

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Communities & Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 4th March 2025

Subject: Digital Inclusion Update – bridging the digital divide in Manchester

Report of: Strategic Director – Neighbourhoods

Summary

The purpose of the report is to provide the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Council's digital inclusion work, since the last report to scrutiny in March 2024. This includes the implementation and ongoing revision of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- Consider and comment on the information in the report

Wards Affected: ALL

Environmental Impact Assessment -the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city	Increasing residents' ability to be regular, confident online users supports zero-carbon targets by reducing use of paper and reduced travelling. Specific initiatives in this report support the zero-carbon targets, for example commissioning and supporting the refurbished device scheme that reduces waste, repurposing devices to be used by Manchester residents. Digital inclusion is led by libraries who support the zero-carbon agenda. This includes high quality, low-carbon buildings that are community hubs to be used by multiple organisations, that libraries encourage books to be read by multiple people and the increase in ebooks – reducing the use of paper. We have signed up to the Green Libraries manifesto. https://www.cilip.org.uk/general/custom.asp?page=greenlibrariesmanifesto
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty	As this is an update report, an EQIA has not been carried out specifically on the report. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of the digital inclusion agenda, with people with the protected characteristics being most likely to be digitally excluded and being disproportionately affected by exclusion.

and broader equality commitments	
Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the Our Manchester Strategy/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan supports Investing In success: Manchester's Economic Strategy. One of the five priorities of this strategy is to "Develop world-class infrastructure, places and talent." As part of that it references "Delivering Manchester's Digital Strategy" and "Digital connectivity is now as essential to businesses and residents as traditional utilities such as water and power."
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan supports Investing In success: Manchester's Economic Strategy. One element of the work is to improve digital skills and be an integral part in the city of lifelong learning.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Libraries offer free Internet access at the heart of our communities, reducing inequalities for digitally excluded residents. The work increase access to digital, digital skills and motivation to use the Internet, all of which are crucial to become a confident digital user and unlock the potential of residents
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Increasing residents' ability to be regular, confident online users supports zero-carbon targets by reducing use of paper and reduced travelling to face-to-face appointments.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Our digital inclusion programme is increasing connectivity in homes, and people's ability to be online.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection): None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Digital Exclusion affects tens of thousands of Manchester's residents. Digital exclusion is where a person doesn't have one or more of the following – access to the Internet, skills/confidence to use the Internet or motivation to use the Internet. People who are digitally excluded are also likely to suffer from other types of social exclusion and be disproportionately affected by not being online. There is a close link between digital exclusion and levels of deprivation. Digital exclusion often links to other forms of social exclusion: people who are not confident online users can have worse life chances than those that are. They are more likely to suffer social isolation and loneliness, have lower skills and job prospects, unable to access services online (for example applying for housing or health), reduced access to information, and in general have a lower quality of life. Reducing digital exclusion is intrinsically linked to reducing the widening of inequality.
- 1.2 For many years Manchester City Council and our partners have done much to reduce the digital divide and support those that are digitally excluded. This includes offering free Wi-Fi, IT support and weekly sessions in all of our libraries. Libraries also work closely with Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) and many of our community organisations to support them to continue to reach more of our neighbourhoods to support them to access and utilise the internet.
- 1.3 The results of a national survey in July 2023 found Manchester to be the most digitally inclusive city in the UK. Analysis carried out by Uswitch mobiles examined the number of databanks, digital inclusion hubs and digital skills workshops on offer nationally, finding that in Manchester there were 11 digital inclusion hubs per 100,000 population. This shows the progress made with combatting digital exclusion in the city. However, there is much more to do, with the impact on those residents who are digitally excluded, being greater than ever.
- 1.4 This report shows the progress that has been made with supporting digital inclusion since the last report to Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee on 5th March 2024. We have developed and implemented a collaborative programme to - assess the scale of the digital divide, improve the existing support infrastructure, develop joint projects, and develop new initiatives to support digitally excluded residents.
- 1.5 There has been a diverse range of key stakeholders involved so far including - adult learning providers, third sector community organisations, registered providers, healthcare partners and private sector businesses. Much of the work is focussed on supporting the VCSE sector to enhance the digital inclusion agenda within their programmes, to increase and strengthen support for residents. The programme of digital inclusion work is a key element of the Manchester Digital Strategy: Doing Digital Together, this is detailed within section 2.1 and included as Appendix 2.

1.6 The City Council's digital inclusion work is considered best practice nationally. This is shown by Councillor Hacking's invitation to be part of the House of Lords inquiry into tackling digital exclusion in 2024. The report praised the work of local authorities such as Manchester and highlighted the lack of a Government strategy to support digital inclusion. The recommendations align with our Digital Inclusion Action Plan. The five priorities for a new strategy were: Cost of living support to stop more people becoming digitally excluded, to invest in basic digital skills, to boost digital inclusion hubs including prioritising libraries, to future proof public services including helping excluded people to not be marginalised by AI and to prioritise telecoms competition including review of the impacts of Public Service Telephone Network switch off.

2.0 Bridging the Digital Divide in Manchester

2.1 Manchester Digital Strategy (2021-2026): Doing Digital Together

The Manchester Digital Strategy, included as Appendix 2, sets out a vision and its Delivery Plan, a roadmap, across four key themes, for what Manchester needs to do to make sure we have digitally skilled residents, future-proofed infrastructure, a thriving digital economy and a digitally enabled transition to zero-carbon economy. This ambition paves the way for a Manchester empowered by technology, benefiting all residents and shaping a thriving, responsible future. Digital inclusion forms the bedrock of the Strategy, with a number of projects within its Delivery Plan being dependent upon included and empowered people. Everyone deserves equal access to the opportunities the digital world offers. Excluding residents deepens inequalities and stifles our city's potential and by equipping all residents with the skills and confidence to navigate the digital landscape, we unlock untapped talent, spark innovation, support self-agency and build a more resilient Manchester. Through inclusive infrastructure, targeted skills development, and strong partnerships, the Manchester Digital Strategy paves the way for a truly connected city where everyone thrives. A detailed report on the Strategy is going to the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 4th March.

2.2 Contributing towards the delivery of other priorities and strategies

2.2.1 The Digital Inclusion Action Plan, shown in Appendix 1 is central to The delivery of a number of key priorities

2.2.2 Making Manchester Fairer: Anti-Poverty Strategy 2023-2027:

Digital inclusion is a key component of the strategy and the Council's cost-of-living crisis response as digital exclusion can be a driver for deep poverty. For example, becoming digitally included could enable residents to save money by accessing cheaper deals online, as evidenced in the Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index research in 2021 which suggested digitally excluded customers pay an average of £348 more per year on their energy bills.

2.2.3 Making Manchester Fairer

Digital inclusion is a key factor for people's health and wellbeing. It can reduce social isolation, by welcoming people to opportunities that they could participate with. Also, digital transformation is resulting in many health services and health information and advice being moved online, driving the need to support people to be able to be online users, so that they can access support to care for their health and wellbeing. Our work helps to support this – for example through digital health hubs. Digital inclusion has been recognised as being central to the Making Manchester Fairer work with digital inclusion being part of each pilot project. Digital inclusion is particularly embedded into the early years kickstarter, resulting in laptops being provided for free to 20 families in kickstarter priority schools. These devices have been donated for free by Community Computers as part of their refurbishment scheme. This year we have developed and launched the Digital Health Hubs initiative, providing support to residents to the NHS App and My MFT App – this is outlined in 2.3.7.3

2.2.4 Investing In success: Manchester's Economic Strategy

One of the five priorities of this strategy is to “Develop world-class infrastructure, places and talent.” As part of that it references “Delivering Manchester's Digital Strategy” and “Digital connectivity is now as essential to businesses and residents as traditional utilities such as water and power.

2.2.5 Local Authority of Sanctuary

Manchester City Council recently became an accredited Local Authority of Sanctuary. The delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan is an element of this – providing Internet access to people seeking sanctuary. This is through provision of free SIMs, free devices and supporting community organisations that support people seeking sanctuary.

2.2.6 Social Housing Sector

Numerous research has shown social housing tenants are more likely to experience greater unemployment, fuel poverty and now digital exclusion. Through targeted initiatives like device donations and subsidised internet access, we look to address cost barriers to connectivity. Working with Social Housing Associations to establish community hubs – offering tech access, training, and peer support. We also want to support our Social Housing Providers, who are also digitally transforming their services and innovative solutions like community mesh networks, or 5G enabled heat pumps, could hold the potential to empower both providers and residents.

2.2.7 City of lifelong learning and digital skills

Devolution agreement with central government, provides further autonomy over our local and regional skills system. The City of Lifelong Learning approach aims to mobilise and best utilise economic, government and community assets and resources. In 2024, Manchester was designated a UNESCO: City of Lifelong Learning. Digital inclusion and digital skills are integral to this initiative. By 2030, over 85% of jobs will require advanced digital skills, whilst basic digital skills are unlikely to meet the needs of daily

life. Residents are at enhanced risk of being digitally excluded, with a skills lens. The City of Lifelong Learning approach will promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education, putting learning at the heart of family and community life, whilst positioning learning for work, home and studying.

2.2.8 Manchester's Age Friendly Strategy – Manchester a city for life 2023-28

The strategy notes that “Over half of Manchester residents aged over 60 are digitally excluded (not having the access, skills and confidence to use the internet and benefit fully from digital technology in everyday life)”. It states that by 2025 - “We will develop a better focus on digital inclusion for the over-50s.” This work is therefore high priority in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

2.2.9 Family Hubs

There is a close correlation between low literacy levels and digital exclusion, so many of the Education priorities, including Read Manchester, rely on our programmes to reduce digital exclusion. In January 2024, planning started for a pilot project at Woodville Family Hub in Cheetham Hill. Woodville applied to join the National Digital Inclusion Network and consequently has applied to join the National Databank enabling staff to give out free SIM cards to users of the centre. We have successfully sourced devices as a social value offer from highways contractor, Rosgal. These devices are used on a weekly basis for a digital drop-in session which is run by a digital champion volunteer. The session is typically attended by 4-5 people during each 3 hour weekly session. The model is now subject to evaluation but from anecdotal feedback, it has been decided to replicate the digital Hub at Crossacres Family Hub in Wythenshawe. Further hubs are being planned for Gorton and Longsight Family Hubs.

