FIFE COUNCIL

DIGITAL INCLUSION & SOCIAL HOUSING RESEARCH STUDY

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Fife Council

Digital Inclusion & Social Housing Research Study

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In March 2012, Fife Council Digital Inclusion Strategy Group commissioned Arneil Johnston to undertake a research project with the aim of determining how Fife could work with social housing landlords to improve digital inclusion.

National research provided by the Raceonline 2012 Initiative highlighted that 70 % of people living in social housing have never been online. That means that they are missing out on all the benefits being online can bring in terms of saving money, accessing services a, job searching, health information etc.

 At the end of 2011 the Chartered Institute for Housing published a briefing on Social Landlords and Digital Inclusion highlighting good practice from around Scotland. Fife was keen to establish what could be learnt from these case studies and whether national figures on digital exclusion were replicated in our communities.

Fife Council is currently developing its bid to submit to Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to secure funding to develop superfast broadband in the rural parts of Fife The research was also seen as a way of collecting evidence of how we aim to stimulate demand for services and support new broadband users will aid this bid .

1.2 The Digital Inclusion Strategy Group

The Digital Inclusion Strategy Group was established in response to growing importance of digital inclusion and participation. There is cross service representation and those who are part of the group fulfil a Digital Champion role within their own services. This means at a time where increasingly there is a shift to delivering public services online there needs to be recognition and action taken to address digital exclusion issues in Fife. The members of the Strategy Group are:

- Service Manager Education and Learning;
- Team Leader Digital Inclusion;
- Head of ICT Education;
- Senior Area Education Officer
- Sustainable Communities Programme Manager;
- Enterprise Planning and Protective Services – Lead Officer;
- Council Customer Services Manager;
- Libraries and Museums – Adult Services Coordinator
- Web Team – Improvement Consultant;
- Housing Strategy and Systems – Lead Officer;
- Scottish Government Digital Participation Representatives.

A variety of pilot initiatives have been established to target work with those most likely to need support to get online and this research was seen as a way to see if efforts could be further targeted around social housing tenants and increased impact of initiatives could be made.

1.3 Digital Fife

Whilst it is acknowledged that social landlords have an important part to play in tackling digital exclusion; there is a well-established multi-agency framework which promotes the use of digital technology across Fife's communities.

Specifically, 'Digital Fife' (www.digitalfife.com), which is an online community supported by Fife Council and the voluntary sector, promotes the use of digital media through working with community groups and a network of volunteer 'digital champions'. This work is promoted through 38 learning centres across Fife, which provide community based free internet access and support. There is a variety of online learning modules which deliver courses in basic computing and on using the internet. Aligned to Digital Fife's work, there are more than 260 community groups in the area who have set up dedicated websites. Such groups play a key role in tackling digital exclusion, in their 'contribution to the life and wellbeing of the community, especially in the more deprived areas and among the most disadvantaged people'.

This research aims to explore how the issue of digital inclusion can be given a greater focus on the strategic housing agenda in Fife. It is therefore imperative that any housing led responses to the issue will be integrated into wider public sector and corporate digital inclusion agendas. This is essential to ensuring that social landlords can:

- maximise the impact of existing resources available at community level; and

- target housing's contribution to digital inclusion where it is most required.

1.4 Research Objectives

The outcome of this research study will be to determine the extent and nature of digital exclusion across the social housing sector in Fife so that support can be successfully targeted to maximise access to online services and wider benefits. Aligned to this outcome, five research objectives have been established for the project as follows:

1. To estimate how many of those in social housing in Fife who are not online, including the numbers and spread of social housing tenants across Fife;

2. To examine whether targeting support and services to this group will impact on improving digital inclusion in Fife;

3. To identify if landlords are likely to benefit from services being provided online;

4. To examine whether there are issues to be considered at an urban/rural level; and

5. To identify the key partners who would add to the impact that social landlords could make to the digital inclusion agenda.

1.5 Research Methodology

In order to meet the research objectives of this commission, the following research methodology was implemented:

1. To review UK best practice in promoting digital inclusion within the social housing sector;

2. To profile the extent and nature of digital exclusion in Fife's social housing sector;

3. To examine interventions to promote digital inclusion in Fife in consultation with services users and social housing providers; and

4. To develop a set of practical recommendations which set out the contribution of Fife's housing sector in tackling digital exclusion.

The following report sets out the main research findings, key conclusions and recommendations, as well as providing access to all research and consultation materials developed to meet research objectives.

2. GOOD PRACTICE REVIEW: DIGITAL INCLUSION & THE ROLE OF SOCIAL LANDLORDS

2.1 Background

A key element of delivering the research objectives outlined above, involved conducting a thorough desk based review of UK best practice in tackling digital exclusion.

Best practice evaluation focused on identifying:

- Examples of how 'targeting' strategies can be developed and defined to promote and maximise digital inclusion across the Fife social housing sector;

- The likely benefits and cost efficiencies to be delivered to social landlords and other service delivery partners of promoting online service use;

- The partnerships that may help to maximise the impact of social landlords' investment in digital inclusion activity; and

- The issues that should be considered to promote digital inclusion in both an urban and rural setting.

2.2 Key Outputs

Arneil Johnston conducted extensive research of social landlords' approaches to digital inclusion across the UK, in order to meet the research objectives specified.

