

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Kim Smith, Chief Executive

Date: 15/04/2021

Subject: **Laptops for digitally excluded students**

Report of: Rhian Davies, Director of Resources, and
Jacqui McShannon, Director of Children's services

Report author: Karen Barry, Strategic relationship manager, Digital services

SUMMARY

To assist digitally disadvantaged students in H&F during the Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent move to increased eLearning, Digital services and Children's services are working with local partners, and in particular United HF, a local charity, to launch a crowdfunding campaign aimed at raising funds for laptops and data connectivity. Children Services, in consultation with schools, has identified that in H&F there is a device shortfall of 1,500 units, and internet connectivity is required for 500 students.

High demand for devices nationally and limited availability have created difficult market conditions for obtaining large quantities of devices. However, an opportunity to secure devices at a very competitive price has arisen through the London Grid for Learning (LGfL). To take advantage of this opportunity, H&F will assist United HF by placing an order as soon as possible and ahead of the crowdfunding campaign in order to secure and deliver the devices in a more compressed timescale.

The purpose of this report is to request the funds to secure the devices and to support United HF's administration costs, with the intention that the crowdfunding campaign will launch and recoup the costs although there is a risk to the Council that there will be a shortfall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Appendix 1 to this report be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it/they contain information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and in all circumstances of the case.
2. To approve the purchase in increments of up to the maximum number of 1,500 laptops and connectivity from the Centralised Purchasing Body London Grid for Learning to be funded from crowdfunding raised by United HF.

3. To approve that in the event that United HF does not raise sufficient funds through crowdfunding, the shortfall will be funded from Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) (of up to £90,000), with any additional shortfall funded through Covid emergency grant to the extent that this is available. Where purchases remain unfunded, these costs will need to be met through annual revenue contingency budget or reserves. The maximum total cost would be £322,300.
4. To approve the funding of £10,000 to United HF to raise funds through crowdfunding and administer the scheme to be funded from Neighbourhood CIL.

Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	The digital inclusion of young people is a primary area of concern for Hammersmith & Fulham. Through this procurement and campaign, H&F aims to help and support local students to fully develop their future potential.
Creating a compassionate council	The provision of laptops and internet connectivity to the most vulnerable students in H&F addresses the digital divide – ensuring no students get left behind.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	The crowdfunding campaign, led by United HF, is aimed at raising funds and using unused devices from local residents and businesses – allowing them a safe and easy platform to help support local children and families.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	In partnership with the London Grid for Learning, H&F can take advantage of a bulk purchase of laptops – ensuring we get favourable pricing and availability in a difficult market.
Taking pride in H&F	This procurement and crowdfunding campaign supports H&F students and local families, and has been made possible through the partnership of H&F with local charities, schools, businesses and residents, including United HF and Ready Tech Go.

Financial Impact

The financial cost of the decision is set out in Appendix 1.

The cost of the expenditure is expected to be funded through crowdfunding raised by United HF. In the event that United HF does not raise sufficient funds then any residual unfunded costs will need to be met by the Council.

Should costs ultimately fall to the Council, this expenditure will need to be funded from CIL receipts and to the extent that is not sufficient, the non-ringfenced Covid-19 emergency grant. To date, the grant is insufficient to meet all of the Council's costs and losses related to Covid-19 and therefore any unfunded costs will need to be met from the Council's annual revenue contingency budget or reserve balances.

The Council is facilitating this purchase on behalf of schools and is expecting this to be eventually funded from crowdfunding once this is in place and therefore have nil financial impact to the Council, though this cannot be guaranteed at this stage.

To ensure that schools can receive the devices as quickly as possible to benefit students, the Council is under-writing this order in the short-term.

United HF require some one-off support with their administrative running costs of £10,000. The Council will fund this element separately through CIL to ensure that all money raised through crowdfunding will go directly to devices and support for digitally disadvantaged children.

The purchase includes both one-off and annual running/support costs for the devices. There is an additional risk of up to £87,300 per annum should funding not be secured in future years for the running and support cost elements should these continue to be needed and provided.

Implications completed by: Andre Mark, Finance business partner, Telephone 020 8753 6729

Verified by Emily Hill, Director of Finance

Legal Implications

This report recommends the award of a contract for up to 1,500 laptops, and internet connectivity for 500 students at a total value of £322,300. The total value of the contract exceeds the EU threshold for goods and services under the Public Contracts Regulations ("PCR"), which is currently £189,330. Therefore, the PCR applies in full. The PCR requires the contract to be procured by either a new procurement competition or the use of a framework agreement. This is also the requirement under the Council's CSOs for this high value contract (CSO 19.1).

This report recommends that the laptops are procured from the London Grid for Learning (LGfL) who are a Central Purchasing Body for the purposes of PCR. LGfL ran a procurement process under CCS framework RM6068 Lot 1 (Technology Products and Associated Services) for the purchase of devices on a call off basis as required. The procurement was carried out on behalf of all the Local Authorities in England and Wales. LGfL have confirmed that they have complied with the framework process in calling off the framework.

Further as LGfL is a Central Purchasing body for the purposes of the PCR the Council is permitted to purchase goods from them pursuant to Regulation 37 PCR and fulfils its obligations under the PCR when it acquires the supplies using contracts awarded by the Central Purchasing Body. This will secure compliance with the PCR requirements and the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

The decision maker needs to be satisfied that the recommended award of contract represents value for money. Furthermore, the decision maker needs to note that whilst a crowdfunding exercise is intended to be undertaken, there is no guarantee or warranty that the funds will be recouped and further that the funds received through crowdfunding may be used for the additional devices required.

As the value of the call-contract is above £300,000, the call-off contract award is a Key Decision and must be submitted to Committee Services for publication on the Council's website. In addition, a copy of the completed (dated) call-off contract must be uploaded to the Council's Contracts Register along with a copy of the award report.

Implications completed by: Sally Stock, Partner at Sharpe Pritchard
sstock@sharpepritchard.co.uk on secondment to the Council.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a financial charge which local planning authorities (LPAs) are entitled to charge on development in their area. Section 59 of Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 requires that CIL funding must be applied by a charging authority, (the Council) to fund the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure to support the development of its area. The charging authorities will decide on the infrastructure needed to support the development of their area.

If the CIL funding is to be relied upon, the charging authority should engage with the communities where development has taken place and agree with them how best to spend the neighbourhood funding. There is no specific process for agreeing how the neighbourhood portion should be spent. Charging authorities should use existing community consultation and engagement processes. This should include working with any designated neighbourhood forums preparing neighbourhood plans that exist in the area, theme specific neighbourhood groups, local businesses (particularly those working on business led neighbourhood plans) and using networks that ward councillors use.

This report recommends that CIL funds received are spent in accordance with the requirements of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010.

Legal implications in respect of CIL completed by: Poonam Rajput, Senior Solicitor,
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Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report - None

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Proposals and Analysis of Options

1. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students have been forced to continue their studies from home. This has brought into focus the digital divide, highlighting the disadvantage to students who are unable to fully participate due to lack of available technology and adequate digital connectivity.
2. Even if schools re-open in the near future, there will be a continued need for homeworking in response to isolation requirements and catching up on missed schoolwork. Children supported through this proposal will benefit from on-going access to laptops and internet connectivity, so they are put on a more equal footing with their peers.
3. Children's services, in consultation with schools through school surveys, has identified that in H&F there is a device shortfall of up to 1,500 units and connectivity is required for 500 students.
4. Several service providers are already offering free internet connectivity for limited periods through schools. Where this is not an appropriate solution for an individual, SIM cards may be required. Up to 500 SIMs have been included in the annual running costs.
5. To address these deficiencies United in Hammersmith and Fulham (local charity) are launching a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to provide devices and connectivity to ensure students are able to access their education. United HF are working in partnership with Ready Tech Go (group of volunteers who repurpose donated devices), and other potential partners; supported by Digital services and Children's services. The crowdfunding campaign will be two-pronged, targeting fundraising as well as encouraging donations of used devices for repurposing.
6. High demand for devices and their subsequent limited availability has created a difficult market to procure the quantity required at reasonable prices.
7. Chromebooks have been identified by schools as the device of choice. Discussions have been held with suppliers focussed on models with the specification meeting the minimum requirements set out by the DfE.
8. With good foresight, in 2020 the London Grid for Learning (LGfL) went out to procurement on behalf of London's Councils using CCS Framework Technology Products & Associated Services RM6068. LGfL has pre-ordered a significant number of devices at favourable price points and these are due for delivery in March 2021. H&F can take advantage of this and order the required units directly from the LGfL however the order must be placed as soon as possible to reserve the devices and ensure delivery. A separate price quotation was obtained from another supplier for market comparison purposes but was not accepted, as further outlined in Appendix 1.

