Forest Voluntary Action Forum
Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership

Insight into Set up and Delivery
of
Local Digital Inclusion Pilot Projects

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1.0 Background

In 2022 Barnwood Trust announced a Digital Inclusion Fund for Gloucestershire. This was a one off themed based funding programme aimed to improve access for disabled people and people with mental health conditions to the digital world in ways that best suit them, building on strengths and enabling take up on future digital opportunities.

Along with improved access, Barnwood Trust also identified additional key elements important to this fund. This included an expectation that

- Projects build on the work already happening in this area and consider how they could further contribute to this body of knowledge;
- The design, delivery and evaluation of projects are co-designed with people of lived experience of disability and/or mental health conditions;
- Projects consider how they can have a sustainable legacy beyond the funding

In July 2022, Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF) submitted an application for this fund.

The proposed bid was to deliver a collaborative community partnership project, led by FVAF. This district-wide partnership would be the first of its kind and aimed to break down the barriers people face in relation to digital inclusion and unlock the many assets available within the Forest of Dean communities and the digital world.

To achieve this, it set out by bringing together the right and relevant people/organisations to do the following:

- build on the needs identified by Digital Divides research
  AND
- work to understand what is needed and where, develop centralised, accessible information and deliver bespoke projects to address the gaps in digital inclusion.

FVAF was successful in its application and received £203,000 from Barnwood Trust in December 2022. This 18-month programme of work began in January 2023. Barnwood Trust has agreed with FVAF that the period from August to September 2024 could be used to undertake the evaluation of the Digital Inclusion Partnership. Appendix 1 details the Evaluation principles being used for this and have been adhered to in the undertaking of this work.

This independent evaluation report has a specific focus on the set up and delivery of the local digital inclusion pilot projects supported by the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership. These findings will contribute to a broader and more detailed final evaluation FVAF will be sharing with Barnwood Trust and beyond, sharing their success, challenges and learning in undertaking their ambitious proposal to address digital barriers for disabled people and those with mental health challenges in the Forest of Dean.

2.0 Structure of the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership Programme

The core mission of the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme was to

> *"Harness the power of the community sector, to create impact locally, the activity delivered by the project aimed to bring about digital social change through practical and sustainable means."*

The programme focussed on 5 key groups of people in the Forest of Dean, who are experiencing additional barriers to accessing the online world due to

1. Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs
2. Physical Disabilities
3. Sensory Disabilities
4. Mental Health/ Wellbeing
5. Children & Young people that may experience any of the above

The delivery of the programme was designed in 4 distinct phases. A program management consultant (external from FVAF) was contracted to support the Partnership with Phase 1 and 2.

PHASE 1: Collaboration: The Partnership

Project stakeholders/partners with interest in addressing the needs of the people identified in the 5 key groups were identified and encouraged to become involved, recognising their value, knowledge, expertise, and energy they could bring in addressing the digital barriers collectively. This was done using existing community forums (e.g., Know Your Patch) as well as FVAF's knowledge of local community assets and individuals interested in or doing work in the area of digital inclusion.

It was envisioned that a maximum of 12 partners would be included in forming the partnership and that these partners would represent a wide range of local community and public sector organisations active within the Forest of Dean.

Appendix 2 details the range of partners/organisations involved and their areas of interest in addressing inclusion issues for disabled people and/or people with mental health challenges.

There was an expectation that partners would assist with shaping and overseeing the whole programme of work and deliverables. This included coming together to agree the Partnership aims/objectives and then regularly meeting and contributing through a Partnership forum. The partnership was collectively involved in designing and utilising a set of project management tools and processes to create a robust governance structure for the work undertaken. Their role was also to ensure there was a continued focus on learning and demonstrating the impact of the programme.

The October 2023 project update to the Barnwood Trust details this approach, and notes the key tasks undertaken by the partnership from its launch on the 16th of January 2023 to September 2023 when the pilot projects were selected.

PHASE 2: Understanding the Community: The Research

FVAF, in its proposal to Barnwood Trust, set within its timeline for the Partnership work a period of time to understand the local needs and barriers faced by disabled people and people with mental health challenges in relation to digital inclusion.

The partners were provided with the current research available, including the Gloucestershire Digital Divides report[1]. Time was then spent to understand whether the findings and recommendations from this report resonated for the Forest of Dean locality and for disabled people/people with mental health challenges who live there.

Each individual partner also spent time undertaking research activities in areas of interest and expertise, and this work has been detailed previously in the October 2023 interim report.

During this time of research, information gathering and sharing the partnership recognised 4 key themes emerging and the needs that should be focussed on:
- A different approach to digital education and skill development;
- Clear focus on online safety
- Addressing accessibility, both in terms of access to appropriate equipment as well as access to digital platforms
- The need to use both digital and non-digital approaches to create interest for disabled people and people with mental health challenges in using technology. This also could assist with their understanding of how technology can have a positive impact in their lives and support their wider inclusion in the community.

These 4 themes shaped the 6 Pilot projects which were supported and undertaken. Appendix 3 describes these projects in more detail and the Lead organisation for each one.

PHASE 3: Removing Barriers: Designing Pilot Projects

As part of the Partnership, members were involved in key activities to support the creation of pilot projects that were going to make a difference for disabled people and people with mental health challenges. And to support an open and transparent partnership, members were also involved in creating the governance framework on how to evaluate and award projects which were aligned to the overall objectives of the programme.

Collaboration in Designing Pilot Projects

Essential to the pilot project development was the acknowledgement and focus that

"*Research, co-production, and engagement with those with lived experience lay the foundations and bring valuable insight of "what" pilots should be and "Why".*

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[1] https://www.digitaldivides.co.uk/reports

Building on the research phase, the Partnership members were asked to spend time thinking about, engaging with, and understanding better the needs and barriers faced by the people within the target audience of each pilot project idea that were beginning to emerge.

This strong emphasis on developing projects using a "user-centric approach" included
- An expectation that co-design and co-production is integral and visible in every project. There was a recognition that meaningful engagement with individuals with lived experience is the only way to ensure that what is delivered is relevant and makes a difference to those who are participating in the pilots.
- The provision of Value proposition training, to assist with eliminating assumptions and biases regarding user need by those considering delivering a project.
- Use of mapping tools to support user centric design. This involved undertaking detailed profiling of the target user's needs, experiences, and desired outcomes with each proposed project, making the project more relevant and more likely to succeed in its aims.

Collaboration in Awarding Projects

Alongside refining pilot project proposals, partners were also involved in setting up the necessary governance structure for selecting the pilot projects that would be supported and would meet the overall aims of the programme.

This included
- Creation of the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership Expression of Interest (EOI) Application form
- Scoring matrix to be used when evaluating the EOIs
- Selection and Award determination of each individual project

The diagram below provides the stages and timescales for the EOI process, as detailed in the October 2023 Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership update report.

FOD Digital Inclusion Collabrative EOI Process
Timeline, process and detail for EOI Submission and selection
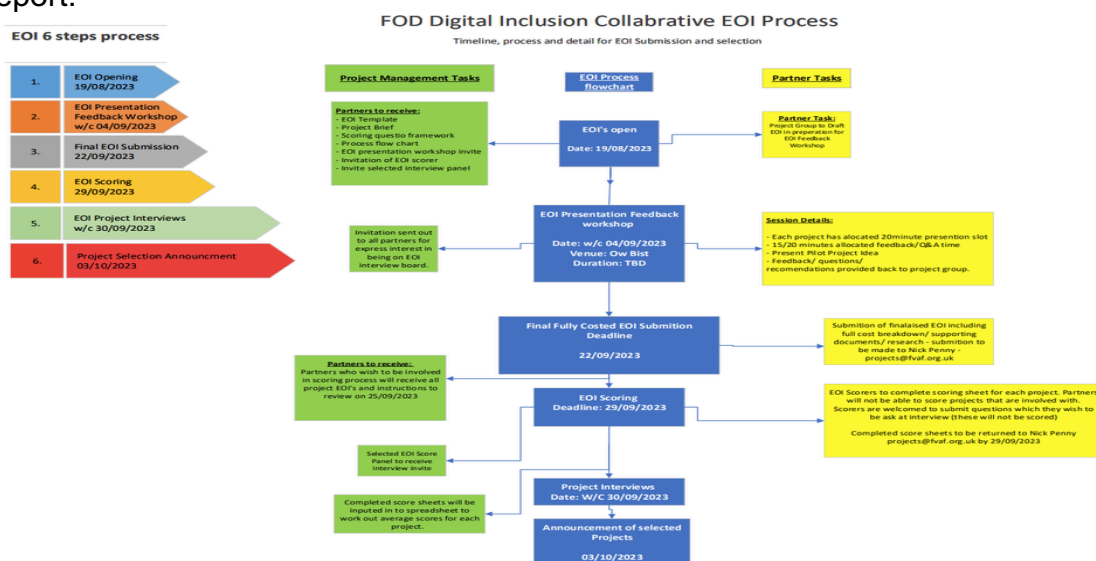
PHASE 4: Learning: The Analysis of Impact

There is a range of expected deliverables for this ambitious programme of work undertaken by the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership.

- Contribution to the current body of research related to digital exclusion for disabled people and people with mental health challenges, with a focus on the specific needs in the Forest of Dean
- Enhanced collaboration and networking locally to address digital exclusion with a focus on unique needs of disabled people and those with mental health challenges
- Delivery of digital pilot projects to address the barriers and themed needs that had been identified, with positive impact on local people participating in the pilots
- Creation of resources/support for the Voluntary Community sector in a variety of areas including increasing/creating online presence, website accessibility and best practice in addressing digital exclusion
- Provision of new technology which can be used by organisations and individuals to support greater awareness/skills and confidence on how this can be used to facilitate digital inclusion going forward

The Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership project has set out a framework for evaluation of the whole programme of work, to gather the learning including how well they have succeeded in achieving the deliverables noted above.

Key questions to be answered in the evaluation and of specific interest to Barnwood Trust include

- How has the project benefited disabled people and people with mental health conditions?
- How disabled people and people with mental health conditions have been involved in the planning, delivery and/or evaluation of the project?
- How projects have been made accessible to a wide range of people?
- How sustainability has been considered as part of the project beyond the life of the funding?

Once completed, there is an intention that the learning from the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership work will be shared with others to create a legacy from the Barnwood Digital Inclusion Fund.

This independent evaluation report has a specific focus on the set up and delivery of the pilot projects, including the pre-pilot design approach, governance around selecting, awarding and oversight of the projects and resources and reflections on delivery of the projects.

The evaluation will review, analyse and highlight
- The impact (on both partners and individuals) of the project
- Good practice that has been established
- Benefits and Challenges of Partnership working

- The success and learning in using a co-design/co-production approach

The findings and learning of this evaluation will be included in the overall evaluation and will assist in the sustainability planning/execution for the partnership and pilot projects going forward.

3.0   Evaluating the Pilot Projects: Process Used

The Role of the Pilot Projects

A key deliverable of the Partnership was to identify, design and support pilot projects that could address the barriers and themed needs that had been identified in the engagement and research work that had undertaken.

In total 6 pilots were supported and the details of these can be found in Appendix 3.

Of the total £203,000 grant received from Barnwood Trust, 44% (£89,076) of it was allocated to the creation and delivery of the pilot projects.[2]

Work and Focus of the Semi-structured interview element:

As each pilot project has already concluded, with a detailed evaluation completed by the lead organisations, focus of this independent evaluation was not on the specific success and challenges of each individual pilot but rather on

- Understanding the experience/learning from the pilot organisations/groups in utilising a research, co-production, and user-centric approach to designing their project;
- Seek feedback on the Expression of Interest process and awarding of resources to support the delivery of the projects;
- Key reflections of the pilot organisations/groups in achieving the outcomes of their individual project and the overall Partnership aims;
- Explore with pilot organisations/groups their views on sustainability of the work going forward and what long lasting impact has been achieved from participating in this programme.

The 6 pilot projects that were selected were delivered by 8 organisations/groups. Although they represented a very diverse set of local organisations, they all shared a strong passion to address digital exclusion for disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the locality.

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[2] Of note is one pilot (Project Engage) which had previously been financially supported by Barnwood Trust to undertake this project. Once the Digital Inclusion Partnership was formed, it made sense to include this project within the Partnership pilots to offer more support in ensuring its progression. This was supported by Barnwood Trust. The previous funding received from Barnwood Trust for Project Engage is not included in the above figures only the allocated amount from the Partnership fund as agreed in the pilot application process.

During the creation phase of the pilot projects, these organisations/groups recognised the skills/expertise of each other and there were partnerships formed within the wider partnership to deliver the pilots successfully. As a result, all 6 pilots were delivered by a collaboration between one or more partners.

The themed areas and priority needs that emerged created a focus on projects that supported groups of people who experience
- Learning Disabilities/Additional Needs (including Dementia)
- Sensory Disabilities (specifically Sight Impairment)
- Mental Health/Well Being needs

Although the original Partnership formed included organisations that solely focus on or include Children and Young People all the pilot projects were predominantly aimed at addressing the needs of adults.

The two key Children and Young people organisations involved (Forest Pulse and the NHS Children and Young People services) were not able to commit to supporting delivery of pilot projects. This was due to capacity issues and a need to focus on other priorities within their organisations.

There was one pilot (Virtual Sight Loss Experience) who did reach out to children and young people, identifying this cohort as part of the testing stage of their project and with the intention to use the virtual reality experience as an educational and awareness raising tool in local schools.

9 Semi-structured virtual interviews were done in a two-week period in August, with 10 key people who either lead, co-lead or significantly supported the pilot in some way. The Digital Inclusion Lead for FVAF, who oversaw the Digital Inclusion Partnership was also interviewed for their reflections. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 4.

The interviews were structured to cover the following 4 elements
- The motivation to undertake and/or support a pilot project;
- Pilot project design process;
- Pilot project application and award process;
- Reflections on Delivery and Future of the project (both the pilot work and the Partnership

The interview questions can be found in Appendix 5.

