Digital inclusion forward look: towards a digitally confident Wales

What we are and will be doing to help more people use digital technology with confidence.

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Contents

Introduction

Since our 'Delivering Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework for Wales' (2016) considerable progress has been made in reducing the number of adults aged sixteen and over in Wales, who do not personally use the internet (within the last 3months), from 19% to 10%, an estimated 255,000 citizens. These figures are based on the **National Survey for Wales**.

However, it was recognised in the Framework, to truly become digitally confident, individuals need the skills to be able to do a range of activities such as communicate effectively, find and evaluate what they are looking for and safely share personal information in a digital context.

Whilst it was our intention to publish a new framework in 2020, recognising the five year lifespan of the current Framework comes to an end in December 2020, COVID-19 has significantly impacted on this. The pandemic meant engagement with citizens and organisations across Wales would not be possible during 2020 as planned. We know that in order to achieve our aim of supporting everyone to become digitally confident we need to further our understanding of the barriers faced in communities. This includes working with organisations and citizens who represent our current priority groups; older people, disabled people, unemployed & economically inactive and social housing residents – and those who prior to the pandemic may not have been considered digitally excluded.

Therefore, through our 'Forward Look' we have outlined areas of focus, we as Welsh Government, will address over the next 12 months, alongside the continued delivery by our Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being (DCW) procured programme. Our overarching aim is to develop and publish a new framework, aimed at stakeholders who already or should be supporting those lacking digital confidence, by winter 2021. This will allow for a more strategic post pandemic view of the digital inclusion landscape and be strengthened by us working collaboratively with the Centre for Digital Public

Services (CDPS) to outline the critical role digital inclusion plays within the transformation and delivery of services by all sectors across Wales.

Context

When we discuss digital confidence, we mean the ability for someone to use digital technology for a reason of their choosing. We recognise this requires motivation, access to technology, connectivity and the basic digital skills to undertake activities independently.

The pandemic has highlighted the significant role digital plays in society. From the ability to engage with health services to maintaining contact with friends and families during periods of lockdown, there has never been a greater need for digital confidence.

In our Framework (2016) we had a shared vision 'to ensure that everyone who wants to be online can get online, protect themselves and their friends and families online and do more online to fully benefit from the opportunities the internet and other digital technologies offer.'

Our intention, through community and organisation engagement during 2020, was to discuss and understand how this vision could reflect and recognise the need to support everyone to have the motivation, confidence and skills in order to make an informed decision as to how they decide to engage with digital. We will, regulations allowing, look to undertake the citizen and stakeholder engagement outlined during 2021. This will be in addition to the work we are already undertaking with the Centre for Digital Public Services on mapping digital inclusion activity across Wales to ensure we are aware of other interventions to avoid duplication of resources.

Implications of COVID-19

COVID-19, national and local lockdowns and the need to adapt to a 'new normal' has drawn attention to the widening inequalities caused by digital exclusion in accessing services, receiving vital information and purchasing goods online. The accelerating shift of public services to online platforms risks further increasing the gap between the digitally included and excluded. Read the study undertaken by the University of Cambridge:

> " And this isn't new. Digital exclusion was a problem before coronavirus, but this is compounding it" "

Welsh Government strives to ensure digital inclusion is embedded in policy, programme and service development. The pandemic has demonstrated how critical it is for those who design and develop services to consider the impact of digital on those who lack basic digital skills and for whom access to, and the affordability of technology and/or connectivity is a barrier.

We must appreciate there will always be those who either actively choose to disengage in digital or require longer-term support to use digital technologies. Therefore, alternative ways to access services (assisted digital channels) need to be considered to ensure citizens are not left behind in society, especially as we consider the design and implementation of future policies.

Recognising 'Data Poverty'

Our appreciation of the relatively new term 'data poverty' has developed since the onset of the pandemic. Prior to March 2020 our understanding of the term centred on the lack of personal resources to access online goods and services;

either the financial costs of purchasing the technology and/or getting connected; ongoing costs of broadband or data, or limited connectivity due to poor reception.

A report published in August 2020 by the Older People's Commission "Leave no-one behind: Action for an age-friendly recovery", stated 'Digital access now needs to be considered as a right and as an essential utility in the same way we consider the need for gas and electricity.'

