



On the road to excellence

David Johnson, lead officer for e-government highways services, has overseen Northamptonshire CC's work with the Street Doctor and EMPReSS systems – and predicts much more to come

Northamptonshire is already a winner when it comes to delivering high-quality and innovative highway services.

The county council has notched up some major achievements developing its online services, building on its reputation for providing and developing practical information that is quick and easy to access.

David Johnson is the lead officer for e-Government highways services in the NeSDS project, sees both the Street Doctor and EMPReSS schemes as examples of how councils already using new technology to radically improve services.

"We know from the feedback we get from customers just how popular these services are with our residents yet really we are just beginning to tap into the potential," he says.

"People are very quick to see the advantages of easy and open access to services. This is something we need to build on by making sure that whenever we put a service we put online, not only does it boost efficiency but it is also well designed and easy to use.

"We have a great deal to learn from working in partnership to develop best practice and our national standards should give our customers and service users a whole range of technical options to choose from – whether its by phoning, texting or using interactive television or the internet.

"The whole point of using new technology is rather more than just finding a technical solution to a service

problem," explains David. "We need to make sure that it adds value and improves efficiency at the same time as it is useful and really meets people's needs."

May's county council elections underlined the growing popularity of the Northamptonshire website attracting a record 47,000 hits between 7pm and 11 pm as the local results were declared.

The site now regularly attracts more than 60,000 visitors a month with the overall number of visitors almost double compared with last year and still increasing steadily.

It's popular Street Doctor service gives residents the opportunity to report a range of highway problems ranging from faulty street lights and blocked drains to broken pavements or potholes. The online service is backed up by a direct-dial telephone service for people who don't have internet access.

Street Doctor adds the advantages of online technology to the council's former 'Clarence' highways hotline and enables people to report problems by completing a short onscreen form and either to give the precise location or use an interactive map to highlight the area of the fault.

Easy reference

Every report is given its own unique reference number and the county offers the ability for customers to check on progress and see what action is being taken with a five day promise to inspect all reported faults and emergencies being tackled within two hours.

Last year the county and its local

authority partners won a prestigious award for information management excellence from the County Surveyors Society for its work in developing and piloting the EMPReSS project – the East Midlands Partnership Regional e-government Spatial System.

The pilot service aims to provide information for members of the travelling public on road works in all the different council areas throughout the region and uses a map-user interface to record roadworks and highlight areas where there are likely to be delays.

Designed and managed by Jacobs Babbie, the website displays road opening information provided by all the major utility companies and is able to combine this with streetworks data from all the highways authorities across the East Midlands.

Not too surprisingly, EMPReSS is attracting a lot of attention from councils throughout the country and consolidated its growing reputation by winning the national award for the 'Most innovative product of the Year' at the recent *Surveyor* Street Works conference.

David Johnson, who is coordinating these projects at Northamptonshire County Council and is the lead officer for e-Government highways services in the NeSDS project, sees both the Street Doctor and EMPReSS schemes as examples of how councils are already using new technology to radically improve services.

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"This is a challenging and exciting time for councils – the national standards are a real opportunity for highways services to innovate and improve," says David.