

Digital Inclusion Review

Report by the Joint Scrutiny Working Group

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the Adur and Worthing review of Digital Inclusion which was undertaken by a Working Group set up by this Committee.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 As part of its Work Programme for 2015/16 the Joint Committee agreed to set up a Working Group to review digital inclusion.
- 2.2 Councillors Liz Haywood and Rod Hotton (Adur District Council) and Keith Bickers and Nigel Morgan (Worthing Borough Council) were appointed to the Working Group. (Councillor Hotton subsequently withdrew from the Working Group but attended two meetings.). The Working Group met on 3 September, 6 October, 12 November 2015 and 14 January 2016 to undertake the review and review the evidence provided. Councillor Keith Bickers was appointed as Chairman of the Working Group which was supported by Dave Briggs, Head of Digital and Design and Mark Lowe, Policy Officer.
- 2.3 The Working Group agreed the objectives for the review:-
- To help find and recommend ways to provide the Council's customers with better access to Council services by increasing their online confidence and how that might then enable the Council to engage with them on other matters;
 - To review the inclusion work already started by the Communities Team where the Pop-up IT Junction scheme has been established to provide access to computers and the Internet for people to develop their online confidence;
 - To identify the reasons why some customers prefer not to use online channels to access Council services; and
 - To consider and review the Council's draft Digital Inclusion commitment.

2.4 The scope of the review was to:-

- Assist the Head of Digital and Design in researching how the internet was used by local residents and businesses and to use that information to inform a strategic approach to digital inclusion that helps support all customers make the most of the opportunities that the internet offers, where it fits in with their lives; and
- To develop an understanding of what the Council's customers want in terms of service and information from the Councils, how they currently access them and how they could do so more easily in the future using the Internet and what skills and support they may need to do this.

3.0 Evidence

3.1 As part of the review, the Working Group agreed that it would gather the evidence and supporting information for the review from a number of people connected with digital inclusion issues and those who worked direct with the Councils customers. The Working Group interviewed the following:-

- Mel Shaw - Neighbourhood Manager, Communities Team, Adur and Worthing Councils;
- Paul Twine - Former Interim Head of Customer Contact and Engagement, Adur and Worthing Councils;
- Dominic O'Brien - Customer Services Manager, Adur and Worthing Councils

4.0 Digital Inclusion and Digital Inclusion in Adur and Worthing

4.1 Digital Inclusion is the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies (the UK Government has recently begun to use the term 'Digital Engagement' but for the purposes of this report we will continue to use the term 'Digital Inclusion').

4.2 Digital Technology and access to technology has transformed society. It has changed how we communicate, learn, work, socialise, engage and participate. It has dramatically altered relationships between citizens, communities, civil society business and government. Over 3 billion people worldwide were estimated to have access to the Internet in 2015 (source BBC news) which is close to half the population of the World. To put that in context for the UK for the period Quarter 1 January to March 2015, 86% of adults had used the internet in the previous 3 months (44.7 million) (Source ONS).

4.3 However, while the majority of people in the UK enjoy the benefits of at least some aspects of digital technology and the positive impact it can have upon wellbeing, there are many citizens who do not have access to those benefits. There is some argument that those without access to digital technology are suffering a disadvantage as a result of that exclusion. 11% of adults in the UK (5.9 million) have never used the internet. Also, only 33% of those aged 75 and over have recently used the internet. (Source *Internet Users 2015*, ONS, May 2015).

5.0 Digital Inclusion Work in Adur and Worthing

5.1 **Adur and Worthing IT Junction Scheme** - As part of the investigative work for this review, the Working Group looked in detail at the work of the Adur and Worthing IT Junction scheme which had been created to provide free and regular Internet access at 8 neighbourhood based IT Centres/Junctions in Adur and Worthing. These Centres are situated at various locations in Adur and Worthing:-

- Northbrook IT Junction - Durrington Community Centre
- Durrington IT Junction - St Symphorians Church Hall
- Goring IT Junction - Maybridge Keystone Centre
- Broadwater - The Wave Centre - Broadwater Baptist Church
- Sompting IT Junction - SBL Community Hub
- Southwick IT Junction - Southwick Community Church
- Fishersgate IT Junction - Laylands Road

It is also planned to provide a further IT Junction at the Shoreham Centre

5.2 The IT Junction Scheme had been set up to help improve Internet access/on line confidence, digital skills and pathways to employment for local people. Local people were able to gain free access to a computer and the Internet including on-line courses. A training provider had been commissioned to deliver a training support programme for recruiting and training digital volunteers on a contract basis to give them skills such as customer service, safeguarding to offer 121 support for the scheme users and at the time of writing the report the scheme had trained 76 volunteers and had visits from 961 scheme users. Funding for the IT Junction scheme was set at £20,000 per annum, (£12,450 was contributed from the 'Think Family' initiative and £7,550 from Adur and Worthing Councils budgets and the funding is in place until June 2016. The Working Group was informed that the current level of funding was potentially at risk which would also put the work and role of the scheme at risk, as retraining is ongoing due to the digital volunteers leaving to go into employment. It had also been identified that there was a need for Technical support for the IT equipment and sponsorship.

5.3 The Working Group welcomes the good work being undertaken by the scheme. As part of the discussions at the Working Group, Councillor Morgan indicated that his company could offer some additional IT equipment and software for the IT Junctions to use at no cost. This offer would also include ongoing IT maintenance support.

5.4 **Adur and Worthing Councils Digital Inclusion Commitment** - The Working Group has been briefed on a draft Digital Inclusion Commitment which has been prepared which includes a set of 5 practical commitments that outlines the Councils proposed stance towards digital inclusion which if delivered would help tackle digital exclusion whilst also contributing to the delivery of existing strategies. These commitments relate to:-

- Commitment 1 - To take a strategic approach to tackling digital exclusion
- Commitment 2 - To sign up to the digital inclusion charter
- Commitment 3 - To continue to develop and sustain the IT Junction Scheme

- Commitment 4 - To explore how we can support our communities to have access to the Internet .
- Commitment 5 - To ensure everyone working for Adur and Worthing Councils has the opportunity to develop their own basic digital skills.

5.5 **National Digital Inclusion Work** - The Government too has been proactive in setting out its desire to remove digital exclusion and has published a Digital Inclusion Charter
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/uk-digital-inclusion-charter>

5.6 This Digital Inclusion Charter makes various commitments which seek to reduce digital exclusion:-

- Enable the use of a common definition of basic online skills and capabilities
- Achieve support for cross-sector national partnership programmes
- Identify and support best practice initiatives to grow through cross-sector working, including:
 - Piloting and scaling up initiatives which bring support to where people are in their daily lives
 - Embedding digital inclusion into partners' communications activity to encourage people, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) to take the first steps to going online
 - Piloting practical ways to make Internet access, kit and digital skills cheaper and more easily available
- Make things simpler for users who lack basic online skills and capabilities by using a shared language
- Establish digital.skills.com as the trusted source of information about good quality help available to get people online.
- Support the development of a national volunteering network of digital champions to enhance existing networks
- Support an online skills and capabilities programme for SMEs and VCSEs
- Share best practice and use data to measure performance and improve what we do
- Build the online skills and capabilities of people in our own organisations.
- Work together to support the aims of the Digital Inclusion Strategy.

5.7 **Adur and Worthing Council - Access to Services**

The Working Group also received some excellent evidence from the former Interim Head of Customer Contact and Engagement, Paul Twine and the Customer Services Manager, Dominic O'Brien. This included an executive summary of Customer contacts with the Councils for 2015/16 and related customer services contact data for 14/15. This evidence revealed and set in context the needs of the customers against the needs to provide digital services. The evidence suggested that digital inclusion was important but that some customers preferred to deal with the Councils on a face to face basis rather than digitally. This was, in some cases

because some of the customers have complex needs and required/preferred face to face attention. It was suggested that customer advocacy and focus also needed to improve alongside the digital offer. Using digital was considered as a better option in many cases to enable constant access to services. To assist in promoting the various forms of access to Council services it was suggested that there was a need for the Councils to provide better publicity for services to allow customers to access these services. A mini roadshow type event might help with that as well as the possibility of providing some training for customers to help them know how and who to contact.

5.8 As part of the review the Working Group was provided with the results of a customer survey which was undertaken in 2015 that had been collected from customers attending Portland House using the self service PC's. The data was taken from 195 responses received between 1 July 2015 and 30 November 2015. The data revealed that 48% of those responses had been from those customers who had self served from the website or other online services. Some of these customers had indicated that they did not want to use the self service kiosks because they preferred face to face contact rather than using the online service, however, the results of the survey did provide a strong argument to develop and promote a user friendly on-line service for those customers able to use the service.

5.9 The main reasons identified for customers wanting to have face to face contact can be identified as:-

- Customers wanting to deal with people rather than communicate digitally;
- Customers considered themselves as not being computer literate; and
- Customers preferred the personal human touch.

5.10 The Working Group notes the findings of this customer survey and would like to thank the Customer Services staff for providing the results of the survey which have provided useful insight into customers use of Council services.

5.11 The evidence on access to Council services also referred to the Worthing Council Tax account online secure self service system which was an ideal way to view information about property bandings within Worthing and for residents to access the personal detail of their own Council Tax account. The Working Group welcomed this as an excellent example of on line service provision.

5.12 **Adur and Worthing Councils website statistics 2015/16**

The Working Group received the www.adur-worthing.gov.uk website statistics for the Q2 period 15/16 (July - September 2015) to assess the amount of visitors to the website and the most popular pages. The top 3 pages were The 'Home' page, Car Boot sales and Planning application details.

5.13 **'Going Local' Project**

The Working Group was also advised on the work of the 'Going Local' Project which

seeks to support communities through social prescribing. As part of this work , a bid for £40,000 funding has been submitted to the Local Government Association to provide digital civic infrastructure to support the 'Going Local' initiative - The 'Going Local' Project aims to connect frontline agencies working with the individuals families and communities. The Councils have recently been advised that this bid has been successful.

