubt helped by his regular informative updates on the country park's Facebook page, which has shown how social media can become and invaluable tool for engaging the local community"

- "Since setting up the page earlier this year, Steve has seen increased interest in Baggeridge and its stunning landscape, which is home to a wide variety of wildlife."

- "Some people don't realise they've got all this wonderful nature on their doorstep. The Facebook page is a great way of publicising it and getting them involved."

Communications

South Staffordshire MP Gavin Williamson joins pupils from Codsall High School

The MPMS project has introduced the concept of online, immediate consultation with local people. Despite the clear 'digital divide' that exists in an ageing, rural district with limited broadband opportunities, MPMS allowed the council to tap into an online community which had previously never been identified.

MPMS also helped open up the concept of engaging with younger people in the district and tapping in to their experiences of rural transport and rural life in South Staffordshire. The council demonstrated the MPMS site to hundreds of High School students as part of council's annual Local Democracy programme.

The council ran a series of workshops, which attracted 600 school children, as part of Local Democracy Week to demonstrate MPMS and showed how they could link their comments through Twitter and Facebook through the social media bookmarks.

Visitor numbers to the site spiked following the demonstrations with useful information posted which helped inform the transport project, and resulted in comments such as:

> **Amberlaura, resident:**
> I don't know where the buses go.
> I don't know where they stop as there isn't sufficient information.
> I would like them to go to Brewood, Penkridge, Stafford, Telford, Codsall and Cannock.

MPMS has highlighted the benefits a dual approach to communications and consultation can have. By using a mix of online and traditional consultation methods, the council is improving its accountability and its decision making process

Benefits

Transport Provision

The project had a direct impact by improving public transport provision for many residents. Not only did it enable the council to hear directly from local people about their experiences of the current bus services, it also enabled the council to then act on these users feedback and a number of their suggestions and then report back on what they action they took. Examples reported in Issue 50 of the South Staffordshire Review include:

- You said bus service no. 69, Cannock -- Wolverhampton, stopped too early in the evening.

- So we introduced a new late evening service which we're funding until April 2012.

- You said bus service no. 76 Staford – Wolverhampton only ran every two hours on a Sunday.

- So we've put on an hourly service on Sundays between Penkridge, Lapley, Wheaton Aston, Bishops Wood, Brewood and Coven.

- You said access to buses in rural areas around Pattingham and Kinver can be tricky.

- So we teamed up with Shropshire Council to extend their 'Shropshire Link' service into these rural areas.

- Residents in Wedges Mills and other smaller villages in the north have difficulty getting out during the week.

- So we put in a new taxi-bus service which links them to Cannock and Penkridge on market days, twice a week.

- Residents in Wheaton Aston wanted a bus service to Telford.

- So we've put on a new Saturday service linking Penkridge, Wheaton, Aston, Brewood and Coven to Telford.

- You said the 88 bus in Penkridge, Wheaton Aston, Brewood & Covenn was unreliable.

- So we've got the county council to re-design the route to improve its reliability.

- You said that early morning bus services from Pattingham needed to be better.

- So the county council introduced a new early morning service.

This period has also seen an increase in the number of bus passes issued to over-65s by the council: from 16,693 April 2010 to 17,537 in April 2011.
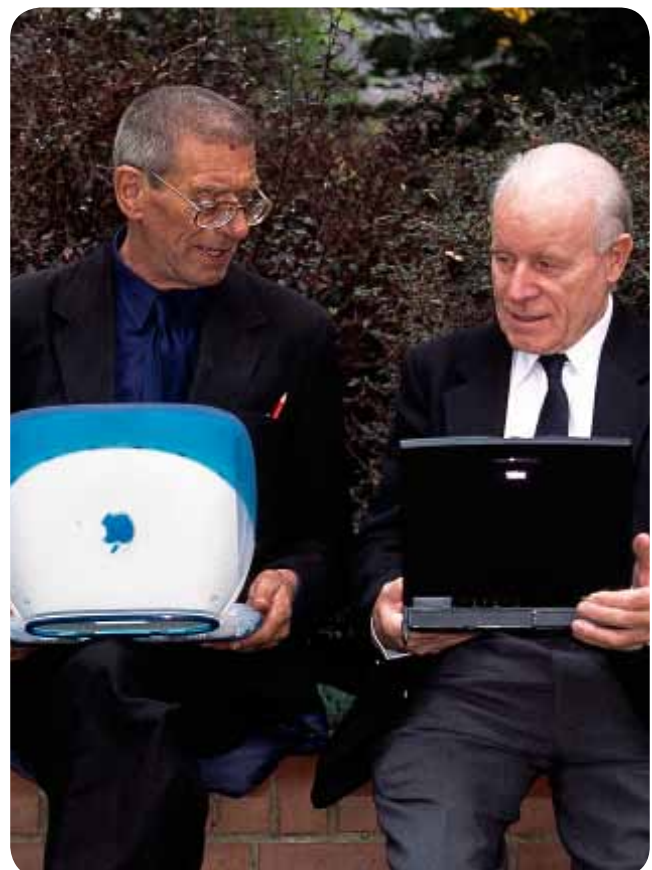
Customer Insight

The locality profiles generated through the Customer Insight work are now being used by many of the partners – for example, as a result of this information the health service has decided to look more closely at childhood obesity and has launched a project focusing on healthy eating in schools and the need to be active.

The use of customer insight information is beginning to alter the culture and thinking of the council by allowing services to respond to local and even individual needs rather than delivering a "pan-district approach". Clodagh Peterson cites an example where local knowledge led to the inclusion of Cheer Leadership as a means of getting some youngsters to be active where it had not previously been considered.

The profiles are being shared with elected Members and for the first time they are receiving key data about health, life expectancy and educational attainment levels in their wards. Anecdotal evidence has always been readily available, but now partners are in a position where they can articulate this data to give a true reflection of the key issues within the localities, which have previously been masked by district data.

For example, the clarification of different life expectancies in different localities has allowed the council to work with the NHS to provide targeted health programmes.

The data sets are now being utilised for the implementation of Locality Delivery Plans.

Social Media

MyPlaceMySay has provided the stimulus for the council to investigate the wider use of Social Media. Since embarking upon the MPMS project the council has, for the first time, begun to develop its social media presence and to look at how these avenues can support its business in the future. The council recently ran a staff conference on the topic of social media which appears to have sparked interest in a number of areas.

The spin-off MPMS/business site will also continue as the authority looks to improve its relationship with local businesses. It will also help provide a more cost-effective means of working with local businesses – replacing previously expensive paper copy newsletters.

The council now has a vibrant and popular Twitter feed (@south_staffs), two Facebook pages (one for its country park and another for the leader of the council) and it is now experimenting with photograph storage through programmes such as FlickR.

Social media is now playing a more central role in the council's communication and engagement matrix (e.g. with a live election commentary) and over the next 12 months investigation will continue into new sources of media including Facebook, FlickR, blogging and YouTube.

Twitter quotes:

> jackjmatthews Dec 20, 10:27pm via TweetDeck
>
> Loving the livetweeting of #ssdc meeting by @south_staffs. #scrutiny #accountability

> mred_uk Dec 20, 7:09pm via TweetDeck
>
> @south_staffs interesting tweets. Would never have imagined I would be waiting for a planning decision while watching emmerdale!!

> garrisod Dec 20, 5:00pm via Twitter for iPhone
>
> appreciates living in an area with a tech-savvy council that offers informative twitter information like @south_staffs

> derbydav16 May 6, 6:32pm via Twitter for iPhone
>
> @south_staffs great elections coverage... Keep it up!!

> Ian__Hawkins May 6, 6:28pm via Twitter for iPhone
>
> @south_staffs great coverage of the election results, thanks for keeping everyone updated on a busy day #ssdcvote

> SimonDavidL May 6, 2:49pm via Web
>
> @south_staffs thanks! great tweets - been following all dy, thanks for all the updates! ;o)] #ssdcvote

> derbydav16 May 6, 10:32am via Twitter for iPhone
>
> Is loving the @south_staffs twitter updates... Democracy is a two way process and needs good communication, great work! #localelections

Communications

As well as delivering specific improvements to public transport provision within South Staffordshire the MPMS website has delivered real benefits to residents within the various localities by facilitating discussions and the exchange of information about specific local needs, across a range of topics in a way that was not previously available. For example, an on-line exchange between a number of residents, the village agent and council officers led to the grounds maintenance team being sent in to sort out an "unkempt grassed area" in Purton.

