Fix the Digital Divide in Greater Manchester

Social Impact Report 2023

GREATER MANCHESTER
DOING DIGITAL DIFFERENTLY

Contents

Foreword

Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester

We live in a world where digital is a part of all our lives, whether we actively seek to go online or not. Digital tools and technologies continue to transform our public services, improve efficiencies and cost savings, especially at a time where the cost of living is widening divides and the ability of services to continue. In today's world, being online and having the skills and tools to do so means the ability to fully participate in society. Digital inclusion impacts your liveability.

In 2021, I announced an ambition for Greater Manchester to become one of the first city-regions in the world to equip all under-25s, over-75s and disabled people with the skills, connectivity, and technology to get online, and established a Digital Inclusion Action Network to lead targeted action. In three years, we have come so far in our vision to build standards so that every resident in Greater Manchester, whatever their age, location or situation can benefit from the opportunity digital brings.

As we plan to accelerate this impact, Greater Manchester steps into a new era for English devolution with greater control than ever before over the levers of economic prosperity, and the future is set to demonstrate levelling up in action. Local leaders will be empowered with the autonomy to invest in things that will have the greatest benefit locally, giving us more ability to improve the lives of people that live and work here. This trailblazing deal takes Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) ability to coordinate and respond to local needs to a new level, with policy areas previously untouched by English devolution.

Now is the time where Greater Manchester can lead the way in achieving an ambition for the UK and ensure each resident benefits from our success. But we need everyone to get involved.

Cllr Nick Peel
GMCA Lead for Digital

Despite having some of the most desirable places to work, live and visit in the UK, Greater Manchester still falls behind national averages on some measures, such as employment, healthy life expectancy and child poverty.

Levelling up is more than strengthening our towns and places, especially with a deeply divided society. To truly level up the UK, we must tackle the systemic problems, for those in our communities that face marginalisation, at a local level.

Strengthening places means strengthening communities, tackling inequalities and giving everyone a chance to live well and thrive. We are living in a time where digital transformation is accelerating at pace, digital services are becoming the default but we ensure our services continue to work for our most vulnerable residents.

If Greater Manchester is to be a place where everyone can live a good life, growing up, getting on and growing old in a greener, fairer more prosperous city region, we need to ensure our region works for everyone. We have made a big commitment to fix the digital and social divide - the consequences of not doing so are severe, with our people at risk of further social isolation and not being able to equally access opportunities. Poverty has many root causes and we must tackle them all.

Greater Manchester Strategy and Digital Blueprint

We want Greater Manchester to be a place where everyone can live good lives, grow up, get on and can thrive in a greener, fairer and more prosperous city-region. Our Greater Manchester Strategy is enabled by our Digital Blueprint, placing people and businesses at the heart of our regional ambitions with aims for more inclusive and sustainable outcomes, building on our region's greatest assets.

Our Digital Inclusion Agenda for Change is one of the underpinning priorities of our world-leading digital ambitions, where every resident has access to the essential skills, tools and support to benefit from the digital world and technology amplifies public service innovation in-hand with ensuring digital services are accessible to all.

The state of digital exclusion

The impact of the pandemic, plus a cost-of-living crisis means people today and having to manage challenging social and economic factors. For millions of people, these factors are made worse by the growing extent of the UK's digital and social divide. As many services go online digital exclusion, and the need to address it, has rapidly increased. A new layer of vulnerability has been highlighted with people and families unable to stay connected, access vital services and education, let alone participate in the digital world.

Digital marginalisation means a lack of basic skills and motivation, tools and access to get online. It is a range of inequality and faces our poorest, most vulnerable people impacting:

- Access to healthcare and health management
- Access to vital public services and advice
- Access to work, ability to continue learning and do homework
- Financial management and access to support

The digital divide is increasing health inequalities, social isolation and loneliness, particularly for groups such as older people, disabled people and those with health conditions.

Up to 1.2 million people

in GM are limited digital users or non-users

Around 32% of adults

experience some form of digital exclusion

Approx 228,500 adults

do not have consistent access to internet connectivity

1 in 8 people

do not feel confident in using digital services and tools[1]

3 in 5 people aged 75

are digitally excluded in some way

205,600 adults

do not have consistent and reliable access to digital devices[2]

2 in 5 disabled people

are digitally excluded in some way

77% of people

believe internet access is now an essential need[3]

41% of people aged 75+ and 27% of disabled people

report a lack of confidence in independently accessing online services

In the North West, around 30% of people are limited digital users, and a further 14% are non-users. While the estimates for limited digital users are lower than the rate nationally and compare favourably with areas like London (38%) and the South East (44%), the variation amongst residents is significant[4]. For example, limited users of digital services are five times more likely to be from low-income households and six times more likely to be over 65 compared to extensive users[5].

Non-users of digital services are two times more likely to have a disability or health condition, and 12 times more likely to be over 65 years old compared to extensive users[6]. There are many reasons why non-users do not use digital services. Around 20% of people claim it costs too much; 20% say it's too complicated; and 70% of non-users are not interested – the core issues of affordability, access, skills and confidence[7].

Affordability is a big issue. 2.5m UK households (7%-9%) struggle to afford fixed broadband services[8]. Without internet access, estimates suggest that people can pay up to 25% more for essential goods and services[9].

Around 11% of adults face affordability issues when accessing the internet; 41% of adults have seen an increase in the price of home broadband or mobile data plans between September and October 2023; 15% are cutting back on broadband or data plans. Nationally, around 1 million people have lost broadband access because of recent increases in the cost of living.

5% of households on Universal Credit are on a social tariff[10], 2.3 million young people rely on mobile data for internet access[11]; 27% low-income adults only go online by smartphone[12].

Access also remains key. 1 in 14 UK households (7%) have no access to the internet at home[13]. Around 10% of adults don't have consistent and reliable access to an internet connection[14].

