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| **UKSPF Theme** | Communities and Place |
| **Intervention** | S12 - Investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities |
| **Challenge Fund Overview** | The Community and Place theme aims to:   * Strengthen our social fabric and foster a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and access to amenities, such as community infrastructure and local green space, and community-led projects. * Build resilient, healthy and safe neighbourhoods, through investment in quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in, through targeted improvements to the built and natural environment and innovative approaches to crime prevention.   Within the Communities and Place theme the North Lanarkshire UKSPF investment plan will be delivered through a number of interventions. This includes an allocation to provide investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities. This will be delivered through a challenge fund, where community groups can make an application for funding to improve the digital connectivity of their local community facility. This in turn will allow increased use of the facility by other local groups, provide an extended range of activities from the facility and increase engagement from the community as a whole.  North Lanarkshire’s [Digital and IT Strategy](https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/digital%20and%20IT%20strategy%202022%20annual%20refresh%20accessible.pdf) identifies Digital Communities as a key theme with the aim of enhancing the coverage and reach of digital networks to all homes and businesses, eliminating areas of low connectivity, driving take up, tackling areas of digital exclusion, and creating markets that support affordability and give individuals and businesses improved choices.  This challenge fund is part of that overall aim and will contribute to the theme of digital communities by seeking to increase connectivity with a focus on supporting areas of digital exclusion.  Funding will complement the existing Digital Infrastructure Connectivity procurement with its focus on the installation of fibre connectivity across local towns and villages, by supporting areas where this is not yet a viable option. This could be to either extend provision into new areas and facilities or to add to the current offer to make installation options more viable. It may also support other infrastructure developments where fibre is not an option. |
| **Eligible Applicants** | To be eligible to apply for funding, the applicant must be a constituted community or voluntary group and have responsibility for the management of the community facility where the improvements are to be made. The community facility must be located in North Lanarkshire.  You must own or have a long term (10 year) lease in place for the community facility where the improvements are to be made. If you lease the facility, you must have written permission from your landlord agreeing to the improvements.  The applicant will be responsible for ensuring all regulatory permissions such a building warrants and/or listed building consent are in place. As the funding available can only meet the costs associated with installing the required infrastructure, the applicant must be able demonstrate that they can meet the on-going revenue costs of the digital services such as your broadband subscription once the installation is complete. |
| **Outputs/**  **outcomes** | It is expected that grants will be awarded to up 40 community and voluntary groups across North Lanarkshire. |
| **Costs** | The grant awarded will not exceed £5,000 unless there are exceptional circumstances which result in costs exceeding this value and a justification for this is provided.  The on-going service charges to provide digital services cannot be included in the application.  A quote from the preferred provider must be provided to evidence the amount of grant being applied for. Please make sure you include VAT if you cannot reclaim it.  The following provides examples of the type of costs that can be funded. However, this is not an exhaustive list and other costs will be considered if they meet the criteria for the fund:   * Installation of fibre connectivity * Wireless access points and associated technology * Internal cabling and infrastructure to accommodate provision * Point to point wireless connectivity solutions   The project must be complete and all costs incurred and claimed before 31 December 2024. |
| **Project Assessment** | You must provide a statement on why you need funding to take this project forward. This should include the impact on the local community facility where the connectivity will be improved and on the wider community that uses the facility. Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:   * What additional services or benefits will be delivered from the community facility supported? * How will existing services be improved? * How will existing (and new) services be more accessible? * How many users are likely to benefit from the improved connectivity in their local community facility? * Will the improvement benefit an area of deprivation, including areas of rural isolation?   A Digital Challenge Fund Assessment Panel will be set up to consider and approve applications to this fund. |
| **Additional Requirements** | Applicants should ensure that the activities set out in the application are not eligible for the UK Government’s [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/) or the Scottish Government’s [Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme.](https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com/vouchers/about-sbvs/) Details of how the two schemes can work together can be found [here](https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/scotland/).  Applicants can check eligibility for the Scottish Broadband Voucher scheme [here](https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com/r100-programme/check-my-address/).  Eligibility for these schemes must be utilised before applications to this challenge fund will be considered. Where appropriate the Council will consider the use of the Digital NL SPF as a top-up for other funding awarded. This will be dependent on the total cost of the project and overall benefits it will bring to the local community. Applicants seeking a top up should email [uksharedprosperityfund@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:uksharedprosperityfund@northlan.gov.uk) providing details of the costs and other funding in place prior to submitting an application so that further advice can be provided. |
| **Supporting Documents** | All applicants must submit the following in order to apply to this challenge fund:   * Application form – a completed digital connectivity application form duly signed by an authorised Board or committee member of the applicant. * Evidence of incorporation – such as the constitution or memorandum and articles of association of the applicant group * Evidence of ownership or lease of the community facility where the improvements will take place – this could be a copy of the lease summary for the premises or proof of ownership. If the facility is leased confirmation of the landlord’s approval of the work will also be required. * Evidence of project costs – this will normally be a quote from the preferred supplier and will include VAT where applicable. * Cashflow projection – this should be provided for the following 12 month period to provide evidence that the applicant can meet on-going revenue costs related to the improvement in connectivity   All applications and supporting documentation must be submitted by e-mail to [uksharedprosperityfund@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:uksharedprosperityfund@northlan.gov.uk) and include Digital NL in the subject line. Applications will be accepted and assessed on a rolling basis and decisions communicated as soon as practical. |
| **Appraisal and Decision** | Applicants must receive a decision on their application from North Lanarkshire Council, before any purchases are made, project works begin, or any other activity or expenditure relating to the project commences.  Any goods or services purchased, or activity undertaken before a grant decision is made will subsequently be ineligible for grant payment and may result in the entire grant award being cancelled.  All applicants (successful and unsuccessful) will be notified of the decision by e-mail in the first instance. Successful applicants will subsequently receive an award letter (sent to the address specified in the grant application), including a Grant Acceptance Form which must be signed, dated and returned within 21 days of the award date specified on the grant award letter. |
| **Grant Claims** | Applicants can submit a claim for grant payment once the project has been successfully completed as set out in the original application form and all suppliers have been paid.  A claim form must be complete and submitted along with evidence of the spend incurred including copies of all invoices and copies of the community groups bank statements showing all payments in respect of this project.  All grant claims must be submitted along with supporting evidence no later than 31 December 2024.  **Bank statement requirements:** a complete bank statement must be provided which shows:   * the business name * sort code * account number * invoice being debited from the bank account (supplier name must be visible and amount must match) * the statement balance the day before and after the payment is made, as this provides confirmation of defrayal   **Supplier invoices**: hand-written invoices or receipts suggesting payment has been received are not sufficient proof of payment. Formal invoices on the supplier’s headed paper must be provided accompanied by bank statement evidence.  Once the installation has been completed, applicants will be required to submit further monitoring reports to ensure that the benefits of the project are realised. Monitoring information will be required up to June 2025. |
| **Other considerations** | All applications will be subject to a subsidy control assessment prior to award. |