Prior to the pandemic data poverty, in large, was not likely to have been regarded as such a significant issue for so many, as children could access online activities at school or in libraries, and households largely had data contracts that met their pre-covid needs. There is now a recognition that those needs have increased, with more members of households sharing devices, data allowances and broadband bandwidth. Increasingly, households are having to choose between paying for Wi-Fi/mobile data or other household essentials such as food and fuel.

As we develop our future policy, our understanding of and discussions with stakeholders on this issue will be critical. The Good Things Foundation report 'A Blueprint for a 100% Digitally Included UK' (September 2020) identified this as an area where stakeholders need to work collaboratively in order to explore possible solutions. Nesta, an innovation foundation, is currently commissioning research to better understand data poverty in Scotland and Wales. We will look to this research as we develop our understanding.

The close link between digital inclusion and data poverty continues to be raised, even as we develop the Forward Look, by prominent public figures, such as **Marcus Rashford MBE on Twitter**:

" Let's take a second to remember that a lot of families in need will not have access to the internet. They can't sign petitions or scroll down my twitter. Their voices cannot be heard so we have to use ours to communicate on

all of this amazing local help. Thank you all ”

Forward look

Our priority groups are consistently identified through several different data sets including the National Survey for Wales. They show older people, disabled people, those living in social housing and the economically inactive & unemployed as those most likely to be digitally excluded. However, as we develop our future policy, we will focus on supporting anyone aged sixteen and over who is not digitally confident. Through our work with the CDPS we will explore individuals deemed as newly digitally excluded due to the pandemic and consider interventions being delivered by higher and further education to support the digital skills agenda.

Our Forward Look does not focus on those of school age but we acknowledge the critical work delivered through the **Continuity of Learning** programme. This ensured school aged learners who were digitally excluded had access to a device and connectivity to continue their education during times of school closures enforced by the pandemic. However, we must continue to learn from this pandemic and ensure that families who'd become reliant on these devices for wider use have appropriate means to continue to engage with digital. We will also engage with colleagues leading on early years to understand how support for parents and families can be embedded to ensure their children are safe and legal online. This will include working with the Welsh Government digital resilience team as they deliver against the **Enhancing digital resilience in Education: An action plan for children and young people in Wales** published in November 2020.

The Well Being of Future Generations Act, through the seven wellbeing goals and five ways of working, will be crucial to shaping our delivery and policy

development. We know developing the digital skills of communities can lead to greater economic opportunities, a more equal society and improved social cohesion. We will strive to achieve a digitally inclusive society which will make Wales a more prosperous, resilient, healthy and equal society with well-connected communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.

In addition to our priority groups, we have identified six areas of focus, we will deliver over the next twelve months, to help inform future policy. These six areas build on issues, which may have existed previously, but have become more prominent during the pandemic, learning from experiences of DCW and wider stakeholders feeding into policy officials. We recognise in order to deliver on these areas we will require engagement across sectors and with communities to fully understand the barriers and interventions which may be vital to ensure everyone in Wales becomes digitally confident. We will also need to work closely with our Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS) to understand the evidence we have and where there are gaps, how we can address them.

- We will engage with communities and organisations to discuss, understand and develop our future digital inclusion and basic digital skills policy interventions
- We will consider through further research how current and future interventions within health and care need to be implemented so staff have the required skills and knowledge necessary to ensure that they, patients and residents, benefit from digital technology
- We will further our understanding of the implications of digital exclusion for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities
- We will develop our understanding of the potential wider implications of 'Data Poverty' to the digital exclusion agenda
- We will ensure digital confidence (motivation, access and skills) is embedded and aligned with the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) Strategy
- We will consider how support for the social housing sector can be developed

and delivered consistently to ensure residents can engage with and benefit from digital services e.g. reporting faults with housing, managing finances digitally and maintaining social connections with friends and families

The outline

This section aims to provide an overview of how we will work to ensure the six areas identified are delivered and reflected in our future policy. There are other areas of policy and potential gaps in current provision which we will aim to explore during development and engagement.