Education and digital skills for life

Around 1 in 5 high school students in Greater Manchester, (around 100,000 pupils), did not have the technology they needed to learn effectively at home when schools closed during the pandemic. Whilst national programmes from the Department for Education, and the Greater Manchester Technology Fund helped to reduce this level of need, there was still an anticipated shortfall of 5,000 pupils needing suitable equipment at the end of the 2020/21 school year[15]. More broadly, this level of need is shown nationally, with 68% of community organisations in the National Digital Inclusion Network needing more devices for digitally excluded people[16].

Whilst society and schooling has moved on since, it has not yet caught up. The widening digital skills gap exists within the workforce. We have heard that laptops have been locked in cupboards because teachers have not got the skills or confidence to download software. Access to learning online and digital skills literacy and leadership of staff within schools are facing widening divides.

Having the skills and confidence to be online are key factors in supporting digital inclusion, as well as in reducing harms. Yet around 10.2 million adults nationally do not have the foundation level of basic digital skills. This equates to around 457,000 adults in Greater Manchester. Estimates from Lloyds Banking Group suggests that around 20% of unemployed people do not have any of the essential digital skills for work[17].

As more services move to digital solutions, there are two important considerations regarding people's confidence in using online services. Firstly, there is a significant proportion of people who do not want to use digital services and of those that do want to be online but currently are not, 46% are dependent on someone else managing tasks online to go online for them[18].

Secondly, confidence is diminished by the fear of risks posed from being online, particularly sensitive to crime and online harms. Research from Ofcom suggest that online harms disproportionately affect different groups, with estimates that up to 74% of mixed ethnicity and black internet users have faced potential online harm in the last 4 weeks[19].

The scale of the opportunity

Up to 41% of residents in Greater Manchester face at least one barrier to digital inclusion and over 700,000 people are only using the internet in a narrow or limited way. A further 450,000 are classified as non-users impacting their ability to fully engage in economic participation.

4.7% of Greater Manchester residents are unemployed, higher than across the North West as a whole[20], and around 24% of residents aged 16-64 years were "economically inactive" as of September 2023, higher than the North West and UK as a whole.[21]

Using data from the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr)[22] we estimate the total cost of not improving basic digital skills over the next ten years in Greater Manchester will cost the economy by £70m.

- £685m estimated benefit from essential digital skills investment
- Cost offset by approximately £139m with efficiency savings, increased tax revenue, and NHS savings

- Time savings equating to approximately £195m, for individuals from use of digital services, plus £175 saved through online shopping
- £177m benefit to businesses through filling basic digital skills vacancies, increased earnings, use of technology adoption and environmental benefits

Lloyds Banking Group estimates that manual workers with high or very high levels of digital engagement can get more direct financial benefits, earning around £5k more each year and saving around £659 in costs, than less digitally active peers[23].

Research in France suggests that using refurbished rather than new smartphones can save up to 90% of CO_2 emissions from smartphone production - preventing 77.6kg of carbon emissions, while producing only 7.61kg of CO_2 emissions end-to-end[24].

There are also personal social benefits from increasing digital connectivity and inclusion. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents to Ofcom's Media Use and Attitudes Report[25] use the internet to support their wellbeing, while 77% say the internet helps them tackle loneliness and stay connected with family and friends.
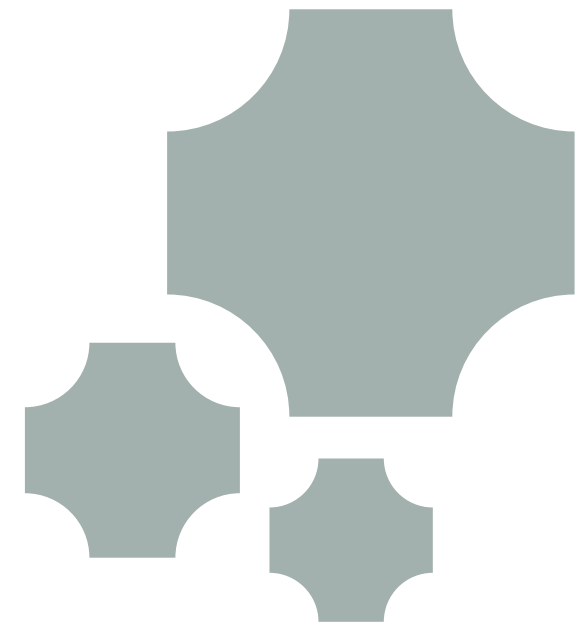
Measuring digital exclusion risk to target initiatives

The barriers to digital inclusion is a global issue, and local and regional authorities across the UK face similar challenges alongside niche regional disparity and strengths. Greater Manchester have collaborated with local and regional governments, industry and VCSE groups to share challenges and learnings to fix the digital divide.

Whilst the depth of the issue is broadly known, to date, there is no single, national dataset that tells us who is digitally excluded, and who is not. Instead, we must look towards risk factors – the issues or aspects of people's lives and places that increase the likelihood of being digitally excluded.

Digital Inclusion Risk Index (DERI) Tool

The Digital Exclusion Risk for England, Scotland and Wales Index was developed in collaboration with local and regional government across the UK to consider the complexities of the barriers to digital inclusion and identify a variety of risk factors to identify which parts of the country are likely to experience significant digital exclusion.

Inspired by Salford City Council's work, the development of the tool has been expanded by GMCA to cover the UK in response to discussions with local authorities around the country who faced the same challenges and has proved beneficial for areas across the UK to understand their own areas of need.

Nicol McConnell, Digital Inclusion Lead, Sunderland Council said:
"We've used the Digital Inclusion Risk Index to help inform Sunderland's Digital Inclusion Plan published in March 2023. It has also been used for our ward scoreboards relating to digital inclusion. It's a great tool."

