Final report of the Digital Inclusion for Adults with Learning Disabilities scrutiny task & finish group

February 2022

1. Introduction by Councillor Jacq Paschoud

There has been, over the past years at escalating speed, an increasing use of the digital realm to engage with both services and social activity. The Covid 19 pandemic of 2020 precipitated one of the most startling social shifts with everyone from reception school pupils to older frail people in residential care engaging with the digital realm in a way they never did before. People who had previously not been seen as a "Target Audience" for social media, online shopping and streaming services were catapulted into a world which suddenly had to find a place for them, and to everyone's amazement, it worked.

Lewisham Speaking Up, an advocacy project for people with a learning disability, obtained funding from London Southbank University to research Digital Exclusion of People with a Learning Disability during the pandemic. This showed that many people with a learning disability had engaged perfectly well with digital resources having been given that firm nudge that the Pandemic provided. But some had not. The reasons for this being many and various.

As a Local Authority Lewisham has a responsibility to all its residents to enable them to engage with its services as and when appropriate. But where people have additional needs it is necessary to look beyond that universal offer to "fill the gaps" so that inequalities are minimised as much as possible.

It may seem obvious that a mobile phone will enable someone who may need help and advice when out and about to travel more confidently knowing that help is only a button press away, or that if someone has limited opportunities to travel to see friends Zoom may mean a meet up on days where no physical travel is possible but how often does the majority of the population sit down and think about how enriching such things may be to those who are being left behind on the digital highway?

The Digital Inclusion for Adults with Learning Disabilities Task and Finish Group has endeavoured to look at what might be done to enable our residents to engage better with universal services as they move online and benefit from opportunities that are out there for an increased quality of life through the digital offer, both universal and specialist. With the right devices and support, intellectual impairment should not be a barrier to the digital realm but the barriers to those devices and that support show how intersectional inequalities affect too many people with a learning disability.

We have made recommendations in this report, we do not claim to have found solutions. Each person is an individual and how each individual's needs are best addressed will be unique to them. The barriers easiest to address are the attitudinal ones, and they require no budget. Understanding that people with a learning disability have similar wants and needs as those who do not is a good place to start, it is how they may be achieved that requires adaptation. Make no assumptions about interests or abilities. Listen! The old adage "Nothing about us without us" could not be

more apposite than when looking to address the digital inclusion of people with a learning disability.

I must thank the Councillors who took part in the Task and Finish Group. Cllrs Milbank, Walsh, Latouche and John Paschoud. The Officers who supported us with such skill, not only arranging evidence sessions but pulling that evidence into shape for the report, John Bardens and Katie Wood. The service providers who gave evidence. Will Davies and Marsh Stitchman of Lewisham Speaking Up whose insight is invaluable. MENCAP Thursday Club who welcomed us to visit. Colleagues at Leeds City Council who generously shared their time and insights. And all the learning disability community of Lewisham who willingly offer their advice, wisdom and insight into how the services they depend on may be improved and adapted in challenging times.

Cllr. Jacq. Paschoud

Chair of Scrutiny Task and Finish Group for Digital Inclusion for Adults with Learning Disabilities

Membership of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Sam Latouche

Councillor Joan Millbank

Councillor John Paschoud

Councillor James-J Walsh

Supporting officers:
John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager)
Katie Wood (Scrutiny Manager)
Cheryl Thorley (Business Support and Administration Apprentice)

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Committee wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. During social need care assessments and at other key assessment stages such as during transition assessments from children's to adult's social services, or for Carer Assessments; digital needs should be considered. This could include consideration of access to suitable devices and data and to any on-going skills or support needed. Questions on assistive technology should routinely and consistently be completed as part of the assessment process.

2. Any work carried out by the Council on digital inclusion should be monitored for Equalities purposes to help build up a better picture of where there is greatest need and to understand intersectional needs to a greater extent. The importance of the socio-economic context should be considered, as data poverty, access to devices and stability of housing are all key determiners of digital exclusion.

3. Resources such as the Digital Exclusion Risk Index tool and the Indices of Multiple deprivation as well as other local data and insight should be used routinely by the Council and partners to help target those most in need when considering locations of in-person support. Data should be collected routinely to build up an increasingly accurate picture of where the greatest needs are.

4. The Council should work with partner organisations to increase understanding of those adults with a learning disability who are most at danger of digital exclusion and who would most benefit from additional support. For example those that live with family members as oppose to those who live in supported living. Support should be targeted to individuals and groups focussing on specific interests as this has been proven to be a successful approach in ensuring motivation.

5. All of the Council's day service provision should have access to wi-fi for their service users. In particular, the Council should urgently work with Ladywell Day Care Centre to ensure wi-fi is installed as soon as possible to benefit their service users.

6. The Task and Finish Group recognise the need for support to be provided to family carers, helping address concerns such as safety which can be a barrier to digital inclusion. This could be through training or through additional software/safety controls etc.

7. The Council should ensure it maintains a permanent role in providing continuity of digital support to those in need. This could be through a dedicated resource or programme that is consistent and accessible to all partner organisations.

