****

**Meeting 15.04.25**

**Welcome and opening remarks – Diana Crump**

Diana Crump welcomed everyone and outlined the meeting agenda, which includes discussions on the government digital action plan, digital inclusion group, local government reorganisation, NHS England abolition, NHS Devon staffing cuts, and the combined authority for Devon and Torbay.

She also mentioned that Joe Garbett from the Stroke Association would provide an update, and Kerry Denton and Phill Adams would discuss the Connect to Work programme.

**Presentations**

**Digital Inclusion Group Presentation**

Natalie Campbell from Devon Communities Together presented on behalf of the Digital Inclusion Group, discussing their objectives, action plan, and the recent government digital inclusion action plan. She highlighted the importance of digital skills, access, and confidence for vulnerable groups and the need for local delivery and partnerships.

Natalie explained that the Devon Digital Inclusion Group is a partnership across the VCSE sector, focusing on digital inclusion and skills within Devon. The group's key objectives include providing leadership, facilitating learning, reducing inequalities, improving coordination and delivery of digital skills, and acting as an advisory group on digital technologies.

Natalie outlined the group's six-point action plan: adopting a digital skills standards framework, identifying and monitoring data sharing metrics, promoting affordable connections, mapping free access to digital resources, improving coordination and delivery of digital skills provision, and maximizing the impact of digital navigator programs.

Natalie discussed the recent government digital inclusion action plan, which acknowledges the challenges of digital exclusion and aims to ensure people have the skills, access, and confidence to engage in modern digital society. The plan focuses on opening up opportunities through skills, tackling data and device poverty, breaking down barriers to digital services, and supporting local delivery.

Natalie emphasized the importance of local delivery and partnerships in achieving the group's objectives. She encouraged collaboration with local authorities, national and devolved governments, and private and third sectors to support locally designed and delivered interventions.

Natalie explained the digital skills framework developed by the digital inclusion group, based on the Lloyds Bank Foundation essential digital skills benchmark. The framework includes establishing the need, providing digital support groups, one-to-one support, and upskilling the VCSE sector.

* + **Framework Basis:**The digital skills framework is based on the Lloyds Bank Foundation essential digital skills benchmark. It aims to establish the need for digital skills, provide digital support groups, offer one-to-one support, and upskill the VCSE sector.
	+ **Establishing Need:**The first phase of the framework involves establishing the need for digital skills through grassroots data collection and understanding community needs. This phase focuses on identifying the digital skills gaps and priorities within the community.
	+ **Support Groups:**The second phase includes providing digital support groups and in-person community support at a local level. This approach aims to reduce barriers to access and offer personalized care to support people in developing their digital skills and confidence.
	+ **One-to-One Support:**The framework also includes one-to-one support at home or in community settings. This personalized approach helps individuals develop their digital skills and confidence in a supportive environment.
	+ **Upskilling VCSE:**The final phase focuses on upskilling the VCSE sector to support people going forward. This includes providing digital training and development across the sector to ensure sustainability and legacy of the digital inclusion efforts.

**Funding and Support for Digital Inclusion:**

* + **ICB Funding:**Diana announced that the ICB confirmed the continuation of the two-year funding support arrangement for the Assembly. This funding will support the Assembly's activities and initiatives for the coming financial year.
	+ **Civic Agreement:**Diana mentioned that the Devon County Council Civic Agreement will continue to be supported for the coming financial year. This agreement provides additional support for the Assembly's efforts in the community.
	+ **Research Network:**Funding for the Research Engagement Network (REN) has been confirmed for the first three months of the year. The REN focuses on raising awareness, understanding, and support for the volunteering community sector and academic researchers.

**Stroke Association Presentation**

Jo Garvey from the Stroke Association provided an update on their life after stroke service, which has been reinstated for at least a year.

Jo announced that the Stroke Association's life after stroke service has been reinstated for at least a year. This service was previously cut due to funding issues but is now available again to support stroke survivors.

The life after stroke service offers home visits, emotional well-being reviews, and person-centered support for stroke survivors. The service is tailored to individual needs and aims to help stroke survivors with various challenges, including communication and emotional well-being.

Jo mentioned that most referrals come through NHS colleagues, but people can also refer directly to the Stroke Association. The service is available across the whole of Devon, and Jo provided an email address for community referrals.

**Connect to Work Programme presentation**

Kerry Denton and Phill Adams from Devon County Council presented the Connect to Work programme, which supports individuals with disabilities or barriers to employment. The programme is devolved to the combined authority and aims to work with local partners to deliver tailored support and wrap-around services.

The programme is funded with £25 million over five years, targeting around 1900 individuals per year. It focuses on individual placement and support, as well as supported employment frameworks, to help individuals enter and stay in the labor market.

Plymouth will deliver the programme in-house, while Devon and Torbay will use a combination of in-house delivery and procurement of local partners. The programme includes a dedicated engagement programme with employers and a small central admin team.

The programme will be governed through the Skills and Employment Advisory Group, with the combined authority as the management body. The outline business plan is expected to be submitted by summer, with recruitment and procurement starting in late summer or early autumn.

Kerry and Phill emphasised the need for collaboration with the VCSE sector to deliver the programme. They highlighted the importance of local provision, innovation, and working with a larger group of providers to achieve the programme's goals.

**Employer Engagement:**Darren Halifax suggested involving VCSE organisations as employers for the Connect to Work programme participants, highlighting the sector's ability to support individuals furthest removed from employment.

**Lived Experience and Co-Design:**Helen James and Phill Adams discussed the importance of involving individuals with lived experience in the design and delivery of the Connect to Work programme. This approach ensures that the support provided is relevant and effective for the target groups.

**Support for Older Workers:**Nikki Flynn emphasised the need to consider older workers in the Connect to Work programme, highlighting the demand for apprenticeships and second or third careers for individuals aged 50 and above.

**Unlocking Assets for Wellbeing:**Gareth from Active Devon suggested leveraging local assets, such as leisure facilities, to improve well-being outcomes for individuals in the Connect to Work programme. This approach can help re-engage people with work by improving their sense of well-being.

**Reasonable Adjustments and Job Coaches:**Stephanie from Living Options Devon inquired about the inclusion of reasonable adjustments and job coaches in the Connect to Work programme, particularly for disabled groups. Phill Adams confirmed that they are exploring options to incorporate these elements into the programme.

**Actions**

* Schedule a session to provide an update on the local government review and combined authority work at an appropriate time. (Sarah – for Diana and Kerry)
* Have an offline conversation to discuss the potential implementation of a brokerage system for the Connect to Work programme. (Diana, Kerry, Phill)
* Contribute insights and experiences related to disability benefits and working to the Connect to Work programme design. (Helen)
* Consider including older people in the Connect to Work programme for apprenticeships and second or third careers. (Phill, Kerry)
* Explore how to unlock leisure facilities for wellbeing outcomes to support re-engagement with work for the Connect to Work programme. (Gareth, Phil)
* Explore the possibility of incorporating a model similar to No Limits Cafe for supported employment within the Connect to Work programme. (Phill, Kerry)