Digital Inclusion in Education Task & Finish Group (TFG)

Report title: Digital Inclusion in Education TFG – scoping report

Date: 5 July 2021

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Assistant Chief Executive (Scrutiny Manager)

Outline and recommendations

This report defines the role of the Task and Finish Group (TFG), and defines the scope of the review.

 The TFG is asked to:

- consider and comment on the content of the report
- define the intended outcomes of the review
- agree key lines of enquiry
- agree a timetable for completion of this work.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

The subject of this TFG was proposed by Cllr Colin Elliott.

The subject and membership of the TFG were agreed by Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 26 May 2021.

1. Summary

1.1.   This report asks the TFG to consider and finalise the scope of the review.

2. Recommendations

2.1.   The TFG is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the content of the report.

- define the intended outcomes of the review

- Agree Key Lines of Enquiry

- Agree a timetable for the completion of this work

3. The role of the Task & Finish Group

3.1.   The proposed role of the Digital Inclusion in Education TFG is to consider:

- *How can levels of digital inclusion be improved for those pupils most in need, and educational outcomes improved, particularly for those already identified as under-achieving prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

- *What best practice has emerged during the pandemic to support pupils who may be digitally excluded and are likely to need to complete more online learning at home in the future?*

- *How can those most in need be identified and how should best practice on digital inclusion be shared, applied and evaluated as part of the recovery from the pandemic*?

3.2.   These are based on the proforma for the TFG, which can be found at **Appendix A**.

4. Policy content

4.1.   The Council's *Corporate Strategy (2018-2022)* outlines the Council's vision to deliver for residents over the next four years. Delivering this strategy includes the following priority outcomes that relate to digital inclusion in education:

- *Giving children and young people the best start in life - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education, and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.*

- *Building an inclusive local economy - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.*

4.2.   The Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan, *Future Lewisham*, also outlines four strategic themes: *An economically sound future*; *a healthy and well future*; *a greener future*; *and a future we all have a part in*. The first of these is particularly relevant to digital inclusion in education:

- *An economically sound future: We are working to get the borough back in business, with a future where everyone has the jobs and skills they need to get the best that London has to offer. We are a borough with businesses that are adaptable and prepared for change, a thriving local economy that sees 'local' as the first and best choice, with digital inclusion at the heart of our plans. We do all we can to support residents into jobs that pay fairly and provide families with the opportunities and security they deserve*

4.3.   The Council's *Children and young people's plan 2019–2022* sits within the wider framework of Council priorities. This also includes the following priorities that are relevant to increasing digital inclusion in education:

- *Priority 1: Children and young people have the best start in life and are protected from harm*

- *Priority 3: Children and young people develop, achieve and are ready for adulthood*

5. Digital inclusion – a brief introduction

5.1.   In a recent analysis of data on digital inclusion, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) noted that: 'in an increasingly digital age, those who are not engaging effectively with the digital world are at risk of being left behind'.

5.2.   The ONS observed that technological change means that digital skills are increasingly important for connecting with others, accessing information and services and meeting the changing demands of the workplace and economy; and that this is leading to a digital divide between those who have access to information and communications technology and those who do not.[1]

5.3.   The Good Things Foundation, a leading digital inclusion charity, argue that a lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person's life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, less access to jobs and education. It can also mean paying more for essentials and lead to broader financial exclusion.

5.4.   Worryingly, the Good Things Foundation also points out that it tends to be those already at a disadvantage – through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment – who are most likely to be lacking digital skills, further widening the social inequality gap.[2]

5.5.   Concerns about a 'digital divide' have been particularly acute during the COVID-19 pandemic as the internet and digital devices have played an important role in allowing people to attend medical appointments, stay in touch with friends and family, and take part in education.

5.6.   The 2020 *UK Consumer Digital Index,* an annual survey of around 4,000 people, estimated that there are 11.3 million people in the UK who don't have the basic digital skills they need to thrive in today's world.

5.7.   Research has also established that children and young people are likely to experience an educational disadvantage in not being able access the internet for schoolwork.[3]

5.8.   The closure of schools during the pandemic to control the spread of COVID-19 concentrated attention on the issue of digital inequality in education as teaching rapidly shifted online. While many children could continue learning remotely, many were unable to access learning resources as they lacked a suitable device or a reliable internet connection.

5.9.   Recent research from Ofcom, for example, found that 20% of children did not always have access to a device for online learning while schools were closed.[4]

5.10. Similarly, a survey of more than 6,000 teachers in January 2021 found that, overall, just 10% of teachers said that *all* their students had access to an adequate device and the

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[1] ONS, *Exploring the UK's digital divide*, March 2019
[2] Good Things Foundation, *The Digital Divide (webpage)*, undated
[3] Digital Access for All, *Switched On: Exploring the challenge of adequate digital access for all children and young people*, 2019
[4] Lloyds Bank, *UK Consumer Digital Index 2021*, May 2021 (cited at p14)

internet. In the most deprived schools only 2% of teachers reported *all* their students as having access to an adequate device, and only 1% said *all* students had access to the internet (see charts below).[5]

5.11.   The chart below shows the lack a devices by deprivation level.

Figure 2. Proportion of a teacher's class who lack a device for learning Jan 2021, by deprivation level of school
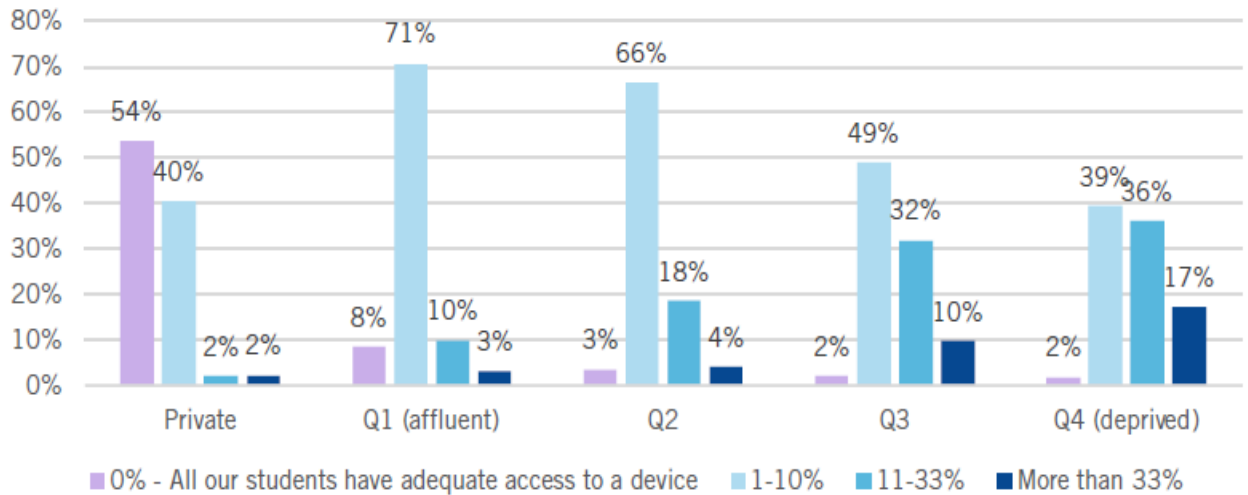
5.12.   This chart shows the lack of internet access by deprivation level.

Figure 4. Proportion of a teacher's class who lack adequate access to the internet Jan 2021, by deprivation level of school
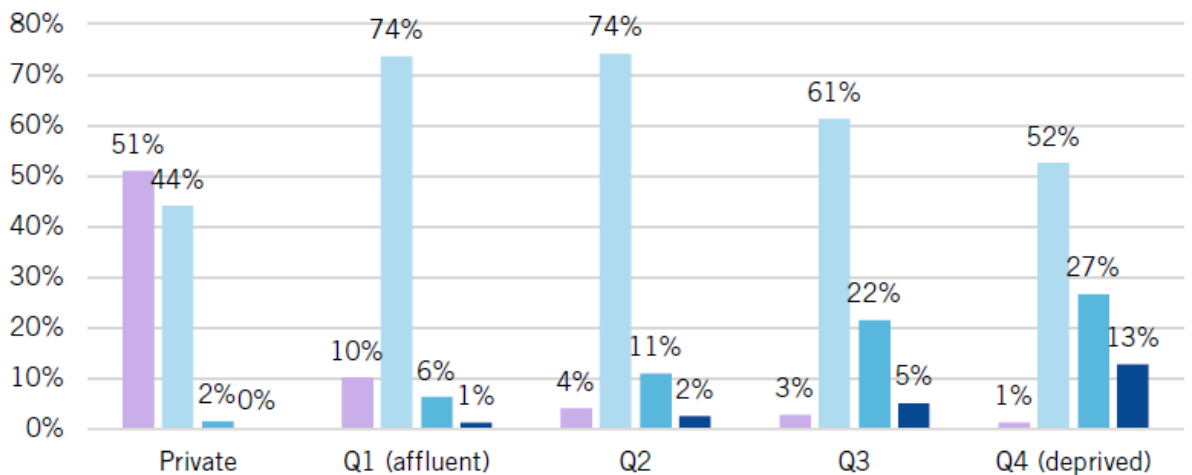
5.13.   An Ofcom survey in March 2020 estimated that 9% of households containing children didn't have home access to a laptop, desktop PC or tablet.[6] And Digital Access For All (DAFA), a taskforce focused on digital inclusion among children and young people, estimates that 1 million children have inadequate access at home.[7]

5.14.   DAFA also points out that those children most likely to be digitally excluded are also those children most likely to be disadvantaged according to almost every other social or

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[5] The Sutton Trust, *Remote Learning: the Digital Divide*, January 2021

[6] The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), *COVID-19 and the digital divide*, December 2020

[7] Nominet, *Digital Access for All launches to help solve problem of digital exclusion (webpage)*, February 2019

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economic measure, the children for whom a positive education experience can make the greatest difference.[8]

5.15. A 2020 University College London study estimated that 20% of children eligible for free school meals have no access to a computer at home – compared to 7% of other children.[9] And according to ONS data, only 51% of households earning £6-10k have internet – compared to 99% of households earning more than £40K.[10]

5.16. DAFA research notes that although the most vulnerable children were able to continue attending school during the pandemic, there remains a wider disadvantaged group at risk of a significant increase in the inequality of their educational experience.[11]

5.17. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the government-designated What Works Centre for improving education outcomes for school-aged children, estimates that the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their richer peers widened during the first lockdown, reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011. The EEF's median estimate indicates that the gap could widen by 36%.[12]

5.18. A recent study of digital inclusion by the University of Manchester commented that the pandemic is reducing the equalising role that the time children normally spend in school may have on their learning.[13] An analysis from the University of Cambridge said that the pandemic risks turning the problem of digital exclusion into a catastrophe of lost education and opportunity for the UK's poorest and most vulnerable.[14]

5.19. The Sutton Trust, also the government-designated What Works Centre for improving education outcomes for school-aged children, said that the lack of access to electronic devices to help children participate in remote lessons and complete homework threatens to undo a decade of social mobility.[15]

5.20. Studies of digital inclusion have identified a wide range of barriers holding people back from making full use of the internet and other digital tools. DAFA argue that access to a suitable device and internet connection and the skills to make effective use of these are essential if children are to access and benefit from digitally-delivered educational resources and teaching.[16] DAFA also warns against assuming that children and young people are 'digital natives' surrounded by technology, pointing out that there remains a substantial group of children and young people who are disconnected.[17]

5.21. A comprehensive review of digital access for children and young people by DAFA noted, however, that digital inclusion is a complex picture with considerations that go far beyond access to a digital device and the internet. As well as access to a suitable and affordable device and an internet connection, the review stated that adequate access should also mean that children and young people have the 'confidence, skills and motivation' they

