London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to:	Policy and Oversight Board
Date:	12/12/2022
Subject:	Developing our Digital Inclusion Strategy
Report author:	Nicola Ellis, Assistant Director Resident Services, Veronica Barella, Chief Digital Officer
Responsible Director:	Bram Kainth Strategic Director Environment Jon Pickstone Strategic Director Economy
Responsible Cabinet Member:	Cllr Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform

Summary

This report provides an update on ongoing work to develop the Hammersmith and Fulham Digital Inclusion Strategy following a report to the Policy and Oversight Board in September.

Recommendation

That Policy and Oversight Board note the content of this report and provide any comments to help shape and inform the development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy.

Wards Affected: All

H&F Priorities

Our Priorities	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Priorities
Building shared prosperity	*Digital exclusion is linked to deprivation. Improving digital inclusion across the Borough will enable us to support our residents to increase opportunity to prosper.*
Creating a compassionate council	*Understanding difficulties and barriers our residents face in dealing with our services and gaining wider digital access where residents are experiencing their most difficult circumstances or have complex needs*
Doing things with local residents, not to them	*Learning from our residents' feedback enables us to ensure that we are delivering services that meet their needs. This strategy is being co-*

	produced with our Digital Accessibility Group including resident representation.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	*Ensuring that the strategy and actions that result deliver value for money and positive outcomes for our residents and community.* *Providing residents with more efficient digital access to services frees up council resources for other priorities.*
Taking pride in H&F	*Promoting and supporting a Borough that is digitally inclusive.*
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	*Digital engagement supports the climate change agenda reducing reliance on paper and unnecessary journeys to complete transactions in person.*

Background

1. The September meeting of the Policy Oversight Board focussed on development of our Digital Inclusion Strategy and a briefing report was provided giving details of the work to date and planned for the future. At that meeting, some useful recommendations were made to support the development and the board asked that an update report be presented to this meeting to update on progression since the last meeting.

H&F's proposed Digital Inclusion Vision and Mission statement

2. By 2025, Hammersmith & Fulham shall be a more digitally inclusive borough; a place where residents have the digital skills, access, and support necessary to help fulfil aspirations.

Proposed objectives of the H&F Digital inclusion strategy

3. The business collaboration has resulted in an agreed set of objectives upon which the H&F Digital inclusion strategy should be built:

    •   Digital public services need to be accessible, reliable, and designed around the needs of the user
    •   Staff can effectively understand the digital needs of service users
    •   The borough has world-class digital infrastructure necessary for the prosperity of economy and the growth of local employment opportunities
    •   All residents have the opportunity to gain the digital skills, knowledge, and access to thrive in education, work or socially in the borough
    •   None of our residents are disadvantaged by the lack of digital awareness, skills, or access to equipment

- Using data in an insightful way to design better interventions and prevent escalation and negative outcomes
- H&F has created and is helping to orchestrate an ecosystem with our partners and businesses in the borough that continue to improve and deliver digital inclusivity when or wherever is needed

Update on work to develop the Hammersmith and Fulham Digital Inclusion Strategy to date

4. Since the last meeting, work has been ongoing with our residents' Digital Accessibility Group (DAG) to deliver the strategy, and two further meetings have been held at the end of September and October. DAG have been continuing to look at the barriers for digital inclusion and have identified their priority areas to address in the strategy. These are shown below:

- **Devices**
  - Not everybody has access to a device.
- **Infrastructure**
  - Impartial advice on the best solution to meet needs:
    - Products -laptop tablet or smart phone
    - Specialist equipment for those who need it
    - Broadband packages
- **Connectivity**
  - Cost for digital services is high. Provide ways to, and advice in reducing and managing costs.
  - Libraries / Public spaces, hostels, Supported Living accommodation. Experience varies place to place. Also, free / access to Wi-Fi in public spaces
- **Skills**
  - Lack of self-help guides / online help videos, etc
  - Knowing what is available online and what residents can get help with over the phone and what skills staff need to support residents.
  - Digital Champions Network – lack of / need for more across the borough at accessible points residents.
  - Digital Champions Network – lack of / need for more across the borough at accessible points
  - Guidance for using tech, developing skills and the knowledge needed. (safe use and risk)
- **Jobs**
  - Apprenticeships-supporting residents to develop skills.
- **Data**
  - Understanding capabilities and needs of residents

5. In addition, DAG has looked at some potential solutions to address these areas and has evaluated these for feasibility and impact. This will be used as we develop the final strategy and associated delivery plan.

6. On 27th September DAG held an event in Lyric Square which enabled wider engagement with residents to gain their views in respect of the barriers they face. This helped inform the key priority areas and it was valuable in reinforcing the views of the DAG. The event was also attended by other parties such as Citizens Advice who were available to support residents. Residents were also asked for their views on a digital champions network and were supportive of this approach with some expressing interest in being involved.

In the middle of December DAG are holding a workshop with voluntary and community sector organisations to develop our engagement with them in the development and delivery of the strategy. The aims of this workshop are:

- To ensure VCS recognise the barriers identified and the priorities and understand if they think there are others.
- To understand what the sector is currently doing to address the barriers and what support is available.
- To identify where the gaps are and what we can do to address these.
- To discuss how we work together to deliver the strategy across the borough and how we can measure outcomes as a result. This is a key building block to help us deliver our Digital inclusion eco-system.

7. Following this we will move on to develop the strategy for approval and recommendations for the development of the delivery plan.

Update on actions from the last meeting.

8. Some actions were identified at the last meeting that relate to the delivery of the strategy and so will feed into the strategy as it is developed. Additionally, there has been progression in the following areas.

Improvements to the website

9. There is an ongoing project to improve the Council's website and to allow more flexibility to improve its accessibility ease of navigation and the user experience. This work has continued throughout this period and the website is moving to a new operating platform in the new year. As part of the Resident Experience and Access Programme, website content is reviewed for each service as they work through the programme as well as online forms. DAG will be coproducing this for future services.

10. In the period since the last meeting, we have been focussing on the Council's response to the cost of living crisis and DAG has reviewed the associated webpage and made recommendations which have led to change. As we migrate to the new platform, we have the facility to create micro-sites and DAG are currently working with our web team to develop this. This micro-site has an improved format which is much more accessible and easier to navigate than the current format.

11. At the last meeting a concern was raised with regard to multiple sign-ons for different online portals. We have fed this in to the REAP programme and are

working with our technology providers to ensure that single sign-on will be the preferred solution when using multiple portals.

Access and support in libraries

12. There were concerns raised at the last meeting about access to wi-fi in libraries and this being chargeable after one hour. We have clarified this and the wi-fi in libraries is not chargeable and is available free of charge. The charge mentioned applies to the use of the public computers within libraries which are currently chargeable after one hour. This was introduced to prevent overuse by individuals which would prevent access to other residents. We need to do further work with libraries to understand if this is a current problem and to analyse if there is demand for over an hour and what impact removing the charge would have.

13. Similarly, the request was made at the last meeting to investigate free printing at Libraries. Currently a charge is made to cover cost of consumables and to help manage demand. Unfortunately, there have been some GDPR issues with the technology in libraries over this period which has required a lot of work with Digital Services to remedy. This has meant that access has been more limited than usual, although now resolved.

14. Libraries were identified as a valuable resource to provide support to residents with digital accessibility. Since the last meeting we have been working on developing this as part of the response to the cost of living crisis. It was identified that residents could be supported through our libraries in a number of potential areas such as: identifying what potential support is available, completing online applications and identifying better value deals for example in relation to broadband and mobile phones. We have carried out awareness training with our Library staff to enable them to support this and have developed a schedule for when one to one support will be available across all our libraries. We are aiming to work with our volunteer network to recruit volunteers to deliver support to residents within this schedule and we are hoping that this will be available early in the new year.

Social tariffs for broadband

15. We have included information and advice in respect of these on our website on the cost of living page. We have also included this in our training of the new Cost of Living Team who are a dedicated team supporting residents through the current crisis.

Face to face access to services

16. On January 9th 2023 we are opening 145 King Street to enable residents who require assisted service to be able to drop-in and receive support face to face. Resident advisers will be available to support residents to self-serve or, where this is not possible, they will be able to advise and if necessary make contact with the relevant service area to discuss in more detail.

17. We are also exploring the possibility of Citizens Advice and potentially other VCS organisations delivering services from this location at specific times.

Adult learning courses

18. We have not yet explored the potential to further incentivise the take-up of adult learning courses to improve skill development but have identified skill development as a priority for the delivery plan in respect of the strategy.

Partnership opportunities - London Office of technology and Innovation (LOTI)

19. Digital services are working closely with LOTI on new initiatives to help get London residents online. A pilot is being launched with Good Things Foundation, an existing national charity, who provide support with devices and technical skills.

20. LOTI is working with lots of businesses and public organisations to build a sustainable pipeline of devices.

21. Participating in these initiatives will help to build the digital inclusion ecosystem.