Whilst not all of these are outlined within the six areas, they could include, but are by no means limited to:

- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- ensuring digital inclusion and digital skills becomes embedded within staff training across the health and care sector and
- the emerging challenges faced within the Justice Commission as courts and tribunal services adopt a digital by default approach.

Furthermore, the pandemic has demonstrated a need to engage with public transport organisations e.g. Transport for Wales, to ensure, whilst e-ticketing is an option, it does not become the only option for Welsh citizens. Whilst e-ticketing may not solely be mobile/smartphone based, we know through the National Survey for Wales data (**August 2020**) that only 86% of those aged 16 and over in Wales have a smartphone. This figure significantly decreases to only 57% for those aged 65 and over, which would cause significant impact if e-ticketing was to be widely adopted across rail and bus services in Wales, in place of more conventional methods. We must recognise printing can't be seen as the only alternative option for those digitally excluded as this assumes either

the ability to print (and a level of basic digital skills) from home, or ability to access somewhere (e.g. library) at a time suited to when you need to print.

We know the wider challenges for supporting those vulnerable and isolated has increased during the pandemic. With the inability to provide face to face support and the ongoing closures/restrictions for many to access community venues and libraries, we need to look at alternative models of support. In Pembrokeshire a wide range of partners are working together to deliver, Digital Connections, a peer to peer support (Digital Companions) model which will lean on those individuals across the county with basic digital skills to provide help to those who are not digitally confident.

Engagement and communication

It will be important to discuss and understand the barriers faced on the ground within communities and across public, private and third sector organisations to support digital confidence. We will engage with people, from a wide range of communities e.g. older people, BAME, social housing, in order to ensure our interventions are targeted at areas of need and where they will have the greatest impact. We recognise and appreciate there is no one size fits all approach to engaging and supporting people to exploit the opportunities offered by digital technology.

We will, once regulations allow, undertake discussions within communities to understand how our proposed policies relate to our procured programme, Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being, and how our interventions may need adapting to reach those in greatest need. Through this engagement we need to understand if there are any gaps in the current support being provided and whether there are other groups where digital exclusion, even prior to the pandemic, is an issue.

Research and Interventions within Health and Care

Through the pandemic we have seen the impact a lack of digital confidence can have on a wide range of issues, from isolation and loneliness to inequality of access to health and well-being services. Our procured programme has and will continue to provide support to alleviate some of these challenges within care homes, providing devices and training to front line staff to allow and assist residents to use digital. Training by the programme was developed to help showcase to the staff how residents could interact with friends and families and engage with health professionals through the virtual general practitioner (GP) service, Attend Anywhere.

However, there remain questions around the sustainability of these interventions. We must consider how digital inclusion and skills are embedded into the training for health and care staff – thus ensuring it becomes a core component for delivering health and care services. The report published by Public Health Wales in 2019, '**Population Health in a digital age**' demonstrated the gap in digital use, while 66% of people in Wales use digital technology to support their health, only 14% make a healthcare appointment online. We need to work with Public Health Wales and Welsh Government health colleagues to understand the reasons behind this data, recognising the current report doesn't provide analysis. Furthermore the report makes clear the challenge faced with health inequalities, especially with a focus on age when looking at (use of digital to support health i.e. 87% of 16-29 year olds Vs 24% of those aged 70 and over. This reinforces the vital role health and care have to play in supporting citizens to become digitally confident. We will also look to the findings of the Age Cymru report 'Experience of people aged 50 and over in Wales during the first lockdown' which showed that 70% of users had a negative experience.

We must ensure through our own definition of digital inclusion we do not exclude those from a supported living context (e.g. those suffering from a brain injury or condition requiring 24 hour care). There is a need to recognise and capture the

vital role technology plays in supporting quality of life. In addition we must ensure those who have a carer role are supported to develop their digital confidence and understanding of the benefits technology can provide.

We will explore, with health colleagues and the Centre for Digital Public Services, current research and, if needed, consider commissioning further work in this area to help better understand gaps of provision and support within health and care for both staff and residents/patients. We must ensure digital inclusion and digital skills are embedded consistently within health boards, with buy-in at senior levels across Wales.

