



INTERNET Socitm's top 20 local sites score just 46% in survey

Websites fail usability test

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The best-performing councils are not doing enough to make their websites user-friendly and easy to navigate, a survey has found.

Webcredible, a consultancy specialising in website usability and accessibility, analysed what were judged to be the 20 best council websites in the Society of IT Management (Socitm) *Better connected* survey. Most scored less than half-marks.

The finding shows how far councils have to go to secure

the huge efficiency savings anticipated from putting more services online.

The websites were rated from nought to five on 20 criteria. The average score obtained was 46%, with only four councils gaining 60% — Camden and Lambeth LBCs, South Norfolk Council and Warwick DC.

The sites were assessed on how easy it is to pay council tax, view planning applications and contact councillors online. The survey also covered error reporting, the quality of site maps, the ease with which councils could be contacted through their website and the

text resizing facility for those with poor eyesight.

Trenton Moss, director of Webcredible, said: "Council websites are generally quite poor. If these are the 20 best, according to Socitm, and you have less than half scoring under 50% for usability that's a real concern. If this is the best, imagine what the rest are like."

But Vicky Sargent, marketing consultant at Socitm, said that considering the amount of information councils had to provide they were generally doing well.

"Local authorities are trying to reflect the delivery of a

massive range of services through their website — more than the average private sector or central government website," she explained.

Ms Sargent admitted usability was one of the most important criteria: "Unless you have a useful website you won't have take-up.

"[This means] you won't get the efficiency savings and the increased customer satisfaction possible by persuading people to go on the internet rather than taking up services in the traditional way."

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