



## SCVO Social Housing Digital Champions Network Evaluation

Final Report

Conducted for:



Contact: [alastair@thelinesbetween.co.uk](mailto:alastair@thelinesbetween.co.uk)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

- i. The Social Housing Digital Champions Network (the 'Network') is a Scottish Government-funded initiative, implemented by SCVO. It aims to create Digital Champions within housing associations who encourage and support tenants to develop their digital skills and increase their use of digital tools. They are supported by Digital Motivators who co-ordinate digital activity. SCVO commissioned The Lines Between to evaluate the Network and identify its success in achieving its outcomes. Fifteen people from 11 associations were interviewed about their views and experiences of the network<sup>1</sup>.

### Organisational impact

- ii. Support to embed digital participation into core service delivery varied between and within associations. A strong commitment to digital at a senior level was seen as key to facilitating digital change within an association and empowering Motivators. Buy-in was usually evident at this senior level between management and Motivators.
- iii. The extent of buy-in often related to the existing level of interest in digital when associations became involved with the Network. For some Motivators, the Network came at the right time for their association. Other associations were at an earlier stage of their digital journey and were still obtaining buy-in from staff.
- iv. In some cases, despite a commitment to digital and ideas of how to drive digital change, embedding this in practice was difficult. Sometimes this was because of staff changes at senior level. In other organisations, staff were discouraged by the time and energy required to embed digital at the "action stage".
- v. Some Motivators were asked by senior managers to join the Network; others volunteered. In either case, many embraced the opportunity to take part. Several were already involved in digital before engaging in the Network and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to further drive digital change.
- vi. Motivators were generally successful in recruiting Champions from a range of roles within their associations. While most Motivators were happy with the type and range of staff in the Network, a few felt that all their staff should undertake Champion training to ensure digital was widely embedded. Many associations used the Essential Digital Skills framework to assess the digital skills of staff.
- vii. Champions were usually happy to undertake the training, but some Motivators described resistance among staff and challenges to achieving buy-in. Careful consideration is being given to how the programme is promoted to staff, to encourage participation. Recruiting Champions was easier in associations where staff understood what the role entailed, and could see a link between digital and their everyday roles.
- viii. There was mixed use of the term 'Digital Champions' among associations. Where it was used, this helped to clarify responsibility for digital and most Champions were

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<sup>1</sup> This comprised seven Digital Motivators, seven Digital Champions and one tenant.

comfortable being described as a Digital Champion. In some cases, the term 'Digital Champion' was adapted to achieve buy-in.

### **Impact on tenants**

- ix. Increased confidence among Motivators and Champions is one of the key successes of the Network's delivery. There was a clear sense that they understand the value of digital skills and can explain and discuss digital with peers and tenants.
- x. Motivators and Champions were generally keen to embed digital activity with their tenants as widely as possible. Identifying which tenants to engage in digital was often Champion-led and reflected their role in their association. A range of everyday opportunities for engagement were described.
- xi. For many, the Network has reframed the concept of digital and conversations about it. There is clear recognition that digital skills and tools vary and that approaches are often straightforward and small scale. They can be easily incorporated into the daily lives of staff and tenants. The Essential Digital Skills Framework was useful in gauging tenants' skills which helped Champions plan and maximise the impact of their engagement.
- xii. Champions have successfully passed on a range of digital skills through everyday interactions with tenants. Universal Credit was often described as a key 'hook', in terms of an opportunity to support tenants to manage it online. Other examples included setting up email addresses, scheduling repairs, writing CVs or assisting with online tasks such as shopping or checking bus times. Tenants highlighted benefits such as increased access to entertainment, news and games online, and using Google for research.
- xiii. In many cases, there was an important social element to tenants gaining new digital skills. Greater use of social media enabled tenants to connect with others and digital groups facilitated new friendships among tenants and staff. Others use Facetime to speak to friends and family, or contacted people they had lost touch with.
- xiv. Some Motivators and Champions highlighted difficulties in engaging tenants. Staff in a few associations reflected that not all tenants want to engage with digital because they cannot see the relevance to them. Fear of digital and a lack of confidence was a key issue for some tenants, particularly older individuals. Other tenants might not have the means, technology or physical ability to engage with digital. Associations discussed steps they had undertaken to try and increase engagement, such as advertising digital activities, empowering tenants to lead activities, introducing lending clubs and free access to wifi and devices within communal areas.

### **Effectiveness and future delivery**

- xv. Feedback on the Motivator Bootcamp and Champions training was largely positive. Staff liked the tailored nature of the training, that it was specific to the housing sector, and the value of bringing together representatives from a variety of associations. A few reflected on the social nature of the Bootcamp which helped develop new relationships.
- xvi. The peer support provided by the programme was particularly valued by Motivators - both the networking opportunities and the ongoing communications, primarily via Slack, that took place after the training. These connections were key in sharing ideas, advice and examples of how to help tenants.

- xvii. The SCVO trainers were widely praised for their delivery of the Bootcamps and the sessions for Champions. They were knowledgeable about the housing sector and this made the training feel relevant to staff and their associations. Motivators felt SCVO were invaluable as an ongoing source of support and in answering their queries.
- xviii. Some Motivators were undertaking, or planned to undertake, the Certificate in Digital Inclusion Project Management qualification since completing the training. This has helped them devise and implement realistic and achievable digital inclusion strategies.
- xix. The Network has encouraged some associations to revise or streamline their internal processes and encourage efficiencies. These efficiencies have positive implications for the longer-term sustainability of the Network in that they free up the time and energy required for staff to embed digital into their core delivery. By having this wider impact, associations are more likely to buy-in to the positive role of digital in the longer-term.

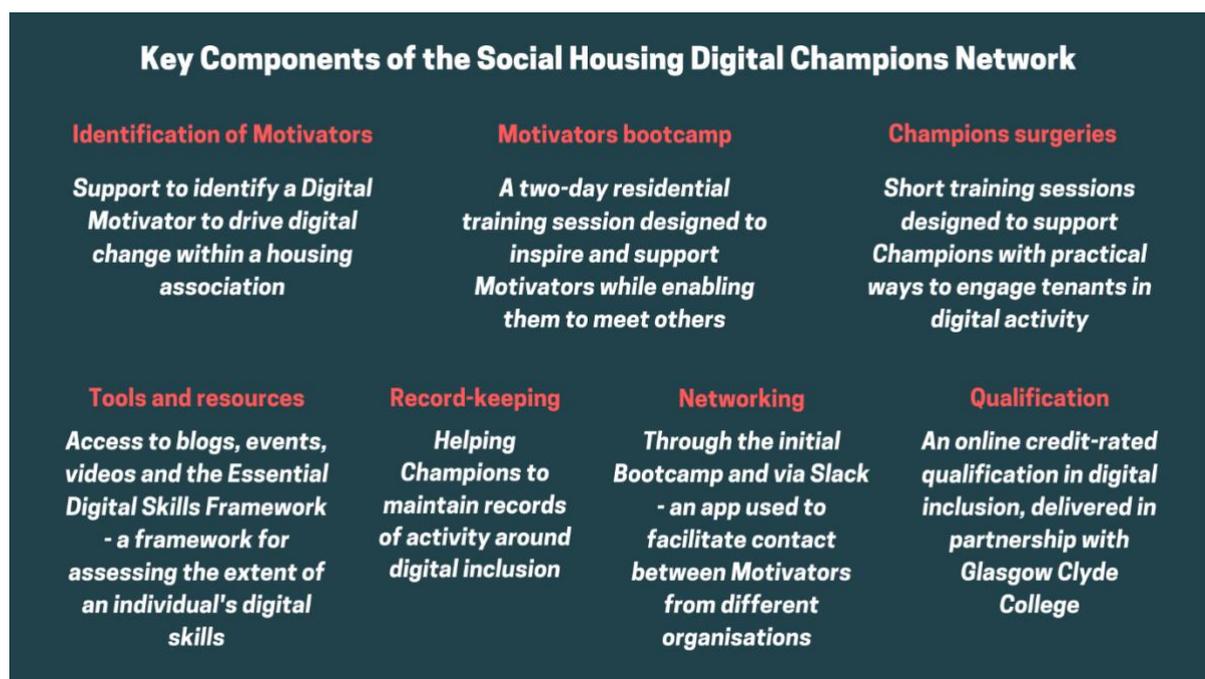
### Conclusions and recommendations

- xx. The core components of the Social Housing Digital Champions Network have worked well, and it has already benefitted participating associations and their tenants:
  - Motivators and Champions were largely positive about both the Bootcamp and Champions surgeries which encourage a focus on digital and develop relationships.
  - Networking and continued support throughout have been particularly valuable to Motivators to share experiences, ideas and examples of how to drive digital change.
  - The tools and resources have been useful, with the Essential Digital Skills Framework which has been used to gauge the digital abilities of both their staff and tenants.
  - Motivators and Champions have seen their confidence around digital increase and feel better able and more empowered to engage with tenants.
  - Tenants and colleagues are being given person-centred support to understand the benefits of digital, increasing their own confidence and social inclusion.
- xxi. Key programme features - which are important to replicate should the programme be used in other sectors - are summarised below, alongside potential improvements:
  - Continuing to target relevant senior managers to train as Motivators to encourage organisational buy-in and enable practical change.
  - Offering more places on the Bootcamp for additional staff, and spending more time discussing the challenges of achieving buy-in and the barriers to using digital.
  - Ensuring staff clearly understand what digital means and how digital activities would affect their day-to-day roles to allay any misconceptions and fears around digital.
  - Helping Champions understand the practical implications of digital for their roles, the risks associated with digital and how to overcome barriers to engagement.
  - Continuing to support ongoing dialogue between Motivators, and with SCVO, which is highly valued and vital given the long-term aim of digital change. Opportunities for Champions to network with each other may also be beneficial.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. One fifth of Scotland's population do not have the skills needed to live in a digital age and face multiple forms of social exclusion and inequality. They are more likely to be older, disabled or from low income households. People who live in social housing are particularly at risk, being 20% less likely to have essential digital skills compared to those who rent privately.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.2. The Social Housing Digital Champions Network (the 'Network') is a Scottish Government-funded initiative, being implemented by SCVO. The Network aims to create Digital Champions within housing associations who encourage and support their tenants to use digital skills and tools. They are supported by Digital Motivators who co-ordinate digital activity in their association and are responsible for encouraging staff to embrace digital.
- 1.3. It is hoped that Digital Motivators from 30 housing associations will participate in the project. Those associations will train 450 Digital Champions who will increase digital participation by supporting around 4,500 tenants.
- 1.4. Participating associations receive fully funded training and support in a range of ways. The key components of the Network are summarised in Figure 1.

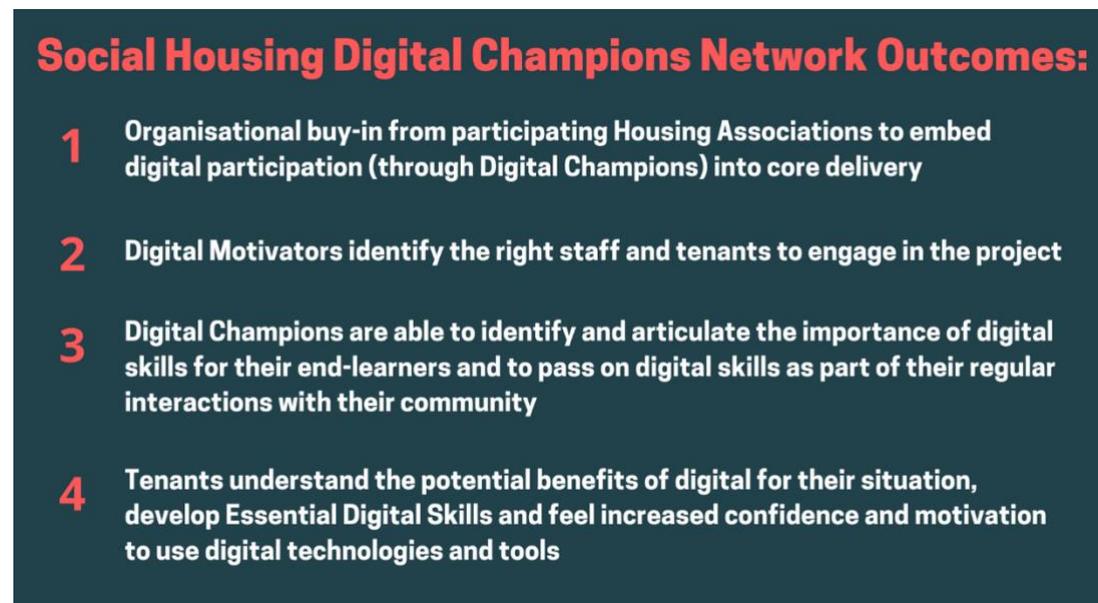
**Figure 1: Key components of the Social Housing Digital Champions Network**



<sup>2</sup> <https://scvo.org.uk/support/digital/participation/digital-champions-in-social-housing>

- 1.5. SCVO commissioned The Lines Between to evaluate the Network and identify its success in achieving the outcomes shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Social Housing Digital Champions Network Outcomes**



- 1.6. To inform future digital participation projects, the evaluation also explores:
- how effectively the network engages with digitally excluded tenants;
  - whether the programme provides a sustainable solution to support digitally excluded social housing tenants; and
  - the factors which must be in place to replicate a project like this in other settings.

### Methodology

- 1.7. We adopted a qualitative research approach to meet the aims outlined above. Fifteen people from 11 housing associations were interviewed about their views and experiences of the network. This comprised seven Digital Motivators, seven Digital Champions and one tenant.
- 1.8. One limitation of the evaluation is that we were unable to reach a large number of tenants. Most associations were still in the relatively early stages of planning and/or implementing digital activities and felt unable to suggest tenants who had experience of being supported with digital.
- 1.9. Key learning in this evaluation is highlighted in standout boxes. We also produced case studies to illustrate different aspects of the Network's impact, attached as an appendix.

## 2. Organisational impact

2.1. In this chapter, we explore the success of the Network in:

- supporting associations to generate buy-in within their organisations, to embed digital participation into their core delivery; and
- identifying the right staff to engage in the Network.

### Obtaining organisational buy-in

- 2.2. Levels of support to embed digital participation into core service delivery varied between and within associations. A strong commitment to digital at a senior level was seen as key to facilitating digital change within an association and empowering Motivators to “run with it”. On the whole, buy-in was usually evident at this senior level between management and Motivators. More challenging was achieving buy-in among Digital Champions.
- 2.3. The extent of buy-in often related to where associations were in their digital journey at the time of their initial involvement with the Network. For some Motivators, the Network came at the right time for their association – for example, one Motivator reflected on the timeliness of the Network as it coincided with the development of digital inclusion within their own organisation:



*For me and for us it was absolutely perfect, because it is exactly where we are as an organisation. The whole strategy just makes perfect sense and we are embracing it... In the 21st century, using IT and digital skills to improve the way that businesses operate, it just makes perfectly logical sense.*



### Power in numbers: the value of a sector-focused approach

See Appendix 1 to discover how the Network came at the right time for Blue Triangle Housing Association to help generate momentum for digital change.



- 2.4. However, other associations were at an earlier stage of their digital journey and were still in the process of achieving buy-in among their staff. In some cases, despite a commitment to digital and having lots of ideas for how to drive digital change, actually embedding this in practice was difficult. Sometimes this was because of staffing changes at senior level. In other organisations, staff were discouraged by the time and energy required to embed digital when it came to the “action stage”. For example:



*The reason I am here is because management agree that digital is a good thing. I think that argument has already been won. The challenge will be putting that into practice; people are all very keen for change when they do not actually have to do anything, but it is about me and the team being able to convince people that going through the pain will be far more beneficial in the long term.*

- 2.5. Some Motivators reflected on the wider context and legitimacy of the Network as being important in achieving buy-in. They discussed the significant investment by the Government and the work undertaken on digital in associations across the country. Because of this wider push, digital was not just “another new thing coming from head office” but part of something much bigger, which was seen as key to justifying engagement with staff.



**With this in mind, SCVO should consider increasing the amount of support it provides to participating organisations to help them achieve buy-in. This could involve allocating more time at the Motivators Bootcamp to explore the practicalities involved in implementing digital within their associations.**

- 2.6. While some Motivators were asked by senior managers to take part in the Network, others volunteered themselves. In either case, many embraced the opportunity to take part and highlighted the benefits of doing so – for example, it opened up opportunities for collaboration and learning from other associations who had experienced challenges around digital.
- 2.7. Several Motivators already had some involvement in digital before engaging in the Network. In many cases this meant they were enthusiastic about being in the Network, as they viewed it as a good fit with their existing work and an opportunity to further drive digital change. For example:



*I am online quite a lot, it is something that I do naturally anyway, and from a communications and marketing perspective, I do the website, I do all our social media. Joining the organisation I was very keen to move us more digitally. We now have Workplace From Facebook instead of a printed monthly newsletter, and that is something I introduced.*

- 2.8. In a few cases digital evolution slowed due to wider organisational change or changes in personnel. For example, one association went through a transition period when their director retired. Staff had to wait for the new director to be appointed and approve plans to create a breakout area where tenants could be supported with digital. In another association, staffing changes were compounded by a changeover with their in-house computing system which became their Champion’s main priority for some time.

### Identifying and recruiting Digital Champions

- 2.9. On the whole, Motivators were successful in recruiting Champions from a range of roles within their associations. The Champions we spoke to held a variety of positions including development managers, community engagement workers, welfare benefit advisors, HR administrators and receptionists.

- 2.10. Motivators' methods to identify and recruit potential Champions varied. Examples included:
- approaching senior managers to ask for nominations;
  - examining staff organisational charts and identifying those who would be best placed to undertake Champion training;
  - encouraging volunteers by distributing flyers with information about the role of Champions and the training they would undertake; and
  - asking their whole team to become Champions.
- 2.11. While most Motivators were happy with the type and range of staff who were engaged in the Network, a few felt that it would have been better to include different, or more, staff. Motivators from one association felt that their operations manager should have undertaken the Motivator training with them, to help motivate their Champions.
- 2.12. A few associations felt that all their staff should undertake Champion training to ensure that digital was more widely embedded in their organisations. This approach worked particularly well in one association with a relatively small staff and could potentially be replicated elsewhere.



**Given that there are limitations on the number of places on the Bootcamp, SCVO should continue to offer ongoing support to Motivators to identify gaps in training or specific individuals or teams who would benefit from the Network.**

- 2.13. Many associations used the Essential Digital Skills framework to coordinate digital activity and maximise the impact of the Network on staff. The framework was used as a tool to audit the existing digital skills of staff. In some cases, this found gaps in digital skills which might not otherwise have been revealed, giving staff an indication of areas for improvement. Digital Champion training could then focus on addressing these gaps and building confidence in staff that they had the skills required to have conversations about digital with their tenants.
- 2.14. In a small number of associations, the framework was adapted to suit the needs of the organisation and its staff, for example by incorporating it into other internal tools or turning it into an online survey to be used as a training needs analysis for staff.

### **Clarifying the role of Digital Champions**

- 2.15. Many of these recruitment methods were successful and Champions were usually happy to undertake the training. However, Motivators still reported a degree of resistance among staff. As such, careful consideration is being given to how the programme is promoted to staff, to encourage participation. This involved clarifying that the Network is not about IT training, or managing concerns that becoming a Champion would not turn into a burden on their day-to-day roles – rather, that it was integral to enhancing work they were already undertaking.

- 2.16. Recruiting Champions was easier in associations where staff understood what being a Champion entailed, where they knew what the training involved and where they could see a clear link between digital and their everyday roles. For example, one Motivator adopted the following approach to recruit Champions from across their organisation:

**“** *We put out a flyer to every single staff member within the organisation to say ‘Here is what we are looking for, here is what you will be involved in and here is the investment that we can make in you. We will give you some extra training, you would be responsible for disseminating all of the training and all of the things that we are attempting to do.’ How easy was it? It was tricky. But we have 25 Digital Champions now; they are all very enthusiastic and they also see the logic of a little bit of short-term pain for longer term gain.*

- 2.17. Contrast this to the situation at another association, where the Motivator struggled to be clear to staff about the role of the Champion:

**“** *We went out to recruit Digital Champions but because we were the first group to take part in the programme it was difficult. It was hard for me to come back and sell the Digital Champion idea to people because I did not really have a complete handle on what I would be asking them to do; we were not entirely sure. And that made it a little bit harder for me.*

- 2.18. There was mixed use of the term ‘Digital Champions’ among associations. Where it was used, this helped to clarify responsibility for digital and most Champions were comfortable being described as a Digital Champion. However, the term was not always used more widely within these organisations. For example, at one association, only the Champion’s own team knew about their role:

**“** *My team know about it because I speak to my manager about it and it is on my work plan. It is always there in the background, so my team know that I am the Digital Champion, but we have other Champions and it is not displayed anywhere in the office. So I would not say it is widely known. Our Motivator asked for volunteers and a few of us put our names forward, but I did not know who would be appearing until on the day.*

- 2.19. In some cases, the term ‘Digital Champion’ was adapted to achieve buy-in. For example, as one Motivator said:

**“** *I use the word ‘digital’. I do not necessarily use the word ‘Champion’ or ‘Motivator’, because I am a bit of a blend of the two.... So I have not been asking people ‘Do you want to be a Digital Champion within the organisation’, but starting that conversation off around what do people want to learn around technology.*

2.20. Another association dropped the term 'digital' altogether to obtain buy-in among staff:

“

*I have stopped calling it 'digital', because that was freaking people out, so I started talking about the website project, because that is how everyone thinks of it. From the staff in here particular I noticed that the idea of it being digital meant it was technology, whereas what they wanted was a website and an app.*

2.21. Some felt their staff needed to be trained and know more about digital before working with tenants. One Champion believed more staff would want to engage with digital if they were more confident, particularly with IT:

“

*Once you realise that you do know basics and it is not that you need to know everything, I think more people would think: "Oh, actually, I could be a Digital Champion".*

### 3. Impact on tenants

- 3.1. This chapter focuses on the impact of the Network on tenants. We explore:
- whether Champions can identify and articulate the importance of digital skills;
  - how the tenants who would benefit from support are identified; and
  - the effectiveness of Champions in enabling tenants to understand the benefits of digital, learn new skills and become more confident using digital.

#### Identifying and articulating the importance of digital skills

- 3.2. An increase in confidence among Motivators and Champions is one of the key successes of the Network's delivery to date. The programme has helped both groups to gain a better understanding of how digital skills can be used in regular dealings with tenants. There was a clear sense that they have increased confidence in identifying the potential for digital skills and talking about digital with peers and tenants. For example, as one Champion commented:



*I feel so much more confident. This morning we ran a course at the health centre and we had our work laptops and a big screen. Before I even thought about it I'd connected the HDMI and it's on the telly and I've got the tablet set up. This time last year, I would've been stressing for days about doing that.*

- 3.3. Increased confidence among Champions in particular was reflected in the data captured during Snapshot Week.<sup>3</sup> Among the 163 Champions who returned data, 88% reported feeling either 'confident' or 'very confident' in their roles.
- 3.4. While a few Champions did not feel their confidence had improved as a result of the training, this was because they were already confident with digital.

#### Successfully identifying tenants

- 3.5. Generally, Motivators and Champions were keen to embed digital activity with their tenants as widely as possible. The process of identifying tenants to engage in digital was often Champion-led. As such, recruiting tenants was less about targeting particular individuals and more about making the most of everyday opportunities for engagement. This is reflected in the data gathered during Snapshot Week, which showed that the largest proportion of the support delivered to tenants (46%) was based on tenants approaching Champions<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.6. Through their involvement in the programme, many Champions were empowered to work closely with their tenants to explore their digital needs. There was a common understanding of the value of spending time with tenants. For example, at one

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<sup>3</sup> Snapshot Week enables Digital Champions to better understand the impact of their involvement in the Network on their work with end-learners. Participating organisations record the number of end-learners they have helped over the course of a week and consider the nature of the support they have delivered.

<sup>4</sup> 35% of engagement was Champions actively taking support to tenants, with the remaining 19% being a mix of passive and active approaches.

organisation Champions were planning to run a series of workshops for their tenants and they had a clear aim for these workshops:



*We want to get more of an insight into the way our tenants live and want to live, to know them a bit better, because the majority of the time we speak to them over the phone. We are hoping that tenants you do not hear very much from may come along.*

- 3.7. To some extent, the process of identifying tenants was also determined by the role of the Motivator or Champion. For example, at one association the Digital Champion was a Welfare Benefit Advisor and the introduction Universal Credit was a significant opportunity to engage tenants in digital. This was often raised as a key ‘hook’ to engage tenants, as the journals which form part of the process must be completed online.
- 3.8. Champions have helped – or plan to help – their tenants with Universal Credit by spending time with them and supporting them to apply for and manage it online. While this was being done primarily to benefit tenants, there was also an acknowledgement that it benefits the Housing Associations as it ensures that rent payments etc. are made on time.



### Digital Trailblazers

In Appendix 1, two Digital Motivators from Fife Housing Group reflect on the importance of the Network in enabling their staff to help tenants with digital.



- 3.9. In some cases, identifying tenants was made easier by using the Essential Digital Skills Framework. Two Motivators used the framework to help them develop support groups for their tenants – in particular, groups for foundation digital skills, job-searching and IT. They found the framework useful in gauging tenants’ skills in particular areas and in planning group activities.

### Success in enabling tenants to understand the benefits of digital, learn new skills and become more confident

- 3.10. For many, the Network has reframed the concept of digital and the conversations participants have about digital. Previously, digital might have had many connotations – about large-scale projects, IT and technology. There is now a clear recognition that digital skills are many and varied, and that they are often straightforward and small in scale. This allows them to be easily incorporated into the lives of both staff and tenants.



**The success of the approach being used by the Network to date should continue to be used in future cohorts. Some potential improvements may further reinforce a clear point of view on the nature and role of digital in social housing.**

- 3.11. Champions have successfully passed on a range of digital skills through their everyday interactions with tenants. Examples of these are summarised in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Digital skills passed on to tenants**



- 3.12. In some cases, there was an important social element to tenants gaining new digital skills. Champions had encouraged tenants to use social media to connect with others or had facilitated new friendships among tenants and staff through digital groups or workshops. For example:



*Since the Digital Champion training, I have set up a couple of groups, one of which is the Crafty Ladies. They did a money management course and three of them got on really well and wanted to use the hub to meet every week for a coffee. They started bringing in their tablets so we would all sit around the table and somebody wanted to go on Facebook so we helped them set it up.*

- 3.13. Only one tenant participated in this evaluation. Motivators and Champions were asked to connect the evaluators with tenants who had been supported by the Network. However this was not possible as many associations were still in the early stages of their digital journey<sup>5</sup>.
- 3.14. However, feedback from Motivators and Champions on what has been done so far shows that the Network is generally succeeding in its aims. Tenants are being supported to understand the potential benefits of digital, develop essential digital skills and develop confidence and motivation to use digital technologies and tools. Some examples of tenants learning new skills and growing in confidence included:
- the ‘crafty ladies’ mentioned above, who got together to use their tablets for social media and to source information such as checking bin collection days online;
  - after members of a cookery club were encouraged to look up recipes online and use YouTube, a tenant was considering ways of using digital to help their child with their homework;
  - tenants knowing they can get help with their Universal Credit and talking housing officers through their journals;
  - after attending workshops on basic digital IT skills, tenants went on to undertake a technology programme at a local college; and
  - during Snapshot Week, one tenant was supported with setting up and using their new smartphone; they planned to start attending a weekly digital group.
- 3.15. Case studies produced by housing associations and SCVO also highlighted ways in which tenants have benefitted from engaging with digital. Examples included: accessing entertainment e.g. TV, films, sports or services such as Netflix; being able to play games and puzzles online; using Google to find things out; staying in touch with the wider world by accessing news and newspapers; and reliving memories by finding photos or videos online. Others have learnt how to use digital technology or get it fixed.
- 3.16. Passing on digital skills has also been valuable to tenants by helping them connect with others. For some this has been learning to use Facetime to speak to friends and family; others have been able find and contact people they had lost touch with. A few also

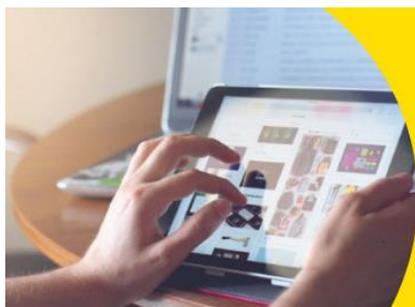
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<sup>5</sup> Both Motivator Bootcamps took place in the second half of 2019.

talked about using social media. One tenant was supported to learn how to use their tablet and was able to participate in a family chat with their sister and nieces online, while also reconnecting with old work colleagues – as they said, “it has just changed my life”. This participant had also grown in confidence as a result of their interactions with their Champion:



*All I could do on my phone was text and phone. My family texted me and phoned me and that was it, and they laugh to this day that I still do not know how to use my phone. They are gobsmacked that I can use my wee tablet now, that I am so confident, and where I go my tablet goes.*



### Confidence and connections through first steps into digital

Appendix 1 explores one tenant’s growth in confidence as a result of their interactions with a Digital Champion at Linstone Housing Association.



- 3.17. Some Motivators reflected on the challenge of monitoring the activity being undertaken by Champions. In a few associations, staff were gathering – or planned to gather – data on impact on tenants, for example by participating in Snapshot Week or by setting Key Performance Indicators. In one association, during a one-month pilot where staff handed out tablets to tenants, the staff were asked to document the interventions they made during that month. However, after this pilot ended and as digital increasingly became “business as usual”, staff stopped gathering data of this kind.
- 3.18. While there was a perception among Motivators that activity was at its early stages, the feedback from Champions collected during Snapshot Week suggests that a large number of tenants (and colleagues) are already being supported. Based on those results, it is estimated that in any given week the current network of 264 Champions support 1,056 individuals - 760 tenants and 296 colleagues.



