



Bone Wells Urbecon
Economics and Planning Consultants



**esd
toolkit**
improving together



Community ICT Champion: City of London Community ICT project

City of London | Citizens Online
British Telecommunications plc | Bone Wells Urbecon Ltd
September 2010

Community ICT Champion: City of London Community ICT project

About This Report

This report was written by Bone Wells Urbecon Ltd and the City of London Delivery Innovation Team in order to document the results of a two-year project to evaluate the impact of a community ICT champion project on residential estates in the City of London and the impact on local public services delivered by the council and its partners. The project was run by Citizens Online in partnership with British Telecommunication plc and the City of London. This is the executive summary.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following without which this project evaluation would not have been possible:

- Citizens Online
- British Telecommunications plc
- City of London project board and working group members

And particular thanks to: Liam Barnes – the City of London eChampion, Elisa Conti and Abdul Rahim who delivered the evaluation of a broad multi faceted project over a 2 year period.

Full Document

The full report can be downloaded at <http://www.esd.org.uk/InnovationToolkit>

Terms and Conditions of Use

© Copyright City of London 2010

You may use this document free of charge for any purpose subject to the conditions of a Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike licence i.e. that you:

1. Acknowledge the City of London and Bone Wells Urbecon Ltd as the original source.
2. Preserve this licence in any copies, prints, distributions or derived works.

Executive Summary

The Challenge and Opportunity

Clear research evidence demonstrates that those who are most socially disadvantaged are also least likely to have access to and engage with information and communications technologies such as the internet¹. This is an important issue for councils and local service delivery organisations. Those who need the most help are being increasingly excluded from modern new public services. As mainstream society increasingly enjoys the benefits of the information age in their education, employment, health and wellbeing, those on the margins are being further disadvantaged. For the frontline workers who are supporting them, their job is becoming more challenging. They have reduced opportunities for engagement, consultation and communication if they themselves, or their clients, can't access the modern communication technologies and services that are becoming ubiquitous in other employment sectors and areas of society.

With every challenge is an opportunity. Local service delivery organisations can actively use technology in inclusive and innovative ways to support the most disadvantaged. There are many excellent and inspiring examples². These might involve helping people by using ICT in the frontline, helping people to use ICT to help themselves – or a combination of both. Either way, the prize is significant. Targeting disadvantage provides the greatest opportunity for councils and community partnerships to deliver the most social impact, and the best prospect of significant reductions in public service costs.

Local Community ICT Champions - Background

The concept of establishing a local ICT champion is one that has considerable pedigree and that has been implemented in a number of local authority areas across the UK. The concept is straightforward. The ICT champion works with:

- **local organisations** to improve access to community based ICT facilities for residents and frontline workers in a disadvantaged area.
- **the local community** and its residents to establish a programme of engaging and stimulating learning activities, both formal and informal, that meets their needs and interests.
- **frontline workers** across public sector and community organisations to help them to use the community ICT facilities to enhance their communication and engagement with the residents that they need to support and that are traditionally the hardest to reach.

The key questions are: What is the social and economic impact of a community ICT champion initiative? What are the measurable benefits to residents, the community, the local authority and its partners? What are the key lessons around implementing such an initiative?

This report provides a summary of the findings of an evaluation of a 3-year community ICT champion project on residential estates in the City of London, undertaken by Bone Wells Urbecon Ltd. It draws on quarterly measurement reports, two annual reports and a business case analysis produced over the evaluation period.

The City of London Project – Everybody Online

The City of London Community ICT project commenced in September 2007 as a partnership between industry (BT), the third sector (Citizens Online) and the public sector (the City of London). The project focused on the most deprived residential communities in the East of the City of London bordering Tower Hamlets and in the north of the City bordering Islington.

A simple governance structure was established to regularly manage the different perspectives and requirements of all project stakeholders:

- **a small steering board** of service directors and representatives from partner organisations; to ensure alignment with community strategy and departmental objectives and priorities.
- **a working group** of frontline workers and community organisations; to agree, plan and co-ordinate community ICT facilities and activities.
- **a user group** of residents; backed by surveys and consultations with residents to develop informal and engaging activities in the community.

