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PRESS RELEASE

NEW FREE HELPLINE TO SUPPORT DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR OLDER PEOPLE

The charity “Citizens Online” has now launched its Digital Champions programme here in Leighton Buzzard. Supported by the Town Council, the scheme is part of the Council’s 55up programme looking to tackle feelings of loneliness and isolation within the older community. The Town Council has agreed to provide funding for the two year project enabling Citizens Online to offer free face to face and over the telephone support to those in need of digital assistance.

According to the May 2022 Digital Inclusion report by Citizens Online, ‘2600 people in Leighton-Linslade are estimated to be not currently online’ and the ‘great majority of these are aged 65+’. As more and more aspects of our lives are moving online, it is of vital importance that everyone in our community has the opportunity to access services such as booking online appointments, completing electronic forms and connecting with family and friends.

Citizens Online provide free support to older people in order to develop their digital skills and gain confidence in accessing the online world. They offer assistance with using a range of technology including mobile phones, tablets and laptops. They can also help individuals with online tasks such as grocery shopping, exploring hobbies and leisure activities and speaking to friends and loved ones. The organisation can be contacted on their **free helpline: 0808 196 5883**. They provide digital support either over the telephone or can organise a support meeting in a public space. Meetings have already been taking place in Leighton Buzzard Library and have received very positive feedback.

Free Digital Drop in sessions are now taking place at The Chatty Café at the TACTIC Centre on **Tuesdays 10:00-13:00**. Individuals can attend without booking and seek digital support coupled with a free cup of tea!

The programme is run by an amazing set of volunteers who willingly give their free time to those in need. Citizens Online is very keen to expand its offering to the Leighton- Linslade community and is currently recruiting more volunteers to become Digital Champions. They offer free, accredited training, resources and online networking. If you are interested in becoming involved in this fantastic initiative or to find out more, please contact: volunteer@citizensonline.org.uk or call their **free phone number 0808 1965883**.

To find out more about the Town Council's 55up programme please visit www.leightonlinslade-tc.gov.uk/55up/ . Here you will find information on some of the grant funded groups and activities aimed at those aged 55up and befriending services.

If you are 55years and older and are looking for some free support with using your technology, or if you know someone who might benefit from this please contact the free **Citizens Online helpline** on **0808 196 5883** or pop to one of the free **Digital Drop In Sessions** at the Chatty Café on Tuesdays 10:00-13:00 at the TACTIC Centre, 17 Hockliffe Street, LU7 1EZ.

END

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