8. The Council should work with partner organisations and commissioned services that work with people with learning disabilities to better understand where there are gaps in the provision and pro-actively assess where they can support.

9. When services are being commissioned for people with learning disabilities, weight should be given to organisations that commit to on-going IT training to ensure staff have the relevant skills to support people who use their service with digital inclusion. As part of securing social value in our procurement processes going forward – the Council should ensure contractors meet standards around accessibility of digital services.

10. Council online services must be accessible. The Resident Experience Programme should include consideration of people with Learning Disabilities. Specific areas of the Council's website such as pages relating to the Local Offer should be worked on and tested with key user groups such as those with learning disabilities and should be targeted to reach higher standards of accessibility than the general website. There should be more emphasis corporately to ensure that throughout the Council, all those who design and input information on the website have a strong focus on ensuring information is as accessible as possible

11. As a local authority we hold a vast amount of historical and current information in PDF format. The adoption of a framework and standards for accessible PDF production should be developed and adopted by the organisation for this information going forward.

12. The council should work with partners to develop a directory of proven digital activities and tools for partners to share. This could include information on access to affordable devices and internet connection such as social tariffs. This could also include an FAQ of key issues that can be shared with family carers. This should be kept up to date, readily available to providers, and signposted to any new providers. Sharing knowledge on online risks for example safeguarding and scamming is particularly important and helps build confidence in individuals and carers on what the risks are and how they can protect themselves and those they care for.

3. Background

3.1. In March 2021, Cllr Jacq Paschoud proposed a Task and Finish Group to consider: "*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?*".

3.2. Following acceptance by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 May 2021, the scope for the Digital Inclusion for People with Learning Disabilities Task & Finish Group (TFG) was established on 8th July 2021.

3.3. The main aims of the review were to explore the digital divide that exists between those who have a learning disability and those who do not, the disproportionate exclusion of people with a learning disability from services and experiences due to lack of access to the digital realm, and ultimately consider 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.

3.4. Lewisham Speaking Up, an advocacy project for people with a learning disability, had recently researched and produced a report on digital exclusion (February 2021), providing valuable information on the key

barriers to digital inclusion for people with learning disabilities in Lewisham.[1]

3.5.   And given the rapid take up of digital platforms for work and leisure activities since the pandemic it was felt that it was a good time to build on this work and look at how we can help residents with learning disabilities overcome some of barriers which digitally exclude them and how might digital enhance the support available.

3.6.   The four strategic themes at the heart of the Council's response to the impact of the pandemic also includes digital inclusion as an element of the strategic recovery theme *An economically sound future*.

3.7.   Following an initial presentation from Lewisham Speaking Up on the findings and recommendations of their work, the committee went on to consider a wide range of information during the course of the review through stakeholder engagement workshops, evidence sessions with service providers, and meetings with other local authorities. The TFG notes its thanks for the insight, evidence, suggestions and time provided by the staff and officers of partner organisations that have contibuted their knowledge and experience to the review.

3.8.   Once the TFG was established, it was clear early on that there is already plenty of examples of successful work going on in Lewisham to support digital inclusion, including for adults with learning disabilities. The TFG heard examples of good practice and the benefit seen throughout the review, with the work of the Lewisham Disability Digital Inclusion Forum, the Lewisham Digital Poverty Action Alliance, and key local partners being examples of the opportunities there are.

3.9.   Nonetheless, based on the wide range of evidence the TFG has considered from a wide range of engagement and research, this report sets out a number of key findings and recommendations intended to help increase digital inclusion among adults with a learning disability.

4. Policy context

4.1.   The Council's *Corporate Strategy (2018-2022)* outlines the Council's vision to deliver for residents over the next four years. Delivering this strategy includes the following priority outcomes that relate to digital inclusion for people with learning disabilities:

* *Delivering and defending: health, social care and support - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.*

* *Building an inclusive local economy - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.*

4.2.   The committee should also note and take into account the four strategic themes at the heart of the Council's response to the impact of the pandemic, which support what we want for every single resident and that we know are what we need to focus on locally. These four strategic themes are: An economically sound future; a healthy and well future; a greener future; and a future we all have a part in. The first of these is particularly relevant to digital inclusion for people with learning disabilities:

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[1]   Lewisham Speaking Up, *Research on Digital Exclusion since the Covid-19 pandemic 2020*, February 2021 (the Ramsbottom report)

- *An economically sound future: We are working to get the borough back in business, with a future where everyone has the jobs and skills they need to get the best that London has to offer. We are a borough with businesses that are adaptable and prepared for change, a thriving local economy that sees 'local' as the first and best choice, with digital inclusion at the heart of our plans. We do all we can to support residents into jobs that pay fairly and provide families with the opportunities and security they deserve.*

5. Key findings

Key issue 1: Understanding the need better

5.1.   One of the key issues identified during the course of the review was how it would help to have a better understanding of the barriers to greater digital inclusion that people with learning disabilities face, and the potential benefits that it could bring.

