City and County of Swansea

Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

Scrutiny Working Group - Digital Inclusion

At: **Remotely via Teams**

On: **Tuesday, 11 May 2021**

Time: **2.00 pm**

Convenor: **Councillor Lesley Walton**

Membership:
Councillors: M C Child, J A Hale, D W Helliwell, T J Hennegan, C A Holley, J W Jones and H M Morris

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Agenda

Page No.

1 **Apologies for Absence**

2 **Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**
www.swansea.gov.uk/disclosuresofinterests

3 **Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips**

4 **Public Question Time**
Questions must be submitted in writing, no later than noon on the working day prior to the meeting. Questions must relate to items on the agenda. Questions will be dealt with in a 10-minute period.

5 **Conveners Letter - Previous Working Group**   1 - 3

6 **Digital Inclusion Report**   4 - 11
Invited to attend:
Andrew Stevens, Cabinet Member – Business Improvement and Performance
Louise Gibbard, Cabinet Member – Better Communities
Allyson Pugh, Cabinet Member – Better Communities
Sarah Lackenby, Chief Transformation Officer
Liz Shellard, Web Development Manager, Digital and Transformation Services

7 **Discussion and Conclusions**
Councillors are asked to discuss conclusions arising from this session for inclusion in the Convener's letter to the Cabinet Member:

a) What do you want to say about this issue to the Cabinet Member in the Convener's letter (what are your conclusions arising from this session?)
b) Do you have any recommendations for the Cabinet Member arising from this session?
c) Are there any further issues you wish to highlight to the Scrutiny Programme Committee arising from this session?

Huw Evans
Head of Democratic Services
Date: 4 May 2021
Contact: Michelle Roberts, Scrutiny Officer

City And County Of Swansea

Dinas A Sir Abertawe

To	
Councillor Will Evans	
Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty	
cc.	
Councillor Clive Lloyd	
Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance	

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Our Ref / *Ein Cyf:*	DI/1
Your Ref / *Eich Cyf:*	
Date / *Dyddiad:*	22 March 2017

Summary: This is a letter from the Digital Inclusion Scrutiny Working group to the Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty following the meeting of the Working Group on 6 March 2017. It is about the Digital Inclusion Strategy for Swansea Council.

Dear Councillor Evans,

Digital Inclusion Scrutiny working Group

I am writing following the scrutiny meeting held on 6 March 2017 to look at the issue of digital inclusion.

Can I first thank you for your attendance at the meeting and that the officers, Sarah Caulkin and Liz Shellard for their report and their answers to our questions. All of your contributions were very much appreciated.

Overall we were pleased to hear that serious attention is being given to this issue given the increasing number of council services being placed online, the importance of ensuring that all citizens are able to access council services when they need them and the need to ensure that as many people as possible have the skills to participate in what is an increasingly digital world.

We were also pleased to hear that progress is being made and that initiatives such as Get Swansea Online are having an impact. We were impressed by the impact demonstrated by the monitoring of these courses.

This is of course a challenging area of work and there is clearly much more that needs to be done. We also happy to hear, therefore, that a review of the digital inclusion strategy is to be conducted shortly. With that in mind we would like to suggest a number of issues that we believe should be addressed as part of that review. In raising these issues we have in mind our experiences as ward councillors and what we know about the needs of our constituents.

Overview & Scrutiny / Trosolwg a chraffu

City and County of Swansea / Dinas a Sir Abertawe
Guildhall, Swansea, SA1 4PE / Neuadd Y Ddinas, Abertawe, SA1 4PE
Page 1
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Issues for the Digital Inclusion Strategy Review

- While we appreciate the need to move people toward digital channels the council should nevertheless ensure that people are able to communicate through non-digital channels where needed

- The language of digital inclusion needs to be carefully considered – the council should not be 'educating' or telling people what they must do but rather working with people and offering choices

- The overall levels of digital exclusion need to be captured so that progress can be measured – in particular to understand who is excluded as opposed to those who simply do not need or wish to communicate with the Council

- The needs of different groups should be carefully researched and understood. The strategy should not be based on sweeping generalizations or stereotypes – we support what we heard about the Council doing more to analyse the data that it already holds but suggest that additional sources of information will be needed

- There is a need for a partnership approach given in particular the increasing online services for welfare benefits and health – this should be developed through the Public Services Board

- As well as courses digital skills could be developed more through family and cross generational approaches through schools and community groups – we would like to see this developed

- Language can be an additional barrier for those who do not have either English or Welsh as their first language – we would like to see this issue considered and, in particular, the needs of refugees

- The strategy needs to ensure that those moving to online services are not missing out on advice that they might need. Here we are thinking in particular about the links to financial inclusion and ensuring that advice about financial services and welfare benefits is not being missed because someone is receiving a service online

- The strategy needs to address the legitimate concerns that people have about privacy and security. We believe that there is a degree of public suspicion about what the council does with data it receives on line and a fear of scams. These concerns need to be addressed.

