

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: Culture Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Date of meeting: 10 July 2015

Subject: Universal Information Offer Workforce Development Programme

Report by: Director of Culture and City Development

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform the Cabinet Member of the Society of Chief Libraries (SCL) digital workforce training carried out by all library staff; the importance of online skills and digital inclusion; the low level of digital inclusion and confidence in Portsmouth; the implementation of the programme through a series of staff training days; and the impact of the programme.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **Library staff will work with relevant departments in the city council and liaise with other services in the city to facilitate the delivery of Universal Credit.**
- 2.2 **That the Library Service will actively recruit and train volunteers, in autumn 2015 to assist Universal Credit applicants to open and manage their accounts on the library PC's.**
- 2.3 **That newly-recruited library staff will undertake the Universal Information Offer Workforce Development Programme as part of their induction training.**

3. Background

3.1 The Digital Challenge

- 3.1.1 Digital skills have never been more important. Basic but vital tasks can now only be undertaken online, such as applying for child benefit. By April 2016 Universal Credit will have been rolled out to Portsmouth; this will also only be available online. Thousands of jobs are now only available via online applications. Adults with good

digital skills are far more likely to find employment; moreover, people with good ICT skills earn 3-10% more than those without. [Note 1] In this environment, libraries have a vital role to play to improve the digital skills of those people who otherwise risk becoming digitally excluded.

3.1.2 Portsmouth has an extremely high proportion of residents who lack basic digital skills. For instance, statistics from 2014 show that 24.8% of Portsmouth's adult residents have *never* been online. This compares to 6.7% of adult residents in Southampton, and a national average of 12.6%. [Note 2] Portsmouth had the second-worst figure for the whole of the UK. This shows that there is a vital need in Portsmouth to engage with residents and assist them in becoming digitally included. As a high proportion of adults in the city lack basic online skills, and in some cases have low literacy skills too, implementing Universal Credit in Portsmouth will be particularly challenging. Support from the library service for applicants will be crucial during the roll-out of Universal Credit.

3.1.3 Public libraries have always been trusted, safe, free spaces where people can rely on staff to help them with their information needs. It is a unique and highly valued service. It is therefore essential that the library's workforce continues to help people to access life-essential information for the twenty-first century.

This means promoting and supporting people to search and complete transactions online. The aim of the workforce training is to equip staff with the skills and confidence to do this.

3.1.4 In 2013, the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) carried out a survey of more than 8,500 members of frontline library staff, to identify key training and development needs to help them deliver the public library universal information offer (PLUIO). Nationally, customer-facing staff told SCL they needed to develop their understanding of common customer needs, how to refer and signpost effectively, how to assist customers in accessing information online and completing online transactions, and how to support people in both one-to-one and group situations. In order for customer-facing staff to gain the skills above and successfully support digital access to life-essential information and services, a national framework was developed. The SCL digital workforce training covers those areas, and aims to help library staff continue to be trusted advisors and supporters of the communities and people they serve.

3.1.5 The programme is the largest development initiative for the public library workforce since the rollout of the People's Network over a decade ago. SCL see this as a vital opportunity that will ensure that libraries keep communities connected and people engaged - and ensures that the library's frontline workforce are both confident and competent to support the changing information needs of their local communities.

3.1.6 The programme has been delivered to all frontline staff within the required timescale and within existing budgets.

3.2 Implementation of training

- 3.2.1 The workforce training consisted of five e-modules, of which four were mandatory and the fifth was optional. On average each module took about 75 minutes to complete and included a range of videos, tests, scenarios and links to information sources. SCL required that all library staff complete the e-modules directly by the end of March 2015. In Portsmouth it was clear that it would be impractical to expect frontline staff to complete the modules in off-counter time. Therefore the decision was taken to have all frontline library staff take the modules centrally during dedicated training days. This would also have the advantage of allowing the trainers to give an introduction to all staff, and also include training on other areas such as supporting businesses.
- 3.2.2 For weekday staff the training sessions were held on the morning of Monday 1 December 2014 and the whole day of Wednesday 28 January 2015. For weekend staff the training was held on Saturday 7 March, 10am-3.30pm. Permission was granted to close all city libraries to release staff for all three of these sessions. This has given the library service ample time to meet the SCL target for all staff to complete the e-modules by the end of March 2015.
- 3.2.3 63 staff attended the training sessions on 1 December and 28 January, and 26 weekend staff attended the session on 7 March. Some non-frontline staff had already completed the modules, and were able to assist colleagues during the training days. All three days began with a presentation by Jacqueline Garrard, the Digital Inclusion Librarian, and Mark Zumpe, the Information & Stock Librarian, which set out the course objectives and the vital role of public libraries to improve online skills, particularly in Portsmouth where residents' online skills are far below the national average. Staff were then able to complete the e-modules at their own pace.

