

Item 7 - Appendix 1

Workshop discussion on Digital Inclusion

Some key challenges

Digital skills

- Basic literacy skills – The lack of basic digital skills is considered the central challenge in regards to digital inclusion because it means that individuals cannot access online content or often digitised public service. This puts them at increased risk of falling into poverty.
- Difficulties in accessing online government services which are often hard to navigate, with multiple passwords, logins and security checks required.
- The school system – Most children are required to complete their homework online. This creates a barrier for disadvantaged children who have no online access and thus further reduces their chances of succeeding.
- The assumption that children are digital natives and can navigate digital services easily is not always correct.
- Perception of a lack of IT apprenticeship opportunities - businesses are still fairly reluctant to offer these opportunities.
- Issues around the perceived value of vocational (digital) learning vs. formal education (e.g. computer science degree) and therefore the low take-up of vocational training.

Accessibility

- Some areas have an issue around accessing the internet due to a lack of digital infrastructure. This is particularly the case in our rural areas.
- Lack of access to appropriate devices - If individuals only have access to a smart phone rather than a PC, tablet or laptop, it can become hard for them to complete e.g. job applications or (in due course) Universal Credit applications.

Connectivity

- Issue around cost of access to data and devices can put many people in a situation where they have to choose between buying data or other essential items.

Possible solutions

- To complement current activities, mapping of community and voluntary sector organisations in the City Region which are doing work around digital inclusion to identify existing activities in regards to training, access to equipment, support to access online services, etc. This could further identify community hubs which could be repurposed to provide digital support. This should help us to identify any gaps but also identify opportunities to increase capacity.
- Establishing a working group to share best practice and learning across districts.

- Consider deliverables, such as tablet lending schemes, free Wi-Fi pilots, targeted support workshops (e.g. Tech Mums).
- Creating a pathway for learning and progressing around digital careers to ensure opportunities are available, e.g. identifying where disadvantaged young people with an interest in digital have limited digital apprenticeships available and doing something about that.
- Provision of free Wi-Fi in community areas, and schemes for accessing appropriate devices, with opportunity around new street lighting contracts.
- Build on the aspirations of the proposed LCR Digital Framework and develop a clear action plan for reducing digital exclusion. Use a Digital champion(s) to do this and associated communication campaign.
- Not imposing blanket solutions but asking communities and creating support and buy-in. This reframes the question to 'How can digital enable and improve your life?' rather than thinking about digital for digital's sake.
- Work through existing organisations and community groups to raise the capacity and capability of those to support local communities around digital.
- Exploring the role of libraries and other community spaces and how these can be re-purposed in order to reduce isolation, create meeting places and digital training opportunities. Targeting people to use the space through people they trust and can relate to.
- Use Channel 4 opportunity to raise aspirations for young people.

Some examples of good practice

- Libraries across the region providing online access. One example is 100% digital Leeds: Free tower block Wi-Fi trial; tablet lending scheme <https://digitalinclusionleeds.com/>
- Community hubs including: Studio 12 <http://www.studio12.org.uk/about/> and Digital lounge <http://www.ls14trust.org/digital-lounge.html>.
- Training and support programmes including: Get into Tech <http://getintotech.sky.com/>, Tech Mums <https://techmums.co/> and Exa Foundation <https://exa.foundation/>.