



West Devon Village Hubs

Summary of Findings from a Digital Inclusion Benchmarking Perspective

Client: West Devon Borough Council

The Devon Village Hubs Project falls outside of the scope of the usual Local Improvement Adviser (LIA) commission in that it is about formulating a strategy whereas the LIA Beacon Checklist benchmarks an LSP relative to the digital Inclusion Beacon Authorities nationally and highlights particular areas for future work. However, the Village Hubs Project has afforded an opportunity to consider many of the issues that would arise from going through the Beacon Checklist and so this summary brings together the two activities and draws comparisons where possible.

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Intended Audience

Globe Regeneration, Darren Cole, Laura Payne

Document Owner

Penval Ltd

Ash house, Church Street, Prees, Whitchurch, Shropshire, SY13 2DQ

T: 01 948 840 726

M: 07 525 198 927

E: info@penval.co.uk

W: <http://www.penval.co.uk>

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Devon Village Hubs. Summary of Findings from a Digital Inclusion Benchmarking Perspective

Background

The Devon Village Hubs Project falls outside of the scope of the usual Local Improvement Adviser (LIA) commission in that it is about formulating a strategy whereas the LIA Beacon Checklist benchmarks an LSP relative to the digital Inclusion Beacon Authorities nationally and highlights particular areas for future work. The LIA process also produces a series of maps which highlight areas of digital and social exclusion where focussed work can achieve best results. The Devon Village Hubs project has undertaken its own detailed mapping which has highlighted areas in more detail than the high level review afforded by the Beacon Checklist process.

However, the Village Hubs Project has afforded an opportunity to consider many of the issues that would arise from going through the Beacon Checklist and so this summary brings together the two activities and draws comparisons where possible.

Leadership, Vision and Strategy

During the interviews there was no evidence presented of a Champion for digital inclusion nor was there evidence of a County wide strategy or cross cutting support, though one could argue that the work of the Village Hubs Project was heading towards this.

Partly as a consequence of the activities outlined above it is not yet possible to see digital inclusion activities embedded in mainstream corporate plans though, again, it could be argued that the process currently in progress will lead to systemic consideration of digital inclusion opportunities in business planning. In turn one would expect to see a systemic consideration of the risks of new policies, services and initiatives to deepen social and digital exclusion in the form of a Social Exclusion Impact Assessment and a robust performance measurement framework. These things are not in place yet though the work of the project can be seen as leading towards them in the future.

With a clear strategy in place one would expect to see an element of future proofing so as to avoid the situation where the life time of an initiative was limited in both extent and impact. This would mean evidence of periodic horizon scanning around new technologies and a sustainability plan.

Enabling Actions

The interviews with Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) stakeholders revealed that connectivity was perceived as a big issue. However the mapping exercise has gone a long way to identifying the most disadvantaged communities and residents and the call for evidence has focussed on the unique opportunities and risks associated with rural areas.

There is still work to do on managing organisational change to see where the productive opportunities for IT and social disciplines to work closely to improve services are and to create a supportive environment for robust new ideas to prosper as well as effective management of change across organisational boundaries.

With the above in mind it is worth remembering that Devon is going through a period of uncertainty at this time with Local Government Reorganisation. The efforts of the District Councils to develop opportunities for more effective service delivery in sparse rural conditions have to be seen against a backdrop of LGR, 8 LSP groupings and a number of high level initiatives such as a Total Place pilot.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

The management of the Parish Plan process by the West Devon LSP shows the potential for citizen and community involvement. At this point in time technology is not part of that community involvement. The interviews did not reveal how far service users are at the heart of service transformation and design though there is a clear commitment to working in this way. It was not obvious from the interviews whether the channel strategies adopted by the various local authorities had been designed to be inclusive.

There is anecdotal evidence of a number of initiatives which support individual ICT skills across the county. There is also evidence of wide engagement with the third sector. However, there doesn't appear to be a coherent approach to this, not does there appear to be a clear policy to support third sector organisations in using ICT to improve services for the most vulnerable. There is willingness by the Devon LSP to engage through Theme Heads with the Village Hubs Project and this should provide a good opportunity to begin to look at the issues around reaching the most vulnerable.

Essential Partnerships

The Devon Village Hub project is a very good example of partnership working. The project has enabled working with other local authorities and across boundaries to improve services for the most vulnerable. There is a need for more evidence on how the project is working with Registered Social Landlords and the wider public sector to improve reach, effectiveness and efficiency of services.

