



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

19 October 2023

Report of the Executive Director - Children's Services

Roll out of electronic devices for learning update
(Cabinet Member for Education)

1. Divisions Affected

1.1 County-wide

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is not a Key Decision

3. Purpose

3.1 Provide an update to cabinet members on the roll out of electronic devices for learning in Derbyshire.

4. Information and Analysis

4.1 Between 2020 and 2023 Derbyshire County Council facilitated access, distribution, and utilisation of over 11,000 new digital devices (laptops) to support children and young people in Derbyshire during the pandemic to connect with schools and wider services. It also enabled pupils to communicate with school, engage with remote learning during the lock downs and participate in educational strategies and catch up schemes.

4.2 A number of services within Derbyshire County Council also annually provide over 180 devices to disadvantaged children and young people enabling access for learning and support services.

- 4.3 Identifying potential demand as we emerged out of the pandemic has been particularly challenging due to the range of devices suitable to support learning and the different platforms and techniques used by education providers to deliver and support remote learning. Remote learning has also naturally declined following the reintroduction of full face-to-face learning across our education system.

Potential demand for a device in Derbyshire was estimated from national reports and a survey of Derbyshire Schools (see table 1).

A Derbyshire school survey carried out in October 2021 received responses from 153 schools and academies identifying a potential demand (by scaling up the responses to provide an estimate for the whole county) of 598 digital devices across Derbyshire.

The reduction in demand since the 2020 national reports and Derbyshire’s survey follows a number of laptop schemes from the Department for Education (DfE) in response to the Covid pandemic and provision of devices through targeted Derbyshire services.

Table 1 Potential demand for a device

Report date	Potential Demand ¹
Ofcom March 2020 ² , 9% of children had no access at home to laptop, desktop, or tablet	13,828
Ofcom April 2021 ³ , 2% of children never have access to a computer	3,027
Derbyshire survey September 2021	598

- 4.4 To deliver the pledge Childrens Services has worked in close partnership with the DfE, a dedicated East Midlands Local Authority group, Derbyshire schools, academies and colleges, and other Derbyshire County Council departments. Delivering the pledge, providing support and devices to schools, care leavers, education providers, and social care during and post pandemic.
- 4.5 The DfE in response to the Covid lock downs supported children’s education and access to key services by providing laptops through two main schemes.

¹ Based upon the number of children in Derbyshire in August 2021

² Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21 (ofcom.org.uk)

³ Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022 (ofcom.org.uk)

- 4.5.1 The DfE provided 2760 Laptops to Derbyshire County Council to loan to targeted disadvantaged groups including children with a social worker, care leavers and year 10 pupils. The scheme was announced nationally in April 2020 and devices started to be delivered to Derbyshire in June 2020. Derbyshire took a lead role in a regional working group made up of 8 East Midlands Local Authorities, working in partnership to ensure regional consistency in approach. Derbyshire officers were able to maximise the opportunity by developing working partnerships with the DfE. Developing a new loan scheme required working sensitively and building close partnerships with Derbyshire Schools, academies, and social care. The team had to quickly identify the type of device required, device set up and safeguards, identification of eligible children and young people with a digital need, distribution and loan arrangements. Between 2020 and 2023 the children services team were supported by stakeholders from every department across the council, all of whom were dedicated to ensuring best utilisation of devices and additional devices requested from the DfE, as well as ensuring underutilised devices were re-distributed. Schools, social care and Derbyshire's business services unit were all critical in enabling the cost efficient and effective distribution of devices to the children and young people of Derbyshire. It is felt that this work represents an excellent example of cross-council working and the benefits of a "One Council" approach to addressing a significant challenge and supporting some of our most disadvantaged residents.
- 4.5.2 A second DfE scheme provided an estimated 8347 laptops directly to schools and academies in Derbyshire. The Children's Services working group with their knowledge and experience with DfE procedures, systems and ordering mechanisms were able to support Derbyshire schools and academies. The team supported schools during the challenging times of the pandemic to enable children and young people to gain access to a digital device and the internet. The team were able to support schools to understand the different schemes and opportunities available, identifying their allocation, place orders, request additional devices and set up school loan schemes.
- 4.6 Free internet access during the pandemic was provided to 562 children and young people across Derbyshire. The Childrens Services team supported the promotion, distribution and administration of a number of national schemes including those from the DfE.
- 4.7 During 2021-2023, a number of workshops with Councillors and senior leaders took place. Schools, academies, and other education provides were identified as those best placed to continue identifying and supporting those digitally disadvantaged with their learning. It was felt

