



AGENDA ITEM: 5(q)

CABINET: 15th September 2015

Report of: Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration/Transformation Manager

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (Transformation)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J. Patterson

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SUBJECT: DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY 2015-18

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval for the Digital Inclusion Strategy 2015-18 and action plan attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Digital Inclusion Strategy 2015-18 (Appendix 1) and action plan be adopted.

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CURRENT POSITION

3.1 The internet has transformed almost every aspect of life, revolutionising communication and business. It is reshaping government through enabling remodelling of the way public services are delivered.

3.2 Importantly for West Lancashire is the lead taken by the UK Government on 'Digital by Default' public services and Welfare Reform. Not only is West Lancashire, like all UK local authorities, expected to follow this lead, but the authority has also to manage the effect of transforming delivery of public services on its residents.

3.3 While the internet provides broad benefits, by helping to address social and economic issues like reducing isolation and improving health, 14% of West

Lancashire residents (approximately 10,000 individuals) do not have the skills or inclination to use the internet (Office of National Statistics). This affects their ability to search for work or to apply for benefits. With the introduction of the online only Universal Credit application process and Universal Job match it is vital that all West Lancashire residents have the skills and understanding to use the internet, not only to save money but to apply for benefits, search for work and have an attractive skill level for employers.

- 3.4 If residents of the Borough do not have the skills and access to the internet, the Council's ability to collect revenue across all service areas will eventually be compromised, this is particularly true for Housing Services and could have a major impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. In addition to this, communities most in need will be increasingly cut off from the means of self-support and wealth generation. Actions in this strategy will compliment what we are trying to achieve with the Financial Inclusion Strategy in ensuring that tenants have the skills that they need to find work, claim benefits, use online services to save money maximising the financial capacity of the communities of West Lancashire.
- 3.5 This strategy aims to address the key elements of 'Digital Exclusion' and provide an equality skill level which will help with the access to public services for all communities throughout the Borough.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 4.1 There are no significant negative sustainability impacts associated with this report. There is potential for positive impacts such as tenants sustaining tenancies, and more money in the local economy.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Digital Inclusion Strategy 2015-18 will ensure the Council is able to continue to pursue its objectives during the period of austerity. For the Housing Service, in particular, it is critical to the HRA Business Plan that the service has the ability to ensure that income is easily collected and it offers a range of ways to make that collection. In addition, because of the changes announced in the budget in July 2015, the service area needs to ensure that it can deliver services in a more effective and efficient way and deliver cost reductions as part of this service delivery. This strategy will ensure that as the Council inevitably moves more services online tenants and vulnerable groups such as disabled or older people will be in a position to access these.
- 5.2 There is a small budget of £20K designed to investigate some of the options suggested in the Action Plan. Any costs arising from implementation of this plan will be carried out using current resources or included in the budget setting process.

6.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy and associated action plan mitigates against the risks that the Council will not deliver its aspirations in terms of channel shift and savings and efficient delivery of services going forward.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Digital Inclusion Strategy 2015-18

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment