



Local and Community Services

Digital Inclusion Strategy

Ensuring that ICT and digital technologies are relevant and accessible to individuals, groups and communities in Fife

Foreword

Technology and the internet are now woven into the fabric of our society and into our daily lives. However, we cannot ignore the fact that there are those who are excluded, who face barriers and challenges, and are much less likely to have access to technology and its potential benefits.

At a time when more government and other services are going online we need to make sure that everyone in our communities has the opportunity to find support to access the benefits of using computers and the internet.

Considerable challenge lies ahead to ensure we engage more people in technology .It is not simply about access to new technology it is also about ensuring that people are able to use technology in a way which will enhance their lives and help them overcome other disadvantages.

Fife's first Digital Inclusion Strategy brings together existing work and areas of good practice to address many of these issues. It promotes a new partnership approach involving many services and organisations contributing together to promote digital inclusion for the benefit of all.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Digital technologies are now part of every aspect of modern society. However the opportunities and advantages they bring are not enjoyed by the whole of the population. Digital Inclusion is about ensuring that the internet and technology revolution is relevant and accessible to disadvantaged groups and communities.
- 1.2 Having access to the internet has become an essential utility and those who do not are disadvantaged in many ways from supporting their children with homework, to searching for employment through to accessing public services and saving from buying online.
- 1.3 10.2 million adults (21% of the UK population) have never accessed the internet including 4 million (9%) who are both digitally and socially excluded.¹
- 1.4 Development of this strategy has been informed by consultation with other services and third sector agencies in Fife. Events have been held to raise awareness about digital inclusion and the challenges for Fife. Focus groups and online surveys have given us context and information specific to the Fife situation.
- 1.5 This strategy sets out priorities and themes for Local and Community Services digital inclusion work.
- 1.6 Significant savings and efficiencies can be made through increased use of public services online. As the e-government challenge progresses it will be increasingly important to ensure people aren't left behind. This shift in services being offered online has the risk of leaving behind the very people who are likely to need to use those services most. It is important that links are developed between digital inclusion work and the e government agenda.
- 1.7 Local and Community Services is uniquely placed to address digital inclusion. We have extensive experience in engaging hard to reach groups of learners, already have projects that set out to improve employability skills and use an empowerment approach to work with community groups and young people. The network of local services offices are providing a range of services to those who could benefit from digital inclusion activities and support.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 According to the latest figures there are currently one in five adults still not using computers or the internet. The majority are likely to be older people, those from 'socio-economic groups C2, D & E, and those living in deprived areas.²
- 2.2 This strategy seeks to give a clear shared vision to the digital inclusion work undertaken by Community Learning and Development which seeks to reach and engage with those most likely to need support to access the benefits of going online.

2.3 The strategy has been developed with reference to a number of key plans and reports that have been published over the last 12 months. The Digital Britain final report ³ was published June 2009 followed by the National Plan for Digital Participation in March 2010. ⁴ In a Scottish context, the Digital Participation in Scotland: A Strategy and Action Plan 2010 has been developed.

2.4 The Digital Britain report identified digital participation as increasingly vital for full participation in civic society in the 21st Century. It is no longer simply an advantage to be online but an active disadvantage not to be.

The ability to use these technologies is now considered to be as important as reading and writing.

2.5 The report outlined the need to maximise digital participation and the economic and social benefits this digital participation can bring.⁵ Central to this is the development of a National Plan. This included a Consumer Framework for Digital Participation which is reproduced here. It shows what people need in order to get the most out of getting online.



3.0 A Shared Vision and Benefits of Being Online

3.1 Digital Inclusion has to be about people and how they live their lives and how they will benefit from digital technologies. It is more than access to the internet and computers although this is part of the picture. It is about how we use ICT in its broadest sense to engage and offer opportunities to some of the most disadvantaged learners and communities across Fife.

3.2 Achieving digital inclusion is about ensuring everyone has the chance to fully take part in modern society.

3.3 From the digital inclusion work Local and Community Services is currently undertaking we know that market forces alone will not be sufficient to get people onto the Internet.

- 3.4 We need to provide 'hooks' to make the internet relevant to people's everyday lives. People need a compelling personal reason' to go online,⁶ and confidence to acquire the skills needed to do so .The Fife model of using an IT buddy or digital champion to support this learning has proved to be successful . This approach needs to be further developed. The internet can offer the public easier, more efficient and effective access to public services and all citizens should have affordable access, support and the right skills to benefit from developments in digital technologies. People need to be aware of the help available within our libraries, learning centres, community centres and colleges across Fife.
- 3.5 We know that end to end support is needed to address digital exclusion. Getting online once is not enough and support is needed at various points on an individual's digital learning journey.
- 3.6 This is an issue which affects a considerable proportion of the population. It relates to the activities of almost every organisation in Fife – from the Council, to voluntary sector networks to housing associations –all have a contribution to make in attaining this common goal. Relevant policies across Fife Council and related initiatives will need to be aligned towards delivering this vision of a Fife where its citizens are digitally included.
- 3.7 This strategy is setting out Local and Community Services contribution and role in this wider digital inclusion agenda.

4.0 Key Priorities for a Digital Inclusion Strategy

4.1 The key priorities for Local and Community Services are:

- On the ground delivery of digital inclusion activity through community based approaches
- Embedding Digital Fife activity within Local and Community Services community capacity building delivery
- Developing a recognisable brand to be promoted to the public to direct them to support available through learning centres, libraries, community centres and colleges.
- Providing opportunities to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to use computers and the internet through education, lifelong learning, and skills development
- Expanding opportunities for peer learning through IT buddies and Digital Champions.
- Promoting an approach to Digital Inclusion which targets geographic areas of Fife and brings together services from across the Council and third sector to innovatively address digital inclusion issues. .
- Ensuring net safety and awareness of risks of being online are highlighted through training
- Facilitating and servicing a partnership working group on digital inclusion

5.0 The Benefits of Digital Inclusion

5.1 In its report for the UK Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox, Pricewaterhouse Coopers brought together evidence to estimate the economic benefits of reducing digital exclusion in consumer benefits, education benefits, employment benefits and improved government efficiency.⁷

5.2 It identified four main areas of potential economic benefit:

- Improved education and employment outcomes /improved earnings and/or probability of employment;
- Improved health and well-being outcomes
- Potential benefits for consumers to be able to purchase a wider range of products at lower prices
- Efficiency savings for public service providers through reduced transaction costs.

It also recognised the saving of time for citizens and consumers, lowered transport costs, environmental benefits, reduced congestion, increased productivity, and economic growth.

5.3 This report also found that:

- Households off-line miss out on savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online
- Children's educational performance can be improved by home access to a computer and the internet
- 1.6 million children in families who do not use the internet to go online at home could boost their total lifetime earnings by £10 billion
- People with good ICT skills earn between 3-10% more than people without such skills

Each contact made by the public with a service deliverer, and each transaction they conduct online which was previously not done online, could save the service provider between £3 and £12 per transaction. This is a direction of travel for many public sector bodies, including Fife Council, as we seek to reduce costs and become more efficient.

5.4 As well as direct economic benefits we know that using ICT in learning enhances the learning experience from use in literacies work and adult learning through to support of community groups. Learning can be personalised through ICT and sharing of learning materials is made easy.

It is also a tool for empowerment. Democratic processes such as petitioning are more accessible, and 'communities of interest' can share information and provide support in new ways.

6.0 Excluded Groups and the Barriers they Face.

6.1 A growing body of research identifies a number of groups who are at risk of digital exclusion. These include those on lower incomes, the unemployed, those with few or no formal qualifications, as well as those with disabilities, all of whom are more likely to be non-users of the internet.

- Older people are nearly twice as likely not to use the internet as younger people.
- Household tenure is an indicator of digital exclusion, with those in social housing nearly twice as likely to be excluded as owner occupiers.
- Those who are socially excluded are likely to be digitally excluded also. Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data shows a large disparity in digital participation between the most and least deprived areas and households.

6.2 The focus for much of the community-based activity within this strategy will therefore be on the groups in 6.1 above.

6.3 There are a number of barriers to going online and these can be major challenges – it is not just about the use of technology.

They include:

Lack of skills and confidence
Poor literacy levels
Negative attitudes to computers and the internet
Perceived lack of relevance
For some, accessing affordable equipment
Lack of appropriate support
Geographic location
Accessing broadband in some areas.

People without access to bank accounts or with poor credit ratings might also be excluded.

7.0 Building From Where We Are Now

7.1 A wide range of activity has, and is, already being undertaken within Local and Community Services which contributes to Digital Inclusion in Fife. Examples include:

- **Community Grid for Learning, Digital Fife** which has won national recognition for its ground breaking work in promoting use of ICT in community engagement as well as developing online learning in an accessible and engaging way for hard to reach learners. (www.digitalfife.com)

In the last year the portal has had 500,000 hits for the home page and 180 community groups and 1126 individual learners from across Fife have used the online learning for the same 12 months. The project has been successful in working in partnership with national bodies such as Skills Development Scotland and drawing external funds to develop the work.

- **Adult Basic Education actively encourage ICT** use in its day to day work as it enhances the learning of its students. Through a partnership with Nottingham College Adult Basic Education staff have developed innovative work using gaming for learning as a tool in youth literacies.
- **Fife Learning Network** – We have a network of 44 learning centres supported by the Adult Learning Partnership. These are spread across Fife in community settings.

7.2 We have equipped a network of venues from libraries, learning centres, youth cafes and community use of schools where people can access computers both daytime and evening and benefit from learning online, learning about ICT topics such as digital photography, using the media for young people and researching genealogy. This makes a significant contribution to Digital Participation in Fife.

