Council Leaflets, Forms and Publications

Background

The Terms of Reference for the review of Customer Access and Communications poses a number of questions which need to be asked concerning the future approach to be adopted by the Council in terms of providing information to residents and visitors. The Council has also adopted an Equality and Diversity Policy and an Accessibility Strategy to ensure inclusivity for all sections of the Community. The review asked a number of questions in order to help identify recommendations for the Council's approach in the future.

Context

The Council does not provide a wide variety of services which in turn does not require a vast amount of information to be produced publicising them. Furthermore, expectations are changing with more and more people electing to carry out their "business" online, spurred on in Local Government by Councils such as Derbyshire County Council and Amber Valley Borough Council promoting a digital by default approach.

It is within this context that the questions posed in the review have been addressed :

1. **How many paper documents does the Council produce and what alternative delivery methods are available to replace them ?**

Publication	Delivery Methods
Visitor Guide	Online and paper copies
Newsletter	On line and paper copies
Grant application Forms	On line, paper copies available on request
Herbert Strutt Charity application forms	On Line, paper copies available on request
Council and Committee Agendas	On line
Fault Forms	On line
Market Place Licence	On line, paper copies available on request
Memorial Gardens Licence	On line, paper copies available on request
Flood Warden Registration Form	On line. paper copies available on request
Belper in Bloom application form	On line. paper copies available on request
Community Awards Form	On line. paper copies available on request
St Johns Chapel Booking Form	On line. paper copies available on request
Event Licence Application form	On line. paper copies available on request
Application Form for staff recruitment	On line. paper copies available on request
Market Stall Application form	On line. paper copies available on request
Festival Stall application form	On line. paper copies available on request
Neighbourhood Plan	On line. paper copies available on request
Corporate Plan	On line. paper copies available on request
Council Policy Documents	On line. paper copies available on request

As the table . above shows very few of the Council's documents area produced in paper by default. In line with many Councils documents are available online with paper copies being available on request

2. How IT literate are the communities in Belper and how extensive is digital access amongst the population ?

Information relating exclusively to Belper is not readily available with Amber Valley Borough Council having no information and Derbyshire County Council having no up to date data. However, it is possible to extrapolate information from various national studies.

Lloyds Bank produce the most comprehensive digital access survey in the UK on an annual basis and the headlines for 2021 are :

- 95% of the UK Population are Internet Connected
- 2.6 million people are offline
- In the East Midlands 13% of the population have only very basic online skills
- The skills deficit is higher in the elderly population
- 95% of households have a mobile phone
- 73% of households have a landline

Nationally there are a significant minority of people with very low level IT skills and Belper is likely to reflect this statistic and although the vast majority of people have access to a telephone and can contact the Council its online offer may not be accessible for some people. What mitigates against this is the fact that most Belper residents live in fairly close proximity to each other and the Community is generally very supportive with very good networks in place.

The County Council have been contacted in order to obtain further information as to how the national trends are reflected more locally prior to making representations to request that a programme of digital skills training is rolled out for Belper residents. Currently none of the digital up skilling courses offered by the County Council are available in Belper.

3. Is the IT infrastructure in the Town i.e. Internet Bandwidth , mobile phone coverage capable of supporting a Digital by Default approach ?

According to Broadband checking tools the majority of Belper has access to Superfast Broadband with speeds of 80 Mbps for Download and 20 Mbps for upload. This is fairly standard for most of the UK but with the next generation "Ultrafast" coming online Belper needs to ensure it does not get left behind.

Most of Belper has good mobile coverage up to and including 4g but there are a number of "not spots" where connectivity is quite poor which is mainly because of the area's

topography. 5g coverage is not available in Belper despite some network providers scheduling it for roll out during 2020.

By and large the infrastructure in place does support a digital by default approach as there are few, if any locations with no coverage or "white space" .The quality of service will always vary by provider but generally people share information about the best coverage and prices locally.

4. What digital tools are available to support the Council's messaging and are there improvements which can be made as a result of this ? Examples include :

- Video screens in public places eg Libraries / Station / Supermarkets etc

The Council is involved in a project to instal a Digital Information totem at the entrance to the jitty which runs from King Street to the Railway Station. For the Traveller this will provide real time integrated travel information for trains and buses and for residents and visitors there will be space to provide local information about Belper's attractions, along with news and alerts. It presents an opportunity to provide information in a new way and it will be interesting to see how well it is received when it is installed in 2022.

As part of this review Members of the Communications Working Group received a demonstration of video screen technology and software. This provided valuable information about the versatility of such products and how they can be installed in places frequently visited by people (eg Libraries, Supermarkets, Doctors Surgeries). They do provide a useful opportunity to improve the Council's communications "reach" and, subject to affordability should be explored further.

- Apps to provide specific subject matter information eg transport and visitor info

There are currently a wide variety of smartphone apps available on just about any facet of life it is possible to think about. Many transport providers, for example, have their own apps which provide live, current information on public transport availability, fares and online purchases.

Whether the Town Council should develop its own app is debateable for a number of reasons. In the first instance there are a wide range of apps and other social media tools which people use to either navigate their way around or find information. Secondly, because as a Town Council there is currently not the infrastructure or expertise to exploit some of the modern tools available. However, there is scope to link information available on the Council's website to physical locations in the town through the use of QR codes.

- Digital alerts to be sent straight to a resident's "in box "

The Council encourages local people to sign up for e mail alerts already and there is ongoing publicity about this on the Council's website. More can be done to promote this useful tool which has been used to help distribute the Council's first e Newsletter

5. How extensively are physical notice boards used ? Are there digital alternatives ?

The Council maintains a number of physical notice boards at various locations in the town. It is not possible to ascertain how many people study the noticeboards and they do not cover the whole of the Belper area by any means. Furthermore, they are not accessible to people who are housebound or to people with visual impairments. The Council uses the noticeboards to place paper copies of all Full Council Agendas but a more proactive approach with more regular communications is too time consuming as staff need to service 10 noticeboards. Nevertheless the Council does receive requests from Community Groups to use the noticeboards to display small posters advertising their events and activities.

The digital alternatives mentioned above would potentially provide a much greater level of coverage as the provision of video screens can be located in the places where most people congregate such as Supermarkets, Libraries, Sports Centres and Doctors surgeries. It may therefore be possible to maintain more regular contact with a wider range of people using digital methods; however, one note of caution is that should problems with COVID 19 continue people will be deterred from visiting public places in indoor settings

6. Do forms and applications have to be in paper format ? Can we introduce exclusively on line processes ?

Most Council documents are available online and can be downloaded to a Computer and the Council makes most documents available in paper format on request which is standard practice. The Council does provide a small number of exclusively online forms where information can be submitted directly to the Council via the Website but these are for only very simple information requests; to place more complex forms on line would be technically challenging and time consuming and there may not be sufficient demand to justify doing it.

7. How far would local Community Groups support a Digital by Default approach ?

Discussion with some local Community Groups reveal mixed feedback on the use of digital methods. Most believe that the digital approach is where society is going but would like to see the Council's website and social media improved to help present information more effectively and to reach more people. As now there is support for making documents available in paper format as a back up to information being displayed digitally, for the minority of people who still require information in paper format.