

<b>SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 5</b>
<b>28 NOVEMBER 2016</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

<b>Report of the Corporate Director for Resources</b>		
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## **DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY OF PARISH COUNCILS AND RURAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To advise the committee on the initiatives being investigated to support Parish Council's with their Digital Agenda and ensure that community facilities across the city are digitally connected and able to operate as vital community serve points.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Commission are recommended to:

Note and comment on the report; and

To agree to the formation of a project working group to continue the initiative. This group will primarily be made up of Parish Council members, City Council Staff and Partners

### **3. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND RELEVANT CABINET PORTFOLIO**

- 3.1 This report is cross cutting in its links to the Council's Strategic Priorities but in particular:

- Drive growth, regeneration and economic development
- Implement the Environment Capital agenda
- Keep all our communities safe, cohesive and healthy

- 3.2 This sits under the Cabinet Portfolio for Communities and Environment Capital.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Parish Councils (PCs) provide an important and increasingly active part of the overall local government service provision in Peterborough. However, they have struggled in the past to meet the increasing digital agenda and visibility due to lack of funding and general resources.

Initiatives have been investigated in the past but have not come to fruition for one reason or another. With the Council progressing its digital agenda more opportunities are being presented to help parishes and potentially other voluntary bodies to gain a more visible presence.

Following discussions with Cate Harding, Community Capacity Manager, a number of themes were discussed with the Parish Liaison Working Group which would form the focus of this project going forward:

#### **4.2 Connectivity**

This relates to postal, telephone and internet connectivity at community centres and/or village

halls owned or managed by Peterborough City Council (PCC), parish council or Community Association on their behalf. This may be an exclusive or shared office or just a drop in area. Such locations would be identified and an assessment made of their current connectivity. Establish any initiatives that may be of benefit to the location from the Connecting Cambridgeshire project or expanding City Fibre provision. Feed any requirements onto those initiatives for consideration.

#### **Equipment**

- 4.3 Review whether any of the PCs would benefit from equipment that PCC may have available. The general view from the members present at the Parish Council Liaison Meeting is that in most cases they were happy with their current arrangements but it should not be dismissed at this time. Many PC's would benefit from laptops so they are portable and able to be handed over more easily if there is a turnover of staff. This would avoid Clerks using their own computers for the business of the parish council.

#### **Data Storage**

- 4.4 This is probably the area of most concern for PCs. A lot of files are held on local machines or at best in web based storage set up by individuals. This approach gives rise to concerns over data access and security. Ideally files should not be stored on an individual device but within a central location accessible to all those on the PC that need it (see above). A location that is secure and backed up.

The proposal should aim to investigate whether storage could be provisioned and managed by PCC using Amazon Web Services or a similar approach.

#### **.GOV.UK addressing**

- 4.5 Most of the PCs have email and many have a web site however most of these are run on the back on non- government web address eg .org.uk or .co.uk.

It is generally agreed that having a .gov.uk address would give the PCs a sense of local government identity and raise their profile with residents. It also enables the ability to access and collaborate with other local and national government bodies not possible with an non .gov.uk address

The proposal aims to investigate the most effective way of establishing and managing a .GOV.UK address for each PC.

#### **Email**

- 4.6 Most of the PCs have email that will be hosted by one of the mainstream providers (Google, Yahoo and the like). The email will therefore have a non-government address, as mentioned above, and there is little consistency in the naming convention used making it more difficult to identify as a government body.

PCC have recently moved over to GMail themselves in a managed business environment using their .gov.uk addressing.

The proposal would aim to investigate hosting and managing email on behalf of the PCs in the same environment (subject to .gov.uk addressing being adopted).

#### **Web presence - hosted or own**

- 4.7 A number of the PCs have their own web sites however a number do not. Some of the web sites are maintained on a best endeavours basis by individuals so increasingly difficult to keep up to date.

It is proposed to look at adopting a similar model to that currently run by Durham Council. This consists of a standard offering of web pages to which each PC can add and maintain their own content. This provides an easily accessible, consistent theme and content that serves each council. Other PCs would of course be able to continue with their own web site if they so wished.

**5. KEY ISSUES**

5.1 Funding – as it stands no funding is readily available for these proposals. Part of the working group remit will be to identify funding sources. Some high level discussions have been held between the Parish Liaison Working Group and DCLG.

Management of digital services – some of the initiatives if taken up may entail the Council managing services on behalf of the PCs. Any such arrangements will need to be agreed with the PCs involved and PCC.

**6. IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None

**7. CONSULTATION**

7.1 The ideas have been discussed with the Parish Liaison Forum, and taken forward by the Parish Liaison Working Group with the support of the Community Capacity Team.

**8. NEXT STEPS**

8.1 Establish a working group to take the initiative forward to a fully costed proposal to include the appointment of a suitably qualified Project Manager if funding is available. This group will primarily be made up of Parish Council members, City Council Staff and Partners

**9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

9.1 None

**10. APPENDICES**

10.1 None

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