Greater Manchester Technology Fund launches with over 500 digital kit bundles for disadvantaged young learners

- Disadvantaged learners across Greater Manchester to benefit from over 500 kit bundles
- Kits funded from Greater Manchester Technology Fund, launched by GMCA with initial £150,000 investment
- Mayor and business leaders call on private sector to support fund so no learner is left behind
- Fund open to secondary schools and colleges in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester Combined Authority has invested £150,000 in 567 kit bundles which will soon be made available to disadvantaged and digitally excluded pupils, working closely with schools and colleges to identify those in most need. A 'digital kit bundle' will include a laptop and the required tools to get online.

The investment is part of the new Greater Manchester Technology Fund which aims to provide learners at risk of digital isolation with the technology and connectivity needed to continue their learning at home while schools and colleges remain closed.

GMCA will invest close to £150,000 into the fund, with a further initial investment being made by Virgin Media Business. GMCA is now actively seeking other private sector support to expand the reach of the fund.

It is estimated that levels of digital exclusion are up to four times higher amongst those schools with the highest level of pupils eligible for a free school meal, with 19% of pupils in Greater Manchester claiming free school meals. Provision of this kit will initially focus on recipients of free school meals, allowing these young people to continue their education from home, stay in touch with friends and family and provides teachers and tutors with a mechanism for support.

GMCA are currently coordinating needs assessments with secondary schools and colleges; once that need is established, kit bundles will be provided to schools to directly manage and distribute to those they prioritise as having the highest need.

Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said "Our young people deserve every chance to fulfil their potential. Having the tools to continue their education and positively engage in their communities is integral to that during these challenging times.

"There are many young people in our city-region who have become digitally excluded in recent weeks, unable to complete schoolwork online or connect digitally with family and friends outside of their home. If we don't intervene now our poorest students will fall further behind. Our Technology Fund will help to address this but we sadly don't have the resources to support every digitally excluded learner.

"I want to put a call out to those businesses in Greater Manchester who are in a position to support us in this vital project. So many of our businesses have stepped up to play their part

during this crisis and this project is a chance for others now to come forward and make sure that no young person in Greater Manchester is left behind."

Business are being asked to support the fund through:

- Donations of new or refurbished devices particularly laptops
- Donations of sim cards, portable hotspots, dongles and other connectivity devices
- Financial donations to support the expansion of the fund

Co-Chairs of the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership, Lou Cordwell and Mo Isap, said: "Greater Manchester's business community always steps up in a crisis. We are so proud to see the countless selfless acts from businesses across the city-region that are helping people get through these incredibly difficult times.

"The Greater Manchester Technology Fund is another way that our businesses can contribute to the Greater Manchester effort. We know the challenges business are facing but if your business can help to provide laptops, sim cards, portable hotspots, dongles or financial donations to the fund, please come forward. You can help empower some of our most disadvantaged our young people by making sure they don't miss out on vital learning."

Sean Fielding GMCA Lead for Education, Skills, Work and Apprenticeships and Oldham Council Leader, said: "We welcome the announcement from the Department for Education over weekend but need to go further and faster to help those most in need. Our young people, their parents and guardians need to feel assured their education will not suffer during this period of lockdown. We also hope these young learners will benefit through reconnecting with their peers and school network"

This fund supports Greater Manchester's existing commitment to provide essential digital skills to everyone, improve the digital capabilities of the region and strengthen the digital talent pipeline.

Businesses able to support young people through this important fund, can contact the GMCA Digital Team at GMCADigital@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk