Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board   **Date: 13th October 2021**

Subject: Digital Skills for the Job Market

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1   Purpose of the Note

1.1   To inform Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board of the position with regards to provisions in place to support residents in gaining digital skills with a specific focus on digital skills for employment.

2   Recommendations

2.1   The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) are recommended to:

   1) Note the details in the briefing note regarding the topics covered.
   2) Make any recommendations to the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3   Information/Background

3.1   It is recognised that during the COVID19 pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the need for residents to be able to access and have confidence in using digital tools. As an organisation it is important that we make provision for supporting residents in gaining the relevant digital skills but we must also be realistic with regards to the extent of the provision that we can provide solely as a local government organisation.

3.2   Through the work of the Digital Coventry strategy and wider city-wide digital activity with key partners, we continue to look for ways in which we can support a digital skills ecosystem that not only includes the provision provided by the city council (further details below), but activities provided by partner and community group organisations.

3.3   This report will now explore the digital skills for employment provision provided by the city council

4   Digital Access

4.1   In the West Midlands 3% of the population are still offline (equates to approx. 11,000 residents in Coventry). However, 30% of residents in the region still have very low digital engagement (completing basic tasks only and not regularly) – this would be approximately 111,000 Coventry residents. The Lloyds Consumer Digital Index (2021) found 53% would improve digital skills if devices and internet access were cheaper and 67% would if they knew support was available to help.

4.2   Free Device Access: Libraries are the main place in which residents can freely access devices. All Coventry libraries are now fully re-open and allow residents 2 hours a day of free PC use. In addition, there is free access to Wifi for residents who bring their own device. The number of devices available is currently halved to allow for social distancing. However, in August 2021 there were still 10,275 sessions (PC and Wi-Fi). Whilst library usage is returning steadily, this remains down on pre-pandemic usage; for comparison there were 46,664 session in August 2019.

4.3   The libraries cannot currently offer face to face close support to residents in using the devices. However, they can offer support from a distance and via help sheets. There is also access to an online learning package called 'Info based learning cloud' which supports people in various online learning.

4.4   In addition to using libraries residents can freely access devices at all 9 Family Hubs and at the Coventry Job Shop.

5   Basic Digital Skills

5.1   In the West Midlands at least 82% of jobs require digital skills, but 56% of the population do not have essential digital skills for work. This equates to approximately 138,000 working age residents in Coventry. Supporting residents with key digital skills can help to improve their job prospects and financial stability

5.2   Basic Digital Skills Provision: Coventry Adult Education are the largest provider of basic digital skills in the City and provide basic skills for 725 residents a year, many referred through the Coventry Job Shop. Coventry Adult Education deliver basic digital skills across the city including the City Centre, Cheylesmore, Stoke, Tile Hill and Willenhall as well as offering online courses.

5.3   Other providers of basic digital skills include Pet Xi and Go Train.

5.4   Digital Pathways: For residents who want to develop their digital skills further; either to develop a digital career or for roles which require a higher level of digital skill, there are clearly defined digital pathways. Residents can access a wide range of courses available through Coventry's FE and Higher Education providers as well as Independent Training Providers, and progress through academic levels. For some they may be eligible for full funding, depending on factors such as their employment status and benefits entitlement. Others can access the student loans system with the Government's new Lifetime Skills Guarantee making it possible to use loans more flexibly for further education as opposed to just higher education.

5.5   A full list of courses is attached in Appendix A

6   Skills to address Digital growth sectors

6.1   There is increased jobs growth in programming (especially coding) and software development with approximately 4530 jobs in Coventry and the surrounding areas and also many jobs in cyber security. In addition, there is increased employer need for data science and analytics, cloud systems and services, ethical hacking and digital marketing including social media.

6.2   Skills support to meet demand in digital growth sectors: Through their £5 million Digital Retraining Fund WMCA commissioned providers across the region to focus on both newer and emerging digital skills such as coding, ethical hacking and cyber security. Some of

these courses have been focused in other areas of the region so have not been easy for Coventry residents to access. However, Coventry Job Shop has been successful in engaging with Code Your Future who provide coding training specifically targeted at refugees. In addition, we've recently engaged with Netcom who attended our Coventry Moves Into Work Event and are providing higher level digital skills specifically focused on digital infrastructure.

6.3   At the same time FE Colleges including Coventry College and North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWLSC) have improved their digital offer in the city. Coventry College now do courses in cyber security and data management and NWLSC have opened a Digital Skills Academy at Coventry University Technology Park which offers coding, cyber security and cloud systems and services.

7   In Work Digital Skills

7.1   Coventry City Council are the lead for the ESF SME Skills for Growth Programme. This supports SME businesses with 50% of their costs in providing training to upskill their workforce. This includes digital upskilling which supports both residents and businesses. In the last year 8 SME employers have requested digital skills support and the scheme has helped 18 residents gain skills in areas such as digital marketing, search engine optimisation, Google ads training and Microsoft Powerpoint and Excel.

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