

REPORT TO COFFEE & COMPUTERS TRUSTEES AND MEMBERS

SECURING THE FUTURE OF COFFEE & COMPUTERS DIGITAL SUPPORT SERVICE THROUGH PROPOSED MERGER WITH PUBLIC VOICE CIC

Andy Jeffrey, Coffee & Computers Chair of Trustees
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Background

Coffee & Computers began back in 2015 as part of the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum with the aim of helping members of the local community to use digital devices and access online services. From initial sessions hosted at The Highgate Society, more locations in Highgate were soon added. As the issue of “digital exclusion” became more apparent, further sessions across Haringey were offered, including in areas with higher levels of disadvantaged residents where the need for services like C&C is arguably even greater.

In 2017, Coffee & Computers was set up as a small (unregistered) charity, and adopted a constitution to formalise its management and open a bank account. C&C continued to gradually develop and grow, based on the model of volunteers sharing their time and knowledge to pass on digital skills and help people engage with an increasingly digital world. By February 2020, there were around 10 sessions a month running at 7 or 8 locations across Haringey and the surrounding area.

n.b. It is important to highlight that the current C&C constitution, and this proposal to merge with Public Voice CIC, does not cover or affect the activities of either The Highgate Society or Five Bells Computer Club. Although there is a lot of overlap between the activities and attendees of the different groups, these are both managed independently to the rest of Coffee & Computers. Learners and volunteers from either of these other groups will continue to be welcome at any of our Coffee & Computers events, and we will continue to work with the other groups to support and promote their activities wherever possible.

Covid Impact & Current Status

With the emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020, we suspended all face-to-face activity. We quickly adapted to move our services online, hosting regular sessions on Zoom and offering direct 1-to-1 support wherever possible.

We added more guides and information onto our website, increased our online / social media activities, and engaged with lots of local organisations offering digital support as well as signposting to other (non-digital) support services.

We have continued to build connections with local Council services and numerous VCS (voluntary and community sector) groups, all with the objective of helping as many people as possible to enjoy the benefits afforded by new technology and the internet.

These activities have progressed alongside maintaining the regular group Zoom sessions as well as responding to an increasing number of requests for 1-to-1 support. All this has only been possible with trustees and volunteers freely giving their time and energy over recent months, and on behalf of C&C I would like to thank them for all their efforts.

There are however only so many hours in the day, and a realistic limit to how much time anyone can volunteer when balancing this with other work, family or personal commitments.

Following numerous trustee meetings, and an independent review by a charity consultancy, it was concluded that the current setup was not sustainable, especially if we wanted to grow our audience and the range of digital support services offered. Our capacity to maintain C&C activities has been further affected by reduced availability and involvement of trustees and volunteers, due to changing personal circumstances and other commitments. The remaining trustees have also expressed the desire to step down from their official role as soon as alternative arrangements can be made.

One of the main issues we have is our current status as a small unregistered charity. This significantly limits our ability to apply for any funding grants, which is crucial to help support all the essential management and administration activities needed to continue running C&C, and certainly to expand our services as we would like to do so.

Public Voice CIC Digital Support Service

Alongside our internal meetings, we have been in ongoing discussions with [Public Voice](#), a well-established CIC (Community Interest Company) based in Haringey who already run a number of very successful and effective programmes such as [Healthwatch Haringey](#) and [Reach and Connect](#).

Public Voice (PV) have been very supportive of C&C over the years (providing volunteers, DBS checks and referring on learners) and are currently running a digital support project of their own focussed on helping NHS patients to access online health services. I am currently employed on a part-time basis by PV as the manager for this project.

As an extension to the health related project, PV are planning a broader digital inclusion service, and are currently applying for funding grants to support the delivery and ongoing management of this project. This project will be planned and managed by PV with funding to cover staffing, digital devices, connectivity, and any costs for running events and activities.

Summary of Proposal

There is a clear overlap between the current Coffee & Computers activities and the planned Public Voice Digital Support Service. Both of these programmes are focussed on teaching people the skills and knowledge they need to take advantage of new technology and access digital services for a whole range of uses and potential benefits.

Both organisations also have very similar core purposes of improving people's lives and affecting positive change through community engagement, training and support services.

Given the common objectives, and the benefits to both organisations and our service users, Public Voice have offered to integrate the current Coffee & Computers setup and activities into the broader digital inclusion project they are planning.

This offer to merge with Public Voice is an excellent opportunity to sustain the current C&C activities, and help develop a comprehensive, fully funded, digital inclusion service that over time can support lots more digitally excluded people.

The details of the proposal are outlined in the following sections, but very little will actually change for any C&C users (learners and volunteers). The key benefit is that C&C will be much better supported going forward and have the capacity to run more activities and help many more people. All the activities will continue to be free of charge and open to any existing (and new) learners.

Goals & Objectives

The primary purpose of *Coffee & Computers* will continue to be to support people to engage with new technology and online or digital services. A summary of some of the short (and longer) term objectives, are listed below:

- Resumption of face-to-face digital support sessions. This will likely start with Hornsey Library and Wellside/Holy Trinity, with more venues added over time.
- Continuation of online sessions if there is an ongoing demand for this.
- Hosting of more “themed” support sessions, focussing on specific topics and classroom-style workshops rather than 1-to-1 support.
- Expanding the website with more “self-help” resources, support guides, and information/links for other useful services.
- Working with other community groups and organisations to set up new C&C sessions for their service users, and training their volunteers to run these going forward.
- Continuing to respond to 1-to-1 support requests where possible, but over time, these requests/referrals will be managed by the Public Voice digital support service as resources and capacity of this service increases.

Transfer Agreement & Ongoing Management

1. Charity Status and Transfer of Assets

- a) The current Coffee & Computers (unregistered) charity will be wound-up and all remaining assets (money and property) will be transferred to Public Voice CIC.
- b) Full details of the assets and terms of the transfer are specified in a separate agreement that will be signed by C&C Trustees and Public Voice Board of Directors.

2. Governance and Management

- a) On winding-up the charity, the current constitution will become redundant, and C&C Trustees will be relieved of any (legal) responsibility for the charity or its activities.
- b) “Coffee & Computers” will become a separate project within Public Voice, with its own budget allocated as part of the overall Public Voice budget. Any funding grants received for C&C and related digital support activities will be credited to this project.
- c) Overall responsibility for governance (e.g. strategic decisions, project planning, and budget allocation) of the new “Coffee & Computers” will pass across to the Public Voice Board where it will be managed as part of the “Digital Support Service”.
- d) Formal C&C “membership” will expire when the charity is wound-up, but current members, or anyone interested in C&C and other digital support services, will be encouraged to join a new management committee to help advise on future activities.
- e) The new management committee will be chaired by the current C&C Chair of Trustees, Andy Jeffrey, who will report to the Public Voice Board. Andy will continue to manage day-to-day C&C activities and decision making as part of the new Public Voice Digital Support team with help from other C&C and Public Voice volunteers.

3. Coffee & Computers Activities

- a) The main focus of “Coffee & Computers” will continue to be the group digital support sessions (both online and face-to-face). Current C&C learners will be welcomed and encouraged to continue attending any C&C activities, along with new learners and members of other community groups who we plan to attract over coming months.
- b) C&C activities will continue to use the “Coffee & Computers” name and branding as used throughout the [Website](#), [Email](#), and [Social Media](#) and any printed comms materials.
- c) Over time we may combine the name/branding, and the online presence, with Public Voice, but the established Coffee & Computers group support sessions, will continue to be branded as such for the foreseeable future.
- d) 1-to-1 support (outside of the group sessions) will continue to be offered where capacity allows, but over time this will integrate into the broader Public Voice service.
- e) As part of the transfer of assets, ownership of the website, email and social media accounts will pass across to Public Voice and be managed by the new Digital Support team with help from the C&C committee and other C&C or PV volunteers.
- f) As part of the transfer of assets, ownership of the mailing list will pass across to Public Voice and be managed by the new Digital Support team with help from the C&C committee and other C&C or PV volunteers. Users contact details will not be shared with any third parties and the C&C mailing list will only be used for notifying users of C&C activities and sharing of other related information. You can unsubscribe from these emails at any time by clicking the link at the bottom of the email, or send a request to mail@coffeecomputers.org
- g) Any current C&C volunteers will be welcomed and encouraged to continue attending and supporting C&C activities (especially the face-to-face group sessions once they resume). The activities may also be attended and support by other Public Voice volunteers and any new “digital support” volunteers we are able to recruit.
- h) In the short-term, all C&C activities and current volunteers will be coordinated by the new C&C management committee and managed separately to other Public Voice projects and volunteers. Over time, we will look to transition the administration and coordination of C&C activities and volunteers across to the Public Voice digital support service as the resources and capacity of this service increases.
- i) From time to time, C&C learners and volunteers may be invited to attend, register or volunteer for other Public Voice events, services and projects that may be of interest or benefit. There is no obligation to take part in these, and this would not affect your eligibility to take part in any future C&C activities.
- j) All C&C activities (including any related activities offered by the new Public Voice Digital Support Service) will continue to be free of charge for all and open to any learners (current or new) that would like to attend or are referred on to us by other organisations.