

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Report Title:	Digital Exclusion Motion
Name of Committee:	Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	20 November 2023
Contact Officer:	Aftab Razzaq Chief Officer Legal & Governance
Summary:	The Committee is asked to consider the setting up of a Task and Finish Group as detailed within this report.
Financial Implications:	There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.
Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:	There are no immediate risk management implications arising from this report.
Environmental Implications:	There are no immediate environmental implications arising from this report.
Legal Implications:	There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.
Equality and Diversity:	There are no immediate equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

Scrutiny Committee - 20 November 2023

Digital Exclusion Motion

Summary

1. The Committee is asked to consider the setting up of a Task and Finish Group as detailed within this report; and
2. Delegated Authority be granted to the Chief Officer Legal & Governance in consultation with members of the Scrutiny Committee to finalise the one-page strategy to detail the objectives of the Task and Finish Group.

1. BACKGROUND

On 20 September 2023, Council considered a motion submitted on notice by Councillor Edwards and seconded by Councillor Mrs New which had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order 11 that stated the following:

“This Council notes that there is in an ever-increasing use and reliance for services including payment using smart phones, Apps, car parking and other digital devices as well as the increase in chat bots (artificial intelligence).

Whilst it is recognised that the use of technology has brought benefits to sectors of the community it has also driven a growing digital divide.

The Digital Poverty Alliance defines digital poverty as “the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where, and how an individual needs to”.

The Good Things Foundation also states that a lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person's life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, less access to jobs and education - <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org>.

Council requests that a small task and finish group scrutinises how Rugby Borough Council ensures that no discrimination is taking place this should include all services including the Queens Diamond Jubilee Centre. The Scrutiny report should be reported back to full Council by the new year as to the outcome of the review and its recommendations.”

A copy of the Motion considered by Council can be found in the minutes via the following link; [Minutes Council 20 September 2023](#)

2. NEXT STEPS

During further discussions with the Chief Officer Digital & Communications it has been proposed that the Scrutiny Committee could undertake work which will provide reassurance on the [Customer Access Strategy](#), [IT & Digital Services Strategy](#) and the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement](#) relating to services provided by Rugby Borough Council.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important that the proposed Task and Finish Group have a robust one-page strategy. This strategy must align with the overall objective of the Motion considered at Full Council and avoid any duplication with the present work that is being undertaken. On this basis it is considered that delegated authority is granted to the Chief Officer of Legal & Governance and this one-page strategy comprises of the following key objectives;

- Reassurance that the consideration of digital exclusion is robust enough to ensure that no discrimination is taking place across all the services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council.
- Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby which are unreasonably restricted by digital poverty as defined by the Digital Poverty Alliance.
- Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby which are unreasonably restricted by those residents and businesses who choose not to access them through a digital entry point.
- Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby where access through non digital means could be improved to increase engagement with those services.

A draft one-page strategy is attached at Appendix 1 for consideration.

Name of Meeting: Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 20 November 2023

Subject Matter: Digital Exclusion

Originating Department: Digital and Communications

DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY YES NO

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Doc No	Title of Document and Hyperlink

DIGITAL EXCLUSION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

ONE-PAGE STRATEGY

What is the broad topic area?

Ensures that no digital discrimination is taking place across all the services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council.

What is the specific topic area?

During the September 2023 Scrutiny Committee meeting a report was considered in respect of a Motion that was considered at Full Council. This motion was submitted on by Cllr Edwards and seconded by Cllr Mrs New and stated the following;

“Council requests that a small task and finish group scrutinises how Rugby Borough Council ensures that no discrimination is taking place; this should include all services including the Queens Diamond Jubilee Centre. The Scrutiny report should be reported back to full Council by the new year as to the outcome of the review and its recommendations.”

What should be considered?

The initial parameters to be address are:

- Is the consideration of digital exclusion robust enough to ensure that no discrimination is taking place throughout all the services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council?
- Are there services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council which are unreasonably restricted by digital poverty as defined by the Digital Poverty Alliance?
- Are there services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council which are unreasonably restricted by those residents and businesses who choose not to access them through a digital entry point?
- Are there services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council where access through non digital means could be improved to increase engagement with those services?

Strategic considerations and principals which drive and support these parameters are:

- Corporate strategy
 - Outcome 3: “Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected”
 - Outcome 4: “Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation”
- Rugby Blueprint
 - We are a modern organisation with optimised ways of working
 - Our communities are empowered and we support them to achieve their aspirations

- Communications and engagement strategy (draft)
 - Our communities are informed, engaged, included and involved
- Customer Access Strategy
 - Ambition: Outstanding customer experience
 - Principal: The best, not matter who you are
 - Ambition: Value
 - Principal: Cost effective and impactful
- Equality objectives
 - Equality and inclusion is at the heart of everything we do.

Who shall we consult?

The recent [Digital Exclusion and the cost of living report](#) commissioned through The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee (chapter eight) centres on accessible services and should be used as a robust source of information to provide reassurance that our related strategies and actions are appropriate. It should be noted that the most recent [Government Digital Inclusion Strategy](#) is from 2014 and therefore should not be considered as a robust source of information for comparison.

Trusted partners and organisations such as the [Digital Poverty Alliance](#) and the [Good Things Foundation](#) can provide guidance and reflection on the findings from within the outcomes.

Officers within Rugby Borough Council can provide feedback and expertise on what services are provided and the entry points for those services.

How long should it take?

Whilst the notice of motion requested a report to be returned to Scrutiny committee by new year with outcomes of the review and any recommendations, for a full and detailed review to be undertaken this strategy suggests at least 12 weeks. This takes into account national holidays, and the work required to reflect on the findings of the review either by Scrutiny committee, officers or external partners to provide a robust and substantial report which will deliver the required outcomes.

Actions

- Task and finish group to gather reassurances through appropriate officers on how digital exclusion is considered within their public facing service requests.
- Task and finish group to select a small variety of services to review alongside partners or partner information to provide reassurance there is no unreasonable restriction of access to those services when residents or businesses are affected by digital poverty, or from those residents and businesses who choose to not access through a digital entry point.
- Task and finish group alongside partners or partner information to review the availability and accessibility of service requests raised through non digital means.
- Task and finish group to review the help and schemes in place to reduce digital poverty for the residents and businesses of Rugby.
- Task and finish group to provide a final report.

What will be the outcome?

Reassurance that the consideration of digital exclusion is robust enough to ensure that no discrimination is taking place across all the services provided to the residents and businesses of Rugby by Rugby Borough Council.

Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby which are unreasonably restricted by digital poverty as defined by the Digital Poverty Alliance.

Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby which are unreasonably restricted by those residents and businesses who choose not to access them through a digital entry point.

Rugby Borough Council will know where they provide services to the residents and businesses of Rugby where access through non digital means could be improved to increase engagement with those services.