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Dear Anna,

Thank you for your letter of 23 May, highlighting the issue of digital exclusion and setting out the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' constructive feedback.

As the Minister responsible for digital inclusion, I am responding here on behalf of my colleague Ivan McKee MSP. There is deep appreciation across our Ministerial teams for your continued engagement and we recognise the vital role the third sector plays in supporting digitally excluded individuals and communities.

I acknowledge the concerns you have taken the time to raise in your letter, particularly regarding strategic direction and the development of the Digital Inclusion Alliance. SCVO's decision not to submit a grant funding proposal for 2025/26 is a significant one and I am disappointed that our joint work together in this space will as a result be unable to continue as it has previously. I note that senior officials have suggested several areas where future collaboration could arise.

The Scottish Government recognises digital exclusion as a significant and persistent barrier to equality, participation, and wellbeing. We are committed to strengthening our leadership and coordination across government to address digital exclusion. I understand that our progress has not met the expectations of the SCVO and we are taking steps to address this at pace. In the remainder of this letter, I will set out the steps we are taking.

We are currently refreshing Scotland's Digital Strategy, in close partnership with COSLA and the Local Government Digital Office. This refreshed strategy will act as the central framework for delivering digital priorities across central and local government. My colleague Ivan McKee MSP has been clear that the refreshed strategy must set out clear, measurable outcomes – allowing stakeholders to understand

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what will be done and when. The Strategy will take a federated approach, with a high-level vision that sets out our ambitions for digital across government, supported by more detailed delivery plans. The overarching vision is currently being developed and we expect to publish it in the summer. Following on from this, we will publish the supporting delivery plans, including a detailed plan on digital inclusion. This action plan will be in part shaped by, and will respond to, the findings of Audit Scotland's report and the views of stakeholders.

I acknowledge the concerns raised in your letter concerning the Digital Inclusion Alliance (DIA). The DIA is still in development and feedback from stakeholders, including SCVO, is pivotal to its design. Our intention is for the DIA to be a collaborative, cross-sectoral forum that coordinates action, shares expertise, and addresses the barriers faced by organisations delivering digital inclusion.

We recognise the vital role that SCVO and other third sector organisations have played in this space, particularly through Connecting Scotland. The DIA is not intended to duplicate or displace the important work already being carried out but rather to support and amplify it. The concept has been developed with input from COSLA, the Local Government Digital Office, and other strategic partners, and we are keen to ensure that third sector voices are meaningfully included in its continued design and direction from the outset.

I understand that you are seeking additional clarity around the DIA's structure and objectives. Governance is essential to enable confident and constructive engagement. The Scottish Government and COSLA teams continue to work to finalise these aspects at pace and further information will be shared shortly. In the meantime, I would welcome the opportunity for my officials to meet with you to discuss the DIA's development and ensure your concerns and insights are reflected in its future direction. If this would be helpful, please contact: connecting.scotland@gov.scot to arrange a meeting.

Finally, I want to reaffirm the Scottish Government's strong commitment to tackling digital exclusion in partnership with the third sector. Your experience and insight are invaluable, and we are determined to continue working collaboratively to build a more inclusive digital future for all communities in Scotland.

Thank you once again for your letter and for SCVO's continued engagement. Once the Scottish Government and COSLA have published its action plan setting out how we will respond to Audit Scotland's recommendations, a Ministerial meeting to discuss SCVO's role in this vital work would be greatly appreciated. In the meantime, my officials remain available to discuss any of the points raised.

Yours sincerely,



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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