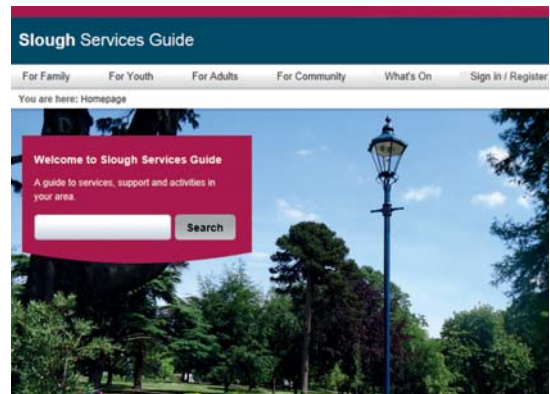


# All in One Place...

Local authorities adopting an holistic approach to online service directories will save money and drive change, says Open Objects director, Gavin Cameron.



The deep cuts in public spending have made the search for efficiencies and transformed ways of serving the public a top agenda item for Local Authorities. The Localism Act 2011 and upcoming Health and Social Care Bill are redefining the relationships between service users, providers and commissioning authorities. A broad mix of public, private, social enterprise, voluntary and community based organisations is essential to encourage efficiency, innovation and diversity in service provision.

## Combined Services Guides

Free and universal access to information about all local services, together with trusted advice and guidance, will provide a key driver to change. Services directories of all types exist across local authorities providing information to specific audience groups, for example Childcare services, Social care services, Community, Housing etc. It is still rare, however, for information about all services, all providers and across all needs, to be drawn together into a single searchable website. The public is left to navigate a confusing patchwork of online information which usually splits down departmental and organisational lines, without the ability to see the whole picture.

Some local authorities are now addressing the challenge of bringing everything into one online place for the benefit of the public. Among these is Slough Borough Council which has recently launched the Slough Services Guide: <http://servicesguide.slough.gov.uk>

"Slough Services Guide encompasses all services across the Borough, with sections for Families, for Young people, For Adults and Community," explains Judith Davids, Assistant Director of Customer Services and ICT at Slough.

"With the launch, we are inviting service providers from the private sector and the third sector to get listed and to take ownership of the information about their service within the Guide. The Services Guide is an integral part of our Customer Focus Programme, and creates a powerful juxtaposition of Council led and community based services from a single point of access."

## Collaboration

The Guide is a collaboration across departments within Slough Borough Council including the Family Information Service (FIS), Adult Social Care, Youth Services, Disability Services, Leisure services and others. Information from all areas within and outside the Council including service provider submissions is held in a single searchable directory. Expert users from across all disciplines contribute their knowledge in adding, editing and moderating information within it. The Guide also collects information from other key online sources such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and NHS Choices using an automatic data harvesting technology.

## Meeting Needs

Already the Services Guide is providing benefits to Slough Borough by meeting a range of statutory and other requirements from a single shared platform, including the information requirements of Section 12 The Children Act 2004, the Disability Register and Universal Services Information as part of Social Care Transformation.

## Enterprise Hub

Slough Services Guide has been built using Open Objects' Enterprise Hub. The Hub provides a flexible database system for managing records about services, activities and events of all kinds. Records can be shared and worked on by any number of collaborators via an advanced administration model. The built-in presentation layer enables information to be surfaced online within any website and as a searchable directory in its own right. Website users can browse and search to create personalised lists of services and activities for later reference or to send to each other. They can register with the site to write service reviews sharing their experience with other users. The user can sign-in to undertake a variety of secure transactions, such as online self-assessments, online updating of records etc. The entire Hub creates a shared online space in which service users and providers can be brought together within a safe and socially responsible online community. The Hub also provides a platform for search and access of services information via smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices.

## Diversity, Choice and Savings

A key component of the legislative changes underway and the ethos of localism is the encouragement of diversity and choice in services to meet citizen needs. By offering completely free access to providers and service users alike, the Enterprise Hub assists the promotion and uptake of voluntary services and social enterprise backed services, enabling them to flourish on an equal footing with private and public funded services. Council funded services will reap direct cost savings and benefits from the greater involvement of partners and externally funded services.

## Customer Service

Above all, by establishing a unified services directory, Councils can establish a significantly improved customer service offering for enquiries from all channels. Using the Enterprise Hub with contact centres and customer service centres enables staff to see a complete picture of service availability when answering enquiries from the public. Moreover, the ability to send personalised responses immediately via email or SMS/text message, as well as traditional print, mail, over the phone and walk-in, provides an integrated and consistent response across all channels. The Hub encourages self-service among the public and produces measurable channel shift into online sources.

## Consolidation and Sustainability

The Enterprise Hub can be used to consolidate directories, databases and other ad hoc information processes across a local authority. Information which is used over and over again in a variety of service settings gains a single home, where it is maintained once only, eliminating duplication of effort. The ability to collect information updates online, directly from providers themselves, saves substantial amounts of staff time, which endows the directory with long term sustainability.

## Online Demonstration

Open Objects is offering readers the opportunity of a free demonstration of the Enterprise Hub. For further information regarding this offer contact [Karine@openobjects.com](mailto:Karine@openobjects.com) quoting this magazine, ITU.