Review of new Coventry City Council website and content

A test of usability of community service pages

July 2015

Contents

1.   Introduction

Healthwatch is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in Coventry. We give local people a voice - making sure that views and experiences are heard by those who run, plan and regulate health and social care services.

We are independent of services (such as hospitals and GPs) and decide our own programme of work. We have a statutory role and legal powers including the right to request information and to get a response to our reports and recommendations.

We work to influence the planning and delivery of NHS and social care services based on what local people tell us.

In 2013 Coventry had an estimated population of over 329,000 people which equates to 0.6% of the country's population. If the recent strong upward trend continues there will be an estimated population of 368,700 residents in 2033[1].

Currently there are over 48,000 people living in Coventry aged 65 years or over, and the number of people who are over 80 years of age is growing, as it is nationally. About 20% of older people use Adult Social Care at some point in their lives. Currently there are over 7000 citizens that use Adult Social Care in Coventry.

2.   Why we undertook this work

Healthwatch has an on-going positive relationship with Community Services within Coventry City Council and meets regularly with key stakeholders for updates on developments to see how Healthwatch can contribute.

In 2012 work was carried out to see how easy it was to find information related to social care services from the Coventry City Council website and the findings were shared in a report[2]

This year the City Council has developed a new website and web content with the aim of improving access to information and meeting requirements of the Care Act for access information regarding social care services.

Therefore the Council is carrying out work to test how user friendly the new web content is and asked Healthwatch Coventry to assist this understanding.

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[1] National Office of Statistics

[2] Accessing Information by using Community Services web pages on Coventry City Council's website: Recommendations and response from Coventry City Council (August 2012)

3. Method

Healthwatch Coventry undertakes qualitative research to gather evidence about what local people think and want from local services. For this piece of work we decided to revisit the original mystery shopping exercise we used in 2012 to gather intelligence. This consisted of 'shoppers' (volunteers who were given tasks to undertake searching on Coventry City Councils social care pages) who had varying Internet surfing skills reading 5 different scenarios about situations relating to social care then armed with this information exploring Coventry City Council's Community Services web pages to find relevant useful information.

There were 12 participants in total. Participants were all aged 45 and over. Four participants disclosed that English was not their first language. They each followed the same set scenarios relating to social care and completed between 2-5 exercises each, some participants did not fully complete exercises due to becoming frustrated.

Participants were recruited from the Healthwatch membership and via Age Uk Coventry and the Healthwatch Coventry Engagement Officer attended an IT course held by FWT – A Centre for Women in order to take the exercise to this group; 4 people took part in this session.

4. Findings

4.1   Overall

Overall the pages appear to work quite well for users who have a variety of Internet surfing skills from not being able to search independently to feeling fully confident using the Internet to find information; although, those with less experience found the exercise more difficult.

Everyone that disclosed which device they had used for the exercise had used a computer/laptop to complete this exercise.

All participants rated the website design between 3 and 5 (1 being the lowest) for usability. One person rated the design of the website a score of 2 but considered that this was due to their limited skill level. However, people of similar ability may be using the web pages.

These scores were attributed to 'easy reading', 'design layout',' background colour' and 'font colour'.

One participant commented:

> *"I gave the site a good rating as it does give contact telephone numbers and seem not to direct the user in circles or use the dreaded FAQs. Home page could be less busy and more emphasis on starting by using the A- button. Better direct links to social care/health services, better direct links to complaint process"*

4.2   The Homepage

Comments on the home page were varied:

"Initially tried to search using the boxes that appear on the home page, it was not helpful at all". Plenty of boxes to pay bills, no information on social care. Then used the search box that I had not seen to begin with, it was quite small'

"First, looked at the boxes, just ways to pay for things. Nothing to do with help for care".

Improvements suggested during the task for Home Page:

'Home Page a little busy....but it would be good if there was a direct link to Health and Social Care'

"Home Page could be less busy and more emphasis should be given to using the A-Z on the home page"

"I would suggest maybe placing a start arrow at this feature (A-Z) as it's natural to read down the page and miss it!"

4.3   Language/Terminology

Overall the language table used in the Website was appropriate for most people.

People for whom English was a second language struggled with some of the terminology e.g. the word 'Safeguarding'. Some people did not understand the meaning of this word so did not readily understand that they have reached the correct page.

A research exercise was carried out by Coventry LINk a few years ago[3] which identified the issue with terminology around Safeguarding and made some suggestions to support people to have a better understanding. From a sample group of 90, 64 people said they did not understand this term although they thought it was *'something to do with protection'*. Commonalities of preferred words that occurred were: ***'Looking out for the well being of'***, ***'protection of'***, ***'keeping people safe'*** ***'preventing'***.

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[3] Safeguarding Clearer Language Survey Analysis, Coventry LINk (2011)

Some people who completed the exercise did not find acronyms were helpful when they were trying to find accurate information e.g.

"I *didn't understand the term FOI and EIR"*.

4.4   Experience of searching the site

Some people, particularly those who were not experienced Internet users got very frustrated and on average gave up at 5 clicks and said that at this point they would telephone the main council telephone number. This appeared to be because they had not got to the correct information.

Search box used for 'Social Worker' by someone looking for support was not found to be helpful.

They said "searched 'Social Worker' – 10 titles came up, none of them made sense, I would call the Council".

Searching for an Emergency number relating to Social Care:

Some comments were:

> *"I got an Emergency number after 5 clicks but this was because I studied the page and scrolled down as it did not appear at the top of the page or in the middle of the page. Didn't find it helpful that I could find an Emergency number more easily for road hazards"! (Rather than social care)*
>
> *"No information is available... within a situation that is required for an emergency situation"*

Website search facility

We found that people do not necessarily think to enter terms to the website search box in order to find information, but that when this was used it did usually produce good, useful results, although this will of course depend on what words/terms are used and those unfamiliar with service may use very different search terms.

4.5   Accessibility options

The accessibility options appear at the very bottom of the page (in the bottom menu bar) in the smallest text on the page. People for who English was not their first language did not find the accessibility options.

We did not have any testers who required screen reader software and so have not tested how the site accommodates this.

None of our tester used the translation option. This may be because they did not find this link which is also in small text on the bottom menu bar.

5.   Conclusions

Web pages are an important source of information for people regarding social care services and how to access services. In Great Britain, 21 million households (83%) had Internet access in 2013[4], so the potential reach is large; although some households do not have access to the Internet and this will be more prevalent in deprived areas and in areas where there is a proportionately an older demographic of people.

Overall the new website and its content worked quite well for people in our exercise. People who have a better skill set in using the Internet had more success in finding the correct information and people who have English is their primary language found the task easier.

There are some small changes which can be made: to terminology, to avoid acronyms and to the organisation of information which will make the site even easier to use. Consideration should also be given to the priority given to information on the home page.

People who cannot read English may not be able to follow the instructions for translating the content.

6.   Recommendations

6.1   The search box needs be more easily identifiable. It should be larger and have a prominent arrow to highlight its presence

6.2   There should be a box/significant menu link on the Councils home page that will take you directly to Social Care pages

6.3   The Accessibility options should appear before the fold rather than after the fold and be in bigger text

6.4   The 'BrowseAloud' page 'New features' paragraph should be bulleted to allow easier reading for people for who English is not their first language and to let them know they have reached the right page, some visuals will help this

6.5   To remove all acronyms from web content

6.6   To make all emergency/urgent situation contact numbers prominent on the pages

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[4] Office for National Statistics

7.   Acknowledgements

Healthwatch would like to extend its thanks to FWT for inviting us to one of their IT sessions to encourage women for whom English is not their first language to contribute to this piece of work.

