

Private and Confidential

Digital Inclusion for Children and Young People

Background and Purpose

1. In May Leaders were updated on the Scottish Government's intention to provide targeted support for children and young people at risk of digital exclusion. The Deputy First Minister later confirmed that £30m would be made available to support this work in schools and further education. £25m of this has now been confirmed for Local Government (of which £3.6m is revenue). The funding, to be provided via a ring-fenced grant, is expected to pay for around 70k devices in total, including 25k chrome books and connectivity devices already purchased by Scottish Government.
2. SOLACE, ADES, Local Government Digital Office and COSLA officers have worked with the Scottish Government to identify need and develop a possible method of allocation. This paper asks Leaders to approve this, ensuring that devices can be deployed before the 11th August.

Key Points for Consideration

3. Due to supply chain concerns and international availability of devices, Scottish Government took the decision to procure 25,000 chrome books and connectivity devices in May. Whilst officers were informed of this decision, there was not an opportunity to provide a Local Government view on this approach. This initial order was originally described as 'phase 1', with the Scottish Government's intention to distribute devices directly to councils and then enter discussions with Local Government on a possible 'phase 2' where there would be funding available (as opposed to just devices).
4. Local Government representatives have raised a number of concerns with this approach, including:
 - Many councils have already made progress and invested in ensuring that children and young people can participate in digital learning irrespective of their family situation, but the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the need for such provision
 - Local Government has identified a range of different options on how to provide digital devices and connectivity cost effectively and quickly and they should be considered by the Scottish Government as a key partner for future phases of this work, especially in relation to procurement. Best value must be achieved in any programme and the ability purchase without incurring VAT should be a major consideration.
 - The totality of funding and resources available to Local Government for this programme must cover devices, connectivity and ongoing revenue consequences (including set-up, technical support, learning support, material changes to outsourced contracts).