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Report of Chief Officer Housing Management

Report to Housing Advisory Board

Date: 29 November 2016

Subject: Digital Inclusion

Are specific electoral wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of ward(s):	☐	Yes	☒	No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☒	Yes	☐	No
Is the decision eligible for call-In?	☐	Yes	☒	No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	☐	Yes	☒	No

Summary of main issues

Leeds has a clear ambition to be 100% Digital, where everyone in the city has the opportunity to get online and to develop digital skills and confidence. Library and Information Services have instigated a range of actions for the benefit of many currently digitally excluded residents. In doing so, opportunities are emerging to work collaboratively with Housing Leeds to ensure tenants also benefit.

Service intelligence illustrates a gap in access to online information; on the basis of which up to 2 in 5 council tenants may be unable to bid for a home via the Leeds Homes website, check their rent account, report a repair or claim for benefits online – as well as access a range of other Council and other services.

A number of digital engagement and inclusion projects have taken place within Housing Leeds and by developing these and by working more closely with Library and Information Services in particular, further progress towards the Council's ambition can be achieved.

Recommendations

The Housing Advisory Board is invited to note current Digital Inclusion activities and to support the collaborative approach to achieving the Council's digital ambitions.

1   Purpose of the Report

1.1 To provide an overview of the current ambitions to make Leeds 100% Digital, where everyone in the city has the opportunity to get online and to develop their digital skills and confidence.

1.2 To share with the Housing Advisory Board an outline of the Digital Inclusion work of Housing Leeds to date and to explore opportunities for collaborative working between Housing Leeds, Library and Information Services and others.

2 Background information

2.3 To understand the level and impact of the digital divide, and in order to appreciate whether the presence of a divide is a cause for concern, it is important to first understand the role, value and breadth of digital services and the growth which these have undergone in recent years.

2.4 Within the library service alone the digital presence has grown. In 2014 free public internet use had grown to 878,736 uses of the computers, by 50,006 users, including 2,319 learning sessions delivered to 3,924 learners, many of whom may be tenants of Housing Leeds.

2.5 The Library Service offers free Wi-Fi at 35 locations, many of which are co-located within the community hub model, plus there are almost 90 other public buildings, including town halls and community centres that are Wi-Fi enabled, allowing users of mobile devices to get online without charge.

2.6 Further, growth and reliance on digital service provision is illustrated by the growth in the Council's web presence. The site was created and launched in 1994/5, at that time the website had very few pages and this was purely informational. The website currently has approximately 1,500 pages, covering a wide variety of services from council tax, planning and waste to local democracy, communities, leisure, libraries, museums and galleries; and usually attracts over 450,000 to 500,000 users each month.

2.7 A complete review of the Housing section of the website took place in 2015, with the input of tenants. Prior to the review, the service received 8,000 visits per month which increased to up to 21,000 visits per month after this area of the website was improved. The most frequently visited pages are 'make a rent payment', 'report a repair' and 'housing contacts'. Housing Leeds social media activity has also increased significantly, linking to LCC and others content and responding to comments and posts from tenants and residents.

2.8 Many of our users come to the site to carry out transactions via our digital channels which are configured with our back office systems, examples of which are listed below:

- At the end of 2016/17 quarter 2, over £25million was collected via on-line payments and our customers 'self-served' 635,365 times;

- We have dealt with just under 272,000 customer enquiries and transactions via interactive voice recognition;

- There have been over 200,000 bids for council homes via the Leeds Home website and our housing tenants have checked their rent balance over 20,000 times;

- We have attracted over 15,000 Active Leeds on-line members; and

- The vast majority of our most recent secondary school admission applications were made on-line.

2.9   Nationally, internet access has risen from just 9% in 1998 to 86% in 2015, as illustrated in the table at 3.1.2.

3   Main issues

3.1   **Digital Exclusion in Leeds:**

3.1.2 Despite this huge growth there remains a sizeable proportion of the population who have not been able to experience the benefits that digital literacy and connectivity can offer.

3.1.3 The graph below illustrates the growth of home internet; however, with approximately 320k households in Leeds, the 13% without internet access equates to approximately 45k households.
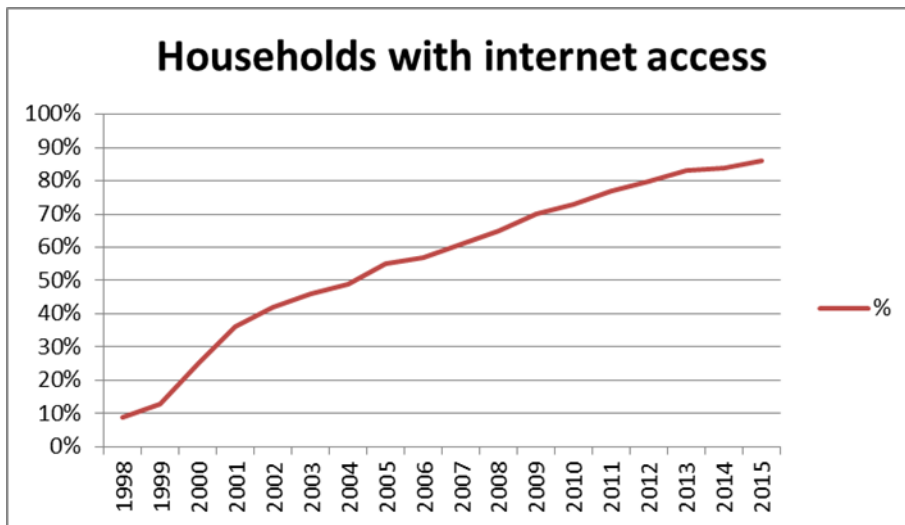
Source: ONS Notes: UK estimates from 1998 to 2004. GB estimates from 2005 to 2015.

3.1.4 In addition,

- 13% of adults in Leeds have never been online, and

- 23% of the adult population of Leeds lack basic digital skills equating to approximately 90,000 people.

Source: Go ON UK, Heatmap

3.1.5   These people are also more likely to be disabled, unemployed, on a low income or have low literacy and numeracy levels. These are the very people who would most benefit from being digitally included. The three main barriers that prevent people from getting online are:

- Access - Cost of equipment and broadband access

- Confidence - Lack of online skills

- Motivation - Lack of interest

3.2   **Levels of Digital Inclusion for Housing Tenants**

Access

3.2.1   These national recognised barriers have also been highlighted in specific data collected relating to Leeds City Council's housing tenants through the Annual Home Visits (AHVs) carried out between April 2015 and June 2016, and via responses to the Tenant Housing (STAR) survey conducted in November 2014.

3.2.2   38% of tenants told us that they do not have access to the internet, including outside of the home; this is supported by the STAR survey results which showed that 41% had no internet access, and a further 11% could only access the internet through a smartphone, and only 3% indicated they could access the internet outside of the home.

3.2.3   The STAR survey also showed that younger people were much less likely to not have any access to the internet (12%) and prefer to use mobile phones, whereas older people were much more likely to say they do not have access (73%) and prefer to use a PC or tablet.

3.2.4   However, it should be noted that some respondents may not have recognised that certain activities (such as accessing social media, online shopping or email), do count as accessing the internet. So actual numbers of tenants accessing the internet are likely to be higher than identified in the survey. AHV information also tells us that tenant access to the internet is changing over time, from 38% not having access during 15/16 to 36% so far during 16/17.

Confidence

3.2.5   During AHVs tenants are asked whether they would be confident making a benefit claim online; overall 34% of respondents (during 2016/17 to date) have said they would not be confident to do this, which rose to 66% of those without internet access.

Motivation

3.2.6   The STAR survey (2014) also asked those that said they don't access the internet, to state why not. Younger tenants were much more likely to report that connection costs were a factor (50%), whereas older tenants were much more likely to report that they don't want access (54%), and that lack of skills (35%) and

security/privacy concerns (22%) were a factor.

		Age Bands			Total
		<35	35-64	65+	
	Have no access to the internet	**12%**	**28%**	**73%**	**41%**
How Access the internet	PC/Tablet and Mobile	31%	24%	5%	**18%**
	PC/Tablet only	22%	34%	17%	**26%**
	Mobile only	29%	10%	4%	**11%**
	Outside of the home only	5%	5%	1%	**3%**
Why don't use internet (multiple response)	Do not have access to the internet	38%	47%	50%	**48%**
	Do not want to use the internet	19%	27%	54%	**42%**
	Equipment costs too high	36%	34%	26%	**30%**
	Connection costs, e.g. broadband, too high	50%	34%	27%	**31%**
	No free internet access near me	15%	11%	9%	**10%**
	Privacy and security concerns	10%	20%	22%	**20%**
	Physical disability	10%	12%	10%	**11%**
	Lack of confidence / skills	8%	32%	35%	**32%**
	Other	10%	6%	4%	**5%**

3.2.7   This information clearly illustrates a gap in access to online information; on the basis of which up to 2 in 5 council tenants may be unable to bid for a home via the Leeds Homes website, check their rent account, report a repair or claim for benefits online. These would be dependent on using traditional means on accessing services - visiting an office or calling the Contact Centre.