2.2.10 Resident and Business Digital Experience Programme

The Council is currently transforming the way it delivers services digitally to residents through the Resident and Business Digital Experience Programme (RBDxP), and the Digital Inclusion Action Plan helps maximise the benefits to residents from this programme.

2.2.11 Local Elections Voter ID

For the first time, voters were required to produce ID to vote in the Local Elections of May 2023. This continued in 2024. People can apply online for a Voter Authority Certificate, where they do not currently have any of the prescribed ID to enable them to vote. Libraries, including the Digital Inclusion Team, are essential to encourage and enable people to be able to gain the Voter Authority Certificate. We support residents to apply online – both via the Team's telephone service and through libraries. Each library has a session each week where residents will be supported to apply online, including taking and uploading a photograph.

2.3 Delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2023-24

This section shows the great progress that has been made with supporting digital inclusion over the last 12 months. A hugely wide-ranging programme has delivered many outcomes that benefit our residents, helping them overcome the disadvantages of being socially excluded and to cope with the current cost of living situation.

- 2.3.1 The work is guided by the Digital Inclusion Steering Group chaired by Councillor John Hacking - Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure. The group which meets quarterly and membership is made up of strategic representatives from organisations across sectors. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan outlined in Appendix 1 summarises our priorities agreed by the Steering Group.
- 2.3.2 Libraries have continued to be the primary community venue which supports digital inclusion. Users of the libraries Internet access tend to be from areas of the city where digital exclusion is highest. This is shown in Appendix 7. In total there were 330,00 hours of public Internet access in 2024 and over 600,000 uses of free libraries Wi-fi.
- 2.3.3 All 22 libraries are registered databank centres and give out Sims that provide six months of free Internet access. In total, 6000 Sims have been given out in libraries and by the team over the last 12 months. These Sims are provided free by Internet Service Providers. This prevents many residents becoming digitally excluded as they can't afford data charges during the cost-of-living crisis. This initiative supported libraries role as warm spaces during winter months.
- 2.3.4 Our digital inclusion programme of work has increasingly been driven by data, considering the different levels of risk of digital exclusion that residents face in various parts of the city. We will continue to develop the [Digital Exclusion Index](#) with the Council's Performance, Research and Intelligence team to target our initiatives in the areas of the city deemed most at risk of digital exclusion. Appendix 5 shows the areas of the city with the highest risk of digital exclusion. Much of our digital inclusion programme has been focused on these areas.
- 2.3.5 The digital inclusion programme is a combination of delivery of services directly to residents and building the capacity of VCSE organisations to support residents with digital exclusion.
- 2.3.6 The direct delivery schemes are described below.
 - 2.3.6.1 Device schemes
Lack of a devices that connect to the Internet is a common barrier to being digitally included. Over the past year, we have run several device schemes to increase the number of Manchester residents with Internet access. Over 200 laptops have been delivered to community organisations and Manchester residents in the last 12 months, via a donation from XMA as part of their social

value commitment. This case study is included in Appendix 8. To make device schemes more sustainable we partner with Community Computers to refurbish old devices and sell them at low cost to Manchester residents. In 2024 they sold 145 devices at low cost to Manchester residents and donated 28 devices to Manchester residents for free. Each library acts as a donation point, thus enabling residents to recycle their old devices safely for the benefit of other residents, instead of throwing them away. Community Computers can offer some devices back to us to donate to Manchester residents for free.

2.3.6.2 Data

Lack of connectivity is another barrier to residents, particularly during this cost-of-living crisis as many people cancel their broadband and mobile data packages. 6000 free SIMs have been distributed in the last 12 months as outlined in section 2.3.3

2.3.6.3 Skills

Digital skills and inclusion are crucial to Manchester's status as a UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning, reflecting the city's commitment to lifelong learning initiatives. By 2030, it is projected that over 85% of jobs will require advanced digital skills. As the digital landscape evolves, incorporating advancements in AI, enhanced digital technology, and online connectivity, possessing these skills will become essential for participating in modern society. Traditional basic digital skills may no longer suffice for the demands of daily life and work, increasing the risk of digital exclusion for residents, from a skills perspective. Appendix 4 provides a summary of core digital skills activities that support the digital inclusion agenda.

- 2.3.7 An increasing emphasis in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan has been given to VCSE Sector support this year. By building capacity within community organisations around digital inclusion, the work becomes sustainable and reaches most people. It is imperative that the Council is not seen as the main delivery solution to combat digital exclusion, but that we support existing provision in communities. Examples are listed below:

2.3.7.1 Using funding from the Work and Skills Team we have been able to incentivise community organisations to embed digital inclusion into their work, through the implementation of a Digital Inclusion Toolkit. Residents are most likely to become digitally confident through community organisations they trust, rather than through traditional IT training organisations. In the past 6 months we have visited 50 organisations, most of whom have begun offering digital inclusion support as a result. This includes registering as a member of the National Databank to be able to donate free SIMs, offering digital training sessions, hiring a digital champion volunteer etc. Through this work we are making a real difference to the digital support infrastructure in the city in a sustainable way. This has been expanded through the £70k Strengthening Communities funding provided by GMCA to all 10 Manchester boroughs.

2.3.7.2 We have established the Digital Inclusion Working group which meets six times a year and progresses work in between meetings. All members have one common goal – to reduce the amount of digitally excluded people in Manchester. Membership includes the digital inclusion team, other Council

staff, digital skills providers, community groups, MACC, housing providers and colleagues from the health sector. Group members value the support provided and the forum to share best practice on issues such as supporting older people, supporting visually impaired people and funding opportunities.

2.3.7.3 Our Digital Health Hubs initiative was first introduced in Wythenshawe and has recently been introduced in North Manchester - Crumpsall, Cheetham Hill and Harpurhey. Through our partnerships with local organisations and libraries, residents are provided with relevant NHS app training. We created promotional materials that outline exactly what offers are available from those centres, and colleagues in the NHS Digital team work with local Primary Care Networks to embed that information into the heart of their service. This allows GP receptionists and practitioners to refer their patients to local community centres, if they identify a need for digital support, for example to book GP appointments online. Two new strands of this work are now being developed. Firstly, an online form is being developed for practice receptionists and practitioners to use to directly refer patients to community settings for digital training and/or assistance. Help centres will then contact the patient to signpost them to the nearest or most appropriate setting and make an appointment. Rather than simply give patients information on where to go for help, the new online form will enable patients to be assisted in a more targeted and effective way. The second strand is to upskill a group of volunteers to become digital champions who specialise in training patients in using the NHS and MyMFT apps. An initial event talking to the Neighbourhood Health Champions based at Moss Side Powerhouse has taken place.

2.3.7.4 To increase awareness of digital support across the city, we have created and maintain a directory of digital drop-ins across the city, including library and VCSE sector drop-in sessions - <https://hsm.manchester.gov.uk/kb5/manchester/directory/results.page?directorychannel=9-1>. We are sharing this directory widely with organisations across the city, so they know where in their local community to signpost residents for digital support. We also work closely with Manchester Adult Education to ensure that residents are aware of the free digital skills courses on offer.

2.3.7.5 We are on the board of the 'Ageing in Place' partnership hosted by Southway Housing. This was due to our partnership work with the successful pilot of the health app Keep on Keep Up (KOKU) using tablet computers from AbilityNet gifted to older Gorton residents at Gorton Central Community Centre. The Digital Inclusion Team work with Age UK in Wythenshawe, and Crossacres day centre is an active digital hub. The Digital Inclusion team continues to look to partner with other age friendly organisations to enable them to become digital help hubs.

2.3.8 **Let's Get Digital campaign and communications**

In 2021, following consultation with residents, the Let's Get Digital Manchester campaign was produced. This branding can be used by all organisations in Manchester, not just the Council, to raise awareness of digital inclusion

support. We send Let's Get Digital newsletters which is used to promote digital inclusion and digital support initiatives. There is a Twitter account [@LetsGetDigiMcr](#) which shares support offers with partners across the city and wider afield. There are also Let's Get Digital Pages on the Manchester Digital website <https://manchesterdigitalstrategy.com/> and we are currently undertaking an accessibility assessment to ensure that our website is fully inclusive to all

2.4 Funding of the digital inclusion programme

The digital inclusion programme is crucial to supporting residents across the city, particularly in those areas with the highest levels of deprivation. The work is key to multiple high-profile corporate priorities. The work to date has been funded from a variety of areas. This includes Covid recovery funding and the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. The Council's Cost of Living budgets provided £47k pa funding in 2023-24 and 2024-25. £50k per year has been provided from GMCA annually since 2020. This year we have benefited from a further £70k funding from GMCA through the Strengthening Communities Digital Inclusion Fund. This has been supplemented through a series of low-level external funding bids to the Good Things Foundation, from mainstream libraries funding and social value contracts. All options are being explored to ensure sustainability of the programme, including continuation of existing funding streams. The need to combat digital exclusion will remain for the foreseeable future.

2.5 Future priorities and projects

The Digital Inclusion programme has done a huge amount to tackle digital exclusion in Manchester, but there continues to be much more to do. Digital exclusion is still affecting the lives of thousands of Manchester's residents, especially with the current cost of living situation. Our most vulnerable residents continue to be disproportionately affected by being digitally excluded. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan, included as Appendix 1, details the priorities for the next twelve months. Highlights of these priorities are:

- 2.5.1 We will continue to directly deliver device, data and skills initiatives. We will donate devices to priority residents (care leavers, cost of living helpline callers, food bank users). We will continue to support people through the cost-of-living crisis by provide data via the National databank sims schemes. We will continue to offer telephone support to residents who have Internet access but don't have the skills or confidence to use it effectively – supporting specific initiatives such as Voter Authority Certificate applications, Council consultations etc. We will introduce a weekly device support session at Central Library where people can bring in their own devices and we'll offer support via digital champions. Funding has been received from the Good Things Foundation from their impact grant scheme. This is for a new device-based drop-in session for Manchester residents at Central Library. Residents will be invited to attend to seek advice on how to operate different types of IT equipment. People can bring their own equipment or use a PC laptop, an Apple Mac laptop or an Apple/Android tablet that will be available. A digital

Champion Volunteer will be utilised to run the drop-in sessions starting during Spring 2025.

- 2.5.2 We will roll out Digital Health Hubs to the other areas of the city. Increasing links with health organisations to increase digital inclusion. We will develop further digital health hubs around GP practices to promote the use of digital health tools, improve residents access to health services and reduce pressure on NHS services.
- 2.5.3 We will continue to support VCSE organisations, encouraging more organisations to embed digital inclusion in their work, and supporting the work of those organisations that already deliver digital inclusion initiatives. Supporting the VCSE sector's understanding of digital inclusion and ability to support digitally excluded people will make this work sustainable in the long-term and is a key priority for the team. Using the £70k funding from GMCA through the Strengthening Communities Digital Inclusion Fund, we will continue our digital inclusion toolkit – providing financial support to community organisations when they embed digital inclusion into their activities.
- 2.5.4 We will commission research to analyse mobile capacity strengths across the city. It is an extension of a mobile mapping project where Biffa's refuse vehicles carry sensors to detect the connectivity and capacity of mobile network operators across in the city centre. The project will be extended to other parts of the city by March 2025. Digital inclusion requires strong reliable connectivity and certain segments of the population in Manchester could be affected if they're situated in a 'not-spot'. For example, those affected by the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) will now rely on mobile connection for emergency care. If these devices have poor mobile connectivity, it could have significant health consequences. We will cross reference or connectivity data with DERI indicators to target solutions to increase the quality of connectivity our residents have access too.
- 2.5.5 We will continue to explore expanding affordable connectivity options. Recognising the crucial role of internet access in tackling digital exclusion, we remain committed to providing free/low-cost connectivity solutions for low-income households. Currently, we are engaged in promising discussions with two Housing Associations exploring the possibility of offering free civic Wi-Fi to their residents. The housing provider acts as a digital landlord, extending their internet connection using relays (access points) mounted on their properties to create a mesh network offering free Wi-Fi to the surrounding area.
- 2.5.6 The Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) is being switched off in the UK. The switch-off process began in September 2023, with the full PSTN switch-off scheduled for 2027. After the switch-off, all devices that rely on PSTN to function, most notably older landline phones, will no longer work. We are working with colleagues across Greater Manchester to identify those types of residents most at risk from this switch off, for examples where care equipment will stop working, and put together an action plan to mitigate the impact.

- 2.5.7 Digital champions are key to supporting digital skills initiatives across the city. We will continue to increase the number of volunteers recruited. The champions will support digital drop-ins in libraries, provide telephone support to those people that text the helpline, and be allocated to organisations across the city.
- 2.5.8 We will continue to build strategic partnerships. For example, we will continue to work with the University of Manchester on KOKU (Keep on Keep Up) to increase mobility for over 55s using a bespoke app. The DI team have held a successful pilot at Gorton Community Central using tablets donated by Ability Net to test the app with residents. The group at Gorton continues to use the KOKU app and are feeding back a very positive narrative around the benefits. We are also working with Manchester Metropolitan University on a delivery AI literacy workshop. Following successful 'AI for all' workshops' delivered by the Manchester Digital Strategy Team, the DI Team are planning a 'train the trainer' event to education and demonstrate uses of AI to VCSEs/Community Organisations.
- 2.5.9. The Digital Inclusion Team are initiating a project on piloting a tech repair cafe. There is an existing presence of repair cafes in the south of the city, but there is potential to tackle both unnecessary e-waste and access to appropriate devices through expanding the repair cafe network. We are looking to find a partner to develop the project with and identify the most appropriate area, where residents will have devices to donate.

3.0 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the information in the report.

4.0 Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2025
- Appendix 2 - Manchester Digital Strategy Delivery Plan 2025
- Appendix 3 - Infographic – Digital Inclusion Team
- Appendix 4 - Digital Skills Update 2025
- Appendix 5 - Wards in Manchester where digital exclusion is highest
- Appendix 6 - SIMs received by Manchester residents by Ward
- Appendix 7 - Library computer users compared to Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Appendix 8 - XMA Laptop Donation Scheme: Case Study
- Appendix 9 - Wi-Fi upgrades in Libraries

Manchester's Digital Inclusion Action Plan

Updated March 2025



Sections

- **What is Digital Inclusion?**
 - Definition
 - Digital Exclusion Research
- **Mission Statement**
- **Digital Inclusion Team**
- **Digital Inclusion in Manchester**
- **Strategic Landscape**
- **Consultancy approach**
- **Purpose of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan**
- **Digital Inclusion Workstreams**
- **Workstream Objectives & Metrics**



What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital Exclusion occurs where someone doesn't have one or more of the following:

- Access to the Internet
- Skills/Confidence to use the Internet
- Motivation to use the Internet – “it’s not for me”

According to [the UN](#), digital inclusion refers to the "equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design of digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere. Digital inclusion is enabled by human rights-based, intersectional, and whole-of-society policies and multi-stakeholder approaches and actions, that take into account the various barriers individuals face when accessing and experiencing digital technologies."

There are different ways of describing and measuring digital inclusion. Recently, the [Minimum Digital Living Standards Project](#) has set out to identify the minimum digital needs of families in the UK. The current working definition is "A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence."

Importantly, as the [UK Digital Poverty Evidence Review](#) highlights, digital exclusion and poverty can affect anyone, and most of us will experience some form of digital exclusion in our lifetimes. People fall in and out of being digitally included. There is no switch we can flip to ensure that someone changes status permanently from "excluded" to "included."

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Digital poverty is both the result of and a cause of financial hardship. A person might not need to live in financial poverty to experience digital poverty.

**UK Digital Poverty
Evidence Review 2022**

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Digital Exclusion Research

UK

- 1.7 million households do not have a broadband connection (2021).
- 2.4 million adults do not have even basic digital skills for life.
- Lack of digital skills costs the economy £63 billion a year.
- 20% of non-users say the internet is too expensive.
- 20% of non-users say the internet is too complicated.

Manchester

- 1 in 3 (37%) residents report that their household experiences some form of digital exclusion.
- 63% of those aged 75+ and 52% of disabled people are likely to experience at least one aspect of digital exclusion.
- Residents are most likely to be excluded due to a lack of skills or support to allow them to access digital online services.
- Only around 40% of residents are able to use digital GP services.
- 12% of residents don't have decent broadband connections.

Social Exclusion

- Almost 20% of residents don't have any formal education qualifications. (Those who left education at or under 18 years are almost 8x more likely to be limited or non-users.)
- Around 17% of residents have a disability. (32% of people with an impairment do not have even the most basic digital skills.)
- 20% of residents have a main language other than English. (Lack of English language literacy can be a barrier to learning digital skills.)
- 42% of children are growing up in poverty and 21% Mcr households have < £30/month discretionary income (not incl. broadband costs). (Limited users are 4x more likely to come from low-income households.)

Sources:

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldcomm/219/21904.htm#_idTextAnchor004

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/building-a-digital-nation/>

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/understanding_motivations_of_non-users_of_the_internet.pdf

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/resident-surveys/>

Digital Exclusion Research

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"Digital exclusion affects millions of UK citizens. Every day, people are unable to access the internet because they do not have the connection, device or skills to get online. This digital divide is undermining efforts to improve UK productivity, economic growth and socio-economic inclusion. Cost of living challenges are exacerbating the problem for the most financially vulnerable."

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry into "Digital Exclusion and the Cost of Living" (June 2023)

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Mission Statement

We **advise** organisations across Manchester on how to embed digital inclusion into their existing offer.

We **support** residents and organisations serving residents to access digital skills training, devices, connectivity, and data.

We **connect** people working on digital inclusion across the city by convening meetings for networking and knowledge exchange.

We **amplify** the best practice across the city and country on digital inclusion to raise awareness.

And perhaps most importantly, we **listen** to the voices of lived experience. We strive to co-create solutions to digital exclusion with the people who have first-hand knowledge.

We don't chase the numbers because we know that being included is not a tick-box exercise. People will fall in and out of being digitally included at different points in their lives, and inclusion is often a qualitative experience.

We're interested in culture change! Everyone needs to take responsibility for empowering people to be digitally included.

let's get digital

2024 highlights



56

community organisations helped to become digital hubs



395

laptops provided to community groups

32

Digital Champion volunteers trained and working in the community



2019

subscribers to our communications

1948

Sims donated to digitally excluded residents through libraries, our team and the care leavers scheme



333

laptops donated via social value from XMA

325

members of our Digital Inclusion Working Group



200

low-cost devices provided in partnership with Community Computers

32 community databanks added to all 22 Manchester Library databanks giving out free SIMs

"I needed mobile internet to stay connected with family that stay in Ukraine"

"I feel like a part of society"

"It makes me feel like everyone else, socialising and shopping."

"This sim has helped me search for resources for my children with autism."



100 MiFi units and 28 Jangala boxes donated to help people with connectivity at home

"For the people that don't have internet at home this has been a lifesaver."



MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Manchester Adult Education

Strategic Landscape

Almost every aspect of everyday life is impacted by **digital** today: work, school, health, community, social and more.

Digital is fundamental to residents' lives, so **inclusion** is necessary for everyone to benefit.

This is why **digital inclusion** must be integral to all our key strategic plans citywide.

Digital inclusion is a priority embedded in several key Manchester City Council strategies.

The Manchester Digital Strategy, 2021-2026

This strategy sets out the city's ambition to be a world-leading digital city by 2026, and digital inclusion is fundamental to this ambition.

