SCVO

Digital Inclusion Roadmap

November 2023

Making digital inclusion everyone's responsibility: a roadmap for Scotland

1. Introduction and context

1.1   The challenge

New technology and the internet provide the foundation of how we live, learn and work. Much of our daily lives can now be made possible, and some would say easier, through the internet: managing our finances, attending classes, finding love, doing our jobs, looking for somewhere to live, ordering shopping, reading the news, speaking to friends, and even having a consultation with a GP. Digital has the potential to make our worlds bigger.

The acceleration of these changes was in response to a global pandemic: digital was our lifeline, we used it to build a new way of life. Four years later, this new way of life has become the status quo. A lot has already changed, and further change is certain. We are on a journey, and we need to make sure that no one is left behind.

Digital divides in the UK present multi-layered problems. Without access, or with limited access, to the internet, people are economically disadvantaged: they are paying more, on average, for goods and services, they have reduced access to employment opportunities and their financial confidence and ability to manage money is impacted.

Being excluded from the online world means being excluded from public services. Digital-first options often present barriers to people that require those services most. In some cases, there are no non-digital alternatives. High streets are emptying of retailers and banks, meaning limited access and choice for people that don't use the internet.

But being digitally excluded is so much more than our money and services. In our increasingly connected world, this is where we come together with friends and family and interact socially. It's also where we learn new skills, develop new hobbies, stimulate our brains and understand the world around us. The digital divide locks people out.
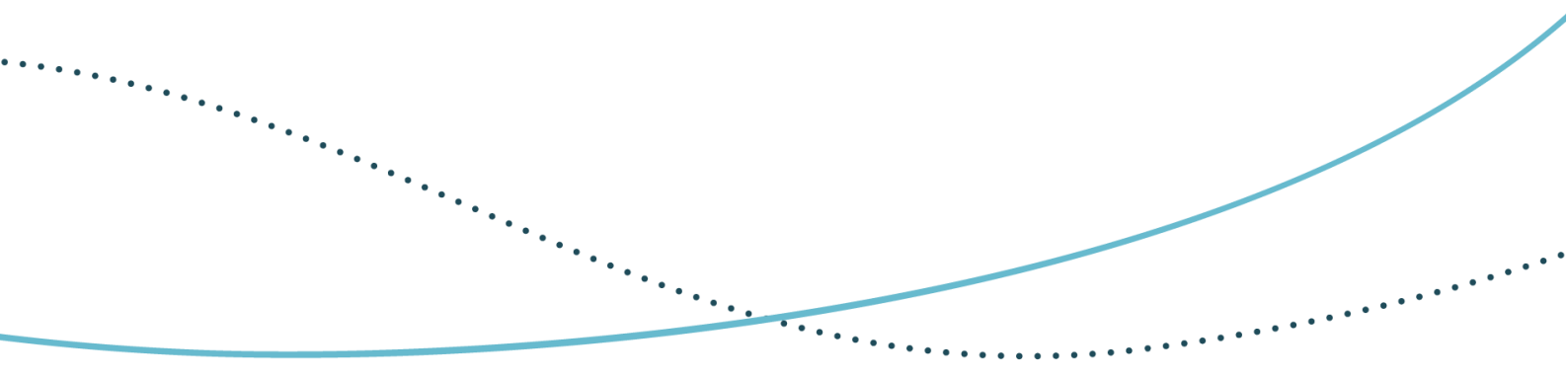
Case study: Simon Community Scotland

At Simon Community Scotland we want everyone who is experiencing homelessness across Scotland to be able to get online easily and move forward in their lives in a way that suits them, it is our mission.

So far through our Get Connected programme we have supported 1,000 people experiencing homelessness by supplying a device, unlimited connectivity, person centred support delivered by our team of frontline workers trained as digital champions, and access to a framework of evidence-based links and resources. We firmly believe that this approach works as digital support is delivered in a trauma-informed way by a trusted person in their existing support network.

People we have helped already are keen to tell us about the life changing results since they engaged with us. Like James.

Prior to getting the device and unlimited data sim plan, James was totally socially isolated and heavily dependent on our support in many ways. His mental health was very poor.

Since getting digitally connected, we have witnessed such a transformational change in him. He has become much more independent in the sense that he is now able and willing to make phone calls, send emails, do research, and make contact with other services without our support.

He seems more confident in himself and empowered in social situations. He is constantly learning new things, via his internet browsing, which has been really good for his mind. He also recently connected with his family members, who he hadn't spoken to in years, via phone calls and text message exchanges.

He is hoping to continue building these relationships over time. His mental health has also greatly improved due to the fact that his internet connection has allowed him to gain unlimited access to one of his greatest loves, music. James loves music and he used to work as a DJ many years ago.

Unfortunately, he spent the past 10 years with very limited access to music because he was experiencing homelessness and without any financial means for a digital device or music player. Now, James spends much of his time listening to music and watching video performances of his favourite bands. It makes him so happy and more productive in his daily life. He is gaining incredible value, and improving his overall wellbeing from the Get Connected Project and he feels that it has changed his life.

1.2 Why it's everyone's responsibility

Engaging online should always be a choice – but some people don't have that choice.

We believe this inequality is unacceptable and there is still a great deal of work to do to create an infrastructure that acts as a safety net for those who are digitally excluded.

We recognise that digital inclusion is complex and multi-faceted, it has traditionally been seen as a luxury or a personal responsibility. We don't think this is the case - digital is an essential part of modern life.

Whilst it has huge personal benefits for those included, it creates multiple benefits across our public, private and voluntary sectors. For example, making cost-savings on delivery, widening reach, growing a customer base or delivering services more flexibly are all possible thanks to the digital world. As we reap these benefits and change how we live and work, we contribute to the acceleration of digital. If we all benefit, we all need to take a share in the responsibility for what we're creating. Digital inclusion is therefore everyone's responsibility.

This sentiment is echoed in the report on the National Digital Ethics Public Panel.[1] The Panel developed three 'Statements of Expectations' in relation to digital inclusion in an ethical digital Scotland:

1. Ensuring fair and equitable access to affordable digital technology and data;

2. Removing barriers so that all of the population, including those who are not already digitally engaged, recognise the benefits of becoming so, and are able to access skills development opportunities that will enable them to participate online safely, productively, and with confidence;

3. Ensuring that those who are not digitally skilled (or choose not to engage digitally) are still able to access services that are provided as 'digital by default' without being disadvantaged.

Across the three Statements of Expectation, the panel attributed a range of responsibility across government and government bodies, businesses, society and civil society organisations, and individuals.

