

Southway Housing Trust

Digital Access Strategy 2016-2020

Our Commitment

Southway is committed to bridging the 'Digital Divide' in South Manchester. We recognise that Digital Access and Channel Shift are essential to enable us to make significant savings in service delivery costs, as well as improving the lives of our tenants.

National Digital Agenda

The benefits of digital inclusion for individuals and society have been well documented, and building the confidence and capacity of individuals to use IT and the internet has been a Government priority for a number of years. Being online can lead to improvements in health, better job prospects, reduced social isolation and money savings¹.

The Government's *Digital by Default* agenda continues to drive efficiencies in public services and has ensured that the majority of these have now been moved online. This has been a key force in steering organisations nationally to look at how they use digital technology to engage with and assist their customers. In the housing sector, organisations have had to look at where they can achieve efficiencies by moving services online whilst ensuring that their tenants are not disadvantaged in the process.

Current Government statistics identify that 11 million people in the UK lack basic digital skills², which is a vast improvement on the 16 million that formed the basis for the 2012 Digital Inclusion Strategy. In 2014 the Government introduced the UK Digital Inclusion Charter as recognition that no single organisation could tackle digital exclusion by itself. This has been replicated on a smaller scale in the Greater Manchester area; in 2014 Southway signed the Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Charter as a commitment to bridging the digital divide and utilising local partnerships to do so.

As well as this, in 2015 Go-On UK developed a UK Digital Exclusion Heatmap as a direct response to the challenges of understanding and tackling the issue of assisting those who lack basic digital skills. Eight different metrics are used to calculate the overall likelihood of exclusion, including access, basic digital skills and basic digital skills used.

The scoring system developed by Go-On UK calculates that the Manchester area is a low risk for exclusion with digital indicators stating good access to infrastructure and broadband speeds and most of the area being serviced by 4G. The research

¹ Lawlor, E (2014) Valuing digital inclusion: *Calculating the social value to people of going online*

² Government Digital Inclusion charter 2014

indicates that 12.8% of Manchester residents are deemed to be offline and 79% of adults in Manchester have all five digital skills.³

This appears to be out of step with the data that Southway has obtained from our tenants, which indicates that there is a vast difference between residents living in the city centre and the more affluent areas and those living on lower incomes or in less affluent areas.

Southway Digital Agenda

Our Digital Access Strategy 2013-2016 committed Southway to ensuring that a transparent road map for developing and supporting digital services was implemented. nSouthway recognised that whilst the move to online services and transactions would bring benefits in terms of efficiencies and accessibility for its tenants, it may also pose potential issues for particular customer groups.

This Strategy aims to continue to develop and support digital services for Southway tenants, to ensure that Southway is building on the processes and efficiencies it has already made as well as including a commitment to channel shift services within the new road map. This in turn will ensure that the Government's commitment to Digital by Default is echoed with our digital services being accessible to those who will benefit from them.

We know from research with other organisations that the single most effective way to implement 'channel shift' is to reduce the level of service around other channels of communication (i.e. waiting times for telephone enquiries.) This can result in a dramatic increase in numbers of users online.

Implementing a deliberate measure to make it more difficult to contact the Hub or increase call waiting times is not, however, deemed an appropriate goal or intention for Southway, for the following reasons:

- An ageing population across our communities,
- Our wish to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction,
- Recognition that not every issue can be dealt with online.

We appreciate that this will probably mean that it will take us longer to achieve channel shift savings, but are confident that gains will be made over the next four year period.

³ Go On Basic Digital Skills Report 2015

Strategy Objectives

The focus of this Strategy remains on the direct front-facing customer aspects surrounding Channel Shift and Digital Inclusion. Supporting elements (such as integration with back-office systems) will be addressed within internal ICT Operating Plans for each service throughout the business.

This new Digital Access Strategy runs until 2020, to bring it in line with the Futures Strategy (2015-2020).

There are four core objectives for delivery of this Strategy:

- 1. We will work collaboratively with partner organisations and local stakeholders to continue to bridge the 'digital divide' in our area.**
- 2. We will implement and promote the right services in the right way, so that transacting with us online becomes the 'first choice' for Southway tenants.**
- 3. We will continue to assist individuals within our communities in obtaining access to computer equipment, the internet and help or training services.**
- 4. We will work towards ensuring our workforce is both digitally capable and actively promoting Southway's digital services.**

It is the aim that these objectives will be embedded in all areas of the organisation, not just within those teams that currently deliver Digital Inclusion or Channel Shift projects.

Specific Strategy Targets

The success of this Strategy will be measured against the following 2020 targets:

- 80% of tenants will have access to the internet at home**
- 80% of tenants will be registered and using the tenant portal / transacting with us online**
- 100% of Southway employees will have a basic level of digital competency**

Achieving the above targets will mean that by 2020 a Southway tenant will be able to confidently access Southway online services from their smartphone, tablet or computer, 24/7. They will pay their rent, check their rent statement and order repairs with ease, via the latest technology available to Southway and from the comfort of their home. Southway online services will also act as the 'go to' option for Southway news and sign posting to other services available in the local area. Southway staff will be empowered, capable and actively assisting any tenants who cannot access our online services alone and will be making use of IT to support the delivery of flexible and integrated services, beyond those services that are transactional in nature, when required by our customers.

Where we are now

2012 STAR survey data informed Southway's previous Digital Access Strategy and provided a benchmark figure that indicated that around 50% of tenants did not have access to the internet at home. This was somewhat lower than the recorded national average of 64% for housing association tenants. In the years following the inception of the Strategy, Southway developed and implemented a wide range of Digital Inclusion and channel shift initiatives in order to tackle what was accepted as a significant issue.

The 2013-2016 Strategy saw outcomes across three main areas: *Access to Equipment and Training, Website and Online Services, and Partnerships.*

Outcomes include:

- A network of 40 Digital Champions (Tenants, Residents and Staff) and 20 Junior Digital Champions assisted 497 people to access the internet and gain digital skills.
- 103 tenants completed a 12 Week beginners computer course called 'Internet Savvy' and were provided the opportunity to purchase low cost equipment.
- Over 650 residents have been assisted to access the internet via a partnership project with Age Friendly IT
- We created an access map, detailing all locations within Southway stock, providing free internet.
- We improved our website and made the transactional functions more prominent.
- We have categorised our tenants 'Digital Capability' in order to best target resource.
- We no longer produce paper rent statements and informed our tenants that they could access this information via our tenant portal. Only 50 households have opted back in.
- We no longer produce a monthly electronic newsletter and distribute it to over 2000 email addresses that we hold for our tenants.
- We established a partnership with a computer refurbishment company who supply quality equipment for our tenants and give back to our digital inclusion projects.
- We run regular 12 week intensive computer training courses for beginners in partnership with 'We are Digital' who are a national provider.
- We joined a Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Group with other HA's and ALMO's and signed up to a local Digital Inclusion Charter.

How will we get where we want to be?

Progress against the Digital Access Strategy will continue to be managed by the Digital Access Management Group, and the tasks involved in achieving the objectives set will form the basis of a firm action plan for each of the following work-streams: *Access to Equipment and Training, Communications and Digital Access, and Website and Online Services*. It is recognised that delivering an effective Digital Access Strategy will require support from other teams and projects; specifically the ICT Team whose input will ensure adequate infrastructure for our staff and in our new building.

The following four year plan details the work that each work-stream will complete in order to enable Southway to achieve its Digital Access and Channel Shift targets. Activities and projects from year 2 will be subject to annual review and budgetary approval.

Year 1

Work-stream: Website and Online Services

- The Southway Website will be renewed, allowing for a much higher quality of web service and much greater ease of use both for the tenants and in back office functionality.

