



## DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

### STATEMENT

#### **March 2022**

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Everyone in Scotland has the right to access the digital skills they need to do their jobs, lead their lives, and confidently use digital services. In Scotland; Councils, Housing Associations, tenants, and community organisations are increasingly turning to digital methods to find new ways to engage, communicate, and consult.

As well as continuing to rethink how we offer services; Spire View and Copperworks Housing Associations are aware that social housing tenants are still the most digitally excluded in society. Despite this, more and more public and commercial services are being designed as "digital by default" including bin and bulk collection, council tax, welfare benefits, including the Universal Credit system on which so many of our tenants will rely on going forward.

There are also the proven benefits of being able to access services online to get cheaper products and service, to learn and to access jobs and training. We therefore must make sure we play our part to make it easier for tenants to get online confidently to engage and carry out business with us and others.

Spire View and Copperworks Housing Associations will support digital engagement in the community.

We are committed to assisting tenants and service users to access online services and make sure no one is being excluded. In doing this we will offer advice, assistance and support.

Our Housing Management Team will assist tenants to access online claims for Universal Credit. We will also signpost tenants to Roystonhill Community Hub, Job Centre and Library where basic digital skills training is available.

We will also make referrals on the tenant's behalf to our Money Advice Officers / Financial Capability Officer and Tenancy Support Officer who can also support tenants to make online claims or access online services.

Housing Officers can also assist tenants and access the PC's in the interview rooms at our discretion.

The Association also employ a Digital Engagement Officer (DEO) based at Roystonhill Community Hub. The DEO will support our tenants / residents and staff by firstly:

- Ensuring people of all ages that do not have the confidence or the required skills receive the appropriate support and training to enable them get online.
- Aiding access to online services
- Developing digital skills to improve employability and financial management
- One to-one training by our digital champions
- Make available appropriate devices from our digital lending library and provide data where required for **those low income households**

Although the Associations publications are available online we will continue to issue hard copies of Newsletters, Annual Reports and Landlord Reports. All other Policies, Application Forms and other documents are available for download on our websites. If our customers can't get access to these the Association will provide hard copies of these documents on request.

Digital Engagement is not just being able to access online it's also about being able to be confident online. Spire View and Copperworks will ensure where possible we assist and support all our services users to access online services.

### Who is at most risk of being digitally excluded?

Low income households	As social inequalities increase, internet use reduces.
People with lower skills level	There is a great deal of variance in individuals abilities to locate content online. Hence, merely offering people a connected machine will not ensure that they can use the medium to meet their needs.
Older people	<p>The internet may be perceived as a younger person's domain.</p> <p>Certainly, computers with internet are seen as essential for households with working-age adults but not for pensioners.</p> <p>But many services, such as banking, telephones and utilities offer discounts for internet only users, so exclusion from these offers becomes an income and expenditure issue.</p>
People with disabilities	<p>Access to quality public services is of particular importance for those people with greater social needs.</p> <p>Those who have more social needs require more interaction with public services but are less likely to be digitally included.</p> <p>Enhanced working and environmental savings through more stimulating and flexible remote work practices could be seen as a key benefit of having vulnerable or more isolated groups digitally included.</p>
The long term unemployed	Unemployed people who use online services can increase their chances of securing employment.

### Promoting digital inclusion – benefits for landlords and tenants

For many landlords the use of technology has become an increasingly important way of delivering their services, for example expanding online services to include repair reporting, making rent payments and (for housing applicants) applying for a house. We have outlined some of the benefits of digital inclusion below: -

<b><u>Benefits for Landlords</u></b>
Landlords can improve communication with tenants by opening up new channels of engagement e.g. consultations, satisfaction surveys and discussion forums.
Online communication may appeal to those who may not normally take part in consultations etc. as there is no requirement to be at a certain place at a certain time.
Online rent transaction can lower rent arrears and leads to faster and cheaper income collection processes.
Offering tenants choices in how to access information and services will be seen to have more value for tenants, and acknowledges that landlords appreciate that their tenants are all different.
Cost savings: it has been estimated that up to £2 billion can be saved annually across the UK's public sector if just a third of contacts made by citizens were done digitally.
Landlords can transmit audio and video over the internet.
<b><u>Benefits for Tenants</u></b>
Saving Money – offline households are missing out on an average saving of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online.
Accessing services after office hours e.g. paying rent and reporting repairs.
Supporting tenants to learn IT skills makes them more employable.
Internet access could enable tenants to access documents such as their tenancy agreement/handbook or policy documents more easily.