"Using DERI can give an insight into areas which may suffer increased digital exclusion as public services move online. In London's case, this is another factor to consider when looking at London's poverty and deprivation picture in general."
Trust for London." [26]

The DERI is recommended as a tool to support actions in the NHS Digital guidance on health and social care. Its use is recommended for senior leaders at ICS, PCN and provider level to understand which communities might be most affected by digital exclusion.[27]
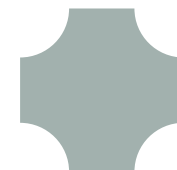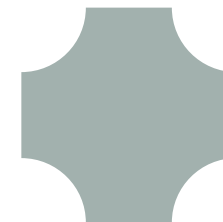
The power of ecosystems - a regional framework for success

In Greater Manchester, our networks and groups provide a strong foundation to join up, enable collaboration and avoid duplication, share learnings, resource and act as a useful mechanism to address evolving needs.

Digital Inclusion Action Network (DIAN)

The DIAN is an a cross-sector action group galvanised to target approaches and address digital exclusion among the under 25's, over 75's and disabled people. Members include Starting Point Stockport, Greater Manchester Housing Providers, Ability Net, Lloyd's Banking Group, Good Things Foundation, Barclays, Nominet, Greater Manchester Police and NHS Primary Care.

Greater Manchester's Local Authority Digital Inclusion Leads

GMCA, and its partners, believe social inclusion should not be a postcode lottery and that impact must be locally led, informed by local needs and embedded within communities. Every month Digital Inclusion Leads from each of Greater Manchester's ten boroughs convene to share opportunities, exchange best practice and lessons learned on tackling barriers to reach residents and communities at a hyper-local level.

Greater Manchester's Digital Inclusion Taskforce

A true power force for good! The 245-member taskforce is made up of cross sector organisations including national and local businesses, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, public sector, local government, schools and health sectors galvanised to address each of the barriers to digital inclusion and serve as a regional platform to share research and opportunities. With the impact and dialogue addressing national challenges and barriers of digital, health and social exclusion, the Taskforce also includes local authorities nationally who benefit from participating.

Building collaboration and maximising partnerships – a spotlight

The inspiring collaboration between The Bread-and-Butter Thing's (TBBT) and Lloyds Banking Group is an example of the benefit of Greater Manchester's Digital Inclusion Taskforce, a partnership cultivated to work together on linking food poverty support with digital inclusion support.

The project centered around TBBT's affordable food hubs and combined the three critical elements of digital inclusion: kit, connectivity, and building confidence. Working within communities, TBBT identified residents who could benefit and provided encouragement and support for them to attend. We Are Digital, skills training provider, ran weekly pop-up learning sessions within TBBT's trusted food hubs, to show residents how to learn essential digital skills including setting up an email address, staying safe online and downloading and using apps. The project also provided tablet devices with a Vodafone data connectivity SIM card. Residents could also access ongoing follow-up support through Lloyd's free digital helpline.

A course attendee said: "These lessons have given me the confidence to try things I would never have tried in the past."

Jane Partington, Partnerships Director, The Bread-and-Butter Thing said: "We work with people who are juggling complex lives, jobs, caring responsibilities, health issues, whilst on low incomes. They don't have time to explore the benefits of being online. They might use social media but often only on their phone and don't access banking or pay bills online. This increases the hidden poverty premiums they face. To achieve real change, you must take digital to them which is what this project is about."

The outcomes of this project included:

- **Connecting with Confidence ran 57 sessions** in 10 Bread and Butter Thing hubs, supporting 411 people
- **Over 90%** attendance rate
- **Confidence levels** moved significantly by 50%, from 2.9 out of 5 at the start to 4.3 out of 5 at the end.

Locally-led impact, embedded in communities

Greater Manchester's ten local authorities' local networks with residents, businesses and VCSE groups powers targeted activity and opportunities across their communities. The local authority Digital Inclusion Leads Group are pioneering catalysts for local activity, cross-borough working, fuelling resource and learning while cultivating opportunities to develop partnerships.

Here is the impact of their work in 2023.

Bolton

**Total population: 296,000
Under 25s: 95,000
Over 75s: 23,000
Disabled people: 52,000
(of which 7,000 are under 25
and 10,000 are 75+)**

- **134** free SIM cards distributed
- **362** digital skills support sessions delivered
- **1,250** residents support with digital skills via 2 skills and career fairs and working with 50 local organisations
- **15** organisations now part of the Bolton Digital Inclusion Activity Network

Bury

**Total population: 194,000
Under 25s: 57,000
Over 75s: 16,000
Disabled people: 34,000
(of which 5,000 are under 25
and 6,000 are 75+)**

- **300** residents completed a 6-week digital skills course
- **50** visually impaired adults received £8,700 worth of assistive tech and support, via Henshaws
- **62** care leavers accessed Get Online Greater Manchester: for care leavers

Manchester

**Total population: 552,000
Under 25s: 212,000
Over 75s: 22,000
Disabled people: 92,000
(of which 17,000 are under 25
and 10,000 are 75+)**

- **350** residents supported through a dedicated inbox and text line
- **3,000** residents benefitted through the Greater Manchester Databank
- **500** devices provided to community organisations and charities
- **22%** increase in the use of the NHS app to order prescriptions, via Manchester Digital Health Hubs pilot

Oldham

**Total population:242,000
Under 25s: 82,000
Over 75s: 17,000
Disabled people: 43,000
(of which 7,000 are under 25
and 7,000 are 75+)**

- **25** Digital Champions trained to deliver digital skills support
- **1,042** residents assisted to boost online confidence
- Device lending scheme launched, and **903** free mobile data SIMs distributed.

Rochdale

Total population: 224,000
Under 25s: 72,000
Over: 75s: 16,000
Disabled people: 41,000
(of which 6,000 are under 25
and 7,000 are 75+)

- **639** residents supported with 187 devices, 67 digital support offers and 172 free SIM cards.
- **168** people supported at 4 weekly digital skills sessions
- **12** local community organisations secured funding to run digital skills programs.