The project had a part time project manager within the City of London to support the community ICT champion. The ICT champion was not employed by the local authority but by a charity, Citizens Online³, giving the freedom to balance the interests and perspectives of residents, different local authority departments and local services providers, but not be dominated by any one.

Over the 3-year project period, some of the activities included:

- **Improving community ICT access;** installing PCs, electronic whiteboards and other technology in a new community centre – covered at marginal cost as part of the original build. Securing recycled technology, in particular from the local authority, for other community centres, key community volunteers and local sheltered housing schemes. Raising awareness and improving access to other community ICT facilities such as libraries and a local museum.
- **Supporting the community and it's residents;** the ICT champion, working with partners, and existing community organisations, arranged regular informal and engaging activities for different groups including: the Bangladeshi community, homeless, elderly residents including those in a number of sheltered housing schemes, teens and school age, unemployed, and social housing tenants. Activities ranged from 'Silver Surfers', 'Wii and Tea', Digital culture events, music production, video and magazine activities, community web site, online shopping and digital photography etc. These were all led by the community's specific interests and needs. The project also created many volunteering opportunities.
- **Supporting Frontline Workers;** the project team organised specific activities to support a host of front line workers from partner organisations and the local authority. For example: youth workers (e.g. ICT resources for home work clubs), the local PCT (healthy living events, access to online health services), Adult and Community Learning Team (informal and formal classes e.g. Myguide, eCitizen and Equal Skills), libraries department (virtual library activities), Supporting People (homeless hostel work), Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (intergenerational activities, safe IT initiatives), Housing Officers (e.g. active aging activities and community web site), Citizens Advice Bureau (ICT support for outreach workers), Economic Development (employment and CV building sessions).

Over the period the project partnered with key national organisations with an expertise in supporting people using technology including StartHere (simple access to services in the community), Abilitynet (assistive technology), Digital Unite (experts in ICT in sheltered housing), UK online centres (for national get online week), Age UK (computer recycling scheme) and Looking Local (service delivery via Digital Interactive TV, mobile phones and other technologies). The project also tapped into the employee volunteering capacity of local businesses.

Headline Findings

There is extensive evidence showing that the project had a positive effect on increasing the ICT skills and Internet usage in the City; it generated positive social outcomes for residents and the community; and it supported frontline workers to deliver more effectively and efficiently. Against each of the key activity areas:

Community ICT Access Impact

The project was successful in attracting significant additional ICT resource into the area including: recycled PCs, local grants, service kiosks, assistive technologies, redirected and prioritised funding, staff time (e.g. spare capacity of ICT training team in the local authority to run community training events), volunteers time etc. The monetary value of these additional assets and resources is estimated to be at least £20k per annum over the 3-year period. Setting the project up in a community and charitable organisation, rather than running it out of the local authority was an important contributor to attracting these additional assets for the community.

There was a clear measured impact of these additional assets and resources. Annual household surveys in the areas in which the project was based recorded a 10% increase in Internet use. The largest increase was recorded amongst the 55+ (only 36% of those falling in this age group used the Internet in 2008



compared to 61% in 2010) and the DE socio-economic group (from 50% to 66%). These target groups were the ones particularly supported by the project.

Measured Benefits for Residents and the Community

There was considerable **participation and engagement** with the project – over the period the project supported hundreds of residents, delivered hundreds of sessions of activity and a number of well-attended annual events. In surveys 56% of participants reported they were more likely to take part in other community and social events; and 62% believed that the activities would help them to access information and to keep updated with what was going on in their community.

There was no shortage of **community volunteers** to the project – with more registering an interest in supporting activities than could be accommodated. 44% of all participants reported that they were likely to use their new skills to volunteer for similar projects or for other community initiatives. This virtuous circle of participants becoming volunteers was confirmed in practice with 12 volunteers getting involved in 2009, of whom



the majority had been through one of the activities as a participant. Some of these volunteers were helped into work on the back of their volunteering experience.

There were around 6000 visits, and 42,000 page views of the **community web site** in 2009 – for a community of 4000. There were also important contributions to the web site by local residents for example young people's artwork was published.

The project had a **clear positive impact on ICT skills**. The group of residents the project worked with had lower skills compared to the wards' average. However, the project helped them to get closer to the area's average. At the project's inception only 61% of residents knew how to use a mouse to launch programmes compared to 83% (ward average); at the project's end this figure went up to 100%. Before attending the ICT activities only 36% knew how to manage files and folders; this figure more than doubled when exiting the activities. 46% of attendees had used email compared to 68% after completing the ICT training.

Other key findings include improved **social outcomes**. The activities:

- Increased the confidence and the self-esteem of participants: 85% of the attendees felt more confident in their skills.
- Had a positive impact on the attitude towards education: 53% wished to enrol in further training and education.
- Addressed a lack of confidence in applying for jobs: 18% felt more confident in applying for a job (80% of the unemployed residents).
- Helped residents to access online public services: 53% were accessing or expressed an interest in using websites such as NHS-Choices and Directgov.
- Encouraged family learning: 50% of the Bangladeshi ladies attending the sessions thought that, with their new digital skills, they would be able to help their children with homework and check what they were doing on the Internet.
- Improved the wellbeing of participants: 68% felt that the activity would help them to pursue their hobbies and interests (particularly important for the elderly).

The project directly supported at least 3 people into work over the period. However, many of the above social impacts should contribute to further employment and training.

Benefits for Frontline Workers

Alongside working with different Local Authority departments within the City of London around 20 new partnerships were established over the life of the project with other service delivery organisations such as schools, a local Primary Care Trust, Registered Social Landlords and volunteering organisations. Frontline workers and key stakeholders were interviewed to understand if they were benefiting from the project and in what way. Overall, they were very satisfied with the Project's outcomes and its innovative approach. They reported that it was particularly successful in:

- **Engaging hard-to-reach residents.** The groups supported experienced barriers in accessing mainstream services and training opportunities; the project offered valuable support for breaking down these barriers and making mainstream services more accessible to marginalised communities.
- **Community cohesion and bridging intergenerational divides.** The Bangladeshi women living in Portsoken took part in several events with different community groups and improved their communication and relational skills. Older residents learnt how to use ICT from younger attendees.
- **Promoting effective partnership working** across different LA departments, and between public, private and third sector organisations working on the estates.
- Improving residents' attitudes towards using **online public services**, which could promote channel shift and support efficiency targets.

The City of London Estates and Housing Schemes approached were extremely satisfied with how the project was working for them. They found the project a valuable complement to the activities they organised for residents.

The Business Case for a Community ICT Champion

A cost-benefit analysis and value-for money assessment of the project was carried out. The ICT champion approach has been compared with alternative options including recruiting more community development workers and embedding community ICT approaches into different departments across a local authority. The key findings are that:

- The community ICT champion approach is more effective than the alternatives across a range of indicators, including improved resident self-esteem and confidence, improved skills, improved participation and

engagement with services and increased participation in community (e.g. volunteering, attendance at community events).

- If governed by a steering board the approach has an excellent strategic fit by helping a local authority or community partnerships to deliver against a range of targets and objectives. It is also a popular project among key stakeholders, such as frontline workers, as it helps them to deliver more efficiently and effectively against their areas of responsibility.
- The community ICT champion works for the community rather than for the local authority. As a result the community runs and owns the project and the project can attract more inward investment to the community than the alternative approaches.

It has been estimated that the project can break even over a three-year period. The primary costs related to the project are the employment costs for the ICT champion. The benefits relate to the monetary value of a) the investment attracted to the community, b) the wider economic benefits of getting people into further education and employment, c) economic value of community volunteering, d) the net economic benefits to residents of personal internet access, e) public service efficiencies. There are many additional benefits that are not financially quantifiable (increased self-esteem; increased likelihood of applying for jobs, etc) but where there has been measured improvement over the course of this project – Annex A provides a list of indicators, and Annex B presents a 'Benefits-Beneficiary' footprint for the project.