3.3 Staff feedback and impact

- 3.3.1 The evaluation forms from staff following the training days were positive, with comments such as 'Very enjoyable' and 'A lot to share with library users'. Some staff felt that although the training was relevant, pressures on enquiry points would make it difficult to always find the time required to give the full support required to members of the public. Staff have also given feedback that they now feel more confident in directing the public to relevant websites. They have been able to respond to enquiries more efficiently and give up-to-date information with greater confidence.
- 3.3.2 Every library in Portsmouth has public access computers as part of the People's Network, giving free online access to anyone with a Portsmouth library card. In total there are 122 People's Network computers in libraries across the city. Naturally People's Network users frequently ask library staff for assistance. The feedback from front-line colleagues is that they feel much better-equipped to deal with these queries following the digital workforce training.

- 3.3.3 Staff continue to refer internet beginners to the Access & Learning Librarians, who can then find them suitable courses. The library hosts a range of courses run by volunteers, including one-to-one sessions and beginners' classes for up to 9 people run three times a week at Southsea Library. The library also runs many IT courses with Highbury College tutors in either Central, Carnegie or Southsea libraries. Over the past 18 months Jacqueline Garrard in her former role as Digital Inclusion Librarian assisted nearly 500 people find a suitable course to improve their IT skills. Jacqueline continues to arrange IT courses and one-to-one sessions in her new role as Access & Learning Librarian. Since the library staff completed the workforce training, there has been a surge of interest from library users. One of the library's one-to-one IT volunteers is now booked up for IT sessions for the next two months.
- 3.3.4 The students have been very complimentary about the library tutors and courses. There has been very positive feedback about the tutors: for instance, the tutor was 'extremely knowledgeable, I think that patience must be her middle name'. Or again: 'Your course gave me the confidence to have a try on my own, for which I can never forget your great help.' Many of the students return for further courses to improve their skills. This is a typical comment: 'I found these sessions at the library extremely helpful and very interesting. The tutors I've had have been excellent.' But the most common feedback from new internet users is a heartfelt thanks and this comment about the learning: 'It has opened up a whole new world for me'.

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 Close working with colleagues in the city council and with other government services such as job centres will be vital for the effective delivery of Universal Credit, especially as there is a lack of alternative facilities and support in Portsmouth. Universal Credit only accepts online applications, and as libraries are free, trusted and safe public places with well-trained staff, they will have a vital role to play to improve the low level of online skills in Portsmouth, and therefore assist with the effective delivery of Universal Credit.
- 4.2 The implementation of Universal Credit will undoubtedly lead to much greater pressure on library service points as applicants on the People's Network ask library staff for assistance. There is not the capacity within the existing library workforce to deal with the quantity of likely enquiries, or the amount of time each enquiry will take to resolve. Actively recruiting and training volunteers will relieve some of the pressure on frontline staff, and the volunteers will be able to devote more time to Universal Credit applicants through one-to-one sessions and tailored courses.
- 4.3 Awareness of the digital divide, and the skills and confidence to assist people overcome this divide, are now an integral part of the role of frontline library staff. Adding the Workforce Development Programme as part of the induction training of new staff will ensure that these aims and skills are embedded in the library service for the future.

5. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

5.1 A preliminary EIA has been submitted

6. Legal comments

6.1 The council will need to ensure that appropriate insurance is in place in respect of any errors in the giving of the training. In addition appropriate disclaimers should be sought from the trainees that the Council will take no responsibility in respect of applications for benefits made as a result of the training and that following the advice given is no guarantee that any application will be successful.

7. Director of Finance's comments

7.1 The Universal Information Offer Workforce Development Programme is available to all libraries through membership of the SCL.

7.2 Existing staff have already completed the training and this has been funded from existing budgets.

7.3 There will be a small cost associated with the future training of volunteers and newly appointed librarians as supervision by a senior member of staff will be required. The cost of this staff time will be met from existing budget resources.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture and City Development

Appendices:

Appendix A: Universal Information Offer Workforce Development Programme
Case study: Demonstrating the impact of the library's digital workforce training

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

| Title of document | Location |
|---|---|
| Source: CILIP, Driving Digital Inclusion: The Role of Information and Library Professionals, p.2, | http://www.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/CILIP%20digital%20inclusion%20statement%20Sept%202014.pdf.pdf |
| Source: Table 5B on page 27 of the Internet Access Quarterly Update as published by the Office for National Statistics in May 2014. | http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access-quarterly-update/q1-2014/stb-ia-q1-2014.html |

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport on 10 July 2015.

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 Signed by:
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport