

## **Pre-policy Briefing Note**

### **Offline Support for Residents**

#### **1 Introduction**

Coventry City Council is committed to ensuring that all residents can access services equitably, regardless of their digital capability. While digital delivery enables efficiency and convenience, a significant number of residents continue to experience digital exclusion. This policy sets out the Council's formal commitment to maintaining inclusive, accessible offline routes and providing appropriate support for residents who are unable or unwilling to engage digitally.

#### **2 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to define the Council's approach to ensuring residents have fair and dignified access to services through both digital and offline channels. Specifically, the Council commits to:

- Guaranteeing alternative access routes for residents who cannot or choose not to use digital channels.
- Providing offline options that are clear, consistent, and accessible.
- Ensuring support is available for residents who require temporary or ongoing assistance.
- Promoting digital inclusion as a continuous process, aligned with resident needs and life circumstances.

#### **3 Scope**

This policy applies to all customer-facing Council services, including commissioned services where the Council is the contracting authority. Internal processes are out of scope unless they directly affect resident access.

#### **4 Policy Principles**

The Council adopts the following principles:

- **Equity of Access:** Offline routes must provide an equitable and dignified alternative to digital channels.
- **Informed Choice:** Residents must be able to access offline and assisted-digital options without pressure to move online.
- **Accessibility by Design:** Services must meet the needs of disabled people, residents with low literacy, speakers of other languages, and proxy users.

- Person-Centred Support: Support for digital capability building must be offered sensitively and in line with individual preference.
- Continuous Improvement: Performance will be monitored through resident effort and satisfaction measures to support ongoing service improvement.
- Integration with #CovConnects: Digital inclusion activity will inform service design and ensure appropriate offline provision is maintained.
- Digital First (Where Appropriate): Digital design will be prioritised to support efficiency, while safeguarding the needs of residents who rely on offline routes.
- Evidence-Led Insight: Information gathered through structured applications will inform holistic support for financially vulnerable households.
- Clarity of Access: The Council will maintain accurate, accessible online information outlining all contact routes.
- Innovative Access: AI-enabled search tools will be considered to widen access for residents with language or literacy barriers.

## **5 Strategic Alignment**

### **One Coventry Plan 2022-2030**

The One Coventry Plan sets out our shared vision for a fairer, more prosperous and sustainable city and is centred around three delivery priorities:

- Improving outcomes and tackling inequalities within our communities
- Improving the economic prosperity of the city and regions
- Tackling causes and consequences of climate change

This Policy supports the ambitions set out within the Plan by:

- Providing clear and accessible online services, for those who can self-serve.
- Offering accessible, high-quality face to face and offline support to those who are unable to access services online or via the phone.
- Empowering residents to gain confidence and knowledge to move online where this is a barrier.

## **6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**

The Council is committed to ensuring that our services are equitable, fair and responsive to the diverse needs of our residents.

Coventry ranks second nationally for digital inclusion, yet significant pockets of digital exclusion remain. Vulnerable groups - including older adults, low-income families, and those with health or housing challenge - face barriers to accessing essential services. This policy seeks to address these barriers through clearly defining the offline support available to our residents.

## 7 Council Commitments

Permanent Offline Routes include:

### Telephone Access

- Maintain published service phone lines, with emergency out-of-hours provision where appropriate.
- Provide dedicated specialist lines (e.g. Adult Social Care, Housing, Education).
- Offer Text Relay services on Adult Social Care lines.
- Provide free telephone access points at Family Hubs across the city.

### Face-to-Face Access

- Deliver walk-in support at the Customer Service Centre, Family Hubs and Civic Centre.
- Assist with completing forms, navigating services, and supported online access.
- Prioritise residents with acute or vulnerable circumstances, including homelessness and safeguarding needs.

### Paper and Postal Access

- Provide printed materials and alternative formats on request, including large print, braille, and easy-read.
- Maintain Plain English, accessible form design.

## 8 #Cov Connects

#CovConnects is Coventry City Council's city-wide digital inclusion programme, working with public, private, voluntary and community sector partners to reduce digital exclusion and support equitable access to services.

- The programme plays a **dual role** within this policy:
- Enabling residents who *want* to build digital confidence and capability to do so

Ensuring that the Council's wider service design recognises, plans for, and sustains the needs of residents who rely on **offline or assisted-digital routes**, either permanently or at different points in their lives

## 8.1 Informing Policy and Service Design

#CovConnects provides ongoing insight into digital exclusion and resident experience, informing:

- Service reviews and transformation programmes
- Evidence based channel shift decisions
- Corporate policies and standards relating to access and inclusion

## 8.2 Device Access

The Council, through #CovConnects and its partners, supports access to appropriate devices where this enables residents to engage with services on their own terms.

This includes:

- Public access PCs at the Customer Service Centre, Libraries and Family Hubs
- Reused devices and connectivity distributed via the #CovConnects Device Bank to community, council and NHS services
- Library Laptop Loans, including provision through the Housebound Library Service

Access to devices is offered **alongside, not in place of, offline service routes**, recognising that not all residents are able or willing to use digital technologies.

## 8.3 Connectivity

Through partnership delivery, #CovConnects supports residents to access affordable and short-term connectivity where appropriate, including:

- Access to the National Databank via Digital Inclusion Hubs
- Loaned Mi-Fi devices through the Device Bank and Library Laptop Loan scheme
- Free guest Wi-Fi in council buildings
- Promotion of social tariffs through Cost-of-Living support

These measures are intended to reduce exclusion and hardship, while acknowledging that connectivity alone does not remove all barriers to access

## 8.4 Skills Confidence, and Assisted Support

#CovConnects recognises that digital inclusion is not solely a technical challenge, but a social and confidence-based one.

The programme supports:

- Digital Skills Champion training for council staff, particularly those in frontline and customer-facing roles
- Informal, community-based digital support delivered through partners
- Progression routes to accredited digital skills through Adult Education Services
- City-wide networks that strengthen the capacity of organisations providing offline and assisted-digital support

Assisted support is delivered in a **person-centred way**, respecting residents' choices and circumstances, and without placing pressure on individuals to move online

## 9 Service Standards (Design & Operation)

All services **must** meet these minimum standards:

### Access

- At least one phone and one face-to-face/paper route, prominently advertised online and in buildings.
- CCC website is kept up to date and written in Plain English.
- Translation tool is available across the website. Frontline staff provide support to access and translate the website as appropriate.

### Accessibility

- Step-free access, hearing loops, BSL/video relay, braille/tactile signage where feasible; quiet spaces for sensitive conversations.

### Resident Satisfaction

- Ease of access for paper forms, phone scripts, and in-person workflows is regularly tested through resident effort and satisfaction surveys, and any identified pain-points flagged with the relevant service area.