LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Policy and Oversight Board

Date: 18/09/2023

Subject: Digital Inclusion Strategy for Hammersmith and Fulham

Report of: Councillor Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform

Report author: Cinar Altun, Strategy Lead, Digital Services
Darren Persaud, Assistant Direct Resident Experience Transformation

Responsible Director: Nicola Ellis, Strategic Director Chief Operating Officer

SUMMARY

This report presents a new Digital Inclusion Strategy for the borough, which has been co-produced with residents and council directorates. Residents and voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners have been actively engaged and shaped the strategy through the Digital Accessibility Group.

The strategy has been developed in the context of the current administration's manifesto, Putting All Residents first, which commits to tackling digital inclusion, "by making technology accessible and affordable for residents, including working with partners to provide the hardware that is often the affordability barrier to people using technology, as well as training."

The Policy and Oversight Board are asked to review and comment on the attached Digital Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Policy and Oversight Board review and comment on the new Digital Inclusion Strategy and accompanying action plan.

Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	The Digital Inclusion Strategy recognises the significant impact that digital exclusion has on residents and aims to address causes of exclusion resulting from lack of access to digital connectivity, devices and

	skills. Through digital inclusion, there is an opportunity for the Council to help residents improve their life chances leading to fulfilled lives.
Creating a compassionate council	In its focus on inclusion, the strategy recognises the importance of creating a digital eco-system in which all services are digitally accessible by default and residents are supported to fulfil their aspirations individually and collectively. By being a digitally inclusive borough, the Council is supporting those in need to access and make use of the technologies that can enrich lives and lead to greater independence.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Through co-production with the Digital Accessibility Group (DAG) we have ensured that the strategy is a product of the steer we have received from residents in the borough. Also working with DAG and VCS groups increases representation and involvement of hard-to-reach community groups in co-production.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The strategy recognises the need for digital inclusion to be delivered jointly and in partnership with stakeholders within and outside the borough. Increased adoption in digital services across by the council and its partners enables the Council to deliver value for money services in other areas too.
Taking pride in H&F	Adopting an ecosystem approach to digital inclusion allows participants in the borough to feel invested in their community. Input from stakeholders within the council and residents reinforces the importance of digital inclusion in our continued pride in H&F services and vision.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Through the strategy there is a positive impact on the borough's footprint through the re-use and re-purposing of devices and participation in London wide activities which support our commitment to net zero.

Financial Impact

There are no immediate financial implications arising the recommendations in this report.

The action plan sets out a list of actions in both the short and medium/long term to deliver the digital inclusion strategy. Funding for most initiatives have been approved as part of wider major programmes (the Resident Experience and Access Programme) or is held within existing departmental revenue and capital budgets (for example, assistive technology).

For the future action plan, where actions may require additional funding to deliver the outcomes that are set out, then this should be considered within existing resources available to the council and as part of the council's medium term financial strategy to ensure the council's financial viability for the future.

Andre Mark, Head of Finance (Strategic planning and investment) 24/08/23

Legal Implications

The strategy proposed in this report will better enable to carry out a range of its functions. It is both incidental to these functions and conducive to their exercise as it will enable individuals to engage with the Council more effectively.

John Sharland, Senior solicitor (Contracts and procurement) 23/08/23

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report
None.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

The Development of the Strategy

1. Since September 2021, we have worked in partnership with Agilisys (a Hammersmith based company that support transformation in the public sector) to begin work on a draft Digital Inclusion Strategy. The vision statement was tested with staff representing all council directorates and partners from the VCS sector. The strategic approach to the strategy was based on utilising the strengths of different stakeholders effectively, with a focus on recognising the borough ecosystem (i.e., a network of stakeholders, partners and businesses and VCS organisations that collaborate to deliver local initiatives that meet digital needs of residents).

2. Agilisys also conducted a review of the Council's key strategies that compliment the digital inclusion strategy, namely – the Corporate Plan (2018-22), Industrial Strategy, Climate and Ecological Strategy (2030) and the Health & Wellbeing strategy (2016-21). A detailed research report and

recommendations were provided by Agilisys which shaped the Digital Inclusion Strategy being presented as part of this report.

3. Officers worked with residents on the co-production of this Digital Inclusion Strategy from June –October 2022. This co-production was undertaken through the Digital Accessibility Group (DAG), made up of residents who reflect the diversity of the borough. 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. Work was also undertaken with directorates across the council and input obtained from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in January 2023. Following further development, the strategy was presented back to the Digital Accessibility Group in June 2023 and updated based on final resident feedback.

4. This report presents the Digital Inclusion Strategy and action plan for the Policy and Oversight Board members to review and comment on.

The Context for the Strategy

5. The current Council Administration's manifesto, 'Rising to the challenges of our time, together'[1] commits to tackling digital inclusion, "by making technology accessible and affordable for residents, including working with partners to provide the hardware that is often the affordability barrier to people using technology, as well as training." The motivation for the development of this Digital Inclusion Strategy stems from the urgent need to address barriers arising from digital and technological advancements impacting all aspects of our residents' lives, including how we deliver our services.

6. Many of our residents do not have access to the support and guidance they need to get online, and many also do not have the devices or connectivity they need. Research by Agilisys and our conversations with residents and wider stakeholders confirmed that they want us to do more and want us to work in partnership with them and a wide range of stakeholders to deliver digital inclusion.

7. Our strategy also draws on learning from other councils and the work of the Greater London Authority (GLA), as well the London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI). Our vision is aligned to that of the GLA, which is also committed to delivering connectivity, basic digital skills and device/support to get residents online by 2025.

8. H&F has also already established strong partnerships at a regional level and is well placed to use this expertise and these connections to enable delivery of our digital inclusion vision for residents in Hammersmith and Fulham, not least through our work with LOTI and the Good Things Foundation aimed at delivering

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[1] The Administration's Manifesto - Rising To The Challenges Of Our Time, Together

devices and connectivity to those residents that need it most. During the Covid pandemic the Council teamed up with local charity UNITED and local tech social enterprise ReadyTechGo to deliver the Tech4Kids campaign, raising funds and hundreds of tech donations to help digitally disadvantaged students in the borough. We are also on the North West London Integrated Health Care Board on Digital Inclusion.

9. This Digital Inclusion Strategy will be the catalyst for transformative change in the Borough, and the Immediate Action Plan sets out some of the work planned or already underway to bring the strategy to life.

Strategy vision, scope and structure

10. The Digital Inclusion Strategy vision is for Hammersmith and Fulham to be a more digitally inclusive borough by 2025 (aligned with the Greater London Authority); a place where residents have access to the digital skills, devices and support they need to achieve their aspirations.

11. This vision for Hammersmith and Fulham will be achieved by working collaboratively with residents, partners and services across the council, the borough and beyond to drive a coordinated and joined up approach to digital inclusion that is informed by data.

12. The Digital Inclusion Strategy sets out an overall vision, based on four principles that drive the strategy:
    1. Resident Led: Our Strategy is led by what residents have told us they need.
    2. Holistic: We recognise barriers to digital inclusion in the wider social and economic context.
    3. Collaborative: We work together to break down barriers and deliver best results.
    4. Insight: We use insights from data to make evidence-base decisions.

13. The Strategy will focus on providing support across the four pillars of digital inclusion:
    1. Devices
    2. Connectivity
    3. Advice & guidance
    4. Skills

14. Supported by these four strategic pillars the objectives of the strategy are that:
    - All residents have the opportunity to gain the digital skills, knowledge and access to thrive in education, work or socially.
    - Everyone who needs and wants support has it.
    - Everyone knows where to go for the help that they want.
    - Residents are able to access digital services, independently or with support.

- No one is disadvantaged by a lack of digital awareness, skills or access to equipment.
- Residents have developed skills that enable them to use digital services and devices with confidence.
- Residents feel safe and secure when online.
- We've had a measurable impact on the level of digital exclusion in the borough.

Update on Policy and Oversight Board actions

15. The actions identified at the Policy and Oversight Board meetings on 12 September 2022[2] and 12 December 2022[3] have been included in the action plan and further detail can be found in paragraph 26 of this report. In summary Members and attendees requested the following points be considered.

16. Improvements to the Council websites accessibility, ensuring ease of navigation and user experience. Further work through the Resident Experience and Access Programme (REAP) has continued with key council services, notably Revenue and Benefits, Sports and Leisure, Cost of Living. For example, DAG have co-produced these pages, to support annual billing and the key questions that arise. Work is ongoing with Parking, Waste and Recycling, plus several other services.

17. Single Sign On (SSO) to several portals are part of REAP. SSO to the Housing Portal has started to be delivered. SSO to the Revenue and Benefit portal will be delivered later this year, with further work planned for the next financial year with Environment Services portal.

18. Access and support in libraries are a key part of the action plan, which has been given an immediate priority.

19. Information about available social tariffs has since been added to the Cost of Living web pages.

20. Face to face services at 145 King Street reopened in January 2023, Resident Advisers have been providing support to 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.

21. Adult Education is also key part of the action plan, which has been given an immediate priority. This links into the action related to information, advice and guidance and bringing together all resources available, including the VCS offer, local partners, etc.

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[2] Agenda and minutes for 12 September 2022 meeting:
https://democracy.lbhf.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=637&MId=7420&Ver=4
[3] Agenda and minutes for 12 December 2022 meeting:
https://democracy.lbhf.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=637&MId=7387&Ver=4

22. Leveraging and seeking out opportunities for partnership working is another immediate priority within the action plan. Work with the Good Things Foundation / National Databank is ongoing, a recent application has been made for the provision of data SIM's. Additional exploratory work is part of the medium to longer term action plan.

Delivering our Strategy

23. Through this strategy we will deliver on our digital inclusion priorities, by continuing to engage residents to make sure that we understand the changing environment for residents and respond appropriately to emerging technology which may impact our services and our residents.

24. Our Digital Inclusion Strategy will be delivered through a digital inclusion 'ecosystem' of council services and partners working together to deliver an immediate action plan of initiatives planned or already in progress by council and partners.

25. The action plan contained within the strategy outlines how we will deliver on our Digital Inclusion Strategy and coordinate our efforts across the Council and with wider partners. It is based on what residents told us were their priorities, these priorities were mapped against feasibility and existing council resources to put together an initial action plan.

26. Based upon feedback from DAG and the VCS, it is proposed that the current strategy and immediate action plan be progressed with a focus on delivering resident priorities in the immediate term, including:
    1. Governance **-** Setting up an LBHF Steering Group to oversee and monitor digital inclusion strategy and progress against action plan and/or mandating the Digital Board.
    2. Cross-council Collaboration **-** Working across the council with relevant departments to collaborate with Adult Social Care (e.g., Technology Enabled Care and the move from analogue to digital in 2025), Childrens Social Care (devices and access) and Housing (others to be identified) to provide greater support to residents.
    3. Access to Devices - London hardware bank of recycled and refurbished devices that can be lent out or given to service users meeting criteria, building upon the work previously done with the Good Things Foundation (point 7 above).
    4. Access to Wi-Fi – work with libraries to explore offering completely free access to the internet. In addition, working with libraries to secure a stock of SIMs preloaded with data for residents who either have no or insufficient access to the internet or cannot afford their existing contract or top up.
    5. Information, Advice & Guidance – bringing together the vast number of resources available, e.g., broadband tariffs; guidance on using technology; accessibility, etc.

6. Digital Champions – create a network to support residents to be able to access the internet and council services.

27. In taking the strategy and its action plan to delivery, Officers will work to ensure that a genuine co-production continues.

28. Monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's delivery will be undertaken by:
   - Regularly reviewing progress against the actions.
   - Developing key performance indicators to measure success.
   - Establishing an annual review process to evaluate the effectiveness of our strategy and making any necessary adjustments.

Reasons for Decision

29. Having a Digital Inclusion Strategy in place allows the Council, residents and wider partners to collaborate towards a shared vision. It will encourage a joint, eco-system approach across the borough, in which residents are supported to access the digital skills they need, and are equipped with the devices, connectivity and guidance necessary to fulfil their aspirations.

Equality Implications

30. There are no direct negative equality implications for groups with protected characteristics, under the Equality Act 2010, by the approval of this strategy. Individual actions contained within the relevant action plan will be evaluated appropriately prior to delivery.

Risk Management Implications

31. The report proposes a new Digital Inclusion Strategy for the borough, which has been co-produced with council directorates and residents, in line with the objective of doing things with and not to residents.

32. The strategy commits to tackling digital inclusion by making technology accessible and affordable for residents, which supports the objectives of building shared prosperity, enhancing the employment and life prospects of residents.

33. Other comments recognise the need to assess risks around data protection.

David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance 25/08/23

Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications

34. There are no immediate anticipated climate and ecological emergency implications as a result of publication of the strategy, but actions and recommendations will be informed by the Council's net-zero target. Some of the actions outlined within the strategy can provide a positive impact on the borough's footprint through the re-use and re-purposing of devices and participation in London wide activities which support our commitment to net zero.

Approved by Hinesh Mehta, Assistant Director for Climate Change, 25/08/2023

IT Implications

35. Digital Services have been involved in the development of the digital inclusion strategy presented in this report, and the Chief Digital Officer is supportive of the publication of the strategy and action plan. Digital Services should continue to be involved in progressing the strategy to publication.

36. IM Implications: Whilst there are no immediate information management implications, possible data protection and GDPR issues should be considered as part of the development of the actions contained within the action plan and IM should be consulted where appropriate to ensure that all potential data protection risks are properly assessed with mitigating actions agreed and implemented.

Implications completed by: Cinar Altun, Digital Strategy Lead, Digital Services, 25/08/23

LIST OF APPENDICES
Appendix 1 – New Draft Digital Inclusion Strategy