# soc**itm**
## insight

### ... a Socitm *Research* service

# How well are library services presented on local authority websites?

This year's *Better connected* survey of all local authority websites tested how easy it was for site users to find answers to questions about a range of council services. In the area of library services, the survey focussed on the task **reserving a library book**.

The *Better connected* 2013 report will describe best practice and cite examples found on individual websites, but summarised below is overall feedback from the survey team about completing this task, including some of the difficulties facing people using council websites for this purpose.

Such difficulties need to be understood, because, apart from the inconvenience to customers, failed web enquiries cause councils unnecessary cost. The reason for this is that frustrated web users will turn to the council's phone or face-to-face facilities to answer their enquiries, and these cost the council significantly more to support than their website.

Members of B*etter connected*'s 12-strong team of experienced local authority website reviewers made the following comments about completing this task:

### Reviewer # 1:
Libraries now seem to be promoted on most homepages and landing pages have also improved their promotion of library tasks, particularly renewing loans and searching. The login pages were still problematic with often no explanation given that you need a library card number to login.

### Reviewer # 2:
Quality of the experience depended on the quality of the integration of the library web pages on the council site and the third-party system and the user interface of the third-party system. For some councils no reasonable catalogue search was possible, unless the search was restricted to this council and to the 'title' field. But this was never explained or made obvious and easy. Why do they rarely give a link back to the main site library pages. So irritating to find yourself stranded there.

### Reviewer # 3:
Mostly awful. Very few said anything about charges except buried in detailed library information. None of mine provided charging information at the point of reservation. A most irritating thing is that you still can't get back from the catalogue to the main site, or even the landing page for libraries.

### Reviewer # 4:
Overall sites are poor at informing you at the point you want to reserve about charges. I liked the 'find more by...' link where at one click of a button I could see what other titles the author had done or what other books are in similar subject areas.

### Reviewer # 5:
Occasionally the same software was not implemented as well in one area as another.

**Reviewer # 6:**
Many councils did not even have a link to Library on the front page of the site instead I would have to go through Leisure and Community. The library catalogue often delivered many copies of the same book and I had to click on it to find which library it was in. Although the better ones would return a copy of the book and then tell me which libraries it was in. One site told me to visit my local library if I had lost my PIN, which did not seem very convenient. There was quite often too much text on the Libraries home page, making it difficult to see the link to Renew and Reserve.

**Reviewer # 7:**
'Catalogue' can mean reserve/renew/search on some sites - it seems to be expected that people should know this.

**Reviewer # 8:**
Highly variable and few did this task very well. I noticed a lot of councils prominently signposting renew library items, but failing to mention reserving items – perhaps renewing is a much more popular task? Libraries landing page often seemed populated with news and promotions of various things, with key tasks either not mentioned or relegated to a lengthy menu where it's difficult to spot them. Managing your library account is what people will usually be using the system for, and this is in no way implied in the term 'library catalogue'. Text will say something like 'Contact your local library if you have lost your PIN' but there will be no link to library contact details page.

**Reviewer # 9:**
I was surprised by how poorly many of the catalogue searches worked – returning irrelevant items and random formats. Most councils seemed pretty good at promoting their library service, and especially the ability to search and renew, although the specific task of reserving got far less attention.

**Reviewer #10:**
Where charges apply, many councils are failing to notify people adequately, at the right time, which is really poor. Information about charges was often buried within the information about the service, with no useful links.

**Reviewer # 11:**
As we've rather come to anticipate (if not expect) with anything to do with libraries, there were huge variances in terms of user journey. The best sites in my opinion are the ones that give you a simple search (single field entry) without any of the baggage of the online catalogue variables or jargon, and the search results list the title you actually entered.

**Reviewer # 12:**
This was quite a frustrating and confusing task to complete in some instances. Catalogue search didn't work very well and the reservation pages themselves leave a lot to be desired in terms of customer experience. On one site I noted: 'couldn't understand what 'mark' meant - was that how you reserve a book?  It looked totally confusing - it really does need some re-engineering'

**The survey questions:**
There were 18 questions about reserving a library book covering things like: 'Does the home page link me directly to the task?' 'Can I easily see which libraries have a copy of an item sought?' 'Where the council charges for reserving, am I warned of this when I click the "reserve" button?"' 'If a password (or PIN) is required to access my library account, is there an automated 'Forgotten your password (or PIN)?' link?' 'Does the service landing page link me directly to either searching for or reserving a book?'

The survey also explored how easy it was to find information using a Google search, or by using search and navigation tools, like the A to Z.

Reviewers were asked to assess whether relevant pieces of information and pages for the 'reserving a library book' task linked together to make a smooth, coherent journey, how effectively the task was promoted within the site, and whether any sites might be recommended to other councils as examples of good practice.

**More about *Better connected 2013***
*Better connected* is the annual survey of all 433 UK local authority websites, now in its 15th year. The survey is published by the Society of IT Management (Socitm), the professional association for IT and digital managers working in local public service organisations. The main survey is carried out by a team of reviewers using a structured survey with 225 questions.

The *Better connected* report for 2013 will be published on 1 March on Socitm's website, and can be accessed free of charge by any employee of a council that subscribes to Socitm *Insight*. More than 75% of councils subscribe to Socitm *Insight*, you can access a list of subscribers at http://www.socitm.net/info/214/socitm_insight/91/. Non-subscribers can buy a copy of the printed report, available from https://www.socitm.net/forms/form/83/better_connected_2013_snapshot_of_local_authority_websites.

Socitm provides a range of services to help local authorities improve their websites. See http://www.socitm.net/info/165/services/31/ for further information.