1.3 Purpose of this document

This document is a starting point. It is the beginning of a post-pandemic roadmap to define where we're at, where we need to go and the high level actions we need to take towards significantly reducing digital exclusion in Scotland.

Our vision and framework for action is based upon a wide range of research and learning produced by partner organisations, as well as our reflections on more than a decade of leading the movement to tackle digital exclusion in Scotland. It also builds on the feedback from stakeholders and front-line workers during the #connect23 series of events we ran in summer 2023.

We all know that no single organisation can tackle digital exclusion alone. We need everyone to make a commitment – big or small – to address the challenge. We hope that the high-level actions set out as part of this roadmap can be built upon and expanded as organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors join us on the journey.

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[1] National Digital Ethics Public Panel, 2021 (Involve)

2. The roadmap

2.1 Our vision

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone has the opportunity be digitally included. To realise this, we're on a mission to make digital inclusion everyone's responsibility. This underpins the approach we are taking in this roadmap.

We want to be **bold** in our approach. Being bold recognises that eradicating digital exclusion requires us to eradicate poverty, and no digital inclusion strategy can do this alone. Being bold also means that we need to take a more nuanced approach, recognising the intrinsic links between digital exclusion and social inequality, and develop a response that can provide people with the right kind of support when they need it.

Our approach is therefore underpinned by the following considerations:

- Digital exclusion is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. It is a consequence of poverty because there is an economic cost to being digitally included (buying a device and paying for ongoing connectivity). It is a cause of poverty because the drivers of poverty reduction are increasingly accessed through the online world: income from employment, managing the costs of living, and income from social security and benefits.

- Digital inclusion alone cannot solve poverty, but it is a critical enabler in a wider systemic approach. By creating a digital inclusion infrastructure, we can alleviate the symptoms of digital exclusion.

- Digital exclusion extends beyond economic barriers, and we must recognise the importance of lifelong learning. The pace of change in the digital world will continue to accelerate as new technologies are developed. The skills we have now may not be relevant or useful in another 10 years. Those who are unable to keep pace risk becoming digitally excluded.

- This accelerating pace of change means that we cannot take a long-term view of what the future might hold and how our needs might change.

- Digital exclusion is not a linear process, or something that once achieved lasts indefinitely. All of us are at risk of digital exclusion throughout the course of our lives due to a range of factors. We are faced with the constraints of a challenging economic context which presents significant barriers to resourcing this work. As a result, we need to be aspirational and realistic in our expectations.

We are therefore taking an approach that seeks to build the digital inclusion infrastructure needed to catch people when they are at risk of exclusion. We need an infrastructure because, as we've highlighted, digital inclusion is multi-faceted and complex. There are many different challenges that require many different solutions which all work together.

2.2 Our framework for action

Our framework for action consists of five specific challenges, the core elements required to achieve digital inclusion, supported by the three broader enablers which need to be in place to support them.
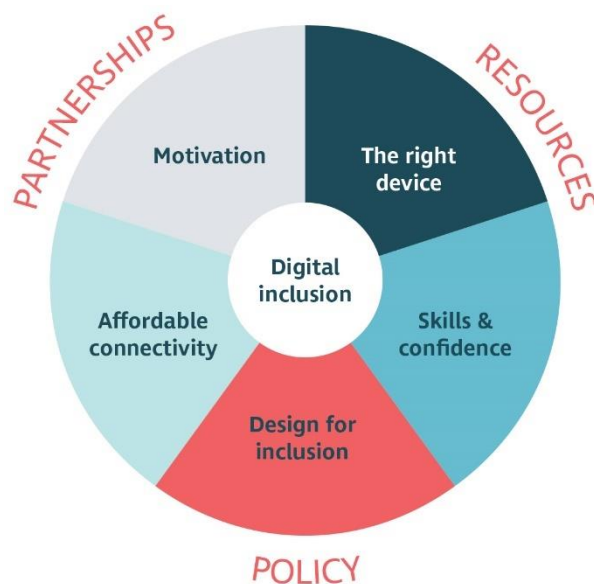
To have full digital inclusion, the five challenges which must be solved for people are:
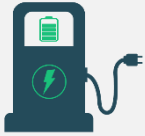
1. Motivation - to be part of the digital world, free from any personal barriers; **and**

2. Access to the right device – the ability to afford an internet enabled device that is suitable for your needs and the task in hand; **and**

3. Affordable connectivity – so that you can connect your device to the internet; **and**

4. Skills and confidence – to navigate the internet, keeping yourself safe, doing the things you want to do; **and**

5. Inclusive design – when you get online, spaces are well designed so that everyone can use them.

The broader enablers that help achieve this are:

- Policy – ensuring a clear commitment to tackling digital exclusion is an integral part of delivering digital public services;

- Partnerships – organisations work together to tackle digital exclusion, playing to their strengths;

- Resources – organisations have the capacity and a supportive environment to enable them to appropriately embed work to tackle digital exclusion.

2.3 An analogy

We can think about digital inclusion just like driving a car, with each of the five challenges having an analogy:

I want to drive	**I have the motivation to get online**	
I have a car	**I have an internet enabled device**	
I have fuel	**I have connectivity**	
I have a driving licence	**I have the skills to get online confidently and safely**	UK PL8TE
I can navigate the transport network (roads)	**Digital public services are accessible and easy to use**	

Only when all five elements are complete can an individual get to their destination.

However, in real life we have public transport system to ensure that we can all navigate and get around the world we live in, regardless of whether we have a car. There's no comparable infrastructure for the digital world. That's why everyone making a commitment to tackle digital exclusion is so important.

Case study: North East Sensory Services

We seek to bridge service delivery gaps and ensure that people living with serious sensory loss or impairment, no matter their age or circumstances, have equality of rights and opportunity. Living with a significant sensory loss can be both physically and emotionally challenging, with increased risk of social isolation, frustration, and disengagement from society due to communication barriers.

We focus on solutions not problems, and enable people to find their own by providing them with the information, equipment, practical and emotional support they need to do so. Central to this is the provision of digital awareness, skills training and support through a number of our Added Value services, thus reducing social isolation and increasing independence, economic security and inclusion, and emotional wellbeing in our service users.

Our 'ICT for All' service frequently supports service users who are engaged in our Employment Service, familiarising those of working age with accessible, assistive technology to allow them to undertake job searches and complete application forms.

We have also found that smart speakers have proved both easily accessible and popular with older people who see their smart speaker as a new "friend" to chat to as well as answering questions, making phone calls, and playing music and radio.

"I find it difficult to put into words the benefit that my wife derived from your visits. The device your worker installed is allowing my wife to read letters which previously I would have had to read to her and to read magazine articles I would have told her about. His suggestions for the computer have made it easier for her to order **groceries and bus tickets and generally keep in touch with the world, for herself."**

3. The five challenges

3.1 Motivation

What's the problem?

The journey to digital inclusion has to start with motivation.
An individual has to want to be online, and this won't be the case
for everyone. Digital should always be a choice, and for some people
it's a case of not knowing what we don't know or what being online can offer. For others, it
can be a choice not to engage because of fears of being online. The most common reasons
for not using the internet in 2022 were a lack of interest and concerns about privacy and
security.[2] This tells us that there are two sides to motivation:

- understanding the benefits of being online; and
- addressing specific barriers around internet use.

While there are many people who would like to go online, but don't have the confidence or
ability, we must acknowledge that some people may never want to use technology or the
internet. They might be unknowingly online through various messaging, news or banking
apps. These people are primarily in the 65+ age group. Experience shows that many of the
people in this group can be motivated to get online when they find the right activity that
piques their interest. For some, the internet has opened up new experiences and
significantly improved their quality of life. The key for this unmotivated group is finding the
right individual 'hooks' to show them that the internet and technology can enhance their day-
to-day lives.

With a focus on the digitisation of public services, it can be difficult to inspire people who are
digitally disengaged. The discourse around digital inclusion has shifted from 'finding the
hook' - understanding the person and their individual motivations to use the internet – to
removing the element of choice, fun and enjoyment. Refocusing our intention for why people
should be online in a way that encourages, supports and motivates them is key to success.
Reminding people that the internet can be an environment of fun and discovery is crucial.

However, the thought of being online can be daunting for many people. We regularly hear
stories of people being scammed, having their identities stolen or being subject to online
harassment and abuse. There are risks to being online, and for some people, these risks will
be more pronounced than others. These barriers will remain in place for this group of people
unless they can be supported how to identify and manage risk of harm online.

We also need to understand and appreciate that mindset can change, and the motivation to
be online can be lost. A loss of trust in digital spaces, services or systems can negatively
impact on someone's decision to remain online.

What does good look like?

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[2] Consumer Digital Index, 2022 (Lloyds Bank)
https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking_with_us/whats-happening/221103-lloyds-consumer-digital-index-2022-report.pdf

> **People being supported to build the confidence and motivation to safely engage digitally through trusted relationships in a way that is meaningful to them, understanding the value of technology and understanding their rights around data and privacy.**

Those who believe the internet is neither interesting nor useful need to be convinced of the opportunities that it offers them. Work with these groups indicates this process happens through 1-to-1 conversations with people they trust and have a relationship with, rather than 'computer experts'. Therefore, a key measure of the success of digital inclusion initiatives is the extent to which it enhances someone's life.

Research has shown there is no 'magic formula' or model for engaging with people. Understanding people's motivation to learn something new is critical and this requires a unique approach to each individual.

Support by someone a learner knows, in a way that adds value to their lives, hobbies or interests, is effective in building skills and confidence. Practice has identified that embedding this element of digital inclusion in an activity which someone already participates in is much more successful than targeting people to attend a new service or organisation. The phrase 'trusted faces in local places' was coined by dot.everyone to articulate the relational value of this concept.

Device lending libraries and device loan schemes can play a vital role in helping someone build their motivation to be online. Stirling Council Libraries are one example of such a scheme.

Beyond individual motivation, there is also the issue of overcoming specific barriers in relation to data privacy and security. This can be partly addressed through embedding online safety messaging in digital upskilling activity. However, there is a broader need for digital services to be more transparent about any data privacy implications, in accessible and plain English terms. Data privacy can be complex to understand, even for those in roles supporting people to get online.

Across all sectors, we can do more to reduce barriers and help people understand the benefits of being online. This requires a commitment at an organisational level to understand the benefits of being digitally included for the communities we serve, alongside our own services, and to take action to promote these benefits.

What needs to happen?

Action 1

All organisations working with people who are likely to be digitally excluded should encourage and empower staff and volunteers to support people to get online confidently and safely.

Case study

Case study: CLASP Digital

"CLASP - a local charity in North Ayrshire, runs a project for over 50s called HOPE in the Community, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. Alongside our vision of increased health and wellbeing and reduced social isolation, HOPE aims to get more older people online so that they can help themselves stay safe online, stay in touch with family, friends and their communities, and make informed choices on matters that affect them.

One of the ways we do this is by using people's hobbies and interests, using this hook to make learning online fun, interesting, and relevant to them. We work with the local libraries to promote fantastic free resources available to everyone with a library card – showing people how to download books and audiobooks from BorrowBox and how to access 2,600 English-language newspapers and magazines from across the world using PressReader. We offer presentations to groups on how they can use websites and apps to develop their creative knowledge and skills for example using a StitchFiddle website to design your own crochet/knitting, needlecraft, and craft picture designs, or how to access a forum of like-minded crafters to ask questions and share advice on how to use your woodturning tools better. We all know how YouTube can help us fix just about anything also."

3.2 The right device

What's the problem?

Cost

Purchasing a device can have a significant cost implication, especially for individuals and families on a low income or living in poverty. The investment in a device cannot be seen as a one-off cost. Devices can be easily broken, lost, or even sold to cover other financial burdens. We must not forget that devices have a shelf-life and become obsolete when they no longer support the newest operating system (OS), impacting app updates and security patches. In addition to ending OS support, some older devices that are not 4G or 5G enabled will be impacted by the 3G switch-off (as set out in the Affordable Connectivity challenge).

Tasks

Different devices lend themselves to different tasks, and this is based on individual need. One in five people access the internet only using a smartphone[3], they are not particularly

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[3] Ofcom Media Use 2023 p. 26
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/255844/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023.pdf

suitable for some tasks (e.g. creating a CV, completing a job application form or Universal Credit journal). Therefore, access to another type of device – commonly with a physical keyboard - is critical to enable people to fully engage in the digital world.

Through Connecting Scotland research, evidence emerged highlighting the challenges of smartphone-only households, the difficulty to complete many tasks online, and families with one laptop or PC struggling to share between multiple children, making it difficult for them to complete schoolwork.

Barriers to access

Local public access internet points, such as libraries and community centres, play an important role in addressing these issues. However, local facilities are not always available within walking distance in some of our most deprived or rural communities. Travel may be beyond the budget of many people on low incomes.

Additionally, limits on computer time per user, restricted opening hours, lack of privacy and lack of appropriate support in local access points have all been shown to act as barriers to people being able to fully benefit from being online. Flexibility on how such hubs function would enable greater engagement with digital.