5.2.   Throughout the review the group heard from a wide range of stakeholders about the many different barriers to digital inclusion that exist. Research from Lewisham Speaking Up, for example, identified the key barriers as: the cost of data and devices, lack of IT skills, lack of adequate support, and specific learning disability-related barriers, such as remembering and retaining information. Lewisham Speaking Up also noted that simply providing a device often only solves a very small part of the problem.

'… simply providing a device often only solves a very small part of the problem.'

5.3.   One of the suggestions that came up in discussions with Lewisham Speaking Up was whether there should be some common questions to assess digital inclusion, in order to build digital needs into care plan assessments. Lewisham Speaking Up also recommended tying in digital inclusion with financial assessment to ensure that any extra monthly payment is affordable to people.

5.4.   In an engagement session with a group of key local stakeholders involved in the Lewisham Digital Poverty Action Alliance, the TFG also heard about additional barriers such as lack of confidence and skills, lack of awareness of what's available, and issues relating to the accessibility of online services. A local learning disability organisation said that one of biggest barriers is people not believing in people's abilities and capabilities to be online and not focusing on their interests and helping them find something to do online that they actually want do. And following discussions about the ongoing barriers that exist, the TFG suggested that the lack of knowledge we seem to have about those in the community who might need support to be more digitally included appears to be another barrier in itself.

5.5.   In the closing discussions at the engagement session it was also suggested that we need to find a way of reaching out to those who might most need support. The TFG also stressed, however, that digital inclusion should be seen as a way of enhancing people's experiences and skills, and that people will still want to carry on with face-to-face activities and clubs in the community.

5.6.   During an additional engagement session with a number of local learning disability support providers, another key barrier identified was some family members not having

access to a device or the internet and not having the digital skills to support someone else. It was stressed that digital skills should not be assumed and that it is important to assess people's ability to train and teach others, particularly those providing support outside of residential settings.

5.7.   It was again suggested (as it was in the meeting with Lewisham Speaking Up) that care assessments and annual reviews should include consideration of people's digital needs. This should include looking into whether someone has access to a device and the internet, and the skills and support they need, and, if not, how this could be provided. It was also suggested that family carers' needs should be considered in a similar way, as part of their carers assessments, and that the period of transition from children's to adults' social care would be an especially important time to consider digital needs. In a later meeting with key council officers the TFG heard that although many young people coming through transitions are more digitally able, a lack of devices, internet connectivity, digital skills and ongoing support and advice are still key barriers.

5.8.   In the TFG's meeting with key council officers it was noted that the assessment process in Lewisham is strength-based and should also be looking at the skills and equipment that could develop someone's independence. It was also noted, however, that digital needs aren't considered as routinely as they should be in the assessment process and that digital inclusion can be a way of creating independence rather than dependency. The TFG suggested that the assessment process should consider the minimum someone needs to be digitally included.

> **'… digital inclusion can be a way of creating independence rather than dependency.'**

5.9.   It is also relevant to note that two recent reports on national digital inclusion projects have also made recommendations in relation to assessing digital needs.

5.10.   Firstly, a recent analysis of two NHS pathfinder projects on digital participation in health and social care recommended that questions about digital (access, use, confidence) should be included during initial assessments of social care and support needs, in order to embed digital inclusion into care pathways. The report also recommended that effective referral routes to local providers of digital inclusion should be established as a way to embed digital inclusion into local health, social care and housing partnerships. The analysis estimated a return on investment for the NHS of £6 for each £1 spent NHS programmes to improve digital literacy via community organisations.[2]

5.11.   Secondly, the Digital Lifeline Fund, a more recent DCMS-funded project to provide devices, data and support to people with a learning disability during the pandemic, also included in its model the assessment the needs of those involved to help them meet their goals. The interim analysis of the project also stressed the importance of addressing the digital access, skills and confidence of family members and informal

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[2]   Dr. Emma Stone et al (Sept 2020) *Digital Inclusion in Health and Care: Lessons learned from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme (2017-2020)*, Good Things Foundation

carers. A barrier that has also been mentioned a number of time in the TFG's own engagement sessions.[3]

5.12. One of the additional benefits of having a better understanding of the levels of digital inclusion among people with learning disabilities is that it would also provide valuable insights into the equalities impacts of digital inclusion, including intersectionality – as noted in the Equalities Analysis Assessment for the review.

Key issue 2: Reaching out to those most in need

5.13. Closely related to the previous issue, another key issue that came up a number of times during the course of the review was the importance of focusing on and reaching out to those most likely to be digitally excluded.

5.14. In engagement with local stakeholders, for example, the TFG heard that overcoming some barriers to digital inclusion might be challenging without very targeted and deliberate support and, in many cases, in-person support. And a number of stakeholders noted that they'd come across a number of people with learning disabilities in online meetings, but with their cameras and microphones off, making it difficult to participate properly with the activities.

