

Meeting of:	<b>Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Wednesday, 15 January 2020</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Digital Inclusion Update
Purpose of Report:	To provide Members with an update and seek views of the Committee on ongoing work to address issues of digital inclusion.
Report Owner:	Managing Director
Responsible Officer:	Head of Policy and Business Transformation
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	There are no matters in this report which relate to an individual ward
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This report provides a six-monthly update on ongoing work by the Council and its partners to improve digital inclusion within the Vale of Glamorgan.</li> <li>• Digital inclusion work aims to ensure that all citizens have access to the financial, social and employment benefits of digital services.</li> <li>• Over the past 5 years work has undertaken collaboratively under the auspices of the Get the Vale Online Partnership, organised and chaired by Digital Communities Wales. However, the group has not met for some time and an alternative mechanism may need to be found to continue work in this area.</li> <li>• The main areas of focus continue to be on improving digital skills through training workshops and drop-in sessions, improving access through the tablet loan scheme and PC provision at libraries.</li> <li>• The tablet loan scheme was launched in October 2019 and to date only 5 loans have been completed. Promotion of the scheme has been deliberately low key while the process and technology are being tested.</li> <li>• Residents have continued to be able to access internet services via a library computers.</li> <li>• On average 80 Council tenants per month have engaged in digital inclusion sessions at 5 locations. Circa 33% of attendees were older people.</li> </ul>	

- A plan to improve digital skills and access for armed forces veterans has been agreed in conjunction with Vale of Glamorgan Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and Digital Communities Wales to deliver Digital Champion training to Armed Forces support organisations.
- Palmerston Community Learning Centre offers "Computer Workshops" throughout the year focusing on improving key internet skills as well as more advanced use of software applications.

## **Recommendation**

1. That Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report and provide feedback relating to the work being undertaken to address issues of digital inclusion.

## **Reason for Recommendation**

1. To give Members of the Committee an overview of the work being undertaken to support citizens who are not able to use digital and online services due to lack of access or skills and enable members of the Committee to consider and provide feedback on this work.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council's Digital Strategy sets out an ambition to enable citizens to get the services and information they need online digitally by default. This means embracing technology to re-design our services and the way they are provided to citizens.
- 1.2 The strategy recognises that not all citizens have the skills or access to digital services and commits the Council to "equipping residents with the digital skills and technologies they need to enhance their lives".
- 1.3 In 2010, the Welsh Government published the Digital Inclusion Framework which identified the groups of people most likely to be digitally excluded: older people, disabled people, social housing tenants, economically inactive people and those experiencing in-work poverty.
- 1.4 80% of households in the Vale of Glamorgan have access to superfast broadband providing fast and efficient access to digital services.
- 1.5 21.6% of the Vale of Glamorgan population is over 65 years old (2019) and this age group is forecast to increase as a proportion of the population in the future.
- 1.6 As of 1st March 2019, 3.4% of the working age population in the Vale of Glamorgan were economically inactive. This is lower than both the Welsh average (4.5%) and the Great Britain average (4.1%).
- 1.7 The Vale of Glamorgan Council is the largest social housing provider in the area with 4,000 tenants. Newydd Housing Association provides 1,576 properties
- 1.8 The Council has been working collaboratively with partners through the Get The Vale Online (GTVO) partnership to address issues of digital inclusion. GTVO is chaired by Digital Communities Wales and comprises representatives from Newydd Housing Association, Job Centre Plus, Castleland Community Centre, Royal National Institute for the Blind, 50+ Forum and Digital Champions in