**Given that the Network is still being established, SCVO should hold further Snapshot weeks if possible, to give associations more time to embed digital and report on its impact.**

### Barriers to tenants’ engagement

- 3.19. Although the Network enabled tenants to gain a wide range of digital skills, some Motivators and Champions struggled to engage their tenants. Staff in a few associations reflected that not all tenants want to engage more with digital because they cannot see the relevance to them. Other tenants might not have the means, technology or even physical ability to engage with digital. For example, one Motivator reflected on the barriers faced by older people:



*I have got lots of people who cannot use tablets because they have problems with eyesight, and the biggest problem I have is touch screen. They sound wonderful, but they cannot use them. Their hands are not steady enough, and I give them stylist pens, but it does not always work. Finding ways that those people can still get involved can be challenging.*

- 3.20. Fear of digital technology and a lack of confidence was a key issue for some tenants. Research participants and SCVO's own case studies highlighted tenants' concerns. Many worried about breaking equipment and making mistakes; they feared 'pressing the wrong buttons' and what the consequences of that might be. There were also worries around security. A few were wary of falling victim to scams, and more generally there were concerns around keeping information secure, particularly on social media. Conversely, others had attempted to stay secure but forgotten passwords which led to online use declining or being abandoned.
- 3.21. Associations discussed a variety of steps they had undertaken to try and increase engagement. One advertised their digital activity widely in the local area and through a number of channels, which resulted in a good level of participation. Another decided to run a group with tenants leading the session, supported by their Champion, to make it more relatable to other tenants. One association was planning to introduce a lending club as another association on their cohort was successfully running one. They hoped that by introducing a lending club, they could lend equipment such as tablets out to tenants to enable them to test the equipment out for themselves – "to see if they could see the benefits of being online before they commit to buying their own".
- 3.22. In Snapshot week, Champions made some specific suggestions about how SCVO could continue to help overcome these barriers. One Champion felt they would value more examples of how to encourage tenants to move towards digital. Another commented that they would benefit from more information to share with tenants "to give them the confidence to do things at a time that suits them". The tenant quoted earlier stressed the importance of their relationship with their Champion who made them feel comfortable and at ease.



**In future Bootcamps and Champions training, SCVO should continue to be mindful of these barriers to tenants accessing and using technology. One possible way of supporting Champions could be to provide more 'how to' guides. These could provide further information about having conversations with tenants and finding the 'hook' and give ideas to help engage tenants in conversations about digital. Existing resources on how to set up a lending library could be expanded and shared more widely.**

- 3.23. Tenants highlighted the value of making an effort to overcome barriers to engagement. In several of SCVO's case studies, older tenants discussed the value of trying to learn something new, even if they decided it was not for them. They appreciated associations giving them the opportunity to see what they could do with digital:



*I would say to people go somewhere and get someone to show you, because it opens up a whole different world.*



*It's good to hear someone talk about what's available and you can choose what suits you and what you want out of it.*

### Risks around tenant engagement

- 3.24. There are some risks involved in helping tenants to engage with digital. One Champion reflected on the hazards of tenants having their details online, sharing their passwords for their online banking account with staff, or accessing betting websites. They felt the programme was crucial in highlighting the need for policies and procedures to protect both staff and tenants. Likewise, a tenant mentioned they were helped with all of their passwords. These risks were also reflected in the Snapshot Week data, where one Champion requested more guidance on how to work with vulnerable tenants in relation to cyber security.



**One way to address this is to ensure staff feel comfortable having conversations with tenants and their families about these potential risks. SCVO also has an important role to play in reassuring associations by providing relevant information on how to mitigate against these risks.**

## 4. Effectiveness and future delivery

- 4.1. This chapter focuses on the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the Network. We discuss its success in providing a sustainable approach to support digitally excluded tenants and the key factors needed to replicate the Network in other settings.

### Providing a sustainable solution

- 4.2. This section covers the role, impact and effectiveness of key components of the programme: the training, tools and resources, networking and qualification.

### Delivery of the training

- 4.3. Feedback on the training from Motivators and Champions was largely positive. Staff liked the tailored nature of the training and the fact that it was specific to the housing sector. Motivators stressed the benefits of bringing representatives from a variety of associations to the Bootcamp training. For example:

“ *There is quite a wide spread within the group, but they have all come together for a discussion about one thing, which is always helpful. You are less likely to get side-tracked as a result. The conversation becomes quite focused, so you spend your time on the things you are there to discuss.*

- 4.4. Delivered over a two-day period, the Bootcamp removed Motivators from their desks, daily duties and mobile phones. The opportunity to become completely immersed in the topic of digital was seen as extremely beneficial.

- 4.5. A few Motivators also reflected on the social nature of the Bootcamp. It provided opportunities for face to face interaction and gave the time needed for relationships to develop, and this had benefits for their work:

“ *The other thing that was really beneficial was having that stay overnight and that social activity. It just built those relationship – we had dinner and we had the time to chat to people. It means that you are then more comfortable approaching them and asking them for things.*

- 4.6. The SCVO trainers were widely praised for their delivery of the Bootcamps and the sessions for Champions. They were seen as knowledgeable about the housing sector and this made the training feel relevant to staff and their associations:

“ *The trainers were personable, professional and they understood the context. They also had an understanding of the challenges that all of us face in our organisations and had an awareness and sensitivity about some of the challenges we were going to face as we implement the actual strategies. Those guys, for me, were high calibre. (Motivator)*

“ *It was good, it was informative, it was pitched well. It facilitated quite a bit of discussion, rather than just being somebody talking to us. They had the introduction and different headings, and then there was a discussion about what we could do, and we thought about how we could apply the skills in our organisation rather than it being not relevant. It kept it relevant. (Champion)*

- 4.7. Participants made some suggestions for how the training could be improved, including:
- going into greater detail about the steps that Motivators could take to engage tenants in digital;
  - further discussion of digital skills for older people;
  - more time for Motivators to develop their action plans at the Bootcamp;
  - giving associations more places on the Bootcamp – one Motivator felt lucky to have been able to attend with a colleague as this gave them someone to bounce ideas off and back them up; they said staff from other associations who attended the Bootcamp alone “felt as though sometimes it was them fighting the world”;
  - delivering the Champions training before the Motivators training, enabling Motivators to be included in both - one Motivator felt that would be useful in enabling the Motivators to “pull together” the issues raised at the Champions training.

#### Usefulness of the tools and resources

- 4.8. Staff were positive about the resources offered through the training and felt these were of great use in driving digital, in particular the Essential Digital Skills Framework. As one Digital Motivator commented: “the tools and the resources, I have used pretty much everything they have given us to use”. Another stressed that the tools were straightforward, colourful and eye-catching.
- 4.9. Some staff reflected on the use of video. One referred to the YouTube videos used at the Champion training including a video of an older person talking about how digital language can be overwhelming. They felt this could be useful for their work with tenants.

#### The value of networking and peer support

- 4.10. The networking and peer support aspects of the programme were particularly valued by Motivators. This applied to the networking opportunities during their training and also the ongoing communications that took place between associations after the training. These connections were key in sharing ideas, advice and examples of how to help tenants, while they also gave some staff a measure of where their association was with digital compared to others.