5.15. In the closing discussions with local stakeholders it was suggested that we need to find a way of reaching out to those who might most need support to be more digitally included and a way of taking into account the improvements to quality of life that could be achieved. Some of the main benefits noted during the session, for example, included making more social connections (across the country), being more able to pursue interests and hobbies, being better able to manage health, increased wellbeing, and being more able to connect with family.

5.16. In terms of those who might be considered most likely to be digitally excluded and most in need of support, in discussions with Lewisham Speaking Up the TFG suggested that support and reassurance should be focused on those who live at home with their families as they are likely to be among some of the most reluctant to use digital services.

5.17. The scoping paper for the TFG also cited recent research into the role of technology in supporting people with learning disabilities. This found huge variations in digital access among people with learning disabilities, but that it is those living independently with their families who are least likely to have the support to enable them to access digital technologies.[4] This group was also identified as among the most likely to be digitally excluded during the

… those living independently with their families are least likely to have the support to enable them to access digital technologies.

3 DCMS et al (Sept 2021) *Digital Lifeline Fund Interim Report*
4 Jane Seale (Nov 2020) *Keeping connected and staying well: the role of technology in supporting people with learning disabilities during the coronavirus pandemic*, The Open University

TFG's meeting with key council officers. In an earlier meeting with officers, the TFG suggested that an adult education course specifically focused on skilling up family carers and informal carers on key digital activities could be beneficial.

5.18.   In terms of reaching out to those most likely to be digitally excluded, the group heard during the review about the importance of providing both motivation for going online and reassurance about any concerns or fears people may have.

5.19.   The scoping paper referred to comments from digital inclusion charity the Good Things Foundation noting that motivation is one of the most significant, persistent and hardest to address barriers to inclusion.

5.20.   In response, the Centre for Ageing Better suggests that digital inclusion should include building confidence and motivation to do things online that matter to people.[5] Similarly, guidance from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) stresses the importance of recognising individuals' unique motivations to learn something new and hooking people in through a relevant, personal interest.[6] While research from the Office for National Statistics also notes that increasing digital skills may need to start by highlighting the benefits and overcoming apprehensions.[7] And, pertinently, the 2021 UK Consumer Digital Index found that 77% of people would improve their digital skills if they thought it would directly help them with a day-to-day task or piece of work.[8]

77% of people would improve their digital skills if they thought it would directly help them with a day-to-day task …

5.21.   As mentioned in the previous section, the importance of focusing on people's interests and helping them to do something online that they want to do was also a point stressed by a Lewisham learning disability organisation.

5.22.   In addition to motivation about the benefits and reasons for being online, the TFG also noted the importance of addressing people's concerns about internet safety. During a visit to Lewisham Mencap's Thursday club, for example, the TFG heard that anxiety about internet safety, particularly online abuse and scams, is a major barrier for some family carers. And in discussions at the stakeholders engagement event it was also suggested that addressing people's concerns should be a key part of digital inclusion.

5.23.   In terms of addressing concerns and finding motivations, the TFG heard from key council officers that the experience so far shows that having this support delivered by a known, trusted person (face to face) is key.

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[5]   Cited in Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) webpage, *Digital inclusion, exclusion and participation*, accessed January 2022
[6]   Ibid
[7]   ONS, *Exploring the UK's digital divide*, March 2019
[8]   Lloyds Bank, *UK Consumer Digital Index 2021*, May 2021 (p5)

Key issue 3: The importance of ongoing support

5.24.   One of the most significant issues identified during the review was the importance of ongoing, rather than short-term, support.

5.25.   One of the key findings of the Lewisham Speaking Up research was that many people with learning disabilities lack adequate support to use digital. The research found that many carers, family members and support workers in Lewisham are not adequately trained or paid for their time to support people to access digital technology. Carers have found it challenging providing support accessing online services and activities and some parents have felt under intense pressure since Covid, lacking IT and tech skills, and feeling exhausted and unable to help.

5.26.   In engagement with learning disability support providers it was also noted that some family members don't have the digital skills to provide support and that there is an older generation in particular that is much less used to digital and will need a lot of ongoing support. It was also pointed out that someone living independently with only a few hours of support per week is likely to receive a very limited amount support with digital activities.

5.27.   Given the lack of adequate support identified by the Lewisham Speaking Up research, one of the recommendations of the research they commissioned was for Lewisham Speaking Up to design and deliver regular peer-to-peer IT support for people with learning disabilities.

5.28.   Similarly, the TFG also stressed early on that short-term support will not be suitable for many people with learning disabilities as they are more likely to have short-term memory issues and find it more difficult to remember news skills over a number of weeks or months.

'short-term support will not be suitable for many people with learning disabilities…'

5.29.   As an example of the positive outcomes that ongoing support can achieve, the TFG heard how one local organisation had, over a number of months, supported someone with an interest in music to use music streaming platforms.

5.30.   Similarly, in a meeting with key council officers it was noted that during the pandemic South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) provided some of their services users with smartphones in order to maintain communication. Officers said that the successes of this initiative should be considered.

