WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Service User Perspective Review: Online Services – **Carmarthenshire County Council**

Audit year: 2018-19

Date issued: May 2019

Document reference: 1256A2019-20

This document has been prepared for the internal use of Carmarthenshire County Council as part of work performed in accordance with Section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and section 2 of the Local Government Wales Measure 2009.

No responsibility is taken by the Auditor General or the staff of the Wales Audit Office in relation to any member, director, officer or other employee in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The section 45 Code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to the Wales Audit Office at info.officer@audit.wales.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

Mae’r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Jeremy Evans, Alison Lewis and Richard Hayward under the direction of Huw Rees.

Contents

Most service users in our survey were satisfied with the Council's online services but the Council needs to establish a process for involving service users in developing its online provision and assessing user satisfaction.

Summary report 4

Detailed report

Most service users in our survey were satisfied with the Council's online services but the Council needs to establish a process for involving service users in developing its online provision and assessing user satisfaction 6

- Most service users in our survey said online services were easy to use but the Council does not have a process for involving users in the design of these services 6
- The Council is successfully shifting services online and most service users in our survey said they would recommend the Council's online services 6
- The Council is widening access to services by improving its online offer and increasing the number of customer service hubs 7
- Most service users in our survey said it was easy to let the Council know about issues with its online provision, but the Council does not routinely assess user satisfaction 7

Appendices

Appendix 1 – key findings from the service user survey 9

Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

1 Councils are making changes to how people can access services. They are creating communication channels and self-service options for customers to access services online. This is called ‘channel shift’. Carmarthenshire County Council is channel shifting more services online. Because this is an increasingly important element of customer interaction, we decided to review the approach that the Council is taking in this area and get perspectives from service users.

2 We undertook the review in two parts. The first part was a review of the Council’s approach to channel shifting services online, looking at how service users are involved in the process. The fieldwork for part one was undertaken in July and August 2018. We gave interim feedback to the Council in November 2018. The second part of the review asked service users for their views. For this we undertook a service user satisfaction survey to ask citizens for their views about the Council’s online services. The survey was available from 19 November 2018 to 8 February 2019. The Wales Audit Office and the Council promoted it via their websites and social media channels. We received 138 responses. Key information from that survey is attached in Appendix 1.

What we found

3 Our review sought to answer the question, ‘Do the needs, experiences and aspirations of service users inform the design and delivery of services to more closely meet their needs?’ Our focus in this review was on the Council’s approach to channel shifting services online.

4 Overall, we found that, **most service users in our survey were satisfied with the Council’s online services but the Council needs to establish a process for involving service users in developing its online provision and assessing user satisfaction**. We reached this conclusion because:

- most service users in our survey said online services were easy to use but the Council does not have a process for involving users in the design of these services;
- the Council is successfully shifting services online and most service users in our survey said they would recommend the Council’s online services;
- the Council is widening access to services by improving its online offer and increasing the number of customer service hubs; and
- most service users in our survey said it was easy to let the Council know about issues with its online provision, but the Council does not routinely assess user satisfaction.

Proposals for Improvement

Exhibit 1: Proposals for Improvement

The table below sets out the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review. We expect the Council to take action in response to these proposals for improvement.

Proposals for improvement
Service user involvement P1 The Council should develop a systematic approach to involving service users in the future design and development of its online/channel shifted services.
Service user satisfaction P2 The Council should develop ways to capture service user satisfaction data on its online services, so that it can continue to make improvements.

Exhibit 2: opportunities for the Council to explore

The table below sets out opportunities that we have identified following this review that the Council may wish to explore.

Opportunities for the Council to explore
Service user data O1 The Council could look at ways to improve the data it holds about the users of its online services. This would help the Council identify sections of the community not using digital channels so that it could engage with them to understand any barriers they may be experiencing.
Accessibility of online services O2 The Council could explore if external testing of its online offer could help ensure accessibility for different user groups.

Detailed report

Most service users in our survey were satisfied with the Council's online services but the Council needs to establish a process for involving service users in developing its online provision and assessing user satisfaction

Most service users in our survey said online services were easy to use but the Council does not have a process for involving users in the design of these services

5 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- 66% of service users in our survey said that they found it very or quite easy to complete the process online;
- 61% of service users in our survey said that they found it very or quite easy to find the services that they needed on the Council's website;
- the Council's approach to channel shift is to design online services that are as easy to use as possible so that people naturally choose digital over the more traditional channels;
- when the Council is deciding which services to channel shift, the assessment process includes consideration of how the new digital channel will improve the customer experience, but the Council does not routinely involve service users in the design of its online services;
- when channel shifting services, the Council is looking to improve current services by reviewing the end-to-end processes to make transactions as easy as possible for the customer; and
- the Council is taking a soft launch approach in rolling out its online services, to give it the opportunity to refine and improve those services, but the Council needs to be clearer when the soft launch/testing phase ends so that it can publicise the service more widely.

