

Digital Inclusion Support Tonbridge and Malling

Business Justification Case

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Portfolio: Chief Executive's Department – Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance – Financial Hardship Programme

Version No: 0.5

Purpose:

The purpose of this Business Justification Case is to provide reasoning for undertaking a digital inclusion support project funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. It evaluates the benefit, cost and risk of alternative options and provides a rationale for the preferred solution.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date Issued	Brief Summary of Change	Owner's Name
v0.1	01.07.23	First draft version	Jake Huggett
v0.2	05.10.23	Second draft version	Jake Huggett
v0.3	09.10.23	Third draft version	Jake Huggett
v0.4	20.10.23	Fourth draft version	Jake Huggett
v0.5	27.10.23	Review of fourth draft	Sam Lain-Rose

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1 Introduction

This business justification sets out the project funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for £75,000 to support residents within the district to become more digitally included. The funding is coming from the Tonbridge & Malling Business Rates Retention Pilot Reserve which is focussed on supporting economic growth through a range of initiatives, one of which is focussed on digital provision across the borough.

The aim of the project is to support eligible residents with hardware (i.e., laptops) and skills development, in line with the government's digital skills framework. There will be a key focus on supporting residents who are seeking employment/career development in, or at risk of, financial hardship and/or becoming NEET.

2 Strategic Context

2.1 Strategic Context

KCC has identified within its Framing Kent's Future strategy a priority for 'Infrastructure for Communities' and their commitment to improve digital connectivity and access across Kent by supporting the delivery of both government-led and local programmes via 'work with our partners to develop and build a coordinated approach to digital inclusion across the county that will benefit residents, businesses, and those organisations supporting them, as digital technology and services evolve in a post-pandemic world'. (KCC, 2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that having access to a digital device and the relevant digital skills is essential in everyday life. Most services now require digital skills to access and require access to a device and the internet and smart towns are growing the importance and potential for digital in the day to day running of our lives. It is an essential requirement that adults have access to a device in order to achieve desired health, education and employment outcomes including booking GP appointments, accessing training courses and applying for jobs.

By providing hardware and digital skills development to residents of Tonbridge and Malling, the project team aim to reduce digital exclusion across the district as well as improve health, education and employment outcomes for residents.

2.2 Case for Change

2.2.1 Business Needs

Inclusion is a philosophy where the belief is that everyone has a basic right to participate fully in society and that differences are accepted and valued. The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society together with the public sector equality duty explains that public bodies must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering service is and in relation to their own employees.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, there were quick changes in the way education, and many Kent services were being delivered and will continue being delivered into the future. The Digital Exclusion in Kent 2021 report (see appendix B) highlights profiles that are at risk of digital exclusion in Kent, it explains that the most deprived communities are much more unlikely to keep up with developments in technology, as well as older people in rural locations. Those in deprived households are more likely to use the internet less than every day. The Digital Exclusion in Kent 2021 report has also noted that there is a strong digital divide in Kent, with some areas more at risk of digital exclusion than others.

According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), in 2019 there were 4.8 million adults in the UK, or 9% of the adult population, who had either never used the internet or not used it in the past three months (ONS, 2019). What can be seen is that those who are on a low income and/or living in areas of deprivation are more likely to be digitally excluded.

Tonbridge and Malling's borough population in the 2021 census data was 132,200 which is an 9.4% increase in 2011 census data. According to the Tonbridge and Malling Digital Exclusion report 2021 (see appendix C) 2.8% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Tonbridge and Malling are in the 10% most likely to be digitally excluded neighbourhoods in Kent. The average LSOA digital inclusion score is significantly lower than for Kent (38.83 vs 49.32) with fewer LSOAs in the most likely to be digitally excluded. The average proportion of households who use the Internet less than every day for LSOAs is 12.6%, which is significantly lower than for Kent. The average digital inclusion score of LSOAs in Tonbridge and Malling is 38.83 (CI: 36.80-40.86) which is significantly lower than for all LSOAs in Kent.

Digital Kent's Hardware access scheme (HAS) offers devices to those eligible Kent residents and is open to professionals or refer through a number of different pathways. Tonbridge and Malling borough has seen low referral numbers compared to other districts and the project team identified this when shaping the project. In Phase 1 (February 2022-December 2022) of HAS 155 referrals were received with 140 approved and only 15 declined. Then in Phase 2 (beginning of 2023 to August 2023) 28 referrals were made of which 18 approved and 10 declined.

Tonbridge and Malling has pockets of digital exclusion across the borough that need addressing and if not addressed those that are excluded will continue to fall further behind the rest of the borough which cannot be addressed without intervention. Identifying those most at need will mean a greater impact on the issue locally as we are able to target those residents that have the greatest need.

To conclude, in unprecedented circumstances during the pandemic many services have transformed from 'face to face' to digital services, where appropriate, and will continue to be digital into the future. For KCC to continue to develop digital solutions to address the need to transform services to generate savings, there is a need to ensure that those who are digitally disadvantaged are not left behind, especially as the subsequent, ongoing cost-of-living crisis ensues. This project will address this issue by providing hardware and digital skills development to those eligible residents within the Tonbridge and Malling Borough. It will also help people get online so that they feel part of society.

2.2.2 Benefits

The **main** benefits expected from the project are described in Table 1.

Type of benefit / Opportunity	Description
Cash releasing (£s)	There are limited immediate cash-releasing benefits from this project. Although, with the successful implementation and delivery of the project, this could possibly generate an income for the Council attracting additional funding (e.g., through the local council or other local authorities within Kent, businesses, or external funding programmes) to continue the project or replicate it in their district/borough.
Non-cash releasing (£s)	The project will address if cash savings can be made in other departments such as health and social care, public health, education, and employment due to the ability of those able to now get online or maintain being access to digital services, rather than relying on face-to-face service provision.
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The % of residents that engage with the project • The % of residents that are gifted hardware • The % of residents that take up the skills development sessions • The % of increase in employment across the district aided by the access to hardware and/or skills development • The % decrease of NEET young people within the district due to having digital access to courses etc • The % increase of residents utilising digital in every day life and having digital access • The % decrease of digital exclusion across the district
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More residents in the district report that they have been able to access services online that are meaningful to them with regards to looking after their health (e.g., submitting online consultation form to GP, ordering repeat prescription, checking symptoms and treatment escalation, food shopping) reducing the need to use NHS services such as A&E and doctors' surgeries ▪ NEET residents in the district report that they can access educational resources online and as a result have been able to maintain and/or enhance their studies, resulting in the decrease of NEET's across the district ▪ More residents in the district report that they are now able to access online training opportunities and platforms for job searching which will support them to achieve economic well-being and a decrease in unemployment ▪ More residents in the district report that they have been able to access online forms concerning financial help (e.g., universal credit application, child benefit re-confirmation, debt advice, etc.) ▪ More residents have access to a digital device and have the skills required to socialise and see friends and family, reducing feelings of social isolation

Table 1: Main project benefits/opportunities

The dis-benefit to the project is that the one-off funding available can only support a certain number of residents with hardware in comparison to the digital skills development sessions which will be opened more widely.

2.2.3 Risks

Main Risks	Counter Measures
Take-up of hardware is low	The project team will actively market the project through both digital and collateral marketing material as well as target residents previously supported. The project team will target organisations who they work with to promote and access the scheme.
Take-up of hardware is high	The project team will monitor take-up to ensure that the hardware is given to those most in need and does not exceed stock levels. The project team will close the referrals as soon as all hardware is assigned to beneficiaries.
Take-up of digital skills development sessions is low	The project team will make the laptop set up and basic skills sessions mandatory for beneficiaries as well as open up the digital skills development sessions to residents across the district as well as ex-HAS beneficiaries.
Take-up of digital skills development sessions is high	The project team will monitor skills development session sign ups and limit the numbers to ensure that they are not oversubscribed and therefore not beneficial.
Eligibility criteria means some residents are ineligible and could cause unhappiness amongst the community	The eligibility criteria have been agreed between the project team and TMBC based on who the project team believe have the biggest need for the devices. If residents are ineligible, the project team will look at if they could benefit from a different scheme such as the loan scheme and still offer the skills development sessions.
Staff sickness or unable to attend sessions	The project team will ensure sufficient resource is put on the project and that staff members are briefed to step in to support as required.
Venues cancelling for skills development session	The project team will ensure back-up venues are available should a venue cancel a session as well as trying to utilise where possible public buildings to reduce this risk.
Partner organisations not engaging with the project or making referrals	The project team will ensure all organisations are briefed and provided relevant marketing material to try and ensure they are engaging and making referrals. The project team will ensure TMBC are also heavily involved in promotion as well as community engagement.
Beneficiaries not able to attend laptop set up sessions	The project team will offer a wide range of dates, times, and different locations to give the best chance for all beneficiaries to be able to attend set up and skills development sessions.

<p>Accessibility issues for residents being able to access the device provided</p>	<p>The project team will offer advice and guidance as to what accessibility tools are available and how to use them when using the device.</p>
<p>Funding delayed/withdrawn</p>	<p>If the funding is withdrawn the project preparatory work is lost and the targeted support cannot go ahead. Written agreement is sought from TMBC for funding arrangements.</p>
<p>Link to other projects of the Financial Hardship Programme</p>	<p>To make use of this opportunity, other relevant projects in the Programme are being mentioned at the skills sessions to support people in need. For example, Household support fund, Kent Money Advice Hub, etc.</p>

3 Options

3.1 Available Options

The following options are what the project team considered:

- **Option 1 – Do Nothing**
- **Option 2 – Do Minimum [Hardware only]**
- **Option 3 – Hardware and skills development**
- **Option 4 – Hardware, Connectivity and Skills Development**

3.2 Analysis of Short-listed options

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Do nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding remains unspent. • No staff time is required to manage the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvement work in digital inclusion within the district. • Our most digitally excluded residents in T&M remain without access to a device. • Our most digitally excluded residents in T&M remain without the digital skills required to improve employment, education, and health outcomes.
Do minimum-Hardware only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of devices available will be higher. • Reasonably quick to complete. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A higher number of residents will be gifted devices but not the skills required to effectively use them. • More difficult to measure impact of providing devices.
Hardware and Skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows residents to have access to device and get the skills support required. • Can offer skills development sessions to a wider audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No connectivity solution. • Fewer devices available than Option 2.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for measuring impact of skills development sessions after device gifted. 	
Hardware, Connectivity and Skills Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers out multiple solutions to residents. • Allows residents to obtain connectivity should they not have this at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer devices will be available to residents. • Connectivity solutions will not be relevant for lots of residents. • Less funding available to support skills sessions. • Digital Kent has other connectivity solutions available.

Table 2: Analysis of shortlisted options

3.3 Preferred Option

The preferred option is Option 3 which is to **provide hardware and skills development for eligible residents within the borough of Tonbridge and Malling.**

The proposal is for **225 hardware devices** and a **6-session skills development course** to be run with a number of different dates/times available for each session.

The eligibility criteria for accessing hardware are set as follows:

- Must live within the borough of Tonbridge and Malling.
- Must be at least 16 years old.
- Digitally excluded (an individual who is unable to use digital technologies due to lack of access, skill or knowledge).

Applicants must also meet one of the below criteria:

A. Financial Hardship

- In or at-risk of financial hardship (for example, in receipt of one or more UK state benefits).

B. Employment

- Unemployed and seeking employment
- Looking to develop skills to support employment or career development

C. NEET young people

- aged 16 to 18 (up to 25 with an EHCP) not in education, employment or training and is actively engaged with Kent County Council's NEET Support Service.

The project requires each beneficiary to attend a set-up session where the hardware device will be provided and basic set up and digital skills taught as well as signing of any required documentation. This is the only mandatory session although we will strongly encourage attendance at the further skills development sessions.