4.0   Semi-Structured Interviews: Key Messages

Motivation to Undertake and Support a Pilot project

To open the interview, interviewees were asked what attracted them or their organisation to want to undertake a pilot project. Gaining an understanding of their

knowledge, passion, and organisational/group own aims/objectives in addressing digital inclusion was what was anticipated in the responses.

Interviewees described the issues disabled people and people with mental health challenges experience around inclusion, including inclusion in the digital world. Dependent on the work of the organisation they were connected to, this included issues around access, lack of skills/confidence and motivation/fear for some. There was recognition that the current "mainstream" digital support services offered do not adequately understand or cater for people who may require a more tailored approach to address some of the unique barriers disabled people and people with mental health challenges face.

This understanding of the issues and motivation to address these comes through not only the learned experience from the organisational roles they have, but also for many, lived experience with disabled family members who experience digital barriers. It was clear for many that the personal connection to individuals was a real driver to become involved in the Partnership work.

Many noted that they had already been exploring and/or undertaking work to raise awareness and address these digital barrier issues before the start of the Forest Digital inclusion partnership programme began. This included having conversations and connections (in some cases funding) with Barnwood Trust on the need to address this as part of fulfilling Barnwood's own aims and strategic direction.

The opportunity to come together and be connected was also noted as a reason to become involved in the Partnership and the pilot work. Working together was seen as a way to broaden access to the work their organisation does. So, when individuals were approached by FVAF and heard more about the Partnership intentions, they were keen to become involved, to shape and collectively address the digital exclusion issues known to them rather than trying to do it alone. As one interviewee noted

"it showed that we needed to be working together. And to be honest, that makes total sense."

The Pilot Project Design Process

Traditionally, many pilot projects are designed and planned in an isolated fashion by an organisation/group prior to seeking funding. It is not typical for funding bodies to support and resource that critical initial design phase of a project.

And although we know using a co-design and co-production approach is key for successful delivery and outcomes for the participants, many projects do not include the time and resources on doing this well.

With the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme, the approach was very different. Organisations with good ideas on how to address digital barriers and use technology to facilitate inclusion were brought together and given time and support to undertake and analyse the research in the area they had identified as a need. This included gathering local data/intelligence, and most importantly engaging

meaningfully with disabled people and those with lived experience, ensuring a user-centric approach to designing their project.

Interviewees shared their reflections on this phase of the pilot work.

Research

All pilot leads were asked to share how they used research to form the foundation of their pilot project.

Many pilots identified that their starting point was with the "historical" data related to digital exclusion.

This included the Gloucestershire Digital Divides research that was previously undertaken as well as other data shared by other organisations in the county and nationally who were working in similar areas.

https://researchbasics.education.uconn.edu/types-of-research/
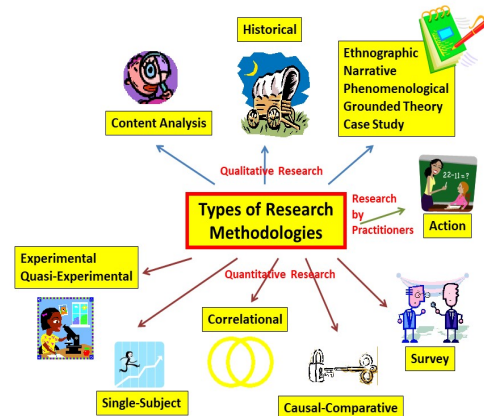
For pilots which had a focus on mental health and well-being, the current research and data which demonstrates the effectiveness/benefits of the therapeutic use of their activities (singing, engaging with nature) was used as a driver to determine how technology could be utilised to improve access to what they currently offer as an organisation.

Along with the broader research available, all pilot leads identified a large body of their own organisation's data they could draw upon through the numerous case studies and single subject stories they had gathered through conversations with disabled people and/or those with mental health challenges.

Discussion groups, surveys and feedback forms were also used by many pilots as part of the data gathering/research stage.

And of note is that all the leads described using an 'action research" approach during the delivery stage of their projects, with observation and feedback from participants used to continually shape and refine the ongoing work of the pilots.

Lastly, because of successfully undertaking the pilot projects further data and research is now available in the evaluation reports produced. This has positively contributed to the wider body of knowledge now available to continue the work on addressing digital exclusion for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Key Reflection on the Research Element:

"that was really valuable because I don't think we'd have structured the pilot project the way we did without that hands on research. Because just talking about it or thinking you know what the issue is doesn't really show you what the issue is if that makes sense. "

Co-design/Co-Production
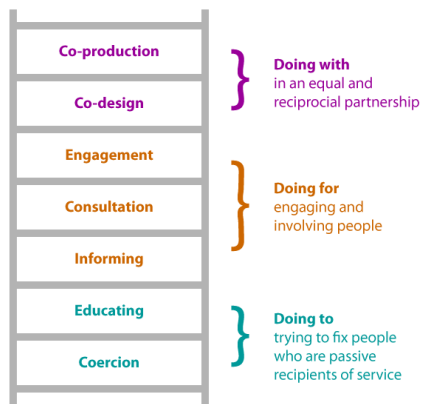
Co-design and co-production, with its strong links to both the disability movement and mental health user movement are key principles that Barnwood Trust both aspires to and promotes in all the work it does. As such the Forest Digital Partnership programme placed a strong emphasis on pilot projects adhering to this approach in both the design and delivery of the projects.

The Co-production ladder[3] as described by the *Think National, Act Local* national partnership and depicted on the left, is a useful reminder on how co-production builds upon a range of similar approaches such as consultation, engagement, and co-design. It is important to note that each are different, and to recognise and define each level if real co-production is to be put into practice.

All the projects shared how challenging using a co-design and co-production approach can be, but how vital it is. Every pilot project endeavoured to involve participants in designing and then refining the pilots through the delivery phase.

Along with tapping into the wealth of knowledge of their own organisation's client base, some also connected with existing groups in the local area and beyond to support the co-design process. These were typically done by hosting focus discussions about their proposed projects.

What was shared and reflected in the individual project evaluations was the many ways in which disabled people and people with mental health challenges, those with lived experience, were engaged with and involved in not only designing the pilots but delivering them as well. This was done as an equal and reciprocal partnership, in a true co-production fashion.

Of note was the two pilot projects had recruited volunteers with lived experience to support both the design and delivery stages of the project, they were involved through the life of the project. Their contribution was seen as invaluable with their input and ideas on how to overcome the barriers and unexpected challenges encountered in delivery ensured the success of the project. An added benefit for these projects was seeing how the volunteers grew in confidence, recognised the skills and abilities they possess, and how they can make a difference in supporting others.

Key reflections on Co-design and Co-production approach

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[3] https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/co-production-in-commissioning-tool/co-production/In-more-detail/what-makes-co-production-different

"It takes a different approach from the beginning in order to make sure that the audience is, or the participants are or whoever the project is relevant to, are a meaningful part of it. It's a really positive way of working and it's not always easy,"

"It was really good to get them involved. It gave a totally different perspective on things."

<u>User-Centric Approach</u>

Alongside undertaking research, embedding co-design and co-production into the projects, pilot leads were encouraged to utilise a user-centric approach in the design phase of the pilot development.

To support this, interested pilot organisations were invited to sessions on how to use a Value proposition framework and provided with some mapping tools to undertake this.

The Value proposition canvas is a framework developed by Dr Alexander Osterwalde, to ensure that a product or service is centred around customers' needs and values. It places the focus on understanding customers problems and coming up with a solution to that specific challenge. Although primarily used in business it was felt there was some value in using this for the pilot project design work, as a way to focus on pilot participants needs and preferences first, then design the projects around those needs and preferences.

The diagram below details the elements considered as part of the value proposition approach, with the expectation to start with undertaking the customer profiling on the left-hand side first and then moving over to the value map to detail the solutions proposed to meet those needs.

https://www.decisionlink.com/blog/a-deep-dive-into-the-customer-value-proposition-map-understanding-the-canvas

There were mixed reviews related to the success of utilising these tools as part of the design phase of pilot projects. 2 of the 6 leads either did not undertake this part of the design phase or were not involved in the Partnership when these sessions were held.

For the remaining 4 pilot projects, only a few noted it was a useful tool and exercise to undertake. Some felt it was too formal and /or abstract to use so modified how this was implemented.

Overall, there was a sense that as this was a very different approach, more time and opportunity was needed by the pilot leads to be able to understand how to use these tools effectively.

Some pilot leads noted that once they understood the process, they did find it useful and could see the benefit in other areas of their work.

This may be an area that the Partnership revisits and considers how to offer further training on this and whether there is a need to refine and/or adapt the methodology to make it more user friendly and accessible for the VCS sector.

Reflections on the User Centric tools

"It just needed that little bit longer to sit and actually kind of percolate into people's minds and give them time to process it and then apply it to their own abstract situations. Because every group of people that we were targeting were different across all of the projects."

Pilot Project Application and Award Process

The intention of the Digital Inclusion Partnership was to have members involved in collaboratively creating and implementing the governance elements of the programme. This included designing the process used to apply for and agree funding or the pilot projects.

It was the hope this open and transparent way to approach allocation of resources would create greater interest, understanding and ownership of all the pilots by Partnership members.

Interviewees were asked on their experience in submitting their Expression of Interest and in being involved in the review and scoring of the proposals, determining which pilot projects would go forward.

Most pilot leads found the EOI process clear and easy to undertake. One pilot lead reflected how less arduous this was compared to their experience submitting funding applications to other grant funding organisations or statutory bodies.

The EOI template, which was co-designed with partners, was found to be straightforward and a helpful way to capture the information required for submission.

However, when one project lead expressed some difficulty with the template, it was discussed and agreed with FVAF that they could organise the information in a way that made sense to them and their project, as long as all information required was included. This aligned with FVAF's intention to have an open, flexible, and collaborative approach within this Digital Inclusion Partnership programme.

One section of the Expression of Interest form required detailed costings for delivery of the project, and it was noted that although this was challenging to do, the structured way of approaching this meant that pilots mapped out all their costs, including ones that often are overlooked. It was noted on the EOI form that the dates and costs were considered to be a guide and subject to change as the project was established, which implies flexibility to reallocate resources as it made sense to support delivery.

During the interview, most pilot leads noted an issue related to proposed pay rates which were deemed too low and/or not refined enough to recognise the varied roles that may be required to support a project. Further discussion surrounding this occurred, and revised rates were confirmed by FVAF to support both budget planning at the application stage and ensuring that rates quoted were competitive for the work undertaken.

All partners had an opportunity to read and score all of the proposed pilots. Overall, this was noted as a positive experience, and described by interviewees as a "*unique*" "*interesting*" "*helpful*" and a "*good*" experience and one they had not done before.

Utilising this approach to decide which pilot projects went forward allowed all partners to see the range of projects proposed creating a sense of direction and anticipated impact for the whole locality. It also revealed to the group individual pilot leads/organisations area of interest and expertise.

For some, this created a sense of working together and made visible opportunities for further connections between and across projects, although this was not always capitalised on. This is likely due to the sense of limited time and capacity, with pilot leads preference to now focus on delivering their own pilot as described in the EOI.

Many pilot leads described how this opportunity to review other project applications supported their own learning and noted how this experience will shape how they approach applications for funding differently in the future.

As part of the peer review of the applications, each Partnership member was asked to score the proposal, which was a new experience for many of them. The scoring framework was noted as being "straightforward in theory" but not always so easy to do and quite subjective.

As there was sufficient designated funding to support all the EOI applications, there was no difficult decisions required on whether to not support or to only partially support a proposal. It is with these situations that the governance structures for applications and awards of resources are robustly tested, particularly the scoring matrix designed.

Following the application and award process, the pre-pilot delivery phase was now complete, and pilots were ready to move into the delivery stage, 9 months after that first Partnership meeting was convened in January 2023. This was slightly longer than initially planned, with 6 months originally allocated for Phase 1 and 2. FVAF has reflected that the longer time required was as a result of

- Need for more time than anticipated to form relationships, undertake focus themed groups and to define the pilots' scope of work
- Desire to be led by those with lived experience, which meant that the community engagement and research focus activity took longer than anticipated

Although, for some pilot leads, there was a sense of urgency to "get doing", there was a sense of appreciation and a recognition of the value to have the time to really understand and design the pilots aligned to the needs of the people. Recognising by doing this you maximise the opportunity for success and learning in each of the pilot projects delivered.

Overall Reflections of the Pre pilot delivery phase

As one pilot lead noted,

"It's taking a really long time before we get to the EOI bit. But, again, I think it needed that time in terms of it being different and trying to achieve its goals in other ways. It like, timings on projects always end up getting a little bit stretched towards the end, don't they? And we in the end, had enough time to do all that we had wanted to do, within the time period that we had. "

Reflections on Delivery of Pilot Projects

The original delivery timeframe for the agreed pilot projects was July to March 2024. As a result of the longer time used for Phase 1 and 2, most of the pilots were extended to June 2024, to give them the full 9 months for completion and evaluation as planned. A small amount of additional time was agreed for pilot leads to formally write up and share the evaluation of their project with FVAF, who are incorporating these findings into the overall evaluation of the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme.

During the interviews, project leads were given an opportunity to share reflections on the successes, challenges and learning in the delivery phase. As greater detail of this is captured in each of the individual pilot project final evaluations, the focus of this part of the interview was to identify key themes across all projects. Specifically, what were the factors that supported successful delivery, what were the barriers and challenges encountered and what is the overall learning in the delivery of the projects through the partnership.

Prior to detailing these themes, it is important to note that not all projects were able to deliver their pilot fully as set out in their project brief.

There were 2 projects (the Virtual Sight Loss Experience and Project Engage) which did not progress sufficiently in the delivery stage for a robust evaluation of the work undertaken. Unfortunately, both projects experienced significant challenges related to organisational and staffing changes, which subsequently created capacity issues for delivery. With these two pilots the Digital and Community Hubs Facilitator at FVAF took on a greater support role, ensuring that the progression of the work continued, albeit at a much slower rate.

