NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Cabinet Board
19ᵗʰ May 2016

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
K.Jones

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Digital Inclusion Charter

Purpose of Report

1. The report seeks to gain support from members to implement a Digital Inclusion Charter within Neath Port Talbot.

Executive Summary

2. Digital Communities Wales, the Welsh Government's digital inclusion project, found that that nearly one in five adults in Wales aren't online. In some places, that figure is as high as one in three. People are being held back in life because no one has shown them how to use the Internet. There are huge benefits associated with being digitally included, both economic and social such as cutting household bills, finding a job or maintaining contact with distant friends and relatives.

    There are four main types of challenge that people face to going online:

    - access - the ability to actually go online and connect to the internet

    - skills - to be able to use the internet

    - motivation – knowing the reasons why using the internet is a positive thing

- trust - a fear of crime, or not knowing where to start to go online

Tackling digital exclusion is a policy priority of the Welsh Government. To increase the pace of change, the Welsh Government, through Digital Communities Wales, launched a Digital Inclusion Charter in February and is inviting organisations to become signatories to the Charter.

The main aim of the Charter would be to raise the profile of work being done to assist more people to become digitally included and enjoy the benefits that they can experience from being online.

Background

3. A group from a number of organisations including NPTCBC Coastal Housing, NPT Homes, NPTCVS, Digital Communities Wales, Communities First and others has met on a number of occasions since August 2015 as part of a working group to look at digital inclusion within NPTCBC.

4. In February 2016, Digital Communities Wales launched a Charter which calls on organisations in Wales to promote basic digital skills and help people to get online. The Digital Inclusion Charter has been developed by the Wales Co-operative Centre which delivers the Digital Communities Wales project.

5. The Charter includes six pledges and is a simple way for organisations to show how they are helping digitally excluded people; particularly older people, people with disabilities, unemployed people, social housing tenants and families in poverty, enjoy the benefits of the internet.

6. The pledges incuded in the Charter are:

- Ensure that all our staff and volunteers have an opportunity to learn basic digital skills, and that they take advantage of this opportunity.

- Ensure that digital inclusion principles are embedded into our day to day activities.

- Encourage and support our staff and volunteers to help other people to get on line and have the confidence to develop basic digital skills, and help other organisations to embrace digital tools.

- Commit support and resources for digital inclusion activities and initiatives in Wales in whatever ways we can.

- Share best practice and activity around digital inclusion with Digital Communities Wales so that our activities can be co-ordinated for maximum impact and measured consistently.

- Look to build local partnerships amongst organisations which want to share ideas and co-ordinate activities with others in their area.

7. Some of the practical ways we could demonstrate our commitment to the Charter locally, proposed by the organisations who are part of the working group include;

- To increase the on-line availability of services and an on-going commitment to monitoring, evaluating and improving these services.

- To give the opportunity for volunteers from all partner organisations to meet up during the year to share good practice and ideas to help progress getting people online more effectively. Establish a social media site where volunteers can regularly share ideas and help support each other and support people to get online.

- To work in partnership with other organisations delivering IT support to assist volunteers to deliver effective IT support across Neath Port Talbot.

- To map free publicly accessible Wi-Fi spots across the county borough.

8. The council has already made a commitment to tackling digital exclusion in the Digital By Choice Strategy adopted by Council in 2015. Commitment to the Charter will help reinforce the council's work in this area and also promote the importance of helping more people get online amongst partners and the wider community. There is a significant range of activities taking place across the county borough, the Charter would provide a mechanism for linking the activities and the people involved in the work together and in so doing, provide an opportunity to make the most impact at a time of shrinking human and financial resources.

9. Signatories of the Charter also commit to working together in a spirit of co-operation to promote digital inclusion in Wales.

10. More information about the Charter can be found at digitalcommunities.gov.wales/charter

Financial Impact

11. There are no new budgets identified to support this work, however, assisting more people to go online, will help increase the number of service users who access council services online, ultimately leading to a reduction in costs for the council of providing services.

Equality Impact Assessment

12. A Screening Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Acto 2010. After completing the Assessment it has been determined that an Equality Impact Assessment is not required, however,older people, people on low incomes as well as people with disabilities or in poor health are groups of people who are more likely to be digitally excluded. Work to tackle digital inclusion will have a positive impact on people who share these and related protected characteristics.

Workforce Impacts

13. Improved digital skills amongst the workforce is one of the pledges in the Charter that the council would be signing up to; to ensure that all our staff have an opportunity to learn basic digital skills, and that they take advantage of this opportunity. Research estimates that

90% of jobs will require at least basic digital skills, consequently working to improve digital skills in the workforce is essential.

Legal Powers

14. The local authority would be signing the Charter in pursuance of the well-being powers set out under the Local Government Act 2000, section 2.

Risk Management

15. By not tackling digital exclusion, the council would risk not fully delivering its Digital By Choice objectives.

Consultation

16. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

17. **Decision**

That Members support the implementation of a Digital Inclusion Charter within Neath Port Talbot.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

18. To gain Member approval for the council to sign up to the Digital Charter.

Implementation of Decision

19. The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

20. None

List of Background Papers

20. http://digitalcommunities.gov.wales/charter/

Officer Contact

21. Mrs Karen Jones, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services. Tel: 01639 763284 or e-mail:k.jones3@npt.gov.uk