

Beacon Report

Efficient Services leading
to Improved Lives

Efficient Services leading to Improved Lives:

Good practice in using technology to deliver local public services

Introduction

For local authorities, digital inclusion means so much more than just getting people online. It lies at the heart of making local services more efficient and effective. That's why in 2009 four local authorities were awarded Beacon status for Digital Inclusion: they showed how IT can be used to transform the lives of disadvantaged groups and communities, and the services on which they depend. So in this document, "Digital Inclusion" is used to describe local policies and actions designed to encourage the socially inclusive use of technology and to mitigate the risks that socially disadvantaged people and communities fall behind as mainstream society increasingly uses new technologies in everyday life.

The Digital Inclusion Beacon award process of 2009 has provided a Framework for considering the different aspects that may lead to good practice within local authorities seeking to promote the socially inclusive use of technology. This report has been constructed by identifying common factors from the Digital Inclusion Beacon authorities who have successfully delivered a number of these programmes.

Run and funded by the Government from 1999 to 2010, the Beacon Award scheme recognised excellence and innovation in local government. Through an annual competition based on set topical themes, it gave high performing

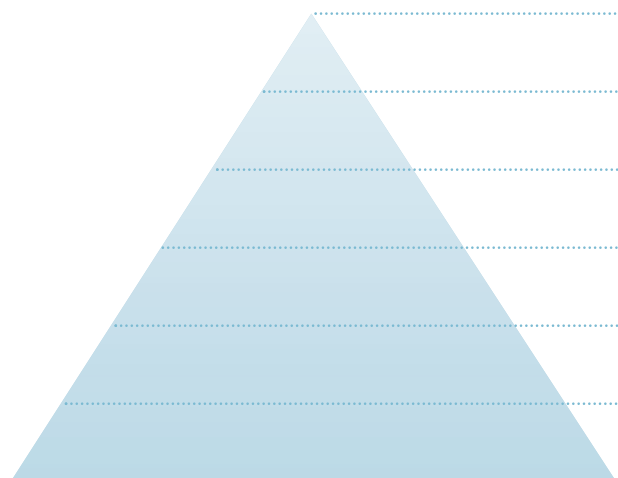
councils the opportunity and funding to share what they did well with other authorities and their partners across the country.

Purpose of Document

This document provides an introduction to The Digital Inclusion Beacon Framework ("the Framework") which consists of a number of thematic areas covering the full scope of good practice. Each of these component categories will be considered in turn, highlighting examples of good practice undertaken by Beacon authorities.

The Framework is designed to encourage discussion at a local level and to aid strategic thinking about the effective use of technology in transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes, and helping achieve more for less. This is a developing area where knowledge sharing and participation will help ensure that community needs are met. Each component of the Framework has key subjects that are highlighted throughout the text. "Beacon Practice In Action" boxes highlight success stories and real examples from the experience of Beacon authorities. These examples are provided to give inspiration and hopefully stimulate ideas for other authorities who need to act within their own unique circumstances. It is not intended to be a prescriptive methodology or template for a document.

The Digital Inclusion Beacon Framework



Leadership, Vision and Strategy

Enabling Actions

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Essential Partnerships

Effective Partnerships

Evidenced Outcomes

1) Leadership, Vision and Strategy

Any successful initiative requires commitment and direction that needs to be set from the top. A shared organisational vision supports the effective use of technology to improve service delivery within a local authority. This vital element of the Digital Inclusion Beacon Framework identifies three areas for consideration.

a) Steering and Championing

A senior member of the corporate or strategic partnership leadership team can act as a **Champion** for this developmental agenda. This person can provide the strategic direction and serves as an ambassador to both external and internal stakeholders. This level of seniority is vital to provide credibility and weight to the initiatives.

Beacon Practice In Action: If a Champion comes from outside of the IT area, as long as they are well supported, Beacon Authorities have found that the different perspective this brings can result in very successful leadership.

A documented **Strategy** for Digital Inclusion prepared by an authority and owned by the Champion can provide the structure for success. This can sit as a standalone document

that supports and is aligned with community and corporate strategies. Engaging end partner and community organisations throughout the development of this Strategy is a key to its acceptance and ultimate success.

Beacon Practice In Action: Effective Strategies have been developed through consultation and were linked to the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement and ICT strategy. Strategies have been developed from the bottom up, with Beacon authorities ensuring that the document is actively managed. Another methodology has been to adopt a Strategy and use continual review to shape the development over time.

For the Strategy to be implemented it will be important to receive strong **Cross-Cutting Support** across senior executives, strategic partners and elected members. To create the ownership that can lead to success within the authority, the vision for Digital Inclusion needs to be a shared one. Widespread awareness of how social exclusion can be linked to digital exclusion, and the effective use of technology to improve service delivery – used in everything from planning to front line services – will benefit from being accepted as part of the core business.



b) Embedding Digital Inclusion

Digital Inclusion needs to be aligned to the other initiatives of the authority to ensure cohesiveness in service delivery. An effective approach to consider is the integration of the digital agenda into routine business.

Mainstreamed Action Plans can place Digital Inclusion alongside corporate strategy and ensure that they become accepted as the norm as opposed to being seen as technical and an IT issue. This mainstreaming ensures that thinking about how to use technology in effective service delivery is included within the **Business Planning** process.

Beacon Practice In Action: Authorities have successfully managed to integrate Digital Inclusion into wider strategies ensuring it receives equal weight within the planning process. Beacon Authorities have forced themselves to consider the Digital Inclusion opportunities and implications of activities in each service area, ensuring cross-departmental involvement.

By conducting a **Social Exclusion Impact Assessment** some Beacon authorities have managed the associated risk of new policies having a negative impact in the key areas of equality, social exclusion and digital exclusion.

An assessment can mitigate the chance of negative impact at a later date or an unexpected result for the community. For example, moving a service online may appear to be a cost saving, but a Social Exclusion Impact Assessment could reveal that this would negatively impact a community or service users that do not have online access and potentially increase long term spend.

Beacon Practice In Action: A solid step that Beacon authorities have taken to counter the impact of exclusion is to assess the web services that are available and ensure their accessibility for all disadvantaged groups.

To evaluate the success levels of Digital Inclusion strategies once they are established, a **Performance Management** framework can be created. Tangible measurement against criteria, established early in the strategy's development, provides demonstrable and communicable results of the policies for the authority.

Beacon Practice In Action: Successful Beacon authorities have managed to measure social outcomes as well as digital outputs. They have developed case study evidence of both the soft and more quantitative success achieved through implementing their Digital Inclusion programmes.

c) Future Proofing

The fact that Digital Inclusion is linked so closely to technology development means any authority could consider active **Horizon Scanning**. This important aspect of the planning process is undertaken by successful organisations that recognise the importance of keeping pace with technological change and understanding how ICT is being used in the private sector, public sector and in the community.

Beacon Practice In Action: Sharing knowledge with other organisations on technologies provides good insight into developing trends. Successful Beacon authorities have also shown a willingness to embrace and test new technologies such as RFID posters and Digital TV and even the innovative delivery of services through consumer technologies such as Wii games consoles.

The **Sustainability** of projects could be considered as successful Digital Inclusion projects are often long-term investments and can fail due to short-term funding. From the

outset authorities could ensure that the Sustainability of different initiatives has been considered and evaluated. With such an evolving landscape it is important that projects have the ability to be adapted if the objectives change.

Beacon Practice In Action: Authorities have utilised a number of strategies to ensure the Sustainability of plans; linking multiple strategies to allow budgets to be brought and managed together, establishing a long-term regeneration company responsible for project delivery, and ensuring an element of revenue generation to cover operating costs of projects.

2) Enabling Actions

Successful Digital Inclusion strategies will be coupled with the authority's understanding of the community that it serves and its specific needs. Alongside this customer insight, organisational insight is required, understanding how the authority is set up to best deliver the strategies. This second element of the Framework identifies two areas for consideration.

a) Local Knowledge and Insight

Understanding the end customer is of the same significance to local authorities as it is any commercial enterprise. **Community Mapping and Customer Insight** enables an authority to identify and prioritise the most disadvantaged communities. Through this process the specific needs of residents can be acknowledged, and plans for engagement taking these into consideration put in place, using technology as an enabler.

Beacon Practice In Action: Authorities have made use of the wide range of Customer Relationship Management (geographic) and placed based insight tools at their disposal (e.g. esd-toolkit, Community Maps, Places Community and Geographic Information Systems) to identify the most excluded communities.

In particular **Rural Proofing** is an important area for those authorities with communities facing unique barriers to technology-enabled services and area based exclusion. In rural communities technology can be used to tackle the issues around population density, physical location and limitations of infrastructure and resources.

Beacon Practice In Action: Beacon authorities have adopted a number of alternative approaches including use of mobile equipment to deliver services, internet access installations in community locations and shared/partnership services to get broadband into areas deemed



commercially non viable. All these strategies have recognised the challenges associated with service delivery in remote areas.

b) Managing Organisational Change

A Digital Inclusion agenda is an opportunity to establish a change culture and environment within an organisation. An example is identifying the opportunities for a **Cross-Discipline Approach**, where the knowledge gap between technical and social departments can be tackled. Through this approach staff are brought together to share knowledge, stimulate change and develop ideas for improving services delivery. An **Innovation**

Environment needs to underpin this Cross-Discipline Approach, where ideas are encouraged, assessed and implemented.

Beacon Practice In Action: A Cross-Discipline problem solving environment has been successfully created in Beacon Authorities by co-locating teams, running joint workshops and holding meetings between users, frontline staff, technology staff, strategic planners and civil society partners. New ideas from this inclusive approach need to be encouraged and collected and visibly followed up on by the authority.

Having efficient **Change Management Processes** becomes the most effective way of delivering technology change programmes. Authorities will be able to generate success in these programmes by listening to the community and using their requirements to define change as opposed to internally created stratagem.

Beacon Practice In Action: By running Digital Inclusion programmes from 'Change and Performance' departments, Beacon authorities are able to closely tie in technology and change management.

3) Community Engagement and Empowerment

The fact that technology can be an enabler for improving interaction between service providers and service users, improving access to services and helping overcome other barriers such as employability through skill development, is commonly recognised. Taking a structured approach to providing these technological services can help ensure

they are effective and that they reach and improve the lives of those who are most marginalised and therefore in need within society. This third component of the Framework has two areas for authorities to consider.

a) User Centred Approach

To obtain productive policy decisions pertaining to the local community, authorities should be seeking **Citizen and Community**

Involvement. Technology can be actively used to support this process and enable participation from excluded people and communities. This consultation is not a one-off exercise and is better to be considered as an ongoing procedure that should include feedback to the community at all stages of the decision-making process.

Beacon Practice In Action: Authorities are using creative measures to involve the traditionally hard to reach for example through using online polls and by broadcasting webcasts of relevant meetings to involve more of the community. Others have found success through the use of third sector parties to act as intermediaries for groups, in particular where communities have not previously used technology.

By ensuring a **Customer Centred Design** authorities are putting the user at the heart of transformation. Customer Centred Design can be best implemented by encouraging public input into the design process. In particular, the needs of the most disadvantaged should be sought and acted upon. Technology can be used to create more convenient ways for residents to interact with the design process and this could encourage more participation.

Beacon Practice In Action: Services can be developed successfully through co-design and co-development, by engaging vulnerable groups. As examples of this, Beacon authorities have worked with various communities including young people, those in community housing and disabled people to develop specific services.

The design of services could also include **Inclusive Channel Strategies** that ensure that the digitally and socially excluded benefit from improvements in delivery. The technology used should be relevant to the service users'

requirements. Authorities will benefit from being aware of how different channels are more or less suitable to the needs of various vulnerable groups in society and also be aspiring to provide beyond the traditional delivery channels.

