

Digital inclusion – Technology Helpline

Overview of proposed helpline

A headline 'needs gap' identified by the Task & Finish Group was digital inclusion, or more accurately the current digital 'exclusion' of this age group. Covid-19 has shown us that supporting older people to use technology is fundamental to reducing their isolation and their loneliness and with concern over more housebound individuals who cannot or prefer not to leave their home, creating connections with others through a digital device, is key to their mental health.

This urgent need could be addressed through a telephone 'technology helpline', with face-to-face support and workshops introduced when Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed.

The training of volunteers in existing community groups who provide forms of befriending such as Leighton Linlade Helping Hands can also be incorporated to give them the tools to further support their current clients.

Similar schemes

AgeUK Milton Keynes have successfully run a technology help service (for the Milton Keynes area only) for the past few years. Conversations with AgeUK Bedfordshire demonstrated they were not considering running one for the Bedfordshire area at the moment.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/miltonkeynes/our-services/technology-help-service/>

Carers in Bedfordshire have a (single) volunteer IT specialist who offers occasional support to carers with digital access techniques. This has been well received by their beneficiaries. This volunteer is not able to expand outside of 'Carers in Bedfordshire' but is willing to give advice/lessons learnt for a potential Leighton Buzzard helpline.

Who will run the helpline?

The Town Council will commission this service to be run by an external organisation. The funding will go towards; a part time staff member coordinating the service, allocating requests for help received via the helpline to expert technology volunteers who can support that person with their digital needs, promotion of the scheme and it's potential expansion into face to face/ workshops when Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Future of helpline

The funding will support the initiative until March 2022, with a review of how the service performed to inform whether this service receives continued support from the Town Council and/or another external funder longer term.

Basic cost breakdown based on conversations with AgeUK MK and local groups
2020/2021 - £14,500 – Initial recruitment and wage of a p/t staff post, development and set up of the scheme – free phone helpline, promotional literature, DBS checks on volunteers etc. 4 months until new financial year.

2021/2022 - £21,000 – Wage of p/t staff post, ongoing running costs of scheme (phone line, further DBS checks of volunteers, etc.) plus creation of face to face workshops with community members. – 12 months of costs