

# Report

Report to:	<b>Finance and Corporate Resources Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>20 May 2020</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Digital Inclusion Strategy 2020/2023</b>
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## **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise of the outcome of the citizen survey questionnaire - Digital Connectivity 2019
- ◆ request approval of the Digital Inclusion Strategy

## **2. Recommendation(s)**

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the findings of the citizen survey questionnaire - Digital Connectivity 2019, be noted; and
- (2) that the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy 2020/2023, attached as an appendix to the report, be approved.

## **3. Background**

3.1. Audit Scotland conducted a Best Value Audit at South Lanarkshire Council and published its report on 28 March 2019.

3.2. Auditors reported that their public focus group "identified some concerns related to digital exclusion as more services move online. Research in this area has found that a significant proportion of people who cannot access digital services come from the most deprived and vulnerable groups (referred to as the 'seldom heard' in the council's Community Engagement Framework). Tackling this issue could be helpful in addressing the CPP's objective of 'tackling deprivation, poverty, and inequality'. The council's digital strategy makes no mention of the problem of digital exclusion. Although the council has some arrangements in place to address digital exclusion, there is no overarching strategy and corporate approach to tackling this issue. The council should prepare a digital inclusion strategy to complement its digital strategy."

3.3. The Council agreed with this finding and committed to preparing and publishing a Digital Inclusion Strategy.

## **4. Approach**

4.1. This action was progressed via South Lanarkshire Partnership's Digital Inclusion Sub-group, which comprises representation from Council Resources, NHS Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership, South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture Trust and a range of 3rd sector partners and is supported by the Council's Community Participation and Empowerment Team (Tackling Poverty Team).

- 4.2. Some desktop research was also undertaken looking at surveys undertaken on the issue by the Office for National Statistics and the results of the Scottish Government's Scottish Household Survey on the use of the internet and this was used to design a citizens' survey on the use of the internet. This was piloted by Community Links with people of lived experience of digital exclusion and this feedback was then used to inform the survey that was undertaken.
- 4.3. The Digital Connectivity 2019 survey was conducted between 5 September and 8 November 2019 and data was gathered in two distinct ways:-
- ◆ face to face interviews conducted by Community Links (3rd sector partners) in Fairhill, Hamilton which is one of the Council's Neighbourhood Planning areas
  - ◆ on-line returns which were input directly by citizens. The survey was publicised on the Council's website and in public-facing council premises such as libraries.
- 4.4. Using both methods provided a rounded view of not only who did/did not use the internet, but also what they used it for, and feedback on how to improve/extend internet use.
- 4.5. Internet usage was also included in the latest Scottish Household Survey (2018) which surveyed 980 individuals across 380 households in South Lanarkshire. The main findings for South Lanarkshire were that:-
- ◆ 88% of households accessed the internet in 2018
  - ◆ 96% accessed it at home
  - ◆ 7.5% used the public library – over twice the Scottish average
  - ◆ a fifth more than in Scotland accessed it and community and voluntary organisations – but only 0.8%
  - ◆ 88.4% used their mobile phone, smartphone or iPhone to access the internet
  - ◆ 22% used their digital TV
  - ◆ 89% said they were confident accessing public services online
  - ◆ only 29% used the internet to look for or apply for jobs
  - ◆ 21% were not confident about online privacy settings and 20% were not able to identify which websites to trust
- 4.6. The results of the 2018 survey show that there remains just under 20% of the population that are not using the internet. Citizens who are not online can be socially excluded and also experience the poverty premium not being equipped to access services and financial benefits online.
- 4.7. The Household Survey also shows that mobile phones are the main way people are accessing the internet but that people in South Lanarkshire do use community internet access significantly more than in Scotland as a whole – this may reflect the investment in internet access through Council libraries and it's funding for Community Link's SELECT projects.
- 4.8. Around a fifth of people still have issues around the internet, especially around security, which is likely to limit their use of the internet and do not therefore see it as a route to employment or training. This should be borne in mind in relation to the Council's recruitment and also employability policies and programmes.

## **5. 2019 Citizen Survey Results and Findings**

- 5.1. There were 329 on-line responses and 171 interview responses, totalling 500.
- 5.2. The responses backed up the findings of the Scottish Household survey and highlighted that the main reasons for non-use of the internet were:-
  - ◆ lack of digital skills
  - ◆ cost of an internet connection
  - ◆ don't have a phone/computer
  - ◆ not interested
  - ◆ family members/friends access the internet on their behalf
  - ◆ poor mobile signal or slow/no bandwidth
  - ◆ too complicated/difficult to use
  - ◆ worried about security
- 5.3. For those respondents who did use the internet, the most popular devices used to access the internet are smartphones, followed by tablets, laptops and smart TVs.
- 5.4. Feedback was obtained on how to improve internet access for local communities. The majority of suggestions were to provide more free wi-fi, improve bandwidth and availability of broadband (including in rural areas), expand free provision of devices (tablets/laptops) in libraries and reduce the cost of internet access.
- 5.5. A wide range of digital abilities was reported along with varying degrees of confidence in carrying out common on-line tasks.
- 5.6. 13.3% of survey respondents indicated that they did not know where to get help with accessing the internet. This was fairly consistent across all age groups.
- 5.7. Older age groups were less confident in carrying out many internet related tasks, including applying for benefits online.
- 5.8. Broadband take-up rates were lowest in most deprived areas and highest in least deprived areas. Usage of internet was also lower in the more deprived areas.
- 5.9. People from more deprived areas were more likely to use a library or community hubs to access the internet. (Note: South Lanarkshire Council currently provides 128 devices for public use in 23 locations. Usage of these devices varies widely across different sites from minimal to heavy use at peak times).
- 5.10. People from the most deprived areas were more likely to agree with the statement that "The Internet has nothing of interest to me".
- 5.11. People from more deprived areas reported lower confidence levels in carrying out on-line tasks including sending emails, applying for jobs and applying for benefits.

## **6. Digital Inclusion Strategy**

- 6.1. The Digital Inclusion Sub-group has analysed the results of the survey and has recommended priority areas to address each of the reasons for digital exclusion.

6.2. The priority areas are grouped into the four main categories:-

- (1) Improve availability – and the speed – of the internet to citizens
- (2) Reduce cost barriers to accessing the internet
- (3) Improve digital skills and confidence – with a focus on key areas to tackle deprivation and poverty – access to employment and training and to address the “poverty premium” paid by not being able to access online deals
- (4) Enhance the Council’s digital services to make it easier for citizens to engage digitally with the Council

6.3. Actions described in the Strategy will be included, monitored and reported as part of the Digital Inclusion Sub-Group action plan.

## **7. Employee Implications**

7.1. Several of the actions arising from the Digital Inclusion Strategy may have training implications for employees who deal directly with citizens. This will be to ensure that they have the appropriate digital skills to support citizens who need assistance with on-line services. In some cases, this training should be made available to partners.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1. It is anticipated that costs associated with the Digital Inclusion Strategy will be met from current or planned funding for other programmes, such as the implementation of the Council’s Digital Strategy and Tackling Poverty/ Neighbourhood Planning initiatives.

8.2. A programme to roll out public wi-fi provision was included in the Future Capital Investment Strategy approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2018. In addition, £150,000 of funding for public wi-fi has been included in a capital bid submission for 2020/2021.

8.3. The possibility of accessing external sources of funding from national initiatives/strategies will be investigated where relevant to Council digital inclusion priorities.

## **9. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications**

9.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

## **10. Other Implications**

10.1. There are no implications for risk in terms of the information contained within this report.

## **11. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

11.1. Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as part of implementation of specific aspects of the Digital Inclusion Strategy.

11.2. Consultation has been undertaken as outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report.

**Paul Manning**

**Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)**

28 April 2020

**Link(s) to Council Values/Visions/Objectives**

- ◆ Improve the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire
- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Working with and respecting others
- ◆ Ambitious, self-aware and improving
- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable
- ◆ Support our communities by tackling disadvantage and deprivation and supporting aspiration

**Previous References**

- ◆ Executive Committee - 21 November 2018

**List of Background Papers**

- ◆ SLC Citizen survey questionnaire – Digital Connectivity 2019?
- ◆ SLC Citizen survey findings 2019
- ◆ Office for National Statistics – Internet Access – Households and Individuals 2019
- ◆ Ofcom – Internet Use and Attitudes 2017
- ◆ Scottish Household Survey 2018
- ◆ Audit Scotland Best Value report March 2019 – South Lanarkshire Council  
<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/best-value-assurance-report-south-lanarkshire-council>

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Brian Teaz, Head of IT Services

Ext: 5648 (Tel: 01698 455648)

E-mail: [brian.teaz@southlanarkshire.gov.uk](mailto:brian.teaz@southlanarkshire.gov.uk)