FutureDotNow and DCMS launch emergency effort to get the most vulnerable online during the COVID-19 crisis

➢ Campaign backed by Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport calls on companies to donate devices and connectivity for Britain’s most vulnerable.
➢ Initial contributions of devices and funding from Accenture, BT, and Lloyds Banking Group will reach more than 1500 households in greatest need.

The FutureDotNow coalition today announces the launch of DevicesDotNow, a new initiative targeting the 1.9 million UK households who don’t have access to the internet and are digitally excluded as we face a socially distanced world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign is asking businesses to donate tablets, smartphones and laptops, as well as connectivity in the form of sims, dongles and mobile hotspots. These are urgently needed to get the most vulnerable people in the UK online. Initial contributions of connected devices from BT and donations to purchase more devices from Accenture and Lloyds Banking Group will help DevicesDotNow to reach more than 1,500 of the households in greatest need.

The DevicesDotNow initiative is supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and led by FutureDotNow, which brings together organisations to motivate people and businesses to boost their digital skills. It has been kickstarted through support from coalition members including BT, Lloyds Banking Group, the Good Things Foundation, Nominet, Accenture, Oliver Wyman, Six, Deloitte, and Brunswick.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said: "We all need to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives but not everyone has access to the benefits of modern technology. This is a great new initiative to help the most vulnerable in society get better access to health services, make shopping easier and allow people to make the most of online education and entertainment. I urge all organisations with the means to donate as many devices as they can while we continue to fight this virus."
The spread of COVID-19 has forced thousands of community organisations, including the UK Online Centre Network, to physically close their doors at a time when they were inundated with people looking for support to boost their digital skills and use computing equipment and network connections. From the elderly at risk of social isolation to financially constrained young families, community organisations are working hard to find new ways to support people with online access so they can continue their day to day lives.

Sir Peter Estlin, Chair of FutureDotNow and former Lord Mayor of London, said: “Many people now find themselves isolated in their homes with limited means of communicating with the outside world, or getting access to vital services such as health, food or banking. Frontline community organisations are in desperate need of digital devices to support the most vulnerable, and DevicesDotNow is an emergency appeal to make their crucial work possible.”

Liz Williams, CEO of FutureDotNow and Chair of Good Things Foundation said: “With the help of UK business, DevicesDotNow aims to power up the community organisations supporting the most vulnerable households around the country – alleviating the strain on the NHS, while ensuring that people aren’t cut off from their loved ones and the outside world at this unprecedented time.”

Companies can support DevicesDotNow by:

1. **Donating devices.** Tablets or smartphones would be the first choice, but laptops are also required.
2. **Donating sim cards, portable hotspots, dongles or other connectivity.**
3. **Making a financial donation.** £10,000 would fund the purchase of tablets and smartphones for around 100 vulnerable individuals and families.
4. **Spreading the word.** Share the DevicesDotNow mission with at least five business leaders in your network in a position to help.

Marc Allera, CEO of BT’s Consumer division, said: “In this time of crisis we’re working non-stop to support our customers with the critical connections they need, while also providing access to free digital skills support through our Skills for Tomorrow programme. We’re incredibly proud to be contributing to the DevicesDotNow campaign, and hope our contribution of one thousand devices and connectivity will make a real difference to those vulnerable groups in most need.”
Nick Williams, Deputy Group Transformation Director at Lloyds Banking Group said: “With 11.9m people lacking the digital skills they need, we set up the Lloyds Bank Academy in 2018 to give individuals, small business and charities the opportunity to access free support. Now, at this crucial time, we need to go one step further to help the UK’s most vulnerable get online. Working together with DCMS and our partners on DevicesDotNow we will ensure that isolated people and communities can keep connected. We hope other organisations will join us and find the devices and donations that can help Britain during these challenging times.”

Olly Benzecry, Senior Managing Director of Accenture UK & Ireland said: “The current situation has accelerated the importance for everyone in society to have access to digital to allow them to fully engage with society. We are delighted to play our part in the DevicesDotNow programme to provide devices to yet more UK households and prevent them from being digitally excluded.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Through the DevicesDotNow campaign, FutureDotNow is coordinating industry support at scale on behalf of the UK Government. Companies that have already been asked by the Government to provide support, particularly to the NHS, should continue to prioritise those asks.

If we are donated kit that is needed more urgently elsewhere, for example by the NHS to enable doctors to video call, we will work as part of the wider Government response to ensure it is appropriately prioritised. Individuals looking to donate spare devices should contact local community organisations directly.

In the first phase of activity, we will be prioritising community organisations in the Online Centres Network led by the Good Things Foundation. This national network has over 1,300 community groups covering the entire breadth of the UK and has identified urgent needs in their community. They are experts at getting digitally excluded people up and running with digital technology and will be working with us to test the device distribution processes, the optimal device set up (what apps and learning to pre-install) and the best way to get people up and running. Our hope is that businesses will donate at scale and we will be able to extend the offer to other community groups. If this is the case, we will invite other community groups to register interest.