

# Leading Libraries Strategic Challenge Case Study

## Service: Dorset

### 1. Strategic Challenge Focus

How do we ignite the enthusiasm and passion in our workforce for all things digital?

### 2. Rationale and Context

In 2019, Dorset Council was formed as part of a local government reorganisation, creating one council by joining six existing councils in the Dorset area. Dorset Council's vision is to be a digital council and the library service is striving to be part of that vision with a workforce who have confidence in their digital skills and knowledge. This vision was a focus of the strategic challenge.

The library staff are passionate about books and enthusiastically help customers, they are proud and committed to providing a great customer service. What was less clear was how the workforce as a whole felt about the digital aspects of the service, there was often a perceived struggle to find the same passion for the digital aspects of our service delivery. We wanted to try and understand why that was the case to try and ensure that passion didn't diminish in the context of the Council's *Digital First* ethos.

Rather than making assumptions on what the reasons might be for staff not confidently engaging in the digital services we set out to collect robust information to provide us with the evidence for any subsequent decisions and actions.

### 3. Approach and Activity

We worked through a reflective learning approach which encouraged us to engage meaningfully with relevant stakeholders and spend time on discovering what might lie at the root of this perceived lack of passion, rather than assuming we knew what the issues were and setting about solving them at speed. If we haven't listened properly to the people involved we might not be solving the actual issues. This approach would take time but we hope to be building solutions on a foundation of evidence rather than assumptions, facilitating change for the better rather than change for the sake of it.

#### ***Evidence gathering***

The discovery and inquiry stage:

Dorset Libraries Information and Digital Offer drivers were considered:

- Dorset Council's digital council vision – represented by a maturity curve diagram to reflect the vision and the stages needed to reach that Digital Council outcome
- Libraries Connected Information and Digital Offer

Evidence was collected to understand the perspectives of staff in the service. This included:

- Staff focus groups with a range of staff - to explore what staff are passionate about
- Drawing on previous data from a digital skills survey which was completed by all library staff in the autumn of 2019.

Focus Groups feedback was mapped into the COINS tool (Challenge; Opportunity; Insights; Needs; System Challenges) and into a multiple causes diagram which helped to emphasise how interlinked the issues identified were.

### ***Investigating staff members understanding of the digital offer***

- One area that the initial data collection identified was that more information was needed on what the staff understood about the service's digital offer. As a result, an Information & Digital Offer staff survey was created and sent to staff to complete. This aimed to explore understanding of the Information and Digital Offer across the Service; to explore how staff feel they are able to fulfil this aspect in their own role and their understanding of that; to provide evidence of what we are delivering.

Evidence from this was added into the tools used for the Focus Group feedback.

## **4. Examples of outcomes and impact to date**

Evidence from the focus groups and the survey highlighted the following:

- Providing good customer service is at the root of staff passion for their work
- Staff are keen to help customers however varying levels of digital support provided for customers across the Service – impact on customer expectations
- Staff confidence levels vary
- Unrealistic customer expectations cause difficulties
- Some staff were engaged digitally outside of work but experienced frustration with using digital at work for various reasons.
  - a lack of confidence having to deal with lots of different devices in the frontline and supporting devices that customers bring in and ask for help with
  - IT equipment not fit for purpose particularly regards using for social media
- There is sporadic understanding of what our digital offer is – a focus on particular areas but not the breadth of the offer
- Managers don't always promote the rationale or the benefits of why we are doing things
- Training – improvements to the training strategy were required
  - how it's delivered is key – isolated training not helpful or suitable for a majority of learning styles
  - it needs to be relevant and timely
  - lack of time to allocate for training for frontline staff
- Recruitment - the recruitment process and job descriptions should be reviewed
  - Some of the workforce are very experienced and long serving and this presents challenges in terms of perceptions and understanding of the role of frontline employees and how it has evolved
  - There has also been a historical focus on attracting new employees who have an interest in reading and not necessarily in digital skills

## **5. Next Steps**

The findings and an action plan have been presented to, and agreed by, the Library Service Management Team, this includes a prioritised timeline to be actioned through mainstream service development planning.

A new Library Service Strategy is being drawn up and the learning from our strategic project is aligned with that as the former is evolving using a wide range of stakeholder feedback, a similar reflective learning process has been undertaken. The outcomes for both the strategy and the project, the action plan from which will form a part of the means to fulfil the strategy going forward, are based on evidence collection.

## **6. Lessons learned**

### *Challenging assumptions*

*“We learned not to jump in and assume what the problem is, we could have easily assumed that staff didn't want to engage with the digital aspects of their role - we need to provide a route for them to be able to express their opinions”.*

It is important to base understanding and decisions on evidence:

*“We learned that we needed to find solutions based on the evidence”.*

The Service is currently bringing a long-held aim to fruition regards furnishing frontline staff with their own digital devices. Office based staff have been provided with a laptop for some years but frontline staff have only had limited access to desk bound PCs. Frontline staff will be provided with a tablet each and that project is currently in the planning stages. The lessons learned from the strategic project regards being clear about clarity on the rationale, accounting for confidence levels and providing relevant and timely training in particular have proved key to the methodology decisions for the rollout.

## **7. How the Leading Libraries Programme contributed to the delivery of the Strategic Challenge**

The Leading Libraries Programme has contributed to delivering the Strategic Challenge in a number of ways including:

- Putting the theory of a reflective learning process into practice, taking different stakeholder perspectives into account
- New methods and approach learned to tackling problems across the service – take the time to understand the complexity of any project
- Use of tools such as multiple cause diagrams helped to highlight how things were interlinked or not, what things had knock on effects and wider implications. Also provided a framework to analyse evidence collected, helped identify themes coming through.
- Made us think about really listening to colleagues, not just paying lip service to listening, we might be listening but are we ‘hearing properly’
- Created enthusiasm for the concept of everyone being empowered to be a leader in their own chair so has led to us thinking about culture change required to facilitate that
- Everyone’s resilience is different

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