Research and interventions for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities

We will further our understanding of the implications of digital exclusion for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. The pandemic has highlighted communities and groups across Wales who may not have previously considered themselves as digitally excluded. We recognise there is need to look to our National Survey for Wales data, and wider, to understand the current levels of digital exclusion and basic digital skills issues within BAME, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, asylum seeker and refugee communities and tailor our interventions where appropriate to ensure all citizens have the support they need. This will be an ongoing process, working closely with Welsh Government officials with responsibility and our Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being programme.

A key part of our engagement and communication work will be to understand the barriers across these communities at a local and national level.

Understanding the wider implications of Data Poverty

The terms "data poverty" and "digital deprivation" have become increasingly common during the pandemic. We need to further our understanding the implications of data poverty on digital exclusion, recognising these terms are mainly attributed to the costs of purchasing technology and internet access (e.g. mobile data and broadband) and the need for families to make a choice between internet access or other essential living costs (e.g. food and heating).

Through a report by the Citizens Advice (September 2020) "Excess debts - who has fallen behind on their household bills due to coronavirus?" we know that Citizens Advice estimate that 6 million UK adults have fallen behind on at least one household bill during the pandemic, with 3.4 million of these related to mobile phone or broadband bills.

We will develop our understanding of the role telecommunications and infrastructure companies play in the data poverty agenda and explore a need for wider awareness sharing of affordable options.

Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) Strategy: where does digital inclusion come in?

The **UK Strategy for Financial Well-being**, published by the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) strategy supports the Welsh Government vision for all people in Wales to enjoy a healthy financial future and have the opportunity to make the most of their money and pensions.

Across the MaPS strategy five agendas for change we need to work with MaPS and other partners to identify opportunities for digital and better understand how and where digital can contribute to the achievement of the strategy outcomes within Wales. The need to align the work being led by MaPS is further

strengthened by the recognised policy link between digital and financial exclusion. We know having basic digital skills and access to digital technology can hugely increase financial inclusion, whether it is using the internet to buy essential goods and services potentially making significant savings to families who struggle financially or using online budget calculators. Financial exclusion issues are strongly linked to the 'affordability' barrier. We recognise people without access to bank accounts may be unable to sign up to broadband or mobile contracts, or those with poor credit ratings might not be able to get a loan for a laptop or tablet. It is therefore essential to tackle digital exclusion as part of a wider and coherent effort relating to aspects of exclusion, such as social and financial exclusion.

The Social Housing Sector

A serious challenge remains within the social housing sector to reach and support residents to become digitally confident. The National Survey for Wales 2019-20 shows that 17% of social housing residents are digitally excluded: an estimated 60,000 residents. This is compounded by the fact that 37% of these social housing residents, who personally use the internet, do not have all five basic digital skills - an estimated 105,000 residents. These figures reinforce that even for those who can use the internet there is a need to support them to become digitally confident.

We need to work with the social housing sector to truly understand the barriers to sustainable support for residents at a time when the rollout of digital housing services e.g. reporting faults and repairs, is on the rise. However, we need to ensure the wider benefits of health, well-being, money management (financial inclusion) and reducing loneliness and isolation act as the main drivers for change. This needs to be reinforced by ensuring staff are provided with support to become digitally confident and help them understand the benefits digital can provide their residents.

We will facilitate the creation of a specific work-stream with key organisations who lead on social housing support to understand the barriers they as an organisation face and how through our interventions we can support them, their staff and ultimately their residents to become digitally confident.

Digital communities Wales: digital confidence, health and well-being

Our '**Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Wellbeing** (DCW)' procured programme, with an annual budget of £2million (funded jointly by digital inclusion and health), works with organisations from all sectors that can help reach digitally excluded people. The programme is designed to provide training and support to front line staff, volunteers and organisations (face to face) to engage with and develop the digital skills of end users (citizens) to access services. The programme commenced in July 2019 and is due to run until 30 June 2022 with an option to extend by a further three years. In response to the pandemic DCW moved from the traditional face to face (F2F) to telephone, email and, where appropriate, virtual support for organisations.

