



**FOR PUBLICATION**

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES**

**22 January 2024**

**Report of the Director - Public Health**

**Strengthen Digital Support in Derbyshire**  
(Cabinet Member for Health and Communities)

**1. Divisions Affected**

1.1 County-wide.

**2. Key Decision**

2.1 This is not a Key Decision.

**Purpose**

2.2 The Cabinet Member for Health and Communities is asked to approve the award of grants to:

- a) Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD) to coordinate the Digital Support Derbyshire Network (DSDN) for 2 years, subject to satisfactory performance, at a cost of £0.050m per annum and a total value of £0.100m
- b) Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners to deliver work that strengthens community based digital inclusion. The Digital Support Derbyshire Network will administer the governance, approval and issuing of small grants to community partners within the network, at a cost of £0.050m per annum for a maximum 2 years at a total value of £0.100m.

**3. Information and Analysis**

- 3.1 There is a strong correlation between digital exclusion, financial exclusion, and social exclusion. Covid-19 led to a widening of this digital divide, as more products and services moved online and became 'digital by default'. Additionally, those facing digital exclusion are more likely to have other challenges that make it difficult for them to access information and engage with online services such as adults with a registered disability or long-term health condition and/or on low incomes.
- 3.2 Increasing opportunities for digital inclusion is essential to reduce health inequalities and helps tackle financial and social exclusion by (1) empowering residents to develop and improve digital skills, ensuring everyone is connected, and (2) embedding digital inclusion in the everyday work of organisations, as well as ensuring that this work is sustainable.
- 3.3 Recognising this, in June 2021, the Public Health Investment Panel supported the proposed investment from the public health reserve to develop a public health approach to address emerging digital inclusion issues.
- 3.4 Following a robust procurement exercise, Citizens Online were awarded the contract and commenced work in April 2022. Citizens Online collaborated with 655 stakeholders to understand digital exclusion risk factors in Derbyshire and produced a draft public health digital inclusion strategy with a set of recommendations.
- 3.5 Whilst the strategy was being developed, VCSE partners across Derbyshire were also forming the DSDN. Work has been coordinated to date by RAD, utilising one-off short-term funding from NHS Charities Together to deliver community based digital services in localities across Derbyshire.
- 3.6 To maximise resources and reduce duplication, Citizens Online and the DSDN collaborated extensively to inform the emerging strategy and drive the agenda forward. A significant mapping exercise to identify existing digital inclusion provision in Derbyshire contributed towards shaping our direction of travel. The website currently lists 108 digital support offers across the county, which continues to increase (quarterly) due to the work of the network.
- 3.7 Other notable achievements of the DSDN include:
  - Over 250 network members.

- The development of a Digital Pantries pilot into 5 DCC supported Community Food Pantries. This integrates basic digital training and support into food pantry settings. 2 further digital pantries are starting in January 2024.
  - 5 network events delivered on topics such as digital health apps.
  - Planned for Jan 2024 – expansion of PC Refurb work from the High Peak locality to cover the whole DSDN area.
  - Planned for Jan 2024 – Digital Awareness Raising Training for organisations across Derbyshire.
- 3.8 On 27 November 2023, the Cabinet Member for Health and Communities was briefed on the Derbyshire Public Health Digital Inclusion Strategy (2023- 2026) and supported implementation being undertaken by officers within the public health team.
- 3.9 The strategy outlines how Public Health can work with internal County Council departments and other external community stakeholders to champion and shape the future of digital inclusion work across Derbyshire. The three key priority areas are summarised below:
- Residents are empowered to develop and improve digital skills.
  - Everyone is connected.
  - Digital Inclusion is embedded into organisations and provision is sustainable.
- 3.10 To kickstart delivery against these priorities this report outlines proposals to strengthen collaboration with VCSE partners, who are best placed to work with local communities to improve digital skills. However, funding for coordination of DSDN is coming to an end, and sustainability of the network is now at risk. Whilst it is recognised that there are over 100 digital support offers in Derbyshire currently, without strategic coordination of the Derbyshire offer there is a risk of duplication across the system. Draft findings from an evaluation conducted by Sheffield University (2023) into DSDN has also concluded that networks “need time to develop, identify synergies and expand their reach”.
- 3.11 Strengthening future community based digital inclusion is a key enabler for public health and offers the opportunity to contribute towards the following areas of work:
- Addressing the wider determinants of health, e.g., supporting people to gain employment via online applications or by contributing towards income maximisation through online savings.

- Improve efficiency and reduce demand on Council services by supporting residents to identify their own support where possible, or by accessing services more efficiently online through health apps, online appointments, or online information.
- Reduce inequality, by proactively supporting residents at risk of exclusion due to digital by default approaches.
- Addressing community safety concerns through supporting residents to access digital platforms safely and securely.
- Increase the number of digital champions supporting people to improve digital skills across Derbyshire.
- Strengthen digital maturity and understanding of digital barriers across the system.

3.12 Elements outlined above will contribute towards emerging areas of focus in the new Public Health Strategy (2024-2029), recognising that improving digital skills is a key enabler for Derbyshire residents.

3.13 Conversations are ongoing with NHS partners to join up work and support Integrated Care System (ICS) priorities.

3.14 This report also proposes the development of a small grants scheme for DSDN members that will support new services, or the expansion of existing provision into other areas to provide more equitable access. A recent survey conducted with organisations in Derbyshire (n=84) identified the need for increased digital provision, with 41 out of 45 respondents suggesting more funding and financial resources are required to support the continuation of both current and new services that support digital inclusion.

3.15 If approved, administration of the grants will be underpinned by robust criteria and overseen by a funding panel that has representatives from the DSDN and Public Health.

## **4. Consultation**

4.1 In considering the digital needs across Derbyshire, 506 residents participated in a telephone poll. 96 stakeholders from 84 separate organisations have also played an active role in shaping findings from Citizens Online's research.

## **5. Alternative Options Considered**

5.1 Share Derbyshire's Public Health Digital Inclusion Strategy 2023-2026, without investing any further public health funding into this area of work. This is not a preferred option.

5.2 Allow the DSDN to expire in March 2024, at the end of RAD's funding from NHS Charities Together. This is not a preferred option.

## **6. Implications**

6.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

## **7. Background Papers**

7.1 Public Health approach to addressing the digital divide. 22 July 2021. Cabinet Member for Health and Communities Report.

## **8. Appendices**

8.1 Appendix 1 – Implications

8.2 Appendix 2 – Digital Exclusion Risk in Derbyshire- Baseline Report: [DerbyshireCountyBaselineReportFinal \(1\).pdf](#)

8.3 Appendix 3 - Derbyshire Residents Phone Poll & overview of findings: [Derbyshire Internet Use Phone Poll Findings 2023.pdf](#)

8.4 Appendix 4 – Derbyshire's Public Health Digital Inclusion Strategy: [Derbyshire Public Health Digital Inclusion Strategy Document Final 20 Sept 2023.pdf](#)

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Communities approves the award of grants to:

- a) Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD) to coordinate the Digital Support Derbyshire Network (DSDN) for 2 years, subject to satisfactory performance, at a cost of £0.050m per annum and a total value of £0.100m.
- b) Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners to deliver work that strengthens community based digital inclusion. The Digital Support Derbyshire Network will administer the

governance, approval and issuing of small grants to community partners within the network, at a cost of £0.050m per annum for a maximum 2 years at a total value of £0.100m.

## **10. Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

- 10.1 Agreeing to the grant funding outlined in this report will enable the DSDN to grow, supporting stakeholders to work in collaboration to improve digital inclusion across Derbyshire.

## **11. Is it necessary to waive the call-in period?**

- 11.1 No.

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## **Implications**

### **Financial**

- 1.1 The £0.100m for the coordination of the DSDN will be funded from the Public Health Reserves and will be issued via a grant agreement in line with Derbyshire County Council's Financial Regulations.
- 1.2 The £0.100m for grants to VCSE partners to deliver work that strengthens community based digital inclusion will be issued by a small grants fund managed by DSDN. This will be funded from the Public Health Reserve and issued via a grant agreement in line with Derbyshire County Council's Financial Regulations.
- 1.3 The Public Health reserve is forecast to be £8.9M at the end of 2023/24 with £3.8m of committed scheme spend approved in 2023-24 to be spent in 2024/25 and onwards. The proposed grant awards can therefore be met from the Public Health reserve balance.

### **Legal**

- 2.1 The Council's Financial Regulations allow grants of up to £0.100m to organisations to be approved by the Cabinet Member.
- 2.2 The Council's standard grant agreement shall be used to set out the terms and conditions for which the grants are made, which provide clawback of funding in certain circumstances and shall also provide that the Council has no liability for any employment liabilities.
- 2.3 The Council has the power to provide funding and grants under the general power of competence set out in section the Localism Act 2011.

### **Human Resources**

- 3.1 The funding will enable local providers to network and provide local digital support to its community. Derbyshire County Council accepts no employment or future redundancy liability, with all employment and related matters to be managed by the providers.

### **Information Technology**

- 4.1 As part of the Council's standard grant agreement, providers will have to complete the Schedule 2 section outlining the measures they will take

around the use of individuals' personal data, to ensure it is processed, stored, and destroyed in line with Council policy.

- 4.2 There will be no Council IT systems used by providers as part of the DSDN coordination or small grants fund.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 5.1 The purpose of the DSDN is to connect and empower Derbyshire residents to reduce health inequalities and help tackle financial and social exclusion. Therefore, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been deemed necessary at this time, as there will be sufficient mechanisms within the administration of the two grants to ensure equity of access.

### **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 6.1 The public health digital inclusion strategy and action plan supports the following DCC priorities:
- (Thriving Communities) Resilient, healthy, and safe communities – enabling residents to manage their health and wellbeing, keep safe online and connecting communities via digital support. It will also support voluntary sector, local networks and libraries strengthen their work in the community, demonstrating the importance of Recommendations 1 and 2.
  - (Enterprising Council) High performing, value for money and resident focussed services – improving staff digital skills, transforming inclusivity, improving user journeys and connectivity will enable delivery of better services for less and improve customer satisfaction. Adopting Recommendation 3 will support this process.
  - Effective early help for individuals and communities – digital access can support residents to access help and support, also support practitioners to manage risk and models for early intervention. Digital inclusion can enable education, managing mental health, well-being and reduce social isolation. Recommendations 1 and 2 will have a positive impact on identifying needs of residents sooner.
  - A prosperous and green Derbyshire - digital inclusion is essential to improve access to better jobs and business growth. Encouraging recycling of tech devices will support the circular economy and reduce



e-waste. Recommendation 3 will support some of these principles of sustainability.

**Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)**

7.1 In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity, environmental, health, property, and transport considerations. There are no anticipated negative impacts from this decision.