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[8] Digital Access for All, *Switched On: Exploring the challenge of adequate digital access for all children and young people*, 2019 (p9)

[9] Cited in Education Policy Institute, *Addressing the digital divide in education: Enabling a blended learning approach for all pupils and teachers*, July 2020

[10] ONS, *Exploring the UK's digital divide*, March 2019

[11] Digital Access for All, *Time for a rapid response to the digital access challenge (webpage)*, April 2020

[12] Education Endowment Foundation (EFF), *Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment*, June 2020 (p4)

[13] University of Manchester, *On Digital Inequalities*, May 2021 (p37)

[14] University of Cambridge, *"Pay the wi-fi or feed the children": Coronavirus has intensified the UK's digital divide (webpage)*, undated

[15] Digital divide: The initiatives working to provide deprived children with laptops, *INews*, 12 February 2021

[16] Digital Access for All, *Time for a rapid response to the digital access challenge (webpage)*, April 2020

[17] Digital Access for All, *Switched On: Exploring the challenge of adequate digital access for all children and young people*, 2019 (p9)

need to navigate effectively and safely.[18]

5.22. DAFA states that the absence of digital skills among some children can mean that their digital use is concentrated on activities such as messaging or gaming rather than broader access to education and learning resources that is now being asked of them.[19] DAFA also draws attention to more subtle barriers such as the number of people sharing a device and how much data a family has for a month.[20] The Educational Development Trust points out that lack of access to software can also influence digital inclusion.[21]

5.23. In addition to this, some children are limited to accessing the internet with a smartphone, often restricting them to a narrow set of tools and resources, DAFA notes.[22] Research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2020 found that 14% of pupils were dependent on their phone for accessing digital content.[23] And Ofcom research found that smartphone-only access was 9x more likely in DE than AB households.[24]

5.24. Given the significant number of children and young people currently without decent access researchers have also been considering ways of mitigating the impact of the of the digital divide on children's learning.

5.25. The Educational Development Trust (EDT), for example, created an *Essential Guide to Remote Learning* for schools in which schools are first encouraged to speak to parents to find out more about what devices a child will be able to use. The guide notes that knowing whether or not the child will have access to an internet-enabled device (whether this is a computer, tablet or phone, and whether it is available for only brief periods) allows schools to plan for how to reach each of their pupils.[25]

5.26. The EDT suggests that schools will need to work out strategies to support families with different levels of digital access and capability – both in terms of how they communicate and in the remote learning activities they set. The EDT also suggests that teachers should carefully consider the potential of 'low-bandwidth, lower-immediacy alternatives to online video classes, such as file-sharing (for readings), email and discussion boards, which – used effectively – can create excellent learning experiences'.[26]

5.27. Research on digital inclusion in education by the University of Manchester found that supporting parents with online learning has been a key priority for many schools in Greater Manchester – with some providing step-by-step guides and telephone support.

5.28. Since COVID-19 many schools in Greater Manchester have also adopted a 'blended' learning approach, combining online platforms with paper-based materials. Given that providing both face-to-face and online learning may continue for some time, the research suggests that policymakers should turn their attention to allowing and supporting schools to develop blended learning offers.[27]

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[18] Digital Access for All, *Switched On: Exploring the challenge of adequate digital access for all children and young people*, 2019 (pp2,7)

[19] Digital Access for All, *Time for a rapid response to the digital access challenge (webpage)*, April 2020

[20] *Digital Access for All (webpage)*, February 2021

[21] Education Development Trust, *Bridging the digital divide: evidence and advice on remote learning and digital equality (webpage)*, May 2020

[22] Digital Access for All, *Time for a rapid response to the digital access challenge (webpage)*, April 2020

[23] Cited in Education Policy Institute, *Addressing the digital divide in education: Enabling a blended learning approach for all pupils and teachers*, July 2020

[24] Cited in Good Things Foundation, *Digital Nation UK 2020*, 2020

[25] Education Development Trust, *Bridging the digital divide: evidence and advice on remote learning and digital equality (webpage)*, May 2020

[26] Ibid.