Whilst there is evidence from the Reference Group it is difficult to see wider evidence of how the district Councils are working with the third sector as trusted intermediaries to achieve digital inclusion and improved services for the most disadvantaged. This may be because the service outcomes for the most vulnerable seem to sit at County LSP level.

There is no detailed evidence of working with national and local businesses to enhance digital and social inclusion, though there is anecdotal evidence from the Reference Group.

Effective Partnerships

As stated above, there are 8 LSP groupings in Devon. The Shared Objectives and Priorities come from the County Wide LSP Partnership and, at this stage, it is not clear how digital inclusion features in the shared objectives, risks and rewards. Nor is it clear, at this stage, how contracts and commissioning processes promote social and digital inclusion. There has been no evidence available as to how

partners share aggregated non personal data to improve services nor has evidence been sought on how partners share personal data to improve services but within a strict policy framework.

There is strong evidence through the Devon Village Hub project of shared learning between partners.

Evidence Outcomes

As yet there is only anecdotal evidence of visible projects on the ground for the most disadvantaged and, not surprisingly, no clear evidence of improved lives and life chances for the most disadvantaged.

Annex 1 Devon Village Hub Interviews

Awareness	Barriers and Enablers	Understanding Digital Inclusion	ICT Strategy
Malcolm Harris, Torridge Community Development	<p>Major barriers are seen as: Access, resources and coordination. Someone to work within the community either or through the Parish Council or Residents Association. Poor Broadband coverage and mobile phone coverage is also seen as a barrier. The demographic of an ageing population is also seen as a major barrier both in terms of mobility, attitudes and training.</p> <p>Enablers are: People like Rural Access Officer – Torridge have one but on a fixed term contract that will not be renewed. Community Action days are successful as awareness raising exercises but they do need more resources for a hands on approach. The ability to build capacity in the community for initiatives to be self sustaining are key. While they would be supportive of an initiative the lack of resources means that participation is limited.</p>	Digital Inclusion is recognised as an issue. There are identifiable pockets of the community that are excluded because of finance, disengagement and social disadvantage. It is perceived as more of an age issue (not necessarily the case) with younger people less at risk of exclusion.	Not aware of an ICT strategy but if they had one it would sit with the new ICT manager and his team with cross service representation. It is not currently in their business plan.
Vaughan Lindsay at Dartington Hall	<p>The biggest barrier to the use of ICT was broadband speeds. These are generally</p>	Didn't know what digital inclusion was but believed that all should have access	Didn't know of a digital strategy in existence but if there was one it should

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<p>ICT had been used to support service delivery but had been very impressed by a database of Parish Plans that had been established by Devon county Council. He also thought that the NHS Direct web site was an excellent example of an easy to use first port of call that benefitted people in rural areas. He didn't feel that the case for cashable savings had been made and saw this as more about improving access</p>	<p>poor and limit the size of applications that will run successfully. There is a premium on communication and this is part of the rural infrastructure debate. He believed that take up of ICT was poor.</p>	<p>to services via a digital world.</p>	<p>sit with the RDA, failing that, with Government Office or Devon county.</p>
<p>Ian Hobbs Devon Strategic Partnership substituted for Julie Richards</p>			
<p>At County Council level investment in ICT as a tool to “speed” access to services e.g. the call centre and service portal. Highlighted library book type services and front of house service access but he was particularly keen on the potential for digi tv.</p>	<p>Physical Access Skills Making it the “right thing” some services are face to face – importance of advocacy (key point this) Would like to see more use of Digi TV (very keen on this) Questions whether poverty is an issue Sees a high reliance on libraries and schools and subsequent capacity issues. (The capacity issues are real, in particular in libraries but I’m not sure about these institutions as a solution)</p>	<p>Range of projects related to an LPSA target which was based around first libraries and then village halls and so on to ensure no individual more than 3 miles from access.</p> <p>Sale of Exeter Airport has raised a substantial sum, some of this has been invested in Credit Unions so that their IT systems can allow people to check balances on line. The aim is to develop service to eventually allow on line account management. (I like these sort of project because Credit Unions can also be a way for low income families to finance equipment or learning or both, a thought worth holding)</p>	<p>Aware of the County Council ICT strategy but appreciates that this is not a combined one. This is a project (devising a strategy) in the context of local government review and shared services. There is currently a Total Place Review underway which includes all chief execs of Districts and members of the 3rd sector. ICT has a place to play in the Total Place Theme. This is very high level stuff both in terms of its thinking and in terms of the people involved and it relates to the outcomes of the Local government Review which ought to come to a head by the end of this year with a High Court ruling due in November. A move to Unitary status by the election is not likely and therefore the local authorities will be forced down a shared services route. I caught a sense</p>