addition to Council representatives from Customer Relations, Supporting People, Vale Homes and Library services.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** Over the past 5 years digital inclusion work has been undertaken collaboratively under the auspices of the Get the Vale Online (GTVO) Partnership, organised and chaired by Digital Communities Wales. However, the group has not met in the previous 6 months and alternative mechanisms may need to be found to continue work if the group cannot be reconvened. The Operational Manager for Customer Relations is currently in discussions with partners involved in the group to establish whether it remains viable or to seek views on how alternatives can be put in place.
- 2.2** The main way in which GTVO provides citizens with opportunities to improve their digital skills is by providing training by 27 Digital Champions at "drop-in sessions" at various locations across the county. This has continued over the period. However, data on attendees and outcomes is not currently available.
- 2.3** In October 2019, GTVO launched Wales' first scheme to lend iPads to library customers to provide accessibility to digital services and improve digital skills. Each library has 2 tablets to lend with 8Gb of data download available per month and will be prebuilt to allow quick start-up to encourage customers to start using the tablets quickly.
- 2.4** The scheme was launched initially at Llantwit Major Library and at the time of this report, 5 library members have taken advantage of the service. The pilot phase has identified an issue relating to the "resetting" of returned tablets and erasing of customer personal data which library staff have found time consuming and complex. This has prevented further roll out of the scheme to date. GTVO is working with library staff to establish a quicker and easier way of completing this work.
- 2.5** Newydd Housing Association is continuing with a pilot to use Amazon Alexa devices in Care Homes and Sheltered Housing to address issues of social isolation and promote independence. The results of this pilot will be reported to Committee in the future.
- 2.6** Citizens Advice continues to provide support to citizens claiming Universal Credit under their "help to claim" initiative.
- 2.7** The Council's Housing and Building Services department is providing training to an average of 80 tenants per month at Aberaeron Hub (Gibbonsdown), Redlands Avenue (Penarth), Fair Oaks (Dinas Powys), Crawshay Court (Llantwit Major) and Longmeadow Court (Cowbridge). Digital Inclusion sessions are supported by Adult Learning team and Volunteer digital champions. 50% of all attendees report increased self-confidence when using the internet and approximately one third are older people. To support this work the department has recently

identified a tenant volunteer to act as a digital champion running training sessions and delivering 1-1 support.

- 2.8** In the previous update, the Committee was informed that the GTVO partnership would be producing a Digital Inclusion Action Plan for 2019-21 to shape and prioritise its activities. Proposals under consideration included options for working with Armed Forces veterans' organisations, working with partners to establish the scale of digital exclusion in the Vale of Glamorgan and working to improve the digital skills of customer facing Council staff so that they could provide better support to residents.
- 2.9** While the GTVO Partnership has not met subsequently, work on these actions has been progressed.
- 2.10** On 16 October 2019 the Vale of Glamorgan Armed Forces Covenant Partnership agreed a proposal to create Digital Champions to provide digital skills training and improve access for veterans through existing support groups. This work is being sponsored by the Council's Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Eddie Williams and led by Abigail Warburton, Armed Forces Liaison Officer. Digital Champion Training is expected to commence during quarter 4 2019/20.
- 2.11** The Operational Manager for Customer Relations is currently working with Digital Communities Wales to create a proposal for training of customer facing Council staff to support residents with accessing online services. The proposal will be presented by 31st March 2020 with the intention of launching the training scheme in Quarter 1 2020/21.
- 2.12** The Welsh Government has announced funding for a Chief Digital Officer with a supporting team for Welsh Local Government, to be hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association. The purpose of the post will include how issues of Digital inclusion will be addressed nationally. It will be important to monitor any associated strategies, policy decisions and funding arrangements to ensure Vale of Glamorgan alignment and take advantage of any opportunities that may arise for the benefit of our residents.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** Digital inclusion is a key element of the Council's Digital Strategy which contributes to the Council's transformational change programme, Reshaping Services. The Reshaping Services programme aims to ensure the Council protects priority services for residents and involves working differently and responsively to customer needs.
- 3.2** The issues relating to digital inclusion are being addressed collaboratively, maximising use of resources and helping to ensure that solutions are sustainable.

- 3.3** Activities being undertaken under the auspices of GTVO and by Council departments to provide access to online services have a preventative impact in that they ensure citizens have access to sources of employment, help address social exclusion and address the poverty agenda by ensuring citizens have access to the best rates for utilities, lending and other services

## **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 4.1** There are no additional financial implications arising from this report

### **Employment**

- 4.2** There are no specific employment implications for the Council as a result of this report. However, digital inclusion has clear benefits for citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan which can assist in increasing employment opportunities

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.3** There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.
- 4.4** This report describes how the digital inclusion work that is underway is targeted at specific groups of citizens who may be digitally excluded due to age, disability and/or due to socio-economic reasons.

## **5. Background Papers**

### **Vale of Glamorgan Digital Strategy 2017-2020**

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Our%20Council/Achieving%20our%20vision/Digital-Strategy-2017-20.pdf>