Key outputs have been hyperlinked to this document and can be accessed below:

UK best practice briefing paper

Summary of research analysis on housing led digital inclusion UK publications.

2.3 Digital Exclusion Fife

The following diagram illustrates the three factors that have consistently been highlighted, throughout the best practice evaluation, as providing the main barriers to digital inclusion'.

It is therefore concluded that any strategy to tackle digital exclusion in Fife must seek to proactively address these barriers e.g.

1. The provision of hardware and broadband **access at an affordable cost** is recognised as a necessary condition for tackling digital exclusion;

2. Good practice suggests that the best way to address the issues associated with **confidence and lack of basic skills** is through face-to-face learning in a supportive environment; and

3. Digital inclusion must focus on **persuading non-users that there is value** in using digital technology and of the genuine benefits of being online.

More generally, the research review established a major link between social and digital exclusion. Based on their traditional role of tackling social disadvantage in the communities they serve, best practice research findings also set out the main reasons why social landlords should be interested in digital inclusion:

To tackle disadvantage & build sustainable communities

To improve services
• Better communication
• Quicker response to customer needs

Savings can be used to invest in housing & communities

Clearly, there are both social and business imperatives for social landlords to proactively address the barriers to digital inclusion. It is therefore important that these issues be considered at a strategic level by the Fife Housing partnership.

2.4 Best Practice Review Learning Outcomes

The best practice review of UK social landlords' digital inclusion activity has produced the following findings to addresses the research questions associated with this study, as follows:

1. How should 'targeting' strategies be developed and defined to promote and maximise digital inclusion?

Generally, the best practice review has highlighted that the following groups should be the subject of 'targeting' strategies in order to promote digital inclusion:

• older people,

• those who are unemployed, and

• those who are most socially deprived.

Given the fast moving welfare reform agenda, it may be worth considering how to target those who are likely to be most affected by the reforms and to build their capacity to engage digitally and mitigate the impact for tenant and landlord alike.

The key finding for this research study is the clear link between social exclusion and digital exclusion. **Generally, digital exclusion can be described as a socio-economic problem.**

As social landlords accommodate some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged households in our society, there is a major role for social landlords to play in tackling digital exclusion.

If the statistic that '70% of social housing tenants are not online' is true in a Fife context; then approximately 27,000 social housing tenants in the area could be targeted by social landlords and other agencies.

Within the best practice findings, it becomes clear that different types of customers will be drawn to different types of digital media. It is therefore imperative that social landlords in Fife:

• engage with their tenant population to understand household circumstances and customer preferences;

- align digital inclusion activity into wider financial inclusion strategies, which seek to tackle social disadvantage; and
- examine how support provision to vulnerable/social excluded groups such as older tenants, homeless households and hard to reach tenants can include a digital inclusion dimension.

2. What are the likely benefits and cost efficiencies to be delivered to social landlords and other service delivery partners of promoting online service access and engagement?

The finding of the best practice review suggests that:

- If just a third of contacts made by citizens to the public sector took place online, £2 billion would be saved annually. Social landlords would be one of a number of service providers to benefit from this;

- Online rent transaction can lower rent arrears and results in faster and cheaper income collection processes;

- Communication using mobile internet/text messaging is a cheap and effective method of tenant engagement to support business activity (i.e. rent collection, arrears management, repairs reporting/appointments);

- Landlords can make properties more attractive/lettable if they have internet connections, particularly where costs are included within agreed rental or service charges (e.g. Tenant Broadband Service); and

- The DWP "Digital by Default" agenda, where it is intended that 70% of all claims for income related benefits will be online by 2017; is a major risk to the income recovery of social landlords if Housing Benefit claimants are not supported to make online applications. Investment in digital inclusion is therefore a business imperative in mitigating this risk.

3. What are the key partnerships that may help to maximise the impact of digital inclusion?

Key partnerships that will help to maximise the impact of digital inclusion activity by social landlords include the following:

- health and social care agencies, including those shifting the balance of care for older people/those implementing of telecare/telehealth systems;
- income maximisation and welfare rights services;
- education and community development;
- economic development; and
- Credit Union and Welfare Rights partners.

4. What are the issues that should be considered to promote digital inclusion in both an urban and rural setting?

The following interventions should be considered by social landlords to ensure that digital infrastructure is developed in every Fife community:

- Regular communication between housing and telecoms providers to ensure that opportunities are understood from both a commercial and social perspective;

- Social Housing Landlords should ensure they keep up to date with Fife's planning and proposals in regard to improving infrastructure and superfast broadband;

- Digital infrastructure and broadband investment should be carefully considered from a procurement perspective, to enable social landlords to

develop partnerships or enter negotiations with Telecom providers to provide more cost effective service provision across the their tenant base;

- Design specifications should be developed to consider broadband connectivity in new build housing developments.

