

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Thursday, 8 July 2021 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jacq Paschoud (Chair), Samantha Latouche, Joan Millbank, John Paschoud and James-J Walsh.

ALSO PRESENT: John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager), Will Davies (Director) (Lewisham Speaking Up), Helen Ramsbottom (Independent Consultant) (Lewisham Speaking Up) and Cheryl Thorley (Business Support and Meeting Administration Apprentice)

1. Confirmation of Chair

Resolved: that Councillor Jacq Paschoud be confirmed as Chair of the task and finish group

2. Declarations of Interest

The following non-pecuniary interests were declared:

- Cllr Samantha Latouche was formally the Chair of Lewisham Speaking Up.
- Cllr Jacq Paschoud has a close family member in receipt of a package of adult social care.
- Cllr John Paschoud has a close family member in receipt of a package of adult social care.

3. Scoping report

Cllr Paschoud, Chair, introduced the item by providing an outline of the proposal for a task and finish group (TFG) on digital inclusion for adults with learning disabilities.

3.1 The recent rapid increase in the use of digital technology for staying in touch with each other, among other things, has affected everyone in the community. However, people with a learning disability are among those who continue to be more likely to be digitally excluded.

3.2 Learning disability is quite poorly understood by most people and digital exclusion among those with a learning disability is due to a range of complex issues.

3.3 Most support for digital inclusion is based on demonstrating how to use particular devices or apps, but this is not always suitable for people with a learning disability as they are often more likely to have short-term memory issues and lose that skill over a number of weeks or months.

- 3.4 The intention of this TFG is to look at how to increase digital inclusion for people with a learning disability so that they're able to use digital technology the way they need to – whether this be, for example, via a support worker or with equipment that has been provided to them.
- 3.5 The recent report on digital inclusion commissioned by Lewisham Speaking Up led to the idea for this TFG and the review should consider very carefully the findings and conclusions in order to support people with learning disabilities to enjoy to digital life that they want and need.

Will Davies, Lewisham Speaking Up, Director, delivered a presentation on their recent research into digital exclusion during the pandemic. This covered the barriers people with a learning disability face, what support they need, and what we can do to address the situation.

- 3.6 The research found that many people with a learning disability in Lewisham do not have access to suitable devices, reliable broadband, or support to use digital technology. It was stressed that providing a device solves only a very small part of the problem.
- 3.7 The research found that day service and other support providers in Lewisham do not have sufficient hardware, fast broadband, or trained support staff with the capacity to offer adequate support to people with learning disabilities using digital technology.
- 3.8 The research also noted that there are serious cost implications for organisations looking to upgrade their equipment and train staff to provide support like this.
- 3.9 The research noted that many carers (and family members) are also not adequately trained (or paid) to support people with learning disabilities to access digital technology.
- 3.10 Some of the suggestions to address digital exclusion among people with learning disabilities include: tying in digital inclusion with financial assessment; having paid workers or volunteers to help people; establishing a community chest to help with purchasing data and other small grants.
- 3.11 Providing training for support staff, and training on digital safety, were noted as particularly important.
- 3.12 It was also found that there is a clear need among support providers to take a strategic approach to digital inclusion, by building in digital needs into care plan assessments, for example, but also by including it in organisation planning such as business plans, for example. The need to future-proof services is vital.

The committee went on to discuss the findings of the Lewisham Speaking Up research, the scoping paper for the review and potential further areas to explore. The following key points were noted:

- 3.13 The group queried whether people with learning disabilities and their support networks were found to be aware of the cheaper 'social tariffs' that some internet providers offer.

- 3.14 The Lewisham Speaking Up research didn't specifically ask about social tariffs but it did come up in conversations with some support providers, who noted that there are certain criteria to meet and up-front payments to make. It was noted that somebody with a learning disability might struggle to access these offers without support from someone else.
- 3.15 Support providers who provide housing also noted the difficulties they've faced arranging broadband for their residents, with complex processes and contracting arrangements (between the support provider, housing provider, and individual) acting as additional barriers.
- 3.16 The group noted that it would be useful to quantify how many people with a learning disability are digitally excluded, although recognised that doing this would be very difficult.
- 3.17 The group suggested that it should also consider how to support and reassure those that might be reluctant to use digital services.
- 3.18 It was suggested that to find out more about those reluctant to go online it might be helpful to speak to those people who live at home with their families.
- 3.19 The group queried whether there are any circumstances where the cost of your internet connection is a deductible expense for the services people get.
- 3.20 It was noted that deductible expenses tend to relate to things like personal care.
- 3.21 The group said that there is an argument that people with learning disabilities need to have a digital connection in order to stay connected with other people.
- 3.22 The group also queried whether providing second-hand technology will always be as up-to-date as necessary to someone with a learning disability to do what they need to do.
- 3.23 The group suggested that a relevant stakeholder group and fully safeguarded community digital champions/buddies would be useful for some people. It was also suggested that the group should hear from some of the social landlords in the borough.
- 3.24 The group noted that Lewisham Homes have some supported living places and have recently been doing work on digital inclusion, including group internet schemes.
- 3.25 It was noted that those people with a learning disability who have short-term memory issues do very quickly forget how to use certain tools soon after they've been demonstrated and that this is why community digital champions/buddies could help provide more ongoing support when it's needed. The group suggested that being able to book support at specific times would be helpful.
- 3.26 The group noted that the GLA are also doing a lot of work on digital inclusion at the moment and that this could be a valuable source of information.
- 3.27 It was noted that there are some national organisation, such as Ability Net, that can provide phone support.

3.28 It was suggested that support could also be provided remotely through the device someone is using as well as over the phone.

3.29 The group also suggested that there should be some common questions on digital inclusion that should be asked to assess digital access.

Resolved: that the scoping report, including the key lines of enquiry and the timeline for the completion of the group's work be agreed.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

Chair:

Date:
