

Stockport Council's new adult social care website 'My Care, My Choice': A business case for service co-design

 Innovation image

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Organisation: Stockport Council

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Social protection

Type: Communication, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2010

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The result of much research and work with service users, carers, partners and staff is My Care, My Choice, a website which guides people through the 'social care maze' and has also made significant savings. Read this business case to see the enormous potential of service co-design.

Why the innovation was developed

- Following research into our current methods of communication, Stockport Council's Adult Social Care Department knew that the information provided on their current website did not help support informed decision making.
 - The transformation of social care in England requires all Local Authorities to provide information to the general public on the range of options available, and also to ensure that people who fund their own care have access to good quality advice.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

- The objectives were to end up with a website that delivered: A clear and easy-to-use pathway for all to understand what social care services are available locally.
 - A platform for Stockport Council to deliver personalisation – so that our service users can make informed choices about their care.
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Main beneficiaries

Elderly people, Government staff, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities

- Residents of Stockport receiving adult social care

Results

Effectiveness

- Since going 'live' the website has received over 100 000 hits. Contacts, inquiries and observations at the contact centre for the period have gone down by 29%, freeing up resources.
 - Whilst the telephone remains the main method of contacting Stockport, it is pleasing to note that email contacts have doubled (albeit from only 1% to 2%) reducing phone inquiries, showing a positive trend even within the short period since launch of the My Care, My Choice website.
 - The number of 'abandoned' and 'closed' contacts have been reduced by 38.4%. Previously people dropped out midway through the assessment process due to issues such as not being informed that there was a charge for services.
 - The number of inquiries and observations received by the Contact Centre that lead to a referral to the 'back office' (i.e. social work teams) has been reduced by 36%.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- The site has been live now for over a year and has been received very positively by our customers and partner agencies.
- People are now accessing the correct information much more quickly than on the old website. We've also had interesting stories of relatives overseas using the website to register concern for a family member living in Stockport.

Responsiveness:

- The feedback we have received – both positive and negative - has been used to redesign and develop areas of the site. An example is the feedback over images that might misrepresent a service. We also changed some of the text on the site in response to direct feedback.
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User satisfaction

- Providers listed on the site tell us they are now receiving direct contacts from service users. Feedback has been very positive and the site is being presented as a best practice example to other local councils in the UK such as Kensington & Chelsea.
- Some of these have developed the site themselves using the templates and design processes and concepts we developed, which we have made available as open source software.

Development

Design

We partnered with CSED (Care Services Efficiencies Delivery) and Quickheart, a specialist website design company, to rebuild our site, working together with service users. This involved using ethnographic methodology to understand how our customers wanted to see information, what language was important to them, their perception of social care as a 'place of last resort' and the importance of clear and easy navigation tools on the site.

The first step was that the ethnographer independently recruited a range of our customers from across Stockport. The important element was that they were not people nominated by social care. The methodology the ethnographer uses means that, instead of the traditional workshop method, he worked with people in an intensive way.

This meant a small number of users (30) to understand their views of social care and how they want to receive information – particularly, what things are important to them in relation to social care support.

Testing

- The ethnographer carried out research with our customers in their own environment in order to establish what they thought of the way we currently provided online information. Headlines from this research were:
 - We needed to improve information and advice to the public about adult social care services, as our previous website was deemed not fit for purpose and was confusing and hard to navigate.
 - Due to demographic pressures and the need to support increasing numbers of people, we needed to provide better information to support service users and their families to enable better informed decision making.
 - We had to reach people before they got into crisis and to promote prevention options and choices for them in line with the requirements of the UK adult social care programme 'Putting People First' – in particular, we needed to promote universal services and we needed to support self-funders.
 - We needed to develop an online charging calculator that gave people an idea how much their likely charge would be, if they received services from us.
 - We needed an information hub that could be used by our own staff (and partner agencies like GPs and nursing staff) as a point of referral to our services.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- We also completed a mystery shopping exercise with a group of customers on our old site and then took the learning from this to redesign the new site. This meant asking people to search for particular information whilst being timed.
- This turned up some interesting results: people sometimes spent up to 40 minutes struggling to find the information they wanted – and what they ended up with was sometimes just the PDF of a standard leaflet or advice that they should ring us at the contact centre!
- We worked with our local voluntary sector partners to ensure that the new design of the website addressed the needs of our diverse customer base. Each of the major voluntary sector organisations recruited a number of testers to work with us in developing the website and we took heed of their feedback on layout, pictures and language.
- An editorial board of staff from all the service areas was set up to ensure we got the ownership of the operational teams. We worked with a copy writer to ensure the language on the site was accessible and did not present jargon and 'expert speak'.
- We built the site using bright, colourful and positive images in three months using a set of templates to reflect the customer journey. These templates ensured that all the 'information pages' on My Care, My Choice followed the same consistent style, with the headings: 'What is the service?', 'How much does it cost?', 'Can I get help with the cost?', and 'How to get in touch'.

Resources used:

- We estimate that the introduction of the website has saved the department about GBP 300 000 per annum.
- The cost of building the site was about GBP 75 000, which included building an online calculator, providing search functionality for services, undertaking the research with customers, and the staff time we put in.
- The site was built and is maintained by the Information & Publicity Team – no additional staffing resources were required but we did second an information and advice worker from the customer contact centre for six months to support the building of the site (350 web pages).

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Information is really important to support informed decision making and websites are a hugely important way that service users, family members, carers, staff and partners can access the information. In saying that, it's still important to provide information in traditional formats such as leaflets.
- Patience is key when delivering a new website - the ICT side of things can take a long time to sort, particularly in a local authority. Getting separate departments to work together is not always easy!
- Co-production with customers is really key to delivering success and ensuring a website that fits their needs.
- We need to reach people who are not traditional users of our services and this website should hopefully provide those people with another 'front door' through which they can access our services.
- Staff and partners use the resource as much as our customers. Not only does this boost our efficiency in delivering the service, it has helped them to take pride and feel ownership in the service. Moreover, it means that we now benefit from their ideas for continuous improvement. Staff and partners also provide a great vehicle for promoting the site - you should never underestimate the power of 'word of mouth'.
- We need to deliver better quality advice and information to ensure we address the demographic and economic challenges the local authority currently faces – My Care, My Choice is just one part of that.
- Building this site has made us more ambitious to deliver greater functionality - for example, building a citizen portal where someone can complete a self assessment, develop their support plan and shop for services and choices in an online market place. That's our next project!

Other information

*The program described in this innovative case study has been discontinued and is no longer in operation.

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