



# DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

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# INTRODUCTION

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Birmingham is a vibrant and diverse city, and every resident should have the opportunity to benefit from the digital world. As more services, opportunities, and everyday interactions move online, digital exclusion can deepen existing inequalities. Birmingham City Council is committed to addressing this early by supporting people before challenges escalate and ensuring that everyone can access the tools, skills, and confidence they need to flourish safely in an increasingly digital world.

Guided by our Early Intervention and Prevention approach, our new Digital Inclusion Strategy focuses on identifying barriers to digital access quickly, offering ongoing timely

support, and working with partners across the city to create long-lasting change. By doing so, we aim to strengthen communities, improve wellbeing, and help residents stay safely connected and independent.

Our vision for this strategy is simple and ambitious: “To ensure every citizen has equitable access to digital services, enabling them to pursue their aspirations and achieve full participation in modern society.”

This is a City strategy, and as city partners we all have a role to play in making Birmingham a truly inclusive digital city, where no one is left behind and everyone has the chance to thrive.

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# FOREWORD

**Councillor Samina Suleman,  
Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage & Tourism**

I am delighted to present Birmingham City Council's new Digital Inclusion Strategy for 2026 and beyond.

In an increasingly digital world, digital inclusion is essential. It provides our residents with the foundation they need to access new opportunities, support their wellbeing, participate fully in society, and connect with the vital services offered by the Council and our partners across the city.

As Birmingham continues to grow as a diverse, dynamic and future focused city, it is vital that we ensure all residents can benefit from the digital world and the services, connections, and opportunities it unlocks.

Our new Digital Inclusion Strategy sets out our clear commitment to this, and the steps that we will take across this city to widen access to the tools, skills, and support people need to thrive.

At the heart of this strategy is our commitment to Early Intervention and Prevention. By identifying barriers to access, we can better understand where support is needed, target services more effectively, and create pathways that enable individuals and families to build long-term digital confidence, both online and offline.

Birmingham's strength lies in its people, and this strategy provides the foundation for a more modern, connected, inclusive and resilient city, where everyone has the opportunity to participate in civic, social, and economic life. I am confident that through this strategy, we can expand digital access and work together to build a fairer future for all.

# BACKGROUND

- The cross-council early intervention and prevention transformation programme has been established as a strategic enabler to support Birmingham City Council's shift from a reactive, late-stage intervention model to a proactive, prevention-focused approach to service delivery.
- Central to this transformation is the advancement of digital inclusion, which serves as a key enabler for embedding preventative practices across the organisation. Evidence from both local and central government demonstrates that improving digital access and literacy empowers residents to engage with services earlier, reducing demand on service interventions and enabling more efficient use of limited resources.
- This strategy outlines the council's commitment to fostering an inclusive digital landscape. It sets out a framework for identifying and addressing barriers to digital access and will be reviewed iteratively to ensure practical, targeted actions are taken to reduce digital exclusion across the citizens of Birmingham.

# VISION

**TO ENSURE EVERY CITIZEN HAS EQUITABLE ACCESS TO DIGITALSERVICES, ENABLING FULL PARTICIPATION IN MODERN SOCIETY, ECONOMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND DEMOCRATICALLY, REGARDLESS OF BACKGROUND, AGE, INCOME, EDUCATION, OR ABILITY.**



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# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

01

**Reduce digital exclusion**  
by addressing infrastructure, affordability, and digital skills.

02

**Empower communities**  
through access to devices and reliable internet.

03

**Improve citizen engagement and outcomes**  
by enhancing digital services and data integration.

04

**Promote equity and opportunity**  
for all citizens in the digital space.

05

**Galvanize**  
the private and corporate sector to integrate with community and public sector in the delivery of digital equity



### **INCLUSIVITY:**

Design for the most vulnerable/ excluded first (elderly, disabled, low-income families, digitally illiterate and people excluded due to cultural /language barriers) - "Diversity by design"

### **TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS:**

Collaborate with the local NHS organisations, DWP (DWP data sharing agreement), educational institutions (University of Birmingham, Aston University and colleges), voluntary sector, businesses, private sector and local tech providers.