Salford

Total population: 270,000
Under 25s: 88,000
Over 75s: 16,000
Disabled people: 48,000
(of which 8,000 are under 25
and 7,000 are 75+)

- **400** refurbished laptops donated to residents in need
- **100+** local businesses brought together for event to address the digital divide locally
- **82** cross-sector members now part of Salford's Digital Providers network

Tameside

Total population: 231,000
Under 25s: 68,000
Over 75s: 18,000
Disabled people: 45,000
(of which 6,000 are under 25
and 8,000 are 75+)

- **125** care leavers supported with digital support packages
- **PCrefurb** community organisation now provides digital skills courses and online service access
- **274** residents supported with digital skills via 65 events across 13 locations during Digitober.

Trafford

Total population: 235,000
Under 25s: 70,000
Over 75s: 20,000
Disabled people: 36,000
(of which 5,000 are under 25
and 8,000 are 75+)

- **1,250** devices donated for refurbishment to benefit residents, via Community Computers
- **11** community organisations signed up as Greater Manchester Databanks
- **80** members now part of steering group addressing digital exclusion

Stockport

Total population: 295,000
Under 25s: 81,000
Over 75s: 28,000
Disabled people: 52,000 (of which
7,000 are under 25 and 11,000 are 75+)

- **2,240+** residents supported with 3,000 devices and data loans
- **175** device donations to Community Computers, enabled 150+ low-cost device sales.
- **£240,000** funding secured by Starting Point for a Digital Champion Training Hub
- **Greater Manchester's flagship Sky Up Digital Hub** launched to support older adults with digital and technology support.

Wigan

Total population: 329,000
Under 25s: 91,000
Over 75s: 28,000
Disabled people: 64,000 (of which
**8,000 are under 25 and 12,000 are 75+)**

- **50%** increase in TechMate Tea Parties sessions. Volunteer numbers increased by 250%
- **107** digital support sessions delivered, aiding 641 residents, via 88 TechMates.
- **26** members make up the Wigan Digital Communities Partnership to initiate digital programmes.

Digital inclusion roadmap across Greater Manchester

Fixing the digital skills gap

Essential digital skills is a basic literacy for work, life and business. According to research by Cebr[28], the current gaps in digital skills will cost UK economy £28 billion, and research by Ofcom[29] during the pandemic showed that one in five school pupils do not have consistent access to a suitable device for their online schoolwork.

We also know people aged 65+ are most likely to struggle to get online and know how to confidently use digital services. GMCA's Adult Education Budget (AEB) supports Greater Manchester's skills and inclusion ambitions, enhanced to levels 1 and 2 for adults, to engage in improving digital literacy skills for free and improve routes into accessing opportunities, learning and employment. Greater Manchester's AEB programme is centred around tackling evolving barriers, supporting English speakers of other languages and improving digital literacy for residents.
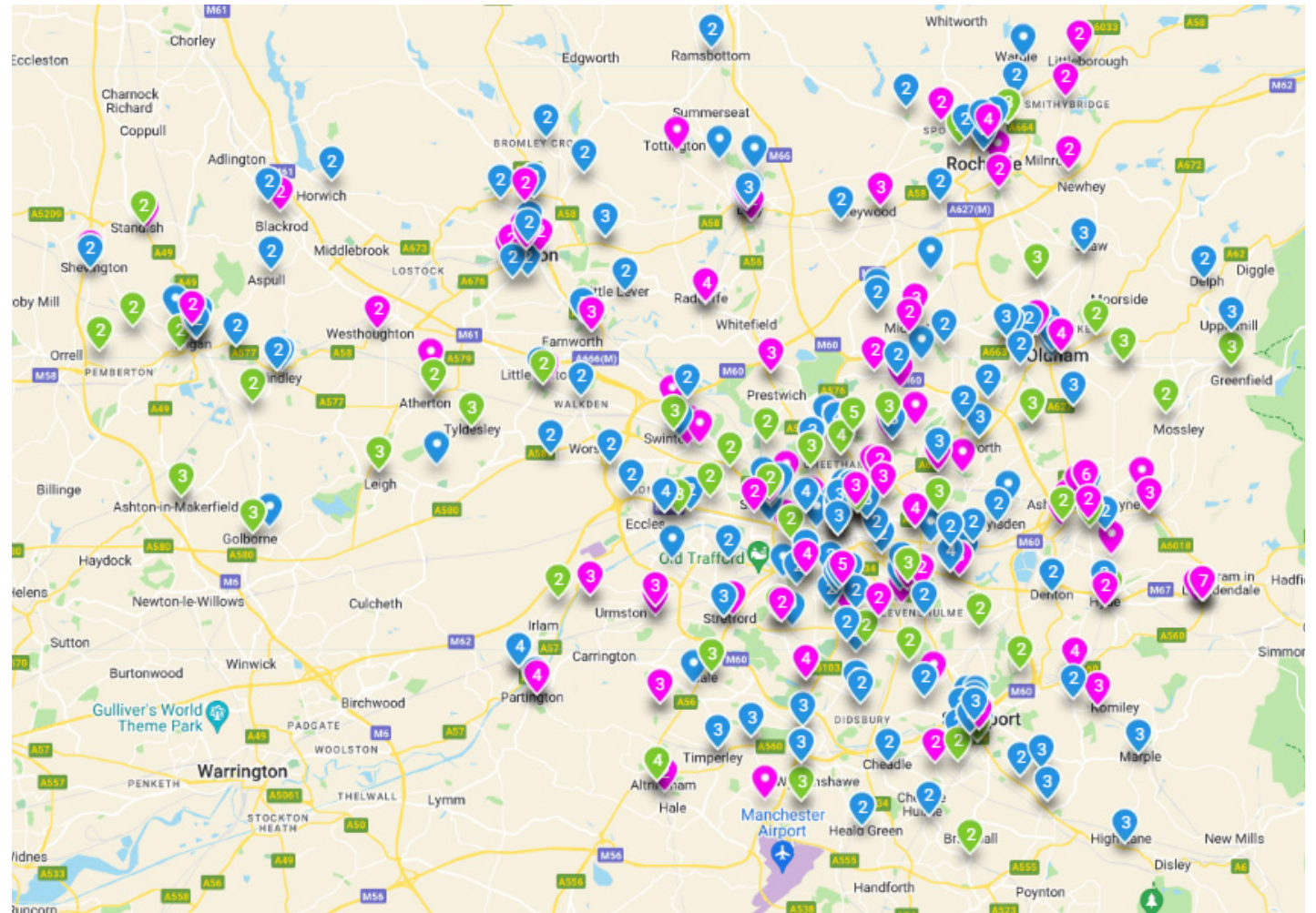
Get Online Greater Manchester

