

Digital Inclusion Strategy



A digitally inclusive borough where residents have access to the skills, devices and support they need to achieve their aspirations

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01 Councillor foreword

While technology provides immense potential for improving residents' lives and the way we deliver council services, so many of the services that we rely on have moved online in recent years.

The digital world will continue to change the way residents live, work and learn, and we know that a considered approach rooted in resident experience and need is essential to ensure they continue to be able to access the services they need.

At Hammersmith & Fulham, we recognise the risk of deepening existing inequalities and are committed to making sure that no resident is left behind. Our Digital Inclusion Strategy will ensure that every resident, regardless of age, income, education, disability, or race, can benefit from the opportunities that technology and an increasingly digitalised world presents.

This strategy is built on a foundation of collaboration, in partnership with residents, and our voluntary and community sector. It outlines our vision for a digitally inclusive borough where everyone has access to the connectivity, skills, devices, and support they need to thrive.

By working together, we believe we can help our residents, third sector and businesses access the skills, devices and connectivity required for everyone to fully participate in work, education and training opportunities.

I invite you to join us on this journey towards digital inclusion. Together, we can bridge the digital divide and create a borough where everyone can succeed in the digital world.

Cllr Rowan Ree
H&F Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform



02 Introduction

Technology is reshaping all aspects of our lives: the way we work, learn, manage our money, access public services and interact with our friends and family.

Residents are becoming increasingly digitally savvy and in the [2021 Census](#) 95% of residents completed their return online (where they had been provided with the code) suggesting a high proportion of residents are experienced at using online services. This is the 40th highest percentage in the country.

Residents, communities, and businesses want to see the borough at the forefront of adopting technology which makes people's lives easier and improves our services. At Hammersmith & Fulham we are using technology to deliver our services better and respond to the changing demands of our residents. Our primary concern is making sure that in this digital age, no resident is left behind and all residents have access to the support, skills and devices they need. But we recognise that digital is not the right channel for everyone or every need, so the council is committed to continuing to provide a range of access channels, including telephony and face to face support, alongside improving access to digital channels.

The digital divide is a societal challenge and intrinsically linked to wider inequity – affecting people's ability to access employment, education and lifelong learning, health and other critical services, social engagement, community participation and financial products and services. It is those already at a disadvantage – through age, education, income, disability, or race – who are most likely to be missing out, further widening the social inequality gap.

Since the pandemic we've seen the digital divide deepen. The [Good Things Foundation](#) reports that people excluded from the internet are locked out of all the economic benefits it brings, like cheaper costs, improved job prospects and the ability to work flexibly – as well as the higher risk of loneliness.

Ensuring our residents and small businesses have the skills and access they need to thrive has the potential to improve outcomes across all our community aims.



Digital Inclusion is therefore essential to our ability to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents and this strategy recognises the significant costs of digital exclusion to people's quality of life and outcomes, as well as to wider society and the economy.

With the right partnerships between the public, businesses and voluntary sector we can build on the excellent work that is already taking place to address digital exclusion. Working together in a joined up way, we will generate new initiatives that support local residents to access digital services and support organisations to remain resilient in the face of an uncertain world.

This digital inclusion strategy sets out our vision for how Hammersmith & Fulham can become an incubator of ideas and deliver solutions to help the most digitally excluded. Doing things with residents and not to them is a core value at the heart of everything that we do, and this means making sure that all residents feel included, represented and are able to actively participate in work, school, community, and social activities. Equally the council cannot deliver the aims set out in this strategy alone. It will require the whole community – residents, businesses, partner organisations, schools and our voluntary and community sector – to work together in a collaborative and innovative alliance to maximise our impact and resources.

03 Understanding digital exclusion

There is currently a lack of data at a local level to understand the level of digital skills and access in the borough. However, national studies have shown the scale of exclusion.

According to the Ofcom, [Communications Affordability Tracker](#), there are 1.9 million households, equating to 8% of households that struggle to afford internet access in the UK today, while statistics by the [Good Things Foundation](#) highlight that 8.5 million adults still lack the most basic digital skills.

Even though 1.5 million more people went online during the Covid-19 pandemic, the [Good Things Foundation Strategy 2022-25](#) states that in some groups digital engagement actually declined – such as older, less affluent groups, and people with impairments and health conditions.

As can be seen from the infographic on page 6, digital exclusion is linked not just to a person's age (which is a factor) but more to one's socio-economic status.

