

ASSESSMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEW

* - sections to be filled in by the proposer of the topic

<p>*Subject of Proposed Review:- Digital Exclusion</p>
<p>*Reason for the Review:- (see Note 1 below)</p> <p>In the digital age people are increasingly expected to use digital technology to interact with public and private sector organisations. For many people the Internet is convenient and efficient; technology is part of their modern day lifestyle.</p> <p>However, a significant minority of people do not have ready access to the Internet and/or do not have the ability and confidence to use the Internet. A recent survey by Maidstone Citizens Advice has shown that c.25% of clients do not have access to the Internet and half of the remaining 75% appear to be apprehensive of using the Internet. There is also anecdotal evidence of children having to use their neighbour's computer to do their homework, people being unable to compare prices and purchase key services such as energy supply and rail tickets and people being unable find or apply for jobs and training. You also need access to a computer to apply to get on the electoral register.</p> <p>It is proposed that this review should identify the numbers of Kent residents who are digitally excluded, assess the social and economic consequences of their exclusion and whether adequate measures are in place to ensure they are not significantly disadvantaged. The review will also assess previous initiatives to improve digital access and identify the extent to which they can be better coordinated and improved in the future.</p>
<p>*Issues to be covered by the Terms of Reference:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify numbers of people digitally excluded and causes of exclusion, e.g. lack of training, issues of trust & confidence, cost, learning difficulties,2. Assess the social and economic consequences of digital exclusion and the potential benefits of improving digital access,3. Assess whether public and private sector initiatives to improve digital access have been effective and identify potential improvements,4. Assess whether adequate provision is in place to ensure that people that are digitally excluded are not significantly disadvantaged.
<p>*Scope of the review:-</p> <p>The review would cover the whole of Kent. It would encompass several KCC units (including inter-alia EYPS, CLS, LRA, Learning Disabilities, Contact Centre); district councils; government agencies (eg DWP, HMRC); charities and voluntary organisations; schools, FE colleges and other trainers, employer organisations, local news and media, and health providers.</p>
<p>*Purpose and objectives of the Review:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To gauge the extent of digital exclusion in Kent and evaluate its consequences on residents and on the Kent social economy,2. To assess the value of previous initiatives to improve digital access,3. To make recommendations on how best to improve digital access for Kent residents,4. To make recommendations to KCC units and other organisations to ensure that people who are digitally excluded are not significantly disadvantaged.
<p>Proposer of the review - (Please print name and sign)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rob Bird</p>

To be completed by the Directorate/Cabinet Member(s)

Are there any reasons why this review should not be put forward for inclusion in the work programme for 2016/17? (see Note 2 below)

Under the criteria set out by Democratic Services, it is important to note that:

- **It has been the subject of a topic review by other Councils from which details of best practice can be obtained.**

There is already an extensive body of national and local research covering the reasons why citizens may not be online. This includes detailed analysis by the UK Charity Go-Online, who have a dedicated remit to encourage greater digital inclusion.

In addition, a number of Councils (including Canterbury City, Worcestershire and Wiltshire County Councils) have already undertaken detailed topic and scrutiny reviews into digital inclusion. These have examined, in depth, the reasons why citizens are not online, the associated impacts and the provision required.

- **New legislation or guidance expected.**

The Government has set out plans for a Digital Economy Bill in the Queen's speech (May 2016). This will cover digital access through the proposals to introduce a Universal Service Obligation for Broadband. There is a strong risk that the Committee's work could be overtaken by the passage of the Bill as it is in the programme of announced legislation and policies for the coming year.

Will the review support the Strategic Statement ('Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement 2015 – 2020'), and supporting outcomes of the council? If yes, please identify aim(s) and give details:-

KCC's Strategic Outcomes

Digital exclusion amongst citizens is included within KCC's Strategic Statement, although it could be argued that there is a tangential link with the following supporting outcome statements:

- 'Kent young people are confident and ambitious with choices and access to work, education and training opportunities'.
- Kent business growth is supported by having access to a well-skilled local workforce with improved transport, broadband and necessary infrastructure.

Evidence of internet usage

The latest Office of National Statistics Bulletin on Internet Users (May 2016) highlights that 87.9% of adults have used the internet in the last three months. Participation was 98.8% for 16-44 year olds, dropping to 88.3% for 55-64 year olds and 38.7% for the 75 and over age group. The Bulletin also notes a continued drop in the number of adults not using the internet (a decrease of 13.3% since 2011). This also includes a sustained increase in the number of disabled adults using the internet.

Regarding the extent of digital exclusion across Kent, the latest ONS data sets (May 2016) indicate that just over 10% of Kent adults have not used the internet in the last

three months. This is slightly below the national average of 12.1% adults not using the internet.

How will this review have an impact on KCC policy development and/or help to influence national policy?

The Council is already committed to encouraging digital inclusion and has a range of dedicated workstreams to support digital access. These include:

- All KCC libraries offering internet access (including a range of software and specialist equipment to support disabled library users get online.
- All KCC libraries being registered as UK Online Centres and offering free courses to help people develop digital skills and confidence. Free wi-fi is also available in 35 Kent libraries, complementing the hundreds of free wi-fi access points already available across Kent.
- The Kent libraries IT buddy scheme providing support on getting online, accessing information and completing online forms, and transactions.
- Free IT courses for beginners from Kent Adult Education Centres.

A number of other organisations also provide digital inclusion support across Kent for groups with specific needs. These include Compaid, who provide bespoke training for disabled adults to use computers, the internet and social media. Skills Plus also provide digital inclusion support targeted at individuals where English is not their first language.

The ability to influence key national policy on digital inclusion appears to be limited at this time. For example, the Government issued a call for evidence to inform the development of the UK Digital Strategy in December 2015 and has already published a detailed Digital Inclusion Strategy.

How will this review add value to the County Council and residents of Kent?

The Council is already committed to encouraging digital inclusion and there is already a range of local and national resources available to help citizens go online.

Furthermore, given the considerable volume of national and local work that has been already undertaken on digital inclusion – and the timing issues created by the Digital Economy Bill – it is unlikely that a detailed review would add value at this particular time.

Does the review need to be completed within a specific timeframe? If yes, please give details:

As highlighted above, there are a number of national legislative and policy changes expected later this year, which will have a significant bearing on, and potentially undermine, the recommendations of the Committee, if the work is undertaken during 2016/17. These include:

- Proposals for a Digital Economy Bill were announced in the Queen's Speech in May 2016. It is anticipated that this will create the primary legislative framework for the Government's plans to introduce greater digital access. The Bill will contain legislative measures for a new Broadband Universal Obligation. This will give citizens and businesses the legal right to request a fast broadband connection.

Initial proposals have indicated a preference for the Obligation to be industry-funded and supplier-led. Ofcom have also indicated that they are looking at the inclusion of social tariffs for broadband.

- The publication of the Government's Digital Strategy has also been delayed and it is unclear whether this would be available before the review started.

Any additional comments from the Portfolio Holder/Corporate Director:-

Given the proposed national policy and legislative changes, I do not believe that such a review would add value at this moment in time.

Portfolio Holder's Signature:-



Corporate Director's Signature:-



Contact Officer:-

Elizabeth Harrison

Date:-

25th May 2016