[27] University of Manchester, *On Digital Inequalities*, May 2021 (pp37-8)

5.29.   The Manchester research also considered the needs of teachers and argued that bridging the digital divide between teachers, to ensure they are appropriately trained and confident in developing digital education, should also be a key priority.[28]

5.30.   Other research into digital inclusion has established the importance of upskilling project workers working with young people and starting the digital inclusion process with trusted relationships and a shared understanding of why digital is relevant.[29] While analysis from the University of Cambridge raised the issue of parents not having key digital skills themselves, and not being able to help their children use the most appropriate learning platforms.[30]

6. Local response during the pandemic

6.1.   In response to a public council question in March 2021, Cllr Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance) outlined the local response to digital poverty in education over the course of pandemic, in particular the widespread provision of devices:

For the 2020 to 2021 academic year, DfE has been providing laptops and tablets to schools to help children, young people and families in need to access remote education during coronavirus (COVID-19). Devices have been made available for disadvantaged children in certain year groups who:

- *are affected by disruption to face-to-face education at their school*
- *have been advised to <u>shield because they are clinically extremely vulnerable</u>.*

There has been two phases to the digital device allocation to Lewisham education providers, children and young people.

During lockdown one, between April and July 2020, Lewisham Council worked with schools, academies and colleges to distribute to over 1700 digital devices including laptops, notebooks and 4G internet connectivity. All Lewisham education providers were involved with the allocation of devices and LBL undertook the role of liaison between the Department for Education (DfE) and distribution to Lewisham education providers. All those devices were allocated to:

- *Looked after children, care leavers and children with social worker involvement.*
- *Disadvantaged Year 10 pupils in maintained schools (this includes voluntary aided schools)*

Under the current lockdown Lewisham is expecting more digital devices and the DfE is increasing the help available through its '<u>get help with technology</u> programme'.

This includes providing hundreds of thousands more laptops and tablets – reaching a total of more than one million and supporting disadvantaged 16 to 19 year olds in further education, in particular to:

- *disadvantaged children in years 3 to 11 who do not have access to a device and whose face-to-face education is disrupted*

[28] Ibid. 31.
[29] Digital Access for All, *Switched On: Exploring the challenge of adequate digital access for all children and young people*, 2019 (p20)
[30] University of Cambridge, *"Pay the wi-fi or feed the children": Coronavirus has intensified the UK's digital divide (webpage)*, undated

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- *disadvantaged children in any year group who have been advised to shield because they (or someone they live with) are clinically extremely vulnerable*
- *disadvantaged children in any year group attending a hospital school*

This offer applies to maintained schools, pupil referral units, academy trusts and hospital schools, as well as sixth-form colleges who have enrolled 14 to 16 year olds.

We are aware that the DfE is in direct contact schools, colleges, trusts and local authorities when they're able to order these devices during the spring term 2021. This is already happening for Lewisham education providers with over 2750 laptops and notebooks ordered and /or delivered. There is still a small number of devices unclaimed and Lewisham education is following up with schools to ensure access to all available devices.

Lewisham education is currently in dialogue with the DfE 'get help with technology programme' to ensure that children and young people who attend alternative provision and 14-16 provision at Lewisham College are not digitally disadvantaged during this lockdown.

6.2. The council question response also outlined the most recent analysis of the ongoing digital inclusion challenges and plans to address these going forwards:

More recently Lewisham Learning undertook a survey with Lewisham primary, secondary and special schools and it is estimated that 99 per cent of children now have access to a device but there is still significant inequality between families. Some children have a laptop or desktop for their own exclusive use while other children are sharing a mobile phone with parents and siblings. The quality of Wi-Fi / connectivity varies greatly between families as does the appropriateness of the space and environment children from different families are working in.

In order to further support this Lewisham Learning has set up a crowd funding page to raise financial resource for schools to purchase additional digital devices and connectivity for the most vulnerable children and families.