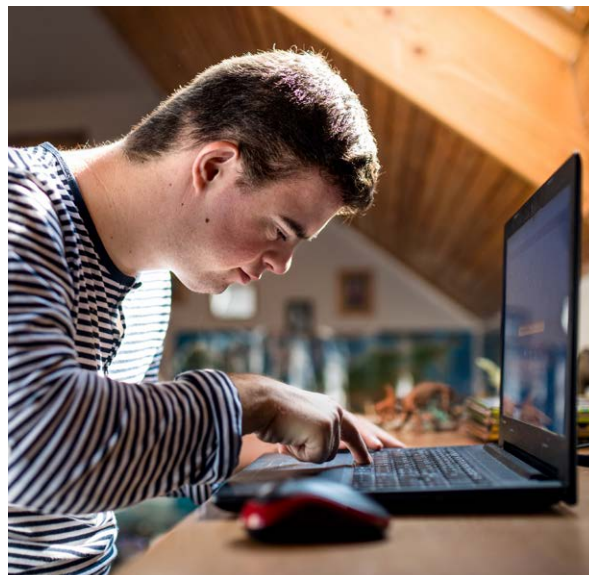
This means that many people remain excluded from the internet – and from the economic benefits it brings. The number of people without all of the most basic 'foundation' digital skills is not improving.

The digital divide may have narrowed in the past two years, but it has also deepened.

This means there is a complex picture that needs to be unpicked.

We know that 24% of our population are income deprived and that around a third of children aged 0-15 live in income deprived families in the borough. Forty-nine percent of our older people aged 65+ are also income deprived (Agilisys Research for Hammersmith & Fulham – 2019).

Through using a range of data sources, we intend to build on our understanding of residents in the borough and use this data to deliver targeted support and interventions in partnership with residents, our voluntary and community sector and businesses. Our work



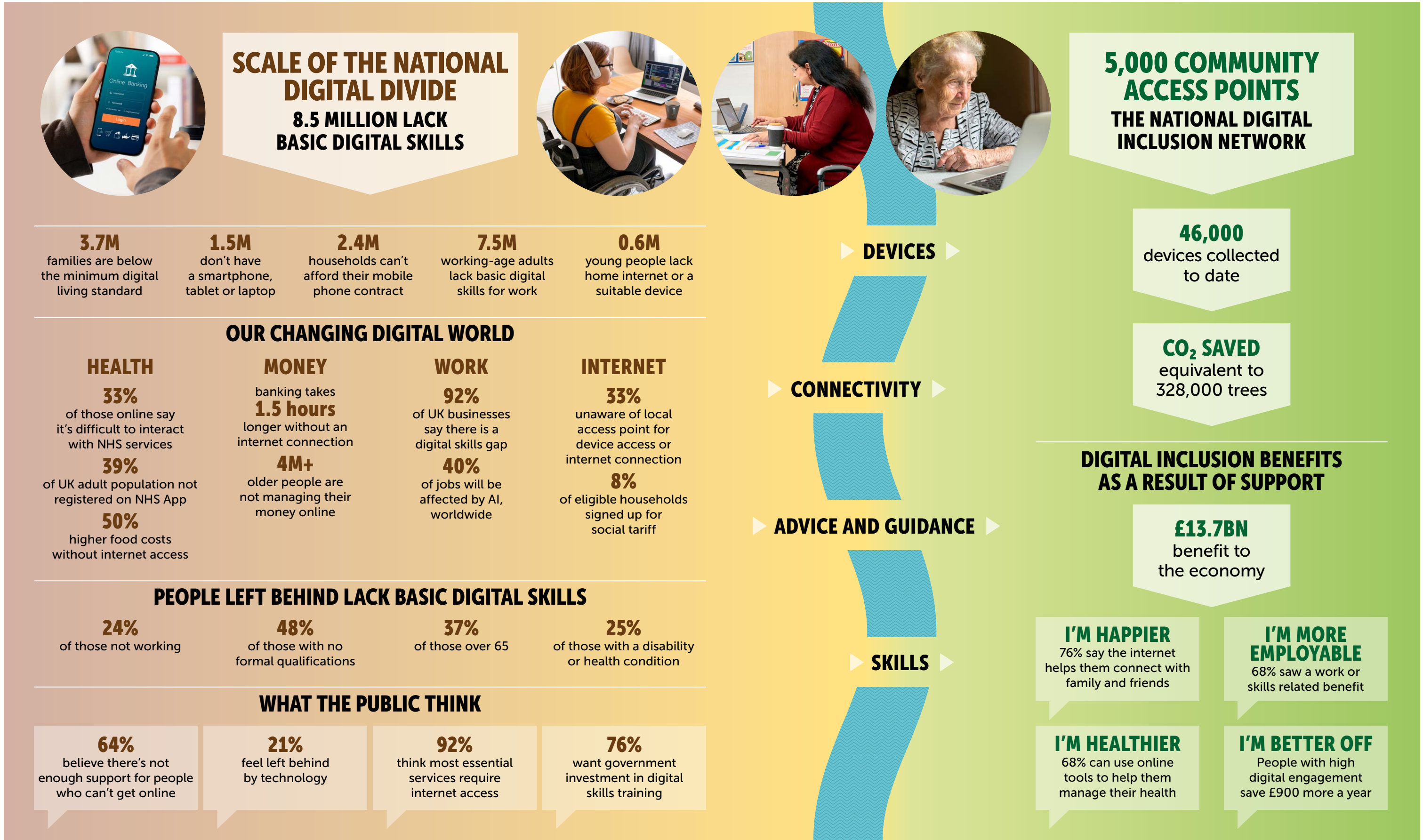
with key partners, such as the London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI), has already helped us to better understand the groups most at risk of digital exclusion: older people, low-income adults and children, minority ethnic communities, the unemployed, people with disabilities and small/micro-businesses.

