

Report for: Cabinet - 10 March 2026

Item number: 11

Title: Adoption of a Digital Inclusion Policy and Roadmap

Report authorised by : Taryn Eves, Corporate Director of Finance & Resources

Lead Officer: Gwynneth Young gwynneth.young@haringey.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1. This report outlines the strategic priorities for adopting a **Digital Inclusion Policy** and implementing a **Digital Inclusion Roadmap** for Haringey. It seeks Cabinet's approval of the Policy and approval to proceed with implementation of the **Enhanced Offer** summarised in paragraph 5.1.2 and detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.2. The Digital Inclusion Policy sets out the objective to bridge the digital divide in the borough and to address the growing risk of exclusion as services increasingly move online. It will be a key enabler of the council's commitment to fairness and equity of access, experience and outcomes to create a fairer borough.
- 1.3. Digital Inclusion will offer a significant contribution to a reduction in health inequalities, improved financial resilience, and close the gaps in attainment between pupils.
- 1.4. The Council's strategic drive to increase online self-service channels can only be achieved if residents are able to engage digitally. Expanding digital inclusion will also enable many more residents to have a say in decisions that affect them.
- 1.5. The Digital Inclusion Roadmap (Appendix 1) sets out specific initiatives to increase digital inclusion and measures to evaluate what is to be delivered.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

- 2.1. Being able to access services, shop and interact online is no longer a luxury, it has become as important as the other utilities that we all need.
- 2.2. Digital exclusion is defined as not having a device, the ability to access the internet, or the knowledge to confidently use the internet i.e. to fill in a form online. Unfortunately, in Haringey, over 30% of residents are considered to be

digitally excluded. There are entire families who have one mobile phone, with limited data, for everyone to use; including for children to do their homework. There are middle aged adults who, although they are using email, are not confident enough to do other things online. And there are adults who have never used the internet at all. And there are adults who have never used the internet at all.

- 2.3 These residents are at a distinct disadvantage. They may become excluded from accessing healthcare. They are unable to shop for the best deals. And when they interact with us, the council, the process can be unnecessarily protracted.
- 2.4 This policy has come about following a considerable amount of work with communities and partners. It is the start of a journey for Haringey to connect our residents and businesses to the internet: to obtain devices, to get internet access and to receive the knowledge to interact confidently online. It is in the interests of many of our partners to help us to deliver digital inclusion. It can be a more efficient way to provide services, although we recognise that there will always still be those for whom interacting online is not feasible and situations where a conversation is the best way forward.
- 2.5 Cabinet is asked to approve the enhanced offer. If we are able to obtain additional external finance, we will be able to extend this further.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. Cabinet is recommended to approve the Digital Inclusion Policy for Haringey and the proposed Enhanced Offer detailed in the Digital Inclusion Roadmap (Appendix 1) which will support all residents in accessing council services digitally by choice and ensure that no individual is excluded by the service offer moving to digital channels.

4. Reasons for decision

- 4.1. A commitment to long-term, sustainable digital inclusion initiatives is fundamental to achieving the Borough Vision for Haringey, reducing inequalities and supporting thriving communities to improve financial, health, and social outcomes. The Council cannot provide essential services or build an inclusive and fair borough unless it is guaranteed that all residents have access to suitable digital devices, connectivity, and the digital support they need.
- 4.2. When residents are digitally included there are significant associated benefits in improved economic circumstances, better prospects for education and employment opportunities, and increased access to housing support and welfare services. The Digital Inclusion Roadmap will achieve lasting, positive impact within communities, and provide more equitable access to services for all residents.
- 4.3. Digital transformation of the Council's service offer is a key driver of efficiency savings and digital inclusion is a core component of the wider digital strategy

for Haringey. The Council cannot successfully achieve the shift to a self-service by preference delivery model unless residents can access services through digital channels.

- 4.4. Demand for digital inclusion services, skills training, donated devices and other support for residents who are currently digitally excluded will increase exponentially as the range of services that can be completed entirely online grows.
- 4.5. While there is already positive digital inclusion work being done in Haringey, it has been limited by a lack of coordination, leading to missed opportunities and/or duplication of effort. Implementing the Digital Inclusion Policy and Roadmap will enable the Council to support the provision of a coherent offer for residents, build and expand partnerships with community groups and businesses, and ensure existing projects are not replicated.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1. There are three scalable offers that have been developed which will determine the ambition for Haringey's digital inclusion Roadmap; the Core Offer, an Enhanced Offer and a Complete Offer (see Appendix 1).

The recommendation is to implement the Enhanced Offer.

5.1.1. Core offer (*Not Recommended*)

The Core Offer is the service that can be provided within existing financial resources. This covers work that is already ongoing to assess digital support needs in the borough:

- Expanding our National Device Bank and National Databank offer
- Establishing a digital inclusion network with councillors, services, NHS, VCS and other interested parties
- Seeking external funding from social value commitments in relevant council contracts, government grants, charitable foundations, and corporate sponsors to fund long-term sustainable digital inclusion initiatives.

The Council's existing digital inclusion function will continue to deliver the Core Offer as described above.

5.1.2. Enhanced offer - **Recommended**

The Enhanced Offer includes everything in the Core Offer, together with a strengthened programme of digital inclusion services that would deliver sustainable long-term benefits for our residents.

The Enhanced Offer will include:

- Taking digital inclusion support to the residents through recruitment, training and management of a team of volunteer digital ambassadors in the community.

- Hosting a Digital Inclusion Fair with partner organisations, enabling residents to see the full range of digital support available and meet providers face to face.
- Developing a hyper-local circular economy device donation and recycling scheme for the borough.

Delivering the Enhanced Offer would require the support of a Level 3 Apprentice, which would be funded by Public Health, and a small additional budget for subscriptions, marketing, and venue hire.

Recruiting an apprentice is a highly cost-effective option and provides an opportunity to align bridging the digital divide with the Council's commitment to supporting Haringey care leavers into meaningful employment.

5.1.3. Complete Offer (*Not Recommended*)

The Complete Offer incorporates all elements of both Core and Enhanced Offers with additional services which would enable Haringey to provide a highly ambitious programme of digital inclusion initiatives and realise the full range of associated benefits.

The Council acknowledges that it is operating in a very difficult financial context and funding for the Complete Offer is not available at this time. However, the Council will continue to explore opportunities for external grants, sponsorship or social value funding and if successful move towards implementing elements of the Complete Offer.

The Complete Offer would include:

- Establishing a digital device loans scheme in collaboration with Haringey Learns enabling adult learners to complete course assignments at home, leading to improved outcomes and higher employability.
- Continuing and expanding the Digital Cost of Living skills programme, delivered through a collaboration between Tender Loving Care (TLC) volunteers and Haringey Learns
- Hosting two Digital Inclusion fairs per year
- Purchasing subscriptions to the Digital Unite Inspire programme (c.f. Background Papers) for Councillors and Senior Leadership, with the option to expand the offer to other staff
- Launching a Digital Bus scheme, taking the digital inclusion support offer into community locations in a way that residents can access easily.

6. Background information

- 6.1. In February 2025 the Government published its Digital Inclusion Action Plan (c.f. Background Papers) setting out its priorities to ensure everyone has the access, skills, support and confidence to engage in our modern digital society and economy whatever their circumstances.

The Action Plan's four areas of focus are; to open up opportunities through skills, tackle data and device poverty, break down barriers to digital services, and build confidence. The digital inclusion strategy for Haringey will address these areas of focus for residents.