Work-stream: Communications and Digital Access

- The Digital Induction project will be rolled out to all new tenants, the purpose of this is to introduce them to interacting with us via the website, and therefore establishing at the earliest point of their tenancy, that transacting online is the most effective method to engage with us (the Induction will also provide a referral opportunity for training tenants who are not competent or confident when using computers)
- We will look at our social media platforms and how we may improve interaction with tenants on these sites.

Work-stream: Access to Equipment and Training

- We will work with partners to put in place free Wi-Fi at Southway Community venues for access during opening hours to help Southway tenants access our online services.
- Support local community partners to recruit a further 30 tenant and resident digital champions to assist with all Southway Digital Inclusion and Channel Shift objectives.
- Progress the Community Wi-Fi pilot project linking in with the Ambition for ageing project in Burnage.
- Identify any digital skills gaps within Southway staff by developing a Digital Competency framework to be included in the appraisal process.

- Closely align Digital Access projects with Employment and Training services being delivered from the network of learning hubs.
- Utilise information from the Business Information Team to target support for those tenants categorised as 'red' and/or who will not be able to use our online services by themselves.
- Continue to deliver 'Internet Savvy' courses run throughout Southway area and implement an intermediate skills course as a 'next steps' option that will keep our tenants online.
- Run specific 'Channel Shift' training courses/ workshops designed to ensure both new and existing tenants are able to transact with us online.
- Roll out an IT equipment loan scheme pilot project in partnership with stakeholders, and centre managers.
- Install 2 new self-service kiosks in Southway sheltered schemes.

Year 2

Work-stream: Website and Online Services

- The new and improved Southway Website will launch in year 2 of this strategy. The website project group and sub group(s) will ensure that this is fit for purpose and will oversee its continuing development.

Work-stream: Communications and Digital Access

- A sustained marketing and communications campaign, including; a new guide showing tenants how to use any new functionality, and incentives throughout the year will enable us to gain more interest and usage of the site. We will develop this alongside a tenant task and finish group to ensure that the language is friendly and accessible.
- This Workstream will feed into the new head office user group to ensure that our new office premises are fully facilitated to encourage use of computers and autonomous digital transactions (as opposed to staff carrying out transactions on behalf of tenants).
- The People and Places directorate will be fully implemented and staff will be working out in our neighbourhoods actively promoting our online services and registering tenants to the tenant portal.
- STAR Survey in 2018 will enable us to benchmark on previous progress and how we're doing against achieving our objectives.

Work-stream: Access to Equipment and Training

- A review of the Community Wi-Fi and IT equipment loan scheme pilot projects will take place to see if they can be expanded further across Southway neighbourhoods.
- We will continue to build on the progress of delivery in year 1 of this strategy, reviewing what we're offering to ensure it still meets the needs of Southway's tenants and residents.

- We will continue to utilise the reports categorising our tenants as “Green,” “Amber” and “Red” in terms of their Digital Capability and target resources appropriately. And look to strengthen this further based on actual usage of our systems, refreshing the data on a regular basis to ensure that it is up to date and valid.

Year 3

Work-stream: Website and Online Services

- In year 3 we will be looking to continue promoting the service and assessing the options provided for tenants.

Work-stream: Communications and Digital Access

- We will commission a large scale survey with tenants around usage of our website to gather data that will help us improve or consolidate functionality.

Work-stream: Access to Equipment and Training

- Findings from the review taking place in year 2 will enable us to identify other training opportunities for our tenants and residents.
- We will continue to utilise the reports categorising our tenants as “Green,” “Amber” and “Red” in terms of their Digital Capability and target resources appropriately.
- Southway will be operating out of its new office premises and tenants will be encouraged and supported to transact digitally, through a ‘customer zone’.
- Subject to a successful review of the Community Wi-Fi and IT equipment loan scheme pilot projects, Southway will expand these projects further across the stock area.

Year 4

Work-stream: Website and Online Services

- We will ensure that the website and is meeting all tenant transactional needs and is the first choice for tenants and residents to interact with Southway.

Work-stream: Communications and Digital Access

- STAR Survey in 2020 will enable us to benchmark on previous progress and see how we’re doing against achieving our objectives.
- Findings from the large scale survey in year 3 will enable Southway to improve or consolidate communications and Digital Access initiatives.

Work-stream: Access to Equipment and Training

- It is anticipated that year 4 activities in this work-stream will be business as usual activities designed to support those tenant that require support to access equipment and training to transact with us online.

How will we measure our achievements?

In order to ensure this strategy is effective and achieving its objectives and ambitious targets, progress will be measured in a number of ways, using both internal and external tools that are available to Southway.

Business Information Team (Customer Categories)

The reports published by the Business Information Team regarding tenant portal registrations and activity will enable us to build a picture of how many of our tenants have access to the internet and also how many of those are transacting with us through our self-service options.

HACT

Establishing the value of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) of our Digital Inclusion and Channel Shift activities will help with organisational buy-in. We have already assigned a value to attending a computer training course and will continue to look at where we can evidence other activities.

Government Digital Inclusion Outcome Framework

This will be a good tool to use to identify how Southway Digital Inclusion and Channel Shift activity compares nationally and we will look at utilising this framework alongside our other reporting mechanisms from 2016/2017.

KPI

The percentage of tenants who we recognise as being digitally enabled has increased steadily throughout 2015/16 by approx. 2 – 3% each quarter. Moving forward, we are assuming that this figure will continue to rise at this rate (2/3% per quarter). We are confident that the new digital induction will further increase this figure. Working on the assumption that this KPI will improve by approx. 5% each quarter would give us a 20% increase per year. This will be monitored on a quarterly basis and the appropriate staff member held accountable for any changes in performance.

Annual Report

As part of this Strategy there is a commitment to produce an annual report in September, to be issued to the People and Places Committee for consideration and comment.

STAR Survey

Southway have a commitment to running STAR survey exercises with their tenants every two years, during this strategy a STAR survey will take place in; 2016 (Benchmarking), 2018 and 2020.

Links to other strategies

Futures Strategy

Southway's Futures Strategy details its commitment to improving landlord services and delivering an efficient and dynamic landlord service to its tenants. Digital Inclusion and Channel Shift activities will assist the organisation in delivering on this commitment.

Community Investment Strategy

The Community Investment Strategy is currently in development; Digital Inclusion Staff now sit within the Communities and Support team. It is anticipated that the strategy will pay regard to the Digital Access Strategy and Southway's commitment to helping tenants and residents to get online, recognising this as a Community Investment function.

Customer Involvement Strategy

We will continue to involve our tenants in shaping the delivery of Digital Inclusion and Channel Shift Initiatives, utilising existing tenant groups where possible.

Value for Money Strategy

Digital Access and Channel Shift projects will continue subject to budgetary approval and we will ensure a commitment to achieving value for money by delivering efficient services that will allow the organisation to make savings.

Glossary of Terms

Digital by Default

The Government's initiative to drive all Government services to be run over the digital medium first. <http://digital.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about/>

Digital Exclusion Heatmap

The Go ON UK Digital Exclusion Heatmap has been developed with support from the BBC as part of their Make It Digital and wider digital literacy initiatives. <https://doteveryone.org.uk/resources/heatmap/#sthash.luZ2nmdq.dpuf>

STAR Survey

STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and is a periodic perception-based survey that provides social housing landlords with the means to compare satisfaction results with each other.

HACT

A social value and insight reporting tool that enables Housing Associations to focus on the social value they create, how they engage with and invest in their communities and actively seek to identify and meet the needs of those who live in them.

Government Digital Inclusion Framework

The Digital Inclusion Outcomes Framework is a single, flexible template for benchmarking and tracking digital inclusion in the UK, and evaluating digital inclusion activities locally. It aims to evidence the wider economic, health and social benefits of digital inclusion.

<https://local.go-on.co.uk/resources/the-digital-inclusion-outcomes-framework/>