



Communications, Branding, Service Development ... and Economic Regeneration in Stoke on Trent

Proposal for Initial study and short term recommendations



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1 Customer Focus and Regeneration in Stoke-on-Trent City Council

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Customer Focus looks two ways:
- 1.1.2 Outwards to the main outcomes that all authorities seek to achieve for their communities.
- 1.1.3 Inwards towards business improvement through gaining efficiencies and economies by using elements of systems thinking that stem from the experience and needs of communities and of individuals.
- 1.1.4 The Customer Focus Strategy sits, alongside others, as a major shaper of the authority's direction. It links closely into community regeneration and development and is an essential contributor to transformation and change.
- 1.1.5 The Access to Service strategy is a key component of the overarching Customer Focus Strategy. It looks to deliver a strategy where all routes into services are designed to deliver the overarching purposes of the Customer Focus Strategy, where service is designed end-to-end, where capability moves steadily towards the front of the organisation - with consequent efficiency gains in the overall service delivery process.
- 1.1.6 The Access to Service strategy is a main driver of the organisation's, or partnership's, aims to gain efficiency and effectiveness in delivering its services to the citizen. It contributes equally to Customer Focus and to Community Regeneration.
- 1.1.7 Over the last few years councils have been able to do more to communicate this strategy well and to make services more accessible to customers of all kinds, from incoming businesses all the way through to benefits applicants, by making good use of electronic methods of communication. These include, but are not by any means limited to, the website.
- 1.1.8 Councils that seek to be make best use of electronic media have to understand the need to undertake cross-council business improvement and to work in partnerships. This will cover the range of the council's main actions. If it is to deliver maximum benefit, the introduction of technology of any kind must go hand in hand with changing and developing ways of working across services. This would include having an improved support infrastructure and a complete understanding at both management and staff levels of the improvements to day-to-day practice needed if technology is to be used well. Without that, all technology procurement is idle.
- 1.1.9 In beginning to understand the situation in Stoke, we have studied the Audit Commission's report ("The Report" after this) on Economic Regeneration in Stoke. This document mentions many other studies and actions that we have not yet seen.

1.1.10 Our proposals are therefore based only on what we have understood from the report and aim to help the Council to address some of its main comments.

1.1.11 Clearly, regeneration of Stoke is not going to be achieved overnight. We believe that the Council may be able to gain a number of short term 'quick wins' which will help it to pave the way towards longer term strategic development. The proposals in this short paper therefore mainly concentrate on the immediate future but attempt always to keep the longer term in mind. The worst possible situation would be to undertake short term actions which impact adversely on the longer term possibilities.

1.1.12 We have not, yet, met the communities of Stoke but we feel that they must be likely to need immediate improvements to service access, especially given the present UK economic situation.

1.2 Rationale

1.2.1 The Audit Commission's report cites the Local Area Agreement (LAA) guiding principle:

"Paid employment, achieved through gaining appropriate skills/educational attainment is in the medium to long term the best/quickest/only sustainable route out of deprivation for the majority of the citizens in the city".

1.2.2 The report then also considers, but does not really clarify the relationships between, the three main actors around this message:

- The citizens of Stoke
- The various partners which provide services and support to them
- The local authority, seen as main facilitator/leader of concerted action

1.2.3 The report does not comment on what short term actions may be necessary before any 'medium to long term' strategies can be put in place beyond commenting (Recommendation 3) that 'existing arrangements need to be rigorously reviewed'. This proposal goes some way towards doing that but further work will be needed.

1.2.4 The report highlights that communications and branding are key issues that need to be addressed at an early stage. However it does not comment on what is to be communicated nor how it may best be branded.

1.2.5 The Audit Commission Report gives only very high level suggestions that need to be broken down and addressed at a number of different levels within the council and its partners if solid progress is to be secured.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 CDW's recent experience of work in the City of Newport, whose citizens appear to have been in an analogous situation to those in Stoke following the collapse, over time, of all of that city's main industries, is that people need a great deal of help and support to get over the extreme shock to the system, to support them through adversity and to help them to get ready to help themselves to move on. The experience is that a large number of the people who have suffered the shocks of serial industrial decline do not, and maybe can not, generate the capability and the will to do this for themselves. They tend to fall, willingly or not, into long term dependency on benefit. The costs of that position fall heavily on the authority, its partners in e.g. the police and health services, and the state generally.

