

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14 June 2016

Report Title: Final Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Digital Inclusion

Report By: Jane Hartnell, Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of Report

To present the review teams recommendations following the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Digital Inclusion

Recommendation(s)

1. Refer to the recommendations in the report.

Reasons for Recommendation

A team of overview and scrutiny members have been undertaking a review of digital inclusion as part of their 2015/16 work programme, which is a key part of the council's broader organisational transformation programme.

Introduction

1. At the annual meeting of the overview and scrutiny committees in June 2015, members agreed to undertake a review of digital inclusion as part of their work programme for 2015/16.
2. The review has focused on a key aspect of the council's organisational transformation programme, in particular the development of My Hastings online initiative and the Digital by Design project.
3. Members have also been keen to understand how the council and its partners can identify and support those who are as yet unable to benefit from services online, including existing training opportunities to improve computer skills and provision of public access computers and free Wi-Fi around the town.
4. The review team have also explored good practice elsewhere to encourage people to use online services, acknowledging that the council will need to continue to maintain traditional lines of communication.

5. The members of the review team were:

Councillor Mike Edwards

Councillor Mike Howard

Councillor Alan Roberts (Chair)

Councillor Nigel Sinden

Councillor Trevor Webb

The Internet

6. The internet has transformed almost every aspect of public, private and work life. It has underpinned our economy; from changing the way every workplace communicates to creating entire new industries. It is reshaping government through improved public services and improving transparency through open data.
7. And it has improved people's lives, whether through cutting household bills, finding a job or maintaining contact with distant friends and relatives. For business and voluntary organisations, going online can provide ways to reach more customers and reduce operating costs. The internet also provides broader benefits, by helping to address wider social and economic issues like reducing isolation and improving health.
8. However recent research published by the BBC has found that 20% of Britain's population lack the basic digital skills and capabilities required to realise the benefits of the internet. Around a third of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

don't have a website, and when we include voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) this figure rises to 50%.

HBC Organisational Transformation Programme

Digital by Design

9. As part of the transformation programme the Council is committed to providing high quality services and putting the customer and citizen at the heart of its business. The 'Digital by Design' project aims to move the highest volume transactions and requests onto a fully automated system; the aim is to provide 80% of council services online, accessed by 60% of the population by the end of 2016, thus vastly reducing the time it takes to respond to such enquiries.
10. A software programme called [Firmstep](#) is being used to support the move to on-line services. Since April last year, Waste services including reporting a missed bin collection, fly tipping or dog fouling, Complaints, Compliments and Comments, FOI's, Housing, and licencing have been transferred online - these services will be followed by all public facing services areas. Hastings' version of Firmstep is called My Hastings Online and is integrated within the new Council website and is available via Smartphone, Tablet or a PC.

[My Hastings Online](#)

11. As part of this transformation process and in addition to the above features local residents are now able to create a 'My Hastings' account, which allows them to look up their Council tax status and Benefits, pay an invoice or parking fines, make changes to their contact details, and keep track of all interactions with the Council. Since 'My Hastings' launch last year, currently around 40% of transactions with the Council are now being carried out on line using My Hastings.
12. Traditional means of contacting the Council are still being maintained for example in person via the Community Contact Centre and by telephone and even if we can meet our target of 80% of all transactions on-line by 60% of the population by the end of 2016 the issue of digital inclusion will need to be considered, as an estimated 20% of the local population, based on local and national data, will still lack the basic skills to go online or have access to the internet.

Digital Inclusion

13. Digital inclusion is often defined in terms of:

Digital skills - being able to use computers and the internet. This is important, but a lack of digital skills is not necessarily the only, or the biggest, barrier people face.

Connectivity - and access to the internet. People need the right infrastructure and the equipment.

Accessibility - services should be designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services. Accessibility is a barrier for many people, but digital inclusion is broader.

Content/trust – Is the content really relevant to the citizen or the customer? How easy is it to find what they really want dealt with?

Cost – How can the citizen be sure that it is more cost effective to do it on-line? Can they afford it?

