



Title: Digital Inclusion Update

Report of: Managing Director

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Board with an update on Digital Inclusion activity within the company and future plans to progress this area.

Background

2. In March 2012, the Government set out a commitment to deliver digital services as the default mechanism for government services. This was further expanded in the November 2012 Digital Strategy.
3. In August 2012, Gateshead Council launched their Digital Inclusion project and partnership, aiming to address and co-ordinate some of the fundamental issues and activity taking place in Gateshead around access to digital technology and the shift to providing more services digitally. The company is represented on this partnership.
4. The digital inclusion project has three broad objectives: -
 - Ensure that all residents and employees have the opportunity to become digitally literate and confident users of technology.
 - Ensure that good quality, high speed broadband is available to all homes and businesses.
 - Increase the delivery of public services using digital technologies.
5. As part of the Governments' intended roll out of Universal Credit, there is an expectation that applicants will make their application for this online, demonstrating an increased need to ensure that our tenants have the appropriate facilities and skills to complete online assessments. If tenants fail to apply for Universal Credit correctly this will pose a serious risk on our rental income in future.
6. The company has been involved in a number of activities supporting digital inclusion for our tenants and leaseholders to date.

Key Facts

7. Aside from the introduction of universal credit, there are a number of benefits to our customers and to the company of being able to access online services and this applies to people of all ages. This includes:
 - Reducing social isolation – Today one in three people over age 60 can go a whole week without speaking to anyone, and one in 10 people spend up to a month without any human contact. Access to the internet can have a significant impact on increasing the interaction people have with others, whether this is family or friends or people with similar interests.
 - Saving money – it is estimated the average user can save £550 annually through buying consumer goods online.
 - Providing convenience and choice – People are able to access a range of services online at a time which is appropriate to them and through price comparison sites can access the most appropriate service for them.
 - Improving employment opportunities and gives people access to a wider range of job vacancies and training opportunities than those advertised through traditional methods.
 - Reducing transaction costs for the organisation – Online transactions are significantly more cost effective than face to face and for a number of routine service requests can provide a more effective alternative for people to contact the company.

Work to date

8. The company has already been involved in a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of our tenants and leaseholders who are able to access services online.
9. Since 2009, the company has worked with Age UK who developed and delivered a successful support and training programme. In 2013/14, 11 Sheltered Schemes were involved in this programme with over 71 customers taking part. These sessions have developed and expanded over time to recognise the changing needs of residents. The original programme focussed on supporting tenants with their initial use of a computer; this year's programme has had an increased focus on security, protecting information and accessing tools such as Skype to interact with family and friends.
10. We have delivered one off training sessions to tenants and leaseholders through the 'Social Media Made Simple' course, aiming to help people access and effectively use sites such as Facebook and Twitter both personally and also for tenants and residents groups to use this to engage more effectively with their members.
11. Through our Community Fund we have also supported local community groups to offer support and access to people living on our estates. This has included providing ICT equipment to community groups to deliver job clubs, develop CVs and carry out research.
12. Most recently we have begun a series of Digital Drop Ins providing very basic support for people to get online. These sessions are delivered to as part of the

Moving Forward training programme to people who often lack the confidence to attend a formal training session in the first instance. Through this one to one, very informal approach we have been able to start working with people to identify their further development needs and signpost these people where appropriate. We carried out an initial pilot of this approach to understand how attendees found the sessions before we look to roll these out more widely.

13. We have agreed with Unison, that following the successful improvements to the communal lounge in Warwick Court, they will deliver a range of digital inclusion initiatives from the block, aimed at residents in this and surrounding blocks. A Union Learning Resource will be provided in the communal lounge for two half day sessions a week with the content of the sessions developed based on the needs of the residents.
14. We are also considering the opportunities for our customers to access our services online. There are a number of actions that can be carried out online including reporting a repair, reporting anti-social behaviour, applying for a home or making a compliment or complaint. However these services are limited and it is recognised that an improved online offer could increase the use by customers. We have recently purchased a package within our housing management system Northgate, which would allow us to offer increased and improved self-serve options to our customers.

