



Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 October 2023

Update on Implementation of Fix My Street

Report of Councillor(s) John Riddle, Cabinet Member for Improving Roads and Highways

Responsible Officer(s): Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

Achieving Value for Money – Residents receive the best customer experience; Working better, more efficiently; Making a difference with digital.
Driving Economic Growth – Thriving places and culture; A connected County

2. Purpose of report

To provide an update to the Committee on the implementation and operation of the Fix My Street public realm reporting system.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee are recommended to note the progress that has been made on the development and implementation of the Fix My Street system.

4. Background

- 4.1 The County Council had ambitions to streamline reporting processes both for the benefit of residents / the wider community and for internal staff efficiency, and hence was looking for a public realm reporting service that would help achieve the following aims:-

- Meet the expectations of residents for a modern, map-based tool to report public realm issues such as fly tipping, graffiti, highway defects, abandoned vehicles and trees/grounds maintenance and to provide timely feedback on close out / completion.
- Help reinforce the good reputation of the County Council to deliver an excellent service by being more transparent around public realm issues and actions being taken in response to issues raised in accordance with service standards.

- Integrating with existing systems such as the Lagan / PlaceCube customer case management systems and Mayrise / Alloy highway management systems to increase internal efficiencies, as well as offering residents/users a more user friendly experience.
 - Through integration provide efficiency in these systems and opportunities for continuous improvement.
- 4.2 The FixMyStreet Pro system was identified as a street and environment fault reporting service which was designed to be intuitive and accessible for residents to use across all mobile devices of choice. It had been successfully implemented in a number of local authorities across the country and offered opportunities to integrate with other NCC systems, bringing efficiencies through channel shift and by reducing duplicate reports of issues.
- 4.3 A basic trial of FixMyStreet using My Society's Open Source code was undertaken and established that the product worked successfully. In October 2022 it was therefore decided to implement the FixMyStreet system using the full FixMyStreet Pro Gold Package. This full package allowed integration with existing systems and access to the FixMyStreet Pro reporting features such as internal dashboards and visual heatmaps for public realm issues raised across Northumberland. The procurement process was initiated, and contracts drafted within the G-Cloud procurement framework in November 2022. The contract was awarded in December 2022 with the project start and initiation programmed for January 2023.
- 4.4 In February 2023 the initial scoping of the detailed project was mapped out. This involved a business readiness interview followed by a 14-week implementation process. The business readiness process was undertaken with My Society and an internal Council stakeholders group consisting of representatives of customer services, neighbourhood services, local services business support, highways, corporate complaints and information technology. The business readiness process was carried out to :-
- understand the Council's current systems and organisational structures,
 - visualise the current and future service delivery incorporating Fix My Street,
 - explore the consequences of roll-out,
 - identify areas of opportunity or concern across all stakeholder departments and
 - consider future opportunities for system integration across the Council's systems.
- 4.5 As well as developing the systems, a key element of implementing a system such as this relates to training the staff who will be involved in receiving the service requests, resolving the issues and providing the feedback information on actions taken that will then be available to the public. A significant programme of training was undertaken with staff across the key services areas including highways and transport, neighbourhood services, customer services, fire and rescue and I.T. This ensured that they were all both familiar with the proposed system and able to action any service requests that they received.
- 4.6 As part of the development of the system a suite of feedback messages were developed across the wide variety of issues that were likely to be reported so that

staff could provide feedback on the stage that an individual response to a request had reached. Where possible this was integrated into the back office systems so that once the back office system was updated it would automatically update the Fix My Street system and provide feedback to the person who had reported the issue.

- 4.7 After system development and testing, a soft launch of the Fix My Street system was undertaken for use by internal staff on the 24th April 2023. The full launch to the public was implemented on 5th May 2023. As well as staff training, information on use of the system was provided to Members and to Town and Parish Councils. The launch of the system was also covered through print media and social media communications. Training in relation to the system was also offered to Members and Town and Parish Councillors in May. A Virtual training session was held with the NALC group members on the 6th of July 2023

Since its launch in May 2023 the Council have received over 17000 reports from over 6,000 different users.

The status of the reports received up to 27th September was as follows:-

Status	Number
Open / In Progress	7647
Complete	6609
No further action required	898
Duplicate request	1359
Not NCC responsibility	663
Total	17176

Of the reports received 55% have been completed/closed with 45% still being 'open/in progress' – the latter includes reports just received that still need to be reviewed and for those in progress this normally entails inspection to determine whether the reported issue meets agreed intervention criteria and if so, scheduling and then completion of the works in accordance with service standards.

As noted at the time, it was expected that the launch of the system would generate reports over and above expected 'normal' volumes; this has since proven to be the case. This is testament to the ease of reporting and publicity associated with the system's launch. It should be noted that this experience is typical of comparator councils who have introduced the same or similar reporting tools.

Northumberland County Councils own experience shows that we have seen a +143% increase in the number of reports made compared to previous similar periods. It is expected that the number of future reports made will reduce from this peak over time.

Latest statistics will be shared with the scrutiny committee at its 25 October 2023 meeting.

- 4.8 The key benefits identified from implementing the system to date are as follows :-
- Improved process for the public to report issues, including locations, photographs and asset based reporting.
 - Reports of issues automatically integrated into back office systems such as Alloy for highways

- Person reporting issues provided with feedback on actions taken at key stages.
- Mapping system identifies issues that have already been reported, preventing duplication of reporting.
- Staff across the Council, including customer services staff, able to see current status of any reported issue
- Improved data allowing clearer analysis of issues being reported.

4.9 The implementation of the system has been very successfully, but as with any wide-ranging system of this type there are still a number of improvements that can be made, and these are being actively worked on. Staff training is continuing to ensure that the responses to reported issues provide sufficient and appropriate information regarding the status of the report and any actions that have been taken. Responses given are being actively reviewed as part of implementation and specific training given where it is felt necessary. The menu of available pre-prepared responses is also being added to where gaps are found, or new situations occur. The data available from the system is also starting to be used to further analyse trends and to share with service managers.

4.10 Once these initial improvements are made, it is intended to consider what further enhancements can be made in the use of the system. This could include integrating the system with Town and Parish Councils and other bodies such as National Parks, so that if a report made by the public onto Fix My Street relates to an asset which is owned by those bodies, then that could be reported directly to the Town and Parishes through the system. Similarly, there may be opportunities to link with organised volunteer groups such as for litter picking and winter wardens to record activities they have undertaken or issues they have resolved. As the Council's new Place Cube system is developed and integrated there may be further opportunities for integration of systems, whilst further work will also be undertaken using Power BI or other systems to analyse detailed performance information and data, to drive further service improvement.

5. Implications

Policy	The implementation of the Fix My Street system supports the Policies set out in the Council's Corporate Plan to ensure residents receive the best customer experience and that the Council's services work better and more efficiently through use of digital systems
Finance and value for money	The initial cost of implementation involved expenditure on a £12k business readiness programme and £38k system set up and integration and on-going licence fees for the system of £38k per annum. It is expected these will be partially offset by a £12k per annum reduction in costs in Customer Services as use of the system reduces and channel shift reduces the volume of telephone interactions.
Legal	None

Procurement	The system was procured through the G Cloud framework
Human resources	None
Property	None
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point All existing channels for reporting issues remain open, with Fix My Street enhancing on line reporting channels
Risk assessment	The key risks that were identified in the business case for the implementation (system integration difficulties, availability of staff to implement system and procurement) were overcome during the implementation process.
Crime and disorder	None
Customer considerations	Significant improvement in on line customer reporting capabilities and ability to provide feedback to residents and customers on the response to the issues they have reported
Carbon reduction	None
Health and wellbeing	Improved reporting of environmental issues and defects that could be detrimental to wellbeing
Wards	(All Wards);

6. Background papers

Not Applicable

7. Links to other key reports already published

None

8. Author and Contact Details

David Laux, Head of Highways and Transport
Email: david.laux@northumberland.gov.uk

Kris Westerby, Highways Delivery Manager
Email: kris.westerby@northumberland.gov.uk