

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Youth, Equalities and Empowerment Committee

approval noting

Ref LMcM/DY/EW

Date 28/10/19

Digitally Included Communities

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Executive Summary

It is acknowledged that digital exclusion has the potential to present a key risk in terms of delivering on the ambitions of the Council, its partner organisations, communities, employees and citizens. As the digital transformation of local services gathers pace, those who do not have the access, skills, confidence or motivation to engage digitally could become further excluded from society, should the 'digital divide' increase.

The Council currently provide employees and citizens with access to a range of Digital Inclusion support mechanisms across North Lanarkshire. This support is provided through a range of methods such as; direct Community Learning & Development (CLD) provision and programmes enabled through the financial support of local third sector organisations. Through the North Lanarkshire CLD Partnership, the joint development of digital inclusion support in communities has also provided a further route for digital learners through a clear, coordinated approach.

The CLD Partnership's Digital NL pilot project, which was part funded by the Council, has been in place since 2016 and is an example of such partnership delivery in action. As the project is now nearing the end of its initial funding period, partner organisations are evaluating the impact of the project and exploring potential future arrangements.

A number of factors such as; the Council's commitment to supporting its employees and communities through its major digital transformation programme (DigitalNL), the outcome of the Employability Review and evaluation of the CLD Partnership's existing Digital community project, present an opportunity for an assessment of current community-based digital inclusion services. This report explores future options to ensure the digital inclusion of North Lanarkshire's communities, and makes a recommendation for the consideration of Committee.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Youth, Equalities and Empowerment Committee:-

- (1) note the role played by Community Learning and Development in digital inclusion initiatives/programmes as set out in section 2 of the report;

- (2) approve the mainstreaming of the CLD Partnership's Digital North Lanarkshire community-based approach through Community Learning and Development direct delivery and the DigitalNL Programme (strategically directed through the Digital Economy – Project/Digital Skills Programme)
 - (3) approve the development of further direct links and referral arrangements between the Council's People & Organisational Development service, Digital NL team and Community Learning and Development to ensure the most creative and effective use of community-based digital inclusion resources for employees and communities.
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The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Enhance participation, capacity, and empowerment across our communities
Ambition statement	(6) Raise attainment and skills for learning, life, and work to enhance opportunities and choices

1. Background

1.1 The Role of Community Learning and Development in a Digitally Included North Lanarkshire

Ensuring digital inclusion for all communities in North Lanarkshire is recognised as a key challenge facing the Council and the Community Planning Partnership. Across a wide range of policy agendas, the further application of digital technology will provide opportunities to improve service delivery and the quality of life for local citizens. Set alongside this is a recognition that people who cannot connect to or access these opportunities will become further excluded and disadvantaged.

Over the past 20 years, the North Lanarkshire Community Learning & Development Partnership has brought together a wide range of local learning and skills providers working within the three national CLD priorities of; Youth Work, Adult Learning and Community Development. Operating within local community planning structures, the CLD Partnership has a vision of a *“strong vibrant community where everyone is committed to improving the quality of life, work, and attainment for themselves and others”*.

Since 2011, following announcements around welfare reform and the 'Digital by Default' agenda, the North Lanarkshire CLD Partnership made Digital Inclusion as one of its key areas of focus. It was recognised that, although many CLD Partnership member organisations provided support around digital skills, these services were often disjointed and provided varying levels of learning outcomes. As a result a successful small scale pilot was launched in Motherwell and Wishaw to test a partnership approach to local digital inclusion services.

In 2014, North Lanarkshire Partnership approved the NL Community Learning & Development Partnership Strategy 2014-18. This included a joint commitment from local learning providers to work towards a '*Digitally Included North Lanarkshire*'. As a result, a paper was presented at Council CMT in August 2014 recommending the creation of a co-ordinated community-based learning offer called 'Digital North Lanarkshire'. Through funding from the Council, New College Lanarkshire and the CLD Partnership, the Digital North Lanarkshire project for communities has been in place since the end of 2016, supported and delivered by over 40 learning providers. Provider details can be accessed by learners via www.DigitalNL.co.uk and shared outcomes are now benchmarked across providers. The initial three year pilot is due to end in December 2019.

In 2018, the Council launched its Digital Transformation Programme (DigitalNL), with one of its three key aspirations being the upskilling of staff and residents to deliver the Council's digital ambition. This now provides clear opportunities to link to the existing community-based Digital North Lanarkshire partnership. These potential links, which could benefit staff and local residents, have been highlighted in a recent report to the Finance & Resources Committee (18/9/19), titled 'Digital Workforce and Skills Programme – Phase 1'.

2. Report

2.1 Digital Inclusion

2.1.1 Opportunities

Through a Community Learning & Development approach, the Council currently provide a range of Digital Inclusion services for young people, adults and communities. This provision makes use of Public Access Computing (PAC) suites within Council community facilities and, more recently, access to wireless PAC laptops which can be used in a wider range of WiFi enabled Council buildings. Although highlighted as a need by learners, there is currently no formal provision for learners requiring 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) support, although some town centre areas are covered by free outdoor WiFi installed by TCA Ltd.

2.1.2 Demand

During 2018-19, through the Council's Community Learning & Development provision alone, 101 unique learners were supported to achieve formal SQA accreditation in digital skills. This accreditation makes up only a small element of the Council's overall digital inclusion offer, with 400 learners taking part in around 80 specific IT related courses and programmes during 2018/19. As a core skill, alongside literacy and numeracy, IT is embedded in the Council's Adult Literacy and Numeracy programmes, which were attended by 926 individual learners last year.

