

The Executive

On 3 October 2006

Report Title: The Digital Divide

Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Access)

Wards(s) affected: All

Report for: **Non Key**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform members of the challenges of the digital divide in the London Borough of Haringey.
- 1.2 To seek members' approval for the development of a strategy to address the digital divide, reporting back to members by April 2007.

2. Introduction by Executive Member

- 2.1 Residents who lack access to ICT are severely disadvantaged in modern society. We need a strategy to tackle this if we are to meet our objectives of reducing inequality, promoting lifelong learning and increasing employment opportunities.
- 2.2 This report asks members to recognise the need for the strategy and agree a timetable for its development.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To approve and provide guidance on the development of a digital divide strategy, encompassing all relevant stakeholders.

Report Authorised by: **Justin Holliday Assistant Chief Executive (Access)**

Contact Officer: **Diana Edmonds Head of Libraries, Archives and Museum Service**

4. Executive Summary

The Digital Divide describes the gap between those who have access to ICT and those who have limited or no access. Within the London Borough of Haringey, many residents are adversely affected by the digital divide, a severe disadvantage in this age of the digital economy.

The Libraries Service within the Borough provides free access to the Internet and to other pc applications, facilities which are extremely popular. A number of other business units

within the Council have requested the installation of internet-enabled pc's for use by members of the public. Rather than respond in an ad hoc manner, it is proposed to develop a corporate strategy to address the Digital Divide and the challenges which it poses, in order to reduce disadvantage, to promote social inclusion, and to open up learning and employment opportunities to all residents within the London Borough of Haringey.

5. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

7. Background

7.1 The Digital Divide

The term digital divide describes the gap between those who have access to ICT and those who have limited or no access. Those who have no access or limited access are disadvantaged in this age of the knowledge economy when a significant amount of information is available online and when IT literacy is a requirement for many jobs. The potential of e-government transactions is also denied to those affected detrimentally by the digital divide.

The social and economic deprivation experienced in some parts of the London Borough of Haringey indicate that many residents are adversely affected by the digital divide. Even in more affluent areas, a significant number of residents will have limited access to ICT facilities.

7.2 The Role of Public Libraries in addressing the Digital Divide

The government paper *Tackling Social Exclusion through New Technology* (Social Exclusion Unit, Nov 2005) highlights perceived barriers to ICT access. These include literacy, cost, and access to resources. The government paper *Framework for the Future* (DCMS Feb 2003), identifies the role of public libraries should play in providing ICT facilities and digital content, and indeed the Libraries Service in Haringey plays a central role in ensuring access to these resources. ICT provision includes the People's Network with free access to the internet, pc applications and wireless technology. This provision is supported by members of staff who are ICT literate. The demand for ICT services in Haringey Libraries continues to grow, with some 600,000 internet sessions each year. In addition, monthly usage of wireless facilities now exceeds 5700 hours. The strategy must therefore include the widening of access to ICT, not only through enabling use of publicly available PCs, but also by ensuring residents have the knowledge and ability to use ICT beyond that provided by the Council. Thus, the strategy will encompass both targeted promotion of the benefits of ICT and how easy it is to learn to use it. To this end, it will address a wide variety of service options.

7.3 Additional Demand

A number of business units within the Council have requested the installation of internet-enabled pc's for use by members of the public. Rather than respond on an ad-hoc basis to these requests, it is proposed to review the challenges posed by the digital divide and to produce a corporate strategy to help ensure that Haringey becomes a digitally rich borough.

The work programme required to develop this report will be undertaken by the Libraries, Archives and Museum Service working closely with IT Services and other business units. This work programme will include the analysis of existing data, market research and public consultation. We will be identifying best practice in other local authorities and also reviewing the potential for new applications with technology providers. Robust procedures will be developed and support, maintenance and procurement issues will be addressed. The report will review the challenges posed by the digital divide and will propose a corporate strategy to ensure that Haringey becomes a digitally rich Borough.

8. Comments of the Director of Finance

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with developing this strategy as the work will be undertaken by existing staff within existing resources. The resultant strategy may identify the need for additional resources either from Haringey or in partnership with other organisations. Any resultant impact and implications will be assessed at that time.

9. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

- 9.1 There are no specific legal implications.

10. Equalities Implications

- 10.1 The Libraries, Archives and Museum service have a proven track record of developing ICT systems, such as the Peoples computer network in libraries and the museum, that are well used by people from all our diverse communities. For example, there are a total of 100 user-sessions per month of the pcs adapted for disabled users. We also run "Silver Surfers" ICT training programmes for older people and have computers specifically for use in the children's libraries. When developing strategies to deal with the digital divide we will continue to ensure that equalities considerations are integrated into the new proposals.