*One of the biggest benefits of the training was being able to relate and share with other associations some of the challenges that they faced. I do not think any of us are really that unique, so being able to learn from what others have done, are doing, and how they benefit is really something you benefit from as being part of that network.*

- 4.11. Slack was useful in maintaining contact between Motivators and in facilitating the sharing of ideas and advice after the Bootcamp. Slack has been used to help associations generate new digital policies and procedures:



*There is a general Slack channel where the Digital Motivators go on and say, “Does anybody know where I can get a copy of this, or a copy of that?” It is really useful for sharing policies and procedures. Because some organisations have had to set up a digital policy from scratch, most of the housing associations have been quite happy to share what they have been doing with everybody else.*

- 4.12. Many Motivators remained in contact with SCVO beyond the Bootcamp, often aided by Slack. They felt SCVO were invaluable as an ongoing source of support and in answering their queries. Some were also considering engaging in other strands of SCVO’s work around digital, for example Charter Fund or Cyber Essentials accreditation.
- 4.13. There is also evidence of potential for greater collaboration between Champions. One Champion spoke positively about the closer working partnerships they had formed with colleagues in their own association, saying they were “helping each other out” with digital and “learning as they go” with others.
- 4.14. During Snapshot Week, another Champion expressed a desire to attend events where they could meet Champions from other associations.



**Given that Motivators have clearly gained from increased networking, SCVO could think about whether Champion-focused networking events or a Slack channel for Champions could be introduced and used to learn from others.**

### The qualification

- 4.15. As part of the programme, SCVO has worked with associations and Glasgow Kelvin College to create the Certificate in Digital Inclusion Project Management qualification. Some Motivators were undertaking, or planned to undertake, this qualification since completing the training. A few had also encouraged their colleagues to do so. Others felt it was not yet the right time for them to undertake the qualification, partly because of other commitments.
- 4.16. Motivators highlighted the importance of the qualification in helping them to devise and implement a realistic and achievable digital strategy encompassing digital inclusion.

### Increased streamlining and organisational efficiency

- 4.17. The Network has encouraged some associations to revise or streamline their internal processes and encourage efficiencies. These efficiencies have positive implications for the longer-term sustainability of the Network in that they free up the time and energy required for staff to embed digital into their core delivery. By having this wider impact, associations are more likely to buy-in to the positive role of digital in the longer-term.

- 4.18. One association has set up an online portal for tenants to make rent payments. This freed up staff time to carry out other tasks. Another introduced a new spreadsheet which staff could access on their phones; this reduced the amount of paperwork required when visiting tenants. The Motivator at this association highlighted the impact of this new system on their everyday work:

“ *I am now doing pretty much the majority of my administration work on my company phone. All of the development managers have got a mobile phone. Not only is it more efficient because we are getting a better track of things in real time, it is more environmentally friendly, and it is also reducing the amount of storage space and fire hazard because we are not keeping boxes of paper for ten years at a time.* ”

### Embedding digital

- 4.19. For digital change to be sustained within an organisation, it needs to be widely embedded. Some Motivators were able to encourage others to engage with digital so it was no longer “person-specific” in their association. Others felt that digital remained very much their own responsibility, and that their association was at risk of digital falling off the agenda if they left their post:

“ *One of the frustrations I have of being the digital worker is that when digital comes up it is me that is working on it. So if tenants are saying “Oh I would like to learn something”, and it is a ten minute interaction, I still get housing officers going: “Can you call out? Can you come and see them in the house?”* ”



This again highlights the potential value in SCVO offering multiple places on the training, to counteract this risk of drop-off and help associations to embed digital more widely within their organisations.

### Barriers to replication

- 4.20. The evaluation uncovered barriers to implementing digital change which would need to be addressed should a similar programme be run in other settings. These are summarised below:
- **lack of buy-in;** in some associations, the process of obtaining buy-in was challenging. Even where staff bought into the idea of digital, there were still practical difficulties in translating this into practical change, for example because of the time and effort needed to embed digital. To help achieve buy-in and increased motivation for digital change, SCVO should continue to target relevant senior managers as Motivators where possible, particularly given the importance of buy-in from the top;
  - **misconceptions and fears around digital, particularly among Champions;** we have explored the anxieties felt by some in relation to digital, as reflected in the use of the word ‘digital’ and in Motivators’ efforts to ‘sell’ digital activity to staff. It is crucial

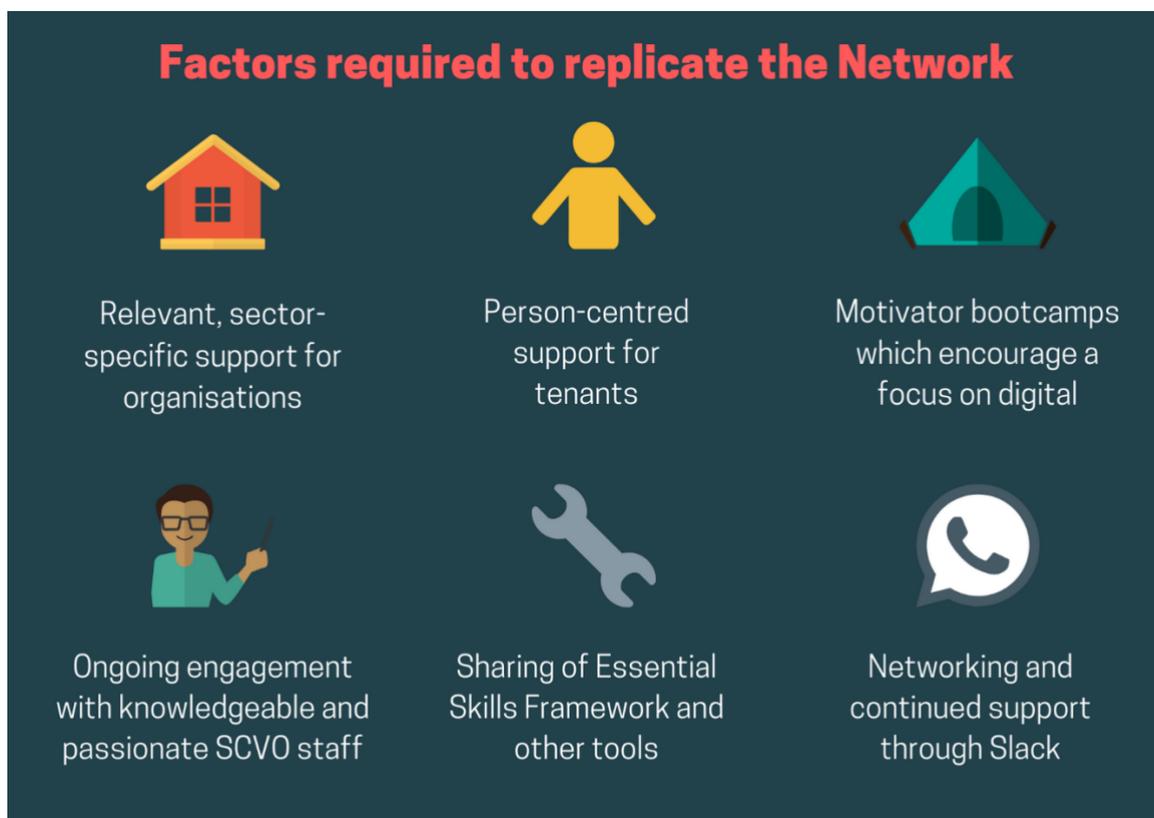
that staff clearly understand what digital means and how digital activities would affect their day-to-day roles in a practical sense. SCVO should support Motivators and Champions to convey their vision for digital in a clear and practical way;

- **lack of willingness or ability to engage with digital;** Champions have sometimes faced tenants' lack of willingness and confidence to engage with digital activities and also the physical barriers to doing so. Continued consideration within training of how these groups could be engaged with will support Champions to have the tools and expertise to overcome some of these objections;
- **digital change is often a slow-burner;** at the time of our fieldwork, many associations were still in the relatively early stages of implementing digital change. Given the importance of networking and ongoing support to participants, it is important that lines of communication with other members of the Network and SCVO remain open in the longer-term to ensure that associations remain well-supported to implement digital change.

