COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 FEBRUARY 2023

DBC MOBILE APP - UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide scrutiny with an update regarding the development of the DBC mobile app.

Summary

2. The DBC app was launched in November 2021. Just like other mobile phone apps it remains in a constant state of development, whether it be the introduction of new features, or regular background reconfiguration to ensure compliance with the iOS and Android operating systems.

3. Information about the functionality available within the app along with planned developments is available on the council's website at https://www.darlington.gov.uk/about-this-website/the-my-darlington-app/

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that scrutiny:-

    (a) Note the content of the report.

    (b) Provide feedback for consideration on to how the DBC app could be improved.

Neil Bowerbank – Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications

Background Papers
None

Author
Neil Bowerbank
Extension 6052

S17 Crime and Disorder	The DBC app provides a way to report anti-social behaviour.
Health and Wellbeing	The DBC app provides access to DBC news and local events. IT also provides access to some 'report it' features that may help some people with their health and wellbeing.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	N/A
Diversity	The DBC app is designed to meet web accessibility standards.
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	The app is particularly beneficial to people who have a mobile phone and internet access., but the functions within the app are also available via other channels.
Budget and Policy Framework	N/A
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
Council Plan	The DBC app supports the key action of 'Increasing the availability of council services online'.
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Online functions (report it)

5. The reporting functions available within the DBC app are determined by the functionality available within two main back office systems (Lagan and Symology) along with the ability of the associated services to adapt their business processes. The reporting features associated with each of the main systems are summarised in the following table.

The LAGAN system reporting features	The SYMOLOGY system reporting features
Abandoned vehicle	Road
Anti social behaviour	Sign
Begging	Roadworks
Fly tipping (large and small)	Pavement
Dog report (lost, found, stray)	Obstructions
Planning breach	Cycleway
	Verge
	Street lights
	Bridges
	Public rights of way, bridleways, footpaths
	Traffic signals
	Vehicle access

Accessibility

6. It is important that the council's online services remain compliant with the prevailing web accessibility standards. Not only is this essential for people with various disabilities, it also helps us to focus on making information easy to understand and online services easy to use.

7. On occasion, there can be a conflict between design, usability, and accessibility, and there is a current issue with the app in relation to this. The back office systems used by the council to administer reporting functionality (referenced above) function in slight different ways. The SYMOLOGY system offers little opportunity for bespoke configuration within the app and therefore limits the way it can function.

8. We want to make the user experience simple, with as few clicks as possible to get them to the online service they require. The challenge we face from an accessibility compliance perspective is we should avoid having different links within a web page going to the same location. The SYMOLOGY system is self-contained meaning there is just one link to the system, and once the user has followed that link they can access a range of reporting features. From the perspective of the DBC app, it is unable to directly link to the individual reporting options within SYMOLOGY. This presents us with 2 conflicting options;

   (a) We provide a single link to the SYMOLOGY system (current method), but it is difficult for the user to know what reporting features are available, or

(b) We list all of the individual SYMOLOGY reporting options within the DBC app, but they will all point to the same location and therefore break website accessibility standards.

9. The LAGAN system allows us to link directly to the individual reporting forms within the DBC app and therefore avoids the usability and accessibility conflicts.

10. The DBC app has been running for just over a year and this has given us time to gather user insights and experiences. We have made some changes to the app in response to this. We plan to review the current conflicting usability and accessibility issues with a view to achieving a suitable resolution in the coming months.

The development of new online 'report it' functions

11. There is an established programme of work to (1) enhance mobile working processes within the street cleansing section of the council, and (2) introduce some new reporting functions. These changes will be integrated with the LAGAN system. The new reporting features are anticipated to include litter, smashed glass, dog fouling, bins/dog bins, and graffiti. The original plan was to roll out mobile working and the new reporting features simultaneously, but a decision has now been made to progress with the bin/dog bin reporting feature in advance of the other components.

12. Before the bin/dog bin report it function can be enabled there is some prerequisite work to complete which will determine how people will report the location of the bin. An accurate location clearly linked to a specific bin would be the ideal scenario but there is an incomplete map of all the bins within the borough so work is ongoing in order to address this matter.