Digital Blackpool

Final Service Use and Impact Report – **August 2023**

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Blackpool Council

Service use and access statistics
From 17/11/2021 to 30/08/2023

Total number of six week loans: **345** *(Includes extensions)*

Number of unique users: **98 users**
(Unique individuals accessing service regardless of loan length)

Extension requests: **78 users**
(Unique individuals requesting extensions past the initial 6 week period)

Number of six week extensions: **268**

Number of completed service uses: **69** *(Number of loans completed)*

Number of active loans: **33** *(on 30/08/23)*

Area distribution

FY1 – 45 users
- FY1 1 – 1 users
- FY1 2 – 11 users
- FY1 3 – 4 users
- FY1 4 – 12 users
- FY1 5 – 7 users
- FY1 6 – 10 users

FY2 – 12 users
- FY2 0 – 7 users
- FY2 9 – 5 users

FY3 – 20 users
- FY3 7 – 15 users
- FY3 8 – 3 users
- FY3 9 – 2 user

FY4 – 21 users
- FY4 1 – 2 user
- FY4 2 – 3 user
- FY4 3 – 3 users
- FY4 4 – 12 users
- FY4 5 – 1 user

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Equipment and digital connectivity

Number of mobile router requests: **40**

Number of users with existing internet access: **58**

Number of users with mobile phone numbers: **92**

Number of users with pre-existing email accounts: **90**

Number of users with pre-existing Google accounts: **70**

Referral pathways

Most successful referral pathways: Libraries, Groundwork

Impact on wellbeing and mental health

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale of positively worded items for assessing a population's mental wellbeing.

Two WEMWBS forms are completed per service user – one is completed on delivery, and a second at the end of the loan. The initial WEMWBS is scored to a total of 35 points over 7 questions. The second WEMWBS is scored to a total of 70 points over 14 questions. In the below statistics, the figures have been compared on a 7 question basis.

To date we've had **39** completed pairs of questionnaires.

76.32% of users have reported an increase in wellbeing after accessing the service. We've seen a mean increase of **6.17** points out of a total of 35.

The questions on the WEMWBS and the mean point improvement reported:

"I've been feeling optimistic about the future"

22 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.182** points

"I've been feeling useful"

20 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.4** points

"I've been feeling relaxed"

27 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.519** points

"I've been dealing with problems well"

19 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.632** points

"I've been thinking clearly"

16 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.813** points

"I've been feeling close to other people"

21 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.429** points

"I've been able to make up my own mind about things"

13 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.462** points

Use of equipment

The most common use of the equipment includes:

- Online courses
- Job searching
- Entertainment
- Skill development

User feedback

"We both now have full time work starting at the end of the month thanks to the use of the laptops"

"I really appreciate you helping us out like this, it means a lot to myself and my family. You really are a superstar"

"I've been keen to start my mental health course but unfortunately isn't doable on my phone only a laptop so this would be a fantastic support for me."

Digital Blackpool Report
30/08/2023 – V1
Adam Beardow

Blackpool Council

GROUNDWORK
CHANGING PLACES
CHANGING LIVES

"I'm applying as my daughter is home with a broken elbow and she needs access to her homework and what a brill service you provide for the community."

"Laptop is great and I am so grateful to have something to use. I was wondering what is the chance of extending the loan? I had my phone stolen and smashed and the laptop is my only life line. I have a meeting with social services online in the next few weeks and no other way of attending."

"I use a computer but my feet are swelling up. My doctor says I must put my feet up so I am wondering if I can borrow a laptop for a while to see if I can use it from my armchair with my feet elevated."

"I currently use Revoe Library on a daily basis to do my job search, keep in contact with family and check my emails. I've seen a flyer for this scheme and really would like to be considered as I spend a lot of time at the local library and the days it's shut I have to travel, so would really benefit from it."

"This would really help me as I am currently living in supported accommodation and I have started up my own artwork page, so I would like a more practical way of working on that, instead of just trying to do it all on my phone."

Post-access progression

After completion of the loan, 3 users have confirmed the purchase of their own digital equipment. 2 users have signed up for home internet packages. 5 further users have stated that they will be purchasing a Chromebook in the future.

18 users have commented that access to the equipment had improved the ease of job searching.

15 further users have commented that access to the equipment had improved the ease of attending online courses. 12 users stated that it wasn't possible for them to complete their online course without access to a laptop or PC.

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Marketing

The Digital Blackpool project has been marketed both digitally and in print format. Digitally, the project has been promoted via email newsletters, on Facebook, on both Blackpool Council and Groundwork websites, and through referral partners.

The project has had two printed flyer designs; an initial design advertising the 3 week loan period, and an updated design advertising the 6 week loan period. These were distributed in local libraries, community hubs, medical centres, job centres and leisure facilities.

Since then, Pride of Place have worked with the project to create additional flyers which advertise the Digital Blackpool project, as well as the Lloyds TSB digital helpline which is now available.

Print marketing seems to be the most effective strategy at reaching the target audience, and an uptake in referrals has been noticed since the distribution of the updated flyers.

Training and skill development

Adam Beardow (Digital Blackpool) and Chantelle Barrot (Pride of Place) attended the Blackpool Community Housing and Blackpool Football Club warm hubs to deliver in-person digital training and support over a six week period from February 2023 – March 2023.