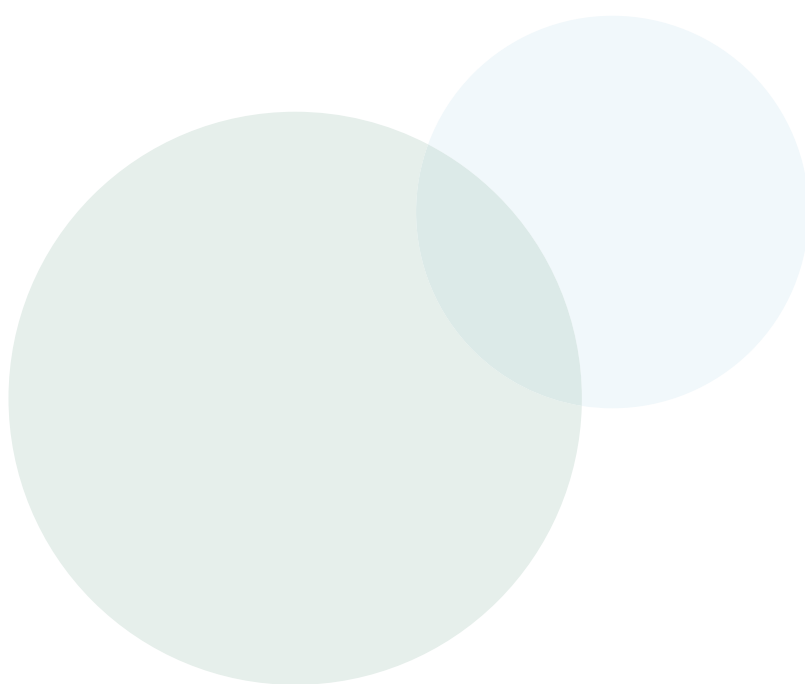
Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The community ICT champion has undoubtedly delivered benefits across a host of indicators, for the community, its residents, local service delivery organisations and the local authority. There are many lessons that have been learned and some areas for improvement identified – the most important of which are:

- **Expand coverage without diluting impact;** frontline workers, when asked how the project could improve, were keen to explore how it could reach more residents. There is a balance to be struck between breadth and depth of support by an ICT champion. Clearly one champion can only achieve so much. However adopting a rolling approach of kicking activities off, which are then sustained by community volunteers and or supported by mainstream LA resources is one approach.
- **Harnessing the full potential of volunteers;** this project used volunteers extensively, yet it could not meet the full demand from the community for volunteering opportunities. Clearly there are diseconomies of scale that need to be managed – when the number of volunteers increases beyond a certain amount the benefit they can provide a single ICT champion can be offset by the additional administrative burden. However training volunteers and residents to support their peers independently is important to the ongoing sustainability of the project.

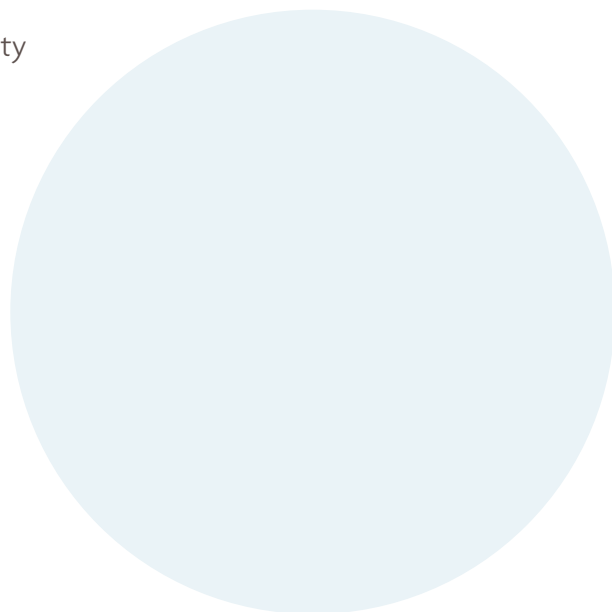
- **The need for the project to be run by a community organisation;** is a critical success factor to ensure that the champion is free to balance the needs of all the various stakeholders and not become overly focused on any one local authority target to the detriment of other areas. This is also important to attract additional inward investment, resources and assets.
- **The need for a project manager with the Local Authority;** to ensure that the ICT champion has good access to, and working relationships with frontline workers across the various departments of a local authority.

