A New DIGITAL PLATFORM for Health & Wellbeing

Richard Hills and Mark Methven, from iMPOWER, and Michael Watts, from London Borough of Bromley, met to discuss how Local Authority digital platforms could be enhanced to offer residents more dynamic and personalised local health and wellbeing services.

Michael developed and oversees Bromley's 'Bromley MyLife' digital platform for local residents.

Meanwhile, Richard and Mark work with Local Authorities and the NHS to change behaviours and better manage demand so that decreasing budgets can have the greatest impact on health and wellbeing.

Read through the top eight recommendations‡ for Local Authorities' online presence.

1. End-to-end service

ANY DIGITAL SYSTEM NEEDS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE FROM THE MOMENT OF IDENTIFYING THEIR NEEDS THROUGH TO THE DAY-TO-DAY DELIVERY OF THEIR SUPPORT AND CARE.

There needs to be a single digital response across multiple platforms (websites, apps, smart phones, etc) that brings together the 'whole person' - families and friends, community support, self-help, care, health, learning, housing and other community assets. It should support the individual through their interactions with the Local Authority and wider community services. Seamlessly it should help them think about identifying and 'owning' the process, supporting them to meet their needs and assisting them in identifying the life outcomes that are important to them. An individual wellbeing plan could be used to capture the individual's community support and self-help to achieve their desired life outcomes. This creates further opportunity for greater levels of personalisation through personal budgets and tailed support plans to provide the individual with more choice and control.

The digital offer should be seamless, quicker than offline processes, have as few 'inputs' from the user as possible and offer enough significant benefits that individuals choose to use it.

2. Personalised approach

PEOPLE WANT AND EXPECT THEIR ONLINE INTERACTIONS TO BE EMPATHETIC.

Local authorities' digital interface (website, apps on smart phones, etc.) need to understand the needs of the user, and be written with a positive, proactive and conversational voice that breaks down barriers. They should allow the user to customise the information and advice around their particular life situation. Personalisation is key - no two people will have exactly the same needs, social situation and history. To do this, the information needs to be easy to customise, users should be able to see what is most important to them. The website should focus on offering positive support to people as they transition through challenging moments in their lives, which can be extremely stressful. By customising the information, the user should be able to build a 'wellbeing plan' that meets many of their needs - one size does not fit all.

The digital offer should be empathetic to the users - it should be positive, simple to use and allow the user to customise the information in a way that allows them to best meet their own needs.

3. Integration with Council services

DIGITAL SERVICES CAN NO LONGER BE SEEN AS AN 'ADD ON' TO EXISTING PROCESSES. PROCESSES NEED TO BE REDESIGNED AROUND THE DIGITAL OFFER.

Local authorities are looking to end-to-end digital systems that seamlessly support the individual through their support needs and helps them identify the right support. The ambition needs to remain that processes within the local authority, health services and voluntary sector should be redesigned around a shared digital platform. Digital provides a way to bring together silo based traditional and paper-based systems. Referrals should be made through a single online point of access. The healthcare workforce (from GPs to care navigators to social workers) should use the same system to make sure that it is embedded into their day-to-day work. In addition, the digital offer should use technology, such as geotagging, notifications and reminders to help the user experience the offer in 'real time'. For example (if users consent and opt in just like with many phone apps), it can use geotagging to promote what's happening at that time as the user moves around their community to promote opportunities to engage with community services which support health and wellbeing.

The digital offer should be at the heart of the care and support system across the local area - it should drive both automated processes as well as human-led processes.

4. Open market place

THE ONLINE PORTAL SHOULD BE THE GATEWAY TO A SINGE MARKET OF SUPPORT WHICH EXPANDS AS AN INDIVIDUAL'S NEEDS CHANGE.

Local Authorities have a responsibility to facilitate a robust and sustainable local care market for all residents whether self funding or meeting their care needs with state support. Digital platforms can provide a way to facilitate and champion the local care market allowing for maximum reach at an affordable price. Digital marketplaces can make things more accessible for the user presenting a one-stop shop where individuals select and purchase goods and services as and when they need them. The offer from the voluntary sector can be better co-ordinated and promoted through online directories and e-market places that promote this community-led support as the best option before any exploration of formal Social Care support is required. To underpin this, the local authority should ensure that there is a list of quality assured and kite marked services available for both Local Authority funded and self-funded individuals. There is further scope for Local Authority websites to learn from and build on the success of systems like 'Check-a-Trade' and Trading Standards to add an extra element of self-review by service users that can help inform customers and promote the most valued services.

A digital platform can be proactively used to bring the whole market together to offer a seamless and collective offer of trusted services and support available to order and buy as required.

5. Interaction

THE DIGITAL PROWESS OF THE USER SHOULD NOT BE THAT IMPORTANT. LOCAL AUTHORITIES'
PLATFORMS SHOULD NOT BE A TEST IN ADVANCED DIGITAL NAVIGATION SKILLS.
KEEP IT CLEAN, KEEP IT SIMPLE, KEEP IT CLEAR.

As a good rule of design, there needs to be a co-ordinated effort to write in Plain English, to keep 'clicks' to a minimum and to make the site visually appealing. Simple clean lines and branding is important to help people navigate your platform and wish to come back when they require further information. Time spent on good design can prevent residents having to revert to phone and face-to-face meetings to get to the answers they were searching for.

iMPOWER has worked with a number of public sector organisations, applying a range of behavioral science techniques and tools to help influence people to change the accepted narrative of traditional state support provided in a paternalistic fashion. Instead to look at what they can do for themselves first with support from their own local community networks. IMPOWER seek to use the initial information and advice provided by Local Authority websites to instill the outcomes of maximising independence harness local community support as well as their own strengths and resources as an alternative to more traditional and restrictive social care services where appropriate.

Around 15% of the population do not have access to the internet. Local Authorities' might consider an assisted digital offer to ensure that these individuals have the same experience and choice as those who use the digital offer. This can be provided through a range of community groups (the same community groups represented online), who can also work with residents on their digital inclusion, providing training and support as the longer term objective should be that everyone has access to digital.

The digital benefits from good design and provides the opportunity to change the narrative from paternalist support to promoting and maximising peoples independence

6. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

LEARN TO REPLICATE THE BEST IN CLASS, DRAW ON THE SEEMINGLY UNRELATED SOLUTIONS TO MEET THE LOCAL PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY.

Local Authorities may not be at the cutting edge of the digital revolution but this doesn't mean that within their restricted capacity and budgets they can't still scan the horizon for what others are doing and make it work for them. Innovation can happen when you simply learn to connect the dots, connecting the best of what you might encounter, and localising it in your specific setting.

Below are a few examples of the best in class we might draw from in our future digital offer:

PROVIDER	INNOVATION	APPLIED SOLUTION
	Search function	You type in 'the bloke with red hair in the action film in 2007' and Google returns 'Chuck Norris'. Google takes my uneducated nonsense and turns it into educated and sensible results.
		Imagine a search engine that doesn't require someone to know that they might need 'domiciliary care'.
	Suggestions / recommendations	'People who brought that coffee grinder also brought this coffee mug' …what a perfect suggestion / recommendation for me!
		The recommendation also utilises the powerful behavioral science effect of 'Norms'…we are influenced by what others do and buy too.
		The future offer needs to make suggestions that are customised to you, suggesting early preventative support that the individual can access and buy, even before you knew you needed it.

PROVIDER	INNOVATION	APPLIED SOLUTION
	Connecting people	On Facebook I belong to the 'Residents action for clean public toilets group'. Despite being an obscure group, I connect with this sub section of society, I draw strength from our shared sense of identity and I contribute to them in a meaningful way.
		The power of peer support is well documented, Facebook is a great tool for connecting people that could be better utilised when bringing people together. Local Authorities should be tapping into this power.
	SIMPLE Digital connectivity and intuitive navigation	Even my mum, who thinks the 'internet' is trying to steel her 'cookies', is able to pick up her iPad, play her favorite games, get her news and fill in a cross word or two without ever needing to hassle me for help to turn it on.
		Apple have made technology intuitive to the human condition.
		Let's not make health and social care tricky to navigate through badly designing digital tools (…because it's hard enough already).

The digital offer can draw on great digital solutions that already exist, bringing these best bits together and applying them to your local problem or opportunity is real job of innovation.

7. Single point of access, coordination and support

TO SUPPORT INTEGRATION, REDUCE DUPLICATION AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SUPPORT, THE DIGITAL OFFER SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND LED BY A SINGLE POINT OF ACCESS.

People expect to be able to solve their health and care issues in one place. They do not want to have to go to different places to receive support nor do they want to tell their story more than once. This provides an opportunity as health and care move towards further integration they could target some of their joint Better Care Fund towards a joint digital platform which focuses on prevention and wellbeing. There is nothing that says these sites cannot be run by a social enterprise or other provider. A social enterprise or partnership-based model of community organisations, jointly with the local authority, could form a robust single point of access focused on meeting user needs. This would also allow the single point of access to bid for and receive additional funding from other sources to add value to the service.

The digital offer could be developed and led by a social enterprise or partnership-based model of community organisations on behalf of health and care, as part of an integrated single point of access.

8. Openness and transparency

EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY, WAITING TIMES AND ACCESS ARE HIGHER NOW THAN EVER.

Users of service are used to having access to the services and products that they need and want in almost 'real time'. Through companies such as Amazon or fast food delivery, people can order their product and service, and receive it the same day or the next day. This expectation has spread to local authorities and social care. With the speed of development in technology, this expectation will continue to grow. One way of managing this expectation is by being open and transparent in who can access the different services and support, what the 'real time' waiting lists are for each service and the costs. By incorporating peer reviews and inspection outcomes into this mix, together with the quality assurance system outlined above, users are able to manage their expectations and make choices based on transparent information.

The digital offer should be a place where users can access transparent, real time data about services and support to help them make choices, have control and manage their expectations.

CONCLUSION

A good digital offer is not a stand-alone solution made up of static web pages that simply list processes for people to follow or search through. Today's Local Authority websites and wider digital platforms accessible through smartphones need to be more dynamic and integrated in the core service offer, not just a reflection of it. They need to offer direct access to solutions that address customers' needs. They should seek to promote a personalised and tailored set of solutions. Finally, they need to be easy to use regardless of the digital prowess of the user.

Digital remains a relatively cost-effective medium through which to communicate important messages and build on innovative new ideas. It seems a natural space for prevention and proactive community action that promotes wellbeing and can act as a virtual community space to be nurtured and developed by the residents who use it. Local Authorities need to pick up the pace in this area beyond their initial channel shift projects. They need to work with other local partners, especially health, to create a community resource to improve residents' health and wellbeing through self-management and to facilitate a sustainable local care market offer that can all come together under a new local community digital platform.

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