The consequence of these changes resulted in senior "buy in" and support for the work by these organisations waning. It also created additional demands on the time of the Digital and Community Hubs Facilitator whose main role was to oversee and support the Partnership programme as a whole.

Although there has not been the progress and success anticipated with these 2 projects, the pilot leads and those involved in supporting these projects can clearly identify the learning which has occurred and can be built on going forward. It is hoped that these two projects will continue to be supported to full delivery in the future.

Factors for Success

The remaining 4 pilot projects were all able to share the success and impact of their pilots. Indeed, many pilot leads noted that their expectations of the project have been exceeded.

"I don't know that I really would have ever appreciated the potential, the positive impact, how much impact it had. And the desire that's been created to do more, the real drive to do more, and to expand it."

"the impact was phenomenal"

3 factors emerged as vital in supporting the successful delivery of the pilot projects.

- A learning mindset
- Flexibility and Opportunity to Change the Project as it progressed
- Opportunity to collaborate with others

A Learning Mindset

A large part of the reason for the success of pilots was the "learning" mindset instilled into the projects and adopted by all pilot leads.

Each lead described using a continuous feedback process to shape and refine how delivery was undertaken as the pilot progressed and were not afraid to do so.

Every lead noted the need to adjust delivery of the pilot at some point in their projects. For many this was due to technology not working as anticipated and/or their own knowledge on how to use it. Many recognised that in future projects more learning or support in this area was needed.

In some pilots the skills and abilities of the project participants was not as anticipated with either an over or under estimation of abilities. Projects were quickly adjusted to accommodate the differing needs in these cases.

Flexibility and Opportunity to make Adjustments

Many pilot leads described how they appreciated being able to have the flexibility to adjust and, in some case, expand their pilot briefs as new opportunities were recognised. And by doing so they created a greater impact than anticipated.

Pilot leads generally felt supportive in doing so, particularly where changes in projects were of a more minor nature. What was not anticipated was the need for some pilots to significantly change their approach to enhance their impact.

In these cases, there was not an agreed or built in process on how to bring back partners together as a whole to share, review and sense check the changes proposed. This left FVAF under pressure and feeling solely responsible in ensuring there was not too significant mission creep and that the changed pilot projects were still able to deliver the agreed outputs to support the overall aims and objectives of the Partnership programme. For pilot leads, excited about the new opportunities they have identified, they felt frustrated with the additional scrutiny they were placed under, and this created a strain on partner relationships.

 Opportunity to Collaborate with Others

All pilot leads described the benefit of collaborating and working with others, either with Digital Inclusion partner members or others who were contacted to support their work.

Pilot leads reflected on the need to have the range of skills around a project. Having a knowledge of disability, and an understanding of digital exclusion issues and what was needed to address these was not enough. People with the digital technical skills who understand the power and potential of the technology to address the barriers was also required.

A good example of this is with the Virtual Sight Loss experience project, and their proposal to use Virtual Reality to enhance understanding of the impact of sight loss for everyday activities of living and in using technology. The collaboration and links made with the Innovation Lab, and the understanding and skills the Lab technician brought to the Partnership enhanced this work greatly and has resulted in a project brief with a much improved, personalised experience going forward.

Challenges Encountered and Lessons Learned

Although each pilot project could identify specific challenges to the delivery of their own projects which they needed to overcome, there was an emerging pattern of challenges surrounding the overall governance and supporting infrastructure of the pilot project delivery.

Flow of Resources

Once project plans and budgets were agreed, there was an issue on how resources were distributed to the pilots.

For some there was an assumption that the agreed resource would be allocated to the individual organisation/group to proceed with their work, and which would have been preferred.

They understood that there was some opportunity to flex and move resources as required to deliver the project, and that they would be required to report back on spend for auditing purposes.

However, as work was completed and/or resources spent, pilot leads were required to submit multiple invoices for approval and payment to FVAF as the Partnership fund holder.

Pilot leads shared that the internal financial control systems used by FVAF either did not match their own organisation's financial systems (which created additional work) and/or was not agile enough to be responsive to the needs of the pilot projects. The invoicing process was described as cumbersome and there were significant delays in payments received. This had a greater impact on those projects where the organisation/group leading it was either a sole provider and/or secured external contractors to support the delivery of work.

For FVAF, there was acknowledgement of the issues the invoicing system created both for the pilot projects as well as for their own organisation, having to cope with a large volume of invoices flowing in from 6 projects. There is a question on whether this stretched the capacity of the FVAF finance team and system and with hindsight it would have been helpful to secure additional dedicated resource to support this element of the project.

With a large amount of money allocated to the pilot projects (circa £90k) FVAF also felt the burden of responsibility to ensure the funding was used wisely and there was sufficient due diligence in scrutinising and monitoring spend.

Key learning from this issue would be the need to spend more time as a Partnership on the financial governance arrangements, ensuring a system is designed that works for all. This needed to be done prior to any delivery so that all pilots project leads clearly understood the role FVAF was playing in Partnership fundholding and that they were not acting as a "grant awarding body".

Rather than allowing the financial processes to emerge as the pilot projects were being delivered, it would have been beneficial to set time aside in the pre-pilot stage to co-design and agree clear funding processes, which included how and when to access funds, an agreed set of essential information required to do so (to support financial accountability),an agreed time frame for receipt of payment following invoice submission and a process to be used to resolve any queries/disputes.

This would have also confirmed the role of the Partnership members in ensuring collective accountability for all the resources for the programme so that responsibility and decision-making did not fall to any one organisation, in this case FVAF.

Alternatively, this collective accountability could have been done through more formal arrangements at the start such as creating a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding.

Ownership of Resources

Projects which required equipment for their delivery noted that purchasing of this equipment happened quite quickly and was done by FVAF.

However, there was a misunderstanding and concerns raised on ownership of the equipment, i.e., did it belong to the individual pilot project organisation or was it being loaned to them by FVAF.

This was a different experience for organisations. When they had applied and secured grants for other projects that required equipment, they would purchase and own the equipment going forward as part of the grant award.

Although this did not necessarily delay delivery of the projects, not having this clarity of the ownership of equipment for the pilot projects has caused some disconcertion and may impact on the legacy of some of the projects.

The above issue highlights the difference between grant funding versus funding through a Partnership, in which ownership of equipment is held collectively between partners and not within a single organisation or project.

As a point of learning, it would have been helpful for partner members to spend time prior to delivery stage to discuss the ownership, sharing and ongoing maintenance of assets.

At the time of the interview, it was not known if organisations that wanted to continue with the work of their pilot would now need to find a way to reprocure the equipment they have been using or if the loan agreement entered into with FVAF will continue to allow them to use the equipment on a long-term basis.

FVAF has clarified that while the loan agreement was set-up and managed by themselves, the resources are now listed assets with the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership and is seen as a technology/equipment pool which all partners have access to. Alongside this, there is scope for an agreement to be established for the transfer of ownership of specific assets, recognised as a "gifted asset" contingent upon the successful fulfilment and completion of the pilot project.

As a final point in this area, the future use of the assets, who can use them, for what purpose, how to access and maintain them is also one that needs to be considered by the Partnership going forward.

External Contracting

Two projects experienced challenges in delivery after an issue arose with an independent contractor who was secured to support technical elements of the project (i.e., coding). The contractor did not fulfil their brief and was subsequently let go.

There were further challenges in securing the return of the project equipment being used by this contractor in a timely fashion. Unfortunately, this contractor also did not hand over the work they had done but rather deleted it. This resulted in delays to the project and some work needing to be redone.

 For the projects involved, key reflections on lessons learned with this was the need to ensure that there is robust governance and formal contracting mechanisms in place to secure and oversee external contractors.

In this instance, a formal written contract with the following included may have alleviated this situation;
- Key contact for the Project, supervision, and reporting mechanisms
- Time to be spent on the project
- The work to be delivered
- How the services will be delivered
- Project delivery dates
- Renumeration, amount and process
- Termination of contract terms
- Any agreement to use of the project property
- Data protection and data processing agreement
- Intellectual property agreement

Overall Reflections on Delivery of Pilot Projects

During the interviews and reading the pilot projects evaluations it is clear the pilot projects have played a significant and successful role in achieving the ambitions set by the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme.

Key to the successful delivery was the pilot projects openness, flexibility, and willingness to embrace a learning mindset throughout this stage. The importance of collaboration and working with others was noted and very much appreciated.

The challenges and frustrations noted by many of the pilot leads tended to centre around the governance structures for the pilot projects. On reflection it was noted that perhaps not enough time, attention, or capacity was given to work through and collectively agree the necessary policies, processes and procedures needed to guide decision making and support smooth delivery of the projects.

However, despite the challenges, many of the pilot leads were proud of what they had achieved, and noted the projects exceeded even what they could anticipate

"the impact was phenomenal"

Reflections on the Partnership Support during Delivery of Pilots

The intention of the Digital Inclusion partnership was to create a group of no more than 12 members who would oversee the whole programme of work, including the pilot projects, with collective responsibility for successful delivery of the programme.

At the start of the Forest Digital Inclusion partnership programme the partnership had a wide representation (see Appendix 2). The pilot leads noted in the interviews that this narrowed once identified themes for pilot projects occurred, with the current Partnership now only comprised of those organisations/groups who are supporting a delivery of a project.

The use of the external project management contractor to support the partnership in the initial stages of the programme and developing their projects was welcomed by pilot leads. Many noted that when this ceased, there seemed to be a marked change in how well the partnership worked. FVAF confirmed that the plan was always for the contractor to only support the initial stages of the programme and a robust handover did occur. But once the contractor finished, this reduced the capacity to both nurture the Partnership as a whole, as well as support the 6 individual pilot projects underway. And as noted earlier, the added challenge of FVAF taking on more responsibility for the 2 projects that were struggling no doubt impacted on capacity to both be responsive to pilot leads as well as to continue to develop the wider partnership.

During the interview, all partners noted the benefit, enjoyment, and success in working in partnership with others on their specific pilot projects.

In relation to the wider Partnership, many of the pilot leads reflected that once projects started into delivery, meetings of the whole group did not occur as expected, but rather they tended to meet with one or two others that they were working with.

When questioned more about this, many reflected that having an opportunity to meet more regularly once projects were underway would have been helpful. It is understood that one meeting did occur with the wider Partnership group during the delivery phase, and as often happens, there were challenges in trying to get everyone back together with partner time and capacity limited and focussed on delivery.

However, not denying the classic partnership working challenge of finding a time that everyone can attend, more regular whole partnership meetings may have assisted in revealing the connections between projects, be a source of support for pilot project leads, further strengthen the relationships between all partner members and increase the overall commitment to the Partnership as a whole.

Reflections on the Partnership

Despite some of the frustrations expressed about the partnership, most pilot leads saw the value in coming together for this work.

> *"We've got to know each other much better as organisations as a result of it, which is great. There's lots of positives that have come out'*

> *"For me, partnership working is invaluable."*

> *"And the people are just really good, nice people. Can't ask for more than that when you're working. Right?"*

Creating and nurturing partnerships takes time and energy by all involved. The Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme were bold in setting out the ambition to form a partnership to address the digital barriers faced by local disabled people and people with mental health challenges and much learning has occurred.

There is a sense that there was a need for additional time to be spent on developing the partnership, separate from the pilot project work. This included exploring and detailing the role of partner members and strengthening the relationships between members.

There seemed to be a shift in the partnership working when it moved from designing of pilots to delivery phase. Narrowing the partnership membership and the demand on pilot leads to get on and deliver perhaps meant there was less opportunity to meet regularly and lift oneself up to see all the projects as whole.

> *"I think, sadly, a little bit of that partnership and togetherness has been lost as we've gone into our own work in silos."*

There may have been some merit in keeping a wider partnership separate from the group delivering the pilot projects. A partnership that has a more strategic oversight of the whole programme of work and can support, check, and challenge pilots as they were progressing. Of course, to do this would require adequate and ideally dedicated resource to do so.

There was also a reflection on the importance of having the right skills in the partnership, wider than the organisations/groups with knowledge of disability who were originally approached. What was also needed is the inclusion of groups/individuals who are the technical specialists, with knowledge to share the potential of what technology can do in this area.

Reflections on the Future: Of the Pilots, of the Partnership

A key priority for the Barnwood Digital Inclusion Fund was to consider how successful work can be sustained once funding has ceased. For the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership this includes thinking about the ongoing work and legacy of both the 6 pilot projects undertaken as well as the Partnership as a whole.

<u>Future of the Pilots</u>

During the interview, every project lead noted an aspiration and ideas on how to continue the good work that was started in the pilots, and this is detailed in their individual evaluation reports.

For some their aspirations are to reach out and share beyond the boundaries of the locality – either through their own network of providers or the links they have made as the project has gone along.

For the 2 pilots who were not able to deliver what they wanted, there is still a strong desire to fully implement the project as planned. However, for this to happen, re-engagement with key organisations need to occur.

Many projects recognise the need for further resource to continue their work – and either are hoping some will be available through any underspend of the programme or other grant funding.

<u>Future of the Partnership</u>

At the time of the interview, there were mixed reflections on whether the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership should continue in the future.

Some were unsure of the future of the partnership

> *"I hadn't even considered that the partnership would continue. Because I don't think it's in a fit shape to continue."*

> *"It's not been given a purpose to continue."*

While others were clear of the need to do so.

> *"I think it's increased the profile of digital inclusion and knowledge of what happens around the county. Because sometimes in the district, that is the challenge we have is how do you know what other people are doing?"*

Many felt the current partnership would need to revisit its purpose, membership and how it works together to be more responsive and agile. It was noted that, should it continue, it will only succeed if resourced adequately.