### **SUSTAINABILITY:**

Embed circular economy principles in device refurbishment and long-term planning for infrastructure, by prioritising contracts and partnership with local small, medium enterprises (SMEs), charities and other partners

### **SKILLS & SUPPORT:**

Complement infrastructure with digital literacy programmes and one-on-one support through neighbourhood networks OR with the aid of local voluntary and religious organisations.

### **DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS:**

Use MDM systems (OneView solution) and digital analytics tools to continuously improve services and identify gaps in inclusion.



# STRATEGIC PILLARS



**Internet Availability:**  
Enhancing IT infrastructure access



**Provisioning of devices to  
community hubs for citizens usage**



**Enhancing digital tools and service  
offerings and citizens contact points**



**Enhancing the pathways for digital  
skills development with focus on  
Digital safety**



**Safeguarding young people online –  
strengthening youth safety  
and digital resilience**



# A National View

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# ACCORDING TO THE FINDINGS OF THE DIGITAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED IN 2021



Older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income households are disproportionately affected by digital exclusion.



70% of people with learning disabilities in Birmingham lack access to a digital device



Many young people still do not have reliable internet access at home, impacting education and opportunity.

# COUNCIL ACTIONS SINCE 2021

Launched the Birmingham digital inclusion strategy, which included:



Device banks and connected services programmes.



Digital champions and community learning hubs.



Partnerships with voluntary sector, businesses, and regional bodies like the West Midlands Combined Authority



# ON-GOING CHALLENGES

The strategy has led to increased digital engagement, but challenges remain in the areas of



monitoring outcomes



scaling support



embedding digital inclusion  
across all services



# BENEFITS



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# ECONOMIC BENEFITS

According to national data



**People with digital confidence and skills are more likely to secure employment and increase earnings, which could translate to economic benefits to the council in terms of reduction in demand on social housing, care needs, pressures on food hand-outs and other locally provided social amenities**



**According to report by Centre for economics and business research commissioned study on digital inclusion (2022) commissioned by The Good Things Foundation, "Every £1 invested in digital inclusion delivers £15 rate of return over 10 years"**



# SOCIAL AND WELLBEING BENEFITS

**Having access to information, knowledge, learning, services and support**

**Staying in touch and connecting with family and friends, including social activities and volunteering**

**Improved job prospects, and reduce "worklessness"**

**Having your say on decisions that affect you**

**Being able to manage everyday matters, including shopping and keeping track of your money**

**Addressing wider equality and social issues, including reducing isolation, improving physical health and mental wellbeing, and**



A woman in a white blazer is celebrating with her arms raised in front of a laptop. The background is a vibrant pink and purple gradient with a large white pixelated number 16. The text "Achievements to date" is centered in the upper half of the image.

# Achievements to date

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As part of the digital inclusion strategy 2021, Birmingham city council launched the digital inclusion project in October 2024

## The goal was to:



**Connect 1000 citizens**



**Train 50 digital champions to support hubs across BCC**



**Connectivity:** 100 boxes have been personally distributed. Get Boxes are supplied by a charity which are distributed to hubs to re distribute to underprivileged citizens. 8 people can connect per box with 25mg per month free for a year. This may stop due to funding by the charity.



**Phones:** refurbished phones received from a charity. They provide 25gb of free data for a year. These are vital to many people including homeless, asylum seekers, domestic abuse, families, housebound people.



**Training:** Digital Champion Training of volunteers from hubs to be trained to support citizens by becoming a Digital Champion. This is an online course which registers with the Barclays platform. There are currently 60 Digital Champions operating throughout Birmingham at this present time.

# Some case studies



# PROVISIONING OF DEVICES TO CITIZENS

- **Situation:** Citizen in dire need of a phone as he had no current way of connecting. Comes to the centre regularly to use any services we can help him with.
- **Organisation:** St Germain's Centre – Edgbaston
- **Intervention:** supplied refurbished mobile phone donated by Hubbub charity. These phones arrive refurbished with free data for a year and are checked to ensure safety and useability before they are delivered.

- **Impact:** Enabled user to make significant life changes. Exact quote below;

*"The phone has been a life changer. I can now make and keep my appointments for my physical and mental health and those of my partner as well. I can manage my UC claim. Get up in the morning and manage my morning routines (I use the alarms) and keep in touch with my family. Thankyou"*



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# INTERNET AVAILABILITY

- **Situation:** Bereaved single man who recently lost his wife. Has no internet at home and no way of moving on with this life, we requested a Get Box from Sally at BCC who delivered one for him.
- **Organisation:** St Germans Church
- **Intervention:** Supplied a Get Box with free Wi-Fi for a year from Jangala charity. The boxes arrive brand-new are tested and then coupled with sim inserted ready to go, before being delivered.
- **Outcome:** Enabled several users to access internet connectivity using the data boxes. A direct quote below from a volunteer at the hub regarding the usage of a data box for a citizen

*He has been able to use the internet to do job search, fill in an application forms and he has got a job! He needs to do some online training, and he can do this from home too! He has been able to keep in touch with his prospective employer by email too. He is over the moon. As a recently bereaved carer this has really made him feel good about still having skills and ability to work.*



grabbing information **online**

# DEVICE PROVISION & INTERNET AVAILABILITY

- **Situation:** A Wi-Fi hub will enable us to offer free Wi-Fi to 33 guests so they can log in, with support, to check online accounts, as so many companies seem to be directing people online for their council tax etc and sign up for training courses. It will also enable people to look for jobs in a relaxed environment or even stay connected with family and friends through email. We are looking at training some digital skills champions who will then conduct some "how to" workshops on how to send an email etc according to the group's needs.
- **Intervention:** Supplied 5 Wi-Fi get boxes provided by Jangala with free data for one year. The boxes each reaching 8 people and are now located within the main hall where the café and pantry operates. There was currently no Wi-Fi available. Also requested 2 mobile phones, supplied via Hubbub charity. 1 for an individual who had no phone for contact and was isolated from family and services. 1 for a volunteer at the centre who now has a separate phone to use for work.
- **Outcome:** Over 100 local citizens have gained access to the free Wi-Fi and are able to use and access benefits, job searches and services
- **Organisation: Engage Community Hub – Hall Green**



# REVAMPING THE DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY, ACTION PLAN – 2025



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# PILLAR 1:

## INTERNET AVAILABILITY: ENHANCING IT INFRASTRUCTURE ACCESS

### Goal

Ensure reliable, high-speed internet access is available to most households in Birmingham, especially in underserved communities, either in their homes or accessed via shared public spaces.

### Key Deliverables

1. Partner with internet service providers (ISPs) to expand full-fibre broadband coverage in low-income neighbourhoods.
2. Explore opportunities for developing discounted/cheaper deals for those who are unable to afford internet connectivity
3. Promote the use of the UK Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme to support homes and small businesses.
4. Expand coverage of Wi-Fi community hotspots in neighbourhood hubs, council buildings, sheltered housing, and community centres.
5. Engender a council policy that emphasises on the embedding of internet access as a core utility in all future housing and regeneration projects – including council run temporary accommodations and shelters.



## PILLAR 2: PROVISIONING OF DEVICES TO COMMUNITY HUBS FOR CITIZENS USAGE

### Goal

Provide citizens with access to digital devices to enable participation in digital life, education, job seeking, and healthcare.

### Key Deliverables

1. Expand access to the 'Device Loan and Grant Schemes' for low-income households, older residents, and digitally excluded citizens.
2. Continue the collaboration with charities, schools, and businesses to refurbish and redistribute used laptops and tablets.
3. Offer a structured 'Digital Starter Kit programme' with a device, internet access, and basic training.
4. Revamp the centralised Digital Equipment Hub to manage inventory and coordinate delivery and returns of loaned devices.
5. Integrate device provision with wraparound support such as digital literacy training and signposting to public Wi-Fi locations.



