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London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Policy and Oversight Board
Draft Minutes

Monday 12 September 2022

<u>PRESENT</u>

Committee members: Councillors Lisa Homan (Chair), Jacolyn Daly, Natalia Perez, Nikos Souslous, Nicole Trehy, Rory Vaughan and Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler

Other Councillors: Rebecca Harvey, Bora Kwon, Patricia Quigley (V) and Rowan Ree

Officers: Veronica Barella, Chief Digital Officer; Jennie Bayliss, Programme Lead; David Isaac, H&F Coproduction Coordinator; Darren Persaud, Reap Programme Delivery and Support Manager (V); Stefan Robinson, Head of Policy Unit and PMO; and Matthew Sales, Assistant Director, Programmes and Assurance

Guests: Lisa Howie, Community Fibre; Elisabeth Petts, resident co-Chair of the Resident Digital Accessibility Group; James Prowse, Hyperoptic; Simi Ryatt, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice HF; Catherine Tyson, Managing Consultant, Agilisys

((V) indicates online attendance)

1. ### <u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u>

   Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Helen Rowbottom.

2. ### <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u>

   Councillor Lisa Homan declared a non-pecuniary interest due to her position as a trustee of Citizens Advice, H&F, in respect of agenda item 4. Councillor Nikos Souslous declared a non-pecuniary interest due to his position as co-founder and secretary of Ready Tech Go, a local charity.

3. ### <u>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING</u>

   ### <u>RESOLVED</u>

   That minutes of the 20 June 2022 were agreed.

4. DEVELOPING OUR DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

Officer Presentation on Council's developing Digital Inclusion Strategy

The Board welcomed officers and guest speakers which sought to explore emerging themes on digital inclusion informing the council's developing digital inclusion strategy. Veronica Barella outlined the council's vision which aligned closely with the mayor's vision on digital inclusion to 2025 and to work with LOTI (London Office of Technology & Innovation). The aim was to develop a digital ecosystem working with residents, local volunteers, and business partners, to deliver a joined up, accessible digital inclusion strategy for H&F. Challenges included identifying and removing barriers such as lack of skills or awareness, or prohibitive tariffs and to source robust data that would help identify the range of needs and priorities.

Cathy Tyson described the work undertaken by the Digital Maturity Assessment which informed and developed a set of best practice measures benchmarking digital standards for accessing online services. Work to date with the public sector and community groups was recognised as an unstainable model and it was suggested that the public sector needed to use its power to leverage provision. Darren Persaud described the work Resident Experience Access Programme which supported the provision of online services that residents may access, and identified 6 pillars of digital inclusion: devices, infrastructure, connectivity, data, skills, jobs and related projects.

James Prowse, Regional Manager – Local Authorities, Hyperoptic

Hyperoptic was founded in 2011 to bring connectivity to urban areas (flats), and provides broadband services to 900k homes, most of which were in London. They had worked with H&F to bring connectivity to those in social housing and about 20-25% of those who could access the provision did so through Hyperoptic. James Prowse state that their intention was to build links with partners across the borough so that by 2024, 80% of residents in flats (and individual homes) could access the hyperactive network. He recognised that there was considerable fear and confusion about digital space and the digital maturity assessment offered opportunities to identify resident touchpoints in accessible locations. It was important to raise awareness of market choices and the range of tariff options so that people were not locked into long term contracts and could switch when it was cost effective to do so. 50% of H&F residents needed financial help so a public service message raising awareness of 'Fair fibre tariff' was suggested.

Lisa Howie, Landlord Success Manager, Community Fibre

Community Fibre had worked with H&F since 2018 rolling out connections for residents in social housing and working with private landlords and local business. The roll out included houses of multiple occupation and single use dwellings. Community Fibre had worked with other local authorities and referenced their work with WCC which had been recognised with a nomination for an award.

Community Fibre were currently recruiting and training four H&F digital ambassadors or champions and was being offered to Disclosure and Barring Service checked volunteers with skills and knowledge (e.g., university applicants) to provide digital skills training to residents. One digital ambassador had already been trained and more were needed. Typically, support was needed to set up email accounts or

resolve related issues, password resets, completing online forms, and help with CVs to access employment opportunities, and practical help with devices. There was limited access to online discounts which were inaccessible to those who were digitally excluded.

<u>Simi Ryatt – Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice H&F (CAHF)</u>

CAHF saw about 12k clients per year with 30k issues and who were some of the most vulnerable in the community. Most were aged over 50. 60% were aged over 60 and experienced significant barriers. CAHF had delivered digital skills support for 10 years, with the support of skilled volunteers. 42% of clients were male, 60% were white, the remainder were from Black and Asian ethnic minority communities. 75% were retired, and 6% worked part time, and 35% of respondents were in social housing.

CAHF worked closely with the council to advertise services through multiple channels, promoted through community groups. They sought digital support for day-to-day issues about devices, online forms, password resets, email set up, the basics that most people took for granted. They also sought support with confirming or making medical appointments or paying online fines. There was a distinction between digital literacy and digital inclusion. Barriers included being gifted devices that were too sophisticated for inexperienced people to use, many did not have Wi-Fi at home and were often fearful or felt overwhelmed about going online. Feeling safe online because of e.g., online scams was a concern. People were suspicious about online systems and many clients returned for repeat advice.

Simi Ryatt suggested that online access to the council website could be improved by consolidating credentials across all departments to create a single access account. She emphasised that alternative access through multiple face to face channels other than digital should be maintained. It was harder to recruit digital ambassadors or champions as the digital divide was increasing and there was an absence of data about the number of people who relied on friends and family to help them. H&F online forms were not intuitive and needed to be refined to allow easier progression and navigation where information was incomplete. The holding time for responding to residents by email or telephone required a quicker response time and the council's website could be more streamlined for easier navigation. Digital literacy aligned with the need for financial literacy, so support was needed to get people online safely. As a trusted brand CAHF was keen to work with the council to support residents

<u>David Isaac, Co-production co-ordinator – supporting the Digital Accessibility Group (DAG)</u>

David Isaac reported that the DAG had met three times since commencing work in May 2022. Currently within phase one a three-phase project a key objective was to help co-produce the development of the digital inclusion strategy. This required a long-term plan to be funded by the council across five key departments. The group consisted of 22 members, with a 50% split of officers and residents working collectively. A DAG sub group worked with the communications colleagues to help design a Cost-of-Living crisis webpage which had implemented most of the group's recommendations to produce an accessible design. DAG aimed to ensure a wider focus on digital accessibility and social inclusion which extended beyond practical competency skills. Aspirations included Wi-Fi access in libraries (the first hour was

free), develop digital inclusion charter and setup principles for connection, ensure H&F and partners were all fully inclusive and matching council standards, and ensure that H&F residents should not be isolated from accessing essential services by digital barriers.

Elizabeth Petts, Resident Co-chair, Digital Accessibility Group (DAG)

Elizabeth Petts explained that a consequence of digital exclusion was less choice, for the digitally excluded, who paid up to 13% more for products and services not online, and unable to make fully informed choices. Disadvantages included not benefiting from time savings that were available by visiting websites instead of telephone calls and waiting in person. 90% of employment opportunities required digital skills or experience and those in work earned about 10% less in earnings than those that were digitally skilled. There was greater isolation, lower communication, and interaction skills for those who were digitally excluded. Elizabeth Petts felt that a digital strategy was necessary to combine systems and welcomed the suggestion of a single input of credentials for digital access. There was a recognition that being online was not everyone's preferred method of interaction or communication, but digital systems required improved signposting. DAG was holding an open day on 27 September 2022, with support from Hyperoptic and other voluntary sector providers which members were invited to attend.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler asked how residents could be supported in learning the skills to be online and to use different devices, how much had take-up of Adult Learning courses increased by and could the costs of these be reduced to encourage take up. Commenting on the website which could benefit from improved navigation, Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler suggested that Wi-Fi could be freely accessible in libraries, together with digital champions located in libraries.

> **ACTIONS**: Data to be sought to identify trend patterns in adult learning course take up and if it was viable to incentivise improved take up through discounted cost; to explore if free or more accessible Wi-fi be offered in libraries; and digital champions be available in libraries to support residents.

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked what work could be undertaken immediately, for example, simplifying log in credentials and unifying them across multiple access points, and how could data protection protocols could be improved to offer less digitally skilled individuals greater security. It was acknowledged that the council was responsible for adhering to data protection protocols however, there was an issue about how data could be safely sourced and used. Simi Ryatt explained that completing online forms could be challenging and hard to navigate, citing specific examples that Citizens Advice (CAHF) had helped residents with. Councillor Vaughan also asked about the potential revenue raised by Wi-fi in libraries and whether there was evidence to indicate the level of demand and if people would use a free Wi-fi service.

> **ACTION:** Councillor Rowen Ree to find out the amount of revenue raised using library Wi-fi and what the evidence was for take up of this provision, to understand the feasibility of making the service free and the potential take up of this.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked about online consultation with GPs or making appointments for treatment and referrals which were increasingly digital. Vulnerable groups found this difficult to navigate, and she asked what support could be offered to address these barriers and if there a project to develop this. Councillor Perez also sought information about how residents whose first language was not English could be better supported as language presented a further barrier. Veronica Barella responded that digital related health issues were not within the remit of the council, but this could be further explored with NHS partners through the Health and Adult Social Care Policy and Accountability Committee (HASCPAC).

> **ACTION:** HASCPAC to explore improved digital inclusion regarding access to primary and acute are services.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked CAHF about how the focus of their digital hubs on skills and safety could be utilised and could they identify funds or pathways to identify help and support for residents so that they could learn to use their devices. David Isaac added that an expansion of digital champion network would be key e.g., help with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). He added that the different systems used in GP practices needed to be consolidated into one system. In exploring the issue further, Elizabeth Petts added that websites for GP practices were not easy to navigate with multiple questions. Teaching digital skills was critical but people were time poor and found it hard to access opportunities for adult learning.

> **ACTION:** The council to explore and implement improvements to its website and online services incorporating single account credentials, clearer signposting, and easier navigation.

In the context of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) Councillor Nicole Trehy asked how people and community touchpoints could be linked and signposted. Simi Ryatt explained that residents who were digitally included were tricky to identify and required patience and support, and given the fear factor, this learning process could become overwhelming. Councillor Trehy asked about safeguarding practices that officers could follow regarding the use of resident's data. Residents could become vulnerable with different providers coming into their homes, Councillor Trehy also asked how residents could be sensitively identified as digitally excluded and asked if was possible to host an accessible and inclusive digital hub at the civic campus, supported with co-ordinated assistance. While there had been a strong movement to digital, accelerated by the pandemic, a significant channel shift away from face-to-face access was a concern. Digital for some meant less face-to-face contact, exacerbating social isolation and loneliness. Simi Ryatt explained that CAHF was funded to setup four mini hubs across borough. It was possible to identify those in most need via different pathways, but this required funding. CAHF volunteers had installed Wi-Fi in Avonmore library themselves at a cost of £500, compared to a council quote of £25k but this was not a sustainable model. It was reported that a request to the Leader to allow the CAHF to be co-located at the new civic campus site had not received a response and the Board was urged to facilitate a response to support the request.

> **ACTION:** To facilitate a response from the Leader to the request to co-locate CAHF advice services at the civic campus, and the feasibility of offering free Wi-fi at the site.

Councillor Patricia Quigley commented as the Lead Member for Inclusive Community Engagement and Co-production that the DAG was the only group that consisted equally of members who were disabled and non-disabled residents who collaborated for the benefit of all residents. Councillor Quigley encouraged officers to connect with the community through effective and co-produced engagement.

As a co-founder and trustee of ReadyTechGo, Councillor Nikos Souslous welcomed the report and the positive progress and actions undertaken by the DAG as group of residents. ReadyTechGo received many referrals from Adult Social Care (the charity had worked with residents during the pandemic to install free Wi-Fi) however, there was a need to work cross-departmentally to understand how services could best identify those who were most at risk of digital exclusion. Councillor Souslous queried whether free Wi-Fi could be offered to families and children. It was Important to look at the trend patterns of using Wi-fi services at the libraries, linked to the cost of free Wi-Fi, compared to potential revenue, but Councillor Souslous felt that the cost of the implementing such a policy should not be prohibitive. It was confirmed that desktop computers were installed in libraries. Councillor Souslous felt that digital policies should extend beyond internal council processes to help people more widely e.g., Imperial College could help the council recruit student volunteers to work as digital champions.

> **ACTION:** Councillor Rowan Ree to consult with Councillor Sharon Holder, Cabinet Member for Public Realm regarding the potential use of public spaces such as libraries to host digital community support hubs.

Councillor Bora Kwon articulated many of the points touched on during the discussion around the development of hosting tech support hubs. She suggested that printing stations could be offered (limited to one or two sheets) or allow residents to access free charging points in libraries. Councillor Kwon observed that the difficulties of ensuring that the council website was accessible and inclusive was not limited to H&F, however this had significantly improved with the input of the co-production team. Two step authentication, Captcha and other security features presented barriers and challenges for the digitally excluded and Councillor Kwon suggested these be removed or adjusted to allow easier access. On the issue of digital health, Councillor Kwon commented that NHS hospitals were increasingly automating appointment systems and digitised processes would require login credentials to access these online. Digital skills e.g., providing free Wi-fi or skills training and support was needed to help residents to access services.

> **ACTION:** The council to consider and explore the feasibility of offering access to printing stations in libraries, aligning with other suggestions as to the accessible use of library spaces to facilitate the delivery of digital community support.

Councillor Homan led a discussion that summarised key points which included improved promotion of cost-efficient social tariffs and a greater awareness of how residents can be supported in accessing better deals online. There was a need to work cohesively and engage with residents and community organisations to pool knowledge and resources, for example the co-location of community digital support services or offering free Wi-fi at the civic campus. The Board welcomed news that CAHF received national funding to deliver an energy advice project co-located in

Avonmore library. Libraries are 'not warm', and it was unsafe to install extra power points as these could trip power circuits. CAHF offered to work with the council and DAG to provide feedback on how the council's website could be made more accessible, both in terms of layout and the terminology used.

The Board noted that Community Fibre delivered 34 Wi-fi spaces in community centres offering up to 1GB, with 18 of these located in sheltered housing, delivering on the intention to provide this in easily accessible public spaces. Hyperoptic observed that tariffs would potentially increase but had committed to not increase these during the duration of a contract. It was also important that the council use its position as a trusted community platform to leverage support and funding. Digital touched every aspect of modern life, and the council was faced with complex challenges. Hyperopic also offered to work with CAHF and DAG to find ways to offer support, recognising that there were barriers to accessing Wi-Fi through set tariffs.

ACTION: Cllr Harvey asked Hyperoptic to mention the cost of their social tariffs offer in their leaflets and to further explore the option of free Wi-Fi offer for community centres, both of which could be added to the council website.

5. POLICY AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE

Councillor Lisa Homan highlighted the importance of identifying emerging, cross-cutting themes. In discussing the cost-of-living it was recognised that this was an important issue affecting residents. The council was keen to ensure that services worked collaboratively to mitigate against the financial impact of the cost-of-living.

RESOLVED

That the report was noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED

That the cost-of-living be the focus of the next meeting of the Board, on 12 December 2022.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday, 12 December 2022.

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Meeting started: 7pm
Meeting ended: 9.21pm

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Chair   ....

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