Citizens Online

Quotes from interviews with 'Deep Dive' Project Managers

Citizens Online's Research Manager conducted semi-structured interviews with local Project Managers in Digital Brighton and Hove (PMDBH) and Digital Gwynedd (PMDG) at the end of Phase 2 (June 2019). Interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes. They were designed around three key questions:

1. How successful do you think the project was a whole?
2. Can you summarise your contributions to monitoring and evaluation of the project?
3. Are there things that aren't being monitored that should be?

The intention was to complete a further analysis of these interviews in Spring 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic has restricted the time available for this. Hence, rather than analyse the full content of the interviews, we have selected quotations that speak to some lessons learned during the course of the projects that are not well covered elsewhere in our Evaluation. The quotes below[1] are selected based on their insights around particular questions rather than in an attempt to cover all aspects of the interviews.

DIGITAL BRIGHTON & HOVE

HOW SUCCESSFUL DO YOU THINK THE PROJECT WAS AS A WHOLE?

"In terms of building a partnership network with lots of different engaged partners and sectors – that was very successful.

In terms of how we successfully implemented a kind of 'embedded Digital Champion approach' within services, maybe that was less successful than the general feeling about being part of a joined-up network.

In the end, you go where the energy and the appetite is, and work with those that are there. [They then] become your most engaged partners. But we did a lot of filling gaps here."

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[1] These have been summarised and edited from the raw recording transcripts for presentation and clarity

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAVEN'T BEEN MONITORED THAT COULD HAVE BEEN?

"[Yes -] The good stuff that would come out of quite challenging places and challenging groups. I think that was hard to monitor within the model we had, [but] actually that has a really lasting impact.

In a sense, it is quite hard to measure and capture … [But] that stuff felt less important in terms of the requirements of monitoring and evaluation of the project. When actually on the ground, it felt like the really important stuff… I think on the ground, the numbers are great, on the ground, it still feels good. But you know, it's disproportionate, those numbers, to the actual… activity happening in Brighton." [Note: The indication being that we only collect a small amount of output numbers compared to the real / actual level of activity].

WHAT ABOUT AMPLIFYING MARKETING – THE IDEA THAT THE PROJECT WOULD HELP PROMOTE EXISTING WORK?

"I think the signposting website is underrated really. It's a great resource we probably need to do … more work around actually finding time to promote and market that and spend proper time, project management time or Digital Champion time, into actually making sure it's, you know… that's part of working, that's part of the bond and of the relationship with partners. So, it's an incentive to find out what they're doing, and we can promote it for them and then it's all joined up in some tangible way."

YOU TURNED THE SIGNPOSTING SITE INTO A LEAFLET AT ONE POINT, AND ALSO THERE WAS A PROJECT WITH THE BUSES.[2] DO YOU THINK THOSE TWO THINGS WERE GOOD EXPERIENCES?

"Yeah, they were, I think we should have done it again, in hindsight. That worked well. When you ask partners in passing, they will say, *"Oh, yeah, we used it [the site], really good resources"*. It's quite nice to hear it. But I don't know if many people are using it. Not enough anyway".

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[2] A partnership with Brighton & Hove Buses in 2017/18 saw information about Digital Brighton & Hove posted in advertising spots on buses around Brighton and Hove, signposting to the Library and other help.

WHAT HAS THE PROJECT DONE FOR INCREASING THE UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN BRIGHTON & HOVE?

"In phase two, the idea was to go to places and train staff up really well. But we ended up spending two or three hours talking about … the digital champion model and the resources…, but we'd just talk more broadly about it using examples and case scenarios that are relevant to organisations around digital barriers to accessing online services, for example, which many people just hadn't thought of.

I was very surprised, to be honest, when I started, as I thought it would be easy to go into these sessions and workshops and it would be a nice session where everyone engaged, and they knew this stuff… [I sometimes perceived] a lack of professionalism in services and some mixing up the personal perceptions you have and the professional responsibility and accountability to have when you're working in frontline services. Sometimes it was extremely frustrating. They wouldn't see how digital inclusion was relevant to themselves or their jobs, in terms of being there to help their customers… That was the work. The work was actually making the case.

A good piece of what we've done is that there's a lot of people now actively engaged in this stuff, and they understand the relevance and the importance of it, obviously the [managers and] team leaders… [but] I'm still not sure that the frontline staff that I've worked with… I'm still not sure that they [all] get it.

Now we're getting these network events and there's proper organisations, properly engaged, they're leading, they're doing their own stuff, they've created subgroups, and they're talking about it [digital inclusion].

