



Transcript:

Narrator: The aiming high for disabled children report was published in May 2007. One of its stated aims in response to parental feedback was to improve the quality and availability of short breaks for disabled children. Suffolk County Council was one of twenty one councils across the UK to be awarded path finder status.

Cheryl: For us I thought this was an opportunity to transform short breaks. It was an opportunity to do things differently but also it's an opportunity to make mistakes.

Narrator: Suffolk County Council will receive 6.8 million pounds over a three year period of which around two hundred and fifty thousand pounds will be spent on a completely new concept, a short breaks travel agency website. Consultation with families showed that many were unaware of the range of short break services available. The new website would display all kite mark accredited breaks in one place with videos and feedback from previous users and it would make it much easier for families to book breaks and involve young people in decisions.

MS1: Right I've got a few slides about the Suffolk Parent Carer network we have to say who we are and what we do and why you might want to think about getting involved with us.

Narrator: The council insisted that families were consulted during the development faze of the site and a family fun day was arranged to preview a prototype.

MS1: Erm this is the erm home page.

Linda: I think we were very open and honest with our ... with our parent carers who visited our sort of, you know the IT suite at the ... on the fun day. Erm asking for them if they found any problems with it when they went home as well on ... if they could access it during our testing sessions throughout the sort of coming days, would they actually email us with any sort of problems that they

found so that we could actually sort of address them as soon as we were alerted to them. The general feedback was that parents felt valued, that erm we had laid on something that was done in a nice setting, they had nice food, the children were well supported and were able to go off and have a great time and parents were just able to sort of you know socialise with each other. The feedback that we got from that particular family event informed our sort of priorities and our commissioning intentions.

Norman: Everyone's eyes really were on the project. The expectation was incredibly high to deliver both in the time frame, to the budget and to the right kind of quality. At the beginning of the process we didn't know you know, how successful we'd be at that.

Narrator: Families were likely to prove just as demanding in their expectations as central government whose aiming higher project is ambitious.

Linda: What the government wants us to do is to transform short break provision across all settings and to make sure that what we have is fully inclusive so that there is a less reliance on the high end very expensive resources which we know from the feed back from our families that whilst they value them because they provide them with their short break, they know that they do tend to worry. A lot of the disabled children feel, experience some apprehension about being sent away. It's not a normal phenomena is it for you know children to be sort of farmed out so to speak on a regular basis.

Narrator: The council invited organisations to tender for a brokerage role, to higher out their existing expertise in the area and work together on the project with commissioners and those providing the technology and business services needed to make it happen.

Cheryl: I was very er explicit from the out set that what I wanted was somebody who shared our vision and around inclusion, around participation and was a risk taker because this was new but also were prepared to sit around a table and sort of scratch heads because this is new and so I wanted someone who could be a partner to that so sit around the table and say this is a problem, we need to come up with a solution, we need to work together and that's what I was looking for in a partner.

- Narrator: The successful party for the brokerage role was the charity Scope and Kevin Filby has been involved since the start of the project.
- Kevin: We've got a huge amount of knowledge and experience within the organisation. What we can bring to the table is some impartiality from the purchaser of the service to actually look at quality and make recommendations. If you give somebody like Scope you know a trusted organisation a brief and give them the autonomy to develop it which is what we've been given then the local authority can in effect dictate their own time scales about how it's going to be delivered.
- Linda: We were trying to look at the speed by which we could bring new services on line for families really. By using a broker we feel that working in the third ... in the third sector that they would help us to sort of speed that process up by actually awarding grants.
- Narrator: Scope would work directly with the council and its business and technical services partner, Customer Service Direct.
- Norman: The challenge was developing the website quickly and in a way that met the needs of users. One of the great things about the partnership we have with Suffolk County Council is they have obviously all the expertise around, children with additional needs, we have the expertise around, developing websites and the technology that's needed so as soon as they got the funding we sat down with them and very quickly came up with our agile approach which would give them what they needed in the time scale they needed.
- Narrator: The agile approach with its emphasis on rapid pace and quick decisions brought its own challenges.
- Linda: It caused a lot of problems for members of my team who were finding it very difficult to keep pace with the, the even the new culture of working within ... under the aiming high program because it's such a fast paced program in term of time scales to deliver, everything that we have to do and you know when you've been used to sort of working in one way and sort of you know what are doing today and this is what we're going to achieve to all of a sudden having to take on new responsibilities as well as your day job, they found it very difficult.

- Narrator: As part of the agile approach Customer Service Direct invited core staff to attend an intense three day hot house to generate ideas.
- Norman: Traditionally I think public sector organisations work in a very linea way. The organisation will work up a list of requirements then will send those out to a supplier who will then develop a website which then at the end of the day might not meet the requirements. Instead of having a meeting for an hour going away and coming back a month later, you've lost thread maybe not all the people can come to the meet ... to the second meetings, lock everyone together for three days you make really rapid progress.
- Cheryl: Again that's a learning we would share certainly if any of the path finders want to know about how they could short, shorten the process I would be recommending the agile process with who ever their business provider is.
- Narrator: When the three day hot house was over, the website needed to be accessed by a sample of prospective users. The feedback from children and families would directly influence changes made to the websites design.
- Linda: Whilst parents and carers loved the website in its initial design found it very simple in terms of its functionality, disabled children, young people actually were less complimentary. In face we had comments such us it's a bit dull and boring in terms of its look and feel and so we had to go back to the drawing board and revamp it so to speak. Children who have very severe disabilities, so their cognitive abilities are very low had difficulty making sense of the word whilst they were familiar with computers, they were quite happy to sit down. They expected when they moved the mouse or pressed a key for something to happen that knowledge enables us to look at the design and its function to try and keep a young persons engagement.
- Narrator: A favourite section was incorporated into the design for the sight giving children an opportunity to suggest which short breaks they might enjoy rather than the decisions being made for them.
- FS1: My son Joe uses aiming high. He goes on quite a few on their activities. He doesn't have you know reading ability so to be able to scan through and to see you know what was coming up that was available it would give him more choice rather than ... I tend to choose them for him at the moment.

- Cheryl: I think one of the reasons why we put the favourites in there because again it's those young people who may have parents who are a little bit resistance to trying something new. If they can actually show their parents on the website, look so and so who is in my class at school who has got very similar needs to me has done this, why can't I do it? And they can put that on their favourites and send it to their parents and I think that's really really quite powerful.
- Norman: And then they can actually email that to their parent or their carer with a little message saying you know, here's a short break I'd really like to go on.
- Narrator: Consultation revealed that young people also wanted links to social networking sites allowing them to discuss and share short breaks with existing online communities.
- Cheryl: County Councils were very conservative around actually having access to social networking sites agreeing to because of this site being new and innovative and at the social networking sites being on there and it was responding to the young people saying this is what we want on our website.
- Kevin: There are some very real concerns about safe guarding which you need to think about but we've worked through those and I think we've overcome those so nothing can be published to the social networking sites without moderation you know, there's safeguards there.
- FS2: I don't have time to fill out paper work so as I say all together and plus we can look at it as well at the same time so yeah we'll definitely be using it.
- FS3: I think it's really good because I mean she could look at this site at home I mean we could look at the bits what we wanted to look at and she could look at the bits she wanted.
- MS1: Yeah and that way if there's anything she fancied going on she could let us know.
- MS2: Well it's great because people can interact at home when they've got time because a lot of full time carers don't have the time so if you're at home and you want your own privacy you can check through the website, find out

exactly what you want when you want and you can book online, time is saved which is the most important thing.

FS2: We will definitely be using the website and definitely registering won't we? Because we've been looking to sort days out and holidays for Jenny anyway in the six week summer holidays. You like anything to do with music don't you? You like music don't you?

Kevin: We're learning literally every single day. They'll be something come up very, very small it might be a booking request comes through and the email just hasn't got the right information on it that you need but we've gotta a recourse in the system to resolve that and resolve it very very quickly.

Cheryl: I think we've done the tough work if you like. We've had the late nights and the sort of banging our heads on the table thinking how we can take this forward and it's an evolving model and it, you know what we've got now will be different in a years time.

Kevin: It is the right thing to do and it is the most obvious way to deliver it. Delivering a travel agency model, brokerage through a web based forum whilst understanding that there are some people who would prefer to communicate face to face or over the phone but offering that real holistic service it just makes perfect sense.

Cheryl: One thing about path finder is it's not just about successes it's about making mistakes that you learn from and if this is a really big mistake then we'll learn from it but actually I don't think it has been, I think it's been a tremendous success and certainly the feedback we get from young people, parents, carers and professionals this is really going to transform short breaks.

[End of Recording]