

30th March 2022

REPORT TITLE:	CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUNDING (COMF) – RENEWAL INITIATIVES
REPORT OF:	SARAH MORAN, STRATEGIC RENEWAL PROGRAMME MANAGER

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks approval to support the funding of the below mentioned Renewal Initiatives:

- 1 One Wirral CIC
- 2 Ask us Wirral – Supporting Wirral Communities (Citizens Advice)
- 3 Involve North West – Reach Out
- 4 Springboard – Health Junction/Wired
- 5 Wirral On-line Together – Age UK

This will affect all Wards within the borough and is a **key decision**.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Director of Public Health is recommended to

- (1) Award a one-year contract (1st January 2022 to 31st January 2023) for services to increase digital inclusion across all wards of the Borough to One Wirral CIC at a total cost of £679,000.
- (2) Award a one-year contract (1st January 2022 to 31st January 2023) for services to increase digital inclusion across all wards of the Borough to Citizens Advice – Ask us Wirral at a total cost of £155,000.
- (3) Award a one-year contract (1st January 2022 to 31st January 2023) for services to increase employment support provision across all wards of the Borough via the Reach Out Programme to Involve North West at a total cost of £346,000.
- (4) Award a one-year contract (1st January 2022 to 31st January 2023) for services to increase digital inclusion across all wards of the Borough to Health Junction/Wired at a total cost of £180,000
- (5) Award a one-year contract (1st January 2022 to 31st January 2023) for services to increase digital inclusion across all wards of the Borough to Age UK – Wirral On-line Together at a total cost of £141,000

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

Digital exclusion has long been an issue of concern for Wirral. The Covid period has increased the extent and severity of this problem. Virtually every aspect of life is now expected to be conducted online, from work to socialising, and from education to shopping. Those who are not online are more disadvantaged than ever.

Digital exclusion presents itself in many different ways. Someone may be excluded because of:

- Lack of a device (or enough devices if shared with others)
- Lack of connectivity - e.g. through access to Wi-Fi or a mobile data allowance
- Lack of digital skills and/or confidence in using digital tools
- Those in economic hardship have reduced options for benefitting from some online content
- Unbanked individuals struggle to transact online
- Language barriers hinder the use of online services
- Different physical and mental disabilities can hinder online engagement

In response to these challenges the Council's Digital Transformation Programme proposes the following: A *Digital Access for all* mission with a goal for 'Every Wirral resident having access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025. As part of this mission the Council will launch the Renewal digital inclusion programme with the goal of using innovative methods to discover, design, develop and scale initiatives that support digitally excluded residents who have been left particularly vulnerable during the Covid pandemic.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 Ensuring we meet the ongoing needs reported by local communities is evidenced by data therefore other options, although considered, are not recommended.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 One Wirral CIC

This initiative passes on skills, confidence, and refurbished IT equipment to Wirral residents who, through digital enablement, could lead healthier lives.

3.2 Ask us Wirral – Supporting Wirral Communities (Citizens Advice)

- Citizens Advice Wirral will provide additional advice, casework and social prescribing to reduce the financial and social impact of Covid now and into the future.
- The service will support the Wirral community most affected by Covid to be more financially resilient.
- The funding will enable us to employ 5.5 workers to work exclusively on the project

3.3 Involve North West – Reach Out

- To increase access to employment opportunities for local people
- To support residents in gaining employment through providing financial support
- To increase awareness of the Reach Out project
- To increase knowledge of the support and help available to people to access job opportunities
- To increase individual's mental health and wellbeing through engagement with the project.
- To increase access to information and advice to individuals to allow them to make informed choices regarding employment opportunities.
- To increase engagement with local partners and stakeholders to increase referrals into the project

3.4 Springboard – Health Junction/Wired

The project aims to support adults who are housebound, have limited mobility and/or a lack of access to online support at home, or unpaid Carers. The project will develop, configure and maintain 100 devices which will be distributed (to those identified as eligible).

3.5 Wirral On-line Together – Age UK

Anyone aged 18+ who is digitally excluded in any way will be able to access support including:

- A bespoke digital skills action plan to ensure that digital needs and aspirations are identified.
- A choice of:
 - One to one support to achieve digital objectives.
 - Access to a range of ICT classes and courses delivered in a range of venues across Wirral.
 - Access to a range of 'Techy Tea parties' where people can access help with a wide range of digital devices, including mobile phones, remote controls, tablets, computers etc.

3.6 Feedback from residents and our local partner organisations informed that there are large numbers of residents within the Borough who are digitally excluded. Digital Enablement and Choice meetings (attended by NHS, CCG, Age UK, Involve North West, Wired, Health Junction, Council and other interested organisations) meet regularly to discuss how we can help fund digital improvement for our residents. Five bids were received requesting funding from COMF to support and drive digital enablement, reduce exclusion and support employment opportunities. These were reviewed, shared with COMF Working Group and approved to progress.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The contract will be funded in 2022/23 through the COMF grant, provided to local authorities from HM Government, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and

mitigate the impact of the pandemic on health outcomes. Wirral has received £14,784,032 in COMF grant to date and can be used to fund initiatives in 2022/23.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The commissioning process for the contracts described in this report comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Wirral Council Contract Procedure Rules.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 N/A as internal staffing has been funded separately

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The Public Health Grant allocation for Wirral in 2022/ 2023 has been confirmed. The Budget and Spending Review 2021 detailed that the Public Health budget for the next three years is protected. However, if there is any reduction in the level of funding associated with the Public Health Grant or a change in priorities identified in relation to the Grant conditions, it may be necessary to withdraw or reduce funding.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The initiatives described within this report have been designed based on, and responding to, findings from a range of insight, including research conducted with local communities throughout the pandemic and through working with the Humanitarian Cell, NHS, CCG, Charities and the wider Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector in Wirral.

8.2 These initiatives are funded by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF). A working group was setup following recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee to oversee this grant. Regular meetings with the group provides scrutiny and transparency.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 The Equality Impact Assessment for these decisions can be found <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-january-202-6>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Use of recycled IT equipment will stop some going to landfill, residents having digital access will enable them to have virtual check-ups, etc, without physical visits, which will save on car journeys. Increasing access to education has been outlined by the Secretary of state for education as critical in addressing climate change.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The additional money that this funding provides will improve the health and social outcomes of some of the borough's most vulnerable residents impacted by the pandemic. This funding will enable trusted and local organisations to provide desperately needed digital enablement and support.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

COMF Working Group Slide deck (December 2021)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date