**Digital Inclusion Strategy
2015-2018**

Introduction

The internet has transformed almost every aspect of public, private and work life. It has underpinned our new economy; from changing the way every workplace communicates to creating entire new industries. It is reshaping government through enabling remodelling of the way public services are delivered and providing transparency through open data.

In the current economic climate, with increasing pressures on public expenditure, significant long-term savings and efficiencies can be made through increased use of online services by customers. Along with demographic changes and increasing citizen expectations, digital delivery of public services offers the public sector an opportunity to meet these diverse demands. The efficiency savings generated by increasing the number of online transactions mean that some local authorities are able to divert more resources, to improving the quality of services and support those most in need.

However, recent research published by the Cabinet Office states that 20% of Britain's population is offline or lack the basic digital skills required to gain the benefits of the internet.[1]

In order to maximise the online use of public services, it is necessary to engage this section of the adult population who are currently "digitally excluded"; they are also likely to be amongst the heaviest users of public services.

This strategy sets out how West Lancashire Borough Council will tackle this issue and increase digital inclusion over the next three years by helping residents become capable of using the internet and benefiting from it.

---

[1] From volumes to value, An outcomes framework for measuring the benefits of digital inclusion, June 2015

Table of Contents

Aims of the Strategy

The aims of the Digital Inclusion Strategy are:

- To increase the proportion of residents in the borough who have basic online skills and access to the internet.

- To increase the proportion of residents using West Lancashire Borough Council's online services (with the long-term aim of enabling the authority to save money on the way it delivers services to residents).

This strategy is critical to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the Housing & Regeneration Service Financial Inclusion Strategy; successful take-up by tenants of the new online Universal Credit and Universal Jobmatch is fundamental to the service areas need to maximise rental income and support tenants into employment. This strategy has been developed with reference to a number of key plans and reports, including Lancashire County Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy and the UK Government Digital Inclusion Strategy so that it aligns to regional and national policy, and with the Digital Deal Challenge Fund Evaluation as this provides best practice across the sector.

The Digital Inclusion Strategy will also support and contribute to the aims of the annual Digital Development Plan. While the Digital Inclusion Strategy aims to ensure that residents have the skills and access to the internet to enable them to choose digital as their channel of preference, the annual Digital Development Plan, part of a new Digital by Preference approach, sets out in detail the steps the Council will take to improve and extend online services. Ensuring they are easy to use for customers and cost-effective for the Council, and to digitise internal processes to increase efficiency and contribute to savings.

Who is digitally excluded and what does it mean?

UK-wide there is 80% internet adoption; half of these are fully digitally skilled while half can perform some functions online but would like to increase their skills.

The remaining 20% of the population are 'digitally excluded': they have no plans to go online; they may be lapsed users or have no interest in the internet, do not see the benefits and lack confidence to seek help.[2]

Digital exclusion can affect people in all sections of the community. National research shows that the majority of digitally excluded citizens fall into at least one of the following categories:

- Aged 60+
- Living in social housing
- Disabled
- Homeless
- Ex-offenders
- Socio-economic group D & E (casual or lowest grade workers, pensioners, and others who depend on the welfare state for their income, semi and unskilled manual workers)

These groups are more likely to be affected by the main causes of digital exclusion; financial, educational and lack of confidence.

Tackling digital exclusion involves addressing the main challenges that stop people going online:

- **access** - the ability to actually go online and connect to the internet
- **skills** - to be able to use the internet
- **motivation** - knowing the reasons why using the internet is a good thing
- **trust** - a fear of crime, or not knowing where to start to go online
- **cost** – being able to afford broadband connectivity and internet enabled devices

To make sure the web is truly available for everyone, we need to provide more than just access. We need to equip West Lancashire residents with the skills, motivation and trust to go online, be digitally capable and to make the most of the internet.

What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital inclusion is defined in terms [3] of:

- **Digital skills** - being able to use computers and the internet, to communicate, share information such as filling in forms, find things such as jobs, transact, i.e. use online banking and stay safe
- **Connectivity** - access to the internet, devices and a WiFi/Broadband signal
- **Accessibility** - services should be designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services.

