

# Digital Inclusion Report

# Executive summary

Digital services provide numerous advantages, from economic benefits to improved service provision and access. However, these opportunities must be balanced with the need to ensure that people who struggle to access digital services are not excluded. The prevalence and impact of such digital exclusion has been highlighted by the rapid shift towards digital services during Covid-19. People who experience digital exclusion may face a range of barriers to accessing services. This can be due to economic drivers such as being unable to afford devices, infrastructure barriers such as lack of availability of connectivity, or insufficient skills and confidence to access digital solutions.

Over time, digital exclusion can lead to worse health outcomes, increased living costs and social isolation. Digital access is therefore a prominent inequality in modern society, which is why Tameside & Glossop Inequalities Reference Group (IRG) have identified digital inclusion as a key area of focus. The IRG is a cross-sector group that aims to reduce inequality in Tameside & Glossop through providing constructive challenge to provider organisations. The group is chaired by Councillor Leanne Feeley in her role as lead member for Equalities, with membership of the group being drawn from a range of public sector organisations and community groups.

Public sector organisations and community groups have an important role to play in tackling digital exclusion, particularly as more services have moved online during the pandemic and will continue to do so in the future. A large range of work is currently being undertaken in Tameside & Glossop to reduce digital exclusion, but this work faces strategic, knowledge and socioeconomic barriers. To effectively tackle digital exclusion in the area, a collaborative, informed and flexible approach is required.

Therefore, the Inequalities Reference Group recommend the following:

- 1. Identify a Strategic Lead for Digital Exclusion in Tameside & Glossop and establish a digital exclusion working group.** The Strategic Lead and working group will be supported by digital leads from individual public sector organisations. The experiences of those who face digital exclusion will feed into the working group.
  - 2. Develop a place-based strategy and action plan to tackle digital exclusion** in Tameside & Glossop. The strategy must be informed by the voices of people with lived experience of digital exclusion, through coproduction and engagement. The strategy should aim to increase the provision of digital devices and connectivity, improve digital skills and confidence, and expand the capacity to support residents who are digitally excluded.
  - 3. Develop an investment plan** that will support the place-based strategy and action plan. This investment plan needs to address access to digital devices and connectivity in the area (for example, through a devices lending approach or additional free public access points). The plan should also support the improvement of digital skills and confidence of people who are digitally excluded, which could be achieved through training sessions or support from digital champions.
  - 4. Build a strong evidence base** to inform the strategy and investment plan. This evidence base should comprise of lived experience, data, and benchmarking. Engagement and coproduction with those who have experience of digital exclusion will be essential to ensure that the strategy and working group are informed by the personal experiences of people in Tameside & Glossop. Mapping digital exclusion and the services that support digital access within Tameside & Glossop will be a key piece of this work.
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# Background

There has been a clear trend for local authorities to move towards providing services and engaging with residents through digital channels. Covid-19 has rapidly accelerated this adoption of digital technology. Services that were previously provided in-person have been forced to move online, with face-to-face contacts being minimised wherever possible. This acceleration has quickly outpaced the digital strategies and plans of many organisations; the Accounts Commission for Scotland reports that “the coronavirus pandemic has moved councils’ digital plans forward by up to two to three years”<sup>1</sup>.

The shift to digital presents numerous opportunities, such as increased efficiency, higher quality of services and a better user experience. However, significant challenges are also presented, particularly for those who struggle to access or use digital services – or in other words, those who are digitally excluded.

Digitally excluded people find it difficult or impossible to access services that are offered through digital means. Even if they can access digital services, they are likely to find that these services do not fully meet their needs. As local councils move towards a future where services and engagement become digital by default, digital exclusion must be tackled to ensure residents can continue to access the services they need and remain engaged.

This report will explore the scale of digital exclusion across the UK and provide an overview of the work currently being undertaken to tackle the issue in Tameside & Glossop, before examining approaches taken by other local authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts Commission for Scotland, 2021, Digital Progress in Local Government

# Scale of digital exclusion

The reasons behind someone experiencing digital exclusion are wide-ranging. According to the UK Digital Strategy 2017<sup>2</sup>, an individual is considered to be digitally excluded if they experience one or more of the following key barriers:

- Access: the ability to connect to the internet and go online
- Skills: the ability to use the internet and online services
- Confidence: a fear of crime, lack of trust or not knowing where to start online
- Motivation: understanding why using the internet is relevant and helpful

As these barriers are common in the UK, digital exclusion is widespread. Although digital exclusion has declined over the last decade, the most recent ONS release estimated that 8% of the adult population of the UK (around 5.3 million people) have never used the internet, or have not used it in the last 3 months<sup>3</sup>. In the North-West of England, this figure rises to 9% of adults. Research from 2020 suggests that as many as 1.2 million residents in Greater Manchester could be digitally excluded in some way, with at least 450,000 of these residents “non-users” of the internet<sup>4</sup>.

Digital exclusion is also widespread in younger age groups – an estimated 15,000 – 20,000 young people across Greater Manchester are digitally excluded from learning whilst at home. There is also a growing digital skills gap, with 25% of employers reporting a lack of digital skills that are essential for many roles<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> UK Digital Strategy 2017

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2021, Internet Users

<sup>4</sup> Yates *et al*, 2020, Who are the limited users of digital systems and media? An examination of UK evidence

<sup>5</sup> World Skills UK & Enginuity, 2021, Disconnected? Exploring the digital skills gap

# Who faces digital exclusion?

Digital exclusion is not simply a generational issue. Although it is well known that older people in the UK are less likely to be online, a range of socio-economic factors also strongly dictates who experiences digital exclusion. Women, disabled people, people from Bangladeshi, White, or Pakistani ethnic backgrounds, and people who are economically inactive are all more likely than other groups to be digitally excluded.

Digital exclusion across ethnic groups has varied considerably in recent years – for example, in 2011 31.4% of Bangladeshi adults were estimated to be non-internet users, whereas in 2019 that figure had reduced to 11.7%. Digital exclusion is also linked to income: only 51% of households earning between £6,000-£10,000 have home internet access, compared to 99% of households earning over £40,001<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> ONS, 2019, Exploring the Digital Divide

# Impacts of digital exclusion

Through denying people access to digital services, digital exclusion can result in worse social, economic and health outcomes, increase the cost of bills and lead to social isolation. The Centre for Economics and Business Research identify five benefits of digital skills/access that digitally excluded people will likely miss out on<sup>7</sup>:

1. **Earnings:** digitally excluded people are likely to earn less than peers with digital skills.
2. **Employability:** digitally excluded people are less likely to find employment or attempt to look for work. A recent survey of employers found that 80% of entry level jobs require essential digital skills.
3. **Retail transaction:** shopping online is cheaper than shopping in-store. Digitally excluded people are likely to be paying more for the same products.
4. **Communication:** digital skills enable more frequent communication. Digitally excluded people are less likely to be connected with others.
5. **Time savings:** online processes are faster than the equivalent in-person process. Digitally excluded people are likely to spend more time per transaction than those with digital skills.

Furthermore, Covid-19 has fixed a spotlight on the importance of digital access for education. Pupils and students without digital devices or connectivity are at a significant educational disadvantage compared to their digitally enabled peers. Tackling digital exclusion may therefore lead to large improvements in individual finances, educational attainment, and quality of life.

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<sup>7</sup> CEBR, 2015, The economic impact of digital skills and inclusion in the UK

# Digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop

Digital exclusion is likely to be prevalent in Tameside & Glossop. High levels of deprivation, a large cohort of disabled people and an older than average population mean that a large proportion of the Tameside & Glossop population is likely to be digitally excluded. ONS statistics<sup>3</sup> estimate that 6% of residents in the UKD35 district (Tameside and Stockport) have either never used the internet or have not used the internet in the last 3 months. This is a large decrease from 2019, where 11.4% of residents had never used the internet or not used it in the last 3 months – at the time this was higher than the Greater Manchester and North West of England averages. This follows national trends, with the proportion of homes in the UK without internet access decreasing from 11% in March 2020 to 6% in March 2021<sup>8</sup>.

National-level data can be used as a proxy indicator of digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop. ONS data from 2019 estimated percentages of demographic groups and their internet usage. These percentages have been applied to the Tameside & Glossop population to provide an indication of the number of non-internet users (defined as those who last used the internet over 3+ months ago) in the area, split by demographics in tables 1 to 3:

**Table 1:** National level internet usage percentages applied to the Tameside & Glossop population (T & G Population), split by age.

| Age   | Used in last 3 months |                  | Used over 3 months ago |                  | Never used |                  |
|-------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|
|       | National %            | T & G population | National %             | T & G population | National % | T & G population |
| 16-24 | 99.5                  | 28,086           | 0.2                    | 57               | 0.3        | 85               |
| 25-34 | 99.5                  | 33,869           | 0.2                    | 68               | 0.3        | 102              |
| 35-44 | 99.1                  | 30,776           | 0.2                    | 124              | 0.5        | 187              |
| 45-54 | 97.9                  | 37,652           | 0.5                    | 270              | 1.4        | 656              |
| 55-64 | 94.6                  | 29,586           | 1.6                    | 603              | 3.7        | 1524             |
| 65-74 | 85.5                  | 21,997           | 3.0                    | 846              | 11.4       | 3569             |
| 75+   | 54.0                  | 8996             | 7.1                    | 1173             | 38.8       | 9035             |

<sup>8</sup> Ofcom, 2021, Adults' media use and attitudes

**Table 2:** National level internet usage percentages applied to the Tameside & Glossop population (T & G Population), split by disability.

| Disability Status                     | Used in last 3 months |                  | Used over 3 months ago |                  | Never used |                  |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|
|                                       | National %            | T & G population | National %             | T & G population | National % | T & G population |
| Disabled (under the Equality Act)     | 81.4                  | 40,588           | 3.5                    | 1762             | 14.9       | 9434             |
| Non-disabled (under the Equality Act) | 95.7                  | 190,147          | 0.8                    | 1805             | 3.4        | 8224             |

**Table 3:** National level internet usage percentages applied to the Tameside & Glossop population (T & G Population), split by ethnicity.

| Ethnicity                                | Used in last 3 months |                  | Used over 3 months ago |                  | Never used |                  |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|
|                                          | National %            | T & G population | National %             | T & G population | National % | T & G population |
| White                                    | 91.6                  | 209,689          | 1.6                    | 3707             | 6.7        | 18,073           |
| Mixed/ multiple ethnic backgrounds       | 99.2                  | 3435             | 0.2                    | 54               | 0.5        | 86               |
| Indian                                   | 96.3                  | 3379             | 0.3                    | 41               | 2.9        | 307              |
| Pakistani                                | 91.7                  | 4513             | 0.6                    | 59               | 7.6        | 362              |
| Bangladeshi                              | 87.8                  | 3948             | 1.9                    | 60               | 9.8        | 288              |
| Chinese                                  | 97.6                  | 1017             | 0.0                    | 0                | 2.4        | 14               |
| Other Asian background                   | 96.8                  | 769              | 0.4                    | 6                | 2.6        | 26               |
| Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British | 95.4                  | 1739             | 1.2                    | 24               | 3.4        | 103              |
| Other ethnic group                       | 97.6                  | 414              | 0.3                    | 3                | 2.1        | 20               |



The pattern of digital exclusion will be highly variable across Tameside & Glossop, with pockets of both high and low digital exclusion caused by a diverse range of factors. This pattern is compounded by the intersectional nature of these factors – for example, someone over 75, of Bangladeshi ethnicity and on a low income will be at a much higher risk of being digitally excluded than other groups. Therefore, identifying and quantifying the digitally excluded population in Tameside & Glossop is difficult, particularly as direct evidence and data at a local level are limited.

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# Evidence and insight from Tameside & Glossop

A range of work has been conducted to gather more information and evidence about digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop. This insight has been collected through surveys, focus groups and mapping exercises. A separate report that covers the insight gained from people with lived experience of digital exclusion is being developed.

## **Mapping**

Mapping work is currently being undertaken by the Employment and Skills team to better understand the distribution of digital exclusion across Tameside & Glossop.

The Consumer Data Research Centre has also produced a useful map of internet user classifications based on 2018 data<sup>9</sup>. The map designates postcode areas as one of ten internet user groups, so is a useful resource for identifying areas of Tameside & Glossop where internet usage is lower than average. This map shows large areas of “e-withdrawn” people (described as those who are the least engaged with the internet), particularly in Hattersley and parts of Ashton. A screenshot of this map is provided in Appendix A, along with a link to the interactive version.

