

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee



SCRUTINY



Epping Forest District Council

Portfolio: Customer Services – Councillor S Kane

Subject: Digital Inclusion Project Update

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the progress made against the recommendations made to increase digital inclusion across the District.

Report:

1. Members will recall that at the last meeting of this Committee a presentation was made by the Customer Service Director on the findings and recommendations for action made by Citizens Online, the charity the Council has been working with to reduce digital exclusion. As a reminder to Members these recommendations were:

- a) To establish a Digital Inclusion Network of organisations across the District to collaborate and co-ordinate activities to increase digital inclusion within the community;
- b) To launch a Digital Buddies programme with a target of 210 Buddies over a period of 3 years.
- c) At a strategic level;
 - i. Support and promote the work of the Digital Inclusion Network;
 - ii. Embed Digital Inclusion into all procurement frameworks;
 - iii. Digital Leadership and Lifelong learning for staff and residents;
 - iv. Embed digital inclusion into the HR process.
- d) To focus attention resources geographically on:
 - i. Waltham Abbey East and the “SW Corridor” where there is a high concentration of Pension Credit and potential Universal Credit (UC) claimants.
 - ii. High Pension Credit areas in Epping and Loughton.
 - iii. Concentration of UC migration in North Weald;

2. Since the October meeting there has been a focus on implementing and developing the Digital Buddy network within the Council prior to its expansion to partnering organisations. Digital Buddies are central to the success of the Digital Inclusion work as they help others understand the benefits of using the internet and can show how to do simple things online that can make a huge difference to people’s lives. The internal Buddy programme has got off to a great start with 61 members of staff signed up to the programme which has resulted in 268 interventions. The Digital Buddies themselves are receiving an on-going development programme to help them deal with people with different needs and barriers to digital inclusion.

3. On the 10th January the Council had its latest networking event with our partnership organisations to establish the wider Digital Inclusion Network and external Digital Buddy programme. The event was a success with the following organisations in attendance:

Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Essex Libraries
Carers first
Salvation Army
Citizens Online
CVSU
Superfast Essex
The First Stop project
Epping Reuse
Citizen Advice Bureau

Other organisations who have expressed an interest in the network

Alzheimer's
Age UK
NHS
Leonard Cheshire
DWP
United in Kind
Peabody
Upskill Digital

There are now 10 external Digital Buddies across the district and the target now is to recruit a further 30 digital buddies externally and 70 internally over the course of the next year.

4. The main geographic area that had been identified from the Citizens Online report was Waltham Abbey. The risk of digital inclusion in this area was aligned with the barriers of age and affordability with Pension Credit and UC take-up used as proxies. Allied with work undertaken relating to the assessing the impacts of UC a multi-agency centre (MAC) has been established in Waltham Abbey at the Epping Forest District Museum with the intention of this MAC running fortnightly. As part of the services available which are tailored to helping the most vulnerable, there is dedicated resource at the MAC to assist with Digital Inclusion. The success of this inclusion work and the MAC more generally will be monitored to see if bespoke roll-outs can be done in other areas of the district.

Reason for decision: To provide an update for Members on the latest

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Consultation undertaken: N/A

Resource implications: N/A

Legal and Governance Implications: N/A

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: N/A

Consultation Undertaken: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

Impact Assessments: N/A

Risk Management: N/A

Equality: N/A