This campaign, including an online hub, brings together support for residents and those supporting residents, looking to improve their digital skills or improve their online access. This resource has contributions from all ten local authorities in Greater Manchester, as well as broader regional and national support, including information on digital skills training and building confidence in using online services. The Get Online Greater Manchester webpage was viewed 12,200 times during 2023.

Affordable and accessible connectivity for all

Greater Manchester Databank

It is estimated that 1 million people cut back or cancelled their internet packages in the last year due to affordability issues. With the cost-of-living crisis impacting many people, GMCA partnered with Good Things Foundation to locally deliver an emergency response to the cost-of-living crisis through the National Databank. The Greater Manchester Databank scheme is a local drive to address data poverty for thousands of low-income residents in need providing free SIMS, which include mobile data, talk minutes and texts for 12 months. With collaborative efforts, Greater Manchester has 10% of the UK's databanks, locally. Throughout 2023:

- **17,991 data SIMs,** donated by Three Mobile, Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone, have been distributed to residents

- **55 new community organisations** across Greater Manchester have signed up as databanks to distribute the free SIMs

In total since launch, Greater Manchester's 164 databanks have issued 29,085 free SIMs to residents across the region.

One Manchester resident said:
"I can do my university work and catch up to my deadlines now. It helps with the cost of living, and for the people that don't have internet at home, this has been a lifesaver."

Helen Milner OBE, Group CEO, Good Things Foundation said:
"GMCA digital inclusion partnership with Good Things Foundation shows the power of regional and local initiatives in tackling digital exclusion. Through the implementation of the Greater Manchester Databank, a 'food bank for connectivity data,' it's already helping thousands of vulnerable people get connected by giving community groups and charities in Manchester access to free data as part of Good Things Foundation's National Digital Inclusion Network".

Innovative models for affordable connectivity in places

Get Online Greater Manchester: for social housing resident's pilot

Digital exclusion and data poverty are significant challenges across the UK, impacting on consistent access to health, education, work, and public services. 1 in 5 Greater Manchester residents live in social housing and GMCA estimate that up to 60% face levels of digital exclusion. In a drive to address inequalities and levelling up across the region GMCA, and partners, brought together five of the UK's largest internet service providers (ISP), collaborating with the public and housing sector to tackle the challenges of digital exclusion, faced by social housing residents.

Whilst the government has the power to impose regulatory social tariffs on all providers to help the most vulnerable, the current position is to encourage providers to introduce targeted tariffs on a voluntary basis. However, with the lowest offers priced between £15-20 a month, they are still not an accessible option for millions of people across the UK.

The pilot was a partnership including Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and Virgin Media O2, Stockport

Homes and BT/Openreach, Bolton at Home and Hyperoptic, Southway Housing Trust and Vodafone and Wigan Council and TalkTalk/Freedom Fibre. Residents were offered a holistic package of support including access to digital skills sessions and connectivity offers from internet service providers ranging from free connectivity, social tariff offers and connecting nearby community hubs.

A research project, led by Professor Simeon Yates, University of Liverpool brought global attention to what alternative connectivity within social housing settings could look like. Significant learnings from the pilot demonstrated the need to tackle long-term sustainable solutions, leading to the development of a standardised property wayleave and specification agreement for Greater Manchester's social housing stock that will speed up industry investment and reduce administrative work for housing organisations.

- **495 residents** took up connectivity offers during the pilot
- **136 residents** gained digital skills support provided by ISP volunteers
- **2 community centres** were given free connectivity

Professor Simeon Yates, Principal Investigator for the pilot research report said: "We at the University of Liverpool worked with GMCA, five ISP's and five social housing providers to explore routes to greater digital inclusion for tenants. Tenants in social housing are far more likely to be digitally excluded or have low digital skills compared to the overall population. This has real impacts on their work opportunities, education, and well-being. This social housing pilot identified some of the key barriers social housing tenants face to getting online and building digital skills. Findings from the study around social tariffs, wayleave access to link up buildings, cost-of-living crisis, and partnership working between regions, ISPs and social housing have already fed into national debate and policy. Bringing this group of partners together was a major achievement and provides a foundation for future digital inclusion interventions and digital support for communities. The Liverpool team is looking forward to further ongoing work with GMCA on addressing this key issue."

Rochdale's Mesh Network

Rochdale, the 15th most deprived borough in England, faced pre-existing disadvantage before the pandemic. The crisis exposed inequalities amongst residents and businesses, with poverty being an underlying factor. A £50,000 grant enabled collaboration with the local social housing provider, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing and the Co-Operative Heritage Trust to develop a mesh connectivity network in areas of high deprivation including College Bank, Lower Falinge, and Freehold to support households with essential and free data connectivity to access essential services and serve everyday needs. This project significantly addresses digital exclusion caused by deprivation.

- **4,000+ households** access free Wi-Fi, working out at 27p per household funded through the Mesh Network. It offers scalable bandwidth and includes digital skills, data, and equipment support

- **1,500 devices** connected simultaneously (including laptops, tablets, smartphones, TVs, and gaming equipment)

Andy Littlewood, a Rochdale resident, said: "Not everyone can afford the internet and that is the key thing when society is moving more and more online. Yet for individuals to move online, it costs them a lot and some people cannot afford £20 a month to have an internet connection put in. I know a lot of people who have been saved by this Mesh Network."

Improving accessible, local community-based support for residents

Get Online Greater Manchester Map

A Greater Manchester resident survey suggested around 16% of people lacked the support to access digital online services and did not know where to go for help. An interactive map has been developed for residents, community groups or frontline staff supporting residents to easily find hyper-local places near them to access local public Wi-Fi, use devices, access face-to-face activities and community-based digital skills sessions as well as identify Greater Manchester Databanks and online centres facilities providing free SIM cards, use of devices, Wi-Fi access and digital skills support.

Sharon Kelly, Principal Skills Manager, GMCA, said: "This map is a useful tool, offering detailed insights into local organisations that can help residents get connected, and hopefully start a journey to acquire new skills which will help them in everyday jobs and responsibilities."

Wigan's sheltered accommodation pilot

Around 52,900 people in Wigan live in social housing. 8,500 of which are aged 65 and over and are more likely to live in sheltered accommodation.

Wigan Council rolled out a pilot with a sheltered accommodation scheme to assess the digital needs of its residents and discovered an appetite for upskilling. Through collaborative efforts with Scheme Managers, they were able to offer customised essential digital skills training sessions and identified the need to run regular face-to-face TechMate sessions. Two schemes, The Rowans and Alexandra House, now enjoy the benefits of weekly TechMate Tea parties with digital champions training for Scheme Managers, two residents and a volunteer to lead longer-term sustainable support.

- **20 residents** access tablets through the lending library
- **The Rowans' sessions** typically see an average of 6-10 participants per week, with the highest session attendance reaching 15
- **A resident from Alexandra House** was referred to the adult learning team to further her learning
- **Referrals to digital support services** have increased - 4 tablet loans and 7 TechMate 1 to 1 referrals for sheltered residents.

Jean, a Wigan resident attending the digital skills session, said: "Before I came here, I was useless at technology and my son would just do it for me but now I've been able to report repairs on My Account and I've had a look at Word which I want to do more of."

Building Stockport's local community and skills network

Working in partnership with Stockport's DigiKnow network, Starting Point offers digital skills support in a variety of venues across the borough, focusing on target areas of deprivation or where the average age is higher than the norm.

Starting Point primarily focuses on addressing digital exclusion and its intersections with health inequalities, the rising costs of living and educational attainment in young people. On average, Starting Point conducts 38 funded skills sessions, supporting over 200 people monthly. Additionally, around 20 new individuals access the Greater Manchester Databank, and the organisation receives over 450 calls to the helpdesk. Currently, over 270 devices are out on loan.

Believing in the power of friendly faces in familiar spaces, Starting Point goes to where people are and supports friends and neighbours to become digital champions to support their work. In October 2023, Starting Point was awarded £240,000 from the National Lottery Fund to develop a digital champion volunteer hub. Over the next 3 years, Starting Point will work to support over 250 digital champions throughout Stockport and has ambitions to spread this work wider.

New digital champion Sam said: "I've met loads of interesting people. It gets boring and stressful looking for work at home all day, and it's been great to have a break for an hour, get out, feel useful and help people use computers. It's been eye-opening, to be honest and I've had some interesting questions."

Improving access to healthcare, managing better health outcomes and public service efficiency

Manchester's Digital Health Hubs Pilot

The 2022 NHS GP Patient Survey[30] highlighted a significant challenge with 47% of respondents struggling to contact the NHS via phone, increased by 15% since 2021. In response, Manchester's Health Hubs were formed in July 2023 in the areas of Wythenshawe, Northenden and Brooklands.

The hubs aimed to promote digital health management amongst residents with a focus on reaching those less inclined to access through digital tools. By demonstrating the benefits of health management through digital tools, the project intended to also encourage broader digital adoption. Manchester City Council collaborated with local community centres and libraries to train staff in assisting residents with the NHS app. Staff then conducted digital drop-in sessions, demonstrating app usage. Since starting the project, Manchester has seen a 22% increase in use of the app to order prescriptions.

Visit your local Digital Health Hub in Wythenshawe, Northenden and Brooklands

To check times of sessions, please contact your local centre

Woodhouse Park Lifestyle Centre
Everyone
Portway M22 1QW
0161 436 0560
lifestyle.reception@wchg.org.uk
woodhouseparklifestylecentre.co.uk

Bideford Community Centre
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34 Bideford Drive M23 0QN
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Brooklands Library
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0161 946 6280
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bit.ly/3XBmKsz

Benchill Community Centre
Everyone
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0161 946 9520
bcc@wchg.org.uk
benchillcommunitycentre.co.uk

Manchester Adult Education
Adult Learners
Forum Square M22 5RX
0161 935 4080
maes.info@manchester.gov.uk
manadulted.org.uk/courses/digital/
Open from September 2023

let's get digital
July 2023

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL | Manchester Adult Education | Wythenshawe

Support available at each Digital Health Hub	Connectivity				Digital Skills Support			How they can help you		
	Free Wi-Fi Access	Device Lending	Free Internet Sims	Devices for use in centre	Weekly drop in available	One to one appointments	Group sessions	Setting up and using the NHS App	Using your GP website	General digital skills support
Manchester Adult Education - Forum Centre	✔			✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Wythenshawe Forum Library	✔		✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	✔
Brooklands Library	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Benchill Community Centre	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Bideford Community Centre	✔		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Woodhouse Park Lifestyle Centre	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Village 135 Apartment Complex	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔

Dorothy, after attending a local drop-in session, said: "I use the GP website to make appointments online. There are two doctors I prefer, so you can choose who you like. And it's easy to make repeat prescriptions. I didn't like going to the doctors the whole time because you had to fight against the receptionist. I don't have to now."