Lewisham Learning is also working with Lewisham schools to improve remote learning by encouraging:

- *Schools to support each other by providing coaching and modelling good practice where needed.*
- *Compliance checks on school websites to ensure Lewisham schools are meeting new remote learning Department for Education requirements.*
- *School / peer review teams to use the new Department for Education toolkit to evaluate the quality of schools offers.*

7. Task & Finish Group methodology

7.1.   The TFGs will be run as projects, utilising an *agile* methodology, and are intended to be:

Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern, using a shared space on MS Teams

Time limited – to suggest solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines

Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement etc

Focussed on residents – service user experience is key, the issue will be clearly defined, and solutions suggested, on the basis of understanding residents' experience

Focussed on solutions – the aim is to take evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

7.2.   A 'double diamond' approach will be taken which will split the project into two parts (diamonds). The first part is the 'discovery' stage. The issue (the topic of the TFG) is the starting point and then research and evidence collection is carried out to really understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue is well understood and well defined, the second stage begins. Further research and evidence collection is carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. Then a clear set of recommendations can be produced.
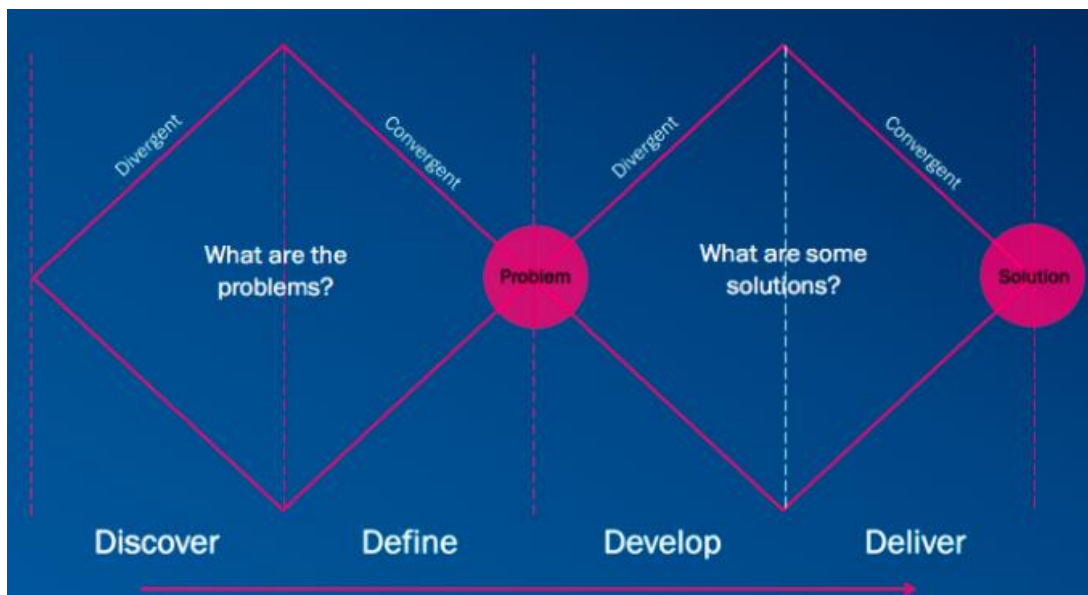
8. Nature of expected outcomes

8.1.   The work of the TFG is intended to support work to improve the following outcomes:

- *More of the pupils most in need in Lewisham are able to access and use the digital tools that are necessary for their education.*

- *An increased understanding and awareness among schools and local stakeholders of local and national best practice in relation to digital inclusion in education.*

- *The identification of ways of monitoring levels of digital inclusion among pupils in Lewisham, particularly those that have been identified as under-achieving.*

9. Stakeholder engagement

9.1.   It is also proposed that stakeholder engagement begins with the **relevant council officers** in order to gather evidence on the key learning points from the pandemic and the ongoing work with schools to address the digital divide going forward. It is proposed that this initial engagement takes place in **July**.