Disabilities

People with disabilities have traditionally had lower levels of internet use when compared to those who don't, although the gap has narrowed over the past few years. Improvements in accessibility features, assistive technology and reduced costs have enabled more people with disabilities to go online. However, people with disabilities are more likely to face other forms of social exclusion, and therefore encounter similar barriers to others on low incomes.

e-Waste

Our use of technology comes at a cost to the environment. According to the [Global E-waste Monitor 2020](#), 53.6 million metric tonnes (Mt) of electronic waste was generated worldwide in 2019, and this will reach 74 million Mt by 2030. E-waste is the world's fastest-growing domestic waste stream. This is driven by increasing demand for electric and electronic equipment, short device life cycles, and few options for repair. Only 17.4 per cent of 2019's e-waste was collected and recycled.

What does good look like?

> **Investment in the organisations and places that can provide access to the right device at the right time, depending on people's needs and circumstances. There should also be consideration of the environmental cost in promoting digital inclusion.**

Our digital inclusion infrastructure needs to provide options for people to access suitable devices to meet their needs. This must include temporary measures to help motivate someone to be online or to provide a safety net at a time of crisis, affordable options for those that can make some form of financial contribution, and longer term solutions for people living in poverty who are unable to afford their own devices.

To be fully digitally included, people need access to the right device for different tasks. While many digital services are designed to work well on smartphones, some important activities, such as applying for jobs or participating in formal education, require a laptop or device with a physical keyboard.

We know from the experience of delivering Connecting Scotland that gifting devices to individuals and families on low incomes during the pandemic was an essential lifeline. We also know that this was a unique situation. Resourcing available during the pandemic would never be sustainable and gifting devices at scale is not a long-term approach for the public purse.

Some people will need private access to a device for prolonged periods of time and as such a gifting model may be the most appropriate option. The type of device would be based on individual need. For example, the Digital Lifelines Scotland programme has supported people who are at risk of harm from using drugs with access to devices, connectivity and skills support. The organisations delivering in this programme support people in three priority settings: transition from prison, discharge from hospital or residential care, and in a homelessness setting. The gifting model here is indispensable as the device (usually a smartphone) is an essential lifeline that may be need at any point of the day.

Lending libraries offer an opportunity to help someone with their motivation to be digitally included alongside providing short term support for those who need it. A loan of a device, usually for up to 6 months, can support someone who needs daily access to their own device but has encountered a short-term problem e.g. loss of employment or a broken device. Lending libraries are not without challenges as there are factors to consider around data privacy and device cleansing after every loan. As such there needs to be a universal standard to support organisations and offer reassurance to people accessing this support.

Public access points can provide essential access for those who don't need regular access but still wish to benefit from the digital world. This could be particularly for someone who could reduce travel time and expenses by attending health consultations via NearMe in community hubs.

Across Scotland there are countless voluntary sector organisations doing amazing work to tackle digital exclusion, including distributing devices to those who need them. However, this is not without challenge. Device procurement can be a complex process, and there can be difficulties around supply issues and distribution processes. A streamlined process to support these organisations, with preferential pricing, would help improve the efficacy of device distribution.

The shelf-life of devices also raises questions around the environmental impact of digital inclusion and the level of e-waste being generated. There are numerous organisations operating across Scotland promoting device refurbishment and repair. These organisations can provide high-quality devices at significantly reduced prices and are often gifted to those in most need. However, these organisations are typically under-resourced. This presents an opportunity to invest in building the capacity of a network of device refurbishment organisations to build a supply chain of refurbished devices and reduce the level of e-waste.

The public and private sector can also play an important role in supporting device refurbishment, through the donation of old devices.

What needs to happen?

Actions 2-5

Libraries and other relevant organisations, including housing associations, in local communities should continue to provide public access to computers as a safety net for those without suitable devices.

Organisations should consider establishing technology lending libraries for short-term use, where they would be beneficial for the people they support.

Organisations should donate devices to technology reuse projects which should be supported to provide quality refurbished devices, reducing costs for individuals and minimising electronic waste.

Programmes to provide free devices to the most vulnerable should be established where there is a clear case to be made for significant improvement to people's lives and outcomes related to health, education and employment.

Case study

Case study: North West Glasgow Voluntary Sector Network

"North West Glasgow Voluntary Sector Network, is a support organisation that offers advocacy, training, advice and networking to charities and community groups in the North West of Glasgow. During lockdown, member organisations came to us saying that they were moving most of their support services online but discovered many of the people they serve didn't have devices and/or internet access. They had previously relied on libraries and community services get access to devices and internet, but they were closed. We did some research and found out the extent of digital exclusion and that it wasn't caused by lockdown but had been exacerbated by it. I started the refurbishment project to meet the need and then discovered so much equipment that could be used is in landfill.

Since May 2020, we given out over 1000 devices. We take donations of laptops, phones, tablets and PCs, digitally wipe them, put on a free operating system and office package, PAT test for electrical safety, then give them to those who are digitally excluded in the community. We have a referral process where member organisations or friends of the network refer those they work with that are digitally excluded: these referral agencies come from thirdsector, health professionals, education staff, employability staff.... We offer a device package with a PC, laptop, tablet or phone, at least 6 months internet access and a 'How to guide'. Referrers are then responsible for setting up the device with the recipient and after care."

3.3 Affordable connectivity

What's the problem?

Alongside a device, people need access to an internet connection to be able to fully utilise it.

There are a range of connectivity options, from full-fibre superfast broadband to pay-as-you-go mobile data sims. Each of these needs to be understood alongside individual needs and circumstances, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. In an ideal world everyone has access to unlimited data at home, but there are economic barriers at both the individual level and at a government level to facilitate this.

Affordability and data poverty

Recent research by NESTA into data poverty in Scotland found that one in seven adults are experiencing data poverty and are struggling to afford sufficient, private, and secure access to the internet. In addition, one-in-ten people with monthly mobile contracts regularly run out of data before the end of the month.

Data poverty has been defined as the situation where individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private, and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs. The Data Poverty Lab defines essential needs as a continuum rather than an absolute.

Those on the lowest incomes are, unsurprisingly, the most likely to face data poverty and be unable to connect to the internet. Over the past few years, more telecoms providers have started offering 'social tariffs;' providing low-cost connections to those on benefits such as Universal Credit. Following our call for affordable tariffs in 2018, BT, who are under statutory obligation to provide a social tariff, have improved their offer, upping the speed of the connection, raising the visibility of the tariff and, crucially, removing the monthly usage cap. Other telecoms providers have also started to offer voluntary social tariffs.

Social tariffs are not the most widely marketed tariffs and even with improvements there is still low awareness, never mind uptake, which is currently at 5.1% of eligible households. The low uptake of social tariffs is perhaps unsurprising given the evidence around financial literacy compounding data poverty. Most social tariffs require a credit check which can be a detrimental factor for many of those eligible, preventing access. This is an area which is ripe for further action and influence.

Perhaps the most jarring problem is that essential public services are not free at the point of access. For someone on a tariff with a data cap, connectivity is a resource that must be rationed. This means that any decision to use a public service online has a cost implication, which can impact and limit the ability of that person to do other essential tasks online. Consequently, essential public services now bear a financial cost for some people to access them.

Broadband infrastructure

There remains significant interest and investment in the issue of broadband infrastructure. However, the proportional use of the internet is similar across rural and urban areas. Undoubtedly there are challenges in terms of the speed and quality of internet connections in some rural communities. Additionally, some places in Scotland have no adequate fixed-line broadband and must rely on expensive, and sometimes compromised, alternatives such as satellite internet.

The Scottish Government has committed to achieving 100% superfast broadband coverage across Scotland and is delivering this through the R100 programme. There are also voucher schemes to support people who may never be able to access fixed-line superfast broadband. However, given the technical nature of these schemes and solutions, access to support is likely to be complex and expensive, and sometimes impenetrable for those with low digital skills.

Mobile connectivity

Those that cannot afford or who lack the infrastructure to connect via home broadband will be reliant on mobile connectivity. This can often be more expensive, especially for pay-as-you-go connections. Remote and rural communities are more likely to struggle to get a reliable and sufficient mobile connection. The Scottish Government's 4G Infill Programme is seeking to address mobile 'not-spots'.

The 3G network will start to switch off in 2024. This will impact on those who rely on the 3G network for connectivity, or do not have a 4G or 5G enabled device. The 2G network will remain in place until at least 2033, but this network only enables voice calls and message, not data. This is likely to affect many people who still rely on the 3G network or who still have older devices.

What does good look like?

> **A partnership approach which recognises that the financial burden of internet access is crucial in supporting people experiencing data poverty. Social landlords and telecom providers in particular should examine their policies and practices to make connectivity easier, cheaper and fairer.**

The ability to access uncapped data at home at an affordable price is crucial to addressing the issue of data poverty. With lower levels of financial literacy and poor uptake of social tariffs, there needs to be a greater emphasis on enabling digitally excluded people to access the lowest cost connections available to them.

Additionally, a high proportion of those who are digitally excluded live in social housing and therefore housing associations are a crucial partner in addressing this challenge. One specific area of action centres around how all housing associations can provide low cost internet access to tenants, building on the success of a number of pilot programmes in Scotland.

Access outside the home, with mobile devices, also remains important – not least for those unable to afford a home connection. Public Wi-Fi remains a crucial lifeline for people facing data poverty, and future investment needs to be targeted at providing this infrastructure in communities facing higher levels of deprivation.

There remains a need for long term data gifting schemes to support those experiencing sustained digital exclusion. Such schemes are an essential lifeline for individuals and families living in poverty.

What needs to happen?

Actions 6-11 ▶

Housing associations and residential accommodation should consider ways they can provide free or very low-cost internet access for their tenants.

Telecoms providers, regulators, government and front-line organisations should explore barriers to the uptake of social tariffs and identify actions to maximise savings for eligible households. There should also be an exploration of how connectivity can become considered as an 'essential utility', with protection for vulnerable customers, reducing risks related to upselling and minimising credit check requirements.

Public, private and voluntary organisations should continue to provide free Wi-Fi wherever possible as a crucial lifeline. Investment in free Wi-Fi should be targeted at areas with levels of high deprivation.

Charities should consider accessing the Good Things Foundation's National Data Bank, for free short-term mobile connectivity for the people they work with.

Organisations working in rural areas should have simple, clear guidance on what alternative connectivity options there are in areas of poor fixed-line and mobile internet coverage. This should include how to support people to access Government broadband voucher schemes.

Device gifting programmes should include the option for free unlimited connectivity for those who need it.

Case study

Case study: Vodafone

Connectivity is essential, and everyone should have access to the opportunities it provides.

Through our everyone.connected campaign want to help 4 million people living in digital exclusion by the end of 2025. We have already connected 1.5million digitally thought out this program.

As part of this UK wide campaign, we introduced charities.connected. This allows charities to apply for free sims with 40 gigabytes of data for 6 months, plus unlimited calls and texts, to support their service users with digital inclusion programmes. We support existing support mechanisms like the National Databank, powered by Good Things Foundation. We've pledged 24m gigabytes of data, enough to connect 200,000 people for six months. We recognise that for many people, these lifelines are the only way they can get connected.

We've also committed to social tariffs for people on qualifying benefits. Our fixed-line broadband social tariff is now complemented by a mobile tariff through VOXI For Now. We have called on Openreach to make changes to help us help more families with better affordable broadband at home. Vodafone's new faster social broadband to help more families

Beyond our support for connectivity, we think improving digital skills is an essential component of our [everyone.connected](#) campaign. Our Digital Parenting portal and Digital Parenting Pro resource provides advice and support on making the right digital choices for your family, and through Hi Digital Vodafone UK Foundation is working with Independent Age to provide digital skills training to older people.

We are also helping Small Business's and Business Start Ups, with Digital Skills, where we help SME's and Start Ups to discover how to take the next step on your digital journey. V-Hub by Vodafone | SME Solutions | Vodafone UK is here to help with free expert guidance, a knowledge centre and a constantly evolving range of tools and training.

We launched with our 'Digital Inclusion Ambassador' celebrity Emma Willis, a Three part mini series "Disconnected" to help raise awareness of the challenges that come with Digital Exclusion. [Disconnected | Episode 1 | Emma Willis | Vodafone UK - YouTube](#)

To support the challenge on Rural Digital Derivation and help contextualise the correlation between lack of connectivity and deprivation, we tasked the WPI to produce a white Paper on behalf of Vodafone, that has generated a Digital Deprivation Index. We hope to see Government continue to support and help drive better Infrastructure in Rural Communities. Should the Vodafone and 3 merger be approved, we have committed to bring 5G to every School and Hospital in UK with £11billion investment, which would enable us to improve rural connectivity.

3.4 Skills and confidence

What's the problem?

Everyone needs the [foundation and essential digital skills](#) as a minimum to be able to use the internet confidently and safely. However, 15% of people lack foundation skills, and more than 1-in-4 lack essential digital skills.