14. Each of these definitions addresses a single specific barrier that some, but not all, people and organisations face. There is seldom just one reason why people are digitally excluded, and there is no single approach to solving it.
15. Digital inclusion is about overcoming all of these challenges, not just one. Equally, with so many challenges, the Council cannot address digital exclusion alone.
16. As part of this review members considered some of the activities and opportunities that are on offer in the borough, aimed at trying to address the barriers that have stopped people going online until now. Encouragingly there are a range of activities underway by partners in the business, voluntary and public sector to support digital inclusion and improve the accessibility of on-line services. As a council we are determined to use these existing activities in a way that encourages increased digital skills and take up and use of our on-line services.

Data Gaps- why are residents digitally excluded?

17. One of the issues locally is the lack of detailed local data about the number of local residents that are digitally excluded. Nationally, it is estimated that 20% of the population is digitally excluded for the reasons described above.
18. According to East Sussex in Figures, 80% of households in Hastings & St Leonards in 2014 had internet connection at home, with 40% of households using the internet for between 2 and 10 hours a week and 41% for more than 10 hours per week (source: East Sussex in Figures).
19. In June 2015, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) commissioned a telephone survey with local residents across the County, building on earlier survey work they had undertaken to inform their residents media use survey.
20. This showed that in Hastings between June 2013 and June 2015, there has been a gradual increase in the percentage of residents who use the internet rising from 81% to 89%; and overall there has been a huge change in the way people access the internet, such that in June 2013, 25% of residents used a tablet, rising to 62% in June 2015; and 30% of residents used a smart phone in June 2013 rising to 80% in June 2015.
21. During October to December 2015, both the Community Contact Centre and Community Hub at Renaissance House undertook a brief survey with customers using the two centres to try and gather a bit more local data.
22. The surveys showed that 84% of people surveyed – have access to the internet at home and use a mixture of devices including laptops, tablets, smart phones, and internet TV. Of the reasons given for not using the internet at home - 55% said it was too expensive (cost), 27% don't know how to (skills) and 9% poor reception on device (access). These findings reflect national research, and demonstrate that the

Councils ambitions to provide 80% of all of its services online, accessible by 60% of the population should be achievable, in terms of people who do have access to the internet at home and the skills to access our services on line.

23. It is estimated that 10% of the population will never be able to access services on line for a variety of reasons including: they don't want to; trust issues; skills and ability.

Local activity to tackle digital exclusion

24. A broad range of activities are already underway to promote digital inclusion and help local people get on-line. Desk top research was carried out to identify local training and learning opportunities and local places offering internet and Wi-Fi access. Secondly a survey was circulated to all Members to help identify local community facilities offering training and/or internet access help and support.
25. The research showed that there are a range of learning and training opportunities on offer across Hastings and St Leonards. Training opportunities are mapped on Appendix A to this report, online centres in the town are also shown at Appendix B.
26. There are currently 9 UK On-line Centres (a network of local facilities managed by the Tinder Foundation helping people make the most of technology and widening digital inclusion among the most socially excluded in the UK). The centres provide digital skills courses supported with ['Learn My Way'](#) website, training and capacity building.
27. The following are the borough's current UK On-Line Centres - Hastings Library, Hastings Works, Hastings Advancement Centre, St Leonards Works, The Bridge Centre, Horizons Community Learning, Chapel Park Community Centre and Next Steps and The B@sement - both located at 49 Cambridge Gardens. The services on offer are of course affected by the resources both in people and funding that each centre can offer at any one time.
28. Other community focused learning and training opportunities are provided by local organisations such as Brighton Housing Trust -which offers training through a lottery funded project, ESCC which offers family training opportunities through a third party via its Children's Centres, Learn Direct/Learning Services and Horizons CIC. These venues offer a broad spectrum of opportunities that range from 'Making Sense of Computers' to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) .
29. More formal learning opportunities are offered by local colleges including Sussex Coast College, Claverham Community Education and Robertsbridge Community College - which provide adult education courses such as Computers for the Confused, Internet for the Over 60s and Brush up Your Office Skills.
30. HBC is the accountable body for a DWP funded initiative - Reach2 Project - which is a partnership project involving HBC, Fellowship of St Nicholas, Horizons, The Bridge, Hastings and St Leonards Works and HARC. As part of the project 'digital hubs' are provided in the most deprived parts of the borough which offer 1-2-1 and group support, training and learning.
31. AmicusHorizons - coordinate a digital champion project for their tenants which involves peer to peer support. Digital Champions are people who help others

understand the benefits of being online and spend some time showing them how to get online , how to use Google, set up an email account or use Skype.

Access to the Internet

32. A wide range of private, public and community venues offer free access to the internet whereby you can take your own device and connect to the venues Wi-Fi or a computer is provided for your use. These are dispersed across the local area with a 'hot spot' in Hastings Town Centre and to a lesser extent St Leonards.
33. Venues include free access areas such as Libraries, HBC Community Contact Centre, CAB, Hastings & St Leonards Works. In addition free internet use, though product purchase is usually necessary in a range of hotels, retail outlets, pubs, restaurants and coffee shops. Maps showing venues with free Wi-Fi and free computer access are shown at Appendix C and D.
34. The research findings also showed - that public and voluntary sector partners and some local businesses and organisations are providing a broad range of learning and training opportunities as well as access to a 'free' Wi-Fi network, which indirectly enables access to the Councils on-line services.

Next Steps of the Transformation Programme's Digital By Design project

35. Over the next year the transformation programmes Digital by Design project will see a further migration of services available through My Hastings Online. These will include a wide range of Environmental Health features such as making noise complaints and keeping an on-line 'noise diary' and being able to book a pest control visit, making licence applications, and the development of further easy access to reporting problems. In addition, and subject to approval of the recommendations the project will implement these.

Policy Implications

36. Equalities and Community Cohesiveness – 20% of Hastings residents are being excluded from accessing services, financial savings and are socially isolated due to lack of skills and ability to access the internet.
37. Economic/ financial implications – access to retail, financial and comparison services online, enable people to access goods and services, in the whole, cheaper when purchased online. In addition, the overall transformation programme aims to achieve savings to the Council.
38. Organisational Consequences – As the Council faces up to increasing budget reductions, we need to ensure we use digital means to help change our service provision while maintaining outcomes for residents, visitors, partners, suppliers and customers. The Councils transformation programme, and specifically the Digital by Design project, is providing an opportunity to target our diminishing resources to support those in most need, which do not have access to the internet at home, or have the skills to currently use the internet. In addition, it aims to minimise internal costs of our services by transferring them online.
39. Local Peoples Views – the ESCC media survey and low key customer survey undertaken at the CCC and The Advice HUB at Renaissance House has given us a

clearer idea about the reasons local residents are digitally excluded and how they access the internet at home, e.g. tablet, smart phone.

40. Anti-Poverty – – 20% of Hastings residents are being excluded from accessing services and potential financial savings. Access to retail, financial and comparison services online, enable people to access goods and services, in the whole, cheaper when purchased online.

Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed using the findings of the review and are based on the recommendations of the Governments Digital Inclusion Checklist (Appendix E)

41. Arrange a Digital Inclusion Networking meeting, inviting local organisations and partners to share knowledge, experience and identify local gaps in provision
42. Continue to improve knowledge of current local provision and activities to tackle digital exclusion and promote widely
43. Continue to collaborate with partners across public, private and voluntary sectors to help people get on-line.
44. Maintain a watching brief and analysis of digital exclusion in the borough. Continue to work in partnership and draw down funding to deliver local projects that help local people get on-line and become more digitally included.
45. Continue to work in partnership and apply for funding to deliver local projects that help local people get on-line, become digitally skilled and digitally included.

Wards Affected

All

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	Yes

Additional Information

Appendix A – Map of Training Opportunities
Appendix B – Map of Online Centres

Appendix C – Map of Free Wifi Venues
Appendix D – Map of Free Computer Access
Appendix E – Digital Inclusion Checklist

Officer to Contact

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