

Local Members' Interest
n/a

Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee – 30 November 2020

Digital Inclusion/Exclusion

Recommendation

1. That the Committee considers and comments on the content of the report

Report of Cabinet Member for Finance and Resource

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

The Select Committee is asked to consider and comment on the work being undertaken to tackle digital exclusion in Staffordshire. Reviewing the approaches in the context of Social Care and Health in particular but also, Families and Communities and Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the overall impact on service delivery.

Report

Background

Digital exclusion can be broken down into three key barriers:

- **Connectivity** (infrastructure / access to the internet)
- **Accessibility** (for all including low income homes, people with disabilities etc)
- **Digital skills** (being able to use computers and the internet)

Digital Exclusion in Staffordshire - Pre Covid-19 - Digital exclusion was improving but still very much an issue. Five cohorts of people were identified nationally as most likely to be excluded; older people, disabled people low income households, women, and people who leave education early. In Staffordshire, 4% of premises do not have access to superfast broadband and three districts were identified as having a medium likelihood of digital exclusion (East Staffs, Newcastle and Stafford).

Emerging national trends regarding the impact of COVID-19 on digital exclusion -

Following Covid-19, trends have shown an increased use of digital across all sectors. Digital exclusion has reduced in some cases following the efforts to support people at risk during lockdown, however, the impacts could potentially grow more severe for those who remain digitally excluded. Lack of access to affordable devices and internet packages was a key issue, particularly for older people and low-income households.

The digital response in Staffordshire to COVID-19 – A huge amount of activity took place across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to provide digital support and information for communities during lockdown. This included supplying digital equipment to vulnerable residents and families, flexible Community Learning offers and VCSE digital support.

What work has happened?

A digital inclusion action plan has been compiled as a working document for 2020/21. This plan can be found at appendix A to this report. This plan has been developed through:

- **Digital inclusion workshop** – An online workshop session was held with commissioning leads specialising in the use of digital in public health, adult social care, children and families, libraries, connectivity, corporate services, Member engagement, local businesses and community learning and local VCSE sector.
- **Engagement with All Party Working Group** – An update and presentation shared with all members, followed by a discussion and feedback opportunity.
- **Engagement with the Digital Leadership Group** – A discussion took place with the Staffordshire County Council Digital Leadership Group and the Staffordshire County Council Cabinet Lead for digital. This session considered the draft action plan and practical steps the County Council and partners can take to tackle digital exclusion, including connectivity and infrastructure.
- **Engagement with the Communities Leadership Group** – A session with the Staffordshire County Council Communities Leadership Group also took place. This session considered the draft action plan and how Staffordshire can best use its community assets and relationships with partners locally to address digital exclusion.
- **Covid-19 residents survey** – Staffordshire County Council published a survey for residents on the impact of Covid-19. 3921 residents replied, and although the survey was not specifically about digital exclusion, it has provided useful context on related issues facing residents across the county.
- **Promotional awareness of action plan** – Digital Inclusion objectives and actions have been shared with Cabinet Community Support Members, district and borough colleagues.

Aims and Objectives for Digital Inclusion Plan

The Digital inclusion plan addresses the barriers to digital inclusion in Staffordshire. The four main aims include the practical actions that can be delivered in the next 12-18 months. These are summarised below:

- **Connectivity (and access to the internet)** – Ensuring as many people as possible can connect to the internet where they live and work, especially in rural areas.
- **Accessibility** – Enabling access to the internet, digital devices and / or digital support for everyone, in particular older people, people with disabilities, low income families and people in rural areas.

- **Digital skills** – Helping residents to have the right skills and the confidence to use the internet and digital devices to access the support they need, especially during the social distancing restrictions in place due to Covid-19.
- **Communication, engagement and data** – Communicating as effectively as possible the benefits of using digital and the support available to those who may be excluded. In addition, engaging with residents and reviewing data to ensure we continue to understand the issues during Covid-19 and develop our approach accordingly.

Connecting to other workstreams

The Digital Inclusion Action Plan 20/21 will contribute to several of the Council's strategic priority workstreams moving forward, including:

- **Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF)** – The DISF and its supporting implementation plan will outline the digital infrastructure vision for Staffordshire over the next 10 years. It will address short, medium, and long-term demand for digital connectivity, including (but not limited to) full fibre, fixed Wi-Fi, 4G and 5G. The development of this framework over the next year with key stakeholders will be critical to digital exclusion.
- **Digital Delivery Plan 2020/21** – Using technology and data to connect, inform and support our citizens. This includes ensuring that residents and staff have the access to the right digital information, skills and equipment to remain connected and supported.
- **Communities Delivery Plan 2020/21** – Empowering communities to help themselves and each other. This includes making the most of our community assets such as libraries and children's centres, as well as working with our VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partner to support both residents and the voluntary sector.
- **Supportive Communities/Community Help Points** - Improved adult social care and health IAG Offer. The Staffordshire.gov.uk web-site content has been significantly refreshed to reflect health and care priorities with specific focus on mental wellbeing, staying active, and staying connected. Links have been made throughout the site to Staffordshire Connects, our community assets directory to support residents to find local support and services.
- **Library Services** - Reading friends service provided by the libraries team is a good example of an alternative that has been provided to people who might be experiencing loneliness/digital exclusion as this is telephony based

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