Tackling the Digital Divide

A plan for promoting digital inclusion in the Scarborough Borough: 2015 - 2017
DIGITAL exclusion is a huge issue for individuals and public sector organisations. Expectations are growing on people to access information and services online and that in turn is increasing the pressure on large sections of society which don’t possess digital skills.

As things stand, many vulnerable people are at risk of becoming excluded from the very services they need, as well as the online choices that could bring real benefits, socially and economically.

Digital exclusion also has wider implications on future democracy and the way public sector organisations engage with communities. It is also a barrier to “channel shift” - an ambition embraced by the public sector as a whole to encourage more people to “self-serve” and access services online.

This council is determined to break down the barriers that prevent people from getting - and staying - online, but we realise it’s not something we can tackle alone.

This document sets out our vision of how public sector, voluntary and community organisations can work together to make digital inclusion happen.

It highlights some of the challenges we face, as well as some of the benefits and opportunities; and sets out a plan for how our aspirations will be achieved in practice.

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Our Digital Inclusion Vision

“To work together to help people gain the skills and confidence to get online and stay online”

WE RECOGNISE that in today’s fast-paced, digitally connected, modern society the ability to access and make use of modern technology is becoming increasingly vital.

We want to encourage people not just to access services online but to be able to access the full range of financial, social and quality of life benefits that being digitally connected can provide.

Our aims through this plan are:

- **To give more access to services online;** to make life simpler for residents to access services at times and in ways that are convenient for them.
- **To provide support to those most at risk of digital exclusion** and tackle the barriers of access, skills, motivation and trust that can prevent people from going online.
Why Is This Important?

ACCORDING to figures from the Government’s Digital Inclusion Strategy (2014), between 18% and 21% of people nationally cannot use the internet. Around 7% of these have internet access but cannot use it.

Currently, the number of people who have never been online is decreasing by about 3% per year. However, having been online does not mean people are digitally capable. The number of people who do not have basic digital capabilities is decreasing at a slower rate of about 1% per year.

It is also recognised that digital exclusion affects some of the most vulnerable groups, compounding wider issues of exclusion and disadvantage.

- People in **social housing** - 37% of those who are digitally excluded are social housing tenants.
- Those on **lower wages or unemployed** - 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet compared to only 2% of those earning more than £40,000.
- Those with **disabilities** - 33% of people with registered disabilities have never used the internet. This is more than half of the total number of people who have never used the internet.
- **Older people** - more than 53% of people who lack basic digital skills are aged 65 and over and 69% are over 55.
- **Young people** - 6% of people who lack digital skills are aged between 15 and 24. Only 27% of young people who are offline are in full time employment.
- **Offenders and ex-offenders** - research shows the risk of reoffending drops significantly when digital skills, training and support is used to complement existing approaches.

“Digital exclusion affects some of the most vulnerable groups, compounding wider issues of exclusion and disadvantage.”
Why Is This Important? (continued)

A 2013 STUDY by Citizens Advice Bureaux in York and North Yorkshire paints a familiar picture of internet usage in the county, which highlights the “digital divide” and the task facing those organisations which want to help.

Its figures reveal:-

- A quarter of under 65s and almost two thirds of over 65s do not use the internet
- 50% of disabled people do not use the internet
- Almost a third of people do not have an email address
- 50% of people say without help they would not be able to apply for benefits online

The Office for National Statistics (2014), says that of the four million households without internet access, more than half said “they did not need it”. Of households with no internet access, almost a third (32%) said this was because of a lack of skills, with further barriers including high equipment and access costs.

The research by Citizens Advice Bureaux in York and North Yorkshire backs up those figures. It says the major concerns facing claimants using a digital Universal Credit service include lack of access to the internet, the cost, and lack of skills, with privacy and security of personal data also among their worries.

As locally and nationally more organisations open up more online channels and the government continues to promote its “digital by default” agenda, there is a risk that some people will become further excluded, unless organisations come together to tackle the barriers people face.

Giving people the online skills so they can navigate their way around this digital world will be life-changing for some people and in other instances will prevent people spiralling into crisis situations which then require the urgent intervention of already stretched public sector or voluntary organisations.
INTERNET usage is increasing.

The Office for National Statistics says more than three quarters of the adult population access the internet every day, with a similar proportion of people buying goods or accessing services online.

There is a growing section of the population who would welcome opportunities to do more online. In this context it is absolutely logical for local authorities and other public agencies to develop online channels that are easy to use for those people who are already digitally active, while also providing assistance to those people who risk missing out on the advantages provided by the internet.

The Government’s “digital by default” ethos reflects a growing technological sophistication in large parts of society. But among “those who can’t”, it’s the public sector and voluntary and community organisations that will have to pick up the pieces when things go wrong.

A person who struggles with the online Universal Credit process may potentially miss out on critical income that’s the difference between managing and being plunged into crisis. And an older person who is not digitally connected to family, friends or the world around them, may suffer from physical and mental health issues linked to isolation and loneliness and also need the help of a number of services.
“We aim to set up a multi-agency digital partnership, underpinned by a digital charter, which commits stakeholders to working together to promote digital inclusion.”