Salford's Digital Inclusion Triage Tool

The Digital Inclusion Triage Tool, backed by the Local Government Association and developed by digital specialists Mortar, is a one-stop solution designed to identify user needs and direct them to the necessary support for improving digital skills. Salford was the lead partner for the beta phase, a significant milestone, and its success has led to wider plans for roll out across the city in 2024.

- **In a survey of 200 Salford residents,** 88% expressed a desire for digital skills, with 51% uncertain about the first step. The Digital Inclusion Triage tool simplified resource access for both frontline staff and residents.

- **Frontline staff aided 9,453 customers** with support, initially taking 13.4 minutes per enquiry. The triage tool reduced this to 4.9 minutes, saving 8.5 minutes per enquiry, equating to £19,511.77 council savings annually.

Liz Perrin, Customer Service Officer, Eccles Gateway, found the tool very promising and said: "Very positive, this seems like it will save lots of time and also be a more accurate way of finding the right solution for the customer."

Removing barriers for young people

Get Online Greater Manchester: for care leavers

Across the region, there are 4,275 care leavers aged between 18-25, and 42% of these individuals classed as not in education, employment or training. Greater Manchester's leaders, private and public sector and young person's charities have worked together with the Greater Manchester care leaver's network to design a comprehensive package of support including access to free data connectivity for 12 months, devices and free digital skills training to support care leavers to build their skills and confidence online and benefit from opportunities to thrive. Since its inception, achievements include:

- **566 young people** in care have accessed a free data SIM

- **369 devices** have been donated

- 163 care leavers have signed up to develop their digital skills through the Learn My Way Programme

- **130 have completed** the Salford Money Matters course

- **74 have been referred** to a Digital Skills Bootcamp by IN4.0/Skills City to improve their employability skills and inspire them into digital careers.

In total, **732 young care leavers** have accessed the support.

A personal advisor from Manchester City Council said: "A girl I support who was digitally excluded and unable to write an application and take part in an NHS employability program initially. I reached out to you guys, and you provided a laptop which I gave to her, so she could complete the required application forms. This person was previously not in education or employment. Myself and 'careers connect' supported her with the application and she was successful in being accepted on a Nursing assistant traineeship where she's going from strength to strength working with the NHS."

Internet Matters care leavers project

With more young people leaving care each week and having to often live independently at a far earlier age than their peers, care leavers do not have the same access to support, opportunities and basic security, impacting their ability to live well and move towards positive pathways in life. The Greater Manchester Care Leavers' Guarantee was set up to commit to tackle key priorities and bring support in vital areas such as navigating the online world and staying safe online.

Internet Matters and GMCA launched the Bee Smart pilot programme, empowering care leavers and personal advisors to improve online safety literacy for care leavers in Greater Manchester. These sessions were delivered in all ten boroughs and covered content on disinformation, hate speech and online fraud. A unique peer-to-peer approach made the content relatable.

A care leaver involved in the project said: "Not all care leavers want to listen to professionals, whereas they'd listen to me."

Key findings in the report showed long-term investment is essential for improving media literacy for care leavers, the importance of codesigning initiatives with care leavers and being flexible to address the barriers that care leavers face.

Digital inclusion for older adults

Doing digital in later life

3.9 million people over 65 do not use the internet at home, compared with just 320,000 for those aged 35–44.[31] One of the barriers identified for using the internet was a lack of knowledge of how to use it and what for. GMCA partnered with Good Things Foundation to create an easy-to-use, practical guide aimed at improving digital participation amongst older adults. The guide accompanied by an animated video was co-developed with the Greater Manchester's Older People's Equality Panel and includes advice on how anyone can support older individuals to embrace digital technology. The doing digital in later life resources have secured:

- **469** guide downloads
- **1,000** webpage visits
- **5,717** views of the animated video guide

Hayley Hughes, Assistant Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Manchester said: "Together, we can help people take their first steps into the digital world and having resources like the doing digital in later life practical guide is invaluable to our staff at Citizens Advice Manchester

– who are using the guide to effectively support and motivate older people to get online, stay online and most importantly benefit in way's best for them."

Sky Up Digital Hubs

As part of the national Sky Up Programme, Sky developed its flagship 'digital hub' in community spaces across Greater Manchester in partnership with local charities, providing free public Wi-Fi, technology devices and one-to-one volunteer support to improve the digital skills and knowledge of residents aged under 25 and over 65.

Age UK Stockport was the UKs first flagship Sky Up Digital Hub to launch in Greater Manchester in July 2023. Since the launch, over 270 older adults have increased their confidence to use digital tools The skills sessions have supported residents to utilise various apps, navigate online applications and search for budget-friendly broadband packages and devices. The success of Stockport's Sky Up Digital Hub model in partnership with Age UK Stockport has led to the roll out of Digital Hubs across the UK.

Margaret Brade, CEO, Age UK Stockport said: "The greatest causes of digital exclusion for residents that come to us are a lack of skills, a lack of trust and not having a reliable internet connection. With the support of our partners and volunteers, we can overcome all three."

Dorothy, a local resident who attends a weekly session said, "I feel relieved now that I know I have a place that I can come to sort out the problems I am having with my iPad. I've been worrying about this, having sleepless nights, now I can go home more relaxed."

Supporting disabled people to get online

According to the Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2023,[32] there remains a disparity in the capacity of individuals with impairments to carry out fundamental digital tasks, with 75% of disabled residents having foundational digital skills compared to 90% for those without impairments. Advancements in technology and the digital transformation of public services have presented many ways to ensure people can access services at a touch of a button. However, this does not mean services are accessible to all, or that everyone will feel the benefit.

We want to ensure that everyone in Greater Manchester, whatever their age, location or situation, can benefit from the opportunities digital brings. The following organisations provide a range of local support for free or at a reduced cost, to help residents across Greater Manchester benefit from the opportunities digital brings.

AbilityNet

AbilityNet promotes digital technology accessibility for all. The organisation offers free guidance to disabled individuals, employers, and their support networks on using adaptive technology for greater independence. Their volunteer network within Greater Manchester provides in-home assistance for technology adaptations.

Jonathan, an AbilityNet client said:
"I'm 82 years old, I live alone and need my PC to stay connected to the world. I've spent months struggling to resolve problems with my PC. Since being directed to your organisation my life has been changed."

Henshaws

Henshaws, a charitable organisation, is working across eight of the ten local authorities in Greater Manchester, to offer personalised assessments for blind and visually impaired individuals. They recommend appropriate devices to assist residents in achieving greater independence.

Pauline, Henshaws client said:
"I've had great support from the tech team for several years. They have shown me how to use technology to live more independently. Now I don't need people coming round to read my mail, because I can do it for myself. It's made my life a lot less stressful."

Maximising partnerships through social value and responsible business

Local Full Fibre Network programme

GMCA's public procurement contracts go hand in hand with maximising social value and levers to deliver regional ambitions and address local need.

The Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) was a £23.8M programme delivering world-class digital infrastructure through biggest government full-fibre investment in the UK, connect more than 1,500 public sites across the city-region. Through the appointment of Virgin Media O2 Business (VMO2 Business) up to 2,700km of new fibre optic broadband infrastructure was installed, which would underpin a wide range of digital transformation, digital inclusion and smart city projects.

VMO2 Business made a number of bold investments in social value initiatives to support Greater Manchester's Digital Blueprint and contribute to regional digital skills and inclusion ambitions. Partnership-working inspired the development of VMO2 Business' Connect More pilot which informed the development of the programme and scaled across the UK.

Key achievements of the LFFN partnership, across Greater Manchester, included Virgin Media O2 Business delivering/donating:

- **17 community sites** saw installation of connectivity, free for five years
- **1,000+ volunteering hours,** including Greater Manchester based employees supporting support community-based activity
- **51 employees' volunteers** contributed to digital skills sessions in local community spaces, helping over 207 people gain digital skills and confidence.
- **Volunteers supported patients** at the Park Medical Centre in Wythenshawe to access the NHS App
- **£15,000 donated** to Greater Manchester Technology Fund
- **£100,000 donated** to the Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity
- **78% (average) of the LFFN workforce** based in Greater Manchester, exceeding local employment target

- **£25,000 donated** to the Future Workforce Fund in partnership with GMCA and The Prince's Trust, working with young people aged between 14 and 25 who face barriers to engaging with education, employment or training
- **38 new apprenticeships,** enhancing original local target by 90%

Patricia Handley, a patient from Park Medical Centre, Wythenshawe resident said: "I don't feel like I'm in a foreign country anymore. I've now been on this app and that app, and I never knew what people were talking about. But now I do."
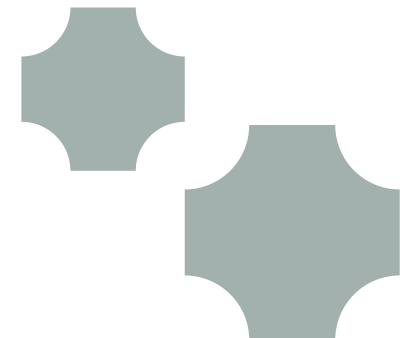
Greater Manchester One Network connectivity programme

In late 2022 the Greater Manchester One Network Programme launched – a single network infrastructure across several public sector organisations set to make network services more efficient, secure and flexible. Public sector delivery partners have appointed Cisco VMO2 Business and other private sector partners to provide faster and more resilient data connections to over 1,300 public sites in the city-region. As part of this initiative Cisco made several bold investments in social value initiatives that support Greater Manchester's Digital Blueprint.

To date, social impact outcomes across Greater Manchester, include Cisco:

- **Securing 13 apprenticeships,** covering a range of technical roles, including engineering, marketing and project specialists

- **Achieving a record number of applications** for an annual, regional work experience programme, giving students a glimpse inside the various areas of the tech company including sales, marketing, cybersecurity and networking. Students from 23 schools applied to take part, with 70 students being taken on during the first year of the project. They will develop skills such as team working, time management and communication. Students will also work on a team Dragons Den project throughout the week, and on the final day they will present their idea to the Cisco Dragons

- **2,225 hours of volunteering hours** have been invested into the communities of Greater Manchester, running IntoUniversity workshops, Foodtruck runs with Fareshare, and schools career events

- **Financial contributions** to regional community groups

Kathryn Baddeley, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, Cisco UK & Ireland, said: "Cisco's support for the GMCA extends beyond our official collaboration, reflecting our commitment to empowering Greater Manchester's citizens, particularly the unconnected. Over the past year, our partnership has significantly impacted the digital journeys of thousands of young individuals, fostering their increased interest in digital skills, and boosting their recruitment prospects."

Adele Every, Managing Director, Public Sector, Cisco UK & Ireland said: "Looking ahead, we're excited about the continued development of our programmes and our ongoing mutual commitment to digital skill development. In addition to our skills academy, which trains more and more people in the region, we have also funded businesses in the region to enhance their digital skills credentials and we are sponsoring their accreditations. Cisco's support to the Manchester community is creating exciting new digital opportunities to support its World Leading Digital City Region ambition."

Greater Manchester's roadmap for 2024

As part of Greater Manchester's Digital Inclusion Agenda for Change, we want to ensure that everyone in Greater Manchester, whatever their age, location or situation, can safely access and benefit from the opportunities digital brings if they want to. Part of our approach is making sure we are joined up across all policy areas and digital inclusion is a priority focus to ensure public services are accessible to all. Looking ahead, our plans centre around:

- Enhancing locally-led, place-based, accessible support in every borough of Greater Manchester.

- Driving 100% digital literacy for all (tackling barriers to education and training)

- Enabling social value to drive responsible business

- Improving health outcomes

- Tackling digital poverty in communities

- Growing a regional Digital Champion Network (Tackling the skills gap in communities)

Find out more on our ambitions and work to fix the digital divide at: greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital

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