- There is certainly scope to run positive campaigns to encourage people to do more online – we think that such work should be undertaken on a piloted basis aimed at smaller communities or population groups for example

While we do not require a formal reply do this letter we do expect that these issues will be given full consideration as part of the review. With this in mind, and given the importance of this issue, we will be asking that this issue is revisited by scrutiny after the election perhaps as a further working group. In any case we would expect that the issue is raised at the relevant Cabinet Member Question and Answer Sessions.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LESLEY WALTON
Convener of the Digital Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group
✉ cllr.lesley.walton@swansea.gov.uk

Report of the Cabinet Member for Business Improvement and Performance

Overview Briefing for Digital Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group
2.00pm, Tuesday 11 May 2021

Digital inclusion update

Purpose:	To provide the working group with an update on digital inclusion.
Content:	This report provides an update on digital inclusion and how the needs of the digitally excluded were met during the pandemic.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Andrew Stevens
Lead Officer Report Author:	Sarah Lackenby Liz Shellard E-mail: liz.shellard@swansea.gov.uk

1. Introduction

This is 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.

The Council has an established focus on increasing digital inclusion, with Get Swansea Online starting in 2013 to provide free courses for beginners provided by Lifelong Learning. Before COVID-19 and the first lockdown, this had expanded throughout Council services and partnership organisations. It encompassed help through the employability programmes, referrals to and from the financial inclusion and Local Area Co-ordination teams and face-to-face support via the contact centre, libraries plus the Lifelong Learning team.

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.

The advantages of being online were thrown into stark reality during the lockdown.

2. Work during 2018 through to March 2020

2.1 Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework

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. However, this does not mean Swansea does not have problem with digital exclusion. The ONS Internet Users 2019 data suggests that around 6% of adult residents in Swansea had never used the internet. The percentage of non-users increases significantly for residents with a disability and who are aged 65+, particularly those people over 75.

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.

2.2 Get Swansea Online

The Get Swansea Online free tablet and PC courses had 454 attendees in 2018/19 and 302 in 2019/20. The KPI target was reduced to 300 because of the increasing levels of digital inclusion and a move to a more flexible way of learning. This better suited the changing needs of attendees, especially younger attendees wanting to improve their digital skills and do specific tasks like learning Excel or creating a CV. This was achieved with a successful grant application to Good Things Foundation which allowed the Lifelong Learning team to supplement the Get Swansea Online courses with BT Learn My Way online learning.

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. The courses can also be used by the employability teams as they cover how to create and update CVs, using Microsoft software and other useful skills for job hunters. Lifelong Learning staff use the courses as a stepping stone for users to improve their skills before offering them the more advanced courses they offer.

Lifelong Learning staff attended regular face-to-face Swansea Working drop in sessions to provide immediate individual help for attendees. This helped to cement the flow of referrals between Lifelong Learning, employability teams and financial inclusion, ensuring people could access the help they needed.

3. Work on digital inclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic

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.

3.1 Digital inclusion for staff

The Council's agile working programme had already allowed most office based staff to use the latest equipment and technology to work from home.

Digital Services deployed the agile working equipment quickly where there were gaps, and also produced guides, made support available and provided daily communications.

This helped to upskill staff who may not have been using all the tools available to them, for example on the effective use of Microsoft Teams for meetings and chat functionality. Role-specific training to upskill staff was also offered through Lifelong Learning and partnership organisations.

Accelerated work between Digital Services and the supplier moved all call centres to homeworking in time to support shielding residents, including the Common Access Point in Social Services and the emergency contact centre. Where staff lived in very rural areas with poor internet access MiFi devices were deployed.

A staff survey was carried out in summer 2020 about homeworking which had a very high response rate. Most respondents did not feel they needed ICT training, showing a high degree of digital competence in using the tools available. This was reflected in the stats, for example there were 238,000 chats and messages in Teams between January and March 2020 which increased to 715,000 between April and June 2020.

3.2 Support for shielding residents

The emergency call centre was set up in a matter of days, with scripting developed on Staffnet and forms to help staff triage the shielding callers to the food help administration team, SCVS for prescription help, Local Area Co-ordinators, financial inclusion or help to get online as appropriate.

The emergency call centre received 3823 contacts to its closure on 23 August 2020. Local Area Co-ordinators took 22,935 enquiries, the food help administration team processed 850 requests for help and facilitated the delivery of 7,700 Welsh Government food boxes to shielding residents in need, and SCVS had 940 referrals in the same time period.

It was very clear that if service users were able to self-serve online, they did so, with online requests and reports around recycling e.g. bag requests jumping from a total of 7800 January - March 2020 to 16496 from April - June 2020.

There were no corporate complaints about access to the Council's services in 2020/2021.

3.3 Digital inclusion for residents during the pandemic

The internal strategy for assisting residents was clear: provide information and signposting online for those who could access it and self-serve, while giving offline help and support for those who needed it.

Several service areas had a comprehensive response to help users to become digitally included:

3.3.1 Education

During the lockdown, a digital divide emerged between pupils who could access online learning remotely and those who could not. To maintain the continuity of learning for pupils without access to digital devices, many schools initially deployed paper-pack resources which could not be a long-term solution on its own. Welsh Government provided funding to local authorities for additional digital equipment for schools. By June, 450 MiFi dongles and 700 devices were provided, via schools, to digitally disadvantaged families.

During the return to school, the pressures on digital devices have largely reduced as the majority of pupils have returned to face-to-face lessons. A recent parental survey indicates over 70% of pupils have remained in school this term.

However, when asked to self-isolate at home, difficulties remain with pupils needing to share devices with other siblings or parents, and unreliable internet connectivity. The survey of parents indicates that 92% of families have reliable connectivity and 80% believe they have a suitable device for home learning. The main issue is the need to share devices with the family at home.

Education keeps a small central resource of around 100 Chromebooks that are deployed on an as-needed basis to support schools when pupils need to self-isolate at short notice. In addition, schools have worked hard to support families where there have been technical issues, such as how to support their children to access work through different platforms. Further, to mitigate the sharing-a-device problem, many schools have opted to deliver in asynchronous ways – recorded lessons and work sent through a virtual learning environment – which allows pupils to engage with learning at a time convenient to the home.

3.3.2 Employability teams

In summer 2020 there was a consultation of existing clients receiving employability support through Communities for Work/Communities for Work Plus. This was on behalf of Welsh Government to look at the proportion who were digitally excluded. Approximately 22% of the 72 people receiving support during the survey felt they were digitally excluded, with the majority saying this was due to having more restricted access to public PCs during the pandemic and not having their own device and/or broadband. This figure was similar across Wales and reflects the result of lockdown.

From this came the ICT Loan Scheme for Communities for Work/Communities for Work Plus programmes:

- Officers have worked with Welsh Government to implement an ICT loan scheme which has been introduced across Wales. This is aimed specifically at Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus clients. This scheme is live in Swansea, and computers are being loaned out to clients who need them to carry out job search and employment functions. Mentors ensure that the resource reaches those in need, and the team have designed and introduced a safe loan process in line with the main project partner, Digital Communities Wales.

- The scheme enables staff to link clients up with other provision to develop their digital skills further (for example Lifelong Learning courses and other providers, including Digital Communities Wales courses). Additionally, the Council's Lifelong Learning service support the clients to get started via phone.

3.3.3 Life Stages Team

The Life Stages Team worked with colleagues/partners to ensure promotion of opportunities for residents 50+ to get online due to the pandemic. Work included:

- The production of posters, newsletters and messaging for citizens and partners to understand what help and support to get online was available
- Promotion of the support through Safeguarding Week, which had the theme of "Staying Connected"
- Mapping local and national provision for assisting citizens to get online and stay connected
- Linking with Digital Communities Wales to promote their free opportunities to the Ageing Well subscribers.

3.3.4 Lifelong Learning Service Digital Services

The Lifelong Learning Service maintained delivery of its full programme of learning during COVID-19 by switching all provision online and providing support to access the courses.

The service utilised GSuite (Google) to deliver online teaching and learning opportunities including live sessions, pre-recorded videos, projects and assignments. The platform has enabled the service to utilise a variety of teaching and engagement strategies including learner and tutor interaction. There have been 1516 learners taught across 56 courses.

Learning for Life, Essential Skills and Family Learning accredited programmes continued to be offered online to 172 learners on 17 courses.

Tutors have received support, training and digital equipment to facilitate the change to delivery. Extra support was given to 8 tutors and 24 learners to allow provision of and access to courses.

Termly meetings and weekly Google Meet sessions for extra help
An audit of digital skills and equipment carried out with tutors and existing learners during early Summer Term 2020 enabled managers to work to improve skills and provide digital devices where needed.

Digital equipment loaned out included 25 laptops, 17 mifis plus one mifi booster and17 iPads

Managers worked with Jisc Wales to improve staff digital skills and provide ongoing digital and blended learning training. 4 staff were trained in the initial Digital Champions training, and subsequently all staff have now received platform specific 'Creative Teaching Online' training.

Lifelong Learning introduced daily digital support sessions for individuals during lockdown. These sessions have been widely signposted through partner organisations and the general public.
87 learners have been contacted by Lifelong Learning staff for very specific IT support and many of these have gone on to the Learn My Way course.