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Summary of performance

The Digital Blackpool project had a slow initial uptake in late 2021, early 2022. The extension of the loan period to six weeks has drastically improved the uptake, with promotion of the project in April having a noticeable impact on numbers.

Evaluation of the figures suggests that, initially, the scope of the project was too narrow, with eligibility being limited to Covid 19 isolation referrals. Uptake improved with the expansion to include low-level mental health referrals, though only slightly.

As the scope of the project has expanded to include all residents, and the loan period increased to 6 weeks, the number of users has been steadily increasing.

The library system has seen an increased number of new users, due to previously unregistered residents accessing the program. Several residents who were previously unaware of the digital services available at the library are now aware and using these services.

Connections and rapport between local services and both Groundwork and Blackpool Council has improved as a result of the project.

At the end of May 2022, March 2023 and June 2023, mobile routers were out of stock due to demand.

Of the 60 completed loans, 11 users did not return their equipment.

Changes to the service

Groundwork's involvement in the Digital Blackpool project will cease on 31st August 2023. This will change how the service is delivered:

- Delivery and collection will no longer be available.
- Users will be required to return equipment to Blackpool libraries.
- Setup, cleaning and maintenance of equipment will be handled by Council IT department.
- Troubleshooting of faulty equipment will be managed by Blackpool libraries and Council IT staff.
- Relationship management will be handled by stakeholders.
- User management will be handled by Blackpool libraries.

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Opportunities to improve

- Due to the repurposed nature of the equipment, it's important to regularly assess the health of the devices. Many of the batteries are end-of-life and struggle to hold a charge. This results in unpredictable battery life and issues with charging. I would recommend a battery health test every 18 weeks to ensure that equipment is functional and in acceptable condition.

- We do not currently provide project documentation in accessible formats or alternative languages. We also do not provide documentation in large print format. If possible, a library of documentation should be created in accessible formats.

- We do not offer the option to purchase equipment after loan periods. While digital inclusion is improved for the loan period, many users require long-term access to equipment. Existing and new partnerships should be explored to offer permanent solutions to digital exclusion.

- Training in IT skills and basic troubleshooting is currently in low availability in the area. Relationships should be built with training providers to ensure that basic IT courses are available frequently for service users, and that the training providers are able to work with the Chromium OS that is utilised by Digital Blackpool.

Notes for future delivery

- It is paramount that marketing of the service continues in the library service, as this is the highest source of referrals. Flyers will have to be redesigned with new contact details and information, printed, and distributed throughout the libraries. Roller banners are recommended.

- It will be necessary to accept return of equipment in all Blackpool libraries. Systems should be put in place to ensure that all equipment is returned to stock on a regular basis.

- It may be necessary to offer the equipment loans from all Blackpool library locations. Stock will have to be distributed to all libraries with sufficient, safe storage.

Digital Blackpool Report
30/08/2023 – V1
Adam Beardow

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- Equipment continues to default to a US keyboard layout. This has to be changed manually prior to delivery. Users logging in to their own Google account may also default to a US keyboard layout. This must be addressed before delivery via the libraries, as users are often not able to change this themselves without instruction.

- The renewal of equipment loans is likely to require amendment. Currently, users are permitted to renew equipment indefinitely, stock permitting. This may have to be limited to a total of 18 weeks.

- Equipment being returned must be inspected to ensure all parts are present, e.g. laptop, charger, mobile WiFi equipment with charger and plug.

- Demand for equipment is currently on par with stock, though it is expected to exceed stock. I would suggest a further 20 laptops are added to stock to allow for demand, with a further 10 laptops made available as replacement units for damage/faults. In addition to the above, at least 10 chargers should also be made available, as these have proven to be unreliable.

- Considerations must be made for users who are house-bound and will not be able to access the library. Existing partnerships should be explored to act as a referral and delivery route for these individuals.

- Library staff will need to be trained in basic use and troubleshooting of the Digital Blackpool equipment.

- Existing referral pathways will need to be notified in the change of service delivery.

- Laptops should leave Council IT bundled with chargers. The laptops should be **thoroughly** cleaned before being added into stock. Libraries may need suitable cleaning equipment (e.g. isopropyl alcohol) and PPE to clean returned equipment.

- The relationship with the Council and Ian Clough at 6Gi should be strengthened, ensuring that they support in delivery of the "Internet for Everyone" service. This will benefit Digital Blackpool by reducing the cost of supplying mobile routers.

Digital Blackpool Report
30/08/2023 – V1
Adam Beardow

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- Blackpool library staff must receive two up-to-date contact methods from service users to ensure that they are contactable.

- Library staff will be responsible for monitoring return dates for equipment, and must contact Council IT to request deactivation of non-returns. It may be necessary to catalogue equipment serial numbers, IMEI numbers etc.

- It may be necessary to explore direct-to-equipment notification or messaging, including warnings of loan expiry.

- The Digital Blackpool project has an opportunity to set a Minimum Digital Living Standard in Lancashire.

Final Notes (30/08/23)

The available stock in Central Library consists of:

7 Laptops

7 Tablets

4 Mobile Routers

There are **33** ongoing loans.

21 users have been in touch to confirm that they will return equipment to the library.

12 users have not responded to contact (call, text and email). These users have been passed to the IT team for deactivation of equipment.

Faulty devices have been returned to Bickerstaff, C/O Lucy Warburton.

The total stock (active loans and available) stands at:

47 Laptops

19 Mobile Routers

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