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		<p>Highlighted a range of issues via children’s services aimed at improving participation including social networking, Twitter and Face Book.</p> <p>Views on the appropriateness of ICT service access in different situations. Has a good awareness of value of ICT for people who are comfortable with technology or who have a car to get to access points and how it is less useful for a single parent with a child in a pushchair. One stop shops and work with organisations like Job Centre Plus are points on a journey and represent embedded service opportunities that are well used</p>	<p>of this at the meeting on the 2nd September. Suffice it to say that if a total place themed approach were to become a reality and work that West Devon undertake will have to be in this context. Therefore, positioning what they are doing relative to this will be key and therefore the roll of the Chief exec is vital</p>
Amanda Harvey South Hams LSP			
Aware of the West Devon initiative via Laura Payne	<p>The main barriers to the use of ICTs Older People who don’t take particularly well to new technology, People with learning difficulties who might struggle with the skills element and the generally poor state of the broadband infrastructure. She pointed me to the Devon County and Devon Renaissance project with ITV West http://www.devonbbsurvey.com/ . This</p>	<p>Digital inclusion as access for all. Universal access to infrastructure and a package of skills support. Identified that skills support was happening in an organic way via communities – this sort of activity is worthy of official support in some way –identified a project that South Hams had run supporting people with Learning Difficulties, this is one of</p>	<p>Not aware of an ICT strategy for Devon. Feels that it should sit with Devon SP as the LSPs do not work particularly well in a 2 tier context (I concur).</p> <p>Spoke briefly about the fact that South Hams does have a community forum. It does have a shifting membership depending on the addenda but it has a mailing list of about 500 groups. In digital inclusion terms this is a key group</p>

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	<p>understanding of the issues for people who are, after all, the biggest consumers of services is a key one as is the role of the 3rd sector in helping to address it.</p> <p>The enablers she sees are addressing the connectivity issues and recognising the value of existing community facilities such as village shops or community cafes. This perspective agrees with my own experience. The difficult bit is embedding and supporting the approach.</p>	<p>the key groups for CLG.</p> <p>Supportive of an initiative such as this one. The principle is good though not at the expense of face to face contact, viz this is “as well as” not instead of.</p> <p>South Hams Revs & Bens go out and offer a face to face service.</p>	<p>with which to engage</p>
Dotty Allen, West Devon LSP			
<p>Has heard of the village Hub project, unsurprisingly, and sees it as a good idea. She does work with David Parlby CEO of the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce who recognises an economic imperative in the work (possibly a useful point for comment from a wider stakeholder group.)</p> <p>She also mentioned the work with the Rural Services Network and Sparce and a reference group led by John Baker and James McInnes. Things got a little vague at this point and I wasn't clear whether she was confusing the work that you're</p>	<p>Dotty sees the whole agenda in terms of connectivity and physical access and this represents both the major barrier and enabler.</p>	<p>The West Devon LSP has taken over the management of the Parish Planning process from the Rural Community Council who now just takes care of delivery. Parish plans are then circulated to service providers for comment before being fed back to the communities.</p> <p>She was surprised at the potential scope of digital inclusion and when prompted did go on to explain the ongoing work in the borough on identifying invisible groups such as youngsters not yet in the school system or elderly people not known to the support agencies. She has</p>	<p>Dotty sees Devon county as the natural place for an ICT strategy to sit, if for no other reason that they're better resourced. And she sees somebody like David Parlby as a natural champion, which is interesting as he comes from a commercial background and we have yet to consider whether the economic impact of this is in scope. I would suspect that it's another piece of work but one which could help to inform a robust business case for investment. On which subject I moved away from the usual line of questioning to talk about Parish Plans and Village Design</p>

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<p>doing with another piece of work on service delivery generally. I'm afraid I'm going to have to throw this one into the pool and see where the ripples go. There is an assumption that the work that Darren is doing will feed into the Sustainable Community Strategy review due in April.</p> <p>Dotty also mentioned that they are undertaking a new round of community engagement reviews related to parish planning so it's possible there will be some VCS/ CVS touch points that might be worth exploiting.</p>		<p>concerns that too much technology would lead people to become isolated and not leave their homes.</p>	<p>Statements which led her to admit that a Core Strategy Review was under way and that they had just completed the consultation process. Re-arrange the following into a well known phrase or saying (blood, stone, from, getting, like, it's, a) As core strategy feeds into regional spatial strategy as you know then the village hub work should be a key part of this – it probably is, but I thought I would mention it just in case it hasn't been included for some reason.</p>