#### Factors to replicate in other settings

- 4.21. This report has discussed a variety of factors which have been key to the success of the Social Housing Digital Champions Network to date. These same factors would need to be present for the network to be successfully replicated in another setting or for another sector. They are summarised in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Factors required to replicate the Network**



## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1. While associations are still in the relatively early stages of their digital journey, the core components of the Social Housing Digital Champions Network have worked well, and the Network has already benefitted participating associations and their tenants.

### What has worked well

- 5.2. Motivators and Champions were largely positive about both the Bootcamp and Champions surgeries. They highlighted the tailored and focused nature of the training, by knowledgeable and helpful staff, and the space created for Motivators to develop effective relationships with people from other associations.
- 5.3. The opportunities for networking and the importance of peer support has been particularly valuable to Motivators. This applies to the opportunities arising at the Bootcamp and to ongoing communications where they can share experiences, ideas and examples of how to drive digital change.
- 5.4. The tools and resources have been useful, particularly the Essential Skills Framework which has been used to gauge the digital abilities of both their staff and tenants.
- 5.5. Motivators and Champions have seen their confidence around digital increase and feel better able and more empowered to engage with tenants. A better understanding of how digital can be incorporated into organisational processes and the daily lives of tenants has helped to overcome some barriers to adoption. Staff are able to identify and explain examples of how tenants and colleagues are being supported to understand the potential benefits of digital, such as increasing their own confidence and social inclusion.

### Improvements to the programme

- 5.6. While the Network has generally worked well in helping associations to embed digital, the potential improvements noted in this report can be summarised as:
- **Improvements to the Motivators Bootcamp** – for example, offering more places on the Bootcamp, spending more time discussing the challenges of achieving buy-in and the barriers to accessing and using technology;
  - **Additions to the Champions training and support** – for example, helping Champions to build a clear understanding of the practical implications of digital for their day-to-day roles, spending more time discussing the risks associated with digital, and providing opportunities for Champions to network with each other;
  - **Providing more opportunities for data-gathering through Snapshot Week** – to enable associations to evidence of impact as digital becomes embedded; and
  - **Continuing to support the ongoing dialogue between Motivators, and with SCVO,** – Though not an improvement as such, the network of peers in Social Housing and the Slack channel are extremely valued by Motivators, so SCVO's commitment to supporting these is vital given the slow-burning nature of digital change.

**Appendix 1: Case Studies**

# Power in numbers: the value of a sector-focused approach

A Social Housing Champions Network case study: Blue Triangle Housing Association



*“It has pushed forward the digital transformation within our organisation. The Bootcamp was first class; it gave me the impetus to come back after two days and go straight to my Chief Executive and say: “we need to do this, we cannot wait any longer.”*”

**Graham Lamont, Learning and Development Officer at Blue Triangle Housing Association, feels the Social Housing Digital Champions Network has accelerated his association's digital and strategy development.**

*I was brought into the business to help the evolution of the association and the digital transformation of what we do. The timing for us as an organisation is perfect, as it can guide what the strategy is attempting to do; using digital skills to improve the way that we operate. It has already had, and it's going to have, such a positive impact for us.*

*At the Bootcamp we were all in a room, all different people from different housing associations. That network in itself was an added advantage, because suddenly I was exchanging information with organisations that I had never met before.*

## **Embedding digital into projects across Scotland**

*We have 25 projects going on across Scotland, and we have a Digital Champion in each project who is responsible for disseminating all of the training and all of the things that we're attempting to do with digital.*

*I feel more confident talking about IT and digital skills, the impact for our staff, and ultimately the people who it is all really going to matter to: our service users.*

## **Vulnerable tenants are the primary beneficiaries of the digital transformation**

*Our projects are all having their hardware updated and WiFi connectivity is being improved. If you are living in homeless accommodation and you are a vulnerable, marginalised individual, having a safe space in your own flat where you can watch Netflix, watch Amazon Prime, have access to all of these online streaming platforms, that is going to have a huge impact on your mental health.*

*We are looking to put learning hubs in as many of our projects as we possibly can, which would mean that the service users can then start to get connected to a far greater degree. That will help with things like Universal Credit and other benefits, applying for jobs, CVs, college applications, which are all online.*

# Digital trailblazers

A Social Housing Champions Network case study: Fife Housing Group



*“It’s been fantastic. It’s so useful to have those connections with other housing associations, to be able to meet people who are trying to do the same things as you, and to get peer support and ideas about how others are doing something.”*

**Beverley, Housing Manager and Karen, Communications and Marketing Manager, from Fife Housing Group discuss their involvement in the Social Housing Champions Network. Ideas, validation, opportunities to try new approaches and a supportive network have been key to their success.**

## **You don't need to be techy to motivate**

*Beverley: I now say, 'think digital first'. When I was asked would I go on the Digital Motivators training, I had my reservations, because I thought 'I'm not IT-literate'. I was very quickly told that I didn't have to be a whizz kid to be able to digitally motivate our clients as well as our colleagues. So, I came away a very happy bunny!*

*Karen: The training changes your perspective, and it means you are more motivated to motivate your team.*

## **Engagement across all staff levels**

*Beverley: All our housing team, operations advisors and our maintenance officers have gone through the Digital Champions Training. Housing officers are the forefront of our organisation, they speak to tenants on a day to day basis, whether it's in their house, in the office, out on site in their patches. They're all really enthusiastic about digital.*

*Karen: One of our board members and the chair of our Residents' Scrutiny Group went to the training. They found it really useful and are keen to get involved, so much so that we are looking to do some additional work with the rest of our Residents' Scrutiny Group. To have that support and understanding at board level is going to be invaluable.*

## **Building strength and depth across an organisation**

*Karen: We put the Essential Digital Skills Checklist out to all of our board members, trades and office-based colleagues, and our Residents' Scrutiny Group. We're using that to pull together a training plan for anybody who feels they would benefit.*

## **Demonstrating the benefits for tenants to encourage interest**

*Beverley: We had a community cafe just before Christmas, we thought that was the perfect opportunity to introduce our Digital Champions. We had a stand, a pop-up banner and some balloons, the Champs wore t-shirts saying: 'ask me how I can cut your costs'. The hook was about saving money at Christmas. We'll be doing that at all of our community cafes going forward.*