The skills development sessions planned as a 6-session course which includes the set-up session based around the Government Digital Skills framework and providing residents with the basic digital skills they require in order to use the device for education, health and/or employment outcomes.

The project team plan to integrate Digital Champion volunteers from the network to help support both set up session and skills development delivery. This will allow an exciting opportunity for the volunteers to get involved whilst also reducing the number of staff members that will be required.

The proposal is also to open up the skills development sessions to wider residents in the community, even if they are not eligible for devices as well as offer out the sessions to each Hardware Access Scheme (HAS) beneficiary within the district. This will ensure that all sessions are well attended and provide maximum impact to the residents of Tonbridge and Malling.

With this option the project team can maximise the funding in providing a blend of hardware and skills development to eligible residents to reduce digital exclusion within the district. This will ensure that digital inclusion is improved across the district and the residents most in need across the borough have access to hardware as well as the skills involved to improve their health, education and/or employment outcomes.

If any beneficiaries express a need for connectivity the project team will do an internal referral to the Connectivity Access Scheme should this project remain open and the beneficiary meet the eligibility criteria.

The referral route for this project will initially be via professional referral through the Digital Kent website with local organisations briefed on how to perform this and who would be eligible, etc. The types of organisations briefed will be DWP, borough council departments, local employers, community and third sector organisations, education employers, employment support organisations amongst others. If referrals are slow then the project team will look at the option of allowing self-referrals from residents

directly. Additional checks will be put in place to ensure that all self-referrals meet the eligibility criteria and the laptops and/or support are given to those who have the greatest need.

4 Procurement

4.1 Procurement Route

The Digital Inclusion Support Tonbridge and Malling project is being delivered through already procured elements of Digital Kent’s offering. The laptops within the Hardware Access Scheme were procured through KCS Y21028 framework. The digital support is being delivered by team members of the Digital Kent team alongside Digital Champion Volunteers funded by Kent County Council’s Helping Hands scheme.

The funding for the project is being made available by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council as part of the Business Rates Retention Pilot Reserve funding.

5 Funding and Affordability – Investment Appraisal

The full budget available for this project is £75,000, provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The breakdown of costs is as follows:

Activity	Cost
225 laptops	£56,250
Staffing and project set up costs	£15,000
Venue hire, refreshments, overheads	£1,500
Marketing	£2,250
Total	£75,000

6 Management Arrangements

The project is led by Jake Huggett and Doris Shaba-Jeffries from Digital Kent (Kent County Council) in partnership with Jeremy Whittaker (Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council). Monthly monitoring meetings will be set with relevant stakeholders to review progress, assess risks/challenges as well as agree any actions required.

Impact monitoring and benefits realisation reports will be produced throughout the project by assessing impact of devices for residents as well as skills development sessions.

A post project evaluation will be undertaken to assess overall success of the project as well as understanding lessons learnt for future similar projects.

Draft timeline for project (subject to change):

- November 2023- project sign off
- November-December 2023- project planning and arrangements ready for launch
- January 2024- Project Launch and Marketing activity begins
- February 2024- Laptop set-up sessions commence
- March 2024- Skills development sessions commence
- May 2024- Project close and project evaluation

The Project Management team is detailed below:




- Project SRO: Zena Cooke
- Project Manager: Sam Lain-Rose
- Senior Project Officer: Jake Huggett
- Senior Engagement Officer: Doris Shaba-Jeffries
- Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager (TMBC): Jeremy Whittaker

7 Business Justification Approval

Signed:	Sam Lain-Rose, Digital Lead
Date:	27/10/2023

8 Appendices

The following section contains all relevant Appendices to the Business Justification Case.

Appendix Title / Description	Embedded Document
Appendix A – ROD	 21-0024 - Record of Decision.pdf
Appendix B - Digital Exclusion in Kent 2021 report	 July 2021 - _KENT Digital Exclusion Repc
Appendix C - Tonbridge and Malling Digital Exclusion in Kent 2021 report	 July 2021 - Tonbridge and Mallin