

The Highland CPP

Chief Officer's Group – 11.11.15

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	COG 24/15

Partnership Approach to Digital Inclusion

Report by Depute Chief Executive, Highland Council

Summary

As more and more information, processes and services are going online, the benefits and opportunities for internet users are growing. The level of digital exclusion is also growing for those who are unable to go online. This report provides an update on the work that is currently ongoing to address issues surrounding digital inclusion in the Highlands.

1 Background

- 1.1 The issue of digital exclusion features in the Scottish Government Digital Participation Strategy: *"Critically, we need to ensure that we grasp the opportunity that digital technologies offer to tackle deep rooted social and economic inequalities in our society."*
- 1.2 In the Highlands and Islands, 17.9% of residents have never accessed the internet. There are also a larger number of residents who do not have the skills or opportunity to use the internet regularly. This may be for a variety of reasons, including lack of skills and confidence, lack of appreciation of the benefits of going online, and unaffordability of devices or internet connections.
- 1.3 Digital access and the skills and confidence to use it can enable residents to seek and apply for work, manage their money, make savings, access and engage with healthcare, reduce social isolation and access learning opportunities. This is an opportunity to work together as a partnership, with a national organisation, to reduce the impact of digital exclusion, as well as increasing the uptake of our own digital services.

2 Superfast Broadband

- 2.1 The rollout of next generation broadband will make a significant impact on digital inclusion in the Highlands. Highlands and Islands enterprise report that 86,000 homes and businesses in the Highlands and Islands can now access fibre services and work continues to increase this number further. Community Broadband Scotland also continues to work with 89 communities to bring faster speed internet connectivity to more remote areas. This work will support both the digital uptake of online services, and the ability to deliver digital skills support and training for those who find online difficult.

3 Citizens Online

- 3.1 Citizens Online are a digital inclusion organisation who provide training and support to get more people online. They are a national organisation focused on digital inclusion

and have been running projects in the Highlands, supported by HIE and Highland Council for over 6 years. To date, Citizens Online have provided 740 hours of training. Almost 1000 people have attended one-off taster sessions and 650 people have completed basic skills training. Citizens Online marketing and awareness campaigns in the Highlands have reached over 6000 people. As well as providing training sessions, Citizens Online has been creating a network of Digital Champions; members of local communities who encourage and support others to go online. 63 digital champions have been recruited and trained to date and are engaging with other members of their communities.

3.2 Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have been working closely with Citizens Online on three key areas:

- Digital Resilience – a project looking to develop an approach to the co-ordinated and long-term delivery of digital inclusion in the Highlands (see section 4).
- Digital Highland – the creation of a local partnership to support the delivery of the Digital Resilience project and the rollout of digital skills (see section 5).
- Digital Skills – the delivery of digital skills sessions for local people and community groups, with a particular focus on train the trainer sessions with public agencies.

In 2015/16, this work has been funded by Highland Council, HIE (to end September), SCVO and Big Lottery. This support has enabled the continuation of digital skills training and support for Highland residents, as well as the development and initiation of the Digital Resilience project.

4 Digital Resilience

4.1 The Digital Resilience project is an initiative run by Citizens Online in 4 councils: Highland Council, Gwynedd Council, Brighton and Hove City Council and Plymouth City Council. The Highland project involves funding from Highland Council and a significant investment Big Lottery.

4.2 The aim of this project is to build a resilient partnership across Highland which can support basic digital skills for citizens, businesses and communities. This will maximise opportunities, minimise the risk of exclusion and help to tackle issues that contribute to poverty.

4.3 The project will map the existing provision of support and help to identify any gaps in the necessary digital skills. It will also help to identify and address any barriers that are facing Highland residents in accessing the internet. The project will also facilitate a local partnership to fill this provision gap and will develop a supporting plan to take the work on digital inclusion forward.

5 Digital Highland

5.1 One of the key deliverables from the Digital Resilience project is the creation of a local digital inclusion partnership to look at the issue of digital inclusion collectively. The outcome of this partnership will be a joined up approach to tackling digital inclusion with the provision of support, information and training co-ordinated to provide greatest

impact for our customers.

Potential partners are currently being contacted to invite them to be involved in the partnership steering group and a workshop is planned for the beginning of December.

- 5.2 The partnership will involve two layers: Steering Group and Partners Network. The steering group will aim to:
- Work together to achieve each other's shared objective of basic digital skills for customers / residents / claimants / citizens
 - Focus on practical actions and tasks, defined by the local project plan both for the group as a whole and as individual organisations
 - Provide support and guidance to the Project and assist with decision making
 - Share knowledge
 - Ensure that resources are available within their respective organisations to deliver the Project
 - Liaise and share information with other relevant groups, projects and meetings, through shared members, for example Welfare reform groups, those focusing on financial inclusion and so forth.
 - Ensure that the Project complements existing work in the Highland Council area, and that desirable outcomes are achieved through the alignment of project work with existing strategies and policies.
- 5.3 The steering group will involve public and third sector organisations as well as housing association representation, unions and healthcare providers. The steering group will be supported by a wider delivery partnership involving local community groups and others, focused more on the on-the-ground delivery of digital inclusion solutions.

6 Digital Skills

- 6.1 Citizens Online continue to work with individuals, community groups and organisations to provide training and support with digital skills. This includes recent sessions with the WEA's Women@Work project, Ormlie Community Association, Wick Youth Club, Lairg Learning Centre, Sight Action, Helmsdale Timespan, Dunbeath Community Centre, Brora Learning Centre and many more on topics such as digital storytelling, saving money online, social media and staying safe online.
- 6.2 Citizens Online has also been working with public sector organisations in the Highlands, with a focus on train-the-trainer. As well as basic digital skills, staff learn how to support their customers to go online and maximise the benefits. Recently, Citizens Online have been working with NHS Highland, JobCentrePlus, Highlife Highland, WEA and Unison to improve digital skills and confidence in front line staff, and are rolling out digital skills sessions for staff within Highland Council.
- 6.3 By empowering staff in organisations to help their customers to go online, this increases the number of opportunities for customers to learn about digital skills outwith a formal learning environment.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Work is currently ongoing to examine the issue of digital inclusion in more detail across the Highlands. Key to this is the creation of a local partnership and the associated workshop. This will assist with the identification of current provision of digital skills, and ensure that there is a joined up approach to supporting our residents to go online.

Recommendations

The Chief Officers Group is asked to:

- Note the progress made on digital inclusion.
- Indicate the level of involvement the Community Planning Partnership and its members should have in the Digital Highland Partnership.