

Information Governance Report

Report title: Access to Digital Services

Contact for enquiries: Donald Ford, DPA Phase 3 Project Manager, dford@lambeth.gov.uk, 020 7926 2464

Report summary

The purpose of this report is to examine, via two common scenarios, the assistance available from Lambeth Council to residents at risk of being excluded from accessing services digitally, either because they do not have the skills required to contact the internet or to request online services from their own device or do not have access to their own device or both.

Context

Digital access, via the internet, to services is now universal. In 2018 the Office of National Statistics figures showed that 89% of adults in Great Britain used the internet at least weekly in 2018. This left 31% of adults who did not use the internet regularly or not at all (1).

While there may be a perception that older people are the most likely to be digitally excluded there are many other groups at equal risk. Many of the people asking for assistance are in their 30s or 40s. Lambeth's Digital Inclusion Fund Report states that 9% of residents are digitally excluded (2). The NHS website notes those most at risk include people in lower income groups, people without a job, people in social housing, people with disabilities and homeless people and those whose first language is not English (3), in summary people who may require access to public services for their daily needs.

In March 2021 Lambeth launched a Digital Strategy to address this issue and related matters (4) and in August 2021 published an update, Digital access for all (5).

Staff at Lambeth Libraries, and since March 2018 the Brixton Civic Centre, have helped those faced with digital issues for many years. These services provided invaluable assistance during the Covid restrictions even when other face to face services were unavailable. Now that the restrictions are removed it must be anticipated the need for these services will increase.

This report aims to highlight face to face assistance currently provided by the Council. Both Civic Centre staff and Library staff were consulted for this report.

The scenarios

Scenario 1. The resident who owns a mobile phone or other device which connects to the internet but lacks the skills to be able to use this device to access a Council service, for example obtaining a parking permit.

Scenario 2. The resident who does not have his or own device to access Council online services digitally.

Response

In both scenarios the resident can be directed to the Civic Centre in Brixton or to their local library for assistance.

Scenario 1. Staff at the Brixton Civic Centre are trained and provided with guidelines to enable them to recognise visitors who present as vulnerable and to triage visitors towards a member of staff who will assist the resident.

If the resident is home bound but able to connect on-line at home they can be directed towards the Customer Centre staff based in the Brixton Civic Centre via their phone who can endeavour to assist the person and, for example, to help them to complete an application for a service.

Staff at libraries are trained to assist residents with this type of request and do so on a regular basis on a wide range of related issues, for example with helping job seekers to attend online job interviews. This service was particularly in demand during the full Covid restrictions period. Residents with more complex issues can book an appointment with a library staff member so that sufficient time can be given.

Scenario 2. Residents without their own devices can be directed to the Civic Centre or to their local library and use the devices provided for members of the public. Residents with library cards can log onto the public devices in their library. For example, Brixton Library currently has 35 devices available. If the resident does not have a library card library staff will endeavour to assist the person using staff devices.

References

- (1) [ONS internet access figures 2018](#)
- (2) [Lambeth digital inclusion report](#)
- (3) [NHS digital inclusion website](#)
- (4) [Lambeth Council Digital Strategy March 2021](#)
- (5) [Digital for all update August 2021](#)