We have great connectivity across our borough with extensive coverage of high speed fibre but there are still some areas constrained by connectivity issues, whether it is mobile data 'not spots' or poor broadband speeds and connections. These gaps can show up in various scenarios from workplace environments, such as small businesses, through to temporary accommodation placements which leave families with limited access to the internet.

Understanding the needs of our residents is the foundation on which we are building our efforts in digital inclusion and therefore, a key element of how we will measure our success will be building our data capabilities. By using a targeted approach we will ensure the most effective use of limited resources whilst enabling evidence-based decision making. We will use data to understand who is affected by digital exclusion to connect them to the support that they need and to track and measure our progress. This will include developing standard data capture and referral forms to standardise datasets at the beginning and end of engagements.

Digital inclusion

Facts and stats to fix the digital divide for good



04

Our vision

By 2030, Hammersmith & Fulham will be a more digitally inclusive borough; a place where residents have access to the digital skills, devices and support they need to achieve their aspirations.

This strategy supports the wider vision of a borough that is prosperous, where residents can participate in society fully and thrive at work, home and in the community. To make sure that Hammersmith & Fulham remains the thriving diverse borough that it is, our residents need to

be empowered and equipped with the skills and support they need to confidently navigate the new complex digital landscape of work, social interaction, public services and online businesses.

Our borough is rich in the economic opportunities and cultural richness it offers, and our vision is to make sure everybody benefits from these and nobody is left behind. Making sure that our ecosystem of residents, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and public services work towards this same vision in a coordinated fashion is at the heart of this strategy.



05 Our principles

This Digital Inclusion Strategy has been coproduced with our residents, voluntary and community sector and public sector partners.

We have made sure that the resident voice is embedded in our digital inclusion strategy and action plan.

We know that our residents want us to focus on outcomes, work together, deliver more consistently, improve communication and keep listening (source: Hammersmith & Fulham's [Our Resident Involvement Strategy 2019-2022](#)).

That is why this strategy is driven by our core principles:

Resident led

Our strategy is led by what residents have told us they need

Holistic

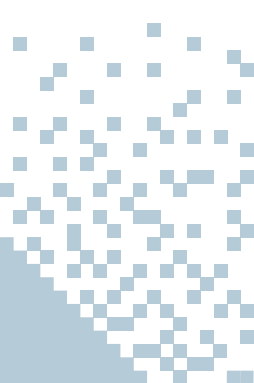
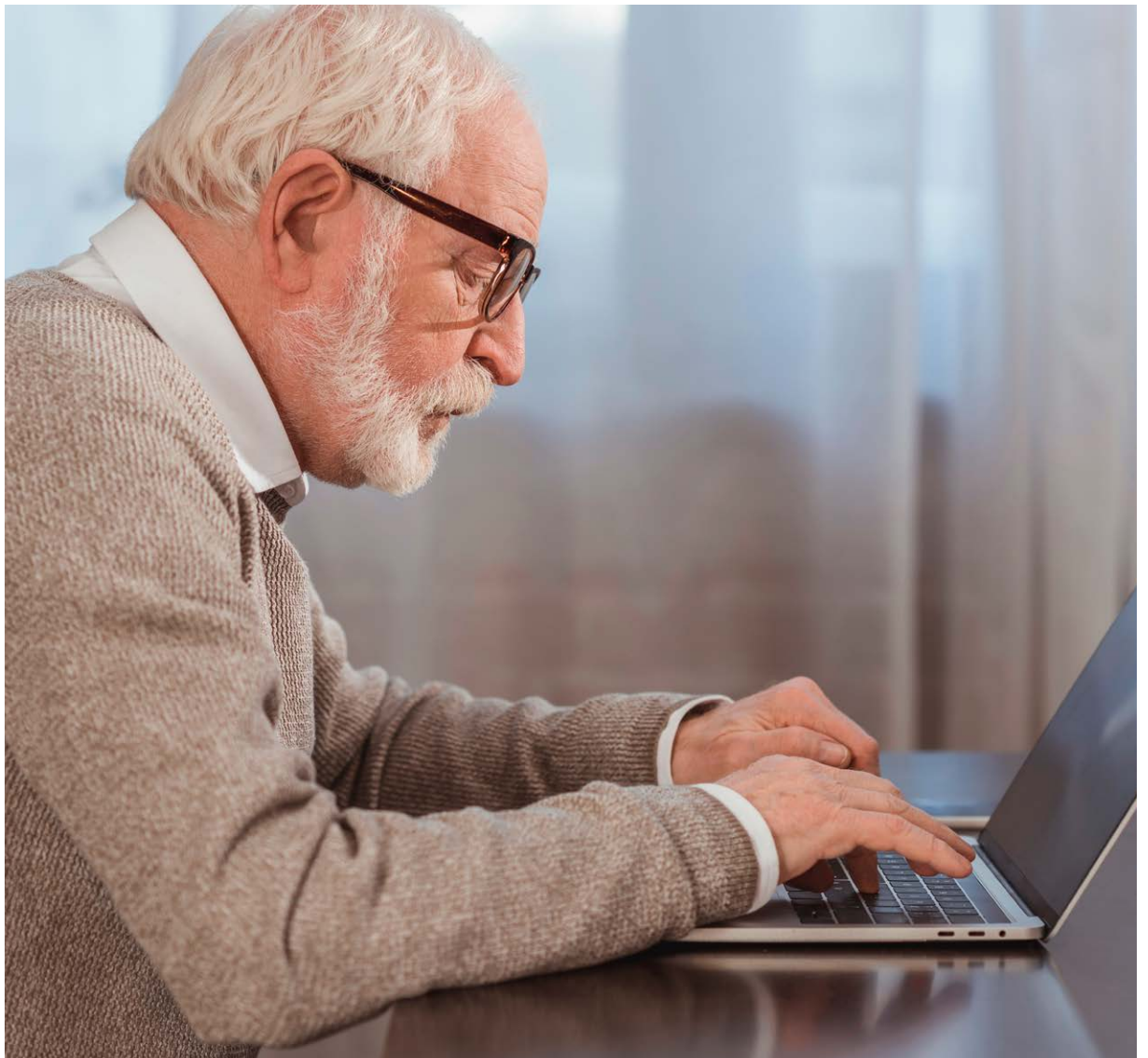
We recognise barriers to digital inclusion in their wider social and economic context

Collaborative

We work together to break down barriers and deliver the best results

Insight-driven

We use insights from data to make evidence-based decisions

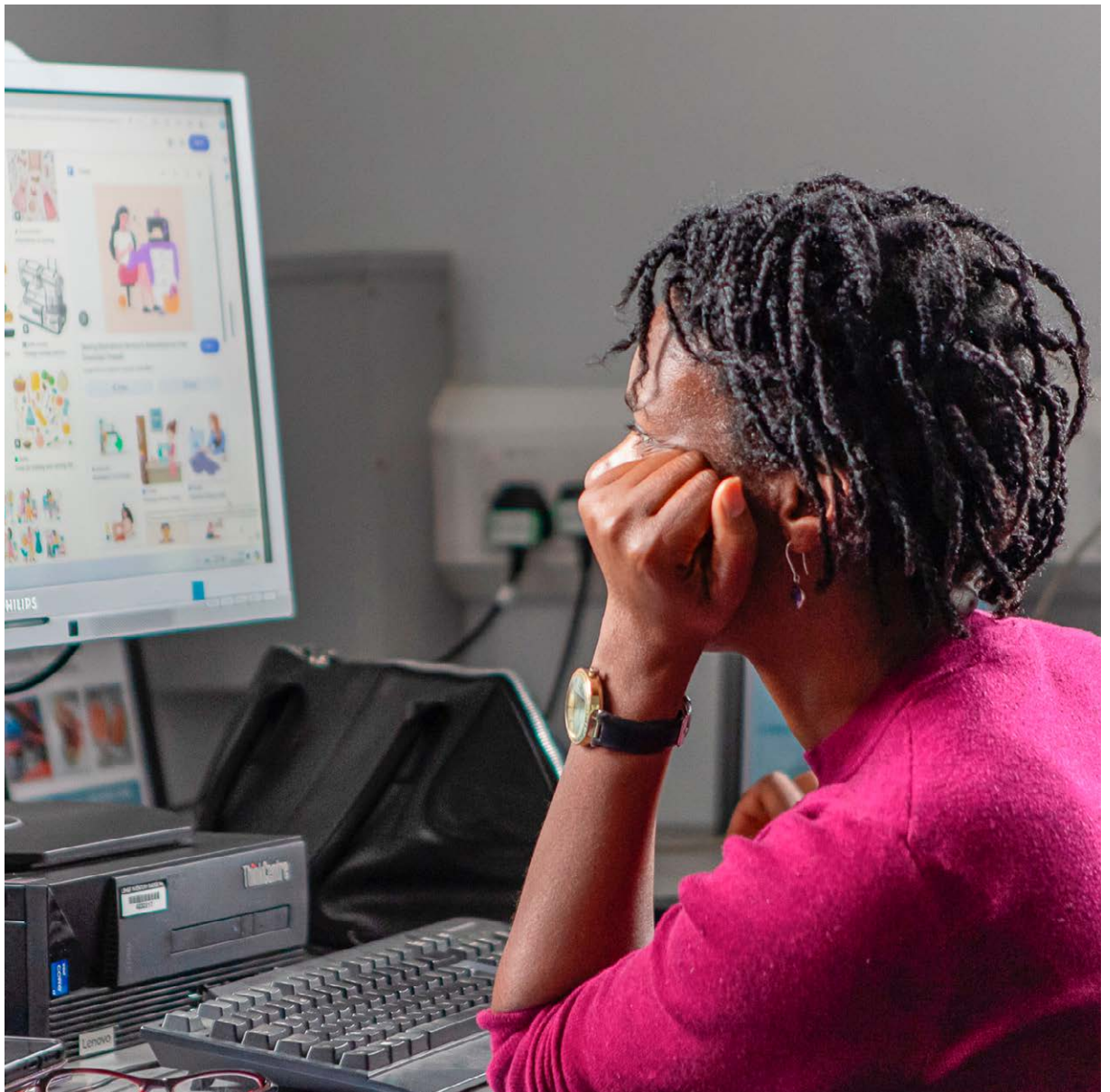


06 Objectives

The objectives for this Digital Inclusion Strategy are based on our four pillars of Digital Inclusion: access to devices, connectivity, advice and guidance, and skills (see pages 12 to 15).

Through the process of coproduction with residents and our voluntary and community sector we have identified these core objectives:

- All residents have the opportunity to gain the digital skills, knowledge and access to thrive in education, work or socially
- Everyone who needs and wants support has it
- Everyone knows where to go for the help that they want
- Residents are able to access digital services, independently or with support
- No one is disadvantaged by a lack of digital awareness, skills or access to equipment
- Residents have developed skills that enable them to use digital services and devices with confidence
- Residents feel safe and secure when online
- We've had a measurable impact on the level of digital exclusion



07 Delivering our strategy

We will deliver our digital inclusion vision for Hammersmith & Fulham by working collaboratively with residents, partners and services across the council, the borough and beyond to drive a coordinated and joined-up approach to digital inclusion that is informed by data.

Residents and partner organisations have played a critical role in the development of this strategy and this coproduction will remain an integral part of our future work.

We know that we already have multiple council services, voluntary, community and other organisations providing support in this area but, for the most part, these services and organisations work alone and on specific areas and are not always joined up. This can mean that residents who need help often don't know where to turn, and the help they receive may not address all their needs.

We need to work together across services and organisations to maximise the use of our scarce resources and to make sure that there are no gaps or duplication in the delivery of digital inclusion services.

We will deliver our strategy by:

- Developing a more joined up and coherent digital inclusion 'ecosystem' – we are working towards a shared vision and programme of change across H&F, the West London Alliance, and London with a coordinated group of partners in the voluntary and community sector, health and industry to support our vision that by 2030 all our residents will have access to connectivity, devices and digital skills – we are calling this the Digital Inclusion Alliance
- Underpinning this work by data to help us identify who needs help, who provides it, what help is effective, and to track and measure our progress
- Ensuring more H&F residents will be digitally confident and motivated and will feel safe and secure online
- Working with voluntary and community organisations supporting residents in the borough to make sure that residents are aware of, and able to, access the support that they need – advice and guidance is at the heart of our strategy, and we will take action to make our services inclusive by default, underpinned by an effective 'signposting' platform to provide clear pathways to advice, learning and support
- Continuing to coproduce our digital inclusion work with residents, voluntary and community sector and incorporating user led data, to ensure it remains a living document and adapts to changing needs and opportunities



08 Delivery across the four pillars of digital inclusion

Through this strategy we will deliver a Digital Inclusion Programme for Hammersmith & Fulham.

We will also continue to engage residents to make sure that we understand the changing environment for residents and respond appropriately to emerging technology which may impact our services and our residents.

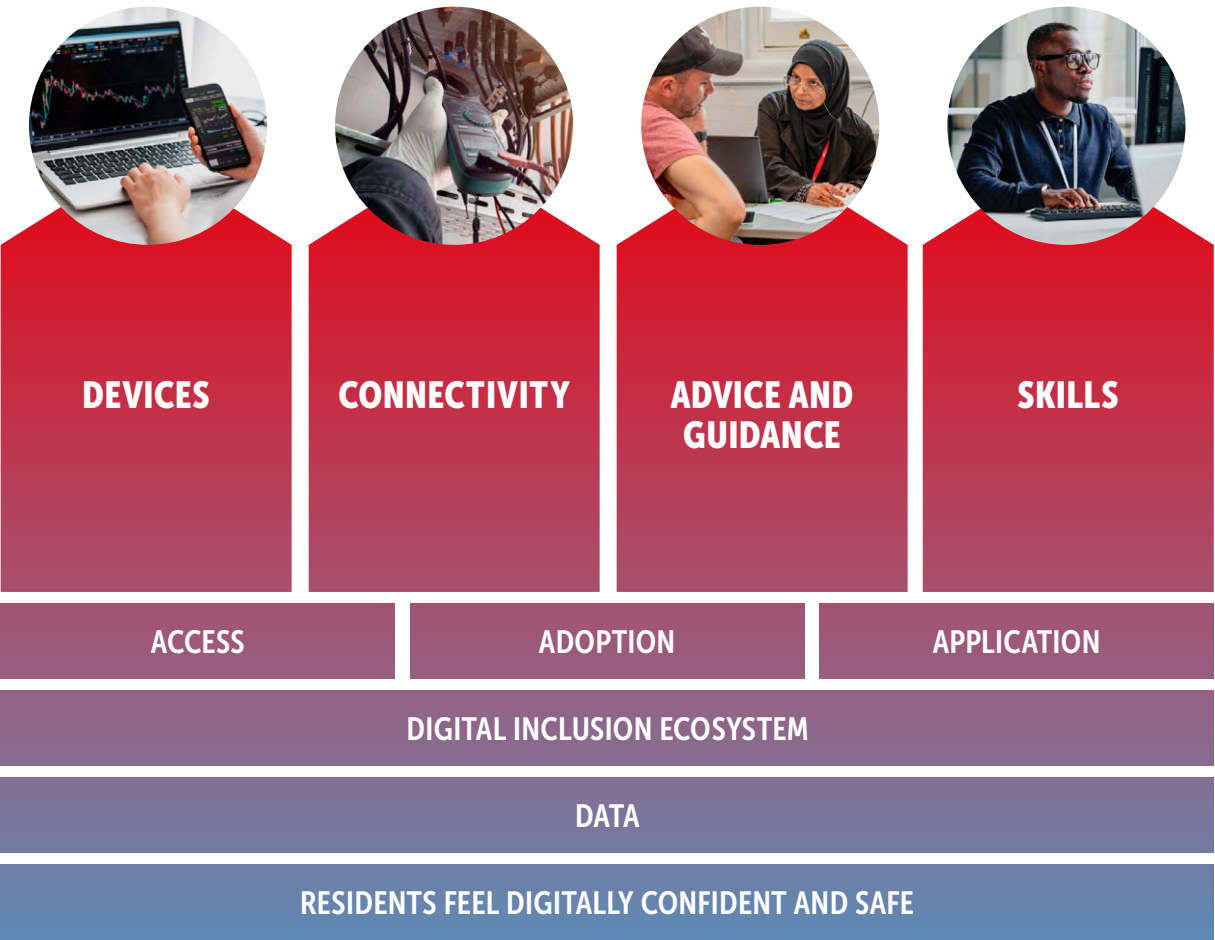
Our strategy will focus on providing support across the four pillars of digital inclusion:

- **Devices**
- **Connectivity**
- **Advice and guidance**
- **Skills**

Working with all partners, we will promote access, adoption and application across these four pillars with the aim of achieving a digital inclusion ecosystem where residents feel digitally confident and safe.

However, we recognise that there will be a need for effective collaboration and facilitation to bring this work together. Therefore, we recommend that the borough create a cross-sector Digital Inclusion Alliance that will initially be chaired by a councillor. This is with the aim of kickstarting a new digital inclusion programme in the borough and promoting an ecosystem that fosters collaboration and partnership.

Four pillars of digital inclusion



8.1

Devices

Our vision and priorities

We want to make sure that no one is disadvantaged by a lack of access to equipment and that residents have developed the skills that enable them to use digital services and devices with confidence.

Our residents reminded us that digital accessibility isn't just about having a device, but it is also about considering the end-to-end support needs around digital inclusion (e.g. skills and advice) as well as the clear link between connectivity and devices.

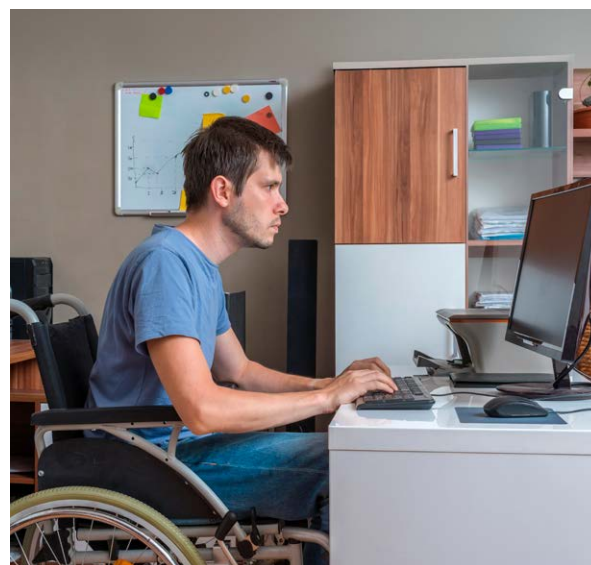
The voluntary sector sees the council as a powerful ally with the potential to engage industry as an active collaborator in our work to end digital exclusion in the borough, ensuring the council maximises its use of pan-London and local businesses' support.