Roles and Responsibilities

OVERSEEN by the local Public Service Executive and supported by Community Learning Partnerships, we aim to set up a multi-agency digital partnership, underpinned by a digital charter, which commits stakeholders to working together to promote digital inclusion. The partnership would be tasked with developing some of the ideas outlined in this strategy, such as young digital champions and community / wellbeing hubs and would provide mutual support.

PUBLIC SERVICE EXECUTIVE

The local Public Service Executive (PSE) is made up of high-level representation from Scarborough Borough Council, North Yorkshire County Council, North Yorkshire NHS, North Yorkshire Police, Scarborough and Ryedale Clinical Commissioning Group, Public Health North Yorkshire, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, North Yorkshire Ambulance Service, Yorkshire Coast Homes, North Yorkshire’s Probation Service, and the University of Hull. The PSE is backing the idea of community hubs and is eager to see plans brought forward to tackle digital exclusion, which it recognises has the potential to impact right across the public sector.

DIGITAL INCLUSION PARTNERSHIP

Persons nominated by individual Public Service Executive stakeholders would form the core of the local Digital Inclusion Partnership, with other members drawn from the wider community. They could be from the voluntary or community sector, business or commercial world, depending on their background and area of expertise. Terms of reference for the Partnership would be agreed and it would report back to the PSE on a regular basis. The Partnership as a whole would look at sponsorship and funding opportunities, branding, marketing and communications. Members of the Partnership would also lead a number of sub-groups.

Community hubs, WiFi and broadband

Through the idea of community hubs, we want digital inclusion to be a gateway to other services, aligned with the priorities of PSE stakeholders. The provision of WiFi and broadband access is also part of that much bigger picture.

Digital toolkit, skills and training

It’s vital existing provision is properly mapped out so partners can point users to the most appropriate help; an additional digital toolkit would enhance provision and provide a way to measure learning.

Peer-to-peer learning

This task group would be responsible for scoping out the Job Skills digital buddies idea and the Young People’s Digital Champion concept.
Our latest digital journey began in April 2013, when the council pulled together a team of staff under the project name, SWITCH.

Bringing together practitioners in ICT, policy and performance, customer services and communications, the team set out to develop and implement a new operating model for the council; one that would enable us to deliver our vision for an improved customer Experience - particularly online - as well as a more agile and efficient workforce.

The new website with an integrated, customer-friendly forms package and self-service portal, offering our citizens a secure and simple way to make service requests, report problems, make payments and track the progress of their requests from whatever device they choose and at a time that’s most convenient for them, was launched in November last year.

We’ve put customers in control, enabling them to fully manage their interactions with us, bringing council and community much closer together.

As well as catering for customer demand, we believe that improving services for those that can use online access can also assist the council with reducing the cost of delivering services.

SOCITM - the association for IT professionals working in local authorities and the public sector - estimates the cost of handling an enquiry that’s come in via the web is just 15p, compared with the £2.83 cost of a telephone call, or £8.62 for a face-to-face interaction.

The more people who can access services online, the greater the savings and the ability to focus on customers and enquiries that require more intensive support.
“We’re rolling out a promotion campaign, designed to embed the ‘Do it Online’ ethos throughout the council.”

Work So Far - Do It Online Campaign

TO COINCIDE with the launch of the new website and self-service portal, we’re rolling out a promotion campaign, designed to embed the “Do it Online” ethos throughout the council and make our residents aware they can access many of our services over the internet, with many more to follow, as well as utilise social media channels to get in touch with us.

So far we have:-

- Redesigned the corporate letterhead
- Incorporated the “Do it Online” message on business cards and complements slips
- Introduced the branding on some of our bin wagons
- Promoted “Do it Online’ on waste collection calendars
- Recorded new telephone messages
- Installed new decals on the Customer First windows in Scarborough
- Put new “website-first” messages on the screens in the Town Hall civic reception and Customer First centre in Scarborough

The next stage of the campaign will see:-

- 56,000 “Do it Online” leaflets distributed to residents with their council tax bills in March
- Leaflets promoting our website made available from Customer First and other council buildings
- A push to standardise council staff email signatures to ensure the “web-first” message is being carried
- Promotional fridge magnets produced for Customer First centres
Our Priorities

**Priority 1** – To bring public, voluntary and community partners together to co-ordinate an integrated, shared response to digital exclusion and its consequences.

KEY action points in the next 12 months include:

- Establish a multi-agency digital partnership (supported by the Public Service Executive) to develop and oversee progress and ensure work is developed and delivered in an integrated, cohesive way. To include partners such as North Yorkshire County Council, Yorkshire Coast Homes, JobCentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK, Adult and Learning and Skills Service, Community Learning Partnership.

- Development of a Digital Charter, which commits partners to working together to tackle digital exclusion.

- Expanding digital pathways and integrating digital inclusion with wider access to services and support, such as those which could be delivered from a community / wellbeing hub.

- Map out existing and future digital provision and support available.

- Investigate the feasibility of producing a bespoke training toolkit, with a focus on local services and amenities, that could underpin any additional training provision and mentoring.