The Council is successfully shifting services online and most service users in our survey said they would recommend the Council's online services

6 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- 66% of service users in our survey said that they were very likely or quite likely to recommend the Council's online services to family and friends;

- 63% of service users in our survey said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall quality of the online services; and
- the data on types of contact shows an increase of approximately four per cent in the proportion of contacts using e-forms for comparable months across the period April 2016 to December 2017.

The Council is widening access to services by improving its online offer and increasing the number of customer service hubs

7 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council is continuing to channel shift a range of services to give an online option;
- apart from school admissions the Council has not made any services online-only, digital channels are created to be options alongside traditional channels;
- the corporate website is fully device responsive, bilingual and uses assistive technology software[1];
- the Council is also investing in its customer service hubs (Hwbs) with a new one recently opened in Ammanford and plans for a further one in Carmarthen;
- in the Hwbs, Council offices and libraries customer service staff help people access online services;
- where residents need IT skills support, customer service staff signpost to training sessions held in the Llanelli Hwb; and
- the Council's mobile library fleet provides free Wi-Fi that residents can access using the on-board iPads or their own devices.

Most service users in our survey said it was easy to let the Council know about issues with its online provision, but the Council does not routinely assess user satisfaction

8 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- 64% of service users in our survey said that they found it very easy or quite easy to let the Council know about any issues with its online services.

---

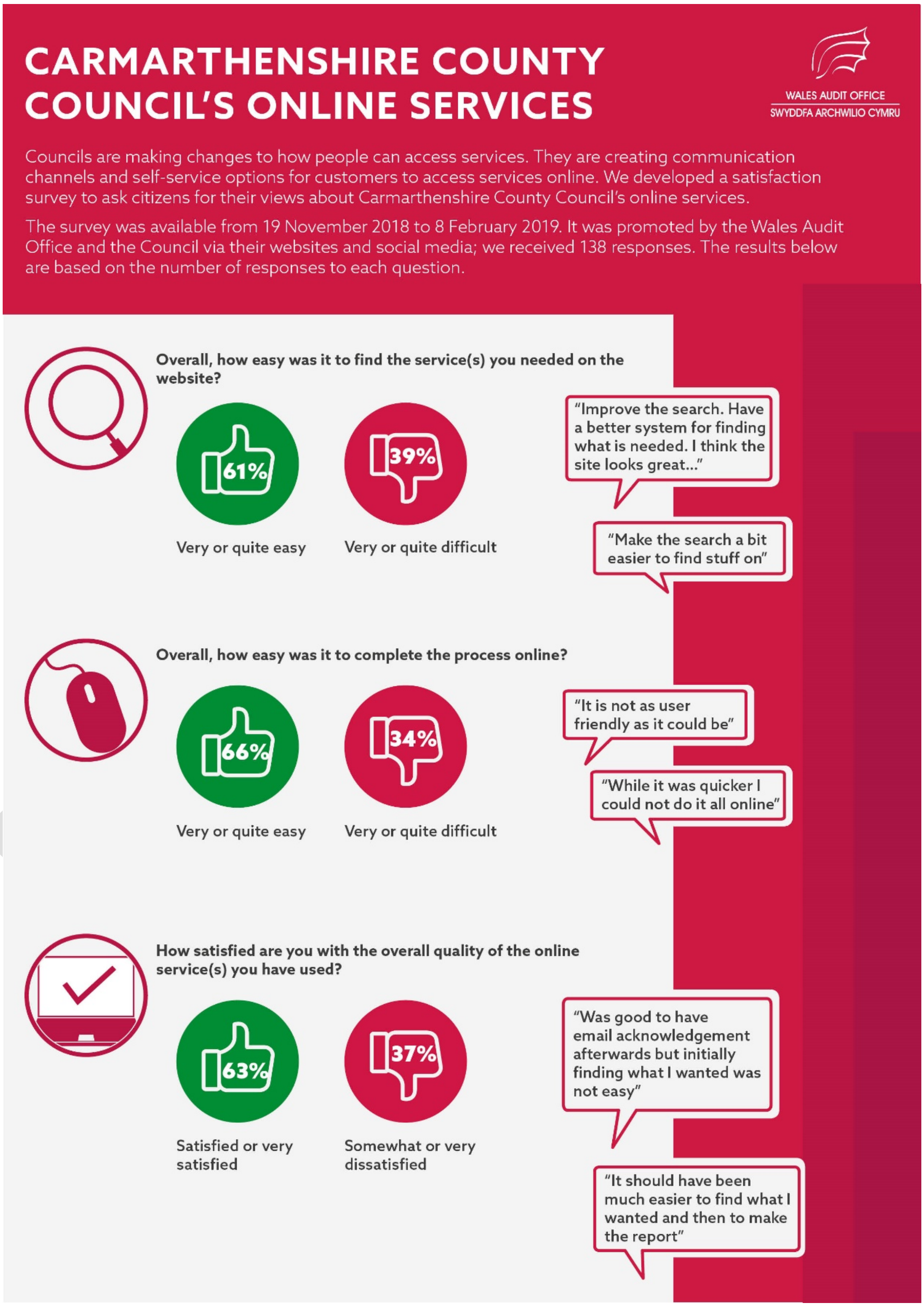
[1] Assistive technology software helps make websites more accessible for users with specific needs by allowing them to customise the website, for example, by adjusting the colour contrast settings, making the fonts larger or having the content read out to them.

- in our survey, services users were divided on whether they thought the Council was good at letting residents know about the Council services that are available online:
  - 46% thought they were very good or good; and
  - 46% said that they thought they were poor or very poor.
- the Council is not routinely collecting data on user satisfaction regarding the quality of its online services, although in February 2018, an online feedback tool was launched for the green waste service via MyAccount (this feedback tool could be applied to other online services).
- there are mechanisms in place to capture customer feedback on the website, for example: 'ask a question', 'feedback' tabs and page ratings. The Council is also looking at developing online web chat functionality with its customer service agents.
- in developing the housing repairs e-form the Council has made changes based on customer feedback.
- the MyAccount service allows users (and Council staff) the ability to view the history on queries and services that have been requested.
- the Council is in the process of developing a new dashboard of digital measures for its channel shifted services.

Appendix 1

Key findings from the service user survey

Exhibit 3: key findings from the service user survey



CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ONLINE SERVICES

Councils are making changes to how people can access services. They are creating communication channels and self-service options for customers to access services online. We developed a satisfaction survey to ask citizens for their views about Carmarthenshire County Council's online services.

The survey was available from 19 November 2018 to 8 February 2019. It was promoted by the Wales Audit Office and the Council via their websites and social media; we received 138 responses. The results below are based on the number of responses to each question.

Overall, how easy was it to find the service(s) you needed on the website?

61% Very or quite easy

39% Very or quite difficult

"Improve the search. Have a better system for finding what is needed. I think the site looks great..."

"Make the search a bit easier to find stuff on"

Overall, how easy was it to complete the process online?

66% Very or quite easy

34% Very or quite difficult

"It is not as user friendly as it could be"

"While it was quicker I could not do it all online"

How satisfied are you with the overall quality of the online service(s) you have used?

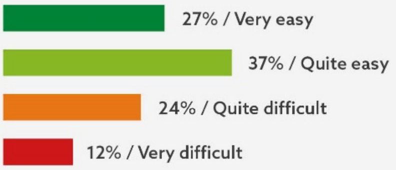
63% Satisfied or very satisfied

37% Somewhat or very dissatisfied

"Was good to have email acknowledgement afterwards but initially finding what I wanted was not easy"

"It should have been much easier to find what I wanted and then to make the report"

How easy is it to let the Council know about any issues with its online services?

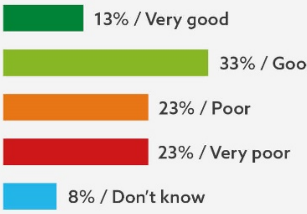


> "I doubt the Council consults with users when checking their web services – I often find little wrinkles which would soon be picked up"

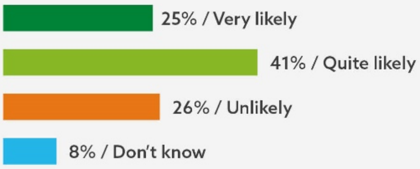
> "Have used the Carmarthenshire website several times to report issues and each time have received a prompt and great response to resolve the issue"

51% of respondents said the main advantage of using online Council services compared to completing them in person or over the telephone was having access 24 hours a day 7 days a week

Overall, how good do you think the Council is at letting residents know about the Council services that are available online?



How likely are you to recommend the Council's online services to family or friends?



The Wales Audit Office supports the Auditor General as the public sector watchdog for Wales. Our aim is to ensure that the people of Wales know whether public money is being managed wisely and that public bodies in Wales understand how to improve outcomes. To find out more please visit our website at www.audit.wales

Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500
Fax: 029 2032 0600
Textphone.: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales
Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500
Ffacs: 029 2032 0600
Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru
Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru