

Submission for Task and Finish Group

How might greater digital inclusion be achieved, and how might this provide a better quality of life, for residents of Lewisham who have a learning disability?

Overview

I propose that we explore the digital divide that exists between those who have a learning disability and those who do not share that characteristic. How has this shown itself during the Covid 19 pandemic, what has been learned about the accessibility of the digital realm to people with a learning disability and how might that be increased? What benefits (or disadvantages) might be experienced by people with a learning disability as a result of greater digital inclusion?

Reason For Proposal

During the past year there has been enormous escalation in the speed of implementation of digital platforms for work and leisure activities. Many of those who believed they could not navigate the digital realm, including some people with a learning disability, have become digitally enabled however there are still those who have been left behind.

Lewisham Speaking Up, an advocacy project for people with a learning disability, has researched and produced a report on digital exclusion. I believe this is the time to build on this work, look at the factors which do digitally exclude those with a learning disability, look at how we, as an authority and community, might ameliorate those factors and how in the future the digital realm might increase and optimise the support available to those who need the help of others to lead a safe, rewarding and fulfilling life.

While in the long term this sort of support will become a mainstream part of what is offered to those who use our services, the work of a Task and Finish Group, widening the reach and maintaining the momentum of the expansion of digital use due to Covid 19 seems timely.

Policy Context

The Council is reviewing services provided to people with a Learning Disability. A report has been written by Lewisham Speaking Up into digital exclusion which fits in a timely way with local and national conversation of the digital divide.

As the Council seeks ceaselessly to provide good service to residents in the time of swingeing government cuts optimising every pound spent becomes ever more important. For those who require a support package every avenue needs to be explored to ensure they have a maximised quality of life, including optimised independence for those with a need for assistance with daily living.

The general population increasingly uses digital technology for both routine life activity and enrichment. By including as many people with a learning disability in what those without that characteristic take for granted not only will their lives be enriched but they will have more independence, more choice, more control and "more bang for their support buck". Better use of budgets is an overall aim of the Council always but especially now.

Criteria For The Investigation

As outlined in the various sections above the suggestion for this Task and Finish work has come out of the increased local and national conversation about digital exclusion and local and national awareness of the disproportionate exclusion of people with a learning disability from services and experiences due to lack of access to the digital realm.

Lewisham needs to increase the use of universal services by people with extraordinary needs and as services increasingly move on line, the more enabled residents with all levels of need become, the better will they be able to use the services we make available to them.

The more universal and community resources residents with a learning disability can use the fewer targeted services they require and the greater inclusion in society as a whole they will experience.

Many of the services used by people with a learning disability are provided or commissioned and wholly or partly funded by the Council. By encouraging a thoroughgoing exploration of how digital inclusion may work towards greater engagement we may well discover improved ways of delivering support in the future. The work of Lewisham Speaking Up may well intersect and inform this exploration.

It might be hoped that this proposed work would benefit directly people with a learning disability and their family and friends who provide them with support. By enabling access to universal as well as targeted services it would broaden support available especially to those on more limited support budgets. Digital inclusion might also enable more timely and appropriate support from paid for sources.

Sources of Evidence

People with a learning disability are well able to express their own opinions given the opportunity and willing communicators!

Providers of support services commissioned by Lewisham, both in and out of borough.

- Adult Learning Lewisham.
- Lewisham Speaking Up.
- Greenvale and Drumbeat Schools.
- Lewisham College
- MENCAP.
- Camphill Friends and Family.
- Carers Lewisham.

Co-optees/Technical advisors

In addition to the sources of evidence given above advice might be sought from experts in adapted digital equipment and leading edge social care research academics from Goldsmiths University of London for example.

Suggested Time Frame.

Because of the ongoing nature of the outcomes of this group, and the exploration of progress through the recovery period, an initial 6 month period of evidence gathering (not including holiday periods) and report production with progress studies to 12 months might be appropriate should there be any implementation studies to be made.

Equalities Impact

People with a Learning Disability are a disadvantaged group in our society and their inclusion in the digital realm is being explored in this proposal.

There is also the opportunity for exploration of intersectionality with other characteristics shown by people with a learning disability in Lewisham's diverse population. Gender, racial heritage, sexual orientation and so forth.

Councillor Submitting this Proposal

Jacq. Paschoud.

While I have been minded to make this proposal for some time I hesitated to put forward the idea believing there to be much competition for topics to be pursued. However the publication of the Speaking Up report on Digital Exclusion has increased my belief that this proposal is timely hence my sole submission up against the closing date.

It might be expected that both those interested in social care and those interested in technological solutions might be interested in the work of the suggested Task and Finish group.