

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 22 March 2022

Report by: Councillor George Cutting, Executive Member for Corporate Services

Councillor Jonathan Kaye, Executive Member for Community Engagement

Report title: Digital Exclusion

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- At its October meeting, Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members expressed an interest in the *Transforming East Herts* programme and identified “digital exclusion” as a specific topic to be debated. Committee Member views will be used to inform policy direction and debate around the Council’s approach to digital exclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A. Committee Members consider and debate digital exclusion and recommend some high level policy objectives for Executive to consider within the Corporate Plan.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 That the Committee consider digital exclusion and a policy response from the Council.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Council's current approach to digital provision of services is expressed through the "Digital by Default" theme of the Corporate Plan. This was adopted at Full Council on 1 March 2022 and can be found here: [Corporate Plan](#)

2.2 The objectives within this theme focus on maximising self-service through use of the council's website and working with partners (for example the Digital Innovation Zone) on creating digital places. At their October meeting Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members were keen to understand and debate how people in our communities who are less confident or less able to use digital services could be supported within this overall approach.

2.3 With that in mind two external speakers have been invited to the Scrutiny Meeting:

- Michael Francis, Head of Customer and Digital at Herts County Council. Michael will deliver a presentation on how the County Council are addressing digital exclusion as a direct provider and commissioner of services as well as a partner/ enabler working through others.
- Cindy Withey, Connect Dacorum Manager. Cindy will deliver a presentation on the "Staying Connected" project aimed at supporting residents in Dacorum with building digital skills and confidence

2.4 Both speakers will provide some good insight about what digital exclusion means in practice and what potential responses could look like in East Hertfordshire. Some key lines of enquiry for Members to consider are:

- Who are the digitally excluded in the district and what do we know about them?

- What is the Council's role in working with partners and stakeholders to address digital exclusion?

2.5 Committee Members views will be used to inform the policy direction and next steps for the council on Digital by Default within its *Transforming East Herts* programme.

2.6 To assist in the debate, various reports and studies have been produced regarding digital exclusion, especially in the context of Covid-19 and how it has driven behaviour change. Some interesting, recent studies include:

- Report from the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network on the digital divide post pandemic, which can be found [here](#).
- Report commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better, looking at good practice on supporting those who are digitally excluded, which can be found [here](#).

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 Committee Members have requested this issue be discussed.

4.0 Options

4.1 N/A

5.0 Risks

5.1 N/A

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 At this stage there are no consultations required however should the council wish to develop its policy position on digital

exclusion further, engagement with residents will be required

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Should the council wish to develop its policy position on digital exclusion further, an equalities impact assessment will be required

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 None

Contact Members

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