- **Access:** free computer and internet access in most of Fife's public libraries and via the 44 learning centres which make up the Fife Learning Network. (14 of these are libraries)
- **Developing ICT skills:** individuals can develop ICT skills through formal or informal learning opportunities in all these facilities and the work that takes place in them is jointly planned in the Fife Adult Learning Partnership Group. This gives the opportunity for planned social marketing to reach excluded groups and increase digital participation by these groups.
- **Helping people get back into work:** individuals can prepare their CV, and undertake e-learning to improve their skills. They can have online access to the services of Job Centres.
- **Access to information:** access government e-services at both local and national level
- **Adaptive technology:** people with specific needs, such as speech to text software to assist those with visual impairment, can access specialist computer software.

7.3 We use staff **websites** to build the capacity of staff to access online material relevant to their work and have developed websites with partners to support the work we do to reach hard to reach groups such as the Big Shout website for young people. www.thebigshout.com and www.fifeyouthworkers.org.uk

Frontline staff are key enablers and points of contact for learners in terms of technology – i.e. youth workers for young people, ICT tutors and library staff and so training on the safe and appropriate use of the internet and IT is needed.

The Consumer Panel Framework in paragraph 2.5 shows creating digital media to be at the high end of digital participation. We have examples in Fife of film making projects which are enabling young people to operate at this level.

7.4 **Empowerment and engagement** of hard to reach groups. A number of initiatives, projects and websites exist to ensure technology is used for empowerment and engagement of hard to reach groups. These include:

- Big Shout Website
- Dialogue Youth
- Digital Fife – working with community groups
- Young People’s panel
- Miss Know It ALL – National Online service on health issues delivered via Young Scot website
- Music projects
- NHS / Fife Council joint Initiative Young Person’s Health Website
- IT classes supporting older learners

Many young people are often known as ‘digitally native’ in that they find it easy to access and use new technologies. These projects widen their understanding of how technology and the internet can be used beyond social networking to improve their employability skills and create digital media.

7.5 We are committed to providing information and training on **net safety** to a variety of groups so they can manage the risks of going online. We have also developed an online learning module addressing net safety as well as having staff trained to deliver the training developed by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection agency – CEOP . Key groups targeted with this training are:

- Youth Workers
- Parent Groups
- Young People

7.6 We know that using **digital champions**, (local people and staff) makes a difference in the promotion of digital technologies. We have recruited 8 local champions within the Digital Fife project and there are key staff are taking a champion role in Digital Fife work across Fife.

Evidence has shown that those learning these new digital skills are helped greatly when having these skills passed on in an informal setting and by someone who remembers what it was like to learn them themselves.

8.0 Keeping Abreast of Scottish Government Policy and UK Initiatives

8.1 Along with keeping abreast of current reports and plans we have representation on the digital inclusion cross party working group in the Scottish Parliament through the Digital Fife initiative. This provides a platform for MSPs to engage with a range of organisations on issues relating to digital participation. The group provides an opportunity to consider how best Scotland can maximise the social and economic benefits derived from the development of digital technologies.

8.2 We have active engagement with both NIACE – National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education, LTS – Learning and Teaching Scotland and national bodies such as Ofcom Scotland.

8.3 We will ensure an ongoing collaborative relationship so that maximum benefit is gained from opportunities around funding and delivery of policies and activity.

9.0 Strategy into Action

9.1 Considerable effort is needed to ensure that those already marginalised do not become further disadvantaged by being the wrong side of the digital divide. In Fife we will put this digital inclusion strategy into action by:

- Mapping our existing practice and identify gaps in provision using the Communications Consumer Panel framework on page 4.
- Working collaboratively with a range of services and agencies to ensure we provide activity where there are gaps identified
- Piloting new approaches to digital inclusion, working with a wider range of partners to target e.g. older people in sheltered housing/residential care and young parents
- Contribute to the e Government agenda by setting up digital panels comprising representatives from targeted groups to ensure that online services are tested by consumers.
- Addressing the availability of data and analyses to inform practice and target delivery. Little information exists beyond Scotland wide statistics in relation to access and use of the internet for example.
- Providing training for Community Education Workers with a capacity building remit to increase support to community groups within the Digital Fife online community
- Marketing our learning centres, libraries and computer suites within community centres as a one stop provision for access to and support in getting online
- Targeting Fife's top 15% SIMD datazones for digital inclusion activity
- Targeting low income families, older people and those with few formal qualifications
- Developing a structured programme for IT buddies and digital champions including consistent training and development opportunities, a website to showcase good practice and a branding and badging scheme to raise the profile.
- Rolling out net safety advice and training to our staff and public
- Working collaboratively across the community planning partners to ensure key policies reflect the shared vision for digital inclusion
- Awareness raising of Fife's Digital Inclusion vision within the Housing and Communities directorate and with other services and agencies
- Developing effective evaluation of initiatives and approaches used in addressing digital exclusion

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