5.31.   Local learning disability support providers also suggested that it would be helpful to be able to access direct support at hubs in community centres and libraries in different parts of the borough.

5.32.   One of the additional pieces of evidence considered by the TFG was the *Digital Inclusion Risk Index* (image below). This is a mapping tool created by Greater Manchester Combined Authority to show where digital exclusion is most likely to occur, based on 12 indicators on demography, deprivation and broadband. Information like this could be helpful in identifying priority areas in Lewisham.

Low risk | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | High risk
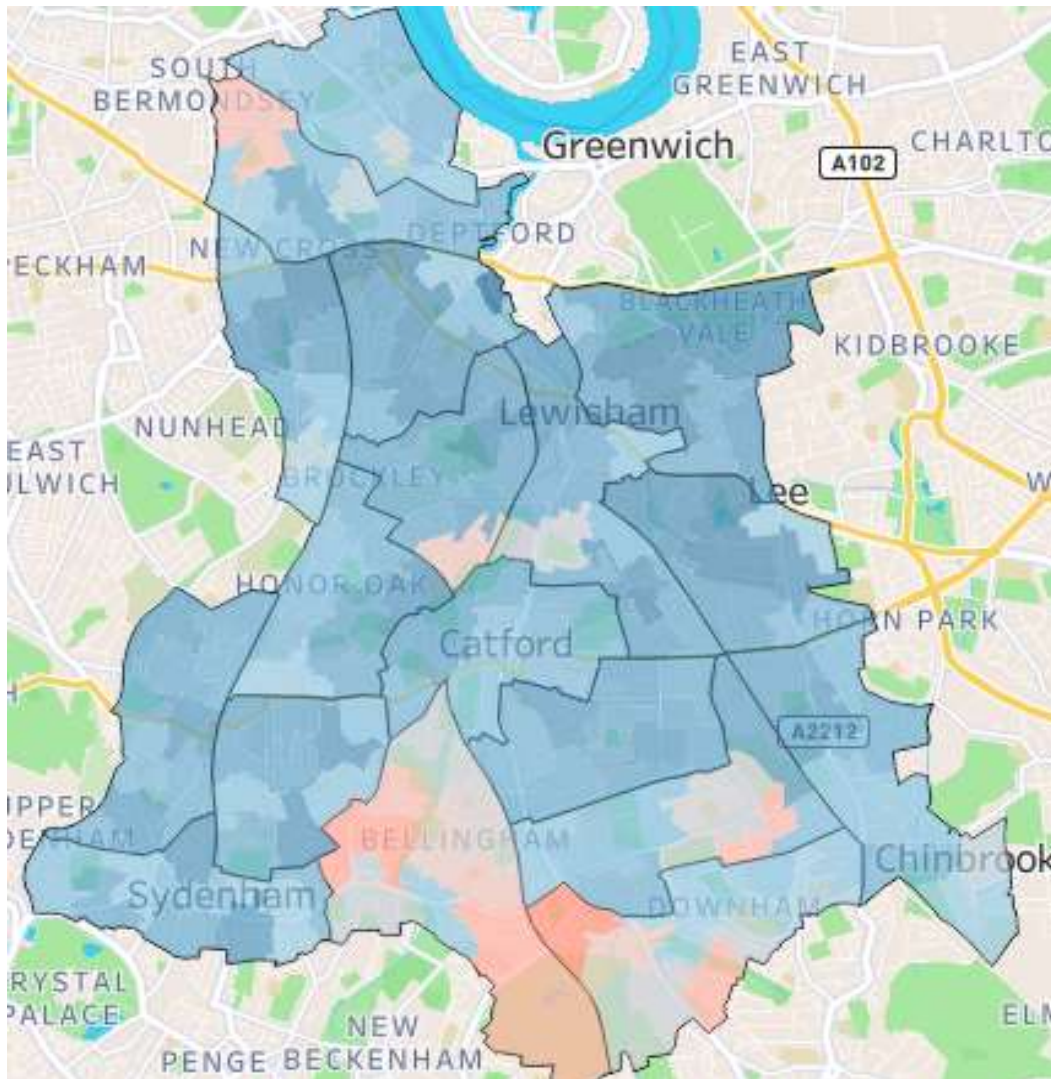
Key issue 4: The importance of coordination

5.33.   The importance of coordination and making the best use of the digital support that already exists is another significant theme to emerge from the review.

5.34.   The Lewisham Speaking Up research that prompted the initial proposal for the TFG found that day service providers and other support providers in Lewisham do not alone have the devices and data nor trained support staff with the capacity to offer adequate support to people with learning disabilities using digital technology.

5.35.   The report stressed that in Lewisham, as elsewhere, organisations providing services and support are stretched and that they can struggle to provide the resources needed for support staff to be able to support people with learning disabilities to become digitally included. The group also heard in engagement with officers that the Ladywell day centre doesn't have the Wi-Fi in the building needed to introduce more digital tools.

5.36.   One of the key findings from the Lewisham Speaking Up research was that support providers in Lewisham would like help in training their support staff, or in accessing

funds to do so. The need for training for staff and provider staff was a point that was also raised in the TFG's own engagement with support providers and council officers.

5.37. More positively, however, the TFG also heard during the course of the review about the encouraging range of digital inclusion activity that already exists in the borough, including from libraries, adult education, housing providers, and the voluntary and community sector. And in a number of meetings the group discussed potential ways of making the best use of these existing assets to improve digital inclusion for people with learning disabilities. The group discussed, for example, developing new adult education opportunities for family carers, as well as raising awareness of existing courses. The group also suggested working closely with Lewisham Homes to make the best use of the knowledge and support they can provide, given their recent work to establish a digital skills support service.

5.38. And in terms of coordinating activity, the TFG heard about how a number of local stakeholders had formed the Digital Poverty Action Alliance during the pandemic in order to share information and work together. Similarly, the group also heard about how the Lewisham Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Forum had been set up during the pandemic to bring support providers together to identify opportunities to improve digital inclusion.

5.39. The group also considered evidence on the importance of coordination from outside of the borough. For example, the Digital Inclusion Manager of 100% Digital Leeds, the City Council's well-established digital inclusion programme, noted that working with partners and coordinating digital inclusion activity across the city has been central to their approach. He added that having coordination and oversight in one place has stopped individual pieces of good work from happening in silos and helped with the longevity of the project.

The 100% Digital Leeds approach

The fundamental principles of the 100% Digital Leeds approach are:

- Convening community based assets to ensure that no-one is 'hard to reach';
- Working flexibly and responsively;
- Moving to a whole system approach that enables people to independently look after themselves and improve their lives;
- Connecting people to their communities and a wider circle of care and support;
- Co-designing the right interventions with professionals and practitioners, staff and volunteers and people with lived experience.

5.40. Similarly, in a meeting with Skills for Care North East London the Chair heard about how local health and care partners in the area had worked together to compile training and draft job descriptions, in collaboration with Barclays Digital Eagles, in order to develop digitally-focused apprentices for care homes.

5.41. It is also relevant to note that recent guidance and research on digital participation suggests that working together and embedding digital support in existing activity is one

of the most effective ways of increasing digital inclusion. Guidance from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), for example, suggests embedding digital support in services currently being accessed, where people can see an immediate practical application.[9]

5.42. Recent Open University research also recommended that education, health, and social care partners should develop and embed innovative capacity-building programmes for both people with learning disabilities and their supporters (including family members) so that they can confidently use technology.[10]

KEEPING CONNECTED AND STAYING WELL

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

5.43. As part of coordinating activity, during a briefing on the council's strategic plans for digital and digital inclusion, the TFG also emphasised the importance of considering the 'user journey' that residents have to follow to access the support or information they need. The TFG made a number of suggestions relating to the accessibility of council provided and commissioned online services and information.

5.44. The TFG noted that with more local services going online we need to be careful that we're not excluding more people from services they need to access and suggested that the council's strategic plans for digital inclusion should include consideration of the needs of residents who are, or who look after, people with learning disabilities.

5.45. In a later meeting with key council officers, it was noted that making council information more accessible, particularly through the website, is a key corporate challenge. It was noted that doing this can be empowering for people with learning disabilities while also improving access for everyone else. At the same meeting, the TFG also heard from commissioners how targets in relation to digital inclusion are being included in the commissioning process for learning disability support providers.

Key issue 5: Sharing knowledge

5.46. Closely related to the previous issue is the final key issue of the review: the importance of sharing knowledge and learning in relation to digital – particularly the equipment, apps, websites and other online tools that have been used successfully and found to be beneficial.

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[9]   Cited in Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) webpage, *Digital inclusion, exclusion and participation*, accessed January 2022

[10]   Jane Seale (Nov 2020) *Keeping connected and staying well: the role of technology in supporting people with learning disabilities during the coronavirus pandemic*, The Open University

5.47. In the meeting about the Lewisham Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Forum, one of the key issues noted was the lack of any best practice guidance for the workforce to refer to, and a strong theme during engagement with support providers was a lack of awareness of what's available and what might be beneficial.

'… one of the key issues was the lack of any best practice guidance for the workforce to refer to.'

5.48. In engagement, support providers have mentioned that it has been a struggle to convince some people that there is any benefit to come from being online and using more digital tools, and a number noted it would be good to share more information with each other about what support is out there and what works well. Some providers spoke about some of the tools they'd used and found helpful, such as video calling devices and physical mute buttons – one noted that they'd found 20-30 different apps, including music, games, virtual museums, and exercise classes.

5.49. Support providers said that sharing more information would potentially save them time and money searching for and trailing different tools and allow more people to benefit, particularly given that some equipment can be quite specialist.

5.50. The TFG noted that the lack knowledge of what's available appears to be another barrier and suggested that a way of sharing information (such as a directory of all the equipment, apps, websites and other online tools that have worked well) should be developed. Given that the TFG heard in its visit to the Mencap Thursday Club that there is feeling that there is a lack of accessible content, it may also be useful to share information like this among families as well.