And I think other organisations have helped us along the way to make the case, especially around digital accessibility and inclusive tech - we're very lucky in Brighton & Hove to have Diversity And Ability. We get on very well with them – we help each other - and they want to be part of the network and showcase their own stuff because part of the business is to be in that scene, in that sector".

HOW DID YOU GET ON WITH VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPIONS?

"I didn't feel like we were robust enough as a local project team to support more than five, maybe six volunteers at a time. It's just it's just too complicated with volunteers; but we

had some good ones and they were pretty autonomous in the end but that was thanks to our own team Digital Champions being out there on the ground, working with them, training them and supporting them.

WHAT ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WAS REALLY SUCCESSFUL? A SPECIFIC BIT OF WORK?

"I think our meetings, always about learning, a bit of sharing and some kind of project updates. We managed to get a good group of people there. The last meeting [of Phase 2] was amazing, in the sense that we had a whole mix of organisations - I knew them, I knew what they were doing. Everyone shared what they had, where they had got to, what they've done…"

DIGITAL GWYNEDD

ARE THERE THINGS THAT YOU THINK SHOULD HAVE BEEN RECORDED, BUT THAT HAVEN'T BEEN? THE KIND OF OUTCOMES FROM WHAT THE WORK HAS INVOLVED THAT HAVEN'T GOT RECORDED PROPERLY ALONG THE WAY?

"With hindsight, we should do more to record the people assisted who went into work, it was something with the Get IT Together[3] project but not with this. Looking back, the plan was way too big from the start - and would it be better for it to be simpler… some of those aspects? We got carried away with adding stuff into plans that we should do this all. [But] this is only X amount of years; we're not going to achieve all these".

WHAT ABOUT AMPLIFYING MARKETING – THE IDEA THAT THE PROJECT WOULD HELP PROMOTE EXISTING WORK?

"The marketing was a bit strange… we developed loads of posters at the start of the project, forgot about them, then used them a bit and then they disappeared again. I think that was a bit of… we weren't set up enough to experiment with that sort of stuff. I mean, if you chase the figures, like the stats needing a set amount of people, you couldn't really take a risk with *"shall we try this poster in this village?"*

On the one hand, it's supposed to be 'test and learn' with space to try all these different things out. But on the other hand, it had quite hard targets there - getting the numbers

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[3] Previous Citizens Online led project in the Gwynedd area

through. Once we got a baseline number of figures coming through, you were freed up… a bit more to be more experimental.

The signposting tool took a lot of time. I'm not convinced at all that our intended target [of] people actually use it – whether that's frontline staff, or individuals. I like the idea of the webpage, but whether it actually [helped direct people to support?]… we didn't get loads of people coming through door saying I saw this. It was very rare to get a phone call or a message about something on there, enquiring about anything."

WHAT HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES BEEN WITH DIGITAL CHAMPIONS?

"Overall we've got decent digital champions. And if there's one thing with all of them, I think their ability to assist people is great, it's fine. It's just the complications to recruit them. I'd say it's a very difficult role to fill, always struggled here. I think I was part of three advertising campaigns, if not four, for DCs here. And we struggled to get decent applications, we did highlight at the start that the wage was low, for the ability and expertise we're looking for. And then there was a combination of not only did we want someone who was a good digital champion, we wanted them to be highly mobile, and used to the area which means, you know, you can get quite a lot of people who are good digitally, but they're not in the way that we're looking for."

WHAT ABOUT THE EMBEDDED DIGITAL CHAMPIONS?

"It's worked in the library. And they really took it on and, you know, to the point where all their staff have done the DCN training, and they're really buying into it, that's worked well. Not so well in other departments… there wasn't always a buy-in from their line managers [to follow-up on training sessions I was running for staff].

So… they have a great training course… and then they wouldn't really get it. And it's quite difficult to change your training parameters to suit – to explain the whole background of it.

Variation of skills was a biggie. Having frontline staff with different skills, it's also about the context of the support that they have, from that department. And the understanding of why it's important, all of that stuff as well."

HOW ABOUT VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPIONS?

"We've had lots of volunteers over time, just the tendency that the really good ones would move on to do some or find employment or similar. There's also the thing… understanding how much work is involved in managing volunteers. You can get a call on the Thursday night saying, *"I'm not able to do what's on tomorrow."* and you'd have to cover that yourself… It was a nightmare at times, with volunteers. And we even tried placing volunteers with training with employed DCs to support large groups. That was a bit of a pain in its own way because you have to look after that person as well as train everyone else."

HOW HAS DIGITAL INCLUSION WORK CHANGED OVER THE COURSE OF THE PROJECT?

