

Mid Devon District Council Digital Inclusion Scrutiny briefing paper

Background

The channel Access strategy 2014-2017 states that:

To ensure that citizens who do not have access to digital channels at home or work are not disadvantaged when communicating with the council

1. Provide public internet access at our key locations, e.g. Leisure Centres, Council Offices and provide information on other free access available.
2. Provide full mediated access to our website at the council's face-to-face locations and over the phone.
3. Widely advertise our full choice of contact channels, particularly to hard to reach groups, e.g. transient and socially excluded groups.
4. Never design a service that is available only through digital channels
5. Provide staff training to ensure they have the skills to support customers using digital transactions.

Current position

We have public access in our offices and leisure centres, we also provide mediated access to customers who need help using our on line solutions and make every effort to let our customers know the various access channels that we have available.

To help more customers move to on line services we need to help provide access and training on how to use new technology.

Universal Credit will require all customers who wish to claim this benefit to make their application on line and our role will be to help people "go on line and stay on line".

Action Plan

Working with "Cosmic" who are funded by Devon County Council (for a further 12 months) to work with parishes and communities we plan to hold events that will provide parishes with the information they need to make decisions on how to improve digital access in their communities. Cosmic have created a "Digital Villages Toolkit" this provides parishes with a tool to help them scope what needs to be done.

Following a meeting with Cosmic the following joint action was agreed:

1. Cosmic will hold four events in Mid Devon, (Crediton, Cullompton, Bampton, Tiverton) with parishes to help them understand what is required to provide digital resource for the communities they serve. This will look at a variety of digital needs, such as equipment, setting up a "hot spot" for citizens to use, review how parish officials use email, store and publish document, website etc.
2. Mid Devon District Council will set up a funding pot for parishes from the digital transformation agenda, suggested figure £10,000 2016/17 and £10,000 2017/18. To apply for money from the fund each parish will need to explain what the money is needed for and explain how they will sustain digital services in future years.

3. Cosmic will host a “staff awareness session” and digital literacy training for Mid Devon District Council staff.

The aim is to work with Cosmic to reach rural communities and help them assess their digital capabilities and plan for new skills, access and equipment that may be needed.

Current support for parishes provided by MDDC

MDDC has a Town and Parish Charter in place (attached) which was last updated in May 2012. As per the budget and policy framework this is due to be updated in October 2015.

Listed below is the support currently provided by various services

Community Development team

- In terms of supporting T&P Councils Community Development provide the following:
- The Communities and Governance Officer is the Parish Liaison officer and is in regular communication with the T&P clerks. The T&P councils asked for us to provide them with a liaison officer and this arrangement has worked well since its introduction a few years ago.
- Parish Matters newsletter is sent out 6 times a year which gives clerks lots of information about what is going on at the Council.
- Support, advice and guidance to clerks is provided for issues falling under the remit of the Monitoring Officer and will attend meetings if appropriate to provide information or training. Both the Head of Communities and Governance and the Communities and Governance Officer get a lot of requests from Parishes and we do help them as much as we possibly can.
- T&P clerks sessions used to be run once a year and on one night but we are now running two sessions a year in all three towns.
- In September/October the Monitoring Officer will be doing 6 training sessions for new Members/re-elected members on register of interests and codes of conduct.
- The Grants and funding Officer provides advice, support and guidance to any Town or Parish Council asking for assistance with a funding application. If we are not able to assist we signpost them to another organisation that can help.
- The Community Development team work with town teams in Cullompton and Crediton on projects to improve their towns which involve businesses, voluntary and community groups and the Town Councils.

- Town and Parish Councils are supported on a number of other projects – e.g. youth service changes due to DCC cuts, Bampton Library project, etc

Website

- MDDC offer to host websites for T&P councils and are currently in the process of designing a new template to roll out to T&P Councils which will meet the requirements of the Transparency Code
- MDDC have information pages on our website giving details of T&P Councils and linking to their website if they have one. There is also a useful page on their for clerks which they do use.

ICT

- Provide support and guidance on use of the website
- Enable and provide ICT support but cannot fund or procure ICT equipment.