- Look at adapting existing resources - Learn My Way and Digital Unite are just two examples. By bolting on local “hooks” and making the internet more relevant to learners, we believe there’s a greater chance of getting people interested in going online and staying online.
Our Priorities

**Priority 2 – Provide support to the most vulnerable and those at most risk of digital exclusion.**

“Key action points include producing a digital information sheet containing details of all IT and digital training, for distribution via all public-facing public service staff across public, voluntary and community organisations.”

KEY action points in the next 12 months include:

- Explore the feasibility of launching a digital buddies initiative, where young people become mentors and provide support for older friends and relatives to get the most from the internet. Conversations have already taken place with representatives from uniformed youth groups who see great potential in the idea.
- Look at the possibility of a job seekers’ digital buddies scheme, where a person looking for work who is digitally proficient would gain credits for helping a fellow job seeker who doesn’t possess digital skills.
- Provide a regular information sheet with details of all IT and digital training, from light-touch assistance to regular bite-sized sessions to accredited courses, for distribution via all public-facing public service staff across public, voluntary and community organisations.
Our Priorities

**Priority 3 – Work with IT training providers to deliver a consistent and cohesive package of digital inclusion training that is recognised through national quality standards.**

ALTHOUGH the needs of the Borough’s digitally excluded residents will vary, it is important that a consistent approach to digital inclusion training is adopted, so stakeholders can be confident learners are receiving help and training that’s of a good standard that will support someone to stay digitally active.

This will ensure that progress can be effectively monitored across the organisations within the Partnership as well as assisting the learner with a unified learning approach along their digital journey.

Luckily, there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” here, as nationally-accepted quality standards are available through UK Online which outlines a number of criteria that IT training providers undertaking basic digital inclusion training must adhere to in order to become a recognised UK Online Centre.

IT training providers working with the Digital Inclusion Partnership would be expected to be a recognised UK Online Centre or will be actively working towards this goal. Moreover, UK Online has developed the “Learn my Way” toolkit as a standardised blueprint for teaching basic digital skills with user-friendly guides to everything from using a mouse to utilising online banking. It is anticipated that partners will expand on this approach to share information on their own online services with the various local IT training providers.

Other key action points in the next 12 months include:

- Establish a digital toolkit, skills and training working group to progress a co-ordinated approach to digital inclusion training.
- Work to ensure that all IT trainers working within the partnership programme are already recognised UK Online Centres or actively working towards this.
- Ensure that partner organisations work proactively with IT training providers to transfer usable knowledge of their own organisation’s online services and how to use them.
Our Priorities

Priority 4 – Increase the number of people accessing Scarborough Borough Council services online.

“Key action points include changing the way face-to-face services are delivered within Customer First, to include improved self-service points, with access to support for people who require assistance to self-serve (assisted digital).”

Key action points in the next 12 months include:

- Change the way face-to-face services are delivered within Customer First, to include improved self-service points, with access to support for people who require assistance to self-serve (assisted digital).
- Targeted campaigns and ongoing promotion of the “Do it Online” branding, with the online-first message embedded wherever possible in council communications.
- Pursue advertising opportunities that are likely to deliver value for money.
- Continue to improve and enhance what we offer online, so our website, www.scarborough.gov.uk becomes the “channel of choice” for people who are already digitally skilled.
Our Priorities

**Priority 5 – Pursue funding opportunities to further develop digital inclusion initiatives and services.**

KEY action points in the next 12 months include:

- Investigate sponsorship opportunities or commercial funding to support digital inclusion projects across the Borough of Scarborough.
- Investigate and cost out WiFi provision.

“Key action points include investigating opportunities for sponsorship partners / commercial funding to support digital inclusion projects.”
Our Priorities

Priority 6 – Work with community groups to expand community-based digital support as part of the development of “Wellbeing or Community Hubs”.

COMMUNITY settings are a key factor in our digital inclusion approach. An important part of what we want to achieve will be through the development of “wellbeing or community hubs” in various locations in the Borough.

Working to a similar model as “The Base” situated in the most disadvantaged part of Scarborough’s Castle Ward, these hubs will not only provide volunteer-led informal IT and digital inclusion training in a friendly setting based within the heart of the community but also house a number of outreach public services and community projects that residents can access at their convenience and on their doorstep. Community hubs will be a gateway to a whole host of other services provided by various different agencies.

At their heart, community hubs should be encouraged to develop in line with the needs and requests of the communities they serve. So where they are located (community centres, village halls, pubs, GP surgeries, cafes etc.) to what services are delivered will vary from hub to hub.

Community hubs will also be independent organisations led and managed by local people with support from the council and its partners, including Coast and Vale Community Action and North Yorkshire County Council.

Key action points in the next 12 months include:

- Establish a multi-agency partnership to foster and encourage the development of community hubs across the Borough.
- Establish a solid brand and brand identity that can be applied to each of the community hubs.
- Work with communities and partners to identify suitable communities / venues to develop community hubs.
- Aim to have worked with other partners to develop at least five community hubs across the Borough.