6.2. **External Context**

The Good Things Foundation's Digital Nation UK 2025 report (c.f. Background Papers) brings together recent data on digital exclusion from a range of sources and shows the disproportionate impact on already vulnerable groups:

- 1.9m households struggle to afford their mobile contract
- 7.9m adults lack basic digital skills
- 69% of those with no basic skills have a disability or impairment
- 77% of those with no basic skills are over 65.

The benefits of digital inclusion support include:

- Improved skills for work and better opportunities for learning
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Improved financial circumstances
- Improved education outcomes.

6.3. **Local Context and Corporate Priorities**

The Digital Inclusion Policy and Action Plan will positively contribute to the council's corporate priorities.

6.3.1. Supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis

The best deals on credit, special discounts and the lowest energy costs require online access. Universal Credit claimants must update their 'journal' online or risk being sanctioned and losing part of their benefits. Many routes to apply for additional financial support are now online only.

6.3.2. Striving to reduce the unacceptable inequalities in Haringey, making sure everyone can live a secure, healthy, and fulfilling life.

Digital exclusion is one of the most damaging inequalities. It affects access to housing, welfare benefits, education, and employment.

People who are digitally excluded generally face a higher risk of physical and mental health inequalities, increased social isolation, poverty and deprivation.

Feeling equal in having a suitable device and data results in being better able to participate fully in society.

6.4. **Borough Profile**

The most common high-risk categories for digital exclusion are age, especially older people living alone, long-term illness or disability, socio-economic deprivation and lack of proficiency in English.

Data shows the borough's population is aging. Haringey has areas of acute deprivation and, given that there are over 180 languages spoken within the borough, not having English as a first language is likely to be a significant factor.

In July 2024, an analysis was undertaken of how many residents are likely to fall into one or more of these categories and as a result face barriers to accessing council services online.

This study found that of the approx. 216,000 residents aged 16+ in Haringey:

- 65.9% (~142,000 people) present none of these
- 23.1% (~50,000 people) present one barrier and are likely to need some level of assistance
- 11% (~23,000 people) present more than one, suggesting they will need significant assistance.

6.5. The Haringey Deal

In The Haringey Deal, the Council commits to:

- create new and genuine opportunities for residents to have a say in decisions that affect them
- work harder to hear the voices that are too often overlooked and strip away the barriers so that everyone has a real opportunity to be part of the change

However, many of the routes for residents to participate or provide feedback require digital access either via the Haringey Engagement Hub or the Haringey Deal email address.

Expanding the digital inclusion offer by providing devices, improving connectivity and developing digital skills will enable many more of our residents to have a say in decisions that affect them.

6.6. Emerging technologies

The proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies brings the risk that systems are created that perpetuate or amplify existing inequalities. Residents have the right to understand where and how these new technologies are being used.

True digital inclusion means people have genuine choice about how they engage with technology-enabled services and the ability to opt out.

There will always be a small percentage of residents who can't or won't interact digitally and the Council must ensure they can still access services through non-digital channels.

7. Partnering and engagement

Partnering and engagement are key to the successful delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan. Proactive engagement with internal and external

stakeholders is a priority for the digital inclusion function, and relationships are continuously being developed with a range of voluntary, community, and commercial organisations (see Appendix 1).

These relationships will underpin borough-wide digital inclusion activities that will deliver coherent, high-impact initiatives through coordinated partner working.

8. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-26 High level Strategic Outcomes

The Digital Inclusion Policy and Roadmap will be a key enabler of the council's commitment to fairness and equity of access, experience and outcomes to create a fairer borough.

It directly contributes to the following themes in the Corporate Delivery Plan:

8.1. Resident experience and enabling success:

The Council's commitment to excellent resident experience specifically promises that the digital skills and inclusion strategy and action plan is developed.

A key progress measure of this outcome is the percentage of all transactions completed by residents via self-service which can only be achieved when residents are actively engaging with the council through digital channels.

Equipping residents with devices, connectivity and skills will enable them to self-serve and support a consequent reduction in demand on Customer Services.

