

Survey of UK and Icelandic Web Sites of Local Authorities

Jon Thorsteinnsson

jonhth@simnet.is – www.jonheidar.com

31. March 2004

INTRODUCTION	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
FINDINGS	7
THE 15 UK LOCAL AUTHORITY WEB SITES	7
<i>Table 1: Scores for the three functions and the frequency of features for 15 Web Sites of UK Local Authorities.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Image 1: Fullfillment of Roles of Local Authority Web Sites by Regions</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Table 2: Scores for Web Sites of 15 UK Local Authorities by Number of Inhabitants</i>	<i>9</i>
WEB SITES OF UK AND ICELANDIC LOCAL AUTHORITIES COMPARED	10
<i>Table 3: Overall Scores for Top Five UK and Icelandic local Authorities surveyed.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Image 3: Web Sites of Largest Icelandic Local Authorites Compared with the 15 UK Local Authority Web Sites</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Table 4: Scores for Web Sites of 30 Largest Icelandic Local Authorities by Number of Inhabitants.....</i>	<i>12</i>
ANALYSIS	15
ISSUES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES RUNNING ONLINE SERVICES	19
METHODOLOGY AND URLS OF THE WEB SITES SURVEYED.....	21
<i>Table 6: The 15 UK local authorities surveyed</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Table 7: 30 Largest Icelandic Local Authorities Surveyed.....</i>	<i>21</i>

Introduction

This survey covers how 15 randomly selected web sites of UK local authorities and 30 largest Icelandic local authorities fulfill three different roles

- Self Service Centre
- News and Information Dissemination
- Forum for Democratic Exchange

The purpose of this survey is also to compare the amount of online features and content offered by UK and Icelandic local authorities. It suggests further avenues of research of the provision of online services by UK local authorities, especially whether there are significant regional differences in the services and content offered to users. The Icelandic experience demonstrates that the size of the local authority can be an important variable for the amount of content and services offered. Whether this is the case for the UK as well remains to be seen. This survey supports to some degree that this may indeed be the case although greater study is needed. It concludes with a to-do list and an issues list for local authorities employing online services.

The survey for the UK web sites was conducted in March 2004 while the Icelandic sites were surveyed in January and March 2004. A separate paper in Icelandic covering the Icelandic sites in detail has already been published. It is the third consecutive survey of web sites of Icelandic local authorities the author has conducted and published since 2002.

Copyright and terms of use

All copyright is reserved by the author. Please do not forward the full version outside your organisation. This paper is written in the free time of the author and sold online on <http://www.jonheidar.com/> and <http://www.simnet.is/jonhth/>

And thanks are due

The usual thanks to my fiancé, Hallveig Rúnarsdóttir, for her tolerance of my geekish hobbies (which include writing papers such as this one). My three and half year old daughter, Ragnheidur Dóra, deserves even more thanks of having no tolerance for them at all, saving me from spending far too much time in front of the screen and keyboard. And of course, thank you, dear reader, for purchasing this paper. I hope you find it useful, if someone does the whole enterprise is somewhat justified.

Reykjavik, 31. March 2004

Jón Heiðar Þorsteinsson

IMPORTANT NOTE

Please note that this paper **does not constitute an assessment on how good the sites surveyed are**, it only aims to look what features and content is employed and what roles the site fulfill. Quality of web sites depend on many other factors such as ease of use, design, relevant and up to date content, prompt answering of e-mail and online queries, technical functionality etc. The most important measurement of the quality of any site is actual usage and usefulness to those whom the site is supposed to serve. Assessment of these factors individually or combined fall beyond of the scope of this paper. All figures in the paper are rounded to the nearest decimal.

Please also note that this survey (obviously) really only measures what the researcher found. So if an existent feature is not reported for a given site it simply wasn't found. This may indicate that reorganisation of content or services is required (or that the researcher needed to look further).

Executive Summary

The sites of UK local authorities surveyed here are mostly organised around the services offered or such user centric concepts as “life events.” Larger Icelandic local authorities seem to have more or equal amount of services and content on their web sites than the UK authorities although they have a lot fewer constituents to serve and perhaps comparatively less resources. However, the UK local authorities surveyed here have overall more content and services on their web sites than the Icelandic local authorities.

No uniform standards on how online information or services are presented to users by local authorities in the UK or Iceland have emerged although there is some degree of uniformity of features and content on offer in each country.

Demands upon local authorities from citizens, businesses and national governments increase constantly. Online efforts of local authorities can thus only succeed if they support some overall strategy for improved performance and increased democracy. The to-do list for local authorities in Iceland and in the UK include the following:

- Formulate a clear online strategy and integrate it with existing communications and service strategy
- Look for synergy and balance in service provision
- Emphasise services and content
- Understand user preferences and patterns of useage
- Implement and market only those online solutions that work and which users really need
- Answer the demand for one stop shopping
- Use the Internet to enhance democratic processes

This is covered in more detail in this paper.