6.0 Legal

- 6.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything to facilitate or which is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of their functions.
- 6.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a Local Authority to do anything that individuals generally may do (subject to any current restrictions or limitations prescribed in existing legislation).
- 6.3 Section 1 of The Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 provides that every statutory provision conferring or imposing a function on a local authority confers the powers on the local authority to enter into a contract with another person for the provision or making available of assets or services, or both (whether or not together with goods) for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority.
- 6.4 In addition to the power under s1 above, the Council must comply with its Contract Standing Orders and the Public Contract Regulations 2015.
- 6.5 Section 38 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 permits local authorities to use their own surplus computer capacity to provide computer-based services to third parties and to charge for those services if they consider it appropriate to do so.

7.0 Financial implications

- 7.1 There may be some financial implications relating to the implementation of the options set out in this report.

8.0 Conclusions and proposals

- 8.1 Having reviewed the evidence provided, the Working Group has identified a number of recommendations which it believes the Councils should implement to help reduce digital exclusion in Adur and Worthing. There is a lot of great work already being undertaken to help customers go on line and remove digital exclusion but it remains a big issue but one which can be reduced with more partnership working that long term will help improve wellbeing.

8.2 Recommendations/Comments:-

That the Committee be requested to endorse the following recommendations from the Working Group and submit them to the Joint Strategic Committee for consideration.

8.3 IT Junction Scheme :-

(1) That the valuable work being provided by the IT Junction scheme, supported by the Community Team from Adur and Worthing Councils, to help local people with digital skills and pathways to employment be welcomed.

(2) That there is a need for further IT Junction Centres to be provided at other locations across Adur and Worthing i.e. at East Worthing Community Centre, Shoreham, Mash Barn etc and that officers should investigate the feasibility of setting up these Centres.

(3) That the Councils should seek to continue the current levels of financial support for the IT Junction Networks but should also work in partnership with others to ensure that alternative adequate funding is in place to maintain the current provision of the IT Junction Centres. It is suggested that this can be achieved by:-

- working closely with the Federation of Small Businesses and other local business networks/local businesses to see if any further funding/equipment opportunities exist and to achieve this it is suggested that Officers should set up meetings as soon as possible; and
- that the Officers from the Communities Team should work up an external funding bid working with the External Funding Officer as a matter of urgency to ensure that new funding streams can be put in place during the 2016/17 financial year.

(4) That the support/help of Councillor Morgan in offering to provide equipment/technical support be welcomed. The Working Group acknowledges that he has been integral in supporting the Group's work.

8.4 Adur and Worthing Digital Inclusion Commitment

That the draft Adur and Worthing Digital Inclusion commitment be welcomed as a practical series of commitments that will help reduce digital inclusion whilst also contributing to the delivery of existing Strategies. The Working Group recommends that the draft commitment should be approved as soon as possible by the Councils/Leaders to publicise the Councils intent to remove digital exclusion.

8.5 Government Digital Inclusion Charter

The Working Group notes the Government's Digital Inclusion Charter and recommends that both Councils should support the Charter as soon as possible.

8.6 Access to Council Services

(1) That the current levels and type of customer contact be noted.

The Working Group has noted that some customers prefer to deal with the Councils on a face to face basis rather than digitally and notes the comments contained in the customer survey undertaken in Portland House in 2015 which outlined some reasons why customers would not use online/digital services.

(2) The Working Group considers that using digital services is a better option in most cases to enable constant access to Council Services, is quicker and adds extra value.

(3) The Working Group recommends that better publicity should be provided on access to all Council services, advising customers who to contact and how to contact the Councils either face to face or digitally.

- 8.7 That the findings of the recent report from Age Concern UK 'Later Life in a digital world' be supported as highlighting the concerns of the older population when using digital technology. The Working Group believes that older people should be supported and encouraged to get online but also allowed to access services and supported in ways that suit them.
- 8.8 That the work of the 'Going Local' Project and the recent successful bid for funding be welcomed.

Background Papers:

7 March 2016

Contact Officer:

Mark Lowe
Policy Officer
Tel. No. 01903 221009
E-mail: mark.lowe@adur-worthing.gov.uk

Schedule of Other Matters

1.0 Council Priority

1.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

2.0 Specific Action Plans

2.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

3.0 Sustainability Issues

3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

4.0 Equality Issues

4.1 Matter considered. The Councils will need to consider that all customers have equal access to Council services.

5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)

5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

6.0 Human Rights Issues

6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

7.0 Reputation

7.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

8.0 Consultations

8.1 Matter considered. Consultation undertaken as set out in the report.

9.0 Risk assessment

9.1 Any areas of risk are identified within the attached report.

10.0 Health & Safety Issues

10.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

11.0 Procurement Strategy

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

12.0 **Partnership working**

12.1 The report from the Working Group relates to Adur and Worthing.