"I think we had a nice rich vein of people wanting help by doing drop-in sessions. Pushing that *"there's no need to come back every week"* sort of thing. Just come in with your specific problem, look into that, or give you some more guidance or stuff – that worked well. And especially, maybe that was just a sign of times, because smartphones and stuff like that getting more [popular]… A lot of people get hold of new devices [and] they wanted to come in… you have someone coming in with a specific device saying I don't know how to do this… You'd be learning yourself as you're helping them sort of thing.

The major difference I saw in people coming in was that you have the classic little old ladies *"I don't do much at all online"* - except they might be able to send an Email [even if] they don't really grasp email.

And they might do FaceTime, Skype, and… you know, banks closing and disappearing at record rates has forced these people to bank online… In fact, it's got more people banking online in this county than I have. The joke is if you go into a local bank, that is open, then you're actually doing online in the bank. It's a machine it's only one teller - so that's the key, the banks are being clever!

There's [also] a subgroup that we identified that isn't mentioned a lot. And that's people who think that they're on the ball digitally, because they were at the forefront, but they're sitting at home with their laptop, and they have no clue what a tablet is… They haven't tweaked it as digital skills have developed… these people aren't in the app world… they need retraining.

You'll meet people who seem to be doing very well online, do a lot of their stuff online, via a laptop or a PC. And yet you'll find that banking frightens the heck out of them, because the safest way to bank online is via the app. Because the app has got the best security. And that throws them."

HOW ABOUT YOUR COLUMN IN THE PAPER? HOW HAS THAT EVOLVED OVER THE TIME? HAS IT BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

"I think that was successful. And it's something that I said we needed do and the Steering Group team were really interested in it. It got us in the papers, I really enjoyed it. That was good… I got a lot of inquiries from people I get these emails from Mr. Jones from somewhere. And there was another way of linking to people and getting people to come to drop into stuff. It was another angle. And on top of that, I did do quite a few things for local radio. We didn't have the time but we could have built much more of the marketing around that sort of stuff."

WHAT HAS BEEN CHALLENGING?

"Steering group meetings, to be honest, because it was all left me to sort out from venues to guests to the whole… Got to be quite on the ball with it. Feedback started to be really good. Because we got the level right, and the guests and speakers. But it took a while for me to get into the habits of starting to build up the next network meeting straight after the old one.

I think what we didn't grasp… is that because the large size of the area, you're having to not reinvent yourself, but *reintroduce* yourself to new areas. So it's like starting from scratch every couple of months, which does affect the figures as well as takes time out, starting afresh all the time, not establishing yourself."

DO YOU THINK THAT THERE'S MUCH OF A LEGACY TO THE PROJECT?

"I think we've had a big effect on the libraries, and they will know continue to go upwards and give what we intended that there's something local that is now drive somewhere, people will go for digital support, I think they'll continue doing that… I think what you've got to remember as well, is that when we started out this project… with Brexit three years ago, things were quite different. And that what we thought would happen, it's really hard for that to happen now because of that financial restriction and staff going (Note:

referring to local authority and charity sector budget cuts). So, I don't know if it's going to be as easy for Gwynedd Council to continue having a digital inclusion drive. The interest from the Council seems to have dropped - the partners have been distracted by what's going on in their, you know, funding… this Brexit thing… a long time of organisations not knowing what the hell is going to happen… I think we're the last major project, I've been, you know, doing this sort of work for a long time and I've seen the rest disappear; funding is going to be less and less."

QUESTIONS USED TO FORM THE STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEWS

ATTITUDES TO PROJECT AS PART OF EVALUATION OF DEEP DIVES

- Which delivery aspects (from Forming and Developing Strong Partnerships, Achieving Digital Journeys, Enhancing Provision & Plugging Gaps and Amplified Marketing – Increased understanding of DI, increased triage/signposting/referral, better utilisation of digital services, examples of channel shift) do you think were most and least successful? Is there anything to say about any of them that isn't about success?
- What were your experiences with DCS (anything specific with PDCs? Anything specific with EDCs and do you think the model's focus on these is right? Volunteers?)
- Are there other aspects of the work that have been particularly successful?
- Are there other aspects that have been particularly unsuccessful or challenging?
- Any other challenges – things that have been overcome?

MONITORING AND EVALUATION META-EVALUATION

- Are there things that aren't being monitored that should be?
- How useful do you find these – is it helpful to have KPIs based on numbers? How easy has it been to reach them? Do you think qualitative findings/experiences – inc. case studies – receive enough weight?
- What has been most valuable to partners?
- How much time has your contributions to monitoring and evaluation taken up (too much, not enough, about right?)
- Has the process for reporting back monitoring and evaluation from the central team worked to help identify challenges and/or celebrate successes?