**Integrating digital**

For the past year we have been looking into the feasibility of increasing the size of the Hospice to support the future specialist palliative care needs of County Durham. Project Grow is aimed at increasing the size of our current in-patient unit from 10 to 30 beds to create a sustainable specialist palliative care unit that will provide for the needs of the people of County Durham.

If we go ahead with this project we will be looking to launch a capital campaign in 2019. We anticipate the project will take 4 years to complete. The development of the website will be hugely beneficial in the shorter term as stakeholders visit the website for information about the Hospice but also over the longer term as we expand our services to reach more user groups. It is important that our website represents our vision of excellence now and into the future.

Our strategic plan is squarely focussed on delivering impact to the people that we serve and the difference that we want to make on their lives. At the heart of our strategic plan is the notion of a good death for the people of County Durham.

Our strategic goals are focussed on 5 constituencies:

1. For people at the end of life to achieve a good death in the place of their choosing.
2. For people with life limiting illnesses who use Hospice services to live well with and make every day count.
3. For the carers of people with life limiting illnesses to be provided with information and support to provide the care that they want to provide.
4. For people who are bereaved as a consequence of a life limiting illness to be supported to adjust to life without their loved one.
5. For the general public to break down the taboos associated with dying, death, loss and grief.

The website will play a fundamental role in reaching these constituencies and will act as a key component in our digital strategy through the provision of information and as a central hub to which external communication channels and are linked.

As well as the 5 strategic goals, our strategic plan also identifies enablers, each of which could be enhanced through the use of technology.

For example; we will require the funding to enable us to increase our activity (and thus our impact) and we know that the role of digital in fundraising can only grow. A well-developed website will allow us to provide a clear case for support & calls to action, and improve the giving process.

We will also require the support of volunteers to support us in delivering our aims. St Cuthbert’s Hospice are currently supported by around 480 active volunteers who contribute over 92,082 hours equivalent to 47 full time staff members.

Community engagement through digital channels will help local people to become more aware of our role and how we can help. Our website will once again provide vital engagement with these audiences in the achievement of these aims.

It will also be important for us to measure our success. The development of our website will enable us to better measure the impact of our work with data analytics driving understanding, engagement and feedback to inform the delivery of our strategic goals. In 2017 we employed a Data Analyst whose focus it has been to utilise and cross reference data captured from all of our internal systems (Donor CRM; Medical records; staff and volunteer data) to measure and explain the impact of our strategic goals. The next stage of this project is a focus on the metrics which are received from external communications channels to gain further insights on the impact that we are having in terms of our engagement with the general public. Again, improving the functionality of our website will improve the analyses and reporting of web analytics.

We have recently received some support from Digital Drive County Durham who have provided a free digital health check which included an audit of our website. The key areas for development that they have identified and their impact on us include the following;

Responsiveness. Our site is not easily viewed from a variety of mobile devices and tablets which makes navigation difficult and may put off visitors accessing the website or finding the information that they are looking for. Additionally Google are prioritising mobile compatible sites meaning our site may be penalised in search results. Users accessing our website may be doing so at a time of stress and upset and so it is vital that information can easily be viewed and located on our site.

The design of the website could be improved to maximise its effectiveness. Improving the design and navigation would enhance the user journeys making our service offer clearer (what we do, who we can help, how we can help (our services) and how people can help). Our current website features a lot of ‘white space’ making it hard to distinguish menu and areas of interest.

Our call to actions could be clearer for service users and supporters. Our donation functionality (for one off donors and regular donors) could be significantly improved.

Our website has a below average load speed. This may result in us losing visitors during load time.

Our website pages are not clearly named according to what is featured on the page and page extensions. Having clearly names pages would improve the direction of traffic to our website through our marketing channels. We have been informed by our current provider that this functionality isn’t available through our current platform.

The search functionality on our website isn’t fit for purpose. We feel that this has an impact on our site given the number of pages that we have. By improving the navigation, we could rationalise the number of webpages that are currently in use.

Our site doesn’t rank highly on search engines for our location.

Storytelling, testimonials and third party validation is vital for our users to raise awareness of our work and the impact of what we do. Stories can be incredibly powerful to break down misconceptions about Hospice care, and may help to break down barriers for people accessing our services. Whilst we currently feature images and quotes on our website we are limited in how else we can portray stories, such as through video and audio. We see these being a key part of a new website.

As part of a recent digital workshop we identified the potential for digital to support in our service provision;

* Training videos to support informal carers in their roles
* Support group forums (for people that are bereaved / carers)
* Online counselling
* Log in areas that could be used for particular user groups (e.g. health professionals).
* A membership scheme.

A newly developed website which would allow us to incorporate additional functionality would allow for us to reach more people in our community helping to make every day count for those affected by life limiting illnesses.