Beacon Practice In Action: Beacon authorities ensure that channels are accessible to those with specific disabilities and language needs. This includes the use of simpler language and use of symbols and illustrations. In another successful example an authority recognised that Mobile Telephones and Digital TV are more available to members of vulnerable groups and worked to deliver services through these channels.

b) Community, Skills and Capacity

Providing infrastructure channels, such as internet access, is not enough without the ICT skills to make use of it. Many socially excluded groups are also lacking in the ability and motivation to use technology such as online services. Residents need to be supported and a lack of education or confidence can be tackled through **Individual ICT Skills and Support**. Technology can deliver services to aid self-sufficiency as long as those in need are trained in the use of them and appropriate methods of access are provided to some of the most disadvantaged groups.

Beacon Practice In Action: In different communities there will be differing needs whether these are training requirements or improved shared facilities. Beacon authorities identify and meet these needs in community outreach programmes. Authorities have also worked with the community and voluntary sector to reach out to other 'hard to reach' groups. Mobile units and equipping town halls with internet access have also proven successful strategies.

Authorities can successfully work with **Third Sector and Community Capacity Building** to make use of partnerships to further improve service delivery. Third Sector bodies are proven to be driving forces in reaching out to disadvantaged communities. For this relationship to be a success the authority and Third Sector need to maintain an open dialogue about effective use of technology as this will cascade down to better technology use in service delivery.

Beacon Practice In Action: Schemes of identifying and equipping ‘champions’ within the Third Sector and community groups has proven to be a successful approach. Some authorities have also looked to provide shared services in areas such as web design and web hosting to improve the capacity of the Third Sector organisations.

4) Essential Partnerships

Comprehensive service delivery will involve the joined up participation of partners in the process to ensure that gaps in the service do not appear into which socially excluded groups fall. Partnerships across the public, private and third sector are essential to provide Digital Inclusive services. This fourth element of the Framework consists of consideration of these three groups.

a) Public Sector

Authorities will find benefits in not working in silos, and engaging across tiers of local government with neighbouring and other councils to deliver truly joined up services. **Local Authorities** could work in tandem to ensure that vulnerable groups are captured across geographies and will find that technology plays a vital role in maintaining this relationship.

Beacon Practice In Action: Beacon authorities have developed links with Parish Councils to facilitate community access to services. There have been successful co-operation initiatives on joint procurement and shared services with other local authorities.

The networks that authorities work with include the **Social Housing Sector**. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are a significant consideration for Digital Inclusion programmes, as some 70% of people living in social housing are digitally excluded and many are socially excluded. Local authorities could consider engaging RSLs on joint initiatives.

Beacon Practice In Action: Examples of successful projects between local authorities and RSLs include low cost internet access, ICT training, electronic choice based lettings, electronic repair requests, anti-social-behaviour reporting and telephone based care and support.

Authorities should also consider the **Wider Public Sector** stakeholders that will improve reach, effectiveness and efficiency of services. These are organisations such as Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Police, Fire Service, Jobcentre Plus, FE colleges, Schools, and Connexions. Developing the frontline staff of these partnership organisations to become advocates of ICT will help promote the Digital Inclusion agenda of the local authority.

Beacon Practice In Action: Beacon authorities have provided training to third party staff on ICT service channels and provided access to services in third party buildings and facilities. This makes use of partnerships to deliver better services to the community and further improves the reach of the service through indirect channels.

b) Third Sector

Local authorities can work with the **Third Sector** as trusted intermediaries who have the reach and relationships to deliver improved services for the most disadvantaged. In addition, the frontline workers in these organisations can provide important suggestions for how service delivery should be adjusted to meet specific needs.

Beacon Practice In Action: The Third Sector organisation can become a key partner for the local authority in the overall Digital Inclusion strategy and benefit mutually from the delivery of the strategy.

c) Private Sector

By partnering with local and national businesses, local authorities can ensure that **Private Sector Service Providers** are pursuing



shared Digital Inclusion ambitions as well as delivering the contracted service successfully. An authority can work with Private Sector organisations on initiatives such as harnessing employee volunteer schemes, reusing infrastructure and recycling ICT equipment back into the community.

Beacon Practice In Action: Considerable success has been achieved in Private Sector-Local Authority Partnerships in particular around overcoming the local market failures in broadband and communications services for deprived urban and remote rural areas.

5) Effective Partnerships

While the advantages brought by a broad range of partnerships to provide enhanced service provision have been acknowledged above, this needs to be balanced with an effective working structure. Shared objectives and rewards are important as are considerations on how the partnership can act in a joined up manner. This section

of the Framework consists of three areas for further consideration.

a) Partnership Foundations

Strong partnerships will prove successful if founded on **Shared Objectives and Priorities** to ensure that the direction and activity are complementary and focused on identified goals. Equally where risk and reward are shared between parties, the sense of ownership

increases. Technology can play an important part in enabling these partnerships and galvanising their efficiency.

Beacon Practice In Action: Successful Beacon partnerships have involved both parties from early stages to ensure commitment for every step, right through to delivery. One authority established a legal entity alongside the partnership to hold responsibility for taking joint actions forward as an alternative approach. A Beacon authority productively linked the Digital Inclusion objectives to other joint initiatives such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP).

By adopting a **Smart Commissioning** focus, a local authority can not only promote social and Digital Inclusion through practices such as ‘contracting for outcomes’, but also work to ensure that all new contracts do not inadvertently deepen exclusion. Ensuring that factors related to digital and social exclusion are stated considerations in the procurement process provides a basis for this.

Beacon Practice In Action: A Beacon authority has shown success in this area through an inclusive procurement process that involves the input of community members in the decisions being taken.

b) Data Sharing

A joined up partnership will also involve the free flow of information within agreed parameters between parties. Agreements regarding both **Non-Personal and Personal Data Sharing** should be established early and clearly defined. Successful partnerships will utilise the information assets that all parties have and recognise the leverage that this may provide if used creatively in service delivery. Personal data however must be governed by protocol and within a robust framework for protecting privacy, including the Data



Protection Act. Barriers to sharing of data, particularly personal data, could be addressed within the partnership if there is a wider advantage to be gained from doing so.

Beacon Practice In Action: Using the data from partners and bringing this into GIS projects, a number of Beacon authorities have developed some important mapping exercises to understand service delivery. Beacon authorities have also identified that breaking down barriers of personal data sharing can enable better and more conjoined service delivery to vulnerable groups.

c) Knowledge and Good Practice Sharing

Generation and implementation of ideas is only possible where good practice and learning is shared both within the organisation and externally with third parties. By making good use of the **Shared Learning** from partners new initiatives can be put in place quickly and concepts developed further by being used in different locations.

Beacon Practice In Action: Successful Beacon authorities use a mix of channels to share their learning experience such as testimony from users, customer journey studies, tours of initiatives and shared video. The DC10 partnership is a further good example of productive information sharing.

6) Evidenced Outcomes

Success of any initiative requires outcomes that are both quantitative and qualitative showing that Digital Inclusion is improving. This last section of the Framework has two areas for further consideration.

a) Innovative Action

Technology can be a catalyst for change and can enable local authorities and their partners to create new service models and work in more effective and productive ways. It is important that local authorities are open to new practices and have space within the organisation to be innovative with service delivery. Authorities can look to engage in **Clear and Visible Activity** that encourages innovation by breaking from traditional practices and harnessing the potential of technology for service delivery.

Beacon Practice In Action: Examples of successful projects from Beacon authorities include using power lines to deliver internet broadband to high rise blocks, a dedicated telecare service connected to 20,000 vulnerable individuals and the development of dedicated community training facilities within existing school buildings.

b) Improve Lives and Life Chances

Investing time and resources into technology enabled services means little if the services do not improve the lives and life chances for residents, particularly those service users who are most vulnerable and marginalised. Measurement of Digital Inclusion success should be provided with **Clear and Evidenced Social Impact**. This should be targeted at the socially excluded groups i.e. the 5-10% hardest to reach in society and the 10% most deprived communities. The statistical evidence should be coupled with a broader evidence base of soft measures that are harder to quantify.

Beacon Practice In Action: Success stories of helping someone achieve a qualification, or someone researching a medical condition which many take for granted, are used by Beacon authorities as clear evidence of improving lives and life chances.

Beacon Authorities 2009:

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Sunderland City Council

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