

Record of Executive Member Decision Taken Under the Scheme of Delegation	On
	15 January 2021

Title	Report of
Tackling digital exclusion – provision of resources to enable home schooling for vulnerable children	Jennifer Mullin

Is this report confidential?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets is asked to consider allocating up to £20,000 from reserves funding to provide tablets, laptops and data for children who are unable to home-school due to affordability.

Recommendations

2. Allocation of up to £20,000 to fund a pilot project for home-schooling accessibility across the most deprived areas of South Ribble – providing devices and data to children who would not otherwise have access to them.

Reasons for recommendations

3. Following the Government announcement on 30 December placing Lancashire into the ‘very high’ tier of COVID restrictions, and the subsequent announcement on 4 January to close schools, immediate pressure was placed on schools and families to move to a home-school model.
4. National guidance has been put in place to minimise numbers of children in school and reduce the risk of virus transmission. Previously ‘key worker’ status enabled parents and carers to secure school places; this has now been replaced with more stringent rules for ‘critical workers’ only. As a consequence, there are some children whose education is being adversely impacted as they do not qualify for a school place, but do not have the ability to learn online.
5. In order to deliver a manageable scheme, and to prioritise the children who are most likely to be in need, the pilot project is proposed in the following areas:

Leyland – Wade Hall	Penwortham – Kingsfold
Leyland – Broadfield	Bamber Bridge

6. Staff are working with colleagues in schools liaison at LCC to ensure that schools are signposted and encouraged to apply for the government scheme, ‘Get Help With Technology.’ Through this, devices can be made available for disadvantaged children in certain year groups who:

- are affected by disruption to face-to-face education at their school
 - have been advised to shield because they are clinically extremely vulnerable
7. The 'Get Help With Technology' schemes is aimed at pupils in year 3 and above – essentially juniors and secondary level.
8. 9 responses have been received from schools to date, with the following feedback:

Applied for government grant	Not applied for government grant yet	Ineligible
7 schools, of which:	1 school	1 school (infants only)
1 has received 50% of need		
1 has been promised 50% of need		
1 has been promised 75% of need		
4 have not heard back yet		

9. Research is currently being undertaken with schools in the above areas to determine
- How many children are in need of support with a device / data supply
 - Whether the above central government grant has been applied for
 - If so, the amount received and if any, the shortfall
 - The type of device needed for compatibility with lesson delivery (i.e. tablet or laptop)
 - The number of devices and data supplies needed
10. The requested funding would be used to purchase devices and data supplies in line with unmet need. They would be given to schools to allocate, manage and maintain going forward. All devices would remain in school ownership.

Other options considered and rejected

11. No other options considered, given the importance and urgency of the issue.

Corporate outcomes

12. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary council	✓	Thriving communities	✓
A fair local economy that works for everyone		Good homes, green spaces, healthy places	

Background to the report

13. There is very little by way of background to this report, given the circumstances in which we are currently operating. This project complements other work with vulnerable families, such as the holiday hunger scheme, designed to reduce inequality and narrow the deprivation gap in South Ribble.

Risk

14. The principle risk in relation to this project is the potential for significant demand. Close working with LCC schools advisory / liaison team will give assurance that we are meeting genuine need, with government grant utilised as much as possible.
15. The impact of this risk is ensuring that the required number of devices can be sourced and purchased. Enquiries are being made with known suppliers to gauge stock levels.

Equality and diversity

16. There are no negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics as a result of this project. There are potential positive impacts for those with disabilities.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

17. Provision for this £20k will be made from within existing reserves and the project will be reported within the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Reports.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer


18. There are no issues of concern from a legal perspective with what is proposed here. There is general enabling legislation (for example Local Government Act 1972, Localism Act 2011) on which we can rely.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report.

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Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of this report, I approve the recommendation(s) contained within this report in accordance with my delegated power to make executive decisions.

Signed:			
	Cllr Matthew Tomlinson, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets		
Date:	22/01/2021		
Publication Date (DSO use only):	22/01/2021	CL	

This decision will come into force and may be implemented five working days after its publication date, subject to being called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution.