Case Study 1: DC10plus and Norfolk Connect – joining up for better service delivery, Stephen Dodson, Director DC10 Plus

Nature and location of the initiative

DC10plus was originally founded from ten local authority networks and their partners – all finalists in the 2007 government Digital Challenge competition. Following on from the Digital Challenge, DC10plus is now a collaborative authority on digital inclusion issues and how they impact at a local level.

One of the key themes that the network is delivering is Community Building Capacity. The solution involves creating a framework to support exchange of good practice between Community and Voluntary organisations, other partners and Local Authorities fully supported by technology, building local capacity and service access. The Norfolk Connect Partnership is one such project which aims to bring all of the authorities together to share information, knowledge and experience on their efforts to implement e-government; to agree joint projects that offer mutual benefits and opportunities.

Within Norfolk the Service2gether project looks at how we support joined up service delivery through community organisations in isolated rural communities to tackle digital and social exclusion

Why this initiative was introduced

The Digital Challenge competition, sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) aimed to identify a national showcase for ICT innovation and set a vision required to create a truly digitally enabled society. Digital Challenge provided a unique incentive for local authorities and their partners to work together to provoke innovative thought and discussion on how ICT's potential can be harnessed to impact significantly and positively on local communities.

Norfolk is a large county which is very sparsely populated outside of the main population centres of Norwich, Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth. There are some rural areas – especially the Fens and mid Norfolk – which have high levels of deprivation within small towns and villages. At the same time there are significant digital divide issues as these areas have higher than average percentages of older people and low levels of skill. The rurality makes this double or even treble deprivation.

Increasingly partners are providing access to services, advice etc online, but the skills to use this access channel – and indeed the broadband services that make it easier – are often missing. We have a strategy of supporting third party intermediaries in service delivery, but these often also lack the skill, the equipment and the connectivity to deliver services.

The small size of the communities involved means it will never be cost effective for public organisations to have their own access points – even on a shared basis – and this sparsity also makes it costly to provide improved public transport to access facilities in market towns – leaving aside the significant journey times this would necessitate.

Objectives

What was the objective of the initiative? (e.g. was it a pilot programme with the potential for scale-up?)

The DC10plus vision is to be a network for change; helping local authorities and their service delivery partners to empower people and connect communities through technology and innovation.

The vision of the Community Building Capacity (CBC) theme is to create sustainable and cohesive digitally enabled communities which include those currently excluded.

The Services2gether project was set up to deliver community managed service access in small rural communities. The first phase was some very detailed research in a some small communities in North Norfolk. This aimed (and succeeded) in testing the hypothesis that (a) there was a demand for local service access (b) that this was principally about identifying what was available, signposting and providing first level advice (c) there were locations where access points could be hosted which were well used by the community and (d) that there were local community groups and organisations that were happy to host them and provide a voluntary service if suitable training was provided.

The second phase has been to (a) identify the best locations for an initial roll out (b) design the "standard" service offered and what varistions were needed to match local needs (e.g. more or less services for older or younger people, greater health, crime or other needs) and (c) engage the local community and stakeholders to set up and market the service.

The "standard" service is based on one or more computers with broadband access, a freephone with locked down numbers to key services, and training for community volunteers based on the Council Information Centre and council@yourlibrary services. The staff are supported and "managed" by the County Council's customer service staff.

This is supplemented by:
  o Surgeries by bodies like Police, Jobcentre Plus, Children's Centres, Age Concern etc
  o Local free wireless services attached to County Council backhaul in broadband not spots
  o Adult Education courses and library run internet training sessions
  o Links to Norfolk's Virtual School and Virtual College

Factors influencing design

The pilot and the phase one roll out have been designed using:
  o Extensive profiling and GIS mapping – including the use of ACORN customer profiling as well as a wide range of data on population, health, crime, learning etc in the Norfolk Data Observatory. Key criteria were deprivation, access to services, low car ownership and poor public transport as well as distance from other service centres
  o Extensive local consultation with local people and stakeholders in the first phase including meetings, questionnaires, focus groups etc
  o Further consultation and co-design work is planned for the roll out phase to ensure (a) the generic model is designed well and (b) this is customised to local needs

The roll out is part funded by the EU Smart Cities project and the academic partners in that project will be evaluating the work done and turning it into a model and set of products that can be easily rolled out to other areas.

The design is also based on the EU Living Labs model which DC10Plus has adopted for all of its projects. Several DC10Plus members are now also members of the EU network of Living Labs.

Delivery constraints

The first phase of Services2gether was funded by an Investors in Communities grant. The second phase is funded partly by the EU Smart Cities project and partly by partner own resources – mainly Norfolk County Council and Local Strategic Partnerships. The main constraint of both is that evaluation is done thoroughly and the results are expressed in a way that is replicable.

DC10Plus has a similar imperative to develop its pilot activities into "products" that can be picked up by other areas. An early phase was to support Sultions4Inclusion which maps good practice cases in digital inclusion initiatives to the government's National Indicator set. DC10Plus is a partner in the ASK ME! Consortium funded by the EU to develop best practise and policy guidance in developing the capacity of local government to tackle Digital Inclusion

Results and lessons learned

Results of the DC10Plus network work include:
- Building local capacity and service access
- Creating an ongoing network of effective practice exchange
- Joining up service delivery, customer service
- Joint bids for funding across service sectors

Results of the Services2gether project (so far) include:
- Effective techniques for mapping need in rural areas
- Clear understanding of the service access needs in such communities
- A strong partnership of service providers and commitment to sharing resource on service access
- Confirmation of the model and training materials for third party service access
- A model for rural notspot wireless broadband delivery

Service Sectors

All services including digital technology, employment, skills etc