



Digital inclusion and use of technology by and for older people

Round-up from group discussion – 22 February 2018

In the light of the presentations and discussions on digital inclusion the following key aspects were identified by those attending at the end of the conference.

Helping older Londoners to develop and improve their digital skills

Older people's ability to manage digital technology varies enormously. Digital equipment aimed at the general public must cater for the lowest denominator. Those with the greatest difficulty working with digital systems need basic help. By providing the right information in the right place at the right time, something that may appear complex can become relatively straight forward. We need to reduce the digital divide by facilitating access to technology.

The group discussion recommended that:

- The Mayor should create of a benchmark/tool kit of support/education services to be delivered by local authorities, including more use of inter-generational skills. There is a great need for training on keeping safe online.
- It was recognised that the Internet is normally available in libraries across. This could be used as a greater resource for training by councils.
- Boroughs must do more to make their constituents aware of the support there is available. This might include more traditional forms of printed or face-to-face communication to ensure the information gets to an older audience. The delegates would like to see the return of local support sessions in community and at home with their own devices
- We need to address access and disabilities. We need to consider speech initiated programmes and equipment with less reliance on manual appliances. Synchronise sub-titles with the visual could help.
- Many online forms etc. are not user friendly for older people and some other groups –too long – too complex – often need to be completed within a certain length of time or you get timed out. Councils & the GLA could create a Chatbox to assist with the filling in of forms. This technology should include translation services/features, needs to be universal and also incorporate images and clear descriptions and prompts.
- Worried about funding. Will the Mayor's office provide funding to explore digital support for older people?

Training & research

Training is essential to utilise free Wi-Fi and to use available technological equipment such as Tablets and smart phones.

Training on Skype and other communication platforms such as WhatsApp, snapchat, Facebook, etc. could be provided using satellite library sites that could be run by volunteers or at certain periods could even be unmanned and would be a place where older people could go and receive training and use available ICT equipment.

When new equipment is introduced into an office or public space, training needs to be provided with clear information on how to use the device.

Before training can be rolled out it is important to identify what the barriers are for older people. How can we make provision more inclusive? There is a need to include the voice of those who do not or who are unable to access or utilise current technology.

Possible barriers identified:

- Cost
- Need for adaptations (diverse range of ability levels and disabilities)
- Language (communication issues including E2L)

It was felt that there should be a more collective approach to these issues and the development of collaborative schemes as budgets for digitalisation differ in boroughs and across services.

We should investigate the innovative projects funded by the EU, what has been their impact? Whether they have evolved into or been incorporated into mainstream services?

Case studies of digital training for older people:

- E-senior scheme – a digital learning scheme, Pass It On, introduced in a presentation by Moira Alan, seemed very innovative. We would like to look more into these schemes, find out how they are funded and develop similar projects, possibly through cross-borough schemes/collaborations.
- Age UK is taking the lead in holding Techy Parties for positive aging people. This service and others like it need wider publicity to ensure help gets to those who need it.

Making new technology accessible to all

Many older people do not use digital equipment that could be very useful to them because they do not know what is out there on the market. Devices that could be of help need to be made more available to older people. There needs to be more direct, targeted information and contact with these devices.

The cost of digital products (smart phones, laptops etc.) exclude older people on low incomes – solutions would need to be found such as:

- Provision of reconditioned PCs, laptops, smartphones, etc., free of charge for those on very low incomes, or at affordable rates for people on moderately low incomes;
- Provision of free open Wi-Fi connections with strong enough signals to be usable

Co-designing digital services

- There is a need to move from listening to users /possible users to engaging more effectively with the community and users to determine the most useful features needed.
- Development of a coherent co-design and co-development process with older people.
- The Mayor should encourage councils to consider the needs of older people when re-designing websites. Fashions in website design change so rapidly many older people find it hard to keep up –websites used only occasionally have changed out of all recognition the next time a user visits and they must re-learn from scratch.

Example: Negotiating with a digital interface rather than a person causes confusion for older people with dementia problems who are having difficulty holding on to reality. Digital interfaces are dehumanising so they need to be made as friendly as possible. Digital text and other digital devices must adapt to older people's needs more closely. More research needs to be done to understand this.

Wi-Fi and broadband connectivity

We need more connectedness – with the caveat that for this to happen, online connection must be free or low-cost. The following was identified:

- Online connectivity has the potential to reduce loneliness and social isolation
- It is vital that the infrastructure is available to support access to the online world. We need:
 - Free Wi-Fi on transport and buses
 - Free Wi-Fi in council and public buildings, including council houses
 - Free Wi-Fi in public spaces

Transport services

- The Mayor should encourage TfL to join up transport information options, including not only bus, train, tube, tram etc. but also private and voluntary sector options such as community transport links, volunteer driver schemes etc. The potential is there, but is there the will and the motivation? Public and private/voluntary sector need to be given the motivation to co-ordinate provision and take-up of services.
- Digital sensors could reduce the risk in all types of environments by providing various types of alert systems. Technology can overcome physical obstacles and help adapt people to new situations. We must embrace technology for this purpose.
- Digital devices such as Fitbit can be used to influence behaviour and this was recognised as generally a good thing that could be further developed to help older people to encourage good habits.
- Flagged up were digital parking meters in hospitals and council car parks that are not user friendly. We need to have concise instructions printed on the meter that are easy to follow. A button could be introduced that can be pressed to give spoken instructions. This would also help the short-sighted and those that have difficulty reading written instruction.

Digital security & payment systems

- Councils must be aware that many people, especially in the older demographic, have fears around making financial transactions online.
- The need for people to be free to choose what elements of the service they want, and do not want.

- Identity issues – around ID theft and security need to be addressed. There is still a need to provide documentation to validate identity when using online services such as opening a bank account and similar financial processes.
- Currently there is no joined-up set of requirements and standards – banks etc. still require obsolescent forms of ID while rejecting paperless ID. At the same time older people without passports and driving licences don't have acceptable old-style visual ID documents – could something be done to make e.g. Freedom Passes more acceptable?

Digital first, but not at the loss of everything else.

- The total changeover to digital and online services will exclude many sections of the community. Steps must be put in place to ensure that people who cannot /don't want to engage with digital services can still access essential services.