Let's Get Digital Survey

15. Whilst there has been a range of activity undertaken, it was acknowledged that in order to take this work forward in a coordinated approach, it is necessary to understand what proportion of our customers have access to the internet and what they currently use this for.
16. A sample survey was therefore carried out to get an idea of the current picture to help inform our next steps.
17. The Let's Get Digital Survey was issued at a number of events over the summer as part of Opportunity Knocks, was provided online and local housing offices gathered information from people attending the offices.
18. In total 490 tenants completed the questionnaire which asked a range of questions ranging from whether people had access to the internet, and if they did what they currently do online as well as asking about whether they would use our online services if they were improved or offered a more effective service.
19. The full results are included at the appendix to this report which includes the profile of the respondents.
20. In summary this questionnaire told us: -
 - 73.1% of respondents currently have access to the internet; this varies from 67.5% in the West to 78.7% in the South of the borough.
 - Access by age varies significantly from 97.9% of Under 25s having access, compared to 49.7% of Over 60s.

- The majority of people access the internet in their home; however 7.9% access it at local libraries.
 - Of those who do have access, the greatest proportion still have computers or laptops, however over 58% of people have access to the internet on their phones, and 28.5% have a tablet.
 - 76.1% access the internet every day with the highest proportion using it to email, general browsing or use social media.
 - Of those who responded, 60% had accessed the company website before with the highest proportion being to look for another home.
 - 65.5% of people said that they would be likely to use our website more often if we improved the services available with the most popular requirements being to view rent or repairs history or to reschedule a repairs appointment.
21. Whilst this information is only a snapshot of our customer's experiences it does provide a useful foundation for our further work. The information suggests that a much higher proportion of our tenants have access to the internet than previously estimated and that they would like to access more of our services online. This would then allow us to spend more time carrying out targeted activities with the people who need either support or facilities to gain access to online services.

Next Steps

22. This information has provided a base for us to carry out some further work to fully understand the different circumstances of our tenants and leaseholders to increase both digital access and our digital offer in the future.
23. We have commissioned a customer insight project through a local organisation to use this data, plus all other profile data held on our tenant and leaseholder base, along with additional segmentation information to carry out a research project. This will involve categorising our key customer groups to form the basis of a digital strategy. It is estimated that this work will be completed by the end of December to allow this to feed into the business planning process.
24. We will continue to work closely with partners to deliver on the digital aims, most recently having met with representatives from Gateshead Council's Library Services to understand how we can work more closely, referring people to their services where appropriate and hosting some of our activities in the training suites offered in some library buildings.

Link to Values

25. This report relates to the company values of: -
- Being a listening and learning organisation.
 - Being honest, accountable and transparent.
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional.
 - Embracing equality

Impact on Tenants

26. Our Digital Inclusion activity will impact tenants in a range of ways from helping them to use the internet to access a range of activity and potentially to provide a more convenient way of carrying out some interaction with the company.

Risk Management

27. Adverse impact of welfare reform legislation has been identified as a strategic risk for the organisation. A key element of this risk is preparing tenants for the introduction of Universal Credit, including establishing that they will be able to make a claim online to secure their income. The activity resulting from this research will help us prepare for this and understand the scale of the issue.

Financial Implications

28. The Head of Corporate Services confirms that there is a budget available to fund the research outlined within this report. Any actions resulting from this which have a financial implication will be taken to Resources Committee for approval.

Equalities and Diversity

29. The digital survey and the subsequent planned research will consider the broad range of characteristics which may affect someone's ability to get online and access services. Using customer insight will help to understand and take a tailored approach to the activities we undertake in the future.

