

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Digital Inclusion support during Covid19 and recovery</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>24<sup>TH</sup> June 2020</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Sally McMahon</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 296963</b>
	<b>Email:</b>	<b>Sally.mcmahon@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b>	
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All Wards</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The report is seeking agreement for the council to make a funding contribution to the continuation of the Digital Brighton & Hove (DBH) project through to March 2021, to continue to support digital inclusion work with vulnerable people in the city during Covid19 and in transition/recovery. DBH has been operating as the digital inclusion delivery work stream of the vulnerable people's cell in the council during the pandemic. DBH has been working with others such as seniors housing, homeless charities and many others to supply devices and digital support to vulnerable people especially older residents and homeless people during Covid19.
- 1.2 Digital Brighton & Hove (DBH) has been successful in delivering and coordinating Digital inclusion in the city in the last five years. Current project funding ceases at the end of June this year, at a time when the services that it delivers are even more needed. Over its existence, the project has successfully attracted additional funding from other sources such as BT, National Lottery Community Fund, Community Works, and CAST (Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology), but needs core revenue funding to continue to operate and to lever in other resources.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the council makes a contribution of £51,809 to enable Digital Brighton & Hove to continue to provide the digital inclusion support and coordination in the city from July 2020 to the end of March 2021.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Digital Brighton & Hove (DBH) is a digital inclusion project run by Citizens Online, and over the past five years has achieved considerable success as reported in its [evaluation and impact report](#), working with over 300 organisations and reaching in excess of 4,500 residents, and provided nearly 7,000 sessions of support.

3.2 DBH has established the extent of digital exclusion in the city through a [baseline evaluation](#) in 2016 which was [reviewed](#) in 2018. The disproportionate impact on older people has long been recognised, and DBH has produced a [report](#) on this. This disproportionate effect is reflected in the impact of Covid19 on older and vulnerable people, who are now doubly disadvantaged at a time when digital access is even more critical.

### 3.3 Benefits of Digital Inclusion Provision:

To the end beneficiaries:

- Access to services and support via digital means especially for vulnerable people
- Reduction in social isolation and exclusion, and related financial disadvantage
- Improved health and well-being using digital contact with health and social care providers, digital self-help resources, and mood-boosting recreational resources
- Earnings benefits: these relate to increased earnings of between 3% and 10% through acquiring digital skills
- Employability benefits: access to work, education and training opportunities, improved employability, and access to benefits if unemployed
- Retail transaction benefits: shopping online has been found to be 13% cheaper on average than shopping in-store
- Communication benefits: basic digital skills can enable people to connect and communicate with family, friends, and the community 14% more frequently
- Time savings: these relate to the time saved by accessing government services and banking online rather than in person, est. about 30 minutes per transaction.

(Data based on research by the [Centre for Economics and Business Research](#)):

To the council:

- Improved communication and service delivery to residents
- Improved customer satisfaction through improved quality of service
- Greater cross-sector collaboration in meeting the needs of local vulnerable people

To the community and voluntary sector:

- More efficient use of their resources and better sustainability from greater collaboration
- Improved digital skills of staff and volunteers
- Improved communication and marketing using digital tools
- Less dependency of clients on face to face or telephone advice on routine issues as they become more willing and able to use online resources

3.4 In a crisis where digital access and skills are even more essential to get support, food, medicines, benefits, and remain in contact with family and friends, it is essential that organisations and sectors work together to reduce the digital divide. Specific objectives are:

- To operate as part of the city's Covid19 Recovery Programme, supporting vulnerable people through digital inclusion activity

- To coordinate the provision of remote digital support to those already online but lacking skills and confidence to use digital, and isolated due to the Covid19 crisis
- To help organisations source and distribute digital tech and connectivity to those without it, and link this to remote support in using it
- To support local community and voluntary sector organisations with their digital development using digital strategies and tools to innovate and improve their service as they shift from face to face to more digital contact with their end beneficiaries (this work was interrupted in its last phase by the Covid19 crisis)
- To maintain and support the DBH network, working across sectors to enable collaboration on digital inclusion activity
- To support the network of Digital Champions to resume face to face digital inclusion support, and provide training for organisations developing their digital development

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Three options were considered in the business case: do nothing; fund 100% of the core operating budget for DBH; fund 70% of the operating budget for DBH.
- 4.2 The case for doing nothing is that the council does not spend £51,809 in supporting the project. But the disadvantage of this is that the city will then lose the value of the benefits that DBH can bring, estimated at £229,859, and also face potential additional costs of increased email, telephone and face to face enquiries relating to digital support and skills, and recreating the training and support materials for volunteers and staff supporting digital inclusion and skills that DBH currently provides. Most importantly, local people would also feel the negative impacts of digital exclusion including, greater isolation and poorer mental health; difficulty accessing benefits, information, support, and services.
- 4.3 The other two options bring similar benefits (see 3.3 above) with the opportunity to reach more people and achieve higher targets with the fully funded option as more time would be spent on seeking funding for digital devices rather than to just remain operational. The 70% funding option gives DBH a reasonable chance of being able to raise the additional funding required from elsewhere, whilst still achieving substantial outcomes and targets.
- 4.4 The estimate value of the contribution that DBH can make is £229,859, if the council can provide £51,809 (70% of operational funding) made up of:
- £155,400 value of social return on investment at 3:1 ratio<sup>1</sup>
  - £36,750 value of support to each sector organisation (output)<sup>2</sup>
  - £10,500 value of DC volunteers time
  - £5,500 value of devices already acquired
  - £5,000 Citizens Online Training & Support Resources (webinars, materials)
  - £1,500 DBH Signposting Website hosting and development