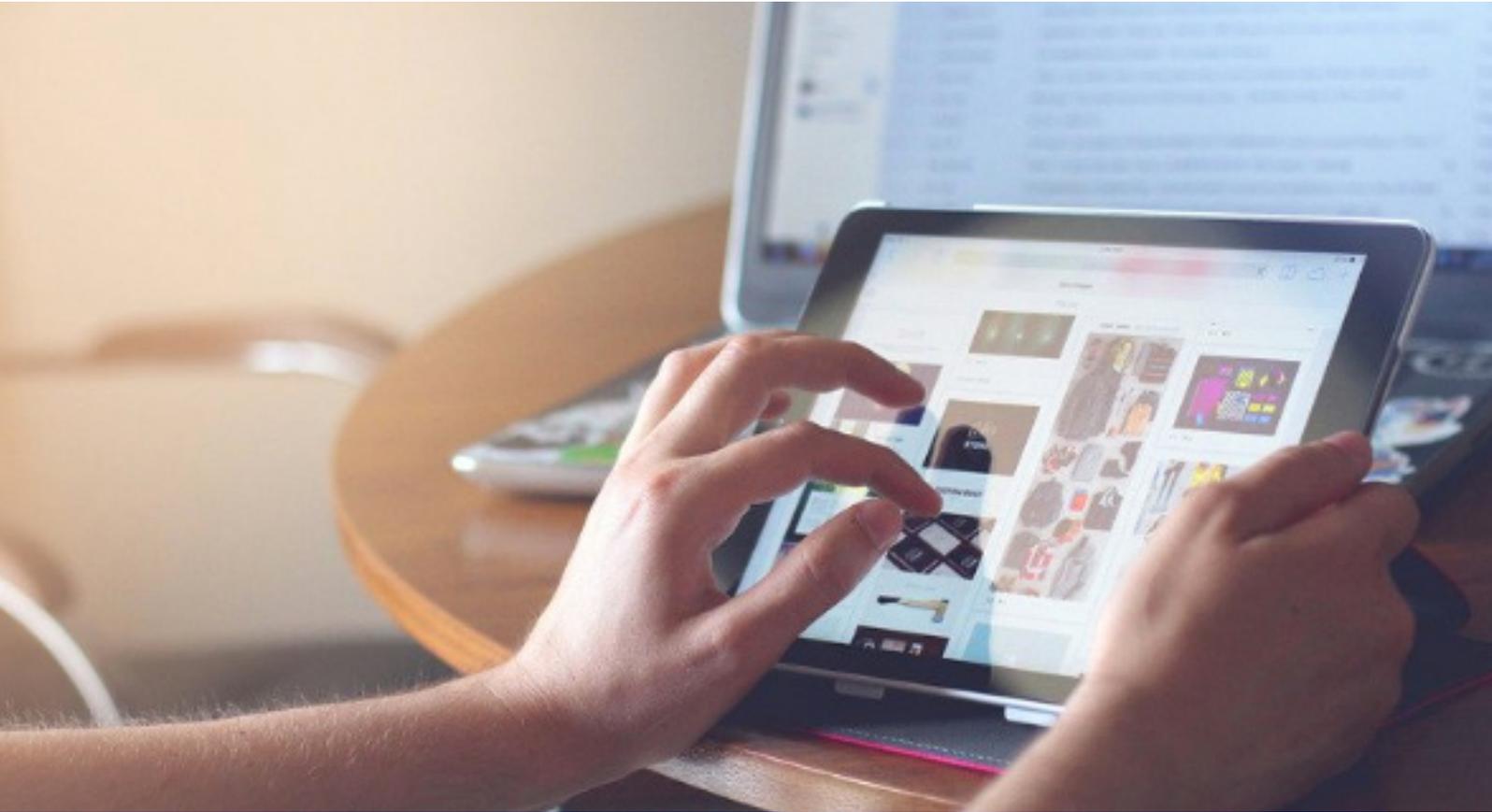
## **Housing officers are enabling tenants to manage their digital Universal Credit accounts**



*I think the training has empowered the housing officers. When they're out in the area they sit with the person, talking them through the journal, showing them how to log in to it, what steps the journal has, what information is required. To actually sit with the tenant and see what information they've got in front of them on the journal gives both the tenant and the housing officers understanding of what's happening.*

# Confidence and connections through first steps into digital

A Social Housing Champions Network case study: Linstone Housing Association



“

*I take photographs on my phone now. We have a group chat with the family, now I can chat to them all at the same time, and that's just amazing, it's changed my life.*

Connie Hyndman, Linstone Housing Association's Community Engagement Worker, describes how the Digital Champion training gave her the confidence to speak with tenants about digital, set up support groups and most significantly, offer one to one support.

### Building trusting relationships is key when thinking digital.

*It's nothing really to do with IT skills, it's about knowing how to help somebody. That was a big eye-opener for me. It used to freak me out if somebody asked me a question. Since the Digital Champion training I've set up a couple of groups. The Crafty Ladies wanted to use the hub to meet every week for a coffee. They started bringing in their tablets so we'd all sit around the table, we would go back to basics, switching them on, getting them to work, and then we would all sit and use them to do things like check the bin days.*

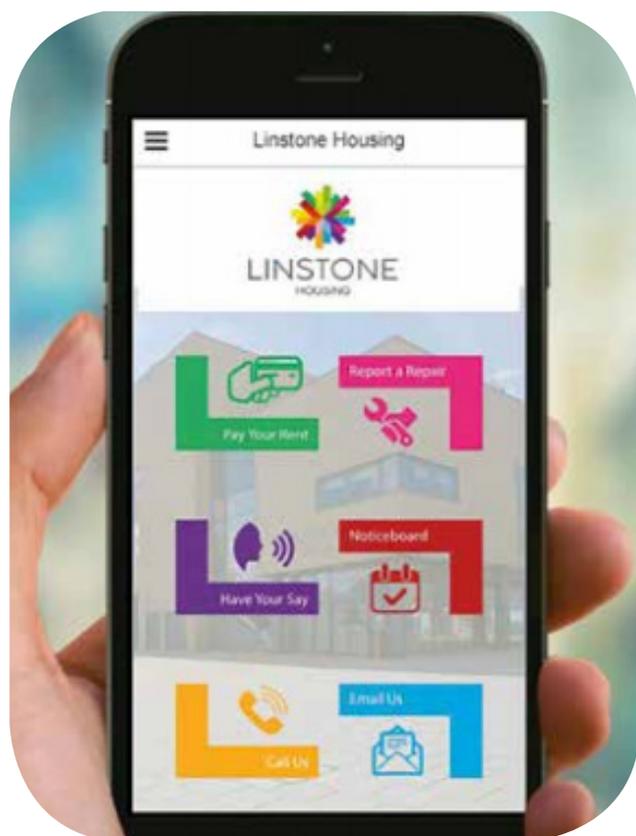
*That's what I took away - you don't need to know everything, it's about how you're speaking, building up a relationship with somebody and then doing it with them. It doesn't matter if I don't know, we can figure it out together.*

### Digital Champion training ensured that digital is now a part of the day-to-day at Linstone.

*This morning we ran a course at the health centre and we had our work laptops and a big screen. Before I even thought about it I'd connected the HDMI and it's on the telly and I've got the tablet set up. This time last year, I would've been stressing for days about doing that. A wee light switched on.*

*It's been the little things for me that have been the most rewarding. I would've been a lot more apprehensive before the Digital Champion Training.*

*I've helped people set up the association's app. Tenants can download the app, and it tells them all sorts of events, what's going on in their area, and they can pay their rent, ask for a repair.*



Sandra Wilkie, a Linstone tenant, had a series of one to one meetings with Connie. Here, she reflects on that experience and describes the life-changing impact of gaining Essential Digital Skills.

*My mental health has been really bad and I've been really poorly. I had just lost all confidence, I wouldn't go out the door. My family bought me a tablet, thinking that that would give me a wee interest. I didn't know the first thing about it. I've got a mobile phone and I just know the basics of that, and I don't do anything fancy with it, just phone and text. I met Connie, and I was looking for a wee course to learn my tablet. She said I'm qualified and I don't mind taking you on a one to one.*

*I've never looked back. I was so nervous about it, I was scared to even touch the screen, in case I knocked everything off. I was scared to put my email in, in case I put the wrong email. I was forgetting my passwords constantly, and I was getting all agitated and my confidence had just went, and Connie just came right down to my level. I don't know how to explain it but that lady's got a gift, and she made me feel so comfortable.*

*“ She taught me how to go onto Facebook, she taught me how to order online, she taught me how to get all my films and the TV and go onto all the different channels. And I'm like a different person, that wee tablet means the world to me, and it's got me more in conversations, it's got me back in touch with my colleagues at my work.*

*So as a result, I'm going out and about now, I'm going out for my own shopping and my confidence is building. I'm going for coffee with friends that I had worked with for 30 odd years, that I wouldn't even say hello to before.*