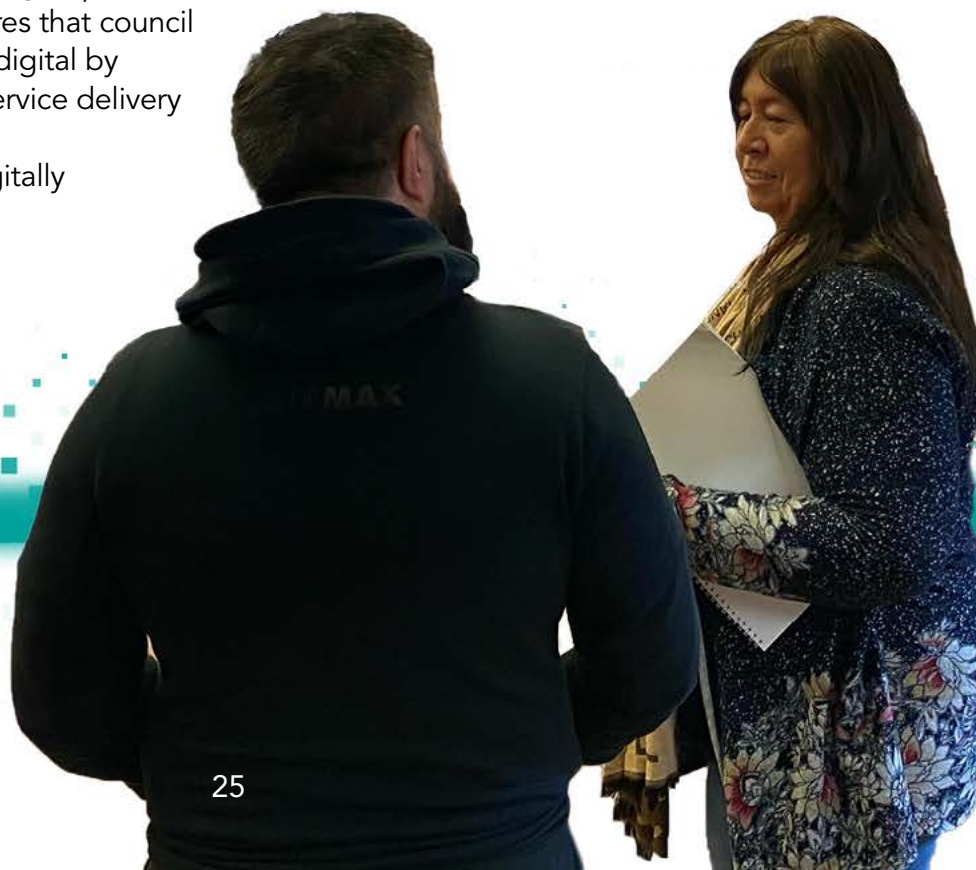
# PILLAR 3: ENHANCING BCC DIGITAL TOOLS AND SERVICE OFFERINGS

## Goal

Modernise and streamline Birmingham City Council's digital services to ensure accessibility, usability, and responsiveness.

## Key Deliverables

1. Overhaul the Council's website to improve navigation, information pathways, language accessibility, mobile usability, and services discovery.
2. Expand self-service customer contact portals for key services such as council tax, housing, benefits, and waste collection.
3. Promote in conjunction with digital and data services and corporate services, co-design and user-testing with residents, especially those from digitally excluded groups.
4. Promote a culture that ensures that council services are designed on a 'digital by default' basis to maximise service delivery and accessibility
5. Encourage partners on a digitally inclusive service portals



## PILLAR 4: ENHANCING THE PATHWAYS FOR DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

### Goal

To create inclusive, accessible, and sustainable pathways for individuals of all backgrounds to develop essential digital skills, enabling full participation in the digital economy, improving employability, and fostering lifelong learning.

### Key Deliverables

1. Citizen's upskilling – which is a culmination of the trainings that are delivered by our private sector sectors as well as the trainings that are offered by the voluntary sector and Birmingham adult education centre
2. Enhance existing frameworks to transition from basic digital literacy provisions to advanced and continuous skills provisioning (e.g., coding, cybersecurity, data analysis, AI learning).
3. Create an outline across all provisions that aligns with national standards such as Essential Digital Skills and Skills for Life.
4. Working with local hub managers, set up and sustain training hubs for continuous digital upskilling for local citizens



## PILLAR 5:

# SAFEGUARDING YOUNG PEOPLE ONLINE – STRENGTHENING YOUTH SAFETY AND DIGITAL RESILIENCE

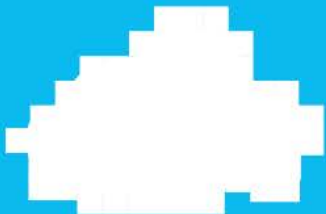
### Goal

To prevent harm, build resilience, and ensure that children and young people across Birmingham can participate safely, confidently, and responsibly in the digital world through early intervention, targeted support, and strong multi-agency partnerships.

### Key Deliverables

1. Develop a unified approach to online safeguarding and early-risk identification, drawing on prevention models that target serious youth violence and harmful behaviours
2. Create consistent, age-appropriate resources delivered through schools, community hubs, youth services, and online platforms, supported by trauma-informed practice
3. Improve visibility of support routes for issues such as online exploitation, bullying, harmful content, and mental-health pressures, reflecting wider youth wellbeing priorities
4. Establish a Youth Digital Advisory Panel to ensure Birmingham's young people shape how digital spaces, safety interventions, and inclusion pathways are designed and delivered
5. Formalise partnerships between the Council, schools, health services, police, voluntary groups, and digital providers, mirroring collaborative youth-safety models recognised for reducing harm and supporting vulnerable young people
6. Ensure all neighbourhood hubs, libraries, and youth spaces provide safe, well-monitored environments for young people accessing devices or public Wi-Fi, supported by trained staff and volunteers





# HOW WE WOULD ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AGAINST THE DELIVERY GOALS OF OUR PILLARS



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Jobs

# MEASURING, MONITORING & EVALUATION

**Delivery:** Set up a council wide digital inclusion delivery team to pull together and oversee all engagement with all stakeholders (the voluntary and private sector) and facilitate all digital inclusion activities and projects. The team will serve as a melting pot for all digital initiatives within the council and drive EI&P focus to all digital consideration and drive down duplication of services, enhancing efficiency, drawing on the EI&P community asset base.

**Reporting:** The Digital inclusion delivery team will report in a matrix structure to the digital and technology as well as the early intervention and prevention directorate directorates.

The team will facilitate the working of digital inclusion partnership within the council and act as liaison between the local authority and partners/stakeholders.

**Evaluation:** working in collaboration with partners, the team will employ 'small pilot to scale' delivery approach, which will allow for flexible, agile response to digital inclusion needs.

Delivery and success will be assessed, replanned and celebrated in an annual partnership gathering – the proposed event will be open to all partners for celebration and agreement around plans

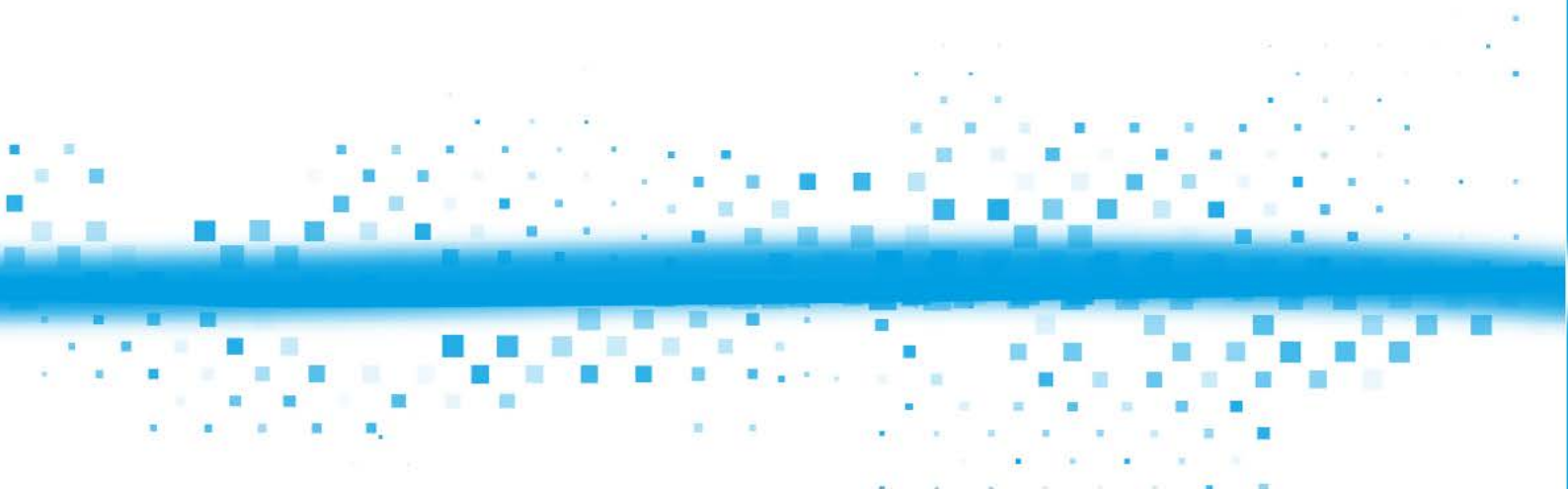
# GOVERNANCE



**Oversee  
operational  
and project  
delivery**



**Provide  
strategic and  
operational  
direction**



# DIGITAL INCLUSION PARTNERSHIP FORUM

## Objective

- Providing strategic guidance, feedback and championing initiatives that promote digital inclusion across Birmingham. Working collaboratively with the councils and other partners (private and voluntary sectors) to ensure all citizens have equitable access to digital connectivity, devices, and continued skills development

## Governance

- Planning and delivery: quarterly partnership connect sessions to ensure alignment of activities, projects and initiatives  
Celebration and launch: Annual 'conference-like' gathering to celebrate achievements in the year under review and launch the action plan for the year in view



# OBJECTIVES OF THE DIGITAL INCLUSION TEAM

The digital inclusion team will serve as the coordinating and secretariat function for all digital inclusion activities across Birmingham.

Its objectives are:

- **Coordination & Delivery**
  - Act as the central point of contact for all digital inclusion initiatives.
  - Ensure alignment between council departments, voluntary sector, and private sector partners.
- **Secretariat Support**
  - Provide administrative and logistical support to the digital inclusion partnership forum.
  - Prepare agendas, minutes, and reports for board meetings.
- **Strategy Implementation**
  - Support the delivery of Birmingham's Digital Inclusion Strategy.
  - Monitor progress against strategic goals
- **Stakeholder Engagement**
  - Build and maintain relationships with community organisations, businesses, and public sector partners.
  - Facilitate collaboration and resource sharing.
- **Data & Reporting**
  - Collect and analyse data on digital inclusion activities.
  - Produce quarterly and annual reports or activities and projects
- **Funding & Resource Development**
  - Identify funding opportunities and support bid development.
  - Coordinate resource allocation for digital inclusion projects.

## ROADMAP/DELIVERABLES: 2025/26 TO 2026/27

The deliverables are represented in form of Hypothesis ('if Statements'). 'if statements' allow us to identify and work on the most important items within any delivery area and to evidence progress within it.

collecting information  
**online**

**If: We invest in the provision of good quality internet access for citizens in public and private spaces, then we would be able to address the barriers to discovering and accessing our digital systems giving them the ability to self-serve, resulting in the greater accessing and consumption of our digital services and better signposting to relevant provisions**

**Its objectives are:**

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Review date	Status
Engagement with 3rd party suppliers (e.g. Jangala) to explore the provisioning of mobile internet devices	DIT	An agreement in place for the provision of data boxes. Funding in place for the required annual number of boxes identified.	Oct 25	Oct 26	Open
Engagement with 3rd party suppliers/volunteers/VCSO (e.g. Age UK, Vodafone, Virgin media/O2) in the provisioning of mobile internet data services – data boxes sim cards.	DIT	A working agreement in place with mobile providers who work in partnership with the digital inclusion team.	Dec 25		Open
Set up and sustain a robust governance framework to manage the distribution and monitoring of mobile internet provisioning through community hubs	DIT	Digital inclusion team in place; digital inclusion team create and monitor a register of provisions	Sep 25		Open
Set up and manage re-stuck and continuous supply of devices on-demand	DIT	Digital inclusion team establish and manage a register	Jan 26	Apr 26	Open

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Revie date	Status
Engage with and develop contract OR MOU with local internet service providers (ISPs) to expand good-enough broadband coverage, and develop affordable alternatives beginning with low-income households	DIT	Contract/ MOU for internet provision in place Low-income internet scheme operational via the MOU	Jan 26	Jan 27	Open
Identify places we can expand community Wi-Fi hotspots such as public libraries, council buildings, sheltered housing, and community centres. To achieve a city-wide coverage of 5~10mins of good internet access explore accessing social value funding set up a POC in up to 2 neighbourhood hubs?	DIT	Permanent internet coverage achieved across the city at a rate surpassing previous year by 50%	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open
Work with housing colleagues to influence housing policy to include the embedding of internet access as a core utility in all future housing and regeneration projects.- temporary accommodations, social housing	DIT	Housing policy enhanced to support provisioning of internet	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open

**If we invest in the provision of good quality devices for citizens in public spaces, then we would be able to include and give more users, the tools to be able to learn and become more confident in using and accessing our digital systems giving them the ability to self-serve; Resulting: in the greater accessing and consumption of our digital services and better signposting to relevant provisions**

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Revie date	Status
Ensure that neighbourhood hubs are provided with the support that they require to maximise digital inclusion activities	DIT	Case studies of success from users and neighbourhoods	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open
Work with voluntary and private sector organisations to provision new/refurbished mobile devices on loan, from neighbourhood hubs and libraries	DIT	Register of loan devices provisioned to neighbourhood hubs	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open
Explore the establishment of council wide mobile devices means-tested grant scheme which will be administered via the neighbourhood networks and supported via the EI&P and the DIS directorates	DIT	Digital grant scheme established, and central register maintained	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open

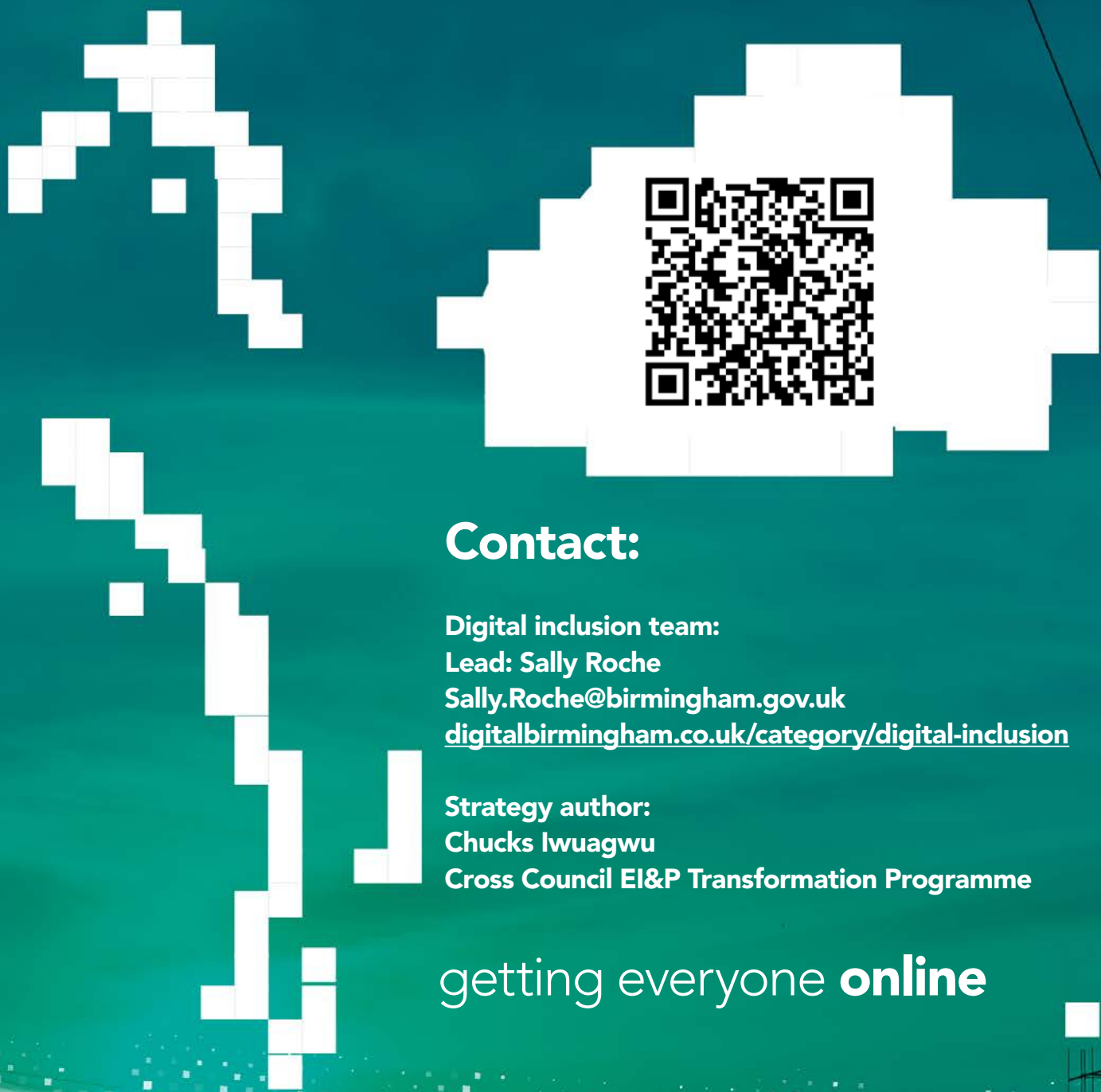
**If we pursue a transformation of our digital tools with the aim of delivering a revamped website and a standardised council design systems which create a uniform look and feel for all council tools, then we would be able sign-post more users to use our digital channels result in drive down of service demand and increase prevention self-service approach**

