



GETTING ONLINE

Digital Inclusion
Strategy 2013 - 2015

I. Strategy statement

1.1 Digital access and skills are becoming vital to maintaining residents' financial health and well being. The digital world is changing fast and Octavia Housing with it. We want residents not online to get online. This will help sustain their tenancies and build their lives at a time of extensive external change. We also want as many residents as possible to take up our own efficient and flexible on line services.

1.2 Digital access and skills give residents greater choice to lower cost services, can improve their employability, connect them with Octavia's own online services, and connect those isolated with friends and relatives. With welfare reform, digital inclusion is vital for tenancy sustainment. In this context, Octavia will offer assistance to residents digitally excluded to go online by offering: free internet access points at our head office; opportunities to acquire effective on line skills; sign posting to the support provided by specialist partner organisations; and going forward we will explore how we can enhance internet access in our schemes through multiple digital channels.

1.3 To achieve this we will tackle the key barriers of: access; skills; and motivation.

2. Definition and background

2.1 For the purposes of this strategy, digital inclusion is defined as:

'Providing assistance to help residents to go online, where they lack regular access to the internet and / or they do not have the skills to use services, maximise work opportunities, or communicate online effectively.'

2.2 47% of the 8.7 million adults in the UK who have never been online live in social housing. Households on a low income and older people are particularly over-represented amongst those who are not online. In 2010 the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills funded a mutual company UK Online Centres to run marketing campaigns and promote the network of community organisations providing digital inclusion services. In 2012 the Social Housing Providers Digital Inclusion Strategy Group published 'Digital by Default' to encourage the social housing sector to join in the push for digital inclusion.

2.3 An important recent driver for digital inclusion is welfare reform. A key change will be the rolling together of most benefits into one Universal Credit payment. This will be implemented in phases from October 2013 to 2017. Claims and management of Universal Credit is expected to occur online. In February 2013 we conducted a survey of Octavia residents of working age and in receipt of part or full Housing Benefit. Key findings relating to digital use were:

- ▶ 21% of residents surveyed had no internet access at home or elsewhere;
- ▶ 36% had never made an electronic payment;
- ▶ 4% paid rent by electronic payment;
- ▶ 0% paid rent online;
- ▶ 38% said they wanted support to set up electronic rent payments in the future.

2.4 In addition to the external context, Octavia provide a range of online services. Currently 385 residents subscribe to SeeMyData, our secure online service. Many more residents could benefit from this service. These include the core services of making rent payments and ordering and tracking repair orders. With our Smarter Working initiatives our online service will develop and we will look to improve access through

widening the use of different digital devices. This will also make our service more efficient and responsive. We will promote these benefits at key customer contacts to increase usage of our online services. We want to see as many of our residents online as possible to maximise these gains.

3. Building on success

3.1 This is Octavia's first Digital Inclusion Strategy. However we have already done some good work in this regard through a number of initiatives. We want to build on these successes, which include:

- ▶ Through our Silver Surfers project, we have provided older residents with opportunities to go online and provided training on IT and internet skills.
- ▶ Our Employment and Training service have referred people to computer skills courses, and provided assistance with job searches and CVs.
- ▶ Through education grants, the Foundation have helped with the costs of those in education and unable to afford a computer / laptop.
- ▶ We already provide a range of online services including paying rent on line, ordering and tracking repairs.
- ▶ We have increasingly made use of texting including as a tool for arrears management and as reminders of repairs appointments.
- ▶ Residents can initiate a CRM contact themselves to track their contact with us.
- ▶ Octavia Housing's Twitter account provides valuable updates about Octavia, related organisations and housing policy news.
- ▶ Octavia Foundation's Twitter and Facebook accounts promotes the work of our shops and our social enterprise activities.





4. Our aims

4.1 The aim of this strategy is to help residents who are not online to overcome the barriers. We will especially target two resident groups:

- ▶ Those of working age who are claiming benefits and who are not online / or not accessing services online.
- ▶ Older residents who are not online and lack confidence to use the internet.

We see the key barriers that we need to tackle as being:

- ▶ Lack of access
- ▶ Lack of skills and confidence.
- ▶ Motivation

5. How will we achieve those aims?

5.1 Widening access

5.1.1 Internet access points in reception area

We will make internet access points available to all residents to use free of charge during office opening hours in our reception area at Emily House. Access will be limited to the Octavia website and those providing public and information services. No booking is required but residents can make a booking (to a maximum of two hours) if this is more convenient. PCs are screened off to provide some privacy. Where greater privacy is required, our interview rooms also have PCs and internet access.

5.1.2 UK Online Centre and the Exchange Group

At various locations in our communities, the UK Online Centre and the Exchange Group provide free training with basic IT and online skills including email, internet searching, internet safety and using online public services. We will promote their services widely and encourage residents who can benefit to take up the opportunities.

5.1.3 Mobile working

As part of Smarter Working our front line Officers will be provided with mobile electronic devices, and will be trained to show residents when they are on visits how to access our online services and those of other public services. They can also make referrals to relevant services or book appointments whilst on site.

5.1.4 Low cost equipment / grants

Residents with particular financial difficulties and in full time education can apply for an education grant from the Octavia Foundation. There are several organisations who sell low cost / second hand computers and internet equipment – we will provide information about these services where needed. We will also look to re-condition older IT stock that Octavia Housing is disposing of, either to sell through our shops or to gift to residents in need.