The discussions with residents and local groups centred on recognising the different needs of users with the potential for different devices and specifications, considering accessibility for disabled people and those unable to travel to central hubs, how the borough would prioritise specific groups and the pros and cons of loaning vs giving and new vs recycled devices. The practicalities of how devices would be coordinated and managed was highlighted as an area of concern.

We will work collaboratively across our digital inclusion ecosystem to ensure that everyone who needs a device has access to a supported device that they know how to use and ensure that residents are signposted to additional sources of support for their wider needs.

Key actions

- 1 Work with pan-London, regional and local organisations and businesses to ensure the borough can access affordable and appropriate devices for those that need it, understanding the mix of needs and requirements of residents.
- 2 The council will work with suppliers and partners to ensure that council devices and equipment that are no-longer required are made available to residents that need them through appropriate delivery partners.
- 3 Ensure the council's social care and occupational therapy teams are able to access appropriate technology enabled care to support digitally excluded residents and those at risk of digital exclusion.



How will we measure progress?

- Number of affordable devices provided as part of the digital inclusion ecosystem/alliance
- Take up by priority groups and provision of accessible devices for those with disabilities
- Percentage accessing training and support
- Percentage confirming continued use and improved skills/confidence

8.2 Connectivity

Our vision and priorities

Connectivity and fast broadband access is in the 90%+ range across the region although there are still households with limited access to sufficient broadband connectivity. The deployment of full fibre connections has continued, with 76% of premises in Hammersmith & Fulham having access to full fibre according to the [Connected Nations 2023 report by Ofcom](#). Nonetheless this leaves 24% of residents in the borough who are not benefiting from full fibre. Better coordination is needed by providers and local government to progress these efforts.

There are a range of places offering free public access Wi-Fi in the borough – ranging from libraries, the new Family Hubs, Tenant Resident Association (TRA) halls on housing estates and communal areas of sheltered housing blocks, but this isn't clearly signposted and there is an inconsistency in approach and speed.

The council seeks to improve connectivity in the borough through granting 'wayleaves', for example through the right to access publicly owned buildings and spaces to install equipment and necessary connections. The council will work in partnership with service providers that might need access and progress a coordinated approach to delivering this ambition.

From an individual and family perspective, our residents told us that many didn't understand how to access 'social tariff' offers from telecommunications providers. Indeed only 8% of those eligible across the country are accessing social tariffs according to [Digital Nation 2024](#). It is the responsibility of providers to promote their offer but the plethora of contracts is also confusing and

difficult to navigate. However, local charities and the council have had success in getting free SIMs for residents from mobile providers.

We will work with partners like Good Things Foundation, the London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI), the Greater London Authority (GLA), the West London Alliance (WLA) and telecoms providers to ensure that all residents have access to high-speed internet connectivity and great service at a price that they can afford.

Key actions

- 1 Actively promote and raise awareness of social tariffs available in the borough to address misunderstanding and potential stigma.
- 2 Map all free public access Wi-Fi in the borough and make this available through a signposting tool.
- 3 Achieve better connectivity outcomes using 'wayleaves' to ensure positive outcomes for residents.
- 4 Consider how the council and its partners could develop a universal basic service approach in its requirements for residential developments and in its own supported living settings – e.g. care leavers, foster carers, etc.
- 5 Work with pan-London, regional and local partners to improve access to free SIMs linked to devices.
- 6 Improve access to free and good quality Wi-Fi provision in community settings including schools, faith organisations, colleges, food banks, jobs centres, community centres and through our own highway infrastructure.

How will we measure achievement?

- Percentage of homes in the borough within 1 mile of free Wi-Fi provision
- Percentage of homes in the borough with access to high-speed fibre
- Number of free SIMs provided (aligned to free devices)
- Take-up of social tariffs
- Percentage of community settings offering free Wi-Fi
- Resident survey data – percentage of residents regularly going online and % of residents that know how to use the internet
- Pupil data – percentage of pupils with access to the internet and a device at home

8.3 Advice and guidance

Our vision and priorities

Our residents told us that many of them did not feel safe online. They also didn't know who to trust for advice and guidance on digital matters, such as understanding social tariffs on offer from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) or know where to go for other sources of support.