In order to alleviate some of the initial impact of the pandemic, the programme secured additional funding from the Minister for Health & Social Services to purchase and distribute digital devices (tablets) to vulnerable individuals within care homes across Wales. This focused on supporting care home residents to use technology to improve interaction between residents, their families and friends, as well as with medical professionals and to develop their digital confidence as a priority. The second phase of the additional funding saw the programme providing support to hospices, sheltered housing schemes and young carers (those aged 16 to 18) through a combination of access to devices, connectivity (where required) and training.

Since July 2019 DCW has supported over 27,140 individuals to engage with

digital technology and trained over 1,120 front line staff and volunteers.

In order to determine the impact of the programme in supporting people to become digitally confident and embed digital inclusion within public, private and third sector organisation across Wales, we commissioned and appointed an independent evaluation. In June 2020 Olbell3 were appointed to undertake a long term evaluation to understand how well the programme is performing against its objectives and whether any changes to the structure and delivery mechanisms could strengthen the programme.

For the first stage of the evaluation, Olbell3 undertook a Theory of Change study, which involved interviewing stakeholders and organisations supported by DCW to understand the current model, intervention and expected outcomes, including the appropriateness of key performance indicators. The first stage was completed in November by Olbell3 and is due to be published in January 2021 on the Welsh Government website. We will be considering the findings and what, if any, changes may need to be actioned, including how we measure success.

Oldbell3 will undertake a further two stage reports as part of the overall evaluation. These stages will include looking in detail at how the programme is having a direct impact on the ground (reaching citizens) and gathering case studies which will track organisations, volunteers, front line staff and citizens journey from initial engagement by the programme. These further stages will help officials when advising Ministers on the option to extend the DCW contract by the additional three years.

Programme delivery change

At the time of writing the Forward Look there remains much uncertainty, as we approach winter, on the pandemic-related restrictions. However, we continue to

support DCW, as they develop plans and appropriate processes to ensure when are able to gradually re-establish face to face training and support, we can do so safely. This support will continue to be focused on ensuring front line staff, volunteers and organisations have the knowledge and digital skills needed to help Welsh citizens become digitally confident.

Support for community based services such as libraries and community centres will remain vital to the digital inclusion agenda as we plan for the "new normal". For citizens whose only access to a computer might be through a library, until libraries reopen, we know it is impossible for them to perform the full range of digital activities, maintain digital contact with family, order groceries, access vital health services and wider information online.

FutureDotNow (and DevicesDotNow)

FutureDotNow brings together organisations to motivate people and businesses across the UK to boost their digital skills. Their vision is to empower everyone to thrive in a digital UK, by helping people understand the digital skills they need for life and work, inspiring them to invest time in the tech they need, and then supporting people by signposting the training they will need to match their own ambitions. Through DCW, who are a recognised partner of the coalition, we ensure the Welsh perspective is represented.

As part of their response to the pandemic, FutureDotNow launched DevicesDotNow, an initiative which aimed, by seeking donations of devices from businesses, to support those who do not have a device or connection to the internet and are therefore digitally excluded. These devices were delivered to individuals through 2,400 local Online Centres across the UK with more than 100 in Wales (the majority in Wales are libraries). Online Centres were required to submit an online application outlining how many devices they needed to support vulnerable people within their communities.

The DevicesDotNow initiative will now be led by Good Things Foundation under the banner of 'Everyone Connected'. We will continue to engage with Good Things Foundation as this develops.

Good Things Foundation (Learn My Way)

Learn My Way (LMW), an online basic digital skills platform containing courses such as, relating to managing money online, online basics, video calling and accessing health information. The platform enables individuals to develop basic digital skills at a pace and location convenient to them, for free. We continue to work closely with Good Things Foundation ensuring that when their website changes or new course content is introduced, Welsh translation is incorporated into the planning. The most recent example was during lockdown when we ensured the Video Chat course was translated and launched bilingually in May recognising the need for support with a vital form of social contact during lockdown.

BT Skills for Tomorrow

In October 2019 BT announced a new programme which aims to support digital skills – '**Skills for Tomorrow**'. The UK wide programme to digitally upskill 10 million people by 2025, works through collaborating with a range of partners, including Google and Good Things Foundation, to meet the needs of different and sometimes vulnerable audiences. The overarching aim is to help people of all ages and backgrounds to thrive in a world of digital opportunity. We and DCW remain closely engaged with BT Wales and prior to the pandemic were devising a Wales specific focus. Although this element in on hold due to the pandemic, BT continue to engage with us on policy and programme interventions.

