

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**POLICY AND FINANCE CABINET MEMBER**

**CHANGES TO SOCITM BETTER CONNECTED SURVEY**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

1.1 To provide a summary of the changes to the national 2015 SOCITM *Better Connected* assessment of local authority websites.

1.2 The key points in this report are:

- The SOCITM *Better Connected* survey is the pre-eminent national annual assessment of 430 local authority websites
- For 2015 the format and focus of the survey is changing substantially. Details on the key changes are set out in the report
- Actions are now underway to prepare the council for the 2015 assessment

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1. The SOCITM *Better Connected* survey is an annual assessment of over 430 local authority websites. The survey has operated for the last 17 years.
- 2.2. As an outcome from the survey each council is awarded a rating of between one and four stars based on ease of completion of key tasks and overall usability.
- 2.3. For the last two years North Lincolnshire Council has performed well scoring three stars (previously two star) supported by positive and favourable comments from the review team. The website was noted as one of the review team's "five favourite sites" to use, narrowly missing out on a 4 star rating last year.
- 2.4. In recent years we have delivered two significant programmes of website enhancement to improve both its functionality and accessibility. This included a new strategy which sees the website foremost as "transactional"; improved capabilities for supporting access via mobile devices (which now account for over half of all visits) and improved features for people with disabilities. As a result the site now receives around 1.7m visits a year, one of the highest in the Yorkshire & Humber region, with continuing month on month growth in use.
- 2.5. From September 2015 the focus of the *Better Connected* survey will change significantly. A summary of the key changes is set out below:

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Previous Assessment</b>	<b>New Assessment</b>
Annual Survey	One major publication of survey results on 1 March each year	Monthly publishing of service areas tested and star ratings culminating in publication of the overall corporate results in the Spring of each year
Context	Corporate websites	The “digital experience” including service area functionality and overall digital capability
Publishing	200+ page report	Online with results customised per council, by service area tested. Public and wider audiences such as industry suppliers will also be provided with access to the results
Methodology	Top tasks (e.g. bus pass application)	Top tasks supplemented by other surveys
Ranking/Scoring	Overall star rating for the corporate website	Star rating by service area tested plus overall corporate website rating

- 2.6. As detailed above, from September 2015 the format will change to include a number of task / service specific inspections undertaken over a six month period. Currently SOCITM have only announced two initial inspection areas for unitary authorities and councils with county council functions, namely: “Planning” and “Transport and Buses”
- 2.7. Each assessed service area will be awarded a rating of between one and four stars.
- 2.8. In future SOCITM will select their review tasks based on customer responses to their national pop up survey on council websites. These will be categorised by council type to ensure that they are appropriate eg. “Parking” is a top task for many London Boroughs but arguably less important to unitary authorities.
- 2.9. During the inaugural year of these changes SOCITM intend to restrict the service assessments to tasks that were included in previous year/s assessments.
- 2.10. After six months of service specific assessments there will be a single technical assessment including mobile, accessibility, usability (search, A-Z, navigation), digital engagement and web management functions.
- 2.11. These technical functions will be scored by performance against a matrix as in previous years. Each element is scored between 0 and 3 with an overall pass / fail for each technical function tested.

- 2.12. An annual council-wide score of between one and four stars will then be awarded; based on performance in the service areas and technical platform assessments.
- 2.13. Results will be published online for each component throughout the year. And for the first time they will also be made available to the public and a wider audience such as industry suppliers.
- 2.14. Within this new format web content and online customer journeys are as important to achieving a successful outcome as the technical platform. As such service areas, Communications and Digital Services all have an important role to play in achieving a successful outcome.
- 2.15. Accordingly Digital Services will create a new stakeholder working group to co-ordinate all North Lincolnshire Council work in relation to the SOCITM Better Connected assessment.
- 2.16. Relevant service managers and their web authors will be invited to review and improve specific areas that are identified for assessment by SOCITM.
- 2.17. An initial meeting will take place during the first week of September 2015 and the group will meet at least monthly during the assessment period. Learning from service assessments as they are published will be shared to ensure that we use the survey outcomes to improve our digital offer to customers.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 There are no options to consider as this report is for information only.

### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 There are no options to consider.

### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

- 5.1 The work will be delivered using existing resources. No additional costs have been identified however service areas will be required to resource improvement activities as identified.

### **6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

- 6.1 Not applicable.

**7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

7.1 No conflicts of interest have been identified.

**8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That the changes to the 2015 SOCITM Better Connected survey are noted.

**DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND RESOURCES**

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report**

None