These last two points are particularly important. An ICT champion approach is consistent with councils handing over more control and delivery of services to the community. The Champion is effectively a form of community development worker who is from the community, works for the community and answers to the community. With a strong facilitating link back into the local authority this approach is a good example of a council helping the community to help itself.



Annex A – Range of Benefits Measured by the Evaluation

- Improved Wellbeing
- Improved ICT Access
- Increased Volunteering in Community
- Increased community participation in activities and services
- Financial Benefits of Internet Access
- Additional Resources and Investment Accrued to Community
- Improved ICT Skills and Confidence
- Contribution towards positive inspection outcomes
- Contribution towards community targets
- Residents progressing to other activities
- Increased employability of Residents
- Increased take-up of public services like NHS Choices
- Increased interaction between different parts of the community
- Active partnerships to support residents
- Increased residents with new qualifications
- New community events delivered
- Increase in residents accessing remote library services
- Increased intergenerational contact
- Participation in active aging activities
- Frontline worker satisfaction that project is supporting them
- Councillor satisfaction that project is delivering for ward
- Clear evidence of support for most vulnerable
- Help to market public and community sector services
- New opportunities to engage youth with IT, new media and games
- New community equipment and facilities to enhance training



Annex B – Project Benefits Footprint

Benefits

Digital Access and Skills
Social Wellbeing
Inclusion, Equality and Empowerment
Service Transformation
Finance/ Income
Housing
Education and Skills
Health and Care
Crime and Safety
Employment and Local Economy
Community
Environment

Primary, Secondary or No Benefit?

Primary
Primary
Primary
Secondary
Secondary
Secondary
Secondary
Secondary
Secondary
Secondary
Primary
No

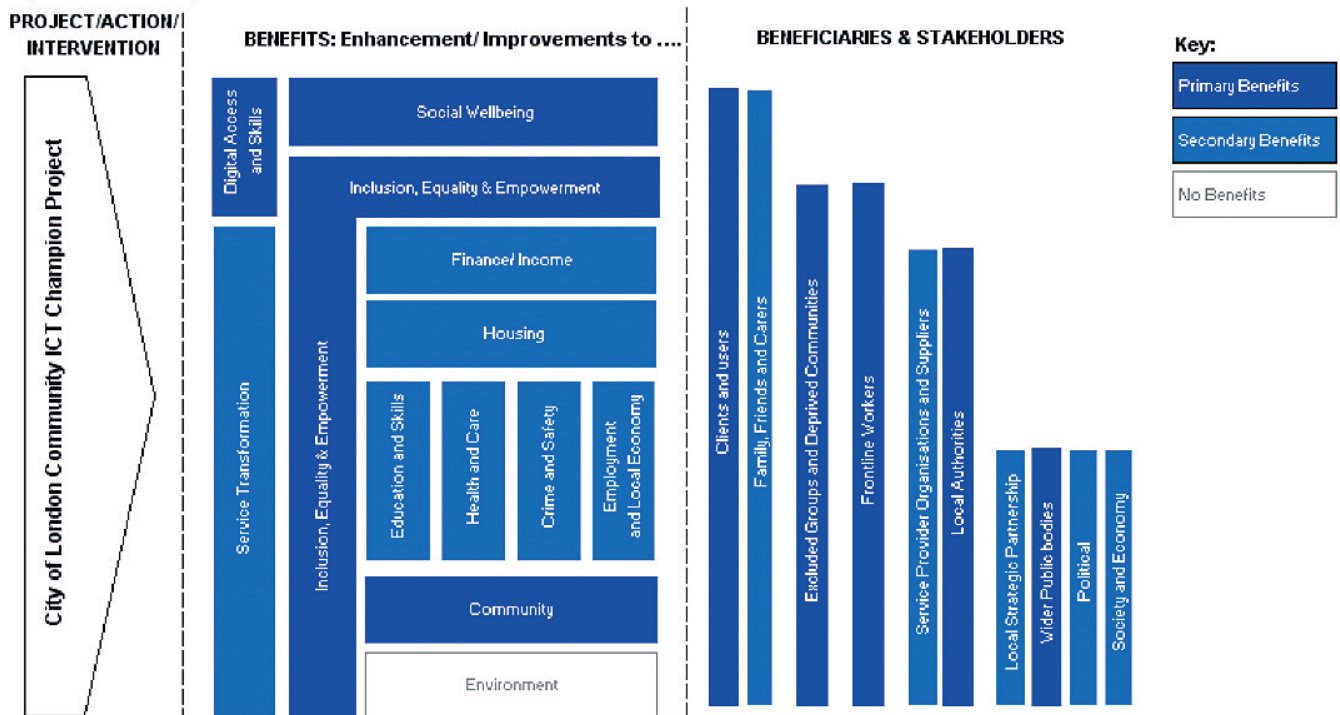
Beneficiaries

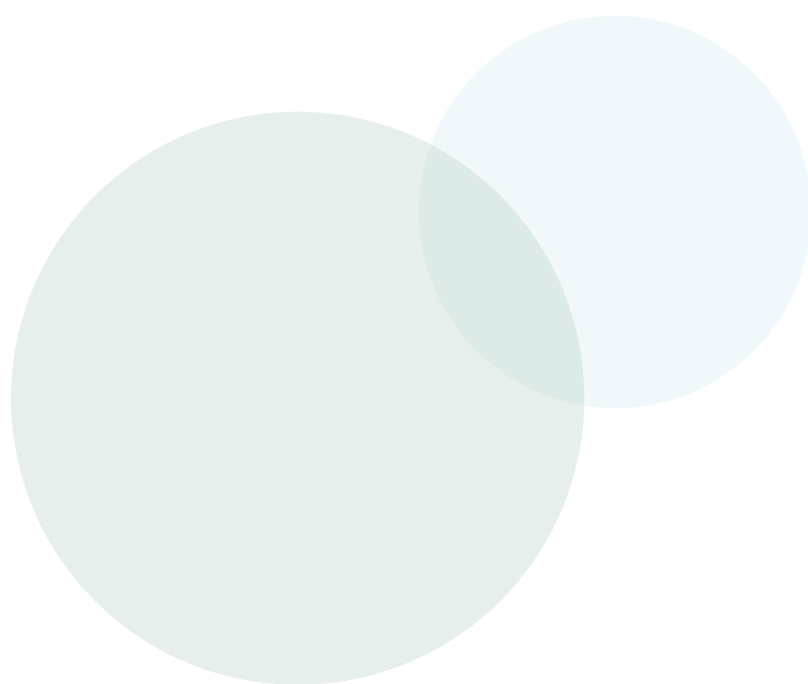
Clients and Users
Family Friends and Carer
Deprived Community
Frontline Worker
Local Authority
Service Provider & Suppliers
Local Strategic Partnership
Wider Public Bodies
Political
Economy and Society

Primary, Secondary or No Benefit?

Primary
Secondary
Primary
Primary
Secondary
Secondary
Primary
Secondary
Secondary

Project Benefit Footprint:





Contact us

esd-toolkit

Local Government Improvement and Development

Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London EC1M 5LG

Tel: 020 7296 6572

www.esd-toolkit.org.uk

The full document is available on www.esd-toolkit.org.uk



© City of London 2010.