Technology

Through this project, the council has created a framework which could be used by other authorities to undertake simple consultations to help increase local resident participation in future service delivery.

Other councils wishing to benefit from this work would need to download the Dotnetnuke development software – this open source software is free to download. SSC would then provide the templates and software for their facility along with some basic guidance. The user councils would require skills in Dotnetnuke but would then be free to amend or configure the site to their requirements.

In addition, SSC intends to extend the mapping element to deliver a "where's my nearest" function which will be available for other councils to use. This development allows location based reporting against the council's own mapping facility and internal systems.

The council would integrate this system with their LLPG to allow postcode searches and also plan to link to datasets such as bin collection dates etc and also third party API's such as NHS Choices.

SSC plan to use this rather than a national website such as UpMyStreet due to the ability to add their own data and locality information, engage with residents in terms of allowing them to make forum posts and give feedback and allow consultations to be possible etc. Whereas the national facility would just provide the information reported on maps.

Social Media, as exemplified by this project, has enhanced the ICT functions role as it moves from being a support service to a transformational one.

Financial Savings

To date, there are identified cost savings of between £6,000 and £10,000 per year in software and licensing costs resulting from the use of this in house, open source based system when compared with the cost of a commercial consultation package.

The council has traditionally used its residents' panel to undertake postal surveys and recruit face-to-face focus groups which are both expensive and not necessarily focussed.

The MPMS project has helped to demonstrate that with online communities, consultation can often be more focussed and relevant as well as more cost effective. For example, as part of its social media strategy, the council is looking to introduce Facebook pages for its four leisure centres in the near future. Whereas in the past, they would have perhaps used the residents' panel to ask customer satisfaction questions around leisure facilities – a captive and active audience online could provide a better quality, customer-focussed consultation outcome.

The council estimates that if they conducted a survey though traditional channels, for example through the post and telephone or face to face, it would cost in excess of £3,000 per consultation. The exact cost would depend upon the size and depth of the consultation. By using this system these costs could be avoided or reduced in suitable circumstances.

Financial constraints have meant that the number of survey's carried out by the council has been reduced in recent years to the point where the council currently undertakes 5 or 6 survey's per year at a cost in excess of £20,000. In these circumstances this approach can clearly make an important contribution either by reducing this spend or by allowing more surveys to be completed.

In addition, the move to develop and implement a social media strategy more widely across the council has been undertaken with the expectation of delivering savings from channel migration and a reduction in avoidable contacts.

In July 2010, Tameside Metropolitan Council reported, in a More for Less Case Study, that:

> Not only has the speed and accuracy of processing been improved………. but each self-service application via the Internet now costs 6p to process end to end. In contrast, a face to face application now costs £9.13 and a telephone application costs £1.34.

MPMS has also demonstrated the worth of engaging with online communities. The council's new ICT Transformation Strategy is centred around creating a cultural shift to web-based services. Through self-service, customer profiles and web-based technologies, the council is expecting to make significant savings in the future – although at this stage exact figures are not yet known.

Ultimately, the council recognises that in the future, the shift to online web-based services will produce real cost savings as reliance on personal and telephone contact reduces.
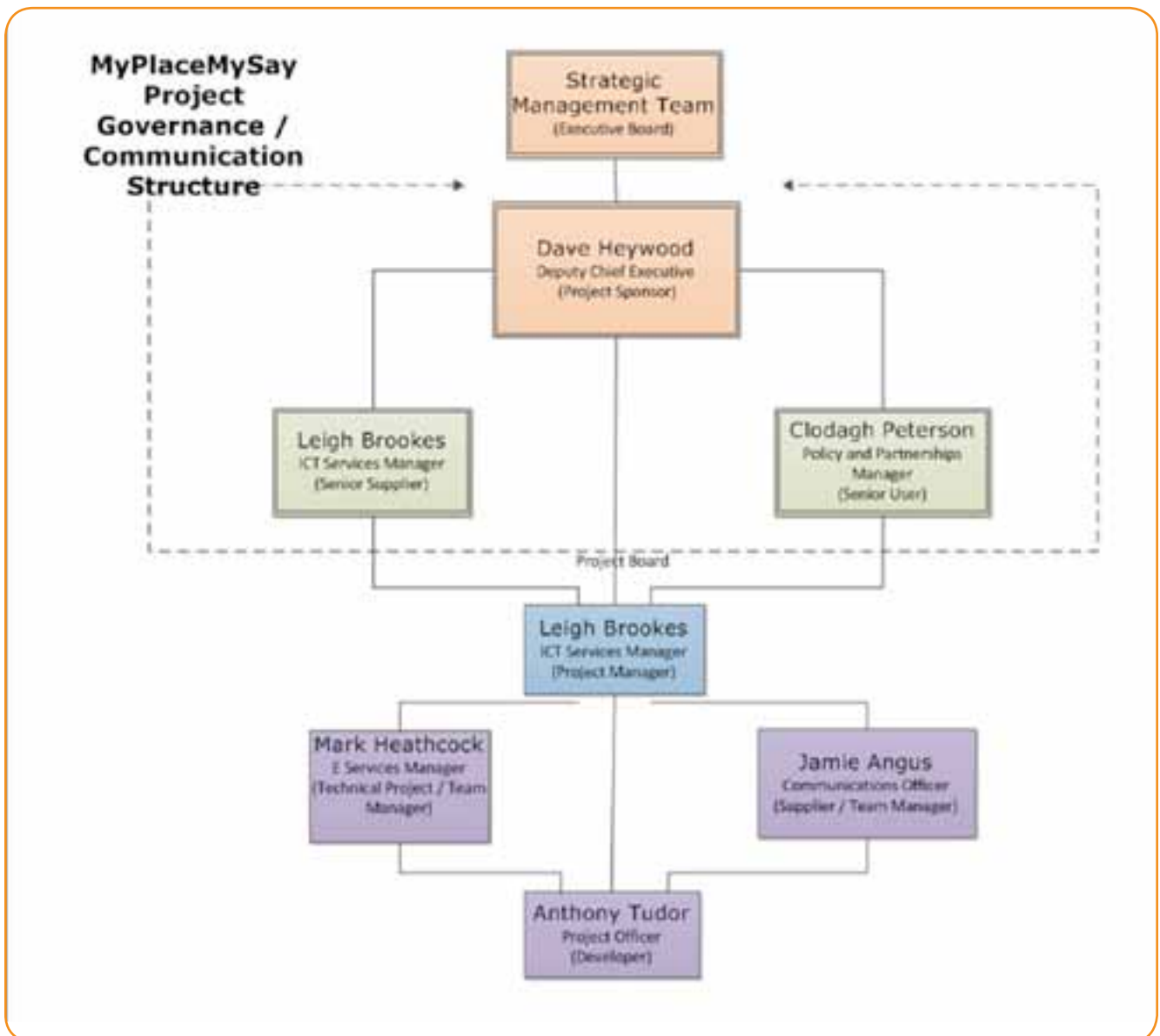
Governance

South Staffordshire Rural Transport Partnership oversaw the project. This partnership is part of the Local Strategic Partnership and its membership includes South Staffordshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust and The Community Council of Staffordshire.

The project was managed and run by a small team within South Staffordshire Council following standard Prince2 disciplines:

South Staffordshire Council worked with their LSP partners, including Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services, Staffordshire Police and local housing associations to promote the MPMS site.

MyPlaceMySay Project Governance / Communication Structure

- Strategic Management Team (Executive Board)
- Dave Heywood, Deputy Chief Executive (Project Sponsor)
- Leigh Brookes, ICT Services Manager (Senior Supplier)
- Clodagh Peterson, Policy and Partnership Manager (Senior User)
- Project Board
- Leigh Brookes, ICT Services Manager (Project Manager)
- Mark Heathcock, E Services Manager (Technical Project / Team Manager)
- Jamie Angus, Communications Officer (Supplier / Team Manager)
- Anthony Tudor, Project Officer (Developer)

Resourcing

Spend Type	Amount
Staffing Costs	£22,000.00
Consultancy / Support Costs	£29,000.00
Advertising / Publicity Costs	£16,000.00
Training	£8,000.00
Software Costs	£5,000.00
Total	£80,000.00

In addition to the work of the Project Support Officer Online Communities (approx 543 man hours) which was covered by this grant funding, the ICT department also contributed:

- ICT Service Manager – approx 40 man hours
- E-Services Manager – approx 155 man hours

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The technical development of the site was a success. The project provided the council with the opportunity to bolster their knowledge of social media and successfully develop a platform where their original concept could be put into practice. The site remains operational and has already seen a spin-off project created specifically for local businesses. The other spin-off development has seen the council utilise the 'report tool' map in its own website.

