



**South Cambridgeshire District Council**

# **DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY**

**2015-2017**



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## 1. Foreword

This is the digital revolution and it is changing the way that people communicate, socialise, share information, work and access goods and services.

The Council intends to be part of the revolution rather than looking in from the outside. There are opportunities to rethink the service delivery model from the bottom up, and examine how the relationship between council and citizen can be changed to enable the challenge to be met together.

Improving the quality of life for South Cambridgeshire residents is an important priority for the Council which includes improving the availability of and access to digital services throughout the District. This will have a positive impact on peoples health and wellbeing; ability to search for and apply for jobs; help tackle social isolation; help people save money and reduce digital exclusion.

Digital services are becoming the default option for accessing public services, information, entertainment and each other. In 2013 36 million adults (73%) in Britain accessed the internet every day. Those who are offline and not capable of using the internet risk missing out on the benefits that the internet can offer.

The implementation of this Strategy will help to ensure that we play our part in helping to reduce Digital exclusion experienced by residents throughout the District. This is in line with central Government which in partnership with Go ON UK, a digital charity, has a target to reduce the number of people who are offline by 25% by 2016.

Whilst it is recognised that this strategy is largely a housing service document it links in with our corporate objectives of working in partnership to develop digital service in the District and the present Governments 'digital by default' agenda.

## 2. What will the Digital Inclusion Strategy do?

The Digital Inclusion Strategy is a supporting document to the Council's Housing Strategy and sets out our plans to help improve digital capacity within the District.

The Strategy aims to set out:

- What Digital Inclusion is and help target those households most at risk from being digitally excluded to gain access to services.
- Work currently happening across the District to support Digital Inclusion.
- Our future priorities for tackling Digital Exclusion, when we will do this by and how it will be done.

Our Vision for Housing –

***“To be the best housing service by providing good quality housing across all tenures that is accessible to all – that enhances residents’ quality of life, their health and wellbeing, that supports economic growth and social opportunities, alongside improved energy security and reduced carbon footprints.”***

By developing policies and measures to promote digital inclusion we will be helping some of our more vulnerable residents within the District improve their quality of life and health and wellbeing which in turn will support economic growth and social opportunities within the community.

The development of the strategy and its related action plan seek to deliver against our three key Corporate aims of:

- **Engagement:** Engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money.
- **Partnerships:** Work with partners to create opportunities for employment, enterprise, education and world-leading innovation.
- **Wellbeing:** Ensure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer an outstanding quality of life for our residents.

### **3. Digital Inclusion explained**

#### **3.1 What is Digital Inclusion/Exclusion?**

South Cambridgeshire District Council’s Housing Service believes that digital media is an alternative and convenient means of communicating and engaging with our customers. Digital media can be defined as content accessed online via computer, tablet, smartphone or similar device. Our strategy therefore is to encourage and support increased customer access and involvement via digital media and develop it as a viable communication tool with our tenants.

However, we are mindful that there are obstacles to digital media and hence people can be digitally excluded. Therefore it is our aim to ensure that where possible we will make it easier for people to be digitally included.

Digital exclusion impacts on our tenants financially, in the job market, educationally, increases social isolation and contributes to levels of deprivation.

Digital Inclusion will become even more important for low income households with the implementation of Universal Credit planned for 2016/17 in Cambridgeshire where it is expected the majority of tenants will have to manage their benefit claims online.

### 3.2 Why is Digital Inclusion Important?

In just over two decades the internet has become a huge part of our everyday lives.

Today 82% of adults in the UK are online. Completing transactions online has become second nature, with more and more of us going online for shopping, banking, information and entertainment.

**WHY?** *Because online services tend to be quicker, more convenient and cheaper to use.*

The digital efficiency report suggests that transactions online can be 20 times cheaper than by phone, 30 times cheaper than postal and as much as 50 times cheaper than face-to-face.

But it isn't just about the money – customers increasingly expect to access services quickly and conveniently, at times and in ways that suit them.

Digital technology can be used effectively to deliver better services at lower costs.

Other benefits include:

- **Education and Life Chances:**  
Home access to a computer and the internet can improve a child's educational performance.
- **Employment and Skills:**  
It is estimated that between 75% and 90% of jobs require at least some computer use. Being online also gives people more opportunities to search and apply for jobs, especially as some positions are only advertised online and many processes require CVs to be e-mailed or the application to be completed online.
- **Saving Money:**  
Offline households are missing out on an estimated savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online.
- **Welfare Reforms:**  
The benefits system is changing. From April 2013 a new Universal Credit is being introduced to replace many current benefits, including housing benefit and job seekers allowance. The Government wants 80% of applications for Universal Credit to be online by 2017.

### 3.3 What are the barriers to getting online?

**It is thought that 4.1 million of the 8.7 million adults who have never been online live in social housing.**

There are, of course, barriers that may need to be overcome when trying to promote and facilitate digital inclusion.

### **3.3.1 Difficulties with Access:**

- **Affordability of equipment or usage**  
Whilst the costs of technology are reducing it is believed that cost will remain a significant barrier for some excluded groups even in the long term. This is in contrast with the rapid adoption of mobile phones even by low-income groups which is largely as a result of more flexible and non-excluding pricing structures such as 'pay-as-you-go' packages.
- **Lack of time**  
People may not have the time available to take training courses, or to travel to an internet café/online centre.
- **Lack of training or support**  
This may be in learning how to use a personal computer or the internet or low literacy levels. During April 2014 we provided two days IT training attended by 39 residents interested in scrutiny work including TPG members. We would like to have a bank of IT champions including some of these attendees which will help with the roll out of additional IT equipment and internet access at our sheltered schemes across the District during 2015.
- **Disabilities**  
Some disabilities may require accessibility devices or improvements in design to be necessary in order to make effective use of technologies.

### **3.3.2 Motivation:**

- **Lack of interest or perceived need**  
Large numbers of people report that the reason they do not use the internet is that they have no need for it, or no interest.
- **Cost/benefit ratio too high**  
Even if some benefit or interest in using the internet is assumed, it may be judged that the benefit is too small to justify the investment in computer equipment.

### **3.3.3 Skills and Confidence:**

- Lacking the skills, confidence or ability is particularly a problem among those who do not have immediate family or friends who are internet users. There are organisations based in the area who help support residents to get on line especially those households where someone has a disability. We intend to research local resources to ensure residents can access appropriate help when needed.

### **3.3.4 Concerns about security**

- Concern regarding security and undesirable material being available on the internet can affect both take up and willingness to transact online.

## **4. Actions so far and future priorities:**

- 40 PC's to be sourced/re-built and located in the sheltered schemes, communal rooms across the District
- Install Wi Fi in 40 communal rooms at sheltered schemes subject to suitable revenue funding being available
- Promote and increase use of Community hubs
- Bid for Government funding
- Promote/train community champions at local hubs to help local residents access the internet
- Improve digital information held and access to our services.

## **5. Consultation and Monitoring Performance**

### **5.1 How we consulted**

Consultation with TPG representatives and staff has taken place prior to considering new services/initiatives for development within the District. Meetings have taken place with corporate and ICT staff and further consultation will take place once the policy is adopted.

### **5.2 How we will monitor performance**

The Digital Inclusion Action Plan will be monitored by the Housing Services Management Team as part of the wider performance monitoring of the Housing Strategy and updated annually. Progress and achievements will be publicised through the South Cambs Magazine, TPG and staff forums.

The Action Plan is intended to be a live document to ensure it continues to meet our key objectives during the lifespan of the Strategy.

### **5.3 How we will resource the Digital Inclusion Strategy**

Further funding opportunities will be explored as part of the Strategy's Action Plan implementation.

#### **Staff Resources**

The Council does not have a dedicated officer for Digital Inclusion.

In order to fully resource this strategy including carrying out initial research in to current services within the district we will recruit a Housing/Digital project support post on a fixed term contract, initially for twelve months.

## **6. Contacts and further information**

If you require any further information about the Digital Inclusion Strategy please contact the Housing Strategic Team on 01954 713037 or email [peter.moston@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:peter.moston@scambs.gov.uk).

**PROTECT - COMMERCIAL**

DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN				
What	How	Expected Outcome	When	Progress/Action needed
Research existing digital services available, e.g. workshops that tenants/leaseholders could attend.	Utilise the internet, staff and local knowledge to identify available services.	Identify services that we could signpost to, or contact to consider partnership working opportunities.	Short Term	Starting April 2015 dependent on adoption of policy and recruitment of new post.
Signpost interested tenants/leaseholders to available existing support.	Once the above research has been carried out, we may be able to signpost interested people to existing services.	Help tenants/leaseholders to gain support with their digital progression and may develop close working relationships with other organisations.	Short Term	Dependent on recruitment of new post.
Install WiFi in 40 communal rooms at sheltered schemes across the district.	Sheltered housing manager to lead project by liaising with ICT department and housing Asset Management (IT) officer.	Provide residents of supported housing schemes with access to the internet. Enable staff to also utilise facility for remote working.	Currently in Progress. Completion target April 2015	SCDC's sheltered housing manager is working alongside the ICT department and asset management (IT) officer to facilitate the installation and implementation.
40 PCs to be sourced/re-built and located within the communal rooms.	Recycle old Council owned devices for use at the communal rooms.	Reuse existing equipment to enable residents to provide access to the internet for tenants/leaseholder that may not own equipment.	Currently in Progress. Completion target April 2015	SCDC's ICT department are currently working with sheltered housing to facilitate the rolling out of this project. Support for the ongoing maintenance of these devices will need to be sourced.



## Appendix 01 | Digital Inclusion Strategy Action Plan

### PROTECT - COMMERCIAL

What	How	Expected Outcome	When	Progress/Action needed
Promote and increase the use of community hubs.	Advertise on social media and in tenant/leaseholder magazines.	Create more things to do for people in the area, active communities and could potentially bring a revenue stream to the Council.	Short Term	Dependent of recruitment to new role
Bid for Government funding.	Explore available opportunities.		Long Term	Dependent on recruitment to new role
Arrange for staff training for supporting tenants/leaseholders with ICT.	Arrange training sessions for staff on familiarising themselves with various devices, how to utilise online SCDC services (so they can provide support) and ensure that they are equipped and comfortable in providing advice to tenants/leaseholders.	This should enable tenants/leaseholders to feel more comfortable when using online services and will open opportunities for savings & convenience by going online (e.g. grocery shopping and more).	Long Term	TPG/scrutiny members IT training commenced April 2014 (39 attendees to two IT training days). TPG members on-line increased from approximately 20% 3 years ago to over 70% now.
Look into possibility of providing the facility to log non-urgent repairs online with our repairs contractor. Also for residents to access rent account information on line.	Liaise with our repairs contractor regarding their capacity & experience in this area. Speak to our web team regarding the creation of an online form setup.	Provide an alternative and convenient way for tenants/leaseholders to log routine repairs at a time and place that suits them. Reduced costs.	Medium Term  Long Term	

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**PROTECT - COMMERCIAL**

What	How	Expected Outcome	When	Progress/Action needed
<p>Provide tailored support to tenants/leaseholders in using digital devices/services.</p>	<p>Research opportunities to provide support, such as putting on workshops at our communal rooms, staff providing help on an adhoc basis (through knowledge gained in provided training) or even offering digital support (setting up printers or web cameras etc.) as part of any proposed handyperson service.</p>	<p>Will provide tenants/leaseholders with improved confidence in using their device(s), could enable residents to keep in touch with friends/family (through being able to use instant messaging/video calling apps), they will learn new skills, could potentially save tenants/leaseholders money through online shopping savings.</p>	<p>Long Term</p>	<p>Part of the role for the new post.</p>