Go ON UK[4], the UK's leading national digital skills charity, has outlined the basic digital skills. This definition was redefined in January 2015, becoming more complex to reflect the changing pace of technology. Possessing digital skills is defined as having the following abilities:

---

[2] From volumes to value, An outcomes framework for measuring the benefits of digital inclusion, June 2015
[3] Cabinet Office & GDS, Government Digital Inclusion Strategy, December 2014

- **Managing information –** Find, manage and store digital information and content
- **Communicating –** Communicate, interact, collaborate, share and connect with others
- **Transacting –** Purchase and sell and use digital government services, organise finances
- **Problem solving –** Increase independence and confidence by solving problems and finding solutions using digital tools
- **Creating –** Create basic digital content in order to engage with digital communities and organisations.

The Business Case for tackling digital exclusion

It is cheaper for local authorities to provide services online than by phone or personal visit; Socitm (Society of IT Managers) published average channel cost figures for local authorities in its 2013 report "Doing better with less"; face-to-face £8.15; phone £2.59; web £0.09.

However, savings will only be achieved if people use the online services that the council provides, in preference to using the phone or making a personal visit combined with a fully digital back office. By tackling digital exclusion, equipping local people with the skills and confidence they need to use the internet, and making them aware of the online services that the council offers, the council will drive up use of online services and so contribute to savings.

An important business driver is the need, for example especially in an era of welfare reform, to help and encourage West Lancashire residents to maximise their household income through the effective take up of benefits online as well as using digital technology to gain employment, and to achieve savings on household bills and other spending.

A digital inclusion strategy can help to boost skills and provide the experience to access training and support as well as promoting health and wellbeing among isolated communities, particularly among older people.

Benefits of digital inclusion:

- Drives education attainment (helping children with school work, monitoring their online activity)
- Enabling access to online health information and services
- Enabling access to online public services including benefits
- Social benefits
- Providing opportunities to save money
- Providing opportunities to find and apply for jobs

UK Government commitment to digital inclusion

The UK government's Digital by Default approach aims to have everyone who can be, online in the next five years. The government is rolling out Universal Credit, which requires people to submit online applications. Additionally online job searches via Universal Jobmatch will be a

---

4 Go ON UK is jointly leading a cross-sector partnership focused on increasing UK digital inclusion It focused intense campaigns on three national areas, one of which was the North West. Stemming from this, a six month Go On Lancashire project ran between September 2014 – February 2015

condition of receiving benefit and claimants will require a 'gov.uk' account or be subject to sanctions.

The government is investing in world-class internet access and digital infrastructure, including public investment of over £1 Billion to boost coverage of superfast broadband across the UK.

Government Digital Service (GDS) was set up to make government digital services and information simpler, clearer and faster, by putting users' needs before the needs of government, resulting in GOV.UK, simplification of online services.

Where we are now?

The latest figures[5] show that West Lancashire has between 85 – 89% of internet users against a UK average of 87%. This means that between 11 – 15% of the borough's population do not use the internet, compared to a UK average of 12.6%.

Based on 2013 population data, this equates to approximately 10,000 digitally excluded individuals in West Lancashire.

At this stage there are no detailed local figures about West Lancashire residents' access to the internet and use of it. Action to collect these is included in the 2015/16 action plan through a survey of residents, which will provide baseline information. Further surveys in future years could help measure the success of initiatives and track changes.

Libraries have been running digital training for the past five years and they are just some of the UK Online Centres offering free online access and training in the borough. Government funding to assist with the Universal Credit pilot has provided this support. A campaign conducted during Spring Online in April 2015, tested the response in West Lancashire communities to an online campaign. The learning from these events has been used to inform this strategy.

Digital by Preference

While the Digital Inclusion Strategy aims to ensure that residents have the skills and access to use digital as their channel of preference, the Digital by Preference approach focuses on the work that needs to be undertaken by the Council to provide easy to use, accessible services online.

In 2014, the Council invested in a major website redesign, creating a mobile friendly approach. This is supported by Browse Aloud software, an accessible web reader for users with no or limited vision who struggle to read; it also provides translations.

For a number of years the Council has taken a 'click, call, come in' approach to customer service, which aims to make the digital channel the first choice for customers and promote channel shift. The number and range of online services has steadily increased as a result of this and now more than 100 services and payments are provided via the website. Data is collected to measure take-up of the online services and payments; actions to extend data measurement are included in the action plan to support the Digital Inclusion activity.

An annual plan, the Digital Development Plan (formerly the web improvement plan) sets out in detail further proposed improvements to the website and online services as part of the Digital by Preference approach with the aim of continuing to provide more services online and improve the delivery of existing online services. A number of the proposed improvements in the Digital Development Plan will support the Digital Inclusion Strategy by improving the website and online services and making them easier to use for customers. The Digital Development Plan is therefore referenced in the action plan in this strategy.

---

[5] ONS, Internet use by NUTS 3 area, Quarter 1 2014

Digital Inclusion Best Practice

Initial digital inclusion projects across the UK have been quantified and assessed and provide valuable learning experiences for the implementation of digital inclusion in West Lancashire. Best practice shows that the most effective way to reach hard to reach groups is through referrals. This means directing people identified as being in need to services that can help them rather than expecting them to self-select those services. The following criteria has been drawn up by the Government Digital Service (GDS) as best practice and the West Lancashire Borough Council action plan aims to address these issues.

1. <u>Start with user needs – not our own.</u> Tailor support around the unique barriers that stop people going online, and adapt to people's needs which change over time. Services need to be built for the user, not for local government.
2. <u>Improve access – stop making things difficult.</u> Provide simple, low cost options for those who are socially and economically excluded to get online. The most digitally excluded are often the most socially and economically excluded, and could benefit the most from going online. Making the practical steps of going online easy and affordable makes a huge difference to people who are new to the internet.
3. <u>Motivate people – find something they care about.</u> Bring digital into people's lives in a way that benefits them; helping them do things they care about and can only do online. Pushing people to do something that doesn't interest them doesn't work.
4. <u>Keep it safe – build trust.</u> Make it easier to stay safe online by providing simple and straightforward advice and tools. This is a particular barrier for older and less affluent residents.
5. <u>Work with others – don't do it alone.</u> Work with partners to maximise expertise, experience and resources to better meet user needs
6. <u>Focus on wider outcomes – measure performance.</u>

Go On Campaign

Government Digital Service makes the point that collaboration across all sectors is the way forward and this is the planned approach in West Lancashire, as set out in the action plan.

Following the Go On North West and Go On Lancashire campaign, successful partnership working with Community-i West Lancashire and Lancashire Libraries pointed to the opportunity to recruit more partners who are currently working on their own digital inclusion agendas, and co-ordinating and strengthening the campaign.

Go On West Lancashire – proposed partnership approach

Networking to date suggests that the community, the third sector and statutory bodies across West Lancashire are keen to link to the digitally excluded and that there is support for the establishment of a Go ON West Lancashire network, providing a partnership approach to Digital Inclusion with the aims of:

• Empowering everyone in West Lancs to reach their digital potential.
• Sharing initiatives, expertise and work jointly on digital inclusion initiatives.
• Sharing best practice and deliver thought leadership on digital skills throughout West Lancashire.
• Promoting Digital Inclusion initiatives across the borough.

There are different audiences with different needs across the borough; therefore a 'one size fits all' campaign may not be as effective as taking a different marketing approach for each audience. This would be facilitated by a partnership approach, which will facilitate co-ordinated campaigns, with the potential for events in a wide mix of venues such as libraries, community centres, health centres and other local UK Online centres, and with promotion through grassroots community organisations.

Establishing a Go On West Lancashire partnership is a key action in the 2015/16 action plan.

Go On West Lancashire potential partners:

- Lancashire County Council (LCC)
- West Lancashire College (WLC)
- Edgehill University
- UK Online Centres
- Community Centres

- West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Services
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Job Centre Plus
- UK Online
- Parish Councils

- West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- One West Lancashire
- Community-i

Partnership model

SWOT analysis of digital inclusion within West Lancashire Borough Council

Looking at the current situation within the authority, the table below presents an overview of the strengths that the organisation has and the barriers that need to be overcome to enable it to move forward with digital inclusion.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Commitment at senior level • Political commitment from all parties	• Limited resources • Digital communications activity needs authority-wide leadership and investment • Some software currently not capable of delivering our requirements
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Digital inclusion role offers opportunities to improve communications and services • Funding streams are available • Partnership opportunities with statutory bodies, third sector, etc. to work together on digital inclusion	• Getting left behind by technology • Losing willing customers through poor online experience • Reductions in funding / budgets

Digital Inclusion Strategy - critical success factors

Critical success factors are those elements that need to be in place in order to ensure the success of the project. Below is an analysis of potential issues and related contingencies.

Critical success factors	Why it is important	Mitigation/contingencies
Successful partnerships	Digital inclusion needs a partnership approach to be successful and sustainable	Partners currently being sought, connections made with county council and Go On UK
Management and political support	To ensure the strategy is effectively resourced	Keep management and members on side with regular updates of successes, achievements. Appoint a political champion of digital inclusion and sign the Digital Skills Charter.
Budget	Projects need to be resourced	A £20K budget has been allocated to the Digital Inclusion project for 2015/16. External funding and support is also available

Commitments of this Strategy

- Helping break down barriers for people who are digitally excluded and supporting them to build the digital capability they need to fully benefit from being online
- Bringing together a wide range of different stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors to align plans and coordinate activities in order to maximize impact for and sustain support for individual citizens
- Working closely with stakeholders to identify and deliver creative approaches to getting people online to achieve the shared 'outcome' of digital inclusion
- Achieving sustainable change for the digitally excluded
- Ensuring the use of digital technology is embedded in the habits of residents

Action plan

An annual action plan will be prepared to deliver the aims of the strategy.

The 2015/16 action plan is attached at Appendix A.

This is set out in five sections: corporate actions; actions that address three of the main barriers to digital inclusion: connectivity, skills and accessibility; and communications.

The action plan will be reviewed in March/April 2016 order to inform the preparation of the 2016/17 action plan.

Measuring success

One of the actions set out in the plan is consultation in early 2016 to measure assess internet use and access. The results of this survey will provide figures that can be used to measure success of the implementation of the strategy in future years.
A single shared framework has been developed by Government Digital Service. It aims to provide comparable findings and produce evidence about what works to make it easier to share best practice, providing consistent, common robust measures across public and third sectors. West Lancashire Borough Council will participate in the pilot of this framework.
Additionally, the implementation of the strategy will be measured in a variety of ways:

- For some actions, success will be measured by completion within the year.
- Feedback will be gathered from partners along with any statistics and figures they have.
- Increasing use of online services compared with telephone access and personal visit.

Appendix A: 2015/16 Action Plan

1. CORPORATE	Detail/Issues	Who can do this? Lead /involving	Priority (1 – 3)	Cost
Make digital inclusion part of wider WLBC policy, programmes and digital services	Sign Digital Skills Charter	Cabinet	1	Nil
	Nominate a political representative to act as digital inclusion champion	Cabinet	1	Nil
	Add digital inclusion agenda to Corporate Business Plan	Transformation Manager (TM)	1	Nil
	Ensure that the Digital Inclusion Strategy is aligned with the Digital by Preference approach (subject to Cabinet approval).	TM Each service needs to link Digital Inclusion into their communications and digital plans	1	Nil
Continue to improve and develop the Council's website and online services (annual digital development plan)	Proposed improvements are set out in the digital development plan, including investigating the potential for service delivery via an app in Housing and Regeneration.	TM / Comms and Consultation (C&C) / Housing Communications and Digital Inclusion Officer (HCDIO)	1	Officer time Possible budget implications
Define the needs and attitudes of residents, and set benchmarks	Conduct baseline survey of use and attitudes in West Lancashire as part of the Citizen and Stakeholder Survey 2016. This will provide baseline figures that will inform action plans and form the basis of research, which will help assess the success of digital inclusion initiatives.	TM / C&C / HCDIO	1	TBC. (Funding may be available in corporate consultation budget)
	Extend data gathering to compare use of online services with traditional service access to track trends and measure success	TM / C&C / Customer services / HCDIO	2	Officer time Possible budget implications

Establish Go ON West Lancashire partnership	Bring together community, third sector and statutory bodies across West Lancs in a Go ON West Lancs network, providing a partnership approach to digital inclusion	HCDIO	1	Officer time
CONNECTIVITY				
To improve residents' access to IT equipment and broadband / WiFi	Investigate the possibility of 'cleaning' and donating older IT equipment to residents	Led by HCDIO / In partnership with Lancashire CC and BTLS	2	
	Install 'free' community WiFi to two trial locations	Working group formed (Performance and Project Manager / Tenant Participation/ HCDIO) In partnership with BT	1	£6 per home per month.
	Investigate ways to help residents get cheaper broadband deals from suppliers	Led by HCDIO / In partnership with Lancashire CC and BTLS	2	Officer time
	Investigate UK Online assistance / partners / initiatives	Led by HCDIO in partnership with Go On West Lancs*	1	Officer time
	Prepare a 'how to' bidding pack for equipment and support aimed at community groups and third sector organisations	HCDIO	3	Officer time
	Conduct audit of IT equipment in Sheltered Housing and develop action plan to address any needs arising from this	HCDIO / Sheltered Housing Team	1	Officer time Possible budget implications
	Survey of IT wants, needs and attitudes in Sheltered Housing	HCDIO / Sheltered Housing Team / TP Team	2	Officer time
	Investigate development of new wireless hotspots in public spaces such as town centres, parks and public buildings.	HCDIO / in partnership with Leisure Services	3	Officer time

	Assess use of existing WiFi hotspots and further promote their use.	HCDIO	2	Officer time
ACCESS				
To improve accessibility of WLBC website to maximise its use (as set out in digital development plan)	On-going review of site accessibility via Siteimprove	C&C / HCDIO	1	Officer time
	Promote browse aloud	C&C/ HCDIO	1	Officer time
	Remove PDFs from website and transfer contents to web pages	C&C/ HCDIO	2	Officer time
	External user testing programme focusing on accessibility to identify the user experience (UX) barriers specific to WLBC.	C&C	2	Officer time
	Complete further accessibility improvements to the website as set out in digital development plan	C&C	3	Officer time
SKILLS				
To increase the proportion of residents in the borough who have basic online skills	Investigate potential for customer service team to act as 'Digital Champions'	TM / Customer services	3	Officer time
	Take part in national promotions such as Spring Online & Get Online Week in order to raise awareness and improve skills	HCDIO with Go ON West Lancs and partners	1	Officer time
	Create a network of trained, community based Digital Champions to teach and promote digital skills	HCDIO with Go ON West Lancs partners	1	Possible budget implications
	Partner with a training provider to support tenants to gain skills	HCDIO with Go ON West Lancs partners	1	Possible budget implications
	Investigate use of volunteers from Edge Hill University to give IT support to older people	HCDIO with Go ON West Lancs partners	2	Officer time
	Investigate programs aimed at	HCDIO / West Lancs College /	3	Officer time

	promoting digital jobs	Schools		
	Investigate digital workshops / events aimed at school age children and young people	HCDIO / West Lancs College / Schools	3	Officer time
	Investigate digital workshops / events aimed at older teens and adults	Housing Communications and Digital HCDIO / West Lancs College / Schools / Community Centres / Associations	3	Officer time
	Link adults to online financial advice and money saving web services	Financial Inclusion Officer (referrals)	1	Officer time
	Set up user testing group among tenants	HCDIO	1	Officer time
	Refer potential business skills development opportunities to Regeneration Team	HCDIO / LCC / Regeneration Team	2	Officer time
	Promote successes through award schemes	HCDIO	3	Officer time
COMMUNICATIONS				
Raise awareness among residents / tenants of the Council's online services	Develop awareness campaign, using e.g. press, social media, advertising, newsletters, meetings, workshops etc	C&C / HCDIO	1	Possible budget implications
Raise awareness among residents /tenants of the importance of digital skills, technology, online safety, universal credit etc	Develop campaigns using a range of methods e.g. social media, partnership approach.	HCDIO / C&C	1	Officer time

	Encourage residents to sign up for text and email services offered by local emergency services such as Police and Ambulance services to encourage use of digital technology.	HCDIO/Go ON West Lancs	2	Officer time
Publicise workshops / online skills events	Maximize attendance at events organised for tenants /residents.	HCDIO / C&C	1	Officer time
Extend use of social media by Housing Services to support digital inclusion agenda	Trial use of Facebook in Housing Services to publicise	HCDIO	1	Officer time
Embed digital inclusion communications into all routine communications activities	Link digital inclusion with services' communications and publicity plans	C&C / HCDIO	1	Officer time

* Partnership with Go On West Lancs include:
Lancashire County Council
Lancashire Police
Council for Voluntary Services (CVS)
West Lancashire Borough Council
Department of Works and Pensions (DWP)
Quarrybank
West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group
Edge Hill University
West Lancashire Community