Looking at the development of digital skills in its broadest sense, a large number of community-based learners are supported to use IT as part of their wider Youth Work, Adult Learning, Family Learning and Community Development programmes, which are not directly IT related. Participants within Duke of Edinburgh Award groups, for example, routinely use the online 'E-DofE' tool as part of their learning. Groups use online language tools to develop English as a Second language. Given that 8718 individual learners engaged with Community Learning & Development programmes in 2018/19, the current level of need/demand around community IT provision and digital support clearly continues to grow year on year.

2.1.3 Partnership Working

Through working in partnership with learning provider colleagues from Libraries, New College Lanarkshire, Routes to Work, Skills Development Scotland, VANL and a range of third sector organisations, the ability to engage with communities and provide digital inclusion support for learners is increased exponentially.

The current Community Learning & Development Partnership arrangements provide organisations with the ability to refer learners on to the most appropriate partner for their own needs and availability. To ensure a consistency of approach across partners, the current Digital NL project has created a standardised suite of outcomes, allowing learners to participate in Bronze, Silver and Gold level Digital North Lanarkshire programmes, whilst collecting 'Digital Badges' along the way and recording their progress in a Digital Diary, which can be shared across providers.

2.2 Future Considerations

Although a review of community needs together with a full Digital Inclusion mapping exercise was carried out by the CLD Partnership at the outset of the current project, recent developments within the council, such as the digital transformation programme, will drive future community-based digital inclusion plans.

As the council transforms its digital processes and online presence, the training and development of employees in relation to digital skills will be a key priority. Given that the majority of Council employees also live in North Lanarkshire's communities, consideration should be given to the most appropriate programmes, methods and venues to provide this learning, including opportunities for both in-work and community-based digital inclusion programmes.

Funding for the current CLD Partnership Digital NL project was initially due to finish at the end of 2019, however the project is now able to continue most services until the end of March 2020. The project incurred several one-off set up costs (including website design, purchase of IT assets, etc.) but current running costs are mainly related to staffing, which consists of a full time project worker and additional time for marketing support. If the project were to continue in its current form, the reduction in funding required would be a key consideration.

Although led by the CLD Partnership's Digital NL Steering Group, the Digital NL project is currently hosted by New College Lanarkshire. As host partner, New College Lanarkshire has responsibility for the day to day management of the project and its staff. If Council funding were to continue for the project, consideration would have to be given to the host partner moving forward, along with any risks around the substantive rights of post holders. Redundancy costs were built in to the current funding package, however the worker involved is an existing member of college staff.

The Digital NL Steering group continues to produce quarterly reports on the progress of the project but is now also preparing end-of-funding reports to advise the CLD Partnership and funders, including the Council, of the longer term impact and outcomes achieved during the project so far. Information from the providers and partner organisations involved will help to inform this process.

Taking this into consideration, future options for the Council's involvement in the joint project is set out below.

- Option 1 - Cease current programme delivered by CLD Partnership
- Option 2 - Current programme to continue (subject to funding being sourced)
- Option 3 - Mainstream approach through Community Learning and Development direct delivery and the DigitalNL Programme (strategically directed through the Digital Economy – Project/Digital Skills Programme)

Committee is asked to note that the recommendation, as above, to mainstream elements of existing partnership work (Option 3), would be subject to the continued support of partners across the North Lanarkshire Partnership. Option 3 is the recommended approach.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

Work towards the reduction of digital exclusion supports the recommendations of the Fairness Commission and the Fairer Scotland Duty to reduce the inequalities caused by socio-economic disadvantage.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

Equal access to digital inclusion services will require to be a key feature within communities. An integrated Fairer Scotland/Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared in respect of the review of delivery options.

The following Options will be considered:-

- Option 1 - Cease current programme delivered by CLD Partnership
- Option 2 - Current programme to continue (subject to funding being sourced)
- Option 3 - Mainstream approach through Community Learning and Development direct delivery and the DigitalNL Programme (strategically directed through the Digital Economy – Project/Digital Skills Programme)

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

The Council currently funds direct, indirect and partnership led digital inclusion provision within communities. A review of programmes, resources and staffing may be able to improve best value for the Council. Overall funding for digital skills development is also reflected within the council's digital transformation programme, previously approved by the Policy and Strategy Committee.

4.2 **HR/Policy/Legislative Impact**

The continuation of the current CLD Partnership digital inclusion programme may have an impact on staffing, if the post of Project Manager or host organisation arrangements were to change.

4.3 **Environmental Impact**

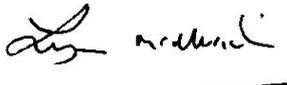
No impact anticipated.

4.4 **Risk Impact**

Digital security risks within Public Access Computing provision is supported through the Council's Business Solutions team, Community Learning & Development staff and partner agencies where appropriate. Other risks relating to community-based learning, venues, resources, etc. are managed through the Council's standard Risk Register and local assessments.

5. **Measures of success**

- 5.1 Measurable increases in the number of unique learners attending digital inclusion provision, particularly from the most deprived 20% datazones, as a result of Council programmes and partner provision where appropriate.
- 5.2 Measurable increases in the number of learners completing accredited or non-accredited programmes related to digital inclusion.
- 5.3 Increased awareness across staff and communities of the range of digital inclusion supports available.



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