REPORT TO WEST AREA PEOPLE BOARD

18th October 2018

Improving digital skills to improve inclusion and reduce isolation

1.   Purpose

1.1   Following the approval of the West Area Committee priorities in June and the subsequent discussion at July People Board with regard to improving skills and ensuring digital inclusion, research has been undertaken to present the findings and suggest proposals for West People Board consideration.

2.   Background

2.1   Digital skills are critical as we continue to move into the digital age, for some communities the skills gap is widening.

Category 1:Basic digital literacy skills (empowering individuals): skills which are needed by every citizen to become 'digitally literate'. These are the skills needed to carry out basic functions such as using digital applications to communicate and carry out basic internet searches. Cyber security sits under this category.

Category 2: Digital skills for the general workforce (upskilling for the digital economy): all of category 1, plus skills needed in a workplace and generally linked to the use of applications developed by IT specialists. While the digital skills needed by the workforce are likely to differ across sectors, there will be some minimum requirements linked to processing information that will be applicable across all sectors.

2.2   It is therefore clear that supporting digital inclusion is not all about universal credit – understanding and being able to navigate the online systems for universal credit is indeed important, however people are 'digitally' vulnerable in many other ways too, if they are not IT confident/literate. Searching for the best price for utilities, online security and avoiding fraud, communicating with services, accessing health advice, by way of an example.

2.3   Improving digital awareness and experience, increasing confidence in the use of ICT could offer the opportunity to improve social isolation as well as health and wellbeing and managing a budget.

2.4   There are a number of wider projects across the city to improve digital inclusion/skills - various partners are already supporting this important agenda – DWP; Gentoo; VCS network as an example. We need to ensure that we are signposting to this support and any project subsequently delivered by the West Area Committee must add value, not replicate. A full list of free digital skills training is attached at Annex 1. This will be shared with the West VCS network to ensure all VCS organisations are able to signpost/ support where they have the skills and / or capacity.

3.0   Required outcomes for any future digital project (full details within Annex 2 attached)

- Able to turn on a device
- Able to use the available controls on a device
- Using a keyboard
- Using a mouse

- Using a touchscreen
- Make use of accessibility tools on device to make it easier to use /assistive technology (google chrome)
- Able to interact with the home screen on device
- Understand that the internet allows people to access information and content and that enables a person to connect to it through Wi-Fi
- Connecting device to a safe and secure Wi-Fi network
- Connect to the internet and open a browser to find and use websites
- Understand that passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others
- Able to update and change passwords when prompted to do so

3.1 Essential Skills
There are five categories of Essential Digital Skills for life and work covered in the framework – and they present it all very well with clear outcomes under the headings:
- Communicating
- Handling information and content
- Transacting
- Problem Solving
- Being safe and legal online

4.0 Proposal for future West Digital Inclusion scheme

4.1 The West has many opportunities to continue to make synergies between its local delivery – link to NEET project; CLLD projects if families are signposted; working with local schools; welfare advice providers; Gentoo; youth and holiday activities (linking with families and delivering joint family-orientated digital activities).

4.2 Any proposal must understand the needs of local communities – what are they telling us on the ground… Young parents / single parents etc. require supported childcare; People lack of confidence; People are unable to obtain reliable advice with regard to expenses and bills; People struggle with communicating on social media; Lack of awareness of to reduce online fraud; Unable to set up an email address; Unable to navigate online banking and managing finances; Unable to undertake online shopping to ensure value for money.

4.3 Communication and publicity of the programme must also be aligned to ensure those in need are reached – drop-in sessions; promoted via the schools; social media forums; advertisements within local GP surgeries; promotion at local events and shopping centres; information sharing via the VCS in their venues and part of their outreach activities, by way of an example.

5.0 Finance

5.1 Develop a call for projects if West Area Committee SIB approved and allocated – ensuring collaborative partnership working across the area, enabling ward specific delivery to eliminate travel expenses to access local support.

5.2 Ensure project delivery is linked into all matchfunding opportunities and complementary delivery – such as the West CLLD projects; West NEET project; local library offer etc.

6.   Recommendations

6.1   Note the contents of the report.

6.2   Agree options to be recommended to Area Committee in November 2018.

6.2.1   Recommend an allocation £30,000 SIB funding to support the delivery of a West Digital Inclusion programme via a call for projects to the West VCS.
Call for projects to include:
- All projects must accept clients signposted from other VCS organisations within the West as well as those organisations who are delivering CLLD projects within the West of Sunderland
- All projects must ensure they are utilising all free training courses available to maximise outputs and use all funding efficiently
- Projects must be delivered in partnership across each ward and the maximum project value is £5,000
- Projects can be a mixture of capital and revenue, however any capital expenditure must demonstrate best value for money and sustainability arrangements to maintain any ICT equipment which has been procured, as well as installation of any relevant security measures to protect users from online fraud.
- A call for projects would be developed and the applications would be presented to a future People board for consideration and a decision.