

SUBJECT:	COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Joint Committee on communications in respect of the City of Lincoln Council/North Kesteven District Council Revenues and Benefits shared service.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report updates on key items of communications within the shared service:
- Digital Inclusion;
 - Educational Courses project with Lincoln College
 - North Hykeham Infolinks.

3. Background

- 3.1 This is a report with regard to communications in the shared service, which is a standing agenda item at this committee.
- 3.2 Key items of communication to report on at this meeting, are:

- **Digital Inclusion:**

Our shared service is committed to increasing free digital provision and training throughout City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. As a follow-up to the 'IT Taster Day' which took place at Navenby Local Access Point in April this year, further events took place at NKDC Offices, Sleaford during August. Our lead officer on improving Digital Inclusion services has been extremely proactive at speaking to Parish Clerks, Local Access Points and Infolinks in North Kesteven – a verbal update on progress will be presented on 6th September.

Volunteer and work experience 'Digital Champions' are a key part of ensuring that not only are free IT facilities available but also that personal support is available where customers need this. This also has a dual positive outcome in that the person delivering the digital support is also increasing their own skills and employment opportunities. This link is a press release from July, outlining how this initiative works in City Hall, Lincoln: <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/your-council/news-and-media/latest-news/digital-champions-on-hand-to-help-people-get-online/> .

- **Educational Courses project with Lincoln College**

Members will recall that a project is underway utilising funding from Lincolnshire County Council's Health and Wellbeing Fund, to provide 600 learners with access to free educational courses through Lincoln College over a four year period. The project started in September 2015, being led by the Head of Shared Revenues

and Benefits. Although the funding bid (for £98,000) was through City of Lincoln Council, access to the courses is not 'postcode dependant', so North Kesteven residents could also benefit from this project.

To qualify for course funding, an applicant must meet three of the following five criteria:

- Income between £12,000 and £22,000 per annum;
- Unemployed, looking for work and available to start work;
- Looking for progression;
- Cannot obtain funding for the course elsewhere;
- Any Special Circumstances (needs to be supported by a written statement).

Up to the end of Quarter 1 2016/17, 160 enrolments to courses had been undertaken. Students' employment status at the start of their course, were:

- Full Time Employed: 26
- Part Time Employed: 20
- Voluntary Work: 2
- Unemployed: 112.

Outcomes from those who have completed their course so far, are:

- Learners who have increased wage: 8
- Learners who were unemployed and have moved into employment: 20
- Achievement Rate: 95%
- Withdrawn: 8.

It is expected the success measures will improve further over Quarter 2 2016/17, as a number of learners who had only recently finished their courses are due to enter the 'tracking period' to determine what impact the course had on their employment. Also, a specific project in which Jobcentre Plus are also involved, where an initial 13 learners took part, should also realise successes in Quarters 2 and 3.

Individual case studies are being collated, with a link to one such press release here: <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/your-council/news-and-media/latest-news/free-course-helps-lincoln-jobseekers-find-work/> . Lincoln City Radio also picked up on this press release, and the Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits and the project lead from Lincoln College took part in an interview for radio on 22nd June.

- **North Hykeham Infolinks**

North Hykeham Leisure Centre re-opened on 1st July, following extensive refurbishment. Link to press article here: <http://thelincolnite.co.uk/2016/07/north-kesteven-sports-centre-rebranded-following-3-6m-makeover/> . As part of the newly-opened centre, our Benefits Service has relocated into the building as part of 'Infolinks' and deliver a provision for customer there 4 days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). Our Benefits Service currently operates two service desks at Infolinks and a private interview room is available as and when required. Although this facility is largely used by North Kesteven customers, City of Lincoln customers do occasionally use this facility when it is more convenient for them to drop in at North Hykeham rather than come into the city centre. This provision helps to improve the availability of our Benefits face-to-face service and helps to achieve one of our shared services' aims from the outset of improving customer service.

4. Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 Growing the local economy: The Educational Courses project with Lincoln College increases employment opportunities for residents.
- 4.2 Protecting the poorest people in Lincoln and North Kesteven: The Benefits Service has a key role in reducing poverty and disadvantage; by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money/debt advice. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are key priorities for the shared service.

5. Organisational Impacts

- 5.1 Finance: There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 5.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.
- 5.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct Equality, Diversity or Human Rights implications arising from this report.

6. Risk Implications

- 6.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 Members note this report.

Is this a key decision? Yes/No

Do the exempt information categories apply? Yes/No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? Yes/No

How many appendices does the report contain? None