However, when the council evaluated the outcomes of the project they found that tying the MPMS site to the rural transport project made uptake of the site more difficult to promote.

The reasons for this were mainly:

- Broadband connection in some villages is limited. The council is, however, working with its partners and the local MP to look at improving broadband provision significantly over the coming years. This issue is also being pursued by the Leader of the Council who represents southern Staffordshire authorities on the newly formed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

- Pigeon holing MPMS predominantly to rural transport meant that many citizens, who perhaps do not use bus services and have easy access to other modes of transport, were not included in the pilot. Limiting debate to this topic in the first instance restricted active take-up initially. The council has now looked to expand the remit of the site away from solely transport.

- The timings of the rural transport project did not always tie-in to the MPMS project timings. As a result of the conventional consultations with parish councils and residents, through focus groups, taking longer than the social media option. This meant that instant/speedy feedback to the MPMS was not always possible. This was not ideal as social media sites build credibility based on speed of content update.

- The two project timings not coinciding in places also meant that the mapping phase of the project could not be fully delivered

as the proposals from the rural transport partnership did not necessarily lend themselves to an online design solution. However, the project created a prototype demonstration showing that this phase could be achieved, in theory, and which could be used in other future consultations.

- The 'purdah' period leading to the council's local elections further delayed project announcements from the rural transport partnership.

Although the timings of the rural transport partnership have not always coincided with the social media project – it has been a worthwhile learning curve and has allowed the partners to examine and develop new technologies which they had previously not utilised.

Customer Insight
A number of interesting and unexpected insights have been gained as a result of the customer information gathered throughout this process. For example, anecdotally, the council thought that those interested in recycling and the green agenda were the younger, 'green-aware' generation. However, it appears that the majority are actually older people who were raised with a frugal approach to life whereby "make do and mend" is standard practice. In future, this learning will inform publicity on the topic.

Social Media
The council and its partners learnt a number of important lessons about the use of Social Media during this project.

Firstly, it was realised that social media provides an interactive environment requiring quick responses. Customers and citizens will quickly lose patience with the council if their submissions are not dealt with for days or even weeks and consequently will stop using the system.

To avoid this problem it is necessary to manage public expectations and to deal with social media communications more like a phone call than a letter – i.e. the recipient needs to interact with the customer on a real time basis, to get all the details, even if at the end of the discussion one has to say that their views will be fed into some process for consideration and this will take a while. To date, the council has not set standards for dealing with social media but is considering the topic.

Secondly, the project confirmed the view that social media is still only being used by a relatively small percentage of the populace with many preferring telephone, letter or face to face interactions. Therefore social media should be considered as one, amongst a number of different communication channels.

Thirdly, it was recognised that social media is a constantly evolving environment and it will be necessary for council's seeking to use this channel to invest time and effort to remain up to date.

Technology skills
The MPMS project has provided SSC with invaluable lessons by allowing them to develop their in-house skills and knowledge of social media.

It's also helped to break down internal barriers/conflicts between ICT development and ICT security.

Next Steps

Since the launch of this project social media has continued to change and develop and, consequently, the future use of the current MPMS site is being reviewed, together with the future use of other council web sites, as part of the council's Social Media Strategy. However, the council has decided that the MPMS brand will continue.

The council will be developing an 'In Your Area' portal which will allow residents to enter their postcode on the site and it will bring up cross-partner information such as 'Your Councillor', nearest primary and secondary schools, waste and recycling collection dates, Google maps of the area, local policing teams and so on.

The spin-off MPMS/business site will also continue as the authority looks to improve its relationship with local businesses. It will also help provide a more cost-effective means of working with local businesses – replacing previously expensive paper copy newsletters.

The council has now created their first social media strategy which features plans to roll-out our usage of sites such as Twitter, Facebook, FlickR and YouTube. This was unthinkable prior to the launch of the MPMS project.

The partnership working, exemplified by this project, may, in future, lead to shared consultation and possibly even shared service provision.
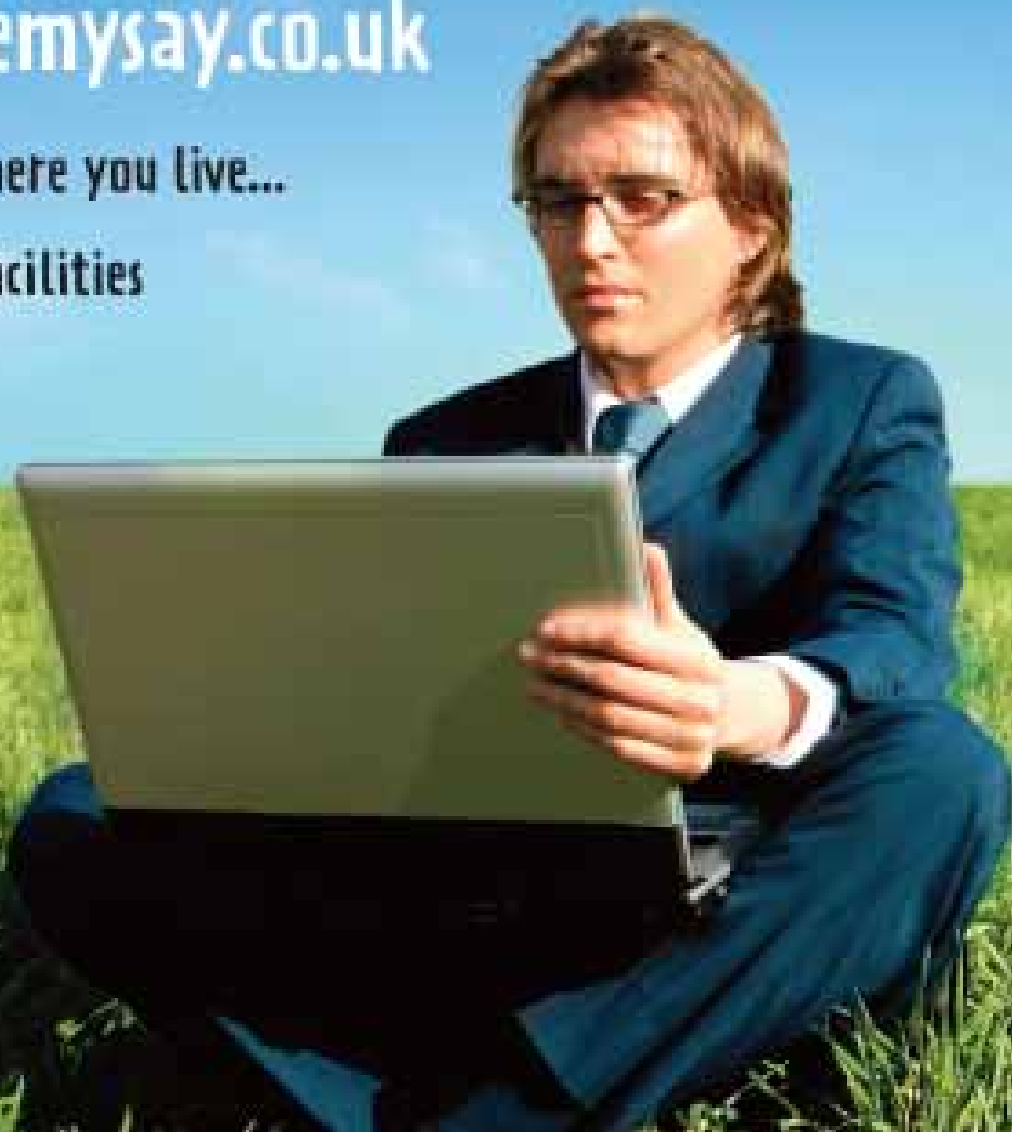
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