5.51. In addition to apps, websites and useful tools, the TFG also heard from local digital inclusion stakeholders that there is low awareness of the options for cheaper devices and internet connectivity, such as social tariffs and cheap data offers, for example. The TFG heard from key council officers that there is a need for more information like this among staff carrying out assessments.

5.52. Similarly, the TFG also considered research from Nesta, based on demographically representative polling of 2,000 people in Scotland and Wales, which found that the most signicicant barrier to going online for people experiencing data poverty is awareness of the best data deals.[11]

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[11]   Nesta, *Data Poverty in Scotland and Wales*, April 2021

Figure 2: Which barriers stop people going online as much as they want?
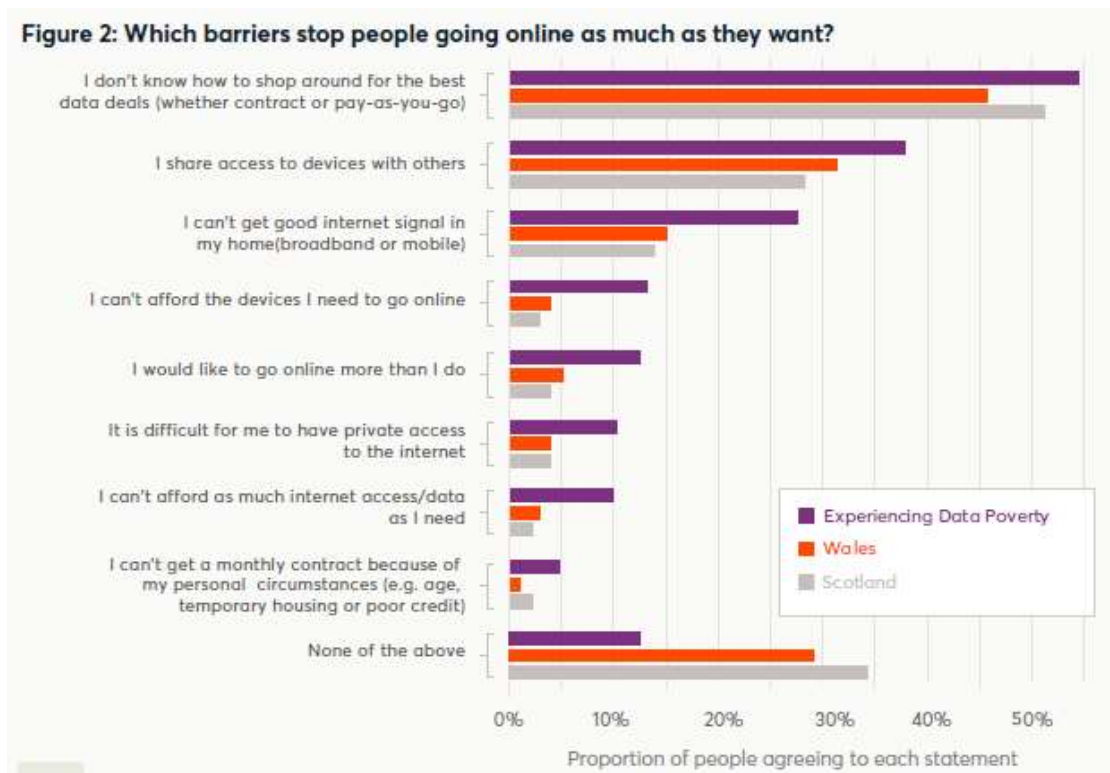
5.53.	In engagement with key officers it was suggested that libraries should be one of the key ways of sharing information like this. And with this in mind, the TFG noted the importance of disability awareness training for library staff.

5.54.	In addition to information about useful tools and affordable access, the TFG also heard about an initiative in NE London to map and pull together all the relevant staff training available via partners and free online digital inclusion charities. The model of the Good Things Foundation's Digital Lifeline Fund also included working with community partners to share information about free resources and advice.

6. Task & Finish Group methodology

6.1.	The TFGs was run as a project utilising an *agile* methodology in order to be:

Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern, using a shared space on MS Teams

Time limited – suggesting solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines

Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement

Focussed on residents – making service user experience key, the issue will be clearly defined, and solutions suggested, on the basis of understanding residents' experience

Focussed on solutions – taking evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