Thanks to Age UK for helping to identify 'shoppers' to participate and as always thanks to Healthwatch volunteers who continue to give their time to help improve local health and social care services.

Also thanks to Coventry City Council Community Services Directorate for asking us to complete this piece of research.

Appendix : Scenarios

Scenario 1 – Council Website

You do not have to be having the same experience as is described below, please try to imagine how you would use the council website if you were in this situation

You have acquired a brain injury through an accident; you have gone through rehabilitation and have used social care services provided by the Council. You don't think these services are meeting your needs very well; you are becoming quite frustrated and are not sure what else to do.

Please go on to the council website and see what you can find out about any options that might be available to you.

Think about
- How many clicks it took to get there?
- Is the information easily understandable for you, do you understand the terminology, is it jargon?
- Is the website layout easy on the eye?
- What was helpful on the site?
- What was not helpful on the site?

Scenario 2 - Council Website

You do not have to be having the same experience as is described below, please try to imagine how you would use the council website if you were in this situation

You are physically disabled and receive a direct payment (this means you are provided funds by the council and you then take responsibility for arranging your own support and use this fund to pay for the support). Your relationship with your carer has become quite strained as you don't see eye to eye on certain things; on occasions you think they are disrespectful. You have a big argument with your carer and tell them not to come back. When you have calmed down you telephoned the carer but they did not return your call. You do not know what to do as without them you will not be able to get into bed this evening as you need some support to do this.

Please go onto the internet and find out what you need to do to get some emergency care in place.

Think about:
- How many clicks it took to get there?
- Is the information easily understandable for you, do you understand the terminology, is it jargon?
- Is the website layout easy on the eye?
- What was helpful on the site?
- What was not helpful on the site?

Scenario 3 – Council Website

You do not have to be having the same experience as is described below, please try to imagine how you would use the council website if you were in this situation

Your parent who is 80 and who normally lives alone has been in hospital for major surgery. They have received the services from a hospital social worker who had informed your parent that on discharge a Coventry City Council Social worker would be making contact. You were not concerned that you hadn't heard from anyone as you had informed the hospital that you were able to support your parent for 2 days after discharge, this is the second day and you are getting very concerned as you have to go back to work tomorrow.

Please go on to the internet and see what information you can find out?

Think about
- How many clicks it took to get there?
- Is the information easily understandable for you, do you understand the terminology? Is it jargon?
- Is the website layout easy on the eye?
- What was helpful on the site?
- What was not helpful on the site?

Scenario 4 – Council Website

You do not have to be having the same experience as is described below, please try to imagine how you would use the council website if you were in this situation

There is a family who lives locally who have an adult son who has learning disabilities; you used to see both parents walking together with their son to the local shop. You now only see the Mother and she looks quite frail and unwell. The son somehow doesn't look as well looked after as he used to. You wonder whether the family are having difficulties with support and wonder if the Mother's declining health is not helping the situation. You decide to go on to the Internet to look at Coventry City Council's website to see if there is anyone you can talk to in order to share these concerns.

Think about
- How many clicks it took to get there?
- Is the information easily understandable for you, do you understand the terminology? Is it jargon?
- Is the website layout easy on the eye?
- What was helpful on the site?
- What was not helpful on the site?

Scenario 5 – Council Website

You do not have to be having the same experience as is described below, please try to imagine how you would use the council website if you were in this situation

Your partner has been experiencing mental health problems for some years now and has medication prescribed by the doctor and has received some day services in the past. You provide lots of support for them but are now finding it difficult to do this and are worrying for your own mental health, the doctor has prescribed you some anti depressants which you are taking but you think you would benefit from being able to have some free time for yourself.

Your Doctor has said that the council might be able to help so you decide to have a look on the web site to see what options may be available to you.

Thank about:
- How many clicks it took to get there?
- Is the information easily understandable for you, do you understand the terminology? Is it jargon?
- Is the website layout easy on the eye?
- What was helpful on the site?
- What was not helpful on the site?

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