In addition, Salford City Council are in the process of developing a [Digital Exclusion Risk Index](#) (DERI) that generates a digital exclusion score for every LSOA in England. Scores are calculated based on three components: age, deprivation and broadband. Within Tameside & Glossop, areas with high digital exclusion scores include parts of Dukinfield, Denton West and Ashton Waterloo. The index will be a useful tool for visualising digital exclusion risk in Tameside & Glossop as it is further developed. A screenshot of this map is provided in Appendix B, along with a link to the interactive version.

## **Digital Skills Survey**

The most recent picture of digital skills in Tameside & Glossop comes from the Digital Skills survey that was conducted in 2018. Over half of all respondents completed a paper version of the survey. Respondents were asked if they were capable of performing a range of digital tasks – a large majority (over 90%) of respondents stated that they were able to complete these tasks. 52% of respondents said that they were interested in improving their digital skills, but very few (11%) were aware of the iDEA digital skills programme. Replicating this survey will enable a more current picture of digital skills and inclusion in Tameside & Glossop to be developed.

## **Census 2021/Library Computer users survey**

A survey was conducted in March and April 2021 to explore the reasons behind people using library computers or needing support when completing their Census form. At time of writing, the majority (67%) of respondents were not able to access the internet at home, with the most common reason for this being a lack of internet connection or Wi-Fi (77%). For respondents who did have digital access at home, the most common reason for using a public computer was for access to a printer.

The final two questions covered digital skills. Most respondents were not interested in improving their digital skills (44%), although a large number (38%) indicated they would be interested. Respondents thought that having someone to help them when they got stuck was the best way to help them improve their digital skills (41% of respondents). Improved access to digital devices and more training courses/workshops (both 36%) were also popular choices of support. Data collection is still underway and an update will be provided once all responses are collated.

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<sup>9</sup> CDRC Maps, 2018, Internet User Classification 2018

## **Engagement through PEN**

Digital exclusion has been a key concern for many people attending Partnership Engagement Network (PEN) sessions and conferences. Comments and stories from PEN participants have been invaluable in illustrating the impacts of being unable to access digital services. Although most PEN participants do not have direct lived experience of digital exclusion, many will have extensive experience of engaging and working with those who are digitally excluded as representatives from the VCSE sector and community advocates.

Specific Covid-19 engagement sessions were conducted in 2020, with concerns around digital inclusion – particularly in relation to access to services – a key output from each session. Digital inclusion was also a recurring theme in responses to an online survey exploring the impact of Covid-19, which ran alongside the engagement sessions. Feedback from PEN participants and survey respondents related to digital inclusion is included below:

- “Make sure online services are accessible for those who have difficulty in understanding them or can’t afford the technology.”
- “Those struggling most financially are also cut off from the digital services and the way information is now provided. No point doing everything online if those who need it most can’t access what’s being offered.”
- “Lack of access to internet - borough wide review to identify how to get ALL families connected.”
- “It’s all about flexibility to suit services and the customer, face to face when needed and virtually when needed. But this to be agreed with the customer as well as for the convenience of the service”
- “...communications has been heavily digital which a large % of our community have little or no access to. For example elderly people had no way of knowing about the food delivery options from some of the market traders. I think there should be a bigger focus on communication to all, and not believing that a few tweets get to everyone.”
- “Make sure online services are accessible for those who have difficulty in understanding them or can’t afford the technology.”

Additionally, a Digital Exclusion workshop was held at the PEN Conference in March 2021. Participants were asked about their priorities for tackling digital exclusion and discussed ideas for promoting digital skills. Key outputs from the workshops included:

- There is a lack of training available for people with low digital skills – particularly poor people. Training needs to be offered for all levels.
  - People with learning disabilities or without English language skills struggle with digital services.
  - Initial set up costs/effort is a big barrier to personal digital access.
  - Promoting the benefits of digital access and skills would be a good way to motivate people to get online.
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## **Community Champions Network**

Members of the Tameside & Glossop Community Champions Network were engaged with regarding digital exclusion and how digital access can be supported in the area. Ideas from the network included:

- Increase the number of free digital access points across the borough – this could include digital devices in a range of venues run by partner organisations.
- Training and support needs to be available on site at these public digital access locations
- Provide equipment to community groups that work with the traditionally “harder to reach” communities.