1.3.2 The objectives of an intensive piece of work that will help to clarify the short term position and suggest actions stemming from that are:

- To scope current service delivery Channels in very broad outline
- To understand current partnerships and the relationships to the Authority
- To gain initial broad understanding of community needs in terms of service delivery, social and digital exclusion

1.3.3 To make recommendations for the short term actions that will, first, help to meet the Audit Commission's main recommendations and, second, support development of medium to longer term positions by opening, but not completing, a discussion of branding, service integration through delivery channels and through partnership channels.

2 The Proposal

2.1 Introduction

“An organisation the size of the NSRP should be able to take a much greater lead in making services more accessible to local people and businesses whether delivered directly or by partners”.

(para 44. Audit Commission report)

- 2.1.1 Developing and then implementing a systematic plan to meet this comment by taking a customer focussed approach will allow the authority to address a wide range of the base level situations highlighted in the report and will give it the base from which some of the higher level considerations can be tackled.
- 2.1.2 This approach will also deliver to the community at a period when the recession is causing considerable needs across the UK.
- 2.1.3 It will allow the council and its partners to concentrate on securing the first elements of economy and efficiency that all councils need.
- 2.1.4 By extension, it should allow its partners to gain from the same strategies.
- 2.1.5 It should give everyone involved pride in, and ownership of, their work.

2.2 First Steps

- 2.2.1 In offering to assist Stoke-on-Trent’s development, CDW will need to understand in more detail the following.
- 2.2.2 The Community study/consultation that has already been undertaken or is being undertaken and is favourably supported in the Report, and to discuss the issues/outcomes and methodologies with the officers that have undertaken any community consultation.
- 2.2.3 Any other studies/consultations of relevance including the ones identified in the Report.
- 2.2.4 The Audit comment that access to regeneration services and, by implication, to other essential services is underdeveloped.
- 2.2.5 The short to medium term outcome targets that will already be in place and may need to be reviewed .
- 2.2.6 The current level of stakeholder engagement.
- 2.2.7 The current standards and levels of service delivery in Stoke-on-Trent.
- 2.2.8 How the services and partners communicate with each other and with the community (as noted in the report)

2.2.9 The ways in which a Customer Focus system can be designed to mesh with the overall regeneration strategy.

2.2.10 This can be achieved through a short, and intensive piece of work.

2.3 Stage One

2.3.1 Meet with the council's designated officer to gain an overview of progress to date and plan a work programme.

2.3.2 Study all documents that he/she recommends off-site.

2.3.3 Hold a two hour intensive focused meeting with the Senior Management team to outline approaches and to understand their current concerns.

2.3.4 Hold a two hour intensive focused meeting with relevant middle managers for the same purpose

2.3.5 Meet a small set of frontline officers in their work places

2.3.6 Review the website off-site to identify its usability, interactivity, usefulness to the community, partners and other stakeholders, integration to back office information and its use of up to date technology and check against its current rating on the Better Connected system. Where the short term intention would be to improve that rating.

2.4 Stage Two

2.4.1 Carry out a two day intensive series of meetings on-site in Stoke. Frontline staff and some members of the community.

2.4.2 Review existing access points and customer interfaces (Angus Doulton)

2.4.3 Meet with community teams and as many community groups as can be arranged in two days (Jennie Brogden). Suggest work in one township, such as Burslem, to start with.

2.4.4 Review with appropriate officers and workers how the website is developed (Jenny Brogden)

2.4.5 Carry out an overview, but not a full scale review, of the ways in which service processes currently run from access points and gain an understanding of existing uses of electronic media and support ICT. (Graham Walton)

2.5 Stage Three

2.5.1 Combine the findings of stages one and two into a short report that identifies immediate quick win improvements in the website, in channel management and in access strategy.

2.5.2 Possibly identify some immediate service improvements.

- 2.5.3 Make outline recommendations for future progress. With outline thoughts about Access Strategy for Stoke on Trent to map into the Audit Report.
- 2.5.4 Meet with the council's officers and informally present our findings. Take responses and produce a final written report.

3 Timings and Financial proposal

3.1 Timings

- 3.1.1 Meet with Stoke's project manager; understand position in detail, gain access to all relevant reports, studies etc. Plan all future meetings. 6, 8 11 or 13 Jan.
- 3.1.2 Offsite study of 1 (1 day)
- 3.1.3 Offsite study of website (five days)
- 3.1.4 Meet senior management team, middle management team and frontline staff. In week of 18 20 22 Jan.
- 3.1.5 Meet representatives from partners. In week of 25 Jan but not 28.
- 3.1.6 Two days intensive on-site work for whole team in Burslem. In week of 1 Feb but not 4th
- 3.1.7 Informal presentation of findings to management. To be scheduled
- 3.1.8 Short written report with all proposals for short term action. To be scheduled.