3.   BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

3.1   Targeting Particular Groups

1. Berwickshire HA has supported local school pupils to visit sheltered housing complexes to teach residents how to use the internet, on a one-to-one basis. The success of the project resulted in wireless connections being installed within sheltered housing provision; [1]

2. Blackwood Homes are piloting internet access within sheltered units where there is a tenants' organisation to guide and promote learning. Five reconditioned PCs have been provided;

3. West Lothian Council provides internet access and support within a homelessness supported accommodation project for families. Within this framework, 'SIKA Solutions' has developed a safe & secure web platform for this vulnerable group of service users;

4. Peabody has developed a number of initiatives in its ambition to become 'digital by default', including provision of IT hubs and wi-fi centres in 10 sheltered schemes and a laptop loan scheme for those who cannot afford their own. 50% of their residents now regularly use wi-fi service through their smartphones;

5. Southampton City Council have provided IT facilities to almost half of its supported accommodation facilities and plans to have at least 2 computers at each of its 24 Supported Housing sites. It has also developed local community links through opening up their IT suites to Age Concern and using a partner organisation to provide buses to bring residents to use the schools' IT suites;

6. Taff Housing has provided computer access in its young women's hostels where they can study and has set up a tenant resources room for residents to obtain advice on, for example, job seeking.

3.2   Community Internet Access/Skills Agenda

1. Shelter Scotland partnered with 11 agencies (including a community cafe, a library, a computer skills training provider, resettlement support for people experiencing homelessness) to undertake a 'web buddying' project. The project proved to be a very popular volunteering opportunity, which proactively addressed the needs of some of the most digitally excluded aspects of the community;[2]

2. ANCHO (Ayrshire North Community Housing Organisation) currently provides 2 community based internet cafes/coffee shops, funded partially through the Wider Role programme;

3. Poplar Harca has an internet café that is a UK Online Centre where mothers learn digital skills to support children with their homework;

4. Sunderland City Council has launched a project to establish 'electronic village halls'; centres now exist across the whole city in adult learning centres, village halls, youth clubs, health centres, GP surgeries, libraries, sports centres, pubs, street kiosks, public service centres and within people's homes.

3.3   Digital Service Delivery Innovation

1. Glasgow Housing Association aims to have 65% of its stock connected to the internet by 2014 and have undertaken extensive feasibility studies to identify the extent of connectivity problems. Procurement process have been developed to resolve these issues and upgrade the physical infrastructure;

2. West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative has set up a community owned co-operative providing broadband services to its members whilst giving control to the local users through a management committee. WWHC uses the provision of broadband as a means to discourage arrears e.g. broadband services are suspended in event of arrears;

3. Parkhead HA is using social networking sites to engage with tenants who already have internet access and digital media competence;

4. Social landlords are increasingly using text messaging to communicate with tenants regarding rental payments and repairs appointments. Yorkshire Coast Homes is exploring the provision of pay-as-you-go phones to new tenants to promote the use of digital media as a service delivery platform;

5. East Lothian HA is successfully using its website to engage with tenants, allowing them to report repairs, pay rent, apply for housing, etc. There is also an 'online housing office' enabling tenants to 'chat' with staff members at specific times of the week;

6. Linc-Cymru HA is using 'My Tenancy', an internet-based system providing secure access to tenancy, rent and repair records held within the Association's management information system;

7. "TenantBook" is used in a similar way to Facebook and is a social network specifically aimed at tenants and housing practitioners. TenantBook has 630 members and is growing across the UK. This can be accessed via: http://tenantbook.co.uk/what-is-tenantbook;

8. 'DigiTV (www.digitv.gov.uk) is a not-for-profit organisation run by Kirklees Council, providing citizen-focused public-sector specific content through digital TV and mobile phones. The site acts as a hub, offering services to set up digital content and showcasing current projects;[4]

9. MySociety (www.mysociety.org) is an organisation focused on developing websites to enable the voice of the community. For example, FixMyStreet (www.fixmystreet.com) is an easy-to-use interface that enables people to report (and discuss) issues concerning their local area;

10. Home Group has redesigned its website to improve functionality and make it user friendly. Tenants can pay their rent online, view/print rent statements, update contact details, report a repair and provide feedback. This is predicted to save Home Group £200,000 per annum);

11. Whitefriars Housing Group (WHG) introduced mobile working for its responsive repairs, with the online appointment system significantly improving performance; urgent works improved from 77% in 2007 to 98% in 2011 and from 92% to 99.5% in emergency repairs. Furthermore, WHG is also encouraging its tenants to 'get more out of life online' via its website;

3.4 Partnership Working

1. Computer re-use schemes in Scotland have included the Wise Group who have worked with Microsoft to make PCs available to people who are seeking employment; and 'Pass IT On', which makes computing equipment available to people with disabilities in the Edinburgh area;

2. The Hyde Group has partnered with Eco Computer Systems (ECS) and uses ECS volunteers to refurbish and recycle computers for members of the local community to buy at a reduced cost. This has resulted in savings of around £200,000 to residents;

3. Sanctuary Group (UK social housing provider) has teamed up with Microsoft (signatory of the 'Digital Charter') to establish a digital inclusion programme
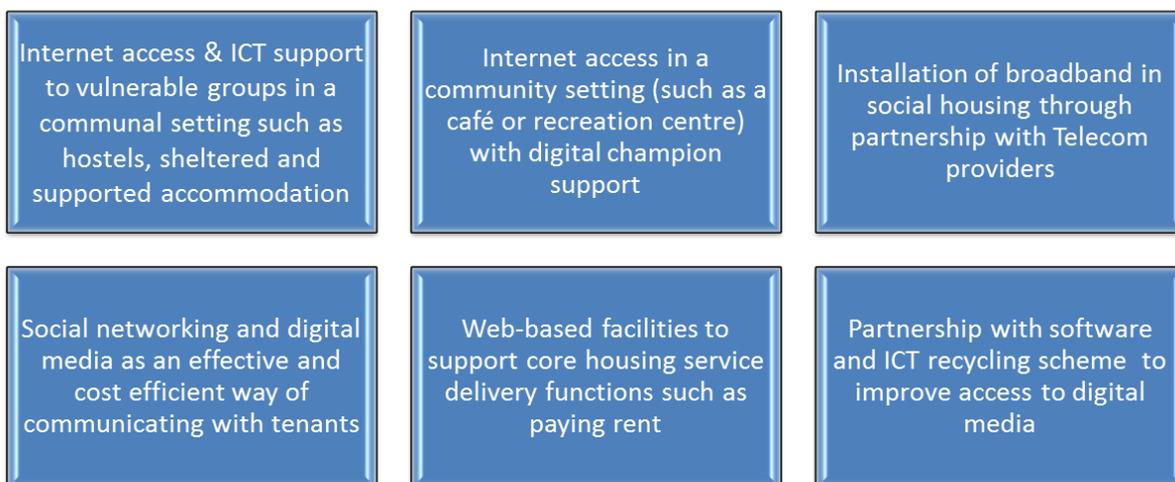
which will provide residents with community IT facilities and access to digital literacy training and qualifications. Sanctuary has been accredited as a Microsoft Learning Academy and is piloting the project in its supported housing schemes for young people in the south east of England. Sanctuary is providing residents in selected schemes with access to refurbished laptops and the internet to enable them to develop their computer skills, study, and carry out online job searches;

4. The Hyde Group (HG) provided training within its sheltered housing scheme (48 properties) to residents from late-60s to mid-90s, using 2 computers, and as a result residents have now set up a computer club to keep their skills up;

HG has also partnered with Eco Computer Systems (ECS) and uses ECS volunteers to refurbish and recycle computers for members of the local community to buy at a reduced cost. This has resulted in savings of around £200,000 to residents.

3.5 Best Practice Conclusions

Best practice examples of the role of social landlords in tackling digital inclusion would suggest that the following types of activity are likely to make a positive difference in a Fife context:

Internet access & ICT support to vulnerable groups in a communal setting such as hostels, sheltered and supported accommodation	Internet access in a community setting (such as a café or recreation centre) with digital champion support	Installation of broadband in social housing through partnership with Telecom providers
Social networking and digital media as an effective and cost efficient way of communicating with tenants	Web-based facilities to support core housing service delivery functions such as paying rent	Partnership with software and ICT recycling scheme to improve access to digital media

4. DIGITAL EXCLUSION STATISTICAL PROFILE: FIFE'S SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR

In order to determine where digital inclusion strategy interventions should be targeted and focused across the Fife population, it was important that the research estimated the extent and nature of the offline population in the area. Key research statistics identified from the good practice review have been assembled to build a profile of digital exclusion in Fife, as set out in the table below:

National Statistics	Fife Level Statistics	Fife Evidence
21% of UK population have never used the internet (Manifesto for a Networked Nation 2010)	Fife population = 365,020 people (2010 SNS)	This equals approximately 76,000 households in Fife
9% of UK population is both socially and digitally excluded (Manifesto for a Networked Nation 2010)	Fife population = 365,020 people (2010 SNS)	54% of Fife households in 15% most deprived in Scotland have home internet access compared to 67% of Fife households outwith the 15% most deprived areas
70% of social housing tenants are not online (Social Housing Providers and Digital Inclusion Strategy Group, Action Plan 2010)	38,848 social housing tenants in Fife (Scot Gov 2011)	Approximately 27,000 Fife households who are social housing tenants are likely to be currently offline
38% who are not online are unemployed (Manifesto for a Networked Nation 2010)	11,060 people were unemployed in Fife (March 2012, ONS) 38% of digitally excluded Fife population (32,851) = 12,483 people who are not online	Between 11,000 and 12,000 unemployed people are likely to be digitally excluded
Internet penetration increases as household income increases. 98% of people in UK with an income over £41,600 had used the internet	Broadband take up in Fife is currently 65% (May 2012)	Lower proportion of the lowest income households in Fife (earning up to £10,000) have internet access compared to the national average for that income group (35% compared to 38%)

These findings reinforce the important role that social landlords could play in tackling digital exclusion in Fife given the strong link between digital and social exclusion and the high concentration of tenants who are likely to be socially disadvantaged and income deprived.

In particular, the statistics perhaps suggest, that social landlords should focus their digital inclusion interventions alongside wider financial inclusion strategies, which

seek to maximise the household incomes of those most in poverty; and also wider employment strategies. In addition, based on good practice review examples, if social landlords in Fife tackled the needs of specific household groups, the following numbers could be assisted:

- 1,800 older households currently located in sheltered housing; and

- over 800 homeless households currently located in supported or hostel type accommodation.

5. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION: HOW DO WE PROMOTE DIGITAL INCLUSION?

Informed by the findings of the best practice research review and based on the indicative profile of Fife digital exclusion; Arneil Johnston facilitated a series of stakeholder consultation events to examine stakeholder awareness and commitment, and test best practice options for inclusion in the Fife Digital Inclusion Strategy. Three events were held as follows:

1. a service user consultation event on 30th March 2012, including ten residents from in and around the Levenmouth area (eight of whom were social housing tenants);

2. a service user consultation event on 20th April 2012, including nine residents acting as representatives from various Tenants and Residents' Associations across Fife; and

3. a service provider consultation event on 19th April 2012, including a range of stakeholders from the Fife Housing Partnership and the Digital Inclusion Strategy Working Group. Notably, a number of large social landlords (including Fife Council) were in attendance at this event.

Detailed consultation report findings have been hyperlinked to this document and can be accessed below:

Service User Consultation Outcomes Report 30th March 2012

Service User Consultation Outcomes Report 20th April 2012

Service Provider Consultation Outcomes Report 19th April 2012

5.1 Service User Consultation Outcomes

The objectives for the consultation sessions with service users were as follows:

1. To discuss why digital inclusion is so important, why the Council wants to achieve this and what is currently being done to achieve digital inclusion;

2. To examine the barriers and perceptions associated with accessing housing services online;

3. To consider the extent to which online services could be encouraged, with a view to setting priorities for the Council's Digital Inclusion agenda.

The presentation materials delivered to service users have been hyperlinked to this document and can be accessed below:

Service User Consultation Presentation 19th April 2012

Service User Consultation Topic Guide 19th April 2012

Key consultation outcomes provided by service users are as follows:

Generally focus group participants were supportive of the digital inclusion agenda and could recognise why it was beneficial for social landlords to encourage online engagement given the improved customer, community and business outcomes that could be delivered.

The vast majority of participants both enjoyed access to the internet and possessed enough basic knowledge to enable them to use the internet. It should be noted however, that the many Levenmouth service users had experienced ICT training through employment schemes and job clubs; and service users involved in

supporting the Fife's Tenant's movement were generally aware and actively involved in Digital Fife's learning agenda.

It was however acknowledged that confidence and skills could be enhanced through further training and learning. There was a general willingness to learn and a particular appetite for one-to-one coaching.

Having said this, although tenants were keen to access as much information regarding their homes and tenancies as possible, and could acknowledge that online service availability could provide convenience and efficiency; most participants still require to be convinced of the real benefits of using online services. However, rather curiously, the outcomes of an interactive exercise to examine how to tackle digital inclusion barriers would suggest that the interventions designed to improve service user attitudes/perceptions of using the internet were the least popular. The most popular interventions were those that focused on providing access to affordable digital media (such as reconditioned laptops and PCs) and broadband services.

It was also noted that online service development would not improve the customer experience in itself and that continuous improvement of performance, informed by tenant engagement should continue to be a service priority moving forward.

Focus group participants were asked to define the three key actions considered to be the most significant in tackling digital exclusion in Fife. The following actions were collectively defined as priorities:

1. To provide an adequate internet connection to all tenants in Fife, the costs of which should be reflected within the structure of rents or service charges, so that affordable and regular payments for tenants can be arranged;

2. To provide online support reference tools, information and resource manuals in a simple and user friendly format (i.e. no jargon and written in 'plain English') accompanied by a network of trained advisors and digital champions; and

3. To ensure that social landlords regularly negotiate with broadband and technology providers to find ways to provide cheaper and more accessible internet access, including reinvesting savings (achieved through online service delivery) in improving faster broadband connections and more reconditioned PCs.

In stating their preferences regarding the type of services that social landlords should deliver and promote online there was unanimous agreement that 'paying rent', 'logging repairs' and 'contacting your housing officer' should be service investment priorities. Service users were also emphatic that websites should be easy to navigate and use (again avoid jargon/use plain English) and that online information must be regularly updated (this does not seem to be the case at the moment).

Other service user priorities to promote digital inclusion can be summarised as follows:

- The provision of digital media through a service charge repayment mechanism e.g. a repayment mechanism for home PCs or laptops;

- More investment in free internet access delivered through a more diverse range of community access points such as leisure and shopping centres;

- The provision and marketing of real life, practical examples of online savings and customer benefits; and

- Analysis by social landlords of the costs and benefits of any investment associated with delivering online services. It was suggested that landlords involve tenants on how to re-invest savings which may arise as a result.

5.2 Digital Fife: Online Survey Exercise

In addition to the focus group consultation sessions, Digital Fife created and uploaded onto their website an on-line survey to gather information on the extent to which Fife households currently make use of digital technology and the internet. The survey was available on the Digital Fife website for 6 weeks, from the middle of March to the end of April 2012.

A detailed breakdown of responses and analytical outcomes has been hyperlinked to this document and can be accessed below:

Digital Fife Online Survey Response Outcomes Report

Of a total of 77 respondents, only 42% fully completed the entire online survey. As a result, the findings should be treated as indicative only. Having said this, a number of key outcomes can be drawn as follows:

- 97% of respondents currently make use of digital technology, with 86% having access to their own equipment for going on line. 85% of respondents are also aware of where to get free access to computers and the internet within Fife;

- The majority of respondents use digital technology for social activities, e.g. emailing family and friends, social networking and entertainment. However many also use digital technology for internet banking, making price comparisons, paying household & other types of bills, and internet shopping;

- Those who do not regularly make use of digital technology do not use it for a wide variety of reasons. It may be difficult to convince these respondents to use digital technology on a regular basis and as a natural contact option;

- The online housing services which interest respondents most are related to repairs (both finding out when major repairs are scheduled and the ability to log repair requests). There is also interest in other online housing services such as, being consulted on how housing services are delivered, being able to make online complaints, and paying rent and checking rent accounts online;

- When asked about their preferred online services, the largest number of respondents (58%) wanted to be able to access other Council services;

- Those not interested in using digital technology could be encourage if: they could save money; if it provided better access to other Council services; and if there were other benefits to going online; and

- Those who wish to build their skills and confidence of using digital technology would prefer to learn on their own or be taught on a one-to-one basis and in their own homes or at the library/community centre.

5.3 Service Provider Consultation Outcomes

The objectives for the consultation sessions with service providers were as follows:

1. To examine the perceived advantages and disadvantages of promoting online service delivery with social landlords and their partners across Fife;

2. To examine welfare reform, the expectation that tenants will be ready for online benefits and the potential implications on housing services;

3. To consider strategies to maximise investment in digital technology and infrastructure; and

4. To prioritise planning and digital inclusion activity including how the targeting of resources may work in practice.

The presentation materials delivered to service providers have been hyperlinked to this document and can be accessed below:

Service Provider Consultation Presentation 20th April 2012

Service Provider Consultation Topic Guide 20th April 2012

Key consultation outcomes provided by service providers, included five actions which are essential aspects of social housing's response to the digital inclusion agenda:

1. Develop a programme of housing led strategic actions on digital inclusion for inclusion within Fife Council's corporate Digital Inclusion Strategy and the Fife Community Plan.

   - This programme should be defined and developed through the Fife Housing Partnership;
   - Action points should be informed by a robust evidence base of:
     o assessed service user requirements;
     o infrastructure investment costs; and
     o best practice review options;
   - Strategic actions should address the following issues as initial priorities:
     o ensuring that rental income is not at risk as a result of the DWP 'digital by default' agenda;
     o identifying high cost/high volume aspects of housing services with most scope to be delivered online and deliver efficiencies;
     o addressing the community skills agenda by targeting excluded tenants;
     o developing a digital inclusion engagement plan to ensure social housing tenants inform partnership and investment activity moving forward.

2. Consult with telecom providers to consider options for addressing customer access barriers.

   - The following priorities should be addressed:
     o to identify and secure private resources to maximise investment in broadband delivery and community based digital media; and
     o develop options to secure best value in broadband delivery to the Fife social housing tenant base.

3. Consider a business case for investment in digital media so that investment objectives can be prioritised and balanced in the context of wider strategic objectives.

   - Social landlords should consider cost/benefits of investment in digital media including:
     o an assessment of the impact of investment scenarios on financial business plan outcomes; and
     o analysis of potential business plan risks and efficiencies.

4. Develop a marketing strategy to improve awareness of the digital inclusion agenda across the Fife social tenant base.

   - Marketing material should focus on promoting the Digital Fife agenda, as well as improving knowledge of:
     o the benefits of online engagement from a customer and community perspective; and
     o the risks associated with not using the internet, including the DWP digital by default agenda.

5. Develop the housing service online offer to tenants including the delivery of appropriate web facilities.

- Social landlords should prioritise developing an interim response to the DWP digital by default agenda including ensuring that appropriate frontline infrastructure is in place to guide the tenant population through online welfare benefit application processes.
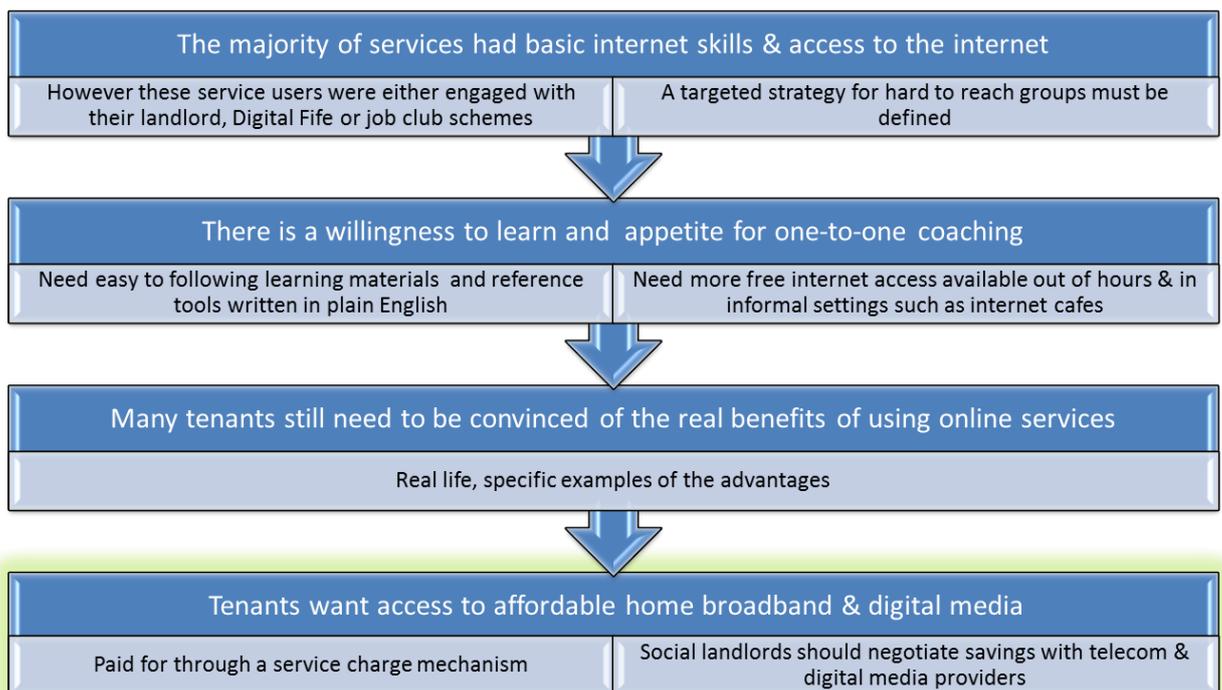
5.4 Key Consultation Findings

5.4.1 Service User Outcomes

It is clear that the service users who participated in the consultation exercise, were already actively engaged with services to tackle social exclusion, promote employment or improve social housing. Nonetheless, as a group these service users had better access to digital media and basic internet capabilities than the research evidence may imply.

The group was therefore in a good position to provide ideas and opinions on how social landlords should promote the use of online housing services and provided a clear and prioritised list of potential interventions.

The clear message was that social landlords should work to provide access to home broadband and digital media in a manner where regular and affordable contributions towards the costs can be made by tenants. Other priorities included:

The majority of services had basic internet skills & access to the internet	
However these service users were either engaged with their landlord, Digital Fife or job club schemes	A targeted strategy for hard to reach groups must be defined

There is a willingness to learn and appetite for one-to-one coaching	
Need easy to following learning materials and reference tools written in plain English	Need more free internet access available out of hours & in informal settings such as internet cafes

Many tenants still need to be convinced of the real benefits of using online services
Real life, specific examples of the advantages

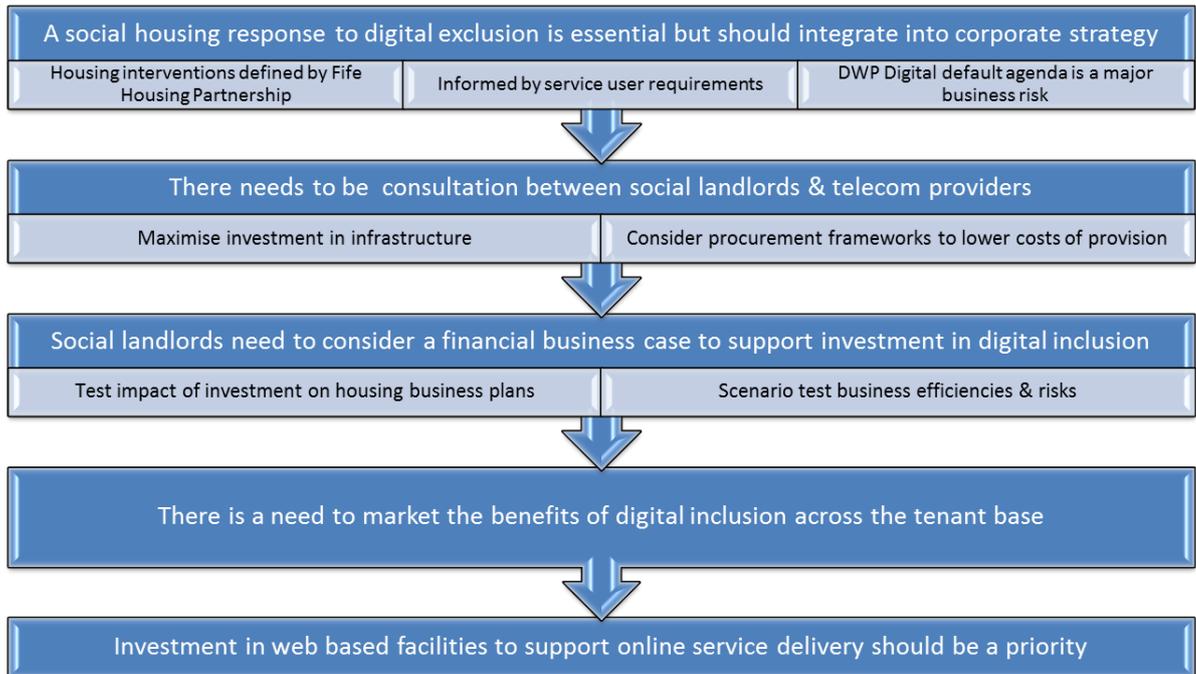| Tenants want access to affordable home broadband & digital media	
Paid for through a service charge mechanism	Social landlords should negotiate savings with telecom & digital media providers

5.4.2 Service Provider Outcomes

Service providers and social landlords were clear that housing has a key role to play in tackling digital exclusion and that there are clear business and social imperatives why this issue must be proactively addressed on the Fife strategic housing agenda.

There was clear agreement however, that this was not an agenda that social landlords could tackle in isolation. There is a real need for the role of social landlords to be defined in partnership with service users and telecom providers. Housing's contribution should then be integrated into the Fife Digital Inclusion

Strategy, where linkages into wider financial and social inclusion activity can be made.

Whilst it is recognised, that there are clear social benefits of encouraging tenants online; the major business impetus to stimulate investment activity is the DWP Digital by Default agenda. There is a major risk to the income recovery of social landlords if Housing Benefit claimants are not supported to make online applications. Investment in digital inclusion is therefore a business imperative in mitigating this risk. It was agreed that the social housing contribution of digital inclusion in Fife should be focused on the following:

A social housing response to digital exclusion is essential but should integrate into corporate strategy		
Housing interventions defined by Fife Housing Partnership	Informed by service user requirements	DWP Digital default agenda is a major business risk

There needs to be consultation between social landlords & telecom providers	
Maximise investment in infrastructure	Consider procurement frameworks to lower costs of provision

Social landlords need to consider a financial business case to support investment in digital inclusion	
Test impact of investment on housing business plans	Scenario test business efficiencies & risks

There is a need to market the benefits of digital inclusion across the tenant base

Investment in web based facilities to support online service delivery should be a priority

6.   KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research study was to identify how to improve and maximise digital inclusion across the Fife social housing sector. A number of recommendations have been developed based on research findings as set out below.

6.1   Best Practice Review Findings

The link between digital exclusion and social exclusion is strong and widely recognised. Given the role that social landlords play in tackling social disadvantage and promoting sustainable communities, there is real ability for digital inclusion activity to fit well into Wider Role and housing led regeneration strategies.

The barriers to digital exclusion are threefold, namely: (i) lack of access to equipment and broadband connections; (ii) a lack of skills, confidence and capability; and (iii) attitudes to and perceptions of using the internet. Any digital inclusion strategy must focus on specific actions to address these barriers across the tenant population.

Different types of customers will be drawn to different types of digital media. It is therefore imperative that social landlords have intelligence of user requirements to inform targeting and promotional strategies e.g. ensuring that tenant satisfaction/ engagement exercises are used as an opportunity to improve understanding.

There are clear business (as well as social) imperatives why social landlords should pursue digital inclusion including the ability to achieve service delivery efficiencies, faster more responsive service outcomes and better customer engagement. As a single issue, the DWP 'Digital by Default' agenda creates a major impetus to pursue digital inclusion given the risk to income recovery linked to the high proportion of tenants paying their rent through Housing Benefit.

There are key partnerships that social landlords should forge in order to maximise available resources in digital infrastructure and the community skills agenda. These include a need to integrate into the strategy and investment planning processes of Digital Fife, Financial Inclusion Strategy Group and telecom providers.

6.2   Best Practice Case Studies

Best practice examples of the role of social landlords in tackling digital inclusion would suggest that the following types of activity should be recommended:

- Target free internet access & ICT support to vulnerable groups in a communal setting such as hostels, sheltered and supported accommodation;
- Provide internet access in a community setting (such as a café or recreation centre) with one to one support from digital champions;
- Consider options to install broadband in social housing through partnerships with telecom providers;
- Use social networking and digital media as an effective and cost efficient way of communicating with tenants;
- Develop web-based facilities to support core housing service delivery functions such as paying rent; and
- Consider options to provide software and ICT recycling schemes to improve access to digital media.

Best practice case studies provide a range of practical interventions that could be usefully considered by the Fife Housing Partnership in developing a programme of housing related activity to tackle digital inclusion.

6.3   Profile of Fife Digital Exclusion

Based on statistical analysis and research evidence, it is likely that there are approximately 43,000 households in Fife who, as a result of income deprivation, are also likely to be offline. More specifically, it is estimated that there are 33,000 people in Fife are who are likely to be both severely socially and digitally excluded. The majority of these households are likely to be located in social housing, with up to 27,000 Fife tenants who do not have access to the internet and in a position to use online services.

The statistics suggest that social landlords should focus their digital inclusion interventions alongside wider financial inclusion strategies, which seek to maximise the incomes of those most in poverty; and also wider employment strategies. It is recommended that targeting strategies could be aimed at:

- social housing tenants who are unemployed and have competent internet skills given their participation in job club activities. This is likely to be a high proportion of the estimated 11,000 digitally excluded people in Fife who are also unemployed;
- the 1,800 older households currently located in sheltered housing and who access the internet and support/coaching in a communal setting; and
- the 800 homeless households currently located in supported or hostel type accommodation, who are severely socially excluded and highly likely to be offline. Integrating digital inclusion activity into the support planning of such individuals could be a practical measure in achieving this.

6.4   Consultation Outcomes

Based on the outcomes of consultation with service users, the following recommendations to promote digital inclusion across the Fife social housing sector have been developed:

1. for those tenants who are experienced in using digital media, social landlords should seek consider options to provide access to home broadband and technology;
2. for hard to reach tenants, a targeted engagement and marketing strategy of the benefits of being online should be developed and implemented;
3. central to this, there is a need for current, real-life examples of the benefits of being online to be identified and promoted to tenants (from a personal, financial and service delivery perspective);
4. there should be more partnership resources to support one-to-one ICT coaching to meet demands for learning, as well as easy to follow reference materials to support personal study;
5. social landlords should communicate the efficiencies that online service delivery could create and the options for re-investing any savings.

Based on the outcomes of consultation exercises with service users, the following recommendations have been developed:

1. housing led digital inclusion interventions should be defined in a consistent way across the social housing sector through the Fife Housing Partnership. These action points should then be integrated into the corporate Fife Digital Inclusion Strategy;

2. strategy actions should be informed by intelligence of assessed user requirements and as an interim priority seek to manage the risk associated with the 'Digital by Default' agenda;

3. social landlords need to consider a financial business case to support investment in digital inclusion, informed by financial sensitivity testing on housing business plans;

4. investment in web based facilities to support online service delivery should be a priority.