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Revie date	Status
The council digital front door must be enhanced in line with the council's digital strategy to deliver  - Seamless, user-centred portal which must consider the needs of vast majority of the citizens	DTS	Annual insight demonstrating improved uptake and completion of transactions through the digital portal	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open
Implement personalization technology by default which would use advanced cookies, compliant with GDPR in setting 'smart nudges' based on user behavior (e.g. reminders to complete benefit applications).	DTS	Insight and data showing increased uptake in BCC accounts	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open
Implement easy form technology with GDS open and free 'Step-by-step' process. This will guarantee users reuse of the same forms in a loosely coupled digital architecture	DTS	Annual insight demonstrating improved uptake and completion of transactions through the digital portal	Apr 26	Apr 27	Open

**If we invest in the provision of good quality fixed devices for citizens in public spaces, then we would be able to include and give more users, the tools to be able to learn and become more confident in using and accessing our digital systems giving them the ability to self-serve; Resulting: in the greater accessing and consumption of our digital services and better signposting to relevant provisions**

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Revie date	Status
Ensure that neighbourhood hubs are provided with the support that they require to maximise digital inclusion activities e.g, equip neighbourhood hubs with devices, good interne connectivity	DIT	Hubs provide quarterly reports and these report could be monitored to success and addressing areas of need	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open
Support the enhancement of the ' <b>Digital inclusion champions network</b> ' led by local volunteers trained to support those who are digitally excluded. This initiative is of great value and needs to be expanded to more neighborhood hubs.  <i>Digital champions respond to a variety of needs, from password reset to trainings on how to make video calls or using the council services online.</i>	DIT	On-going increase in the numbers of certified digital champions across the council	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open

Action	Owner	Measure of success	Roadmap K Kick-off date	Review date	Status
Working with Birmingham adult education centre, create a recognised digital learning pathway that is recognised and delivered through the neighbourhood hubs across the council **link to incentivisation piece	DIT	A published annual digital skills training schedule	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open
In collaboration with private and voluntary sector organisations such as Age UK, create, maintain and facilitate the delivery of ad-hoc and planned digital training and support across the council – delivered through the hubs	DIT	Coordinated digital training report across the council	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open
Create a mechanism for developing and distributing digital training material and literature across the council.  Materials ranging from detail literature on online security, awareness material on public sector digital tools (eg DWP portals and application processes), and simple handouts such as 'how to' guides	DIT	Coordinated digital training report across the council	Apr 25	Apr 26	Open



## Contact:

Digital inclusion team:

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Cross Council EI&P Transformation Programme

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