6.2.	A 'double diamond' approach was taken which split the project into two parts

(diamonds). The first part was the 'discovery' stage. The issue (the topic of the TFG) is the starting point and then research and evidence collection is carried out to really understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue is well understood and well defined, the second stage begins. Further research and evidence collection is carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. Then a clear set of recommendations can be produced.
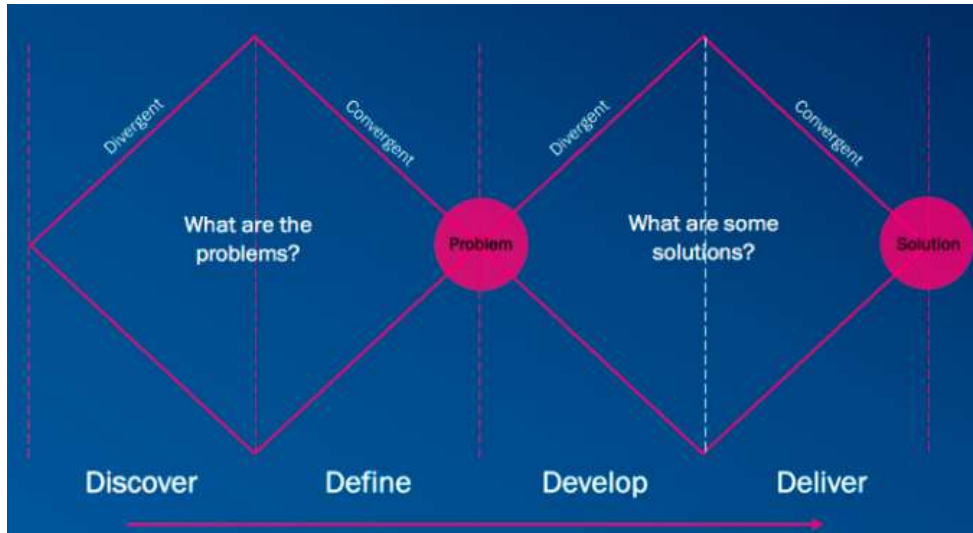
7. Nature of expected outcomes

7.1.   The work of the TFG was intended to support work to improve the following outcomes:

- *Increased levels of digital access and know-how among residents with a learning disability.*

- *An increased awareness of the importance of digital inclusion as a fundamental life skill.*

- *An increased understanding of local and national best practice in relation to digital inclusion and how to embed this into ways of working and services.*

- *The identification of outcomes that the council and its partners might seek to achieve through greater digital inclusion.*

8. Stakeholder engagement

8.1.   Stakeholder engagement began with Lewisham Speaking Up (LSU), who commissioned the research on digital exclusion for people with learning disabilities by Helen Ramsbottom. This provided the TFG with a detailed sense of the barriers to digital inclusion that people with learning disabilities in Lewisham face, as well as some of the potential solutions that have been suggested.

8.2.   The TFG also engaged early on with the officer-led Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Forum (a group of local learning disability stakeholders including support providers, council officers, and LSU). This provided the TFG with detailed overview of the range of digital inclusion work that is already going on with learning disability stakeholders in Lewisham.

8.3.   One of the key engagment sessions for the TFG was engaging with the Digital Poverty Action Alliance (a group of local stakeholders, including housing providers and voluntary organisations, such as Phoenix Community Housing and Community Connections). This provided more detail in terms of barriers but also provided evidcen

and examples of digital inclusion best practice from local stakeholders.

8.4. Another of the key engagement sessions for the TFG was engaging with learning disability support providers in Leiwsham in order to better understand the challenges they face on digital inclusion.

8.5. The TFG also visited Lewisham Mencap's Thursday Club to hear about their experiences with digital exclusion in the last 22 months

8.6. A full list of meetings and engagements sessions are listed as background reports at the end of this report.

9. Monitoring and ongoing scrutiny

9.1. A copy of this report and the recommendations will be circulated by email to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note, and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny may suggest that the report is presented to full Council to allow for wider debate, in addition to it being considered by the Mayor and Cabinet for an executive response.

9.2. The task and finish group will be disbanded once it has made its final report. Its final set of minutes will go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

9.3. The Mayoral response to the report will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The relevant task and finish group Members will be invited to lead the discussion on the response. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may request an update on the implementation of agreed recommendations in six or 12 months' time to itself or an appropriate select committee.

10. Report author and contact

10.1. If you have any questions about this report please contact:

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Background Papers – available on request from the report authors

Background Paper	Description
A	Task & Finish Group Proforma
B	Scoping paper
C	Equalities Impact Assessment
D	Lewisham Speaking Up digital inclusion research
E	Lewisham Speaking Up presentation on research
F	Notes from meeting with Lewisham Speaking Up and Helen Ramsbottom
G	Notes from meeting with on the work of the Council-led Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Forum.
H	Notes from meeting with Skills for Care North East London about their digital inclusion apprenticeship initiative.
I	Notes from engagement session with the local organisations that have contributed to the Digital Poverty Action Alliance and others.
J	Briefing session with Socitm on the evidence gathered so far as part of their national review of digital inclusion.
K	Notes from engagement session with Lewisham learning disability support providers.
L	Notes from meeting with Leeds City Council to discuss their digital inclusion initiative, 100% Digital Leeds.
M	Notes from resident experience session with members focused on digital inclusion/innovation.
N	Notes from briefing with council officers on the council's strategic plans for digital and digital inclusion, including online accessibiliy.
O	Presentation for the mid-stage review on the summary of evidence and key themes.
P	Notes from meeting with key council officers in relation to learning disability.