8.2. Adults, health and welfare:

Digital Inclusion will offer a significant contribution to a reduction in health inequalities and more equitable outcomes by ensuring residents are connected with the right support at the right time in their neighbourhoods.

Being digitally enabled improves financial resilience, health and welfare for residents because it enables them to apply for and manage benefits via online portals, access discounts and deals that are only available online, and manage their healthcare digitally.

8.3. Responding to the climate emergency:

Distributing refurbished digital devices and extending their useful life will support the Council's commitment to increase recycling and reduce waste in Haringey.

8.4. Children and young people:

Digital inclusion initiatives will support the Council's objective to improve educational outcomes and close the gaps in attainment between pupils.

Empowering parents with the skills and information they need to develop safe, positive internet usage for their children can improve children's wellbeing and help mitigate potential online harms.

8.5. Place and economy:

Building an inclusive economy will require a programme of digital upskilling for adult learners and job-seekers.

Enhancing digital skills for businesses will enable their growth and successfully contribute to the local economy.

9. Carbon and Climate Change

- 9.1. The adoption of this digital inclusion roadmap will have a positive impact in terms of carbon emissions and resilience in the face of climate change.
- 9.2. Establishing a circular economy model for refurbishing and redistributing digital devices will result in an upstream reduction in the environmental impact of producing these items by extending their overall lifespan, and a decrease in e-waste.
- 9.3. Where devices cannot be refurbished and reused, the selected partner will be expected to recycle or responsibly dispose of the components e.g. plastic elements, batteries, minerals.
- 9.4. If a resident is provided with a mobile phone or other digital device this improves the Council's overall resilience as they will be contactable in the event of a climate-related emergency and can be easily notified of the necessary response.

10. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Director of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

10.1 Finance

This report proposes implementing a Digital Inclusion 'Enhanced Offer' as set out in paragraph 5.1.2 above. The principal cost is for a Level 3 Apprentice (c.£40,000 p.a. including on-costs) which will be met by Public Health as part of their budget for tackling health inequalities. The remaining non-staff costs are small and will be met from the Digital Services revenue budget.

Moving beyond the Enhanced Offer to the Complete Offer whilst not currently feasible could become so in the future subject to securing external funding, notably from grants, sponsorship, or social value funding within Digital procurement.

10.2 Procurement

Strategic Procurement has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations at this stage, as the proposed Enhanced Offer can be delivered largely within existing arrangements.

Should any element of the Digital Inclusion Roadmap require the commissioning of external provision, specialist support, or technology related services, procurement will assist where appropriate

10.3 Director of Legal & Governance [Fiona Alderman]

The Director of Legal & Governance has been consulted in the preparation of this report. There is no legal reason why this report cannot progress for a decision.

10.4 Equality

The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not. Haringey also recognises socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

Digital exclusion both leads to, and is compounded by, existing inequalities, especially for older people, people with disabilities and those experiencing financial deprivation.

Inability to get online impacts educational attainment and affects the individual's chance of acquiring the digital skills which are now considered essential by many employers, leading to difficulties finding higher-paid employment. This increases the incidence of basic barriers to getting online driven by socioeconomic deprivation, such as unaffordability of devices and connectivity. In addition, digital literacy gaps can limit access to preventive healthcare.

To meet increasing demand, services are increasingly looking at the use of AI, assistive technology and Internet of Things devices that can help deliver good outcomes for users. However, these often have complex digital interfaces and use unfamiliar jargon, meaning the intended benefits of these devices are limited by an individual's struggle to use them. This particularly impacts already vulnerable groups e.g. older residents, and those with a long-term illness or disability.

11. Use of Appendices

Appendix 1- Adoption of a Digital Inclusion Policy Roadmap

Appendix 2- Equalities Impact Assessment

12. Background papers

[Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps - GOV.UK](#)

[Digital Nation | The UK's Digital Divide | Good Things Foundation](#)

[Inspire | Digital Unite](#)