5.1.5 Forward looking – Smart TVs, Smart Phones, wifi on schemes

The digital world is changing fast. Several digital TV companies already offer easy coded links to landlords' websites, a number of landlords already offer rent payment or reporting repair / ASB services through phone apps, and some are partnering with private sector companies to provide free wifi on their schemes. We will research and consider initiatives to make best use of multiple digital channels, explore the viability of piloting internet access on our schemes, and look to any partnership arrangements that may assist. We will cost out any new initiatives to ensure affordability and value for money.

5.1.6 Funding streams

A number of Telecommunications companies, internet providers, Government departments and third sector organisations provide grants to get communities online. To maximise our capacity to provide initiatives that widen digital access we will research external funding streams available and make best use of funding opportunities.

5.2 Improving skills and confidence

5.2.1 Volunteer digital champions / welfare reform

The Octavia Foundation will look to provide a service that gives one to one support with acquiring internet skills. This will be particularly focused on residents who need to up skill to claim and maintain their benefit claims online. The service will be provided through volunteer digital champions who will be available at designated sessions in our office and can carry out home visits where needed. We will consider providing group sessions at community hubs if there is the demand. Key courses delivered will be: how to apply for and manage Universal Credit online; managing bank accounts on line; budgeting skills; using online advice services; products on e learning lounge; making best use of our online services.

5.2.2 IT4Communities

IT4Communities is a charity and provides a service through IT professionals who have volunteered a number of hours each week to advance the organisation's charitable work. We will make links with IT4Communities and seek to benefit from the service to assist residents.

5.2.3 Digital Unite

We will promote the services of Digital Unite, a charity that provides free e learning courses on digital skills; a small network of free local IT tutors; and individual bursaries to those digitally excluded to help them overcome barriers.

5.2.4 Silver surfers

On a regular basis we provide IT and internet use taster sessions and training for older residents. These sessions will be provided through our Digital Champions and will encompass the basics of how to use a keyboard and mouse, through internet searching / using online services, to connecting with friends and family online.

5.3 Motivation and publicising the benefits of being online



We will publicise our digital inclusion services and those of partner organisations, and highlight the benefits of being online to encourage take up of services:

5.3.1 **Get online week / Yourspace! 2013**

In June 2013 we will hold a Get online week with a number of events to publicise the importance of getting online to residents. The focus will be on welfare reform and promoting our online services. As part of the week we will launch our free wifi access points in the reception area of Emily House. The week will culminate in Yourspace! 2013 with a key speaker, welfare reform and online workshop, information stands, and tablet prize draw. Once Smarter Working initiatives are further progressed we will mount a campaign where staff will pro-actively encourage sign up to our secure online web area.

5.3.2 **Welfare reform / tenancy sustainment / employment and training**

A key benefit and driver for being online is welfare reform, and the need for residents to acquire the skills to make and maintain their Universal Credit claims online. We will emphasise to residents that this is essential for them to safeguard their income if they are on benefits and to sustain their tenancy. In addition, being online will increase their work and training opportunities. Our Employment and Training programme provides help with online job searches, updating CVs, job applications online, and job-ready e training courses.

5.3.3 **New Octavia website / services: choice, efficiency and saving money**

We will promote our new website dedicated for residents and publicise our online services, including the key services of: payment of rent; reporting repairs; and providing feedback. Through SeeMyData residents can initiate contacts, update contact details and track repairs. By signing up and using our services online residents will receive a more immediate, efficient and responsive service. We will promote these benefits to residents at sign up, at key contacts during tenancies and through regular publicity campaigns. As set out above, we will aspire to make best use of multiple digital channels in the future to make our online services even more accessible and attractive.

More generally, it is estimated that an average household can save up to £500 a year by switching to online services, checking comparative prices and online shopping. Many businesses provide different prices for the same product on and off line. Online services also provide flexibility in terms of time and immediacy. We will promote these benefits to attract residents to take up digital inclusion services.

5.3.4 **Connecting with friends and relatives**

Our older residents and those with a disability spend more time at home than other residents. Being online can help them stay better connected with friends and family who live a distance away, improving their well being. We will promote the social value of being online.

6. How will we know if this strategy is working

6.1 Each area of digital inclusion work set out in Section 5 above will set its own targets, monitor performance and report against measurable outputs to its project group or to Directors.

6.2 Key performance indicators across the projects include:

- ▶ Number of residents helped with benefit claims online.
- ▶ Number of sign-posting to UK Online Centres and other external digital inclusion service.
- ▶ Take up of volunteer digital champion service.
- ▶ Number of residents using Octavia's services online and number of times logged onto secure areas.
- ▶ Changes to numbers of residents using online services for target groups.
- ▶ Residents' use of our online services shown by analytics activity patterns.
- ▶ Number of residents helped to go live for the first time.
- ▶ Increased 'digital confidence' from findings of resident surveys.
- ▶ Research findings and proposals on future use of digital technology.

7. Promoting the strategy

7.1 We will promote and publicise this strategy as part of the Octavia 'offer' to residents. This will be done through:

- ▶ Promotion on our website;
- ▶ Promotion on the Hub;
- ▶ Articles in the 'Update' and the Staff briefing;
- ▶ Feedback at team meetings, resident and staff events;
- ▶ Get online week / Octavia online services campaign/ Yourspace! 2013.



