



**Hinckley & Bosworth  
Borough Council**

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Scrutiny Commission                      25 July 2024

Wards affected:                              All wards

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**Scrutiny review: digital poverty and cashless society**

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Report of Director (Corporate & Streetscene Services)

**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 To scope the review into digital poverty and cashless society.

**2. Recommendation**

2.1 The scope and style of the review be agreed.

**3. Background to the report**

3.1 At the work programming session, members raised concern about digital poverty and cashless society in light of the move towards providing more services online.

3.3 In many spheres of life, new technological developments and increasing digitisation of services make access to the internet crucial. Lack of access creates a digital divide and results in digital poverty. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of staying connected remotely. For many, education, work, shopping and social life all took place online.

3.2 The Digital Poverty Alliance defines digital poverty as “the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where, and how an individual needs to”. There are several reasons why someone might be “digitally poor” including lack of devices and connectivity (including in rural areas) and lack of skills.

3.4 There are implications for digital inclusion both in provision of council services, and support for the community in accessing services from other organisations.

### 3.4 Council services

In increasing the number of services that can be accessed on the council's website, it is important that residents are not excluded due to being unable to access online services, whether this be due to lack of devices or connectivity, lack of skills, or lifestyle factors. The Scrutiny Commission may wish to receive more information on digitisation of council services and to explore access for those who are not able to use online services.

### 3.5 External services

#### 3.5.1 Other tiers of local and national government

Our communities will also access services provided by Leicestershire County Council, the government, and in many cases parish councils. The Scrutiny Commission may wish to explore access for those who are not able to use online services.

#### 3.5.2 Banking

A concern over recent years has been the closure of banks and post offices, resulting in those without access to online services having to travel long distances to access face to face services.

#### 3.5.3 Healthcare

Healthcare is increasingly digitised. Digital poverty can impact an individual's healthcare by limiting access to health information to learn about symptoms and preventative measures, preventing access to "telehealth" (consulting with a healthcare provider through video calls or messaging), making it more difficult to manage health records, limiting access to health apps to monitor fitness and health conditions and reducing health literacy through lack of access to information to enable informed decisions about health.

#### 3.5.3 Economic opportunities

Digital poverty can lead to economic disadvantages by hindering education, limiting job opportunities and reducing the ability to engage in the digital economy.

### 3.6 Cashless society

#### 3.6.1 Whilst cashless transactions have increased over the years, the coronavirus pandemic contributed to a further increase in touchless and cashless transactions. It is estimated that only 34% of payments in the UK are now made using cash. Whilst many feel that digital transactions are more convenient for both customers and businesses, this method disadvantages people who don't have a bank account, don't have a mobile phone capable of paying online (for example to pay for a car park ticket), are in areas with poor

connectivity, lack the confidence and skills to use technology for this purpose and have a lack of trust of cashless payments.

3.6.2 There are also other risks including:

- technical glitches blocking access to funds (sometimes due to outdated IT infrastructure in organisations)
- system failures, natural disasters or hacking preventing payments
- breaches of data privacy.

3.7 The Scrutiny Commission may also wish to look at research and work being undertaken by other organisations and to invite representatives to present, including:

- LLEP's digital poverty call for evidence and digital skills projects
- The Multiply project – free courses to improve skills, part of a national project provided by Leicestershire County Council
- Leicester City Council's community digital grant funded by the UKSPF
- Research and reports produced by the Digital Poverty Alliance.

3.8 The Scrutiny Commission can also have a role in directing residents to support available, for example via Age UK, Give a Laptop campaign, NHS Digital, the Digital Literacy Project and Freephone Digital Skills Helpline.

3.9 Relevant to all of the above, online platforms must also be accessible to those with disabilities and/or who use assistive technology.

3.10 Since the work programming workshop, a motion was put to Council by Councillor Pendlebury, seconded by Councillor Gibbens:

“This Council notes that while we welcome technological advances and development, there is an increasingly wide digital divide between those who have access to online services and those who don't.

The Ofcom report of 2022 notes that 6% of households in the UK do not have access to online services. In Hinckley and Bosworth this would mean there are approximately 6,600 people who are unable to access digital services and these people are likely to be the most vulnerable in our communities, so those with disabilities, the young and the old and those on low incomes.

Therefore, this Council agrees to:

1. Appoint a Digital Divide Champion to take an active lead in this area.
2. Ensure all council services are available to all our residents and put in place action plans to resolve any deficits.
3. Work with council partners to maximise digital skills for local residents and address digital poverty.
4. Ensure that the implementation of future online services does not increase the digital divide and any future online developments take this into account.

Call upon Leicestershire County Council and the government to ensure that their own services, government offices, national corporations and banks that utilise online services do not negatively impact on those who are unable to access digital equipment in line with the Equalities Act 2010.”

The motion was approved. Letters were sent to Leicestershire County Council and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, with a response being received from the latter outlining the government’s commitment to ensuring everyone has access to public services, whether online or offline. This motion is largely in line with the suggested scope of the Scrutiny Commission’s review.

3.11 The Scrutiny Commission is also asked to consider how it wishes to conduct the review, for example by way of a task and finish group, or as part of scheduled meetings of the whole Scrutiny Commission.

**4. Exemptions in accordance with the Access to Information procedure rules**

4.1 To be taken in open session

**5. Financial implications (IB)**

5.1 None

**6. Legal implications (ST)**

6.1 None.

**7. Corporate Plan implications**

7.1 People:

1. Help people to stay healthy, happy an active and continue to provide initiatives that support children and young people, older people and our vulnerable residents
2. Maximise our residents’ potential through employment and skills support

**8. Consultation**

8.1 Consultation will be undertaken as necessary during the course of the review.

**9. Risk implications**

9.1 No risks are associated with this report.

## **10. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications**

- 10.1 This review aims to support all communities by ensuring access to council services, identifying gaps in provision of services to the community and supporting residents in accessing services provided by other organisations.

## **11. Climate implications**

- 11.1 There are no climate impacts associated with this report, however as the review progresses this will be regularly reviewed to ensure that any recommendations will not have a negative impact.

## **12. Corporate implications**

- 12.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset management implications
- Procurement implications
- Human resources implications
- Planning implications
- Data protection implications
- Voluntary sector

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Background papers: None.

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