

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 5 November 2019**

**Subject: Customer Services**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Kane**

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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1. The findings from the Digital Inclusion project undertaken with Citizens Online were presented to the Stronger Communities Select Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019. Officers are now working on delivering the key recommendation arising from the report. These are:

- The establishment of a Digital Network containing other public sector partners and voluntary organisations which will bring resources to together across our community to deliver digital skills support to our residents.
- The recruitment of Digital Buddies across the network to deliver the support using agreed triaging and signposting processes. This has commenced with the Council's own staff before co-ordinating this recruitment with other partners. It is estimated that around 200 Digital Buddies will be needed across the network.
- Embed digital skills and a culture of life-long learning in the strategies of the organisations within the network and ensure that strategic leaders support its work.
- Centralise all information relating to digital skills into a single hub, potentially hosted on the EFDC website.
- Focus the work and resources of the network on identified geographic clusters where there are high risks of digital exclusion. These clusters tend to corollate with types of Benefit recipients such as Universal Credit, Pension Credit or Carers Allowance.

2. Work on Council's new Customer Service Strategy is developing well. A presentation of the principles around the strategy was made to the Stronger Communities Select Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 and a report will be taken to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 providing more detail.

3. The customer element of the Planning service has now been integrated into the Customer Service team. This migration has been a lengthy piece of work to ensure that as many initial contacts can be dealt with by the Customer Service team without the need to transfer calls to the Planning team, enabling them to focus on the technical elements of their work. I would like to take this opportunity to again remind Members that the Customer Service team is there to help them ensure that their

enquiries are dealt with in a timely manner so please direct your enquiries through the Customer Services team.

4. The Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21 is to be considered by Cabinet on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019. The scheme for 2020/21 remains unchanged from 2019/20. There are plans, however, to fully review the scheme for 2021/22 with the aim of reducing its complexity for claimants and its administration.

5. I am pleased to say that there are now solutions available to enable Members to access their e-mails on their laptops, desktop PCs and mobile phones. Cabinet members are undertaking final user testing prior to a broader rollout to members who wish to have such access.