Value for Money Implications

30. There are value for money implications which may arise from activities as a result of this research such as through realising savings from an increase in the take-up of online services compared to face to face or telephone. This provides more scope for the organisation to carry out more intensive support to our more vulnerable tenants and leaseholders.

Health Implications

31. There are no direct health implications arising from this report although it is accepted that through increasing the digital inclusion of older tenants in particular, this can have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

Environmental Implications

32. There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Consultation Carried Out

33. Consultation was carried out through the Lets Get Digital Survey. This was also shared with the Digital Inclusion Partnership prior to launching it to incorporate any specific information other partners could gain from the consultation.

34. In addition to being carried out by officers at events and in housing offices, the survey was available online and through Gateshead Council's Consultation Portal.

Recommendation

35. The Board is recommended to
- note the Digital Inclusion activity carried out to date;
 - agree to receive a presentation following the wider research being undertaken to discuss the challenges and opportunities available going forward.

Summary of results Let's Get Digital

Do you have access to the internet?

YES	358	73.1%
NO	132	26.9%
Total:	490	

	Yes	No	Level of access
CENTRAL	61	28	68.5%
EAST	72	24	75%
INNER WEST	60	23	72.3%
SOUTH	107	29	78.7%
WEST	58	28	67.4%

Where do they have access?

HOME	313	79.8%
LOCAL LIBRARY	31	7.9%
RELATIVES	27	6.9%
OTHER	21	5.4%

What do they use to access internet?

COMPUTER	260	44.8%
MOBILE PHONE	208	35.9%
TABLET	102	17.6%
OTHER	10	1.7%

How often do they use the internet?

EVERYDAY	249	76.1%
EVERY 2/3 DAYS	52	15.9%
ONCE WEEK	14	4.3%
ONCE MONTH	8	2.4%
LESS OFTEN	4	1.2%

What do they use it for?

BANKING	160	12.7%
COMPLETING SURVEYS	20	1.6%
EMAIL	250	19.9%
CHECKING GAS/ELECTRIC	65	5.2%
GENERAL BROWSING	217	17.2%
READING BOOKS /MAGAZINES	41	3.3%
READING NEWS	76	6.0%
SHOPPING	183	14.5%
SOCIAL MEDIA	208	16.5%
OTHER	39	3.1%

Accessing our services online:

Have people used our website?

YES	213	60%
NO	142	40%

What have they used it for?

APPLY FOR A JOB	18	5.4%
LOOK FOR A NEW HOME	117	35.2%
PAYING RENT	52	15.7%
REGISTER FOR A COURSE	8	2.4%
REPORT REPAIR	53	16.0%
VIEW INFORMATION	68	20.5%
OTHER	16	4.8%

If we had more services online how likely would they be to access them?

VERY LIKELY	126	36.8%
FAIRLY LIKELY	98	28.7%
NEITHER/NOR	46	13.5%
FAIRLY UNLIKELY	21	6.1%
VERY UNLIKELY	51	14.9%

What would they like to be able to do?

UPDATE CONTACT DETAILS	111	12.1%
FORUM/CHAT	41	4.5%
LOG COMPLIMENT OR COMPLAINT	119	13.0%
VIEW RENT HISTORY	192	21.0%
VIEW REPAIR HISTORY	156	17.0%
RESCHEDULE REPAIRS APPOINTMENT	145	15.8%
VIEW BALANCE OR SERVICE CHARGES	141	15.4%
OTHER	10	1.1%

Profile of respondents:

FEMALE	292	59.3%
MALE	200	40.7%

UNDER 25	36	7.3%
25-39	58	11.8%
40-49	82	16.7%
50-59	80	16.3%
60-74	87	17.7%
75+	149	30.3%

Asian or Asian British Pakistan	1	0.2%
Black or Black British African	3	0.6%
Mixed White and Black African	3	0.6%
White British	460	93.5%
White Irish	2	0.4%
White Other	16	3.3%
Blank	4	0.8%
Other	3	0.6%