
Report to: Inclusive Growth and Public Policy Panel

Date: 4 December 2018

Subject: **Digital Inclusion**

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1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To set the context for digital inclusion, provide an overview of current activities and set out options for moving the agenda forwards across the City Region.

2. Information

Context

- 2.1 Digital inclusion was discussed at the Panel's workshop in November, a summary of which is included at **Appendix 1**. Being digitally capable can make a significant difference to individuals and organisations day to day. For individuals, this can mean cutting household bills, finding a job, or maintaining contact with distant friends and relatives. The internet also provides broader benefits, by helping to address wider social and economic issues like reducing isolation and supporting economic growth. The internet also provides improved job prospects as being digitally capable is critical in finding and securing a job or apply for benefits.
- 2.2 Digital inclusion, or rather, reducing digital exclusion, is about making sure that people have the capability to use the internet to do things that benefit them day to day.
- 2.3 There are four main challenges people face:
- **Access to (and understanding of)** the infrastructure (fixed broadband or 4G/Wi-Fi) and access to the right devices e.g. phone, laptop or tablet (most broadband connections require a long term contract, credit check and penalty charges for missed payments, which can be prohibitive for people on low incomes.)

- **Skills** – required to use and engage with content on the internet (literacy skills; basic digital skills and capabilities; confidence about doing something wrong; security)
- **Motivation** – people’s attitudes and choices for being offline (worries about doing something wrong; being online out of a specific need rather than maximising real benefits - financial, social, housing and wellbeing benefits)
- **Trust** – the fear of the risk of crime (identify theft; safety of personal information; understanding of standards online; trust about content and sites)

2.4 Based on research from the Good Things Foundation¹, 90% of people nationwide not using the internet are likely to be disadvantaged. This takes into account poor health and disability, social class and those who left school at 16 or under.

2.5 Local research shows that 6% of people in Yorkshire and Humber have zero digital skills, whilst 13% of the working population do not have basic digital skills. 19% of benefit claimants have low or no digital capability.

Leeds City Region Digital Framework

2.6 Digital Inclusion is a core strand of the new **Leeds City Region Digital Framework** which aims to transform the lives of citizens and businesses across the City Region by opening up opportunities through digital tech.

2.7 The consultation carried out to inform the Digital Framework showed that 95% of respondents strongly agreed with the framework’s inclusive ambition around ‘digital skills for all’:

‘Everyone needs to be digitally included. Not to be means you are severely disadvantaged and excluded. We must invest in delivering against an aspiration of 100% digital inclusion.’ Citizen comment

2.8 64% of respondents identified digital as being both a threat and an opportunity for people:

‘Mostly digital is an opportunity to improve services and lives of citizens - e.g. in public sector money saved by delivering services digitally can be spend on face-to-face interventions with those who need it. Also potential to connect isolated members of society - e.g. the elderly. However vulnerable members of society who are less digitally capable may need to build their skills so that they are not exploited online. There is also a threat to jobs which can be replaced by automation and digital services’ citizen comment

2.9 The framework clearly establishes a need for further investment and activity in addressing digital exclusion, building on existing work already underway.

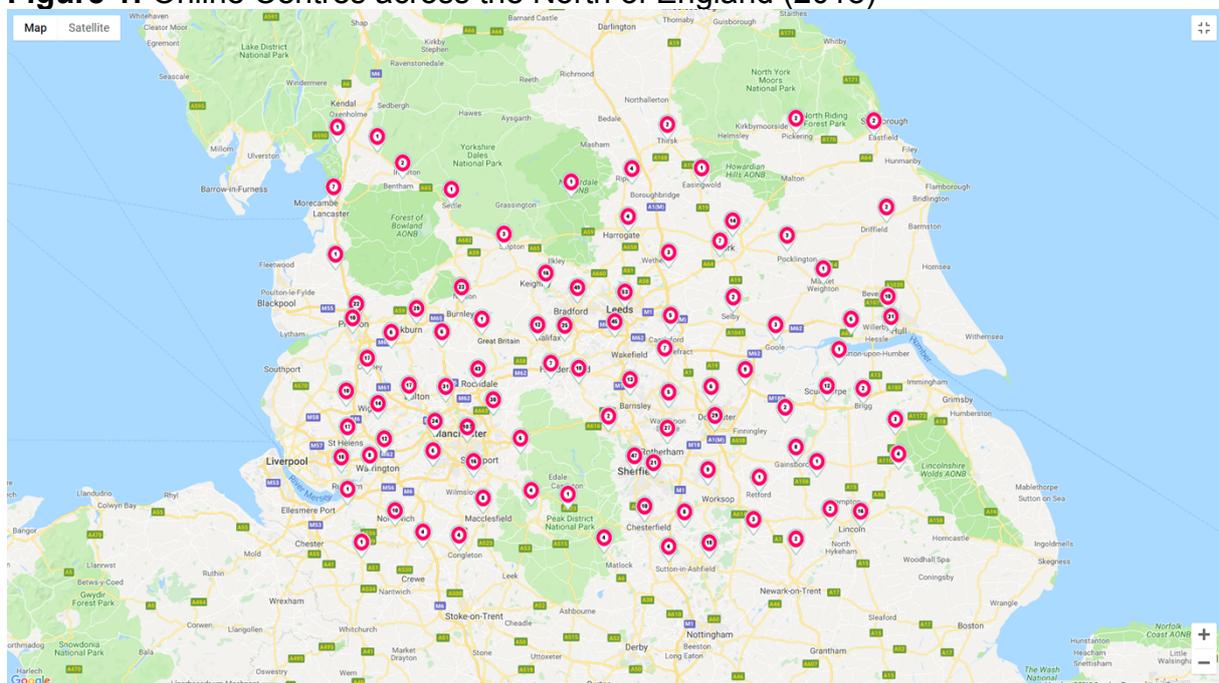
¹ Good Things Foundation, The Real Digital Divide 2017

Examples of digital inclusion activity in Leeds City Region

2.10 There is already existing activity to address digital exclusion in the City Region. A lot of this activity is not about formal classes and courses, it's about patient and empathetic exploration of people's interests and needs, and careful matching of content and services online which can meet those needs and stimulate those interests, which requires a grassroots effort.

- Brought together by Good Things Foundation, the Online Centres Network is made up of over 5,000 grassroots organisations across the UK, all working to tackle digital and social exclusion by providing people with the skills and confidence they need to access digital technology. The below map provides an overview of Online Centres across the North.

Figure 1: Online Centres across the North of England (2018)



Source: Online Centre Network, <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/ournetwork/find-centre#/map>

- **Leeds City Council and Good Things Foundation** are working together to create the 100% Digital Leeds movement, made up of organisations across the city who can support people to get to grips with digital. 100% Digital Leeds is part of the council's wider SMART LEEDS programme, created to identify and deliver new technologies and innovative solutions to help make Leeds the best city to live, work and visit and includes tablet lending and digital champions. The focus of this activity is a small core team reaching out to community grassroots organisations to build capacity within them to provide digital support – creating a movement.

As part of 100% Digital Leeds. **Leeds City Council** has partnered with wireless broadband provider 6G to offer the service to 160 flats at Grayson Crest in Kirkstall and Clyde Grange in Armley. The partnership is aimed at improving digital inclusion and bringing positive outcomes including financial

savings, reduced isolation, better employment prospects and improved health and wellbeing.

- **Leeds City Council** has also partnered with #techmums to take the mystery out of technology, including helping to reconnect with old friends via social media, chatting about online safety with children or finding out how to use technology to help at work. The first #techmums pilot took place in 2012, and it proved to be a huge success. Research found that not only was there a huge confidence boost in mums' ability to use technology, there was also a significant increase in their more general personal confidence. Alongside boosting mums' confidence, there was a marked difference observed in their children as well.
- Good Things Foundation is running a three-year programme - Widening Digital Participation - funded by NHS Digital. Widening Digital Participation aims to reduce digital exclusion in the UK, and ensure people have the skills they need to access relevant health information and health services online.

Building on existing activity across the City Region

2.11 There is an opportunity for the Panel to consider building on some of the existing local digital inclusion work taking place in Leeds City Region to ensure the benefits are seen across all parts of our region. The Panel may wish to consider progressing the following options which would not bear any financial implications as possible next steps:

- Secure senior level buy in and support, with a digital inclusion champion within each district.
- Establish a City Region Digital Inclusion working group to identify opportunities to share other good practice around the access and cost strands of digital inclusion, e.g. free Wi-Fi, equipment loaning, etc.
- Prioritise the initial focus on basic digital skills, motivation and trust.

2.12 Further options for the Panel to consider in the short and medium term which would require some financial input include:

- Undertake mapping of existing digital inclusion support across LCR (including through community sector organisations) mapped against the IMD and areas of most need to identify targeted geographical areas to intervene/support.
- Undertake analysis to understand the social and economic impact of intervention e.g. return on investment.

2.13 A larger scale and potentially wider impact option for the Panel to consider would require a longer term financial commitment is:

- Considering co-investment in a small core team whose core role is digital inclusion; providing outreach to build capacity across community organisations, joining up funding streams across individual councils (e.g.

housing, health, libraries) and ensuring digital inclusion is a high priority across the whole City Region (100% digital Leeds City Region – comprising of 100% digital Calderdale, 100% Digital Kirklees etc.).

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Financial implications will be worked up depending on which options the Panel wishes to pursue.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate staffing implications.

6. External Consultees

- 6.1 There are no implications directly arising from this report.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Panel discusses the opportunities around digital inclusion activity and provide a steer on the suggested direction of travel.

8. Background Documents

- 8.1 None

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Workshop report on digital inclusion