> *"These sorts of partnerships can be really, really powerful, and effective. They kind of live and die by their funding, really. They need some kind of mechanism by which the organisations that are coming together and spending time, are resourced in order to make it happen, are actually benefiting from it.*
> *But at the same time, it would have to have a well thought out purpose in order to make sure that it was valuable for the organizations and valuable for the people that we wanted to work with."*

> *"And I think we need to protect that time going forward, and resource it if it needs resourcing. But it's so wide reaching. And I think the opportunity what this partnership set out with was huge. It was absolutely huge, and there's so much more to be done with it. "*

FVAF has committed to further explore the future of the Forest Digital Inclusion partnership with the current partner members, starting with a focussed facilitated

session exploring the experiences of partnership working as part of the final programme evaluation underway.

Lastly, and loosely related, many interviewees did cite a general gap (not digitally focussed) with not having a network of organisations/groups who could meet and address the wider issues experienced by disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

They noted that this was a convening and connecting role that Barnwood Trust did previously play in local areas, and it is missed.

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5.0 Conclusion

FVAF undertook an ambitious Partnership approach to address the barriers local disabled people and people with mental health challenges face in accessing the online world.

Their motivation to use this approach speaks to the heart of what they are as a local organisation in the Forest of Dean.

> *"We're passionate about facilitating passionate groups, passionate people with confidence that they can do meaningful work collaboratively."*

This evaluation was to understand and reflect on the success and challenges of only one element (creation and delivery of relevant pilot projects) of their wider programme they set.

What has been captured through the interview process with the Pilot project leads and other key individuals involved was the success, challenges and learning that occurred.

The range of innovative pilot projects and the impact they have had on the lives of disabled people and people with mental health challenges in becoming digitally included is impressive.

Much has been learned about partnership working, which is never an easy approach to address complex issues such as digital inclusion, particularly when trying to do so in a short period of time such as the nature of this grant. Strong local connections have been made between organisations. Of note is the commitment by all involved to build on and expand connections regardless if the Partnership continues or not.

In closing I leave with you one interviewees reflection on being involved in the partnership, and project work.

> *"There have been some huge challenges. And, yeah, it has been a joy."*

6.0   Appendices

Appendix 1: Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership Evaluation Principles

These principles provide a clear framework for how the evaluation should be conducted, ensuring consistency and alignment with best practices. By following these principles, we aim to achieve a high quality, integrity, and impact of the project's evaluation.

1. **Open and Honest Feedback**: Encourage transparent communication throughout the evaluation process. Honest feedback helps identify strengths and areas for improvement.

2. **Contextual Consideration**: Evaluate within the broader context, considering how findings can influence future decisions, funding, legacy outcomes, and positive impact on the system.

3. **Key Messages**: Aim to draw out and contextualise key messages from the evaluation. These messages should highlight the impact and effectiveness of specific approaches.
    o **Hyperlocal Funding Benefits**: Assess the advantages of a hyperlocal funding approach facilitated by Small/Medium Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organizations.
    o **Localised Delivery Model**: Explore how the model enables localised delivery by well-placed organisations.
    o **Unlocking knowledge and opportunity:** How the wide project had enabled and unlocked opportunities for organisations and individuals to access unrestricted funding they may not traditionally be able to access.
    o **Lived Experience Involvement**: Evaluate the benefits of involving individuals with lived experience in designing, delivering, and evaluating pilot projects.
    o **Partnership Lessons**: Reflect on lessons learned from partnership working and governance.

Appendix 2:

Forest Digital Partnership – Organisations Engaged and Areas of Interest

	Organisation	Organisation Descriptor	Areas of Interest
1	Artspace Cinderford	An arts and education based charity, based in the Forest of Dean, specialises in offering fully inclusive, accessible creative opportunities for people of any age or ability.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing Children & Young people that may experience any of the above
2	Camphill Village Trust	Charity to support adults with learning disabilities, mental health challenges and autism to lead a life of opportunity. We encourage and empower them to make informed life choices and contribute to society in a way that brings purpose and meaning. Camphill Village Trusts offers a sense of belonging and community, supporting adults with learning disabilities in our communities and services. We provide supported living and day placement opportunities.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Mental Health/ Wellbeing
3	Creative Education Projects	Charity that supports and works with people with a learning, and or mental health disability to enhance their employment prospects a5nd self-esteem.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Mental Health/ Wellbeing
4	Forest of Dean District Council / Forest Dementia Action Alliance	An informal partnership initiative of organisations and individuals from across the public, private and community sectors of the Forest of Dean District. Our Alliance is facilitated by the Dementia Friendly Community Enabler Team within the Forest of Dean District Council. The overarching aim is to make sure that everyone in the district living with dementia is respected and it enables them to continue to enjoy living their lives in their own community as well as possible for as long as possible.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Mental Health/ Wellbeing
5	Forest Pulse	A charity that provides a range of out-of-school social, sport and recreational activities for disabled children and young	Children & Young people that may experience issues with

	Organisation	Organisation Descriptor	Areas of Interest
		people up to the age of 25, giving them the opportunity to meet up with friends, have fun and learn alongside their non-disabled peers.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing
6	Forest Sensory Services	A Charity based in the Forest of Dean supports local people coming to terms with and learning to live with sight and hearing loss. We do this through education, rehabilitation, and peer support at our centre in Cinderford, Gloucestershire.	Sensory Disabilities
7	Gloucestershire County Council Libraries: Forest Digital Innovation Lab	County council service that provides friendly community spaces, offering accessible digital skill development for all ages and abilities.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing Children & Young people that may experience any of the above
8	Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust: Children's Mental Health Services	NHS service that supports children and young people who are experiencing emotional wellbeing problems that significantly affect their ability to cope with normal stresses and demands of life. Work in partnership with families and professionals supporting young people with mental health needs and have subcontracted partnership working with Tic+ Gloucestershire.	Children & Young people that may experience issues with Mental Health/ Wellbeing
9	Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning: Young Minds Matter	A statutory multi-agency resourced safe and confidential mental health support service developed for children and young people up to 18 years of age in schools currently in the Trailblazer project across Gloucestershire.	Children & Young people that may experience issues with Mental Health/ Wellbeing
10	The Shalom Network	A Charity that promotes social inclusion for people with 'additional needs', their families and carers living mainly, but not exclusively, within the Forest of Dean area. Provide a local network group that encourages and enables members with 'additional needs' to participate more effectively within the wider community.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing

	Organisation	Organisation Descriptor	Areas of Interest
11	Wilde Earth Journeys	A Community Interest Company that utilises the beautiful historic wooded valleys of the Forest of Dean to immerse visitors in nature, recognising the importance and versatility of nature connection in improving wellbeing	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing Children & Young people that may experience any of the above
12	Wyedean wellbeing	A Community Interest company formed to provide an alternate, positive vision of collaborative change in our communities. Seek long term, innovation driven and sustainable solutions to the wider communities' challenges in social care provision, for mental health, drugs and alcohol, and disability, with particular emphasis on the social determinants of health and mental health.	Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs Physical Disabilities Sensory Disabilities Mental Health/ Wellbeing