that providers knew their pupil cohorts and their individual circumstances better than anyone else and therefore were best placed to be able to identify those who did not have access to a device at home and were not otherwise benefitting from a device from any of the DfE schemes. Ownership of loan devices has since been transferred to Derbyshire Schools where appropriate, ensuring continued maximised utilisation of the laptops provided by the DfE to support learning in Derbyshire schools. This has meant that providers are not only able to identify those pupils who have a need, but then meet that need straightaway.

4.8 Through the use of technology, the working group has also been able to ensure the best possible utilisation of the devices in circulation. The team have been able to establish remotely where devices have not been switched on for several months. Checks have then been undertaken to establish whether the device is still required and if not, these have been recovered, reset and put back into circulation so they are available for education providers to support students who are more in need.

4.9 While the vast majority of devices have now been transferred to schools, a small number have been retained by the team to ensure they are still able to respond to any direct requests for support, for example which may come from a parent or via a Councillor on behalf of a constituent.

5. Consultation

5.1 DfE schemes rolled out during the pandemic were developed and delivered by a team within Derbyshire County Council Children's Services in consultation and collaboration with DfE, regional local authority partners, social care, corporate services, schools, academies, and education providers.

5.2 September 2021 all schools were surveyed regarding their digital response to the pandemic, 153 responses were received.

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Report is for information and update on the roll out of electronic devices for learning.

7. Implications

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

8. Background Papers

8.1 None applicable

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 – Implications

10. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- a) Note the progress made to support children and young people to achieve their educational potential, enabling access to electronic devices and the range of schemes still available to support children and young people who are digitally disadvantaged in Derbyshire.
- 562 Children and young people were supported with free internet access during Covid.
 - 11,147 Laptops are now in circulation in schools and with individual children since 2020.
 - On average Derbyshire schemes provide children and young people with 180 devices a year.

11. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

11.1 Information, update and on-going roll out of electronic devices for learning.

12. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

12.1 No

Report Author: Robert Hayward

Contact details: Robert.Hayward@derbyshire.gov.uk

Implications

Financial

- 1.1 On-going schemes are managed by individual services and are funded via existing budgets, most notably Virtual School, Derbyshire Foster carers scheme and directly by schools.

Legal

- 2.1 Alongside supporting children's learning in school the provision of electronic devices can be used to help facilitate education for those children not able to attend school, for example, due to illness and can assist the Local Authority in fulfilling its statutory duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996. Section 19 requires the Local Authority to make arrangements for the provision of a suitable education for children of compulsory school age who may not for any period receive suitable education unless arrangements are made for them.'
- 2.2 The Director of Legal Services has provided advice in relation to the contractual arrangements with schools and individuals for the provision and loan of digital devices.

Human Resources

- 3.1 On-going schemes are managed within individual services.

Information Technology

- 4.1 On-going schemes are managed within individual services.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 A wide range of schemes are available which enable access to devices for all children and young people in Derbyshire.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 On-going schemes are managed within individual services.

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

7.1 On-going schemes are managed within individual services.

7.2 Devices were provided through a number of different schemes including,

- DfE Remote Education Scheme, 2322 devices, other schemes 438 devices
- DfE Can't Attend School scheme, 4705 devices to mainstream and 3465 devices to academy school, other schemes 177 devices
- Derbyshire Leaving Care service,
- Derbyshire virtual school,
- Derbyshire virtual classroom,
- Derbyshire foster carers scheme,
- Loan schemes managed by individual Schools, further education and education establishments.
- Derbyshire Libraries

The Derbyshire schemes provide on average 180 devices a year to targeted groups.