<sup>1</sup> Based on Just Economics research from Get IT Together programme 2014. Alternative calculations are £500. saving in the first year for a new internet user (>£250,000 under this programme), or using a 15:1 Cost Benefit Ratio based on research by Good Things Foundation in 2018, however this was based on a ten year cumulative impact and investment.

<sup>2</sup> Estimate of £175. value to each organisation in the network over 9 months, based on 300 current registered

- £1,200 Digital Champions Network resources
- >£7,000 value of leveraged funding
- >£7,000 of in-kind support from Tech sector

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 The DBH network of over 300 organisations meets quarterly and has regular digital engagement, and the issue of the continuation of DBH was discussed through this network. The overwhelming response from those involved was the support for its continuation and the importance of the work that it is doing. There are example case studies with feedback from organisations and beneficiaries engaged in phase two of the project, including from seniors housing; council customer service centres; Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project; and YMCA.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 The context of Covid19 has made the issues of digital exclusion and digital service transformation, utterly essential and urgent. Those suffering from multiple and overlapping forms of deprivation in the city are also the most likely to be digitally excluded. Without devices or connectivity, the most vulnerable may be stuck in their homes, unable to access food, healthcare and other services and the support they need.

6.2 As the crisis swiftly evolves, these immediate problems of connectivity will be supplemented with medium term problems of service provision in the public and third sectors having to make radical and substantial transformations from mostly in person, to online forms of provision. This will trigger many other needs of digital transformation, including upskilling workers and putting in place new forms of digital infrastructure. This digital transformation will then be increasingly necessary for organisations to survive through a recession that is predicted to be the deepest in 100 years.

6.3 The recommendation is to contribute £51,809 for the July 20 to March 21 period to enable DBH to continue to support digital inclusion activity in the city. This represents 70% of the operational costs and gives DBH a reasonable chance of being able to raise the additional 30% from other sources.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

7.1 There is currently no specific budget to fund the £51,809 contribution. However, this cost can be managed within the current Libraries budget by reducing the contribution to the Libraries PFI reserve during 2020/21. A review of the reserve has been undertaken and this one year reduction in contribution is achievable.

7.2 The council is currently facing a gap of an estimated £51.6m due to the costs of the pandemic against the expected levels of government grant. Any additional costs to the authority could increase this gap.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks*

*Date: 09/06/20*

Legal Implications:

- 7.3 The Council must take into consideration the financial implications referred to above in reaching a decision.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 080620*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 Digital inclusion impacts hardest on those most vulnerable, such as the elderly, the poor, the homeless, and those with health conditions and mental health issues. The digital divide reflects other social exclusions factors, and these are more acute at this time of crisis. An equalities impact assessment is being completed.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 DBH will be working with organisations that recycle digital devices to help supply this equipment to those without and who cannot afford to purchase them. Currently exploring the opportunity to work with Tech Takeback on project to recycle digital devices for working and studying at home.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.6 None

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.6 DBH has been an operational workstream of the Vulnerable People's cell during the height of the crisis, supporting vulnerable people in the city through digital inclusion activity. This would continue as part of the developing City Recovery Programme.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.7 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.8 This is an opportunity to build on the benefits already achieved and improve digital access, skills, and confidence for the most vulnerable. If DBH stops work in June, there is a risk that the most vulnerable experience further disadvantage through lacking opportunities that digital inclusion brings and the digital divide gets larger.

There is a risk of not achieving the additional funding needed to maintain the DBH projects work, but this will be significantly mitigated by the council funding 70% of core operating costs.

### Public Health Implications:

#### 7.9 Public health implications include:

- access to services and support via digital means;
- reduction in social isolation and exclusion, and related financial disadvantage;
- improved health and well-being using digital contact with health and social care providers, digital self-help resources, and mood-boosting recreational resources

### Corporate / Citywide Implications:

#### 7.8 Digital inclusion has an important role to play in supporting council priorities:

- A healthy and caring city: as described in public health and equalities sections above. The digital divide reflects other social exclusions factors, and these are more acute at this time of crisis.
- A growing and learning city: digital access to information and learning has become even more important during the pandemic
- A city working for all: job-seeking, self-employment, and small business development, as well as access to benefits and grants, all require some level of digital access
- Homelessness: DBH has been working with homeless charities such as ClockTower Sanctuary, Just Life and BHT to support with supply of technology and digital skills support for homeless people in the city before and during the Covid19 crisis.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background Documents**

Business case for supporting Digital Brighton & Hove