

## Benefits

Contributed by Joanne John  
Friday, 09 November 2007  
Last Updated Monday, 15 December 2008

Additional service benefits that you get from participating rather than just linking are:

- service participation used as an effective training tool not just for IT, but for reference skills, searching and using qualitative data and good customer service.
  
- a heightened awareness by staff of electronic subscriptions, thereby increasing staff awareness of the subscriptions and then the ability to better help your citizens.
  
- ability to have local questions referred within the software to enable citizens to be serviced by their own library staff.
  
- the ability to create permanent local chat or email services.
  
- making every customer contact count as all referrals can be tracked within the software and queries can be sent anywhere within the council for a reply. These can all be tracked to ensure there is a full customer contact audit.

Examples of local services:

Luton have completed 3 'Ask-the-Chief Executive' sessions with Mr Kevin Crompton, these have been extremely successful.

"As a Chief Executive I am always looking for ideas as to how to have more direct contact with our community. When I saw the People's Network Enquire service, it occurred to us that this would be a possible medium for one to one chat with members of our community.

It appeared to offer the right balance of confidentiality and direct contact. It allows me to take all sorts of enquiries with the comfort that if I can not give an answer we always have the option

to print off the request and offer the enquirer a further written response or other follow up.

In the three sessions we have run I have answered a wide range of questions ranging from complaints about anti social behaviour, housing matters, rubbish collection, plans for a new swimming pool and other matters such as what did I think of the manager of Luton Town Football Club ! I was also pleased to receive some contributions where individuals just wanted to say thank you to the Council.

The numbers of enquiries we take in any 2 hour session is relatively small ( around 15 ) but there is a spin off in terms of the message that we are listening Council goes further than those who use the service. We also answer questions logged by individuals who could not get through directly to me.

We are still discussing how to make the medium more effective and it is still early days. I think we will continue to run these 'Ask the Chief Executive' for the foreseeable future and indeed our new Leader of the Council has expressed interest in going on line.

I think the sessions send the right message to our community that we want to listen and I am extremely grateful to my colleagues in the Luton Library service and those colleagues in the Libraries network who have supported this initiative." Mr Kevin Crompton, Chief Executive Luton Borough Council.

North Somerset have recently completed their first Ask-the Chief-Executive session and have also run a Councillor clinic.

Cornwall have a local chat service

Kent have a local chat service that is staffed every day

Essex have a Homework Helper

Cambridgeshire are using the service to field calls about the new central library redevelopment whilst resources are spread about the county

There are many additional benefits to be gained from participation in the service, rather than linking for free.