3.2.8   The survey data also shows clear differences across different age groups in preference of how to access the internet, which should be considered when targeting online services.

3.2.9   It has also identified a worrying lack of knowledge of the availability of free internet access in libraries, community hubs and other local community access points with only 3% recognising that this is available to them, despite it being freely available to all.

3.3   **Next Steps – 100% Digital Leeds**

3.3.1   The council, within the Smart Cities programme, has asked its Library and Information Service to coordinate the task of improving digital literacy across the city. In response to this, our ambition is for a 100% Digital Leeds where everyone in the city has the opportunity to get online and to develop their digital skills and confidence. To measure progress against this ambition, one of the council's "20 for 2020 Key Indicators" is the percentage of adults in Leeds who have all 5 basic digital skills.

3.3.2   Some of the actions that the council is taking to increase digital inclusion include:

- **Tablet lending scheme.** The library service intends to procure tablets to be added to the library management system for public lending from local libraries and community hubs. We would then take a geographical and needs-based

approach to lend tablets to the most excluded groups to have the biggest impact. We would establish key referral pathways to identify these people and link the scheme to the city's health and poverty agendas.

- **100% Digital Leeds Map.** We have created a citywide map of organisations that support digital literacy. The library service is Network Manager for the map and it is being developed to be searchable by need, e.g. training and support, free Wi-Fi, IT equipment, etc.

- **Targeted activity in localities.** The council's GIS team is working to identify areas of the city to target. This will include demographic data, indicators for likelihood of internet use, data from the Housing Leeds survey on digital literacy plus data from the Digital Access Team on geographical take-up of council online services. Overlaying this research onto the 100% Digital Leeds map will highlight specific localities where action is needed and will have the greatest impact.

- **Digital skills audit of Leeds population**. A citizen's panel survey will be carried out in the new year to set a baseline for the 20 for 2020 indicator.

- **Digital skills audit of the Council workforce.** Working with the council's E-skills team, a draft survey has been completed and is out for consultation. Analysis of survey results will show the extent of the internal digital skills gap. This links to the Leeds City Council ICT Strategy 2016 – 2020 which stated: … we will raise the digital literacy of Council and wider city staff so that they are better able to use technology in new ways … This will also enable them to be digital advocates to assist the wider public.

- **Promote 100% Digital Leeds to the public.** Logo being developed which organisations can use to 'brand' their digital inclusion activities. Planning a series of 100% Digital Leeds events in localities to build on the citywide event held at the Open Data Institute earlier this year.

3.3.3   Although the council is taking a lead role in making 100% Digital Leeds a reality, it cannot achieve this alone. Instead, it is offering to coordinate the work while asking others to collaborate and co-produce solutions. We have already established that there is a willingness on behalf of organisations across the city to work together to achieve this ambition.

3.3.4   Housing Leeds is well placed in terms of its interactions with tenants to support a significant contribution to the 100% Digital ambition. There are clear benefits to both tenants of Housing Leeds and to the service for example, in being able to deliver future policy and legislative changes and support priorities such as maximising rent collection.

3.4   **How will these actions improve access or awareness for Council tenants?**

3.4.1   **100% Digital Map**

- Opportunity to raise awareness to all tenants of the free public access computers and free Wi-Fi in libraries, community hubs and access delivered

by Third Sector with by tailored communications and input from local housing teams and wider engagement service.

- Using 100% Digital Leeds Website to find a tenant or tenant's group appropriate training at a library, community hub, UKonline centre or other venue.

- The promotion, support and signposting of local projects such as Neruka's Soup Kitchen (and other) examples like this.

- Possibility to trial activities with different customer groups – for example by showing tenants how internet can help communicate with family, explore wider interests to break down motivation as a barrier, as well as interact with LCC services.

3.4.2 Tablet lending scheme

- Scope to explore referrals by Housing for tenants to borrow a tablet, including 3G connectivity – either by certain customer group or pilot in certain area and the possibility of buying low cost loaned equipment supporting tenants in MSF's that may receive free Wi-Fi but have no device to be able to access the internet.

3.4.3 Mapping exclusion and provision

- Opportunity to identify where gaps are and investigate group booking of equipment for use by community groups, or clusters of residents in certain areas/places.

- Voluntary and community groups could be trained as trainers. Scope for Housing Advisory Panel funding to community groups leading on this locally, or to Third Sector Partners.

3.4.4 Tower block free Wi-Fi

- Make loanable equipment available, use of mobile library or Housing's mobile office for group training when free Wi-Fi goes live. Attract interest of residents by relevant communications about how they can access useful Council or local services, make savings – any online interaction that can impact on day to day lives.

3.4.5 Staff skills

- Training or briefing sessions for staff to achieve basic digital skills levels. Focus on most common everyday online service transactions for tenants – e.g. checking a rent balance, so this can be part and parcel and conversations with tenants when appropriate.

3.4.6 Citizens Panel Survey

- Promotion to housing teams, tenants via social media, local housing offices and tenants groups.

3.5 **Work to date within Housing Leeds:**

3.5.1 **Mobile office, the 'HUGO' Bus** – In a partnership with Leeds Federated Housing Association, Housing Leeds re-branded the mobile office with the HUGO family (Helping You Get Online). The vehicle emits free Wi-Fi and has been used as an eye-catching tool for consultation events, Housing Surgeries, estate clean ups, walkabouts, and engaging with tenants in a variety of ways. Whilst not exclusively a tool to support digital engagement, there is scope to work and in particular show tenants the benefits of being online with loaned or low cost devices.

3.5.2 **Housing Advisory Panel (HAP) funding local projects** - HAPs remain a potential source of funding for localised projects relating to digital inclusion. A number of the HAPs have highlighted the importance of digital inclusion and how this can support access to skills, education and training as a local priority

3.5.3 Some recent examples include projects funded with the additional support of Get Technology Together - a Leeds based community organisation experienced in setting up digital access points in the community, providing support and training to centre users, staff and volunteers. Projects being developed through joint funding from the Community Committees and HAPs of this nature include:

- A digital access point at the Lincoln Green Community Centre working with the Leodis Project who offer advice, digital access and a café facility. It aims to support the development and improvement of digital literacy with those who currently use the resources, increase the use of the digital facilities and also improve the confidence and job readiness of everyone taking part. This is in an area with a high concentration of Council and wider social housing.

- A beginners computer skills and a digital access point at Neruka's Soup Kitchen in Harehills. Initially a 10 week course, 2 hours per week for 6 to 12 people. Neruka White – the Chair of the kitchen - has identified the need within her community for basic computer and getting online skills after speaking to many people who access her soup kitchen. Other computer access points are a 20 minute walk away and bus fares are costly for people on JSA / low incomes. Neruka knows her service users well; understanding that some have support and language needs in addition to having low levels of confidence. Neruka's aim is to support local people and, a few who come

from further away, to go to the soup kitchen to develop the confidence and skills they need to become more work ready.

3.5.4 **Support for Tenants and Residents Associations/tenants groups** – In October Information Officers facilitated an informal training session with some of the city's most active tenants and residents groups on how to use Facebook and Twitter. Helping the groups themselves engage with their communities online. Networking between TARA's aims to spread these skills to other groups.

3.5.5 July's TARA conference included a digital inclusion stall to help bring those active in the third sector together with residents groups – which helped prompt the two HAP funded examples above.

3.5.6 In Garforth, the local Neighbourhood Network delivered a 6 week beginners computer class at the local library in response to group of tenants from a sheltered housing scheme wishing to get online and build their computer confidence.

3.5.7 **Free Wi-Fi pilots within Multi-Storey Flats** – The service is currently negotiating with a number of organisations wishing to install broadband equipment (antennas) on some MSFs. Delivered on the principle of exchanging a reduced period of rental charge for the installation of a period of free Wi-Fi for the blocks residents. Installation has taken place in Clyde Grange and Grayson Crest with further Wi-Fi provision planned for Lovell Park Heights, Holborn Towers, Carlton Garth, Marlborough Towers and Clyde Court.

3.5.8 This has the clear potential to connect residents who are currently not accessing the internet, as well as providing free access to those currently paying for such. There are also significant opportunities to be able to engage with residents of these blocks in new ways, and use the Wi-Fi installation as a kick start for wider training, support or community building activity.