Nominet Reboot

Reboot is an interactive platform with a step by step guide to help community organisations and schools provide digital access to vulnerable groups and disconnected students, by helping them access and repurpose unused devices in an efficient and cost effective way. There is need for us to engage with Reboot to help ensure the resources are shared with key organisations across Wales, possibly working with Nominet to ensure they explore offering the resources bilingually.

Our response to the pandemic

At the outset of the pandemic (March 2020), as lockdown restrictions were implemented, there was a rapid increase in demand being faced across a wide range of settings e.g. health and care, the third sector, and for individuals, to have access to devices and connectivity from their own residences.

This was a particular challenge for those individuals and sectors who were facing the prospect of self-isolation for prolonged periods of time. For many, digital has meant socialising, grocery shopping, finding health information, accessing resources and activities to keep them occupied has remained an option, albeit online. However, for roughly one in ten of the Welsh adult population, particularly those who are elderly or vulnerable, this was not the case.

The Minister for Health and Social Services provided additional funding of £803,080 towards the Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Wellbeing (DCW) procured programme to focus on procuring and rolling out devices to care homes (public and private) recognising the need for support as a priority.

This support was coupled with the work being led within health for rolling out at scale the Attend Anywhere virtual General Practitioner (GP) consultations service to ensure those residents within care homes could have contact with a GP and for GPs to be able to continue virtual care home visits during the pandemic.

Once the priority focus of care homes had been addressed the funding was utilised to support hospices, sheltered housing schemes and young carers. Recognising the difficulties of maintaining face to face services, DCW ensured provision of support and training was available to front line staff and volunteers within these settings through various channels such as telephone, email and where appropriate video conferencing.

Phase 1: Public and Private Care Homes

DCW contacted 1,071 public and private care homes across Wales to determine the level of demand for devices, connectivity and support/training. DCW partnered with TEC Cymru to ensure care homes had everything they needed to access the Attend Anywhere (virtual GP service). This included provision of digital skills training to 206 care homes, resulting in 381 front line staff being supported by the programme. In addition, the programme delivered more than 1,050 devices to 584 care homes across Wales. Devices were delivered with the appropriate applications installed and with medical wipes donated by Clinell in order to keep devices clean. The devices enabled residents to maintain family connections, access vital health services and help develop their digital confidence. The devices enabled residents to maintain family connections, access vital health services and help develop their digital confidence. Watch the **YouTube videos about our tablet loan scheme in care homes**.

Phase 2: Hospices, Sheltered Housing and Young Carers

DCW contacted all 27 hospices across Wales to determine the level of demand for devices, connectivity and support/training. This identified a need for 25 tablets with three month data contracts, which DCW intend to distribute in December 2020 to hospices in order for residents to engage with digital.

For sheltered housing schemes, which includes assisted living and extra care schemes, DCW ran an application process as there was a limit of 200 devices available (tablets) to meet an anticipated high demand. The application process ran for six weeks and 23 applications were successful, requesting in total 206 devices. DCW ensured training to front line staff and volunteers was a requirement of the application as was the need to embed digital inclusion principles within the organisation.

During the early stages of the pandemic colleagues leading on carers policy within Welsh Government identified as a priority a gap in support for young carers (those aged 16-18). We wanted to ensure devices were matched to a need to help carers to carry out their caring role, with a knock on benefit for the person they care for. DCW has been working closely with Carers Trust Wales and the 22 local authority leads to identify and rollout 440 Chromebooks with a 12 month unlimited data package. DCW allocated 20 devices per local authority and ensured they provided training and support for front line staff so they'd have the confidence to help young carers. Through DCW 280 devices were rolled out in November with the remainder due to be rolled out in December 2020. We will ensure we capture the wider outcomes of this support.

Connectivity support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

We have been working closely with British Telecom (BT) and DCW to utilise an offer provided to Wales of 500 BT vouchers. The vouchers are for a 6 month

term (unlimited data) and will allow recipients access to the BT Wi-Fi Hotspot infrastructure across Wales.

Through positive discussions with BT Wales and Welsh Government Equalities colleagues we agreed to provide support for asylum seekers and refugees through the provision of vouchers to organisations who have approach DCW for support. DCW took lead on this vital support, forming a working group to consider how these vouchers could best be utilised, including representation from the Welsh Refugee Council, Swansea City of Sanctuary, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Swansea Council For Voluntary Service and Connected Communities (Newport). This working group undertook a mapping exercise against locations where asylum seekers and refugees are based and will be developing an information pack for recipient organisations and individuals to detail how these vouchers will work. We will monitor the uptake of this support through DCW and consider how to ensure this remains sustainable. In November Travelling Ahead: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Advice & Advocacy Service were invited to join the working group to broaden those DCW may be able to support with the BT vouchers.

Employability Support

Additional funding has been provided to DCW to support our employability programmes, Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus (CfW and CfW+). This will see participants who require a device and/or connectivity to undertake job related activity e.g. writing a CV, searching for jobs, undertake training and attending interviews virtually. Through the support CfW and CfW+ lead bodies will identify Digital and Deputy Champions to receive training through DCW. Once the training is complete DCW will loan 550 Chromebooks between the 55 local area teams delivering CfW and CfW+ support across Wales. This will also see a Mi-Fi device provided, where required, to allow for internet connection for participants. The Mi-Fi devices will be pre-loaded with data, managed on a rolling 6 month contract by CfW and CfW+.

The need for devices/connectivity has become more pressing and continues to be a challenge during the pandemic. In addition we are continuing to see an increase to the unemployment rates across Wales, which is likely to result in an increase to the number needing support (digital exclusion for those unemployed stands at 7%, up from 6% in 2018-19, based on National Survey for Wales 2019-20).

We aim to roll out these devices in December 2020, dependant on the ongoing global ICT supplier issues, and we will ensure to the wider outcomes of this support are captured.

Summary

These remain uncertain times, with the continued need to change regulations in response to the pandemic, which mean it remains unclear as to what normal will look like beyond COVID-19. However, we can be certain based on the past eight months that digital will have key role.

Our future policy will continue to build on the recognised need to support everyone to gain the motivation, confidence and skills in order to make informed decisions and choose how they participate in, and make the most of, our increasingly digital world. For those who cannot, or decide not to participate digitally, we must ensure alternative ways to access services remain. Digital needs to be seen as an approach to solving problems based on user needs and wants, rather than technology alone being the solution. We as Welsh Government will work to ensure that no citizen is left behind as we embrace a digital first approach and digital inclusion will be at the heart of all we deliver.

We have been working to ensure digital inclusion is considered from both a policy and service delivery aspect. In June 2020, following the increased awareness of digital exclusion, brought on through the pandemic, we published

an internally focused (alpha) digital inclusion guide and checklist. These documents are aimed at helping those developing policy and services to consider the implications on those who do not or cannot engage with digital. It is our intention to share these with Local Authorities and other public sector bodies to ensure there is a consistent approach across Wales.

We remain conscious of the increased need and demand for devices and connectivity seen across sectors and by organisations, programmes and individuals during the pandemic. We will consider appropriate interventions which demonstrate value for money and are sustainable models, recognising devices alone aren't the solution, whilst ensuring support is available through Digital Companions. This will include looking to the **Connecting Scotland** model as exemplar for combining devices, connectivity and support for vulnerable people in response to the pandemic.

The pandemic has demonstrated the value for citizens to be digitally confident from a health perspective. Ensuring this remains a priority within future digital and health policy, making clear there is a need within the health and care sector to invest in staff training. This would focus on helping staff to understand, how by developing their digital confidence, they can play a critical role in supporting patients to manage their health and well-being independently – using digital as an option.

Contact

If you would like to engage with us as we develop our future policy, including attending stakeholder events when possible, please do let us know by emailing **digitalinclusionmailbox@gov.wales**.

We appreciate as these remain uncertain times, there may be a need to undertake some of our engagement events virtually. We will look to work closely

with key organisations to help us reach those who would otherwise be digitally excluded if not for an intermediary and ensure we capture wider views.