

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 January 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Education)

Subject:	Supporting Learners and Families - Digital Inclusion
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise members of the progress made by Education Resources to take forward the Scottish Government's Digital Inclusion Agenda.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) the action by the Council, through Education Resources, to meet the needs of families regarding digital inclusion to support learning at home, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Scottish Government announced in June that it would be making funds available to support Digital Inclusion and invited Education departments to bid for this to support families with access to appropriate devices and connectivity for learning at home.
- 3.2. South Lanarkshire Council was able to access a grant of up to £1.46m in support of this agenda.
- 3.3. A bid was submitted by the July 2020 deadline requesting devices, connectivity and support for families.
- 3.4. In August 2020, the first 2 parts of the bid were accepted for devices and connectivity with the third part for supports being accepted at a later date.

4. SLC Education Resources Bid

4.1. The SLC bid gave consideration to 3 areas:

- (1) Part 1 Priority Access
- (2) Part 2 Widening Access
- (3) Part 3 Supporting Access

4.2. Part 1 – Priority Access

An audit by schools of families across South Lanarkshire Council identified that 2,200 Chromebook devices would be required to meet the immediate need of families who currently have no access to digital devices at home for families who were in receipt of Free School Meals.

- 4.3. To support families with no connectivity, 480 Mifi devices with a one year Vodafone contract providing unlimited data were also required.
- 4.4. Part 2 – Widening Access
3200 further Chromebook devices were required to meet the need of families who currently have extremely limited digital access that is shared across the whole family and does not facilitate learning at home (eg access only to a mobile phone). This applied initially to families in receipt of Free School Meals, but has been widened to all families.
- 4.5. Consideration was also given to support pupils with additional support needs and 400 Chromebooks with touch screens were purchased.
- 4.6. Part 3 – Supporting Access
The need to support families with set up and connectivity was also identified as a key factor in ensuring that the devices could be used by children at home. Initial distribution and follow up technical support was provided in the form of a named contact for digital inclusion.
- 4.7. This contact facilitates the distribution of devices and directly links up with targeted vulnerable families regarding set up, connectivity and user access issues.

5. Progress and Impact to Date

- 5.1. 1,792 Chromebooks were initially procured from the XMA stock ringfenced by the Scottish Government and these were distributed in August to vulnerable families.
- 5.2. A further 1,825 Chromebooks were procured from RM who currently manage our school networks and these have been distributed throughout the term.
- 5.3. All priority families' requests were met by the end of October, including the additional requests from schools due to changes in family circumstances e.g. as a result of furlough or job loss and the impact of Covid-19.
- 5.4. All request from families for Mifi connectivity devices have been met with over 700 families now having internet access.
- 5.5. In December 2020 a further 1,175 Chromebooks were delivered and these were set up by RM for distribution throughout December 2020 and January 2021.
- 5.6. Ongoing training is available for teachers to support pupils in the use of these devices in the form of a range of Career-long Professional Learning CLPL opportunities including webinars and online training in the use of digital tools to improve the digital skills of young people and allow them to use the devices for learning at home.
- 5.7. Supports and recordings of webinars are available for staff on the South Lanarkshire Council Staff Learning Centre site.
- 5.8. The Council has procured 5,177 Chromebooks for distribution to pupils to support them with learning at home. By the time all aspects of the bid have been met, with the funding available, this will rise to approximately 5,500.
- 5.9. The Digital Learning team continues to engage with Scottish Government and with schools to consider further opportunities to extend supports and the availability of devices.

- 5.10. Some comments and feedback received from schools and parents:
“Children who are working in isolation in school are engaging more fully into the work of the class and feel they are getting to do the same as their peers. Children who are working from home are also engaging with learning more positively and this is leading to an increase in staff engagement with google classroom as they can see the benefits for their learners.”
- 5.11. “Families have been so grateful for the devices, it’s making all the difference in their children having access to the same learning as everyone else.”
- 5.12. “This has been a fantastic project. Without the devices it was difficult to encourage the families to engage with digital learning, it just wasn’t realistic. Now we can give them the device and they are getting onto Glow and using Google Classroom, it’s been such a bonus for these families.”
- 5.13. A primary colleague fed back that she has a family with 5 children – 3 currently in Primary – who are delighted they can now take part as they only had mum’s phone in lockdown and they now all have access to devices.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of roll out of Chromebooks will now take place.

7. Employee Implications

- 7.1. None

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. The Digital Inclusion agenda is grant funded by Scottish Government.

9. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 9.1. There are no climate change, sustainability and environmental implications in terms of the information contained in this report.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1. There are no risk implications in terms of the information contained in this report.

11. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 11.1. This report does not present a new strategy, policy or plan and is, therefore, not subject to equality impact assessment.
- 11.2. Consultation has taken place with schools, services, RM, Finance and IT Services, trade unions and the professional associations.

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)

5 January 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ◆ Improve achievement, raise educational attainment and support lifelong learning

Previous References

- ◆ None

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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