

## Notes from conference breakout sessions

### What has worked?

- Working in partnership is key - but can be prevented by funding/geographical restrictions
- Better use of online for learning and sharing resources – can potentially reach more people through being on-line. Zoom and other online platforms have been helpful for meetings and for building connections between organisations. Examples of the increased use of a digital offer included:
  - CPFT is moving learning session to an online platform.
  - Kettles Yard House (old cottage) so mobility issues can arise. Video digital tour been achieved during the time of the pandemic. In house artist able to help with in house activities digitally.
- There has been significantly more hardware distribution during this time – COVID has accelerated the distribution of kit to people who need it. There have also been more loan schemes such as New Horizons, the library loan scheme and Cambridge City which is starting a tablet loan scheme for council tenants and leaseholders. The sector has also adapted to new types of kit, such as the Raspberry Pi. This is an affordable option that previously was less utilised - £55 with key board and mouse, needs monitor and other peripherals. "Delivering IT equipment during the pandemic - felt really great because of the difference it was going to make"
- Grants for the COVID response have been generous and incredibly useful
- Free Wi-Fi hotspots. Can get Wi-Fi in much of Cambridge City using CamWifi
- Lots of organisations were doing phone chat/check in sessions. These front line staff are ideally placed to be digital champions as they are trusted and they know the hooks that might entice an individual to try getting online. It should not be about selling the idea of tech but what the tech can do for someone. People will save money, and public services (and others) will save money if they help people get online

## What are the barriers?

Getting on-line is now even more crucial as services such as Universal Credit and those provided by Local Authorities move to a digital offer. Not being online affects all aspects of a person's life, from accessing medical appointments, to shopping, to accessing the best utility deals.

Barriers to digital inclusion include:

- Skills.

Barriers to developing skills during times of physical distancing include:

- The challenge of talking people through the process of using kit over the phone; for someone starting from scratch it is pretty much impossible.
- People with learning disabilities need hands on learning- even those who have used internet before were confused by Vlogs and meetings and what was real time and not and got frustrated when it was not interactive.
- Confidence
- Desire
- Finances – for kit and connectivity
- Language barrier
- Complicated nature of some kit/software. Understanding the format forms are needed to be done in can cause a stop to the process, as can needing to upload evidence. This causes delays leading to a negative impact on the person's financial situation
- Genuine risk of scams and on-line bullying etc, can be heightened for people with vulnerabilities and children/young people
- Finding the people who are digitally excluded and offering them appropriate support
- Some smartphones don't meet people's on-line needs, eg for applying for jobs. It is almost impossible to do Homelink or Universal credit forms online on a phone
- Poor credit ratings mean people cannot access Wi-Fi packages, especially best value/long term packages.
- Financial insecurity stops people from committing to the (sometimes cheaper) longer contracts / agreements
- Data coverage can be really poor in parts of the county
- Some of the area's exchanges are at full capacity unless you just wanted to send emails or were able to pay for super-fast fibre at more than £60 month
- Lack of wifi hotspots
- Lack of knowledge about the support that is available. For example:
  - Some schools were expecting parents to provide equipment and suggesting they download a package that has a monthly cost. The family wasn't helped to access free stuff
  - No single place to access devices – how do you know that you are getting a good deal?

## What could we do in the future?

- Continue to work in partnership:
  - Connecting with one another to create more of a shared knowledge base
  - Creating a resource bank so people know what kind of devices are available and work well with other people
  - Mutual aid groups have the local knowledge which could shine a light on people who have a need
  - share ideas, learn and help one another.
- Make the business/economic case for giving free tech/wifi to the most excluded, we need to build the evidence base of reduced service use and value for money
- Use free school meals as a proxy for disadvantage to get around issues of stigma
- There might also be a need for help for the "just about managing" households.
- Smart city agendas need to be inclusive and focus on equality
- Engagement strategies to share help/knowledge
- Helping people to develop digital skills and encouraging digital uptake- where people had been talked through how to use tech there had been great take up of opportunities to join things like the Healthwatch partnership boards. Can do this through:
  - Front line staff becoming digital champions
  - Volunteer digital mentors
- People "donating" unused data at the end of the month, to others who need it (an example of this running in Australia - <https://www.optus.com.au/about/sustainability/community/donate-your-data>)
- Portable hubs can work.
- Campaign and push for national action:
  - reliable, affordable broadband for all
  - provision of hardware for those who need it
  - funding so that services that provide teaching of practical skills/equipment etc can continue
- Ensure that people know where to go for help with digital exclusion – communications and promotion are key. Included in that:
  - More good news stories to help people develop the confidence to use devices. There were examples of where families had brought devices, but they were not using them as they only hear horror stories about scams on normal media which is where they get their information.
  - Work with schools to support them to support their families
- Ensure that any strategy for working through the pandemic is robust and able to adapt to the changes in society. Avoid digital as the only response as things can go wrong; power cut, unpaid bill, device breaking, internet outage. Face to face and phone are still important ways of communicating.