The service also offered a number of free absolute beginners' digital courses through the Learn My Way programme. There were 181 learners on free IT courses for beginners (up to Stage 3) during 2020/21.

3.3.5 Digital training across partner organisations

The Family Support Network requested training for Teams and Zoom, which included tips on security, running interactive sessions online, organising meetings, assessing needs and ability of clients and gaining confidence in digital skills.

Over 200 staff across the partnership benefited from this training. Council staff from the Early Help Hubs, Jigso, Play Team, Life Stages Team, Children's Centres and the Family Information Service took part, alongside third sector partner organisations, which allowed them to reach families and children effectively online.

This training has had many positive outcomes across the Family Support Network and will improve accessibility of provision for children, young people and families for services.

4. Communication during COVID-19

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 through Gov Notify directly to those shielding to make them aware of the emergency helpline.
- Online channels like the website, social media and emails

In the context of targeting digitally excluded people it may seem out of place to highlight online activity, but there has been a range of benefits:

- Local Facebook groups were highlighted on the new ward information pages, and many of these groups offered help to get online and used the groups to organise offline activity, for example hot meal delivery in their communities.
- The Council's Coronavirus help pages were used extensively by local media to create copy for radio and in the local newspapers. An example of this was the local suppliers list, which was featured as a full double-page spread in the Evening Post on several occasions. This helped support local businesses as well as ensuring that those shielding or who couldn't get delivery slots from supermarkets could access food deliveries and takeaway meals.
- 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.

5. Impact of COVID-19 on the digital inclusion landscape

Several factors will have changed 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, e.g. banking has been one significant change for people where all banks were encouraging customers to shift to online banking, with support via telephone. Only a small amount of transactions were available face-to-face
- 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.

6. 2021/2022 onwards

6.1 Moving forward, 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.

6.2 An exciting project called Community Calling will be coming to fruition in late April 2021, with work being done by the Tackling Poverty Service in collaboration with a charity called Hubbub to roll out donated, refurbished smartphones to 700 vulnerable Swansea residents. Key frontline services in the council as well as partners like SCVS, Citizen's Advice and housing associations will be identifying individuals who will benefit from the scheme.

0^2 are providing a free year's data, calls and texts with the smartphones, and there will be initial support and a skills assessment at the start and again at the six month stage, so that users are able to develop their digital skills record their progression. This will be tied in to courses and support provided by Lifelong Learning.

Hubbub have already rolled this campaign out in several locations in England, and it will be supporting both safeguarding and environmental strategies in Swansea.

6.3 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. This allows schools to provide necessary equipment for staff and pupils:

- 3,869 Windows devices received to date
- 2,144 Chromebooks received to date with a further 4096 Chromebooks are being delivered directly to schools w/c 12/04/21
- Devices : 1,156 Apple devices/accessories received and delivered to schools
- Total devices – 11,265 devices

6.4 Work has started on the new Council website, which will be delivered in late summer 2021. The site will have improved accessibility to meet new standards and to ensure those moving to transact with the Council online can do so with ease, and to help staff to assist online users over the phone.

Accessibility is important for all users, whether they are experiencing situational limitations e.g. using their smartphone to transact in bright sunshine, or a permanent disability which could affect processing, motor function or sight. An accessible website is search engine friendly, which means all users can find the information they need.

Important information is being taken out of PDFs and added to webpages, both to improve accessibility and for users to be able to utilise Google to translate automatically rather than being restricted to English and Welsh.

6.5 Safeguarding through continued promotion of online safety and scam awareness will continue, through press releases and offline channels as well as online to staff and the public. Get Swansea Online courses will always include online safety as an important component.

6.6 The Lifelong Learning team is looking at possible timescales and options to gradually bring back face-to-face courses for beginners, but this will depend on Welsh Government restrictions and future lockdowns. Online delivery has widened learner accessibility and they will continue to offer online, face-to-face and blended learning opportunities in the future.

6.7 The regional digital business case for City Deal has been approved by Welsh and UK Governments and is now in flight. The digital programme has several projects, one of which is to improve the digital infrastructure across Swansea and into South West Wales. This also includes seeking opportunities for private sector investment and exploiting the benefits, e.g. Super Connected Cities, using sensors and internet of things as just two examples. Swansea Council is currently leading an internet of things project on behalf of partner Councils as part of the regional programme.

7. Assessment

The digital inclusion landscape has changed fundamentally since March 2020, and it will be crucial to assess the impact of this through the strategic framework. The changing demographic will impact on digital inclusion over future years and analysis of new data emerging post-pandemic will need to be done.

The Council has provided a robust response to the challenges of the pandemic, and has increased provision of equipment and specific one-to-one help to help get residents online or upskill them during the pandemic. Whilst help over the phone will never replace face-to-face learning for digital beginners, it has helped some residents stay in contact with their families and enable them to feel more self-sufficient.