## **Primary Care survey**

A survey was conducted in 2020 to gather people’s views on the future of primary care. Within the survey some questions asked respondents about their views on digital primary care services. Almost two-thirds of respondents used online services at their GP practice, and the majority of this group found the services to be satisfactory. However, 37% of did not use online services and 27% were not aware that these services were available at their GP practice. Female respondents and people with caring responsibilities were more likely to be unaware of online services compared to other groups.

This survey was online only, so it can be assumed that respondents were not digitally excluded. However, given the low levels of awareness of digital services, results suggest that there is still work to do in promoting digital access even amongst people who are not digitally excluded.

## **Covid-19 Humanitarian Hub**

Digital exclusion was a common issue for people who contacted the Covid-19 Humanitarian Hub for support during various stages of the pandemic. Multiple people who contacted the hub could not access services that had shifted online and relied on phone calls for support. For example, many pharmacies ran prescription delivery services but these were available as online only. As a result, the humanitarian hub received numerous calls from residents who wanted their prescription to be delivered but were unable to access the service themselves. Others were unable to book supermarket delivery slots online and needed assistance to do so.

## **Case studies**

A number case studies from people with lived experience of digital exclusion – and of receiving support – are available from a number of organisations and projects. This includes the Digital Wellbeing Project, the Keep On, Keep Up project, Tameside Employment and Skills team, and Tameside Libraries.

## **Tameside ACE**

During the pandemic Tameside ACE (Adult and Community Education) switched to offer educational courses online. Some existing and new students were unable to complete (and even to enrol onto) these courses as they lacked the necessary digital skills.

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# Current work in Tameside & Glossop

There is a large body of work to tackle digital exclusion being undertaken in Tameside & Glossop by a range of organisations. This section provides a brief overview of this work:

- **Digital Wellbeing Project** - the Digital Wellbeing project was initiated in September 2020 and is led by PCrefurb, supported by Tameside & Glossop ICFT and Tameside & Glossop CCG. The project aims to help people who are unable to access technology to develop their digital skills and confidence in using devices for day-to-day activities that improve their health and wellbeing. This is done through the provision of refurbished digital devices and support through a Digital Champions Network. People without access to a digital device can be referred to the project to receive a refurbished laptop or tablet and access to support through the Digital Champion Network. Groups that have received devices include the Tameside & Glossop Autism Team and Diversity Matters North West (who also received translated training materials). Training has been delivered to organisations and groups including Active Tameside to enable them to deliver online exercise sessions, and to Minds Matter to allow them to access online training courses. To date the project has provided 76 devices and trained nine Digital Champions.
  - **GM Technology Fund** - the Greater Manchester Technology Fund is an emergency response to help support digitally-excluded young people with the technology and connectivity needed to continue their learning at home while schools and colleges remain closed. The fund has distributed donated devices to students without digital access across Greater Manchester. Devices, data packages and funds are donated by businesses in the region.
  - **GM Digital Inclusion Action Network** - GMCA have launched the Digital Inclusion Action Network to specifically help under-25s, over-75s and disabled people to get online through providing skills, connectivity and devices. The network will work alongside the existing Digital Inclusion Taskforce
  - **Princes Trust** - the Princes Trust have delivered 56 connectivity grants to school students in Tameside. The grants are provided to schools that deliver the Trust's Achieve programme.
  - **Keep On, Keep Up project** - The University of Manchester are running a pilot scheme that has seen 40 refurbished iPads purchased and loaned to adult social care service users in Tameside & Glossop. These devices have been provided to support the development of a health app that is designed to reduce falls and improve overall health. Adult social care staff are supporting recipients of the iPads with their digital skills. In addition, adult social care staff are exploring the potential for a Tech Buddy group that can support all social care clients who are digitally excluded.
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In addition, there are a number of digital-focussed projects currently in development. This includes projects from local organisations such as:

- **Action Together** – local social prescribing organisation that supports individual volunteers, groups and organisations
  - **Digital Diamonds** – Tameside organisation that provides an I.T drop-in with free internet and support
  - **Diversity Matters North West** – local charity working to tackle health inequalities and social exclusion and to promote community cohesion.
  - **GW Theatre** – Mossley-based touring theatre company
  - **Jigsaw Homes** – housing association with a footprint in the North West and East Midlands.
  - **Made by Mortals** – creative media company that produces podcasts, films and musical theatre shows
  - **Tameside ACE** – Tameside