

Mapping Resources which Support Community Use of ICT in Carmarthenshire Executive Summary



Chris Lewis
Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services
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Communities @One
Cymunedau @Ei Gilydd



Wales Co-operative Centre
Canolfan Cydweithredol Cymru





Carmarthenshire
CONNECT
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Sir Gaerfyrddin

About Carmarthenshire Connect

This study was undertaken as part of CAVS' Carmarthenshire Connect project funded by the Communities@One programme.

Carmarthenshire Connect works with community groups in Carmarthenshire's Communities First areas to help them take photos and videos of community activities and share them on a communal blog.

More information can be found at: <http://www.carmsconnect.org.uk>.

Communities @One Cymunedau @Ei Gilydd



About Communities @One

Communities @One is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative to help people in Communities First areas make the most of new technology. The programme is jointly funded through the European Union's Objective 1 and 2 programme and the Welsh Assembly Government. Communities @One is administered by the Wales Co-operative Centre.

Communities @One helps people use technology in the communities that need it most in Wales. The project provides support to community groups and voluntary sector organisations to engage with technologies in ways relevant to their lives.



About CAVS

Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS) is the County Voluntary Council for Carmarthenshire. CAVS is an independent charity which provides advice, support, information and training to voluntary and community groups.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report summarises the major results and recommendations of a study to map community provision of ICT and digital media facilities and services across Carmarthenshire, identifying areas of under-provision and investigating barriers to access. The study was undertaken by Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services as part of its Communities @One funded Carmarthenshire Connect project between February and May 2008. Cross references in this summary refer to the full report which is available from the Carmarthenshire Connect website at:<http://www.carmsconnect.org.uk/resources/survey/>.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Aim

To inform future planning for the provision of ICT facilities and support structures to the communities of Carmarthenshire.

Objectives

To determine the extent and scope of current community ICT provision across Carmarthenshire

To highlight geographic areas which are currently under-resourced or otherwise encounter exclusion in terms of access to community ICT provision

To compare provision within rural areas, urban areas and Communities First areas across the County

To determine any limitations on access to ICT by the community, either in terms of the uses to which it can be put, or the mode of accessing it

To identify barriers (whether real or perceived, social, cultural, educational or economic) which prevent the community from accessing ICT effectively, or at all

2. Methodology

The mapping study comprised two questionnaire surveys, one targeted at providers of ICT and digital media facilities and services to the community (the *Provider* survey) and another targeted at community and voluntary sector groups (the *Groups* survey).

66 providers of community ICT and digital media resources were invited to complete an online survey. The comprehensive sample included local authority operated resources, community venues, community education and training providers and resources provided through community and voluntary sector organisations and

social enterprises. After response management and follow up telephone interviews a response rate of 86% was achieved.

500 community and voluntary sector organisations were invited to take part in the Groups survey using a sample constructed from the comprehensive CAVS mailing list. 183 of these were contacted via email and asked to complete the survey online, whilst the remainder were sent a printed questionnaire and a freepost return envelope. In total 86 responses were received, leading to an overall response rate of 17.2%.

Both surveys requested the postcodes of respondents in order to locate them geographically by Community Network area, Communities First area and within a rural / urban classification drawn from the definitions of Carmarthenshire's Rural Development Plan.

3. Highlighted Findings of the Provider Survey

Carmarthenshire County Council provides the major means of access to community ICT and digital media facilities and services, largely through the library service, community education centres and the basic skills service. Some provision is available through community focused schools, although this has probably yet to reach its full potential. The community and voluntary sector is also an important provider through village halls and community centres and larger second tier organisations. There is also some small scale provision made available by the private sector (*see 3.1.1.*) Overall providers appear to be working just short of their maximum capacity, leaving little room to develop provision without additional investment (*see 3.1.8.*)

The location of community ICT providers is split fairly evenly between rural and urban areas, though there is an emphasis on the Llanelli and Taf Myrddin community network areas. 20% of resources are based in Communities First areas (*see 3.1.3.*) Catchment areas for resources tend overwhelmingly towards the local: 40% of respondents reported they served their local area (town or village) only (*see 3.1.4.*)

Most community ICT resources are only available during normal working hours. 84% reported opening on weekday mornings, whereas only 34% were open on Saturday mornings (*see 3.1.5.*)

Most ICT facilities are able to provide access to basic IT equipment (desktops, laptops and printers). There is less provision for digital media usage, such as digital stills cameras, camcorders, video editing and audio facilities (*see 3.1.6, 3.4.*)

Some common restrictions on the use of community ICT facilities were reported. These included restrictions on downloading software (39%), playing games (34%), watching video (29%) and social networking (26%) (*see 3.5.*)

1-1 support is available at many ICT facilities with more structured support or training made available by a small number of key providers (*see 3.1.7.*) Where more structured support is made available this is generally in the areas of basic Office software and use of the web (*see 3.4.*)

Lack of funding remains the most widely reported barrier to improving provision amongst community ICT providers (26%). The overall funding mix employed by providers is the use of grant funding for capital costs, with revenue costs generated through charges or other income. A variety of grant sources has been used to fund capital expenditure, with European funding being the most common source (*see 3.7.*)

Most equipment provided by community ICT providers is relatively new (66% reported purchase within the previous 3 years). However, many respondents had no current plans for reinvestment (32%) or were not aware of any such plans (18%) (*see 3.7.*)

4. Highlighted Findings of the Groups Survey

Respondents to the Groups survey reported widespread use of ICT. 80% of respondents used ICT directly in their community activities or to support their activities; 50% of community groups responding owned their own ICT equipment. Amongst all community groups using ICT there is significant use of personal (70%) and workplace (22%) ICT equipment to support community and voluntary activity (*see 4.2.*)

The most common reason respondents noted for not using ICT was that they had no need to use it (29%). Other responses indicated lack of access, time and suitable training were barriers (*see 4.7.*)

Community groups in Carmarthenshire mainly use ICT to support administrative activity, for email and for accessing the web. Less use is made of newer social and digital media technologies (with the exception of editing and printing digital photographs) (*see 4.3.*)

Most community group access to the internet is via members' own computers (62%). 45% of community groups could access the internet via their own PC; only 3% of respondents had no access whatsoever. Broadband access was widely

available amongst respondents: 79% of respondents who gave an answer were able to access the internet via broadband. 59% of respondents who gave an answer had their own website (*see 4.4.*)

Access to structured ICT support by community groups was much less in evidence than for providers of ICT resources. Only 33% of respondents had an ICT support contract in place, with many community groups relying on self help or the assistance of local informal experts for ICT support. The survey revealed that a service providing 1-1 technical support or tuition would be welcomed by many community groups, although most respondents indicated they could not afford to pay for such a service (*see 4.5.*)

Community groups fund their ICT equipment through a mixture of grant funding from a variety of sources (63%) and member contributions (53%). Equipment owned by community groups is relatively new: 51% had purchased equipment in the previous 12 months, whilst a further 42% had purchased within the previous 3 years (*see 4.6.*)

Amongst users of ICT, there was significant agreement that the main barriers to effective use by community groups were lack of expertise or training (30%) and lack of funding (28%) (*see 4.7.*).

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: A strategy for the development of community ICT facilities should ensure that provision is located within local communities as far as is practical, should build on existing resources wherever appropriate and should involve the local community in its planning and operation.

Recommendation 2: Investigate the potential for increasing the community's access to existing facilities. This could include extending their opening hours or, where appropriate, supporting them to broaden their client bases.

Recommendation 3: Consider expanding community ICT access at a local level by supporting community venues to install broadband internet, wireless networks and small numbers of open-access PCs for the benefit of the wider community. Consider tying such support to a requirement to act as a host venue for ICT training and providing internet access to local communities and the general public.

Recommendation 4: Support should be given to providers of community-based ICT training to invest in portable ICT equipment to conduct training at local venues.

Recommendation 5: Consideration should be given to developing a mobile training facility consisting of suitably packaged laptops and transport for the use of training providers and local venues providing ICT training at a local level.

Recommendation 6: In the development of community ICT facilities, provision for the use of digital and social media by the community should be included.

Recommendation 7: Providers of ICT facilities should review their usage policies to ensure that they do not unnecessarily restrict positive uses of digital and social media technologies whilst remaining appropriate to their particular situations and ensuring the safety of their clients.

Recommendation 8: Ensure the accessibility of community ICT facilities to disabled people by providing support for the removal of physical barriers to access alongside support for ICT developments, or requiring location of facilities in accessible venues as a condition of support for ICT developments.

Recommendation 9: A local service providing advice and support in adaptive technologies and improving access to ICT for disabled people should be established and should draw on the existing expertise of specialist organisations. Support for community ICT facilities to purchase or loan adaptive technology should also be considered.

Recommendation 10: Greater investment in the provision of mobile support services is essential to ensure that effective use of ICT is made by community groups and users of small scale community ICT facilities.

Recommendation 11: The benefit to the community of community group members' use of their own ICT equipment to support community activity should be recognised by providing them with technical support as part of any wider support service developed.

Recommendation 12: Services should be established to enable community groups and smaller community ICT facilities across the whole County to access 1–1 technical support.

Recommendation 13: Support services should consider building on existing informal support structures that community groups employ and providing training and recognition for the many volunteer IT experts that currently provide support for community groups.

Recommendation 14: Consider establishing telephone support and self–help support networks to run alongside any formal 1–1 support provision.

Recommendation 15: The provision of technical support to the community sector should be designed to be flexible and capable of being responsive to the particular needs and unique situations of each individual community group.

Recommendation 16: Support should be provided for ICT and digital media training for community groups and members of the general public.

Recommendation 17: Providers should consider promoting a range of targeted training and support for community groups which includes basic IT skills, more advanced applications and making best use of social and digital media.

Recommendation 18: Providers should consider providing training and support in website development for community groups

Recommendation 19: Providers should consider promoting targeted activities to community groups as a way of engaging older people in using ICT effectively.

Recommendation 20: Providers of community ICT and digital media facilities should consider developing strategies for the planned replacement of equipment at regular intervals.

Recommendation 21: Sustainable business plans, which take account of the likely pressures of funding, should be developed for new community ICT facilities and those which are being supported to expand.

Recommendation 22: Funding support should be provided for community groups to purchase replacement ICT equipment.

Recommendation 23: Support and advice on IT procurement and the development of a sustainable approach to ICT development should be made available to community groups.

Recommendation 24: Consideration should be given to developing specific grant schemes for larger community groups which combine funding for capital expenditure with tailored ICT support and support for the development of sustainable IT strategies.