Voluntary and community partners struggle to recruit, train and retain volunteers and the role of statutory partners, including the council, to provide digital inclusion advice and guidance was unclear.

We will work with digital inclusion ecosystem partners to signpost residents to trusted and accessible sources of advice and guidance, and will develop a network of volunteer digital champions across the borough that reflect its diversity, energy and the community strength of residents, organisations and businesses. We will identify and target those most likely to be digitally excluded and improve awareness of the local offer.

Key actions

1 Develop a network of digital champion volunteers:

- a.** Encourage local businesses to use their corporate social responsibility days to become digital champions in the community.
- b.** Link with local schools and work experience/ Duke of Edinburgh schemes to encourage inter-generational volunteering using school facilities.

c. Encourage council staff to use their volunteering allowance to support residents.

d. Develop a digital platform to enable volunteering and to link digital champions with settings/programmes with clear advice and information online.

e. Enhance the digital assistance available to residents as part of the council's core face to face offer.

f. Increase resident confidence in faith and other community settings to offer digital inclusion support and guidance.

2 Proactively identify and target support at those most likely to be digitally excluded or with the greatest need:

a. Develop specific support offer for priority groups working with trusted organisations – older and disabled people, non-English speaking residents, those unable to attend traditional settings.

b. Capture information on exclusion and needs in our daily interactions (e.g. contact centre surveys).

c. Use different channels of communication to promote offers – including posters and other non-digital channels.

d. Increase awareness of the offer among council, statutory partner and other organisations' front-line staff.

e. Raise awareness of the role of technology and voice activated devices to enable independent living.

How will we measure achievement?

- Number of trained and accredited digital champion volunteers
- Number of partners engaged to deliver digital support in the community
- Number of visits to online advice pages and digital inclusion signposting tool
- Number of people supported through the network including demographics
- Percentage of residents knowing how to access support if they need it (residents' survey)
- Number of excluded groups accessing targeted support
- Percentage of those feeling more confident after support (post engagement survey)
- Percentage of SMEs knowing how to access advice and support (SME survey)

8.4 Skills

Our vision and priorities

We are a borough proud of our academic and educational standards, led by our world class university and excellent further educational institutions. However, the skills and confidence of residents vary and there are still significant needs to be addressed. Digital skills needs vary by age – a school leaver may need support to ensure that they bring sufficient digital skills to their employment; while older people may want support to connect with friends and family that are not otherwise accessible to them. Low levels of literacy and numeracy can also impact people's ability to engage in digital skills.

A recurrent theme in feedback from our residents and voluntary and community sector was that digital skills extend to feeling safe and secure online, and confidently navigating the different options that are available around devices and connectivity.

Through the council's own adult learning services, community partners, banks and local/regional/national partners there is a wealth of training on offer, often free or very low cost. However, for those beginning their journey, this can feel confusing and difficult to navigate and needs to be aligned to wider support. Equally, there is no common standard or progression pathway shared by providers in the borough and an unclear offer for those that cannot easily attend a community venue in person.

We will work across our ecosystem – including education providers and employers – to develop and promote a range of digital skills development programs that meet the needs of excluded residents and enable them to be digitally confident and secure online.

This will include providing ongoing support to upskill and reskill residents to enable their continued participation in an increasingly digital workplace and to ensure those volunteering to help others also have the skills and knowledge to do so effectively.

Key actions

- 1** Convene a digital skills working group to develop a set of common standards and connect with education providers and local businesses.
- 2** Map and promote the full range of training and skills development opportunities available in the borough.
- 3** Develop targeted offers for specific groups – foster carers, disabled people, those with low levels of literacy, older people and those unable to physically attend venues.
- 4** Develop and implement an accreditation, support and training offer for digital champion volunteers.



How will we measure achievement?

- Number of residents participating in digital inclusion training/learning sessions including by priority group/demographic
- Number of volunteers accredited/trained
- Percentage of participants in learning completing the sessions
- Percentage of participants in learning meeting relevant skills at the end of the pathway (appropriate to their wishes at the beginning)
- Percentage of training providers confident in their ability to deliver digital inclusion training
- Percentage of council tenants that regularly use the internet and feel confident to do so (annual tenants' survey)

09 Conclusion

As we look towards a digitally inclusive future for Hammersmith & Fulham, we recognise the crucial role that our voluntary and community, public and private sector play in the ecosystem that shapes the life chances of our residents.

Our Digital Inclusion Strategy is not just a document – it is our commitment to ensuring that every resident can thrive in a world increasingly shaped by technology. We have laid out a vision that, by 2030, our borough will be a place where all residents have access to the digital skills, devices and support they need.

We acknowledge the collective efforts that have brought us to this juncture. As such, this strategy is a roadmap to that future, built on the principles of collaboration and coproduction with our residents and partners.



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