Foundation and Essential digital skills are the activities that are felt to be the minimum level of knowledge and expertise that everyone needs to be able to live and work in the modern world. Foundation digital skills include activities such as having the confidence to switch on a new device, or switch on accessibility settings to make it easy to use. Essential digital skills cover activities that build on that and are outlined in the four quadrants of the diagram below, including how to carry out all activities in a safe, legal and confident way. These include how

to bank online, communicate with family and friends and carry out work related activities such as understanding, verifying and using results from a Google search.

Link to poverty and inequality

The profile of people who do not have essential digital skills is unsurprisingly similar to that of those who are offline. Older people, people with disabilities and people on low incomes are all more likely to lack essential digital skills.

When developing essential digital skills, more fundamental issues around literacy often arise and need to be addressed first.

Moving on from the pandemic

The pandemic was a period of intense digital upskilling, and the data reflects an improvement in people who have all of the foundation digital skills. However, as we move into a more mixed environment of online and offline activities, this may be likely to reduce without continued support. If we don't redouble our efforts to highlight the continuing value of maintaining their skills levels and equipping everyone with foundation and essential digital skills, it's unlikely they will be able to fully realise all the benefits and they will be exposed to greater risk related to online harms.

Digital natives?

We cannot only think in blanket ways about interacting within the internet. There are many digital divides for many different groups of people. For example, while young people are commonly described as 'digital natives', 3% still lack essential digital skills. A study of young people not in employment, education or training in Scotland showed that they spent upwards of 42 hours per week online, compared to an average of 24 hours across their peer group, yet struggled to derive major socio-economic benefit from their significant usage and remained disenfranchised in the realms of job searching, application and other associated activities.

What does good look like?

> **People are met where they are, with employers taking more responsibility for encouraging digital upskilling, and a better, more connected network of skills provision in our community.**

Access to support to develop foundation and essential digital skills is least available where it's needed most. Therefore, we must be mindful of where time and resources are allocated in building digital inclusion to ensure we reach those who need the most support.

An essential prerequisite to helping people build their digital skills and confidence is a digitally confident workforce. Currently across the UK, 59% of workers don't have all the digital skills they need. Organisations across all sectors can help narrow the digital skills gap by including digital skills training in the workplace, for the benefit of the wider workforce. This in-turn enables the workforce to support people accessing our services. Organisations should consider their approach to digital upskilling and ensure that this forms a core part of

staff development. Many organisations have benefited from workplace Digital Champions programmes.

The interventions required include online self-directed learning opportunities – these can work best for those that are currently digitally included and need to commit to continued digital skills development. For beginners, community-based support (those trusted faces in local places) can be best.

Evidence from Digital Participation Charter Fund and other projects to build foundation and essential digital skills has shown that people learn best from:

- Short bursts of repeated activity
- Over a prolonged period of time
- In an informal setting
- Face-to-face
- On a one-to-one basis or in small groups
- Situated in the wider context of the learner's life

The provision of such support can be patchy across our communities, often making it difficult for people to find opportunities local to them. Initiatives like the National Digital Inclusion Network from Good Things Foundation are helpful for finding such opportunities. Scotland needs a well-resourced network of digital upskilling opportunities in local communities, that people know how and where to access.

What needs to happen?

Actions 12-15 ▶

All employers should take responsibility for assessing and understanding employee digital skills and building a digitally confident workforce.

Organisations tackling poverty and inequality should include digital skills assessment and support as part of their work.

Face-to-face digital skills support based in local communities (for example, in libraries) should be maintained and promoted.

Organisations should use the range of existing online digital skills support available (for example, Learn My Way) rather than developing new resources.

Case study

Case study: Carr Gomm

Carr Gomm is a social care and community development charity, providing person-centred support to over 4,000 people each year to live their best possible lives. The online shift of vital services and community connections during the pandemic

highlighted the need for digital inclusion to be recognised as a fundamental human right, and an essential component of high-quality social care support. As a result, we launched our Digital Inclusion Research Project (DIRP) in 2021 to learn more about the digital needs of people we support – and staff – to ensure everyone has the opportunity get online in a safe and meaningful way.

Using action research methods, DIRP collaborates with frontline Carr Gomm services to develop bespoke approaches to digital inclusion support. Each team is supported by dedicated Digital Ambassadors; upskilled Support Practitioners with a passion and motivation for sharing their digital skills with people we support and their wider teams.

Over the past two years, our services have explored digital in various ways, including:

- Supporting people at risk of homelessness to continue their education online
- Upskilling people to host online social events, like sing-alongs and cooking nights
- Empowering people to take their hobbies and interests to the next level (e.g., learning how to DJ professionally)

Our existing, trusting relationships have served as a crucial foundation for people we support to build their digital motivation, confidence, and self-belief. We are already in the lives of thousands of people at risk of digital exclusion each day; and that is how we achieve long-lasting impact.

3.5 Inclusive design

What's the problem?

The 2022 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index highlights that half a million people are 'offline' in the UK and 58% say it's because they 'think the internet is too complicated to use.'

So much literature on digital inclusion focuses on the individual who is digitally excluded with skills, devices and connectivity as the keys to unlocking the digital world. What is often overlooked is the need for services to be designed and developed to make sure that they are easy to use and accessible to all.

Someone who is digitally excluded needs to understand how being connected is of interest or benefit to them, as well as have a device that is suitable for the things that they want to do. They also need affordable and reliable connectivity so that they can connect to the internet, and the skills and confidence to do things for themselves.

However, everything a person does online is facilitated through an app or a website, which has been designed by the providers of these goods or services. If these apps or websites are too complicated to use then the previous steps taken to include someone will be in vain. That individual has not realised the potential of the online world because barriers remain. Consequently, the benefits to the service provider have also not been realised.

This also relates to a shift in power and responsibility. Traditional models of digital inclusion rely heavily on individual journeys to reach these platforms, despite the benefit being

mutually inclusive to both the individual and the service. Those who provide digital services and platforms (primarily the private and public sectors) now need to assume their share of responsibility for the digital inclusion journey. This means that these services can play a role in helping individuals reach the other pillars of digital inclusion, alleviating some of the pressure on the voluntary sector.

What does good look like?

> **Digital inclusion is recognised as everyone's responsibility, and those providing a digital service play their role to make it easier for people to use them.**

Anyone providing a digital service has a role to play in digital inclusion. This doesn't mean that every service must contribute to all the pillars of digital inclusion, but they should all be considered in the design process. This can cover everything from a big tech company launching a new app, to a small community organisation starting a new online group. Within the design of these new services, and those that are already running, we need to think about how those that could be digitally excluded might be able to use them.