Appendix 3: Pilot Project Descriptors and Leads

	Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership Pilot Projects	Organisations Involved	Key Leads	Funding Allocated
1	Forest of Dean Community Choir *To make use of digital technology to allow people with visual impairments to access creative activities, in order to benefit participants wellbeing. Specifically, digitally linking Forest Sensory Services with the Artspace choir*	Artspace Cinderford Forest Sensory Services	Jim Bell (picked up pilot after previous lead Artspace organisation left)	£6,200
2	Virtual Sight Loss Experience *To provide VR headsets with filters to show families and support networks the extent of a loved one's eye condition* *To support our talks within secondary schools, colleges, care homes, doctor's surgeries, and hospitals to give individuals an idea of what it's like to live with sight loss.*	Forest Sensory Services FVAF Innovation Lab	Vicki Frost was employed at Forest Sensory services, left organisation pilot then held by FVAF (Alex Digby) Seth Fright	£5912
3	Digital Inclusion Workshops *To run digital workshops for people with additional needs, sensory needs, and mental health conditions*	Camphill Village Trust The Shalom Network	Janet Hawkins Miriam Goldby	£17.099.64
4	Outdoors, Indoors *To use digital resources to bring nature to those who cannot, and do not*	Wild Earthe Journeys Innovation Lab	Andrew Embling Seth Fright	£28,214.22

Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership Pilot Projects	Organisations Involved	Key Leads	Funding Allocated
independently do so now, and to make known what may be feared or only assumed before visiting a space in nature.			
5 Forest Pathways *Create a Visual motivator (resources) that demonstrates a failed website and the transition to an accessible website.* *Demonstrate that it is no harder to build accessibility features into a website than it is to ignore those features.*		Guy Woodland Henry Woodland	£26,250.00
6 Project Engage *To reduce loneliness and isolation for older/vulnerable/frail people by enabling them to get online.* *To case study different technology options which support vulnerable/frail people (with particular reference to those with a mild cognitive impairment but not exclusively) to stay connected.* *To pilot the development of a "try before you buy" system for vulnerable/frail people via community builders.*	Forest of Dean Council/Forest Dementia Action Alliance FVAF	Lena Maller Alex Digby	£5,000* *In total this project was supported with an award of £10,400. A previous grant award from Barnwood Trust for this work was included
Summary: *6 pilots*	*8 organisations*	*10 Key people*	*£89,075.86 of Partnership Project allocated to pilot work*

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

	Semi-Structured Interview Schedule		
	Pilot Name	Person	Date/Time
1	Virtual Sight Loss Experience	Vicki Frost Alex Digby	Tues, 6th Aug 9:30 am
2	Project Engage	Lena Maller Alex Digby	Wed, 7th Aug 9:30 am
3	Forest of Dean Community Choir	Jim Bell	Thurs, 8th Aug 9:00 am
4	Virtual Sight Loss & Outdoors/indoors	Seth Fright	Thurs, 8th Aug 11:00 am
5	Outdoors/Indoors	Andrew Embling	Thurs, 8th Aug 1:00 pm
6	Digital Inclusion Workshops	Miriam Goldby	Fri, 16th Aug 9:30 am
7		Janet Hawkins	Wed, 21st Aug 10:00 am
8	Forest Pathways	Guy Woodland Henry Woodland	Fri, 16th Aug 11:30 am
9	Partnership Facilitator	Alex Digby	Mon, 19th Aug 1:00 pm

Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

FVAF Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership
Insight into Set up and Delivery of Local Digital Inclusion Projects
Structured Interview Element

Key Evaluation Questions

i) What attracted your organisation to want to undertake a pilot project? (*Recognition of the need to address digital exclusion, aligns with organisational own aims and objectives for the area, already have existing resources and networks that could advance the successful delivery of the Partnership aims*)

Pre-Pilot Partnership Work

The Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership undertook a very different approach in supporting organisations like yourselves in thinking about and designing pilot projects.

ii) Can you share the way you used any research to form the basis of your pilot project? How did it help to understand the issues faced/needs of disabled people and people with mental health challenges? (*understand the importance of project pre-work, use of data and research used to shape and form the what and why of the project and how it connects to other work underway or addresses gaps*)

iii) Both the main funder of the Digital Inclusion Partnership (Barnwood Trust) and the Partnership members recognise the importance of using a co-design/co-production approach in ensuring those with lived experience are actively involved in developing services that they both need and use.

   For your project, can you share how you went about using a co-design, co-production approach? What went well? With hindsight what would you do differently? (*understanding of what co-production is and the importance of embedding it into projects to ensure relevance and addressing any bias*)

iv) I have noted that the pilots were encouraged to develop their projects with a User-Centric approach. I understand that interested pilot organisations were offered Value Proposition training and a Mapping tool to support this approach.

   What was it like to use this approach? Can you describe if/how this way of working enhanced the development of your project? How did it influence your project evaluation? Has it given you additional skills/tools that you have or can use with other projects? (*way to address*)

assumptions/bias, supports good governance around project delivery, ensures project outcomes and evaluation methods can demonstrate impact)

Pilot Projects Application and Award process:

Pilot Lead organisations experience of the applying for, being selected, and supported to deliver their digital inclusion project.

Questions

i) Can you share your experience of the process in submitting an Expression of Interest to deliver a Digital inclusion pilot projects? (*Clear and transparent process, proportionate demands, support provided in doing so)*

ii) On reflection, what went well during this process? What could have been done differently to make it both easier in you understanding expectations as a pilot provider and equipping you for success when starting out? *(Gaps in support, learning for this new way of commissioning/working with providers)*

iii) Were you informed of the grant award in a timely fashion and received it in a time frame that worked for you? Were you clear on the next steps and who to liaise with through the life of your project? *(sense checking the governance around awarding funding)*

Reflections on Delivery and Future of the Project:
Highlights of positive impact and learning, resources and support provided by the Forest digital inclusion Partnership. Views of sustainability of work going forward

i) Once you were informed you were successful, how quickly were you able to get started? Were there any issues? How were you supported by the Digital Inclusion Partnership? Was there anything else that would have assisted you in undertaking the project? *(Understanding of organisational needs and challenges in delivery. Seeking view of experience and reflections of support of the Partnership)*

ii) I have had the opportunity to read your Evaluation. Is there anything you would like to particularly highlight to me or share? Is there anything you would have done differently/learned from undertaking this project? *(Focus on impact and learning through delivery of the project)*

iii) Can you specifically share how the pilot has had an impact on disabled people and/or people with mental health challenges being able to access support to participate in the digital world and address the conditions or unique barriers that contribute to digital exclusion? *(specific impact expected from Barnwood Trust in the DIF fund – how*

has the pilots addressed the unique barriers faced by disabled people/people with mental health challenges participating in the online world)

iv) Have you been able to connect with others in the locality who have undertaken digital inclusion projects? Has this opportunity supported or changed your organisation's work going forward? *(Additional positive impact of using a partnership approach in addressing digital exclusion)*

v) Lastly, how do you envision, or would you like to see this work and the Partnership evolve in the future? What is needed? What do we need to think about to make this sustainable – what needs to change in your locality to create an embedded and enhanced digital offer for disabled people and people with mental health challenges? *(Exploring future state from the perspective of the current providers – resources, time and system changes needed)*