3.2 Costings

- 3.2.1 Angus Doulton 7 days at 900.00 = 6300.00
- 3.2.2 Jennie Brogden (Principal) 7 days at 850.00 = 5950.00
- 3.2.3 Graham Walton (Principal) 3 days at 800.00 = 2400.00
- 3.2.4 Total time = £14650.00
- 3.2.5 plus VAT plus expenses at 10% of price billed = £1465.00 max. All expenses billed at cost.
- 3.2.6 We ask agreement to bill you on contract for the total sum with a10% retention up to completion of and acceptance of the written report.

4 CDW & Associates Ltd

4.1 The company

4.1.1 CDW is a small company that has specialised in helping authorities to develop communications with all types of community together with the services using them since 1991. In 1993 CDW founded the EiP (Exchanging Information with the Public) user group for local authorities. It remains the only user group dedicated to exploring the space in which customer focus, business improvement and transformation meet up (or should do).

4.2 Recent work the company has undertaken includes:

4.2.1 **2007/8 Wiltshire County:** Study the 'old' two-tier authority and customer needs across a wide rural area. Make recommendations for taking a customer focussed approach to developing the new unitary council. Support development of an Access to Service Strategy for the new council.

4.2.2 **2008/9 City of Newport LSB:** Study community needs throughout the LSB and reflect these in helping to plan a 'multi-agency face to face centre' that delivered support to citizens from all LSB partners. Make initial recommendations for governance of same. In fact our main recommendation was to develop a network of access points more geared towards each of the distinct communities of Newport, rather than one central point.

4.2.3 **2009: Merthyr Tydfil LSB:** Consult and engage with communities in order to assist LSB to map existing community consultation and engagement arrangements and produce recommendations for improvement. Ensure that all such recommendations did not conflict with other current actions by understanding existing plans within the partnership. Enable partners to develop a joint community consultation plan with first actions in place.

4.2.4 CDW has carried out these kind of actions for authorities of all types in all parts of the UK since 1992 when we started by undertaking a two part study for City of Westminster Council.

4.3 The Team

The CDW Associates who will work together for Stoke are:

- 4.3.1 **Angus Doulton** (Lead; Customer Focus Expert) Angus has an MA in English Language & Literature and more than twenty years experience of working with local authorities to improve service to the community, largely focused on ensuring benefits are accessible. He is the author of the EiP Group's Customer Focus Framework which sets a nationally recognized standard in this area. Over nearly twenty years, he has studied all aspects of benefits delivery in many different authorities and been particularly interested both in 'reaching the hard to reach' and in what it is that stops so many of people in need taking up the benefits they are due. He has a long standing interest in considering the needs of 'the whole person' where the fact that someone is 'presenting' over housing issues may well indicate many other associated needs.
- 4.3.2 Angus has acted as Peer Reviewer and evaluator for a number of EU, ISB and other projects. With extensive experience of working with Civil Servants, Elected Members, Senior Officers on multi organizational projects, Angus will take the lead in this project.
- 4.3.3 **Jennie Brogden** (Community research and evaluation expert) Jennie has over thirty year's worth of experience leading community engagement in all parts of the UK and Europe. She has led and evaluated EU and UK projects and is expert in assessing how far planned strategy actually delivers against proven community need.
- 4.3.4 Jennie is an expert evaluator of local council websites, and of local government projects as a whole. She has carried out detailed website assessments for a number of authorities. More recently she has pursued an interest in all issues to do with Digital Exclusion. She has just completed work on the CLG's "Digital Inclusion Skills Specification" project. (not yet published) She has worked on a range of research and evaluation projects with the Scottish Research Unit. She has worked with CDW since 1993.
- 4.3.5 **Graham Walton** (Benefits Take-Up / Service Delivery Expert) Before joining CDW, Graham spent six years developing and implementing service delivery for Sunderland MBC including management of the 'Bunny Hill' Community Centre – the flagship for community based, multi-agency customer service delivery. He is experienced in considering all aspects of Benefits Delivery including blockages to service. In Sunderland he managed the complete frontline benefits team including both face to face and telephone delivery teams.
- 4.3.6 While in Sunderland Graham led a multi-agency project to identify the reasons for low Welfare Benefits take-up leading to improvements aimed at decreasing the time taken to process benefit claims. This involved close working with DWP among other agencies.
- 4.3.7 Graham is an expert in Contact Centres and a judge of several national awards for excellence in contact centres.

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