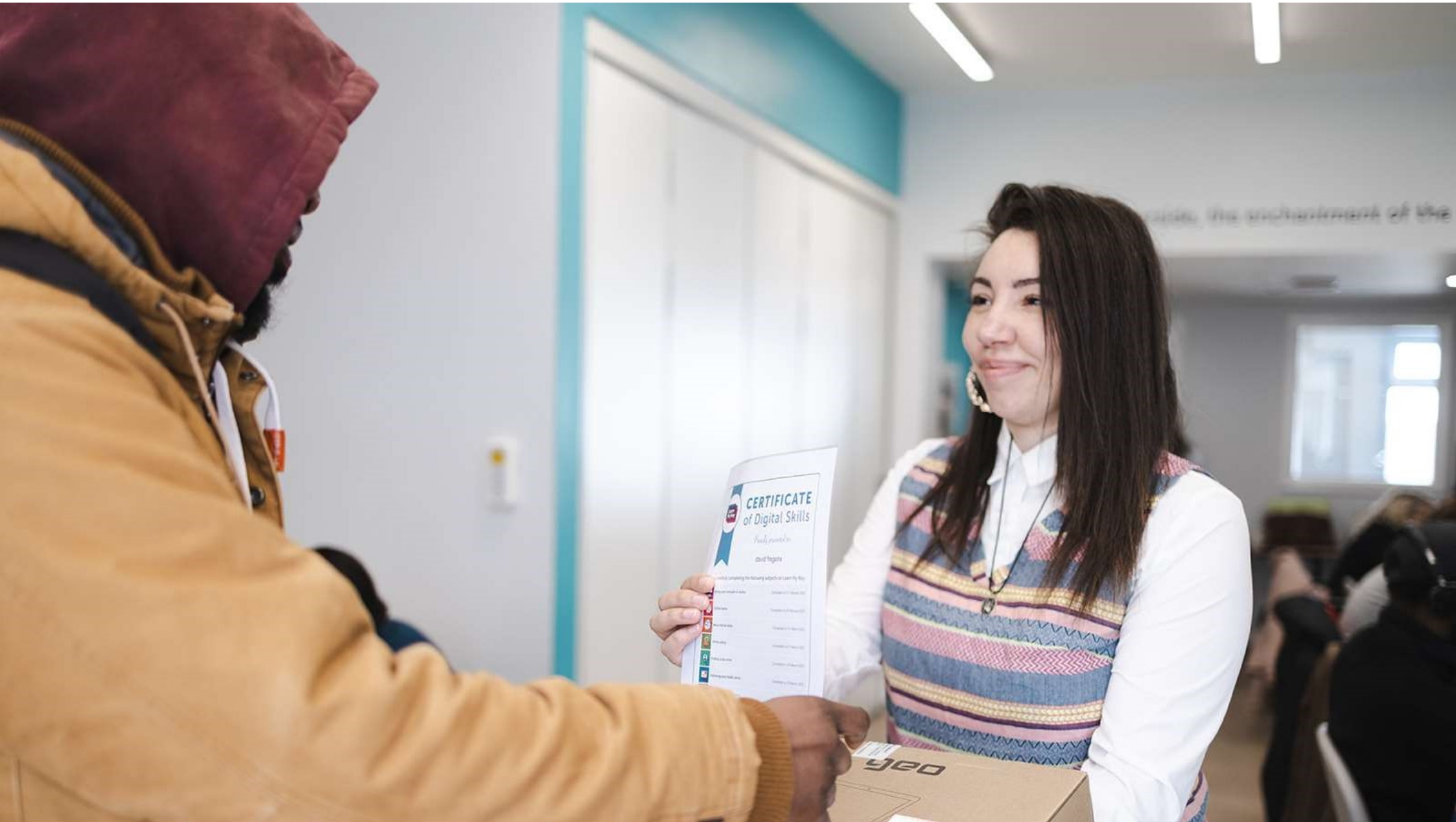
Digital inclusion, equality, and diversity are at the heart of the strategy, and it is a priority to **"deepen our understanding of digital inclusion by continuing to deliver the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, developing the Digital Exclusion Index and actively engaging with residents and VCSE organisations."**

Making Manchester Fairer: Anti-Poverty Strategy 2023-2027

Digital inclusion is also about ensuring that the digital technologies we adopt and use treat everyone fairly. The Anti-Poverty Strategy commits to implementing the Algorithmic Transparency Standard so we can make sure that algorithmic decision-making (like AI) does not unfairly penalise people on low incomes, and encourage our partners to do the same.

Algorithms are sets of rules applied to data in order to find patterns, solve problems, or make predictions. Local authorities and other organisations collect, store, and analyse large amounts of data, and they increasingly use algorithms to support decision making. The use of algorithms gives opportunities to make services more efficient, tailor services to individual users, and reveal new insights about social problems based on robust evidence. However, algorithmic decision-making also brings risks, such as violations of privacy, discrimination, and bias against certain people or groups.

The UK Algorithmic Transparency Standard is a national framework to enable the public sector to share information on the use of algorithmic tools with the public and other stakeholders, such as regulators and researchers. Publishing this information out in the open means that these systems and tools can be subjected to public debate and scrutiny.



CERTIFICATE
of Digital Skills

Proudly presents to
David Higgins

For successfully completing the following subjects on Learn My Way:

- Introduction to Digital Skills
- Introduction to Microsoft Word
- Introduction to Microsoft Excel
- Introduction to Microsoft PowerPoint
- Introduction to Microsoft Teams
- Introduction to Microsoft OneDrive
- Introduction to Microsoft Outlook
- Introduction to Microsoft Edge
- Introduction to Microsoft Windows

Making Manchester Fairer: Tackling Health Inequalities in Manchester 2022–2027

Health inequalities are the avoidable gaps between the healthiest and least healthy people and communities in our city. So many Mancunians fared worse during the pandemic because of existing inequalities.

The pandemic also exposed the added barriers to good health that some communities face as a result of prejudice and discrimination. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, as well as Disabled People, were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

The Making Manchester Fairer Action Plan seeks to address the persistent health inequalities in Manchester and digital inclusion is explicitly highlighted as a key driver of this: "Digital inclusion is about making the benefits and opportunities of the internet and digital technology available to everyone. Addressing the digital divide is one of the many great social – and health equity – challenges."

The Digital Inclusion team is actively engaged with the plan's various kickstarter projects and is advising on where digital inclusion initiatives can support the projects' aims.



Investing in Success: Manchester's Economic Strategy

This strategy sets out a vision for the next 25 years

One of the five priorities is: “Develop world-class infrastructure, places and talent.”

As part of that it references “Delivering Manchester’s Digital Strategy” and “Digital connectivity is now as essential to businesses and residents as traditional utilities such as water and power.”

The delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan will support residents’ digital skills, the economic strategy and the ambition for inclusive growth.



Age Friendly Strategy

The 4 main themes of the Age Friendly Strategy are:

- Being Heard and Age Equality
- Age Friendly Neighborhoods where we can Age in Place
- Age Friendly Services that support us to Age Well
- Work, Skills and Money

Given that digital exclusion disproportionately affects older people, we are working closely with the Age Friendly team to embed digital inclusion into the strategy's delivery plan, under each of the four themes. Our particular focus is supporting age friendly organisations to promote digital inclusion as part of existing services.



Digital Inclusion in Manchester: A consultancy approach

During the COVID19 pandemic, the Digital Inclusion team were responsible for preparing and sending out numerous devices to residents and providing them with mentor volunteers to guide and train in the use of these devices.

Since the end of the pandemic, the Digital Inclusion team has adopted a different consultancy based approach that will bring inclusivity to more citizens of Manchester.

This approach involves contacting community organisations and offering to help them embed digital initiatives in their offer by using a bespoke 'Digital Inclusion Toolkit'.

To date, we have contacted over 40 community organisations and helped them improve their digital offer to their service users.

Here are some of the organisations we are working with:-



Mustard Tree

Believe in children
Barnardo's

New Longsight  **boaztrust**
serving destitute asylum seekers

CAHN
Caribbean & African Health Network

 **MASH**
manchester action on street health
est. 1991

GEORGE HOUSE TRUST
HIV POSITIVE LIVING

 **Cornerstone**
Caritas Diocese of Salford

 **SharpFutures**

(allfm) 96.9
...the real voice of Manchester



422 COMMUNITY HUB

Golden Centre of Opportunities
We are a City & Guilds Approved Centre and a Matrix Accredited Centre

back on track >

 **MDC**
Est 1846
manchester deaf centre


North Manchester Community Partnership

 **Booth Centre**

 **BARNABUS**
Bringing hope to the homeless and vulnerable



COFFEE 4 Craig

CREATING STRONGER MANCHESTER SETTLEMENT COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

 **healthy me healthy communities**
www.hmhc.co.uk

Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy



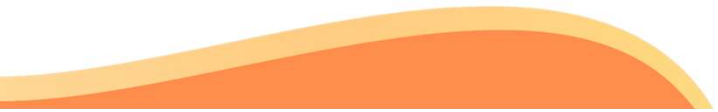
The pandemic shone a spotlight on the issues of loneliness and social isolation in our society. One of the few positive impacts from this time was the rise of people using digital to communicate; and the benefits of these online communities mean that people from diverse backgrounds, who otherwise might not have come together, can find a common space.

But not everyone has access.

As more and more of our life takes place online, from chatting with friends and neighbours on social media, consuming culture, checking local events, to reading regional & national news, for those offline the social isolation is exacerbated. We recognise that digital exclusion is social exclusion.

However, the increase in digital communication can increase the risk of polarisation, as hate speech and fake news lead to online conflicts which spill over into the real world. Therefore, it is vital that digital inclusion work also promotes online safety and media literacy.

The Digital Inclusion team will support the Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy team to ensure that the delivery plan considers digital excluded members of our communities and co-designs strategies to support them.





Purpose of this Action Plan

- This document is a plan for meeting the strategic priorities of the city, particularly those articulated in the Digital Strategy.
- Our actions are organised into workstreams >> workstreams have specific objectives >> and objectives are delivered by our vast array of partners across the city.
- We are always looking for partners who are willing to commit to delivering on this action plan with our advice and support, so please get in touch!



Digital Inclusion Action Plan – Sep 2024

1. Advising & Building Capacity	2. Expanding Access	3. Digital Capability	4. Sustainability, Usability & Affordability	5. Listening & Research
<p>1.1 Embed DI in existing services and build local DI networks by using the DI Toolkit</p> <p>1.2 Increase number of digital champion volunteers providing support in libraries/VCSEs and providing telephone/online support. To encourage knowledge exchange, develop digital champions across all sectors</p> <p>1.3 Support frontline workers to provide ad hoc skills support using the DI toolkit and promoting upskilling activities</p> <p>1.4 Monitor and support communications around the public switched telephone network (PSTN) switch off.</p>	<p>2.1 Donate devices and data to residents & comm orgs (lending & device refurb schemes. National databank)</p> <p>2.2 Make grants and funding possibilities visible to Manchester organisations (incl non-MCC funding)</p> <p>2.3 Develop infrastructure e.g. public Wi-Fi hotspots, alternative free/affordable connectivity, embed connectivity in social value. Work in connection with social housing partners (eg WCHG)</p> <p>2.4 Increase device and connectivity donations through social value contracts</p>	<p>3.1 Digital health hubs in multiple areas of the city</p> <p>3.2 Improve visibility of digital skills support in communities, including in libraries and VCSEs</p> <p>3.3 Help ensure all Manchester residents and MCC staff have digital skills for life and work.</p> <p>3.4 Promote online safety and wellbeing for citizens including children and schools</p> <p>3.5 Data and AI literacy in public and MCC staff and public sector staff more widely. Be able to understand implications of AI technology.</p>	<p>4.1 Promote and support circular economy initiatives (e.g. refurb device schemes)</p> <p>4.2 Encourage software development that is backward compatible (overcome planned obsolescence) To encourage software and app rollouts to be more user friendly</p>	<p>5.1 Involve people with lived experience in co-designing digital inclusion projects and interventions</p> <p>5.2 Support research into digital exclusion and strategies for increasing inclusion and diversity</p> <p>5.3 Use the Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) to target work and encouraging use across all sectors . To develop DERI further</p>

Advising & Building Capacity



Objectives:

- 1.1 Embed DI in existing services
- 1.2 Encourage knowledge exchange, develop digital champions across all sectors
- 1.3 Increase number of digital champions providing support in libraries and providing telephone support
- 1.4 Build local DI networks
- 1.5 Support frontline workers to provide ad hoc skills support

Advising & Building Capacity: We will...

Intervention	Why?	Lead	Target Date/ Report Back	Measure/deliverables	Updates
Digital Champions scheme	To boost capacity at digital skills sessions, to develop skills of volunteers	MCC DI team	Ongoing	Numbers of DCs trained and matched to volunteering opportunities in libraries, community venues and via telephone.	Scheme continues with 15 volunteers. 4 volunteers at Woodville Family Hub
PSTN Switch Off	Monitor developments with public telephone switch off scheduled in 2026		Ongoing		DI team frequently participate in meetings led by BT
Workforce Digital Skills Development	Boost digital skills in MCC	MCC DI Team	Apr 2025	Workforce Digital Skills Development Get Online Week participation	Staff to be digital advocates and have the skills they need for work now and in future
Digital Inclusion Toolkit	Support frontline staff to recognise digital exclusion, know where to signpost. To support community orgs to embed DI in existing services, so residents can access support in trusted spaces.	MCC DI team and W&S teams	July 2025	Number of Let's Get Digital partner organisations, case studies on partner organisations.	40+ organisations 3 case studies live on 'LetsGetDigital' site. Further £20K funding from GMCA
Digital Inclusion Working Group	To share best practice and exchange knowledge with stakeholders and partner organisations	MCC DI Team	Ongoing	Minutes from quarterly meetings	Latest Meeting held on 22/1/25
GMCA involvement	To share best practice and share ideas and knowledge with other DI teams	MCC DI plus GMCA and other GM DI Teams	Ongoing	Minutes from DIAN, DI Leads Meeting, DI Taskforce meeting, PSTN working group	Meetings ongoing

Expanding Access



Objectives:

- 2.1 Donate devices + data to residents & comm orgs (lending & device refurb schemes)
- 2.2 Make grants and funding available to Manchester organisations (incl non-MCC funding)
- 2.3 Develop infrastructure e.g. public wifi, (free/affordable connectivity), embed connectivity in social value
- 2.4 Increase device and connectivity donations through social value contracts

Expanding Access: We will...

Intervention	Why?	Lead	Target Date/ Report Back	Measure/deliverables	Updates
Databank promotion	To ensure more services include this in their existing support offers	MCC DI team	Ongoing	Number of databanks across city increased, including all libraries	20 new databanks set up as part of DI toolkit initiative in 2023 Over 6000 Sims donated in 2024
Funding DI Toolkit	To boost capacity in VCSE to offer DI support	MCC DI team	October 2024	Amount of funding brought into the city	DI Toolkit received £10k grant from MCC W&S for VCSEs VCSEs eligible to grant funding from Good Things Foundation. Additional £70K awarded by GMCA in Dec 2024.
Social Value	To increase the number of refurbished, low cost hardware being reused by Manchester residents	MCC DI team	October 2024	Amount of devices donated to residents.	6 laptops donated by Rosgal for Woodville Family Hub. 333 laptops delivered from XMA as part of their Social Value offering MCC DI team to VCSEs.
Get Online Week	Participate in national advocacy in raising awareness of Digital Exclusion	MCC DI team	October yearly	- Resident participation in Community Computer refurb device sale - Schools participation in workshop	GOW successfully delivered in Oct 2024 at Newton Heath Library
Making Manchester Fairer	Giving help to Manchester most disadvantaged citizens to ensure equality	MCC DI	September 2024	24 devices donated	Awaiting next batch of machines for school giveaway project for Autumn term 2024
Alternative connectivity pilot in MCC social housing	To explore alternative, cheaper connectivity for social housing tenants	Digital Strategy Team	Oct 2025	Work with WCHG around alternative technologies	WCHG
Be Well device scheme	To support Be Well clients' health and wellbeing via online tools	Big Life Group	Feb 2024	25 Geobooks donated to 25 clients who are partnered with a coach for digital skills support	18 devices donated so far
Komp device project	To reduce social isolation in older people to video chat with family	Age Friendly NCDO (MCC)	Completed Aug 23	Number of older people who receive a device and can use it to	Delivery made to Didsbury and Chorlton Good Neighbours

Digital Capability



Objectives:

- 3.1 Improve visibility of digital skills support in communities, including in libraries
- 3.2 Help ensure all Manchester residents and MCC staff have digital skills for life and work
- 3.3 Promote online safety and wellbeing for children and schools
- 3.4 Promote digital skills for employability
- 3.5 Data and algorithmic literacy in public and MCC staff and public sector staff more widely

Digital Capability: We will...

Intervention	Why?	Lead	Target Date/ Report Back	Measure/deliverables	Updates
Digital health hubs	<p>in multiple areas of the city, increasing support of health services online in libraries and other community venues, and promoting in health settings</p> <p>To empower people to manage health via online tools, to ease capacity at GPs in order to keep analogue routes open for those who need them</p>	MCC DI team and NHS	Oct 2025	Number of Digital Health Hubs across the city	Wythenshawe pilot successful. Cheetham, Harpurhey rolled out April 2024. Gorton, Longsight Levenshulme planned for Summer 25
Digital Skills Framework	<p>To align business and resident digital skills needs. To promote further learning</p> <p>Support the development and implementation of a digital skills framework and the UNESCO city of learning status awarded to Manchester</p>	W&S team	Ongoing	Number of residents taking up skills learning sessions	Digital skills framework launched in January 24
Learn My Way in libraries project	To improve digital skills of library customers, to develop confidence of library staff in using LMW platform	MCC DI team	Complete June 23	Training materials and workshops delivered to library staff	Pilot at Central Library is complete
Device helpdesk at Central Library	To enable residents to more confidently use their own devices	MCC DI team	April 2025	Funding received from Good Things Foundation. Weekly session established.	Planning underway with Central Library staff. Digital champions being engaged
Workforce Digital Skills Development	Staff to be digital advocates and have the skills they need for work now and in future	MCC Workforce Development, MAES	Oct 2025	A Workforce Digital Skills plan	Training modules for MS Outlook, Excel and Teams now available for booking on MCC skills hub. Upskills workshop/day still in planning
Promote Online safety for all residents	To reduce the threat of online crime / security	MCC/GMP	Ongoing	Participation in further meetings with view to disseminate relevant information to VCSEs in community	Link made with GMP, Hollie Bowker. Presentation at DIWG
AI 'Train the trainer' workshop	Train VCSE organizations in toolkit on how to use AI as well as educating on potential hazards for VCSEs users.	MCC	Sept 2025	Delivered workshop in collaboration with MMU	Spring 2025

Sustainability & Affordability



Objectives:

- 4.1 Promote and support circular economy initiatives (e.g. refurb device schemes)
- 4.2 Encourage software development that is backward compatible (overcome planned obsolescence)
- 4.3 Keep costs down by recycling

Sustainability & Affordability: We will...

Intervention	Why?	Lead	Target Date/ Report Back	Measure/deliverables	Updates
Community Computers refurb device scheme	Increase number of devices available to residents, to support MCC's Zero Carbon pledge. All libraries are donation points.	Community Computers	On-going	Monthly donation and sales data for Manchester	Community Computers joined Get Online Week at Newton Heath library.
Refurbish old MCC devices for donation to Manchester residents	To increase numbers of devices available to residents, to support MCC's Zero Carbon pledge	MCC IT	April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More refurbished devices received by Manchester residents - Existing contractor (Tier1) makes some devices available to Manchester residents - Influence new and MCC IT contracts to include that residents receive our old devices 	Contact made with Tier1 refurb partner on MCC contract. Negotiations with Tier 1 ongoing.
E-waste recycling advocacy/communications	Drive up donations to refurb scheme; meeting MCC's Zero Carbon pledge	MCC DI team	Oct 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comms campaign produced by MCC - Existing repair cafes increase volunteer numbers & devices repaired. 	Connections made with repair cafes to build on existing network for residents to update existing devices.
Promote user friendly digital solutions	To ensure digital solutions do not exclude certain residents through poor development/implementation	MCC Residents Experience Team	Oct 2025	Ongoing monitoring of MCC and external digital implementation	

Listening & Research



Objectives:

~~5.1 3-part research project on "Reframing digital exclusion"~~

5.2 Digital Exclusion Risk Index

5.3 Annual Digital Inclusion Report

Listening & Research: We will...

Intervention	Why?	Lead	Target Date/ Report Back	Measure/deliverables	Updates
Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI)	Use data to target work in the areas of the city most at risk of digital exclusion.	MCC PRI team	Ongoing	Number of uses of the DERI	Integration with GMCA model to be discussed
Mobile connectivity mapping	Use of the DERI to identify communities disproportionately affected by PTSN switch off – particularly residents who rely on telecare services.	MCC MDS Team	September 2025	- Initial mapping of data connectivity following first 'sweep'. - Second 'sweep' to target digitally excluded areas with poor connectivity	Commissioned Inakalm to use IOT devices on bin lorries to do a first 'sweep' of city.
3-part research project on "Reframing digital exclusion"	Hear from people with lived experience in order to better understand and co-design initiatives	Open Data Manchester (ODM)	Report delivered January 2024	Report on Digital volunteers, report on focus groups, user research materials for community orgs	Complete in Jan 2024
DIWG, consultancy approach	To listen to other DI stakeholders and share best practice	MCC DI Team	Oct 2024	Minutes from DIWG meetings	DIWG meetings held every 2 months
AI working groups	To talk to general public and interested stakeholders about the impact of AI technology	MCC Digital Strategy team	July 2024	Minutes and findings from series of workshops scheduled for April 2024	Workshops complete summer 2024 Findings presented in Sept 2024
Annual Digital Inclusion report, from 2024	To report on metrics which indicate residents are more digitally included.	MCC DI team	Completed Annual Report	Annual report produced from 2024	Complete July 2024



Whatever you want to
do online, we're here to help

Text: 07860 064128

Email: digitalinclusion@manchester.gov.uk

The Let's Get Digital Manchester programme is run by a
dedicated digital inclusion team in Manchester Libraries



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

MANCHESTER'S
DIGITAL STRATEGY





Manchester Digital Strategy Delivery Plan 2025

The Digital Strategy outlines 34 priorities across four key areas, with an annual Delivery Plan to guide progress. In the first two years, efforts focused on; establishing a Digital Strategy Team of 4 Officers, building governance; and forming the right partnerships for effective delivery. There are 12 active projects in the 2025 Delivery Plan. Some that are led by the city council and others requiring ownership by external stakeholders. Each project has its own OKR's and Milestones and quarter report provides updates on progress and any risks. To see the full Strategy visit - www.manchesterdigitalstrategy.com

Aa Priority	Description of Priority	Projects 2025	Delivery Timeframe	Themes	Description of project
1.1 Digital Inclusion	Deepen our understanding of digital inclusion by continuing to deliver the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, developing the Digital Exclusion Index and actively engaging with residents and VCSE organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Inclusion Action Plan 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities Rising to Challenges Future Proofing Our City 	The DIAP will continue to delivery projects across 5 themes - Advising & Building Capacity; Expanding Access; Digital Capability; Sustainability & Affordability and Listening & Research. The Plan will now also include an e-waste and mobile capacity mapping project - (both projects developed initially via Delivery Plan 2024).
1.3 Digital Leadership Within Education	Support schools to further develop digital leadership capability that enables strong digital strategic direction, supporting all young people across curriculum, to become digital citizens		TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Further clarity being developed with the Work and Skills Team.
1.5 Digital Skills Pathways - FE	Scale up and sustain existing entry-level pathways into digital jobs and maximise new pathways within the skills and careers system for post 16 (such as T-Levels), by strengthening connections between colleges and industry.		TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Further clarity being developed with the Work and Skills Team.
1.6 Digital Skills Pathways - Higher Level	Create new and accessible pathways into higher level, high value jobs and encourage entrepreneurship, especially in growing sectors such as Digital Marketing Cyber, AI and Fintech.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manchester Digital Skills Framework 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Continuing to develop the Digital Skills Framework with UoM, MMU, GMCA and the city council.
1.7 Higher Level Employment	Work with the digital ecosystem to ensure that Manchester residents are given opportunities and support to be able to compete for and progress into high value employment		2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Continuing to develop the Digital Skills Framework with UoM, MMU, GMCA and the city council.
2.5 Local Digital Connectivity Action Plans	Produce local Digital Action Plans for priority areas that identify steps and opportunities to improve connectivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fibre & Mobile Mapping 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places Enhancing Lives Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities Rising to Challenges Future Proofing Our City 	Mapping the capacity quality of fibre and mobile. Presenting data back to telecom providers to provide key solutions. Providing actions to be embedded within NDFs and SRP to improve the quality of connectivity in a place based way.
2.6 Smart Urban Design	Work closely alongside major capital and regeneration projects to promote smart urban design integrating digital capacity and smart assets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places 	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places Enhancing Lives Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities Rising to Challenges Future Proofing Our City 	Creating a Wythenshawe Connected Placemaking Plan to support the regeneration of the area. This plan will focus on infrastructure, Net Zero and the implementation of technology across other aspects such as service delivery, design and resident engagement.
-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Twin for Transport 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places Enhancing Lives Pioneering the Future Prosperity for All Rising to Challenges Future Proofing Our City 	Supporting the creation of a digital twin to create a comprehensive digital representation of Manchester's urban environment, integrating demographic data, highway networks, public and active travel opportunities, congestion and road accident information, and development plans.
-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zero Carbon Action Plan 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places Enhancing Lives Pioneering the Future Prosperity for All 	Supporting the delivery of the Zero Carbon Action Plan - Place Workstream. This will include supporting the workstream to map existing IOT Devices across the city.
3.2 Digital Start-Ups & Innovation Districts	Support the development of Innovation Districts, Corridors and Hubs to promote digital start-ups and scale-ups and the expansion of the digital ecosystem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Start-Up Landscape 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pioneering the Future Prosperity for All 	Socialising the key recommendations identified from research in 2024 and identifying key stakeholders and partnerships for ownership of delivery.
3.6 Impact of AI / Automation	Develop more intelligence, data analysis and horizon scanning on the potential impact of automation/AI and promote new thinking and practice on proactive socially inclusive responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding our AI Ecosystem 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pioneering the Future Prosperity for All Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Socialising report and key recommendations identified through research in 2024. This will include - the AI Ecosystems Map and co-designing a Charter to support the fostering of a responsible AI city ecosystem - ensuring the city council are key stakeholders of that.
3.7 Ethical & Socially Responsible Tech Ecosystem	Enhance support for ethical and socially responsible tech development and Manchester's growing ecosystem and reputation in these areas, including driving support in the sector for the Good Employment Charter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tech for Good in a Human Centred Smart City 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pioneering the Future Prosperity for All Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities 	Socialise key recommendations from research in 2024. This will include the development of a Demonstrator, with a small task and finish group, that supports us to apply for funds for delivery. This project will bring together the People's Panel for AI work, the AI for Good events and the work that is being done via the DIAP around supporting community organisations to adopt AI and new technologies.
4.2 Manage Energy Demand	Promote the use of technology and data to better manage demand on energy networks, accounting for new ways in which energy could be used. A focus here on Social Housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackling fuel poverty with data and technology. 	2025-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected Places Enhancing Lives Remarkable People Extraordinary Opportunities Rising to Challenges Future Proofing Our City 	Coordinate efforts from GMCA's - Connected Homes Inclusive Places (CHIP's) plan and DSIT Decarbonisation work - as well as the city councils PRI led Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) programme. We will also work with Citizen Advice, Open Data Manchester and MCCA do drive delivery. This work will focus through the lens of the resident and gathering behavioural insights through data.

let's get digital

2024 highlights



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community organisations helped to become digital hubs



395

laptops provided to community groups

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Digital Champion volunteers trained and working in the community



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"For the people that don't have internet at home this has been a lifesaver."

Appendix 4 – Digital Skills update 2025

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This annex provides an update, for the period September 2024 to January 2025, relating to digital skills activity that contributes to Manchester’s Digital Strategy and Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

The note is provided by Manchester City Council’s Work and Skills Team

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Activity, led and convened by the W&ST, has been cross mapped against Manchester’s Work and Skills, Our Manchester and Digital strategies.
- 2.2 A recap of the digital skills priorities, within the Work and Skills Strategy.
- 2.3 Manchester’s digital skills agenda is integrated into our UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning status (announced in February 2024). This approach has brought together over 625 partners, focusing on strengthening local knowledge, capacity and impact, alongside growing our international credibility, not limited to the digital skills and inclusion agenda.

3.0 Deliverables that contribute to the Manchester Digital Strategy

- 3.1 The Digital Inclusion Toolkit, a £10k funded project by the Digital Inclusion Team and W&ST, saw overwhelming interest, with 48 grassroots organisations becoming digital centre partners. It has helped to establish 37 National Databank Centres, alongside facilitating the training of 28 digital skills volunteers, amongst other outputs. This initiative has evolved into a consultancy offer, providing ongoing support and guidance to VCSE organisations, aiding their efforts to work with digitally excluded individuals within their communities.
- 3.2 Partnering with the Civic University Agreement Network, the City of Lifelong Learning supported over 80 university students at the Green Mission Event to tackle social and environmental challenges. Central to the event was the exploration of digital solutions. Furthermore, an expression of interest fund, in collaboration with the University of Manchester, has been established to support innovative ideas and initiatives stemming from this engagement. This collaborative effort underscores a commitment to fostering sustainable and socially responsible solutions.
- 3.3 The Digital Skills Framework is concluding its research phase, with key insights on digital sector data, role-specific needs, and international models forming the basis for the upcoming test and learn phase. A product launch plan, designed to help educational institutions review their curricula against employer needs diagnostics, remains on schedule for April/May 2025.
- 3.3a The integration of the independent research on 'Structural Inequalities in Digital Careers' is being explored, to embed this research into the Manchester Digital Skills Framework. This initiative will be advanced following the launch of the framework’s test and learn phase.
- 3.4 A collaborative working group between Manchester City Council and Factory International continues to develop the next generation of technicians, producers, and art professionals. Through a focused action plan, this partnership aims to enhance Manchester resident engagement with Aviva Studios and the Factory Academy learning offer. The group co-supported

two funding bids for youth and adult skills contracts. The youth contract was successful, with 28 young people progressing through the Creative Agency Accelerator program to date.

- 3.5 The Careers Education Information, Advice, and Guidance Framework (CEIAG for adults) pilot, which has been aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks (to account for the pre and post 19 transition), is approaching the end of its pilot phase. 15 training providers have tailored the Gatsby Benchmarks model to their needs and are gathering best practice examples. This project will be evaluated around April 2025, before the benchmarks are officially launched city-wide. Greater Manchester is exploring Manchester's activities as part of the region's All Age Careers Strategy.
- 3.6 During Green Careers Week in November 2024, the CEIAG Network hosted the Green and Digital CEIAG Event at the Green Skills Academy. This event brought together over 85 employers, training providers, policymakers, and CEIAG leads, to better inform the skills ecosystem, enhance local professional development and ultimately strengthen student post-learning destinations.
- 3.7 W&ST is sponsoring the 2025 Digital Skills Festival, taking place from February 8th to 14th, as Ecosystem Partners. This sponsorship allows us to elevate the profile and presence of the UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning and Doing Digital Together agendas. Additionally, it provides access to raw employer audit data and exclusive networking opportunities.
- 3.8 The digital CEIAG pilot at Pioneer House High School is currently under evaluation. A case study of this innovative approach is set to be published around April 2025. The project received initial funding of £1.5k to support 80 SEND students in composing and playing a short piece of music using Digit Cmpsr.
- 3.9 W&ST has funded 17 Work Clubs, starting from April 2024, with an investment of £298,000 over two years to support the most disadvantaged Manchester residents through neighbourhood-level interventions. Skills have been integrated into the work club commissions to ensure that lifelong learning opportunities are accessible and embedded at the grassroots level, including essential digital skills for life and work.
- 3.9a Additionally, a £15k ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Toolkit project has been launched, to address the lack of pre-entry ESOL provision. Post launch, multilingual digital solutions are being explored to further enhance this approach.
- 3.10 The launch of the match-funded W&ST and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) RISE online portal has been delayed, due to statutory and legal considerations. The nationally awarded portal is now expected to be accessible by all Manchester residents, employees and learners, by February 2025. This portal will host technical digital skills and digital CEIAG content relevant to Manchester's economic needs, along with [existing RISE content](#).
- 3.11 W&ST have partnered with the University of Manchester to expand the Living Lab, achieving UNESCO endorsement. This project connects university students with social, environmental, and economic enquiries, enabling them to conduct meaningful research focused on solutions and recommendations. Digital skills and solutions are integrated into many of the [published reports](#). Additionally, an expression of interest fund is being established to prioritise up to five Manchester-focused economic, environmental, and learning enquiries.

- 3.12 W&ST leads Manchester's efforts in employment and skills GM Devolution planning, lobbying, and procurement representation, while also contributing to and reviewing national policy developments. Regionally, in connection with the 2025 Single Devolved Settlement, W&ST has provided input on Skills Bootcamps, technical education, the GM All Age Careers Consultation, and the review of regional employment support services. Nationally, consultations and key policy considerations include Skills England and the 'Get Britain Working' white paper.

Note: The GM devolved skills landscape, valued at over £150 million per year, includes the Adult Skills Fund, Skills Bootcamps, Courses for Jobs, and UK Shared Prosperity Funded provisions.

- 3.13 As part of Get Online Week 2024, the Digital Inclusion and Work and Skills Teams organised a Digital Skills Event at Newton Heath Library, on 16th October. In the morning, three local primary school classes, totalling over 90 students, tackled real-life technology challenges provided by Fujitsu, DiSH, and the Blair Project. In the afternoon, more than 30 adults and families received digital support to develop essential digital skills, enabling them to get online safely and access the benefits of the digital world. Additionally, 50 heavily subsidised refurbished laptops, from Community Computers, were sold to local residents on the day.
- 3.13a Throughout the week, W&ST co-led 3 MCC workforce events, to provide digital support and raise the digital competence and confidence of MCC staff. Over 100 members of staff attended these events.
- 3.14 W&ST has supported the Office of National Statistics (ONS) proposed expansion in Manchester, which includes up to 150 technical digital roles. We've provided recruitment and skills support, aligning funded skills provision with ONS growth requirements. Additionally, we have negotiated the initial steps to connect talent to these opportunities.
- 3.15 Throughout the past year, W&ST has actively participated in internally coordinated recruitment events, offering dedicated digital support and showcasing employment and skills opportunities in the digital sector. This initiative has successfully engaged 970 residents.
- 3.16 A university graduate successfully completed a work experience placement with W&ST, focusing on a review of graduate retention. The review highlighted that many graduates feel they cannot access the wealth of employment opportunities, available in Manchester, across various sectors. The research findings and recommendations have been published and presented to the W&S Delivery Group, and planning for the next steps is now underway.
- 3.17 Manchester's UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning designation has elevated the city's profile globally, including engaging thousands of international figureheads through UNESCO and OECD events. The collaboration has showcased initiatives like the Sustainability Starts toolkit and carbon literacy training. The city's innovative, collaborative approach is frequently praised, notably linked to carbon literacy and the Sustainability Starts toolkit.

Manchester is actively engaged with global cities and dedicated international working groups, consisting of political leaders and policy makers, on key agendas including carbon net zero, lifelong learning, economic prosperity, social cohesion and digital.

- 3.18 The Manchester College and Manchester City Council have formed a joint working group with an agreed action plan to support learner destinations after technical education and to strengthen the connection between industry and talent requiring work placements. W&ST is currently

providing intelligence and support to explore the launch of TMC Apprenticeships and Skills Bootcamps, across vocational areas.

- 3.19 The Digital Skills Network (DSN) convened in September, focusing on grassroots approaches to AI. Attendees heard from a training provider about their conversations with staff and learners, with discussions centering on current practices with adult learners. Manchester Met University (MMU) presented key insights from two AI-related projects involving residents.

Additionally, students from Co-Op Academy North Manchester showcased their robotics program and requested additional support for themselves and to expand it across Manchester schools. W&ST coordinated the offers of support from DSN members.

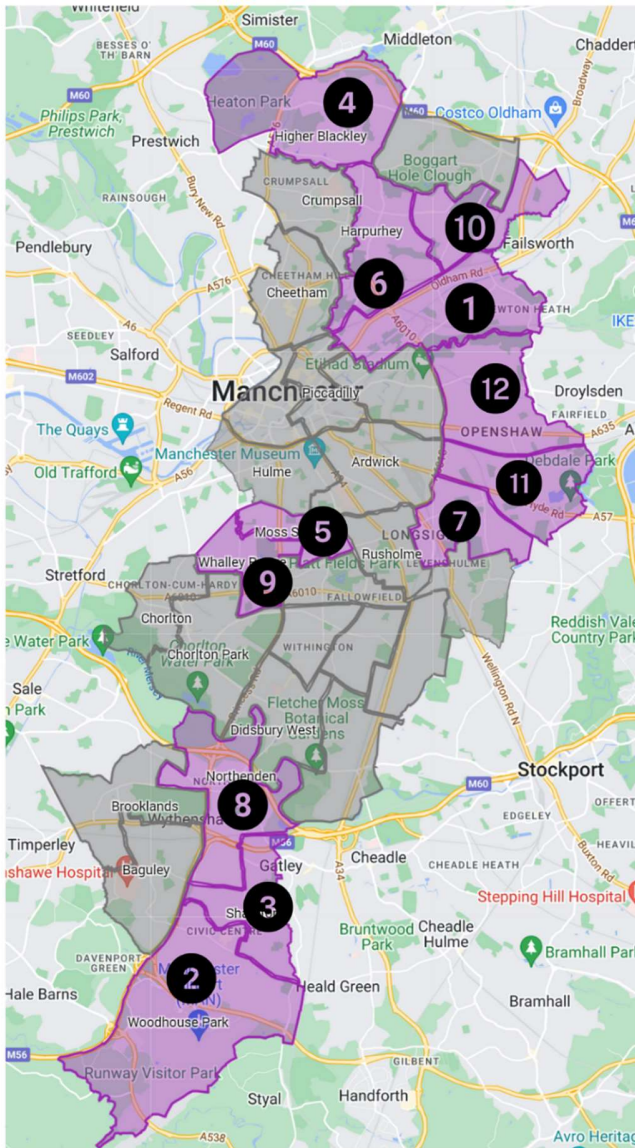
4.0 Risks

- 4.1 The national policy implications linked to Get Britain Working, Skills England and from an apprenticeship perspective, the uncertainty around the Growth and Skills Levy.
- 4.2 The GM Single Settlement Devolution Agreement comes into effect from 2025. To date, devolution has enhanced Manchester's ability to influence and shape the skills landscape, whilst enhancing the demand for MCC staffing capacity. As devolved powers grow, further consideration linked to MCC staffing infrastructure will be required.
- 4.3 Nationally and regionally funded digital skills provision is running parallel, not limited to Skills Bootcamps. This continues to pose key challenges linked to autonomy to shape our local skills offer, the ability to navigate the skills offer and how to make the learning activity easy to engage (by residents, employees and businesses).

5.0 Priorities over the next 6 months:

- 5.1 Focus on policy implications, both regional and national, to ensure Manchester voices the needs of our entire economy.
- 5.2 To transition into the test and learn phase of the Manchester's Digital Skills Framework.
- 5.3 Continue to lead the way in relation to adult CEIAG, pioneering the local benchmarks, whilst providing a coherent voice within the GM All Age Careers Strategy.
- 5.4 Work with GMCA and training providers to embed AI into Manchester's essential digital skills learning landscape.
- 5.5 Continue to be GMCA's lead contact for Manchester's input relating to skills policy, engagement, practice/performance and wider economic needs for all adult skills provision.

Appendix 5 – Most digitally excluded wards



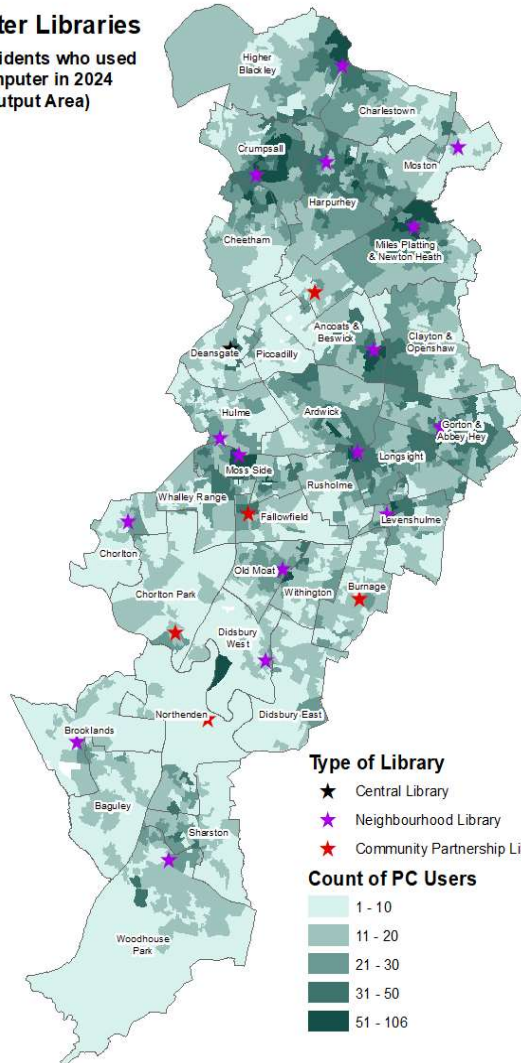
- 1) Miles Platting and Newton Health
- 2) Woodhouse Park
- 3) Sharston
- 4) Higher Blackley
- 5) Moss Side
- 6) Harpurhey
- 7) Longsight
- 8) Northenden
- 9) Whalley Range
- 10) Moston
- 11) Gorton and Abbey Hey
- 12) Clayton and Openshaw

Appendix 6: Library computer users in 2024 compared to Index of Multiple Deprivation

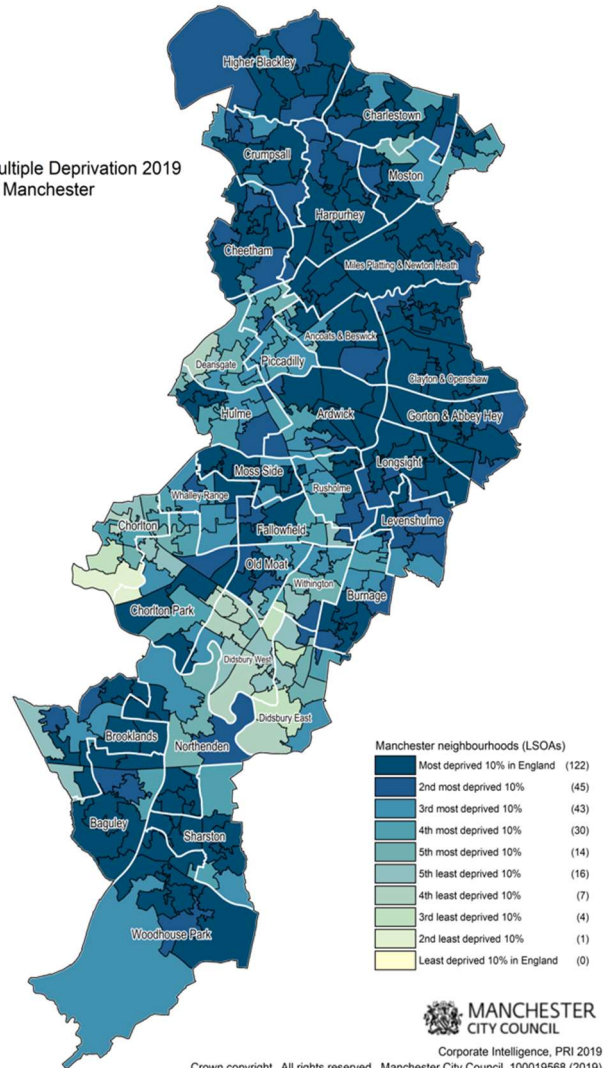
The darker areas are generally the same on both maps, showing that the libraries computer users tend to live in the more deprived areas of the city.

Manchester Libraries

Count of residents who used a library computer in 2024 (based on Output Area)

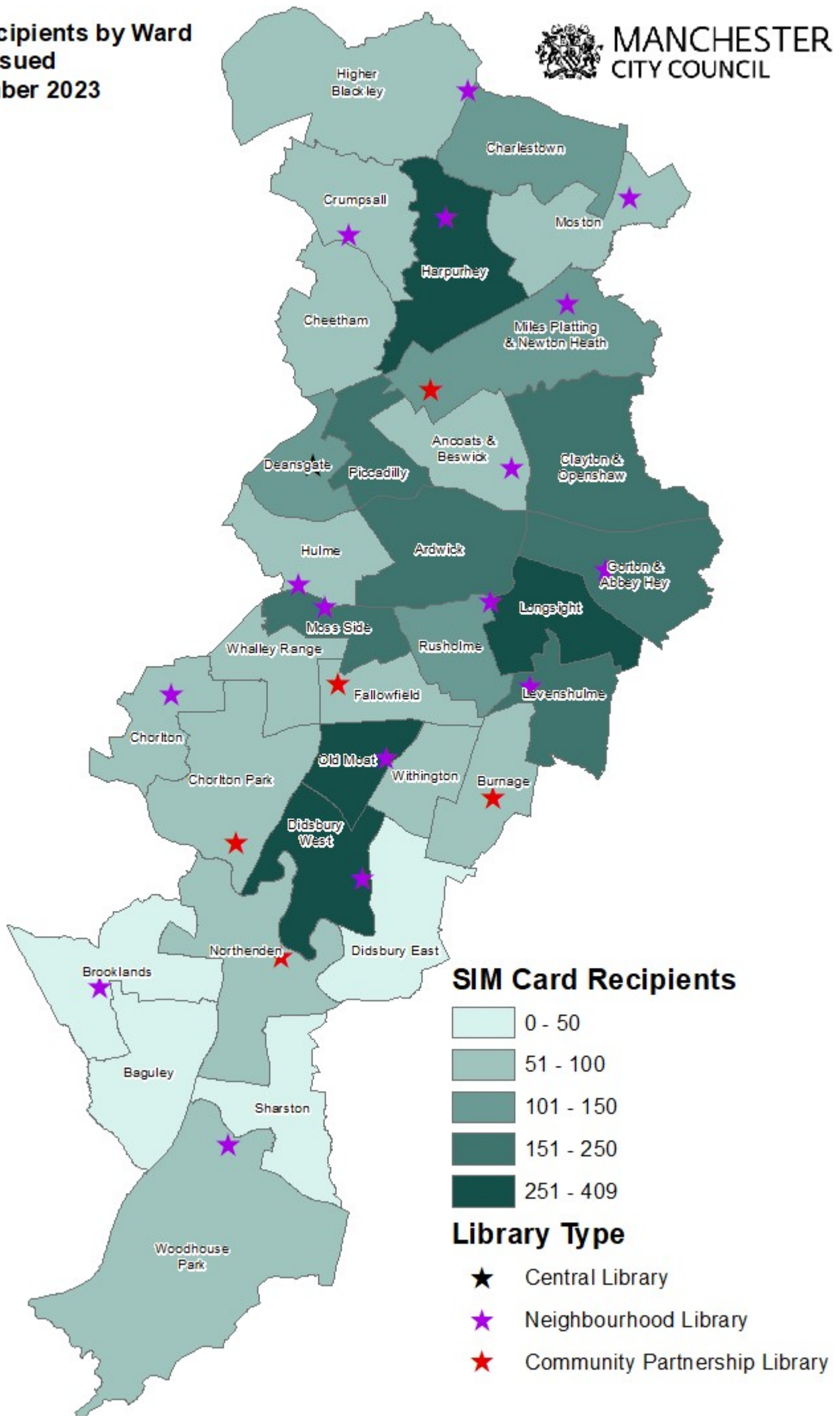


Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 Manchester



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SIM Card Recipients by Ward
Total SIMs issued
since December 2023



Appendix 8 - Wi-Fi upgrades in Libraries

The LAN & Wi-Fi project has successfully upgraded the ICT network in over 17 libraries, introducing a new Wi-Fi solution with dedicated access for corporate users and partners, as well as a free service for library visitors.

All libraries had their Wi-Fi upgraded in 2024.

This new library Wi-Fi replaces the outdated Busy Bee network, which suffered from slow speeds and connectivity issues. The upgraded service provides a modern, user-friendly platform that is accessible to all residents, including those with limited technical skills. It also enables our partners to work seamlessly in library spaces, supporting events and training sessions that benefit the local community.

Additionally, the upgraded network supports the city's evolving needs, providing a reliable foundation for our new Generator Enterprise Hubs at St. Peter's Square and Royal Mills, Ancoats. These vibrant, collaborative spaces offer seamless connectivity for freelancers, startups, and innovators, fostering creativity and growth.

We are working with ICT colleagues to developing a robust and appropriate reporting mechanism, that gives usage levels.

Speed and Latency Improvements

It is difficult to measure speeds but latency which is a good indicator is greatly improved which is leading to increased performance (see below).

Latency and loss between host and our Data Centre is greatly improved, (bandwidth is one thing, but improvements in latency and loss is absolutely key for a better user experience). The user may have bandwidth limits applied to the client to protect the network from saturation but the improvements in latency are even more important for general use. Bandwidth means more can be pushed through at one time but latency dictates how responsive the network is. Reducing loss means a client spends less time retransmitting which again improves performance for the host or user.

Wider than bandwidth the below gives a summary of all the improvements in the Wi-Fi.

Network Enhancements:

- **Robust and Stable Hardware:** Up-to-date, fully supported, and patched network hardware.

- **Optimized Network Design:** Elimination of less efficient solutions deployed over the years.
- **Integrated Appliances:** Devices designed to work together for improved efficiency and performance.
- **Increased Backbone Bandwidth:** Significantly higher backbone bandwidth rates.
- **Enhanced Memory and Processing:** Larger, faster onboard memory and higher processing capacity across switch backplanes.
- **Power Resilience:** More widespread power resilience in switches, stacks, and environments.
- **WAN and Internet Solutions:** Optimized LAN performance to match WAN capabilities.
- **Improved Latency and Loss:** Enhanced latency and reduced loss between hosts and data centers, crucial for a better user experience. While bandwidth allows more data to be transmitted simultaneously, latency impacts network responsiveness. Reducing loss minimizes retransmissions, improving overall performance.
- **Centralized Management:** Simplified troubleshooting through centralized network management and monitoring.
- **Hardware Resilience:** Better hardware resilience and host distribution to minimize impact in case of failures.
- **Simplified IP Schema:** IP schema designed to simplify deployment and firewall rule management.
- **Traffic Flow Optimization:** Enhanced traffic flow optimization.
- **Centralized Licensing:** Streamlined licensing management.
- **Professional Environments:** Upgraded communication rooms and cabinets to professional standards.

Security Enhancements:

- **Superior EDGE Security:** Advanced security compared to legacy networks.
- **Centralized Authentication:** Device and admin access managed through Active Directory.
- **Comprehensive Logging:** Full logging of all access attempts.

- **Advanced Threat Protection:** Enhanced protection against network threats using tools like Stealthwatch.

Wi-Fi Enhancements:

- **Distributed Wi-Fi:** Issues at one site won't affect Wi-Fi at other sites due to distributed WLCs.
- **Improved Resilience:** Better Wi-Fi resilience compared to legacy networks.
- **Enterprise-Scale Distribution:** Wider distribution of MCC Wi-Fi, designed for enterprise scale rather than stretching a single-site design.
- **Wi-Fi 5 and 6:** Deployment of Wi-Fi 5 and 6 across the estate.
- **Enterprise-Wide SSID:** Availability of enterprise-wide SSIDs (e.g., Gov Wi-Fi).
- **Customizable Web Filtering and Firewall Rules:** Options tailored to different Wi-Fi networks.
- **Modern User Portals:** Updated presentation of portals to end users.
- **Reduced Use of Pre-Shared Keys:** Decreased reliance on pre-shared key-based networks.