HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

1 SEPTEMBER 2022

MEDWAY COUNCIL DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY UPDATE

Report from: Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer

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Summary

This report provides an overview of Medway Council's progress towards a Digital Inclusion Strategy. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to support the development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy through incorporation within the wider Digital, Data and Technology Strategy, which has recently been drafted in preparation for Transformation Board and Cabinet approval.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. Local authorities have a legal duty to improve the health of the people and communities that they serve, arising mainly from the NHS Act 2006 and Health and Social Care Act 2012. The Director of Public Health and their team works to promote and support improvement in health and care services in Medway.

1.2. Increased focus and a drive towards the provision of digital services has the capacity to leave people, communities, and organisations behind, and those excluded by such programmes are likely to experience poorer outcomes than those that can access or use digital services - including for their health and wellbeing.

1.3. Partly in recognition of this, since 2018, local authorities have had a legal duty to ensure all websites, mobile applications and other online platforms comply the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, (the Accessibility Regulations).

1.4. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) is responsible for overseeing the council's compliance with accessibility regulations and adherence to Medway's own digital standards.

1.5.   CMT – through the Chief Operating Officer and Transformation Board – is also responsible for agreeing to the creation or commissioning of new websites, apps, and online presences to ensure alignment with legal responsibilities and wider strategic objectives.

1.6.   The Chief Information Officer (CIO) has drafted a Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy, which will draw these and other themes, including a corporate approach to technology, together into a single strategy for the first time. The DDaT Strategy currently also includes provision for addressing digital exclusion within Medway.

1.7.   The draft DDaT Strategy will be considered by the Transformation Board in September 2022, before being presented to Cabinet for approval.

2.   Background

2.1.   In 2021, Public Health provided an initial report for the Health and Wellbeing Board, looking at some aspects of digital inclusion, and consensus was felt that the council required a Digital Inclusion Strategy.

2.2.   Colleagues, including from Public Health and Digital, began exploring the creation of a Digital Inclusion Strategy in the summer of 2021.

2.3.   The Director of Public Health's Annual Report 2020-21, titled "Bridging the Digital Gap – Improving Health Outcomes through Digital Innovation", further highlighted the impact of digital exclusion on communities following the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4.   In April 2022, Medway's CIO became responsible for the Business Change, Corporate Business Intelligence, Customer Experience, Digital and Technology teams as part of a restructure within the Finance and Business Improvement division. The CIO sets the council's corporate strategy in these areas.

2.5.   Under the direction of the Chief Operating Officer, the CIO has drafted a Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy which will encompass the following principles:

- customer choice
- customer centric service design
- technology architecture and system rationalisation
- single view of the council for customers
- single view of the customer for council staff
- develop a culture of informed service improvement
- leaders have the knowledge and skills to meet future challenges

2.6.   The Customer Choice section of the DDaT Strategy currently identifies the following themes, aimed at addressing digital exclusion:

- digital access and inclusion
- helping customers who cannot or will not use our website
- public access
- broadband access and infrastructure in Medway
- barriers to using digital services
- assisted digital tools
- self-help via the website
- web chat and social media
- assistance in person
- assistance over the phone

3.   Options

3.1.   It is recommended that the Digital Inclusion Strategy be incorporated into the DDaT Strategy, which will guide all future digital and technological developments at Medway. The following option is proposed:

- The previously discussed need for a Digital Inclusion Strategy be included within the DDaT Strategy, within the Customer Choice sub-strategy.

- When approved via the appropriate governance process, the CIO will attend a future Health and Wellbeing Board to present the new DDaT Strategy, paying particular attention to the Customer Choice section.

4.   Advice and analysis

4.1.   When people do not have access to the internet, computers, or mobile devices; and lack the skills, confidence, and motivation to engage with digital services; they can become digitally excluded.

4.2.   Common barriers to digital inclusion include:

- access and accessibility
- skills and confidence
- motivation and trust

4.3.   Access to internet connectivity and digital devices like a computer, tablet or smart mobile phone is an essential part of becoming digitally included.

4.4.   A lack of digital skills or confidence to safely use a device and connect to the internet can hold people back. Online training is available, but requires a baseline level of skill, the motivation to access the courses and of course the all-important device and connectivity in the first place. People may also need sustained, face-to-face support over a longer period to develop the skills they need and build their confidence.

4.5. A lack of motivation or trust significantly affects the likelihood that people will invest their time or money trying to overcome the other two barriers. The leading reason that people do not have a home internet connection is a lack of perceived need.

4.6. The reasons that a person or organisation has for being offline will be unique to them, as will their motivation to do more. The support that they will require to make the most of digital will need to be tailored to their needs, and be able to address issues with access, skills, and motivation in doing so.

4.7. The barriers to digital inclusion can be multi-faceted. Any strategy seeking to reduce digital exclusion must be able to address practical barriers to inclusion alongside a lack of ability or trust factors. By including digital inclusion within an over-arching DDaT Strategy, we can better ensure that:

- wider DDaT plans and workstreams align with our digital inclusion ambitions

- we have a more powerful and effective overall "Digital" strategy within the organisation.

5. Risk management

5.1. There are no risks resulting directly from this report.

6. Climate change implications

6.1. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

7. Financial implications

7.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. Legal implications

8.1. The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 impose a duty on local authorities to ensure accessibility of its websites, mobile applications and other online platforms. The Accessibility Regulations build on existing obligations to people who have a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

8.2. Public sector bodies must publish an accessibility statement and review it regularly. The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) monitors public sector bodies' compliance on behalf of the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

8.3. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in England, Scotland and Wales is responsible for enforcing the requirement to make public sector websites, online platforms and mobile apps accessible.

9. Recommendations

9.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

9.1.1. note the report and comment on the proposal to include a Digital Inclusion Strategy within the council's wider Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy.

9.1.2. support the way forward, to include the Digital Inclusion Strategy within the Customer Choice section of the DDaT Strategy, for progression alongside other "Customer Choice" workstreams.

9.1.3. agree to receive a presentation of the DDaT Strategy from the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at a future Board meeting.

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Appendices
None

Background papers
Annual Public Health Report 2020-21