9.2.   It is also proposed that engagement takes place with **primary and secondary school headteachers**. The aims of this engagement would be to better understand schools' experience of digital inclusion during the pandemic; the key issues faced by pupils, parents/carers, and teachers; schools' priorities on digital inclusion/exclusion going forwards; and what role the council might play. A initial selection of potential schools to engage with has been identified (see table below). It is proposed that this engagement takes place around **September**.

9.3.   It is also proposed that a member of the TFG engages with the council officers responsible for the development of **two recent virtual offers** (relating to voluntary work experience and the Lewisham university challenge) in order to report back on these examples of recently developed practice. It is proposed that this engagement takes place **before September**.

9.4.   Further engagement by the TFG will be steered by the findings of this initial engagement and other suggestions. The TFG may, for example, wish to engage in more detail with governors, parents, pupils, other local authorities and other experts in digital inclusion, or consider holding an online call for evidence.

Primary schools	Secondary schools
St Saviour's RC Primary School	St Matthew Academy
St Margaret's Lee CE Primary School	Prendergast School
Brindishe Manor Primary School	Sydenham Secondary School
Rathfern Primary School	Sedgehill Secondary School
Elfrida Primary School	Haberdashers' Aske's Knights Academy
Forster Park Primary School	Addey and Stanhope Secondary School
St Mary's CE Primary School	Deptford Green School
Grinling Gibbons Primary School	Forest Hill School

10. Key Lines of Enquiry

10.1. The proposed key lines of enquiry for the TFG are:

- *What are the main barriers to digital inclusion for pupils in Lewisham, both those faced during the pandemic and those that are likely to persist going forwards?*

- *Which pupils are most likely to be digitally excluded and most likely to experience the negative consequences of digital exclusion?*

- *What support do pupils need to be digitally included as part of their education, particularly those pupils that have been identified as under-achieving?*

- *What best practice on digital inclusion in education has emerged, locally and nationally, during the pandemic and what lessons were learned?*

- *What are the local strategies for increasing digital inclusion among pupils in Lewisham?*

- *What local and national organisations and campaigns are there that the council could work in partnership with to increase digital inclusion?*

- *What outcomes do the council and its partners want to achieve from greater digital inclusion among pupils in Lewisham?*

11. Out of Scope

11.1. Neither further or higher education are within scope of this review.

12. Sources of Evidence

12.1. A combination of further desk-based research and stakeholder engagement.

13. Timeframe and resources

13.1. This is the first formal meeting of the TFG. There will be at least one more formal meeting to agree to final report and recommendations – anticipated to be around February 2022. Before then there will be a mix of informal and formal meetings as required to gather evidence for the review. The intention is for the majority of evidence gathering to take place before and after August 2021 with a mid-stage evidence review meeting around November 2021.

14. Financial implications

14.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Elements of the work of the Task and Finish Group may have financial implications and these will need to be considered in due course.

15. Legal implications

15.1. The Council's Constitution provides at paragraph 6.11, Article 6 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may from time to time appoint sub-committees, to be known as task and finish groups which will exist for a period of no less than 3 months, nor more than 12 months from the date of their creation. It further adds that "Any task and finish group shall consist of 5 members and be established for the purpose of examining a particular issue in depth. The terms of reference of any task and finish group shall be agreed by

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which shall also appoint members to it."

16. Equalities implications

16.1. The Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

16.2. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

16.3. There may be equalities implications arising from activities undertaken by the Task and Finish Group and it will need to give due consideration to this.

17. Climate change and environmental implications

17.1. There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Matters considered by the Task and Finish Group may have climate change implications and the Task and Finish Group will need to give due consideration to this.

18. Crime and disorder implications

18.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Matters considered by the Task and Finish Group may have crime and disorder implications and the Task and Finish Group will need to give due consideration to this.

19. Health and wellbeing implications

19.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Matters considered by the Task and Finish Group may have health and wellbeing implications and the Task and Finish Group will need to give due consideration to this.

20. Report author and contact

20.1. If you have any questions about this report please contact: John Bardens or Timothy Andrew:

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Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Proforma

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