We have developed a framework for helping organisations across all sectors to think about how they can embed digital inclusion and assume their share of this collective responsibility. Across four key areas, organisations should consider:

- **Understanding:** having appropriate knowledge about digital exclusion, including the different barriers and solutions, and knowing how to develop support that works. This includes understanding the needs of the people accessing digital services, their barriers, and how to begin developing solutions to support them. This extends to understanding the digital skills of the workforce.

- **Approach:** how organisations tackle digital exclusion. This would include having a clear business case or strategy, supported by an action plan. The approach should seek to include support to upskill the workforce, as well as having mechanisms in place to measure and review the impact. Any approach should locate digital as a choice, with other channels available.

- **Resource:** the financial, physical, and human assets that are made available to support their approach to digital inclusion work within the organisation or community. This can include in-kind or financial support, with a focus on supporting people to develop their digital skills, and a knowledge of other resources that can be used to provide support.

- **Partnership and collaboration:** the capacity and willingness of organisations to work together in a way that is meaningful and genuine. This is underpinned by actively engaging in internal and external partnerships, that collaboration with other agencies and services. Organisations share their learning and insights for the benefits of others.

What needs to happen?

Action 16

Organisations providing digital services must assume responsibility for their part of the digital inclusion journey, including:

- Understanding the impact of the service for those who might be digitally excluded.

- Taking a proactive approach to minimising any negative impact – whether providing straightforward access to a non-digital channel or resourcing individual support for those who are excluded.

- Working in partnership with organisations that know and understand the people most likely to be affected.

Case study

Case study: Scottish Government, Technology Enabled Care – Digital Inclusion programme

Digital Inclusion is a foundation across Digital Health and Care and is critical to the design and development of digital services, resources and wider digital transformation across health and social care. The Digital Inclusion programme formally launched in March 2023 with a focus on mental health and housing. The programme aims to identify model(s) of best practice digital inclusion in mental health and in housing and contribute learning towards wider embedding of digital inclusion practices across wider health and care services and supports.

Led by Digital Health and Care, in partnership with SCVO and Connecting Scotland, the programme has established a framework for digital inclusion in health and social care (Digital Inclusion: Digital Pillars | TEC Scotland) and is enabling testing and implementation of digital inclusion across different areas of mental health and housing in Scotland through funded projects (Digital Pioneers | TEC Scotland).

In addition to supporting people to be digitally included, the programme is also focusing on building capacity for digital inclusion across the workforce through the co-design of digital champion training tailored to mental health and to housing, and also by supporting the co-production of a digital inclusion practice guide to support frontline staff working across different areas of the health and social care system.

4. The three underpinning enablers

4.1 Policy

We all need to make the case for a digital inclusion infrastructure and secure buy-in across the private, public and voluntary sector.

It is not unrealistic to imagine a future when the majority, if not all, government policy interventions are delivered primarily on a digital first basis. Work needs to accelerate embedding inclusive design that develops digital inclusion. Activity is underway in pockets of government policy, such as in the Digital Health and Care directorate[4]. This needs to be rolled out consistently across all policy areas. The development of a framework and assessment tool to support new policy initiatives should be prioritised. Such a framework would explore how new digital services or policy interventions support the development of digital inclusion and a transition from 'assisted digital' support via face-to-face interactions or telephone, for example, through to digital inclusion. It should also be used in the iterative review and refresh of established interventions.

We need to see a similar commitment from the private sector, especially those businesses that are closing high street units, levying financial penalties for non-digital engagement, or providing part of the essential digital inclusion infrastructure e.g. devices and connectivity. There has been progress in this space, such as Vodafone's Charities Connected campaign, but there is still some distance to travel.

In the voluntary sector there is already a high level of activity to tackle digital exclusion, where organisations are closest to those at risk of exclusion. However, commitment isn't universal or fully embedded at an organisational level. Those working in frontline roles that can have the biggest impact need senior management support and buy-in to embed digital inclusion activity.

Case study: Digital Lifelines Scotland

Scotland has an unacceptably high number of drug-related deaths. Addressing this and exploring ways of preventing fatal overdose amongst those at the highest risk is a national priority. Lack of opportunity to connect to families, friends and support services, is a particular issue amongst people who use drugs and have multiple and complex needs. The Covid-19 pandemic showed the potential of using digital means to maintain support, contact and connection.

Digital Lifelines Scotland seeks to improve digital inclusion and to design digital solutions that better meet people's needs, to improve the health outcomes for people who use drugs, reducing the risk of harm and death. Specifically, the programme aims to ensure that:

- People have greater access to the confidence, skills, and motivation alongside devices and connectivity that form digital solutions that keep them safe and that

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[4] For example, the Digital Lifelines Scotland programme and the Digital Inclusion programme.

enable them to become and remain connected to family, friends and relevant services that support them.
- The services that support these people have the digital means to develop and strengthen the support they provide, and staff that are skilful in using and developing digital solutions to enable those they support.
- The sector is connected and collaborating, developing joined-up services and exploring digital solutions together.

The programme is joint funded by Digital Health and Care Directorate, Drugs Policy Division, and the Drug Deaths Taskforce. The programme partners bring expertise and networks that support creative solutions, understanding of effective practice and opportunities to accelerate development and roll out of new approaches. Delivery partners include Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre (DHI), SCVO, and Simon Community Scotland.

4.2 Partnership

We can only create an effective digital inclusion infrastructure through co-ordinating our efforts and making the right contributions in the right places.

We acknowledge an appetite for a more 'place-based' approach to digital inclusion in Scotland. This has been enabled to some extent through Connecting Scotland, and there is opportunity to build on this. At a local authority level, organisations from both the public and voluntary sector are more connected and embarking on a more coordinated approach to addressing digital inequality. This should include clear and consistent local pathways to address digital exclusion, with clear messaging and awareness illuminating these pathways. A placed-based approach can build on this localised approach, harnessing community assets and working collectively to address emerging need. On an infrastructure level, whilst the ideal is a 1-2-1 home connection, place-based approaches can identify the most appropriate places for one-to-many connections and galvanise the other elements of digital inclusion around these.

A nuanced understanding of individual, local and community barriers acknowledging a far broader scope of issues than might initially be apparent is required if interventions are to be successful. This can help provide local networks to support people and also support emerging issues around trust. The theme of trust and fear of digital has been raised by multiple stakeholders as the primary barrier for inclusion. At a local level the opportunities for cross-sector collaboration have been identified as a means of overcoming some of these trust barriers.

There is also appetite for creating new structures and networks to enable collaboration within communities and share resources. This could include supporting organisations to better identify community assets and partnership opportunities to build capacity to provide digital skills support.

