



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Working Group - Digital Inclusion**

Remotely Via Teams

Tuesday, 11 May 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor L V Walton (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

M C Child
C A Holley

Councillor(s)

H M Morris
J W Jones

Councillor(s)

D W Helliwell

Other Attendees

A H Stevens

L S Gibbard

Officer(s)

Adam Hill
Sarah Lackenby
Liz Shellard

Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources
Chief Digital & Transformation Officer
Web Manager and Digital Transformation Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale

Other Attendees: A Pugh

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None

3 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None

4 Public Question Time

No public questions received.

5 Conveners Letter - Previous Working Group

The Working Group asked for an update on the key points raised in this letter and these have been included as part of the next section.

6 Digital Inclusion Report

This report gives an overview of the work done to increase digital inclusion before and during the pandemic, the work already planned for 2021/22 and a look towards the future, post-COVID-19.

There are many good reasons to being online but the advantages of this were thrown into stark reality during the lockdown. Being online can significantly improve people's life chances by: helping people find work; offering improved learning opportunities; getting access to cheaper goods and services online; reducing loneliness and isolation, especially for the most vulnerable; and being part of digital communities, which improve local outcomes through co-ordinated activities and initiatives.

Work from 2018 to the start of pandemic included:

- A draft Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework was presented to the Financial Inclusion Working Group in November 2019. The framework drew on the latest data and information including from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). This highlighted that Swansea has very high numbers of people accessing the internet, and higher as a percentage than Wales and UK averages. Although this not mean there are is not a problem with digital inclusion. However, since that time Covid-19 has dominated throughout 2020 and into 2021 and will have impacted the digital inclusion landscape. This means that the use of digital channels has significantly increased during this time.
- The Get Swansea Online free tablet and PC courses had 454 attendees in 2018/19 and 302 in 2019/20
- Learn My Way is a series of short and engaging online courses which take learners through tasks like using a mouse and keyboard, scam awareness and security to using social media or banking and shopping online

Work on digital inclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic included:

- When the first lockdown started in March 2020 there was a need to ensure that staff had the equipment, digital skills and access to broadband to work from home.
- For the wider public who may be digitally excluded in Swansea, offline support mechanisms were set up and the offer to help get online was available through various channels.
- This included digital inclusion for staff, support for shielding residents, support for residents in relation to education, employability, life stages including 50+, Lifelong Learning.
- Also provided digital training across partner organisations
- A variety of methods of communication were used to reach Swansea residents, whether digitally included or excluded: offline channels e.g. press releases and posters, letters to residents plus text messages, shielding to make them aware of the emergency helpline. Online channels like the website, social media and emails. Awareness was raised online for all sources of help to get online and improve digital skills. These included sharing Digital Communities Wales courses on the Council's website and on social media and promotion of the Lifelong

Learning helpline and courses. Online messaging was targeted at people who may know someone who needs help.

- Some of the impacts of COVID-19 on the digital inclusion landscape include several factors changing which will be taken into account when reviewing the Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework. These include: a shift towards digital channels by all companies and organisations, greater community and family support to help people get online, as more people have migrated to online channels, skills and confidence will have increased compared with the 2019 data. For some residents, video calling was a vital way of keeping in touch with friends and family, especially for those shielding. The profile of non-users may have changed and this needs more data and analysis.

Moving forward 2021/2022 onwards

- The Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework needs to be reviewed in light of new data emerging post pandemic, coupled with the natural demographic shift over the coming years. The milestones and dates will also need to be revisited to ensure they are fit for purpose before discussing again with stakeholders.
- Community Calling will be coming to fruition in late April 2021
- To supplement Education's small central resources, schools are increasing the number of digital devices by purchasing equipment using the Welsh Government's Hwb Infrastructure Grant.
- Work has started on the new Council website, which will be delivered in late summer 2021.
- Safeguarding through continued promotion of online safety and scam awareness will continue.
- The Lifelong Learning team is looking at possible timescales and options to gradually bring back face-to-face courses.
- The regional digital business case for City Deal has been approved by Welsh and UK Governments and is now in flight.

Discussion

- Ongoing concern was raised about those people who will never, for whatever reason, be able to access the internet and how we insure they are not excluded. The Liz Shellard, the Web Manager (LS) explained that if people can do what they need online that is good but we still have the Councils Contact Centre by phone and this still remains a big part of what we do. Everybody has a range of channels by which they can access our services and can be used in a way that suits them.
- Cabinet Member Louise Gibbard said that we learnt a lot of lessons through the Equalities Scrutiny Inquiry and as a result of the pandemic which we will included when things are being reviewed moving forward.
- The Working Group (WG) heard that the Council is working towards a Swansea Account, where people are able to log in and see all the transactions they have made with the Council in a secure way.
- The WG highlighted that it is a small minority that are potentially digitally excluded now and that it is likely to be individuals rather than specific groups. We need to ensure we recognise that and target our assistance appropriately. We are moving towards digital equality rather than digital inclusion and would

suggest that the review Strategy/Framework is called Digital Equality Strategic moving forward.

- Equality is also about people being able to access good infrastructure, for example broadband and mobile signal. The City Deal infrastructure programme should address some of this.
- Public access through touchscreens in public places was raised including how the council is using this to enable those who would struggle to use computer. LS will look into circulate more information on this after the meeting.
- Through Covid help was given to a small group of 79 individuals who needed more support to access services so they did not fall through the net. Staff across the authority pulled together to do their best for citizens. No complaints were received through this period relating to access to services.
- Privacy and security online. Council is building a library of scams with Trading Standard. These are communicated to the public via social media and via the Councils Communication Team. A phishing campaign and training will be provided that will make more people aware and help counter the issue. It was recognised that some people do not like to do transactions online because of their concerns over safety and security.
- It was recognised that the landscape in digital matters has changed rapidly over last year and that more work will need to be done to see what it will need to look like after Covid.
- A draft Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework had been developed pre Covid and will need to be reviewed. The WG would like to contribute to this and have asked that the original draft be circulated to them.
- A new council wide Website is being developed, it will ensure for example that; the search aspects are right and plain English/Welsh used. Working with access to services officer to work with different equality groups to develop it. WG would like to feed their thoughts into the new website design and have asked to be contacted when appropriate to engage.
- Safeguarding is recognised as key in online activity and this is being considered very carefully.
- The WG were pleased to hear about the Chatbot that went live during the pandemic to assist people when looking for information and signposting in relation to domestic violence.
- The WG agreed that the Council is on the right track with it digital inclusion strategy and recognise that it is keen to make the right improvements.

7 Discussion and Conclusions

The Working Group Convener will write to the Cabinet Member to give the Groups views on the issues raised in the discussion. This will include thoughts on those who will not/do not go online, digital safeguarding and security, the digital inclusion framework, communication and the new Website.

The Working Group felt that digital inclusion/equality is an ongoing issue and that this group should meet on an annual basis to consider the progress being made.

Minutes of the Scrutiny Working Group - Digital Inclusion (11.05.2021)
Cont'd

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm

Chair