

Signing up to Scotland's Digital Participation Charter

Report by Eihbilin McHugh, Joint Director, Health and Social Care

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask the Corporate Management Team to agree to Midlothian Council becoming a partner in a national drive to promote digital participation and the development of online skills.

2 Background

2.1 The UK Government, Scottish Government and Midlothian Council are all committed to promoting the greater use of digital technology in delivering services and promoting citizen participation.

2.2 The UK Government is promoting the **digital by default** agenda, most notably through the processes for claiming benefit. Universal credit will only be possible to claim through an online process and will be introduced in Midlothian in the spring. The Scottish Government's approach is to promote digital by desire, and it is funding a number of programmes to ensure Scots can take advantage of new technologies. This includes the provision of high speed broadband, with the Council part-funding these infrastructure improvements and a number of projects intended to target digital exclusion.

2.3 Digital exclusion is defined as groups of people with no current capability or interest in going online. Work on Midlothian's Customer Profile has shown that 15% of our population have no interest in going online. This is consistent across Scottish Household Survey data, Ofcom data, and commercial data. Channel shift is defined as providing channels which are appropriate to the customer and appropriate for the organisation. In Midlothian, our channel shift work involves focussing support on the 15% of our residents who need our help in face to face contexts, with the support partly funded by savings created by persuading 85% of our residents to use our cheaper channels, in most cases our website, to request service from us.

2.4 Digital inclusion work is being co-ordinated in Scotland by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

2.5 The SCVO has agreed a Digital Participation Programme with a leadership group for this work drawn from the public, private and third sectors. It has a Charter in place for organisations to sign as a symbol of that organisation's commitment to ensuring that every resident has the access, motivation, and basic online skills required to fully participate in the digital world.

- 2.6 The Council is already working with voluntary organisations in the county on digital education projects and runs a number of schemes through both Malani and Community Learning and Development to deliver technology education to adult learners. Signing the Charter would be a public affirmation of this commitment and would complement the channel shift work already underway to maximise the savings and efficiencies possible as a result of our existing investment in a transactional internet site.
- 2.7 Signing the Charter would commit the Council to five key promises. These include ensuring all of our staff and volunteers have an opportunity to learn basic online skills, and have the opportunity to help share that learning with other people and other organisations to help them embrace digital tools. The five key promises are included in an appendix to this report.
- 2.8 Seventy-six organisations have signed the charter so far. Other signatories include: Asda, BT, Capita, the City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow Kelvin College, the Improvement Service, Microsoft, Museums Galleries Scotland, NHS Health Scotland, North Ayrshire Council, O2 and the University of Edinburgh.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

The charter leaves the question of level and type of contribution open to individual signatories to determine. This is captured as “contributing resources and practical support for digital participation initiatives in Scotland in whatever ways we can”.

Practically, the chief executive and/ or other senior officers and councillors are likely to be required to take part in publicity and a set piece event where we sign the Charter, and the Council would be expected to highlight and promote its adherence to the Charter, as we would wish to do in any case.

3.2 Risk

“Forced” channel shift to self-service through a website, which does not take into account the needs and preferences of the customers or service users, is unlikely to be fully successful and the benefits of the investment will not be fully realised. Signing the charter is a symbol of the Council’s understanding of the need to invest in digital participation initiatives to improve the capacity of people in Midlothian and allow them to realise the benefits of the opportunities represented by new technology. It also allows the council’s existing investments in digital inclusion work to be recognised by national partners.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing

- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ✓ ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ✓ ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Improving basic online skills boosts an individual's employability.

3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

On an individual level, greater levels of online knowledge and confidence helps individuals with self-management of health conditions and can assist with easing feelings of physical exclusion.

3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Self-management of health conditions reduces demand for healthcare.

3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

A brief discussion has taken place with Midlothian Voluntary Action, which is supportive of the council becoming a signatory to the Digital Participation Charter.

3.8 Ensuring Equalities

Promoting digital inclusion is part of work to ensure individuals of all ages and backgrounds have access to both the new technologies and the knowledge to use these tools to the best effect.

3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

Digital inclusion work assists in getting the maximum return on investment already made by the Council in our services.

3.10 IT Issues

There are no anticipated IT issues in connection with becoming a signatory.

4 Summary

Becoming a signatory would ensure the Council's existing commitment to digital inclusion in both school and community settings are recognised at the wider Scottish level.

5 Recommendations

- a) The Corporate Management Team is asked to agree to become a signatory to the Digital Participation Charter.
- b) The Corporate Management Team is asked to agree the allocation of this task to Kevin Anderson, Head of Customer Services and Housing, or his delegate.

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Report Contact:

Name Stephen Fraser Tel No: 0131 271 3629
stephen.fraser@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers: Appendix One.

DIGITAL PARTICIPATION CHARTER



Our shared ambition is for Scotland to be a world-leading digital nation by 2020. Central to achieving this, and maximising the benefits from Scotland's investment in digital infrastructure, is ensuring that everyone has the access, motivation and basic online skills required to participate fully in our digital world.

Efforts to scale up and accelerate activity in Scotland are coordinated through a Digital Participation Programme led by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, with a Leadership Group drawn from the public, private and third sectors.

This charter establishes a framework for organisations in Scotland to support the Digital Participation Programme and to pursue our shared ambition. Signatories to the charter commit to working together in a spirit of partnership to promote digital participation in Scotland.

Together we commit to...

- 1 Ensuring that all of our staff and volunteers have an opportunity to learn basic online skills, and that they take advantage of this opportunity
- 2 Encouraging and supporting our staff and volunteers to help other people learn basic online skills, and help other organisations to embrace digital tools
- 3 Contributing resources and practical support for digital participation initiatives in Scotland in whatever ways we can
- 4 Channelling our efforts through the Digital Participation Programme, so that our activities can be coordinated for maximum impact and measured consistently
- 5 Using common language based on digital participation and basic online skills, to make our thinking and actions as clear as possible

Pledge your support

www.digitalscotland.org/lets-get-on/digital-participation-charter

Once we receive your information the team will be in touch to confirm your support and discuss how we can work together.

For more information email digital@scvo.org.uk



let's get on