9. To take advantage of the offer available through the LGfL and provide devices to students as soon as possible, the funds for the devices must be made available before the crowdfunding campaign commence. The campaign will approach members of the public, local businesses and other partners.
10. The intention is to purchase 1,250 devices initially (based on urgent need) along with associated support, to be distributed to students via schools. As the crowdfunding campaign recoups funds, a further rollout of devices will be considered.
11. In line with the distribution of the DfE funded laptops, ownership for these devices will be handed over to families but a support network will be put in place. Support will be delivered through a mixture of LGfL, Ready Tech Go, schools' IT teams, and other partners which are currently being identified. It is expected that any support costs not met through these routes will be met by crowdfunding in years one and two. Schools will be approached to absorb support costs by year three.

Reasons for Decision

12. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a unique situation which has disadvantaged some students in H&F, limiting their ability to take part in education due to their limited access to laptops and internet connectivity.
13. The crowdfunding campaign will be launched shortly, aimed at raising funds for devices and connectivity. This campaign is intended to recoup the cost requested in this report.
14. In these exceptional circumstances, the Council will facilitate the upfront purchase of devices. Purchasing the devices ahead of the crowdfunding campaign will provide needed technology to vulnerable students and families, at a favourable price point although it should be recognised there is no guarantee of recovering all of the funds.

Equality Implications

15. H&F is working closely with schools and local partners to identify and provide laptops and connectivity to digitally disadvantaged students who have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Children's services and schools have advised on the type and specification of devices required and these are available through the London Grid for Learning. It is not anticipated that the approval of the recommendations as set out in this report will impact negatively on protected groups under the Equality Act 2010.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

16. Section 59A of Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) provides that 15% of CIL raised is to be spent on infrastructure or 'anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an

area'. This is called the Neighbourhood portion of CIL (NCIL). The provision of devices to ensure all students in the Borough are able to access education through eLearning during the current pandemic falls within the terms of the use of NCIL.

Implications completed by: Matthew Paterson, Head of Spatial Planning, tel: 07776 672 759.

Risk Management Implications

17. The technological revolution that has occurred since the start of the pandemic has shown what can be achieved by technology and its reach. It has helped to keep children educated, in touch with other children of their own age and in their virtual classroom but has also shown that not all can afford to buy their own equipment. This has highlighted a risk therefore of digital exclusion. The Council will facilitate a remedy and procure kit through a trusted provider to enable and ensure children can access education. Financially the Council is proposing to take some risk that there may be a shortfall of donations and is in effect underwriting such a risk not only for the immediate purchase but also for annual running costs.

Implications completed by: Michael Sloniowski, Risk Manager, tel: 020 8753 2587.

ICT Implications

18. A significant number of school children across the UK are struggling to participate in their *eLearning*. The proposal to purchase through LGfL delivers a good value for money solution at speed. LGfL have existing relationships with many of our schools and will help facilitate deployment.
19. Digital and Children's services will work with colleagues across business development and community engagement to publicise the United HF crowdfunding campaign.
20. The Chromebooks will have web-browsing protection software.
21. A Privacy Impact Assessment should be completed to ensure all potential data protection risks in relation to this proposal are properly assessed with mitigating actions agreed and implemented.

Implications completed by: Veronica Barella, Chief digital officer, Tel 020 8753 2927.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 (Exempt)