Case study: Renfrewshire

By understanding the important of a person centric, grass roots approach, promoting and encouraging multi-partnership working, taking the time to understand the local systems and issues and identifying local assets. Renfrewshire has emerged as a leader in place-based digital inclusion and a success story for others to copy. Substantive discussion about the problems, but more importantly the assets that could make change happen have been key to understanding the local landscape and developing solutions.

Building on the success of the "taking a place-based approach to digital inclusion" pilot, Renfrewshire's approach to digital inclusion continues to grow from strength to strength. This has been achieved through collaborative leadership and effective partnership working between the Council, third / community / voluntary and industry sectors.

The two main vehicles delivering Digital Inclusion in Renfrewshire are:

Renfrewshire's #DigiRen Network
Jointly chaired by Engage Renfrewshire (TSI) and Renfrewshire Council, #DigiRen is a collaboration space for partners and organisations to share information and best practice on digital inclusion and learning, supporting and helping grow both the Network and its members.

Citizens Voice Forum
Established in 2021, Citizens Voice Forum is led by Renfrewshire Council, in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), and is co-designing the following digital inclusion solutions with partners to deliver outcomes:

- Recruit a Digital Champions Coordinator and build a network of digital champions;
- Develop and implement DigiZones (enabling citizens to get online through device access, internet access, digital skills support or signposting); and
- Explore the creation of a device recycling organisation – linked to employability opportunities.

The key ingredients (5C's) for "*Building a Digitally Inclusive Renfrewshire*" are:

- Connect – with existing partners and continue to identity new opportunities;
- Collaborate – using a range of offline / online methods to maximise impact;
- Co-Design – digital inclusion solutions by working together, involving those with lived experience from the outset;
- Communicate – the range of resources and supports available using a range of methods, ensuring no-one is left behind;
- Celebrate – our collective successes and achievements and demonstrate impact in Renfrewshire through qualitative and quantitative data.

4.3 Resources

We need to resource a digital inclusion infrastructure through a commitment to public spending, in-kind support, and contributions from the private sector.

There are several mechanisms that can be used to influence the digital inclusion landscape. The change we want to achieve determines which organisations are best placed to influence relevant stakeholders. It is critical that we identify the key stakeholders and levers that can accelerate sustainable digital inclusion alongside the right influencer to maximise impact.

It is important to acknowledge that funding and capacity is often a challenge for organisations tackling poverty and inequality, and long-term solutions must explore how to support these organisations to fulfil their role effectively as well as embedding digital support.

Despite a range of funding programmes to support digital inclusion a few years ago and more recently during the pandemic this is being promoted less and less. There are very few, if any, funding opportunities specifically for digital inclusion. This does not mean that the ability to include this type of activity has disappeared. It could be seen as a success of the knowledge that an embedded model to digital inclusion is most effective. When organisations are designing and developing projects and reviewing and refreshing activities to apply for funding, digital inclusion activity should be embedded and costed as part of this. Funders should understand that digital inclusion activity is a fair and needed element of many projects that are not outwardly labelled as 'Digital Inclusion'.

Many organisations across all sectors are developing tools and resources to support this digital inclusion movement across the UK and beyond. Different methods of learning chime with different people and having options and choice is important in supporting people on their digital inclusion journey. Often there is a focus, particularly from corporates, on England where there is a greater population. The structure of digital inclusion support systems within Scotland means that there is a greater chance to integrate the corporate social responsibility offers into these support systems.

Resourcing can look different depending on the organisation. It is important that organisations make the right contributions in the right place. No organisation bears the responsibility for the entirety of a person's digital inclusion journey, but playing to our strengths we can all contribute to a connected and collaborative digital inclusion infrastructure.

Case study: Cellnex

Cellnex UK is the country's largest independent owner and operator of wireless telecoms infrastructure. Every day, we help connect a growing and evolving digital society in Scotland, enabling socio-economic growth, business productivity and more sustainable communities.

However, digital poverty is an ever-growing issue, disproportionally impacting the most vulnerable groups in our society, already affected by other hardships such as the current cost of living.

As essential services such as education, healthcare, public facilities and financial assistance become increasingly digitised, there are still groups of people who either lack the skills or the facilities to get online. If we don't take action, we risk excluding marginalised groups even more from the fundamental resources they need to live and thrive in Scotland.

Tackling the problem on a national scale requires collaboration between the government, technology industry and educational bodies, together with the support of charitable organisations. Working together, we can find long-term, sustainable solutions that end digital poverty.

Cellnex UK's partnership with the SCVO is an important step in reducing digital inequality in Scotland. Alongside our financial support of the Digital Participation Charter Fund and our school volunteering initiative, we believe we are in a strong position to make a real difference to the communities in Scotland who need it the most.

5. The way forward

As we've set out, digital exclusion is complex and multi-faced. The nature of exclusion will change over time, as technology changes at an ever increasing pace.

What we know now is that a significant minority of people are locked out of being online and unable to take part in things that most of us take for granted. Digital exclusion is often both a consequence of poverty and a major contributor to people being unable to escape its trap.

We also know that digital inclusion is not something that once achieved lasts forever; any one of us could fall into digital exclusion at different points in our lives.

The unfortunate reality is that digital exclusion cannot be eradicated without eradicating poverty. That is a much bigger and more complex challenge, but we strongly believe that every organisation that delivers services online - or has a desire to reduce inequality - has a responsibility to act to combat digital exclusion.

As a minimum, we must avoid making things worse for people who are already vulnerable. By doing more, digital inclusion can be the key to unlocking life changing opportunities.

However, there are no simple solutions or quick fixes. We need a response that provides the right support, at the right time and in the right place.

No single organisation can achieve this alone. We need everyone to make a commitment – big or small – to address the challenge.

This roadmap is a starting point. SCVO is committed to regaining the momentum to tackling digital exclusion in Scotland. We would love to see other organisations join us on the journey.

To help, our team can provide:

- Support to benchmark and grow the digital capabilities of your workforce
- An assessment of your organisation's digital inclusion maturity
- In-house sessions to help develop your approach to embedding digital inclusion
- Support to develop partnerships and new place-based approaches in your local community
- Expertise on designing for digital inclusion in policy interventions and service delivery

Get in touch to start helping us close Scotland's digital divide.

digital@scvo.scot

www.scvo.scot/digital

@digiscot

We're here to help

SCVO is committed to regaining the momentum to tackling digital exclusion in Scotland.

Building on over a decade of experience, our team are here to help.

Come to us for

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Get in touch and play your part in helping us close Scotland's digital divide.

✉ **digital@scvo.scot**
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