3.5.9 **Self Service Portal (SSP)** – Implemented in March 2016, the portal allows tenants to view their rent account, any garage account, view their personal details, update contact details and view the last 30 days of their homes repairs history. Around 150 tenants view the portal a day. Of the 3,668 registered users, 1,061 have logged in to their account within the last month.

3.5.10 **Housing IT Solution** –Delivered over the next two years, the provision of a new IT solution encompassing all aspects of tenancy and stock management that will also improve customer access and support greater self-service. The solution includes:

- A 'Tenants Portal' - access to rent accounts, tenants details and the ability to log and monitor the progress of repairs;

- Enhancements to our approach to mobile working, for example, the more efficient delivery of Annual Home Visits, conducted on mobile devices by employees

3.5.11   **Increasing Tenant Engagement** – Housing Leeds is currently working with VITAL, the Voice of Involved Tenants across Leeds, to review the tenant involvement framework. A focus of the review is to place more emphasis on improving engagement with all tenants, and how this can be achieved by using more digital engagement opportunities, such as:

- o On line forums, similar to YAgi's online discussion forum about Universal Credit earlier in the year;

- o Producing YouTube videos to promote events and opportunities;

- o Promoting our web and local web pages as the 'go to' default to find out or be able to comment on services.

- o Supplementing reports with film, video and hyperlinks. The latest Housing Leeds Annual Report is more interactive, offering links to film clips to enhance the written narrative and;

- o Making further use of QR codes on our documents

3.5.12   Housing Leeds is increasingly engaging with its tenants through use of social media and the number of followers is steadily growing. Housing Leeds has 1,435 Facebook and 1,599 Twitter followers.

3.6   **Responding to Benefit Changes**

3.6.1   The implementation of Universal Credit highlights the importance of improving digital access for residents and the building of digital skills and confidence. All applications for Universal Credit will be digital by default meaning tenants will have to make the application on line.

3.6.2   To date, Universal Credit has impacted on around 580 newly unemployed single Council tenants. From their contact with the service, these tenants either have internet access or haven't highlighted access as a barrier to making a Universal Credit claim; reflecting the greater online access and confidence of this customer group.

3.6.3   However, an estimated 22,000 tenants remain in scope for moving onto Universal Credit by 2022. All new claimants from 2018, through to the large scale migration of tenants claiming existing benefits that are included within Universal Credit. Given 34% of Annual Home Visit respondents have said they would not be confident to make a benefit claim online and of those without internet access this rose to 66% there are potentially thousands of tenants where access to claiming benefits is made more difficult.

3.6.4   Currently Housing Leeds is providing an enhanced level of support to tenants claiming Universal Credit to help them through the transition process. When Universal Credit is fully rolled out it will be more difficult to provide this level of enhanced support and so it will become more important to ensure that claimants are supported to access digital services and training. This highlights the importance of furthering activity within Leeds to increase digital access and improve IT skills and confidence for tenants.

3.6.5 **Consultation and engagement**

3.7 A number of the activities within this report has been instigated in response to tenant and resident feedback, for example, the request from sheltered housing residents. By sharing more information about how and where residents can get online, our efforts will support Leeds to become 100% Digital, support the Council's engagement opportunities and allow greater resident participation and feedback.

3.8 The deployment of Wi-Fi within high rise blocks gives the service the opportunity to engage with residents in a new way, using new communication methods to trigger more local community activity and resident participation.

4 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

4.1 Greater Digital Inclusion complements a number of strategic Council documents, including the Best Council Plan, specifically to achieve one of the council's "20 for 2020 Key Indicators", the percentage of adults in Leeds who have all 5 basic digital skills.

4.2 The Council breakthrough project theme of 'Strong communities benefiting from a strong city' is supported by greater digital access amongst residents and communities.

5 Resources and value for money

5.1 Digital transactions help support the identification of efficiencies with Council teams and services as unit or contact costs are often cheaper. Resources can be more easily focussed on complex service requests that benefit from face to face or phone contact.

6 Legal Implications, access to information and call In

6.1 The report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

7 Risk management

7.1 Adopting a proactive approach to Digital Inclusion reduces risk and allows services to design more flexible responses to policy and legislative changes. The increased consumer choices digital access provides also reduces the risks of delivering a key housing priority of maximising rent collection.

7.2 Individual risk assessments will be carried out for future localised activity when necessary.

8 Conclusions

8.1 The Housing Advisory Board is invited to note current Digital Inclusion activities and support the collaborative approach to achieving the Councils digital ambitions.

9 Background documents[1]

9.1   None