

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	Decision to directly award £98,844 funding to Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire to support the delivery of the Covid Recovery plan and deliver improved access for digital inclusion across the county through existing community assets and infrastructure.
Date of decision:	10/09/2021
Decision maker:	Paul Smith, Interim Director Adults and Communities
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>Decision taken by Cabinet to approve the Covid 19 Recovery Plan on 24th June 2021: That authority be delegated to the Director of Economy and Place, Director Adults and Communities, Director Children and Families and Director of Public Health be authorised to take all operational decisions to implement recommendation including, but not limited to, the procurement and commissioning of the identified projects (as set out in the detailed action plan)</p> <p>http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=50037702&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI58109</p>
Ward:	All wards
Consultation:	<p>The Covid Recovery Plan was approved by Cabinet on 24th June which provides funding of £6m to support the economy, community wellbeing and organisation with recovery. The plan provided an overview of the schemes for delivery, which included 'Digital poverty and exclusion' and all appropriate consultation was undertaken at this time.</p> <p>The section 151 officer has been consulted and supportive of the project.</p>
Decision made:	To directly award £98,844 to Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire to support the delivery of the Covid Recovery Plan and provide educational digital training across the county in libraries and community settings with existing providers and identify apps/equipment that will support individuals with digital awareness.
Reasons for decision:	<p>The global Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus have had an unprecedented impact on the national and local economy and on people's wellbeing and mental (as well as physical) health. Nationally the magnitude of the recession caused by the pandemic is unprecedented, GDP declined by 9.8% in 2020 the steepest drop since records began in 1948.</p> <p>The pandemic has also had a severe impact on people's mental health and wellbeing, due to long periods of anxiety, isolation, and uncertainty. The Herefordshire Community Wellbeing Survey 2021 found 28% of people reported high levels of anxiety, 32% experienced drop in household income, 33% doing less exercise, and 30% sleeping less well. Wellbeing is lowest in those living in the most deprived areas.</p> <p>The council has worked across all directorates to support businesses, residents and communities throughout the pandemic to remain as safe as possible and to prevent and reduce spread of infection and protect those most vulnerable in our society.</p> <p>Our focus now moves towards recovery. Over the coming months the true impact of the pandemic will become better known for the economy, community wellbeing and organisation.</p> <p>To support the recovery cabinet approved a £6m Covid Recovery Plan which includes the economy, community wellbeing and organisation. The recovery plan</p>

now focuses on the immediate impactful actions we need to take in the short term. Our priorities are to:

- **Establish Safe and Welcoming Places**
- **Support Business Viability and Resilience,**
- **Support Employment**
- **Support Wellbeing.**

This ROOD will give authorisation for direct funding to be provided to Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire to deliver the following activities:

- **6 week courses**
Co-ordinators will facilitate weekly cafes at rural locations around Herefordshire such as village halls, community centres or our own offices and make use of the wealth of how to guides that are available to improve digital skills. Creating a weekly 6 week course to cover: the basic skills, how to access and use social media, set up email, use Zoom/Facetime/Video calling, how to stay safe online and online shopping. These will be delivered by Co-ordinators and supported by Digital Volunteers. A follow on 121 course will also be offered, if participants wish to continue their learning. Age UK will work with them on a 121 basis to support with specific individual tasks like personal admin for household bills, setting up online energy accounts and personal banking.
- **121/Outreach support**
For those who are at the very early stages of entering the digital world, we will provide 121 outreach support by way of Co-ordinator meeting with the client to understand their individual needs. Once these needs have been established, a Digital Volunteer will be allocated who will provide ongoing support to enable the client to get online. This could be with liaising with broadband providers to set up connections, supporting with purchasing the right equipment, setting up new devices and end with supporting the client to attend one of the courses being offered in their local area to continue to build on their new skills.
- **Tablet Loan**
Purchasing 50 tablets, 20 of which will be dedicated to delivering our courses. The remaining tablets will be made available for loan to clients for a 3 month period to 'try before they buy'. An agreement will be established between Age UK and the client so all parties are clear on their expectations. An agreement will be established between Age UK and the client so all parties are clear on their expectations. How tablets will be utilised beyond the project timescales will be decided jointly by Age UK and Herefordshire Council at the end of the project.

Age UK has modelled their offer on the following predicted beneficiary impact: Age UK believe the number of beneficiaries detailed below could be supported based on: employing 2 Co-ordinators at 30hrs per week, recruiting 20 volunteers to support with the café running and 121 support, and that the project starts on time in September/October 2021.

The number of beneficiaries per year are detailed below:

- 6 week computer café course:288
- Follow on 121 course: 60
- 121 Outreach: 80
- Tablet Loan: 50

Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:

The covid recovery plan budget allocation must be committed within the 2021/22 financial year.

A waiver has been completed to direct award to Age UK Herefordshire and

	<p>Worcestershire as an established local provider. Age UK have previously undertaken a similar project, but funding had ceased, with digital support being reduced in line with this reduction. The legacy of the project is retained within the skills gained by the staff involved but also within the volunteers who played a big part in the delivery of the service. This award will allow Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire to utilise these skills once again, making mobilisation a quicker and smoother process.</p> <p>Age UK support individuals age 55 and over. This is a known need in this age group both nationally and locally, with data on digital exclusion, stating that over 53% of people who lack basic digital skills are aged over 65, and 69% are over 55. Whereas only 6% of people who lack digital skills are between 15 and 24 years*. (*data from Understanding Herefordshire website).</p> <p>A recent study by English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) Covid-19 Sub-study (Wave1) looked at the impact the pandemic has had on internet usage for those over 52 years old. The report stated that 88% of 50-64 year olds and 75% of 65-74 year olds in England use the internet almost or every day. This is a stark comparison to those who are just a little older at 75, with only 42% using online services. Meaning 2 in 5 over 75s are not accessing the internet at all. When asked why they do not use the internet, 79% of over 75s said they don't have good enough IT skills. Others cited that they don't trust the internet, don't have access to equipment or broadband or they feel it takes too much time to learn.</p> <p>An equality impact assessment has been completed.</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<p>This funding has been allocated via a direct award to Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire, as a known provider with previous experience of supporting with digital exclusion.</p> <p>There is additional funding that can be available to encourage increased activity across the county via different providers and to increase the offer to Herefordshire residents within other age groups, if a further need is identified.</p>
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>None</p>

Signed: Paul Smith, Interim Director Adults and Communities

Date: 13/09/2021