
Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE, RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 15 May 2023

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: COUNCIL MOTION - DIGITAL INCLUSION

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Chief Officer: Tasnim Shawkat, Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Ward: All

1. Reason for decision/report and options

- 1.1 At the meeting of the full Council on 12th December 2022 a motion was submitted for debate by Councillors Chloe-Jane Ross and Julie Ireland on the subject of digital inclusion. The motion, which is set out in full in section 3 of this report, was referred to this Committee for further investigation and report back.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

Members are requested to consider the motion and make a recommendation to Council about what action should be taken.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Not Applicable
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Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority:
 - (2) For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence and making choices.
 - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
 - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Not Applicable
 4. Total current budget for this head: Not Applicable
 5. Source of funding: Not Applicable
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (*current and additional*): Not Applicable
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Not Applicable
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not Applicable
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Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: Not Applicable
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Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: Not Applicable
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Impact on the Local Economy

1. Summary of Local Economy Implications: Not Applicable
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Impact on Health and Wellbeing

1. Summary of Health and Wellbeing Implications: Not Applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (*current and projected*): Not Applicable
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Not Applicable

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 At the Council meeting on 12th December 2022 the following motion was moved by Councillor Chloe-Jane Ross and seconded by Councillor Julie Ireland.

“Council notes:

- At a high level, the digital divide is the gap between those with Internet access and those without it.
- As access to some public services is moved online some Bromley residents may have difficulty accessing them. In some cases, this may be an inconvenience and in others it may impact their quality of life.
- It has previously been estimated 18% of Londoners lack basic digital skills (ONS 2019), with at least 9% not having any (Lloyds 2019). Analysis also shows that 10% of Londoners do not own a smartphone (Ofcom, 2020). This could mean tens of thousands of Bromley residents are digitally excluded from accessing online services.
- The main reason people lack digital access is older age (Bromley has a higher-than-average older population). Disabilities, learning difficulties, ethnic origin, location, culture and language, and low income are also important factors.
- Some residents will always need an offline option to access services.

Council believes:

- Bromley must be a fair and inclusive borough for everyone” (Bromley’s Equality Policy)
- Digital services have been beneficial to both the Council and local people as they are efficient, accessible and trackable.
- Increased accessibility and usage of digital services is desirable.
- There must be an alternate offline option for those unable to access digital services.

Council therefore calls for:

- The creation of a Digital Exclusion Champion to ensure there is support for local people who do not have digital access.
- The development of a Council Digital Inclusion Strategy which will help reduce the digital divide in Bromley.
- A review of non-digital service provision to ensure it is robust and accessible to those that need it, including scenario mapping for critical services.
- A commitment to use information the Council delivers to every house in the borough to include information that will improve digital inclusion and support those that are digitally excluded.
- All council policies to give specific consideration to people without digital access.
- All Council contractors and service providers have policies in place to improve the accessibility of their digital services and offline access to their services for residents that cannot access them digitally.”

- 3.2 At the meeting, the following amendment was moved by Councillor Ryan Thompson and seconded by Councillor Simon Jeal -

Adding, in the third section of the motion, after “Council therefore calls for” the words -

“An exploration of potential partnerships with major telecoms networks and local digital education providers” and

“A study into learnings from other local authorities that we can embrace.”

On being put to the vote, this amendment was lost, so the motion stood as originally moved. A motion was then moved by Councillor Nicholas Bennett and seconded by Councillor Julie Ireland to refer the motion for further investigation to this Committee and report back to Council.

- 3.3 In its Equality Policy as presented on its website the Council states that the borough must be a fair and inclusive borough for everyone, where there is equity in access to services and where information is accessible to all. When services are reviewed and changed, it is important that residents are consulted and informed and that equality impact assessments are carried out. Information about support and services should be clear and accessible to all, available in both digital and non-digital formats. Staff are available in Council receptions to assist customers to access services, and help them to get on-line directly if appropriate. Our call centre staff can also assist customers remotely in the same way.
- 3.4 The legal and policy frameworks are already in place to support digital inclusion, but Members’ views are sought on what more could and should be done to promote and provide digital inclusion.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 protects the rights of individuals and supports equality of opportunity for all. It offers protection in employment, education, the provision of goods and services, housing, transport and the carrying out of public functions. The Act makes it unlawful for organisations carrying out public functions to discriminate against any of the nine protected characteristics listed in the Act. They must also have regard to the general duties aimed at eliminating discrimination under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The protected characteristics referred to in the Act include age. The Council has a legal duty under sections 20/21 of the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to address or and remove any disadvantage. Hence the Council will consider suitable alternative service delivery options if reasonable and proportionate. For example many Council services can be accessed digitally via Council Libraries and Resource centres across the borough, and staff are available to help residents/customers to use the digital channels.
- 4.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty imposes a requirement to consider equality and good relations in the day-to-day business and decision making of public authorities. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.

Non-Applicable Headings:	Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children/Policy/ Finance/Personnel/Carbon Reduction/Procurement/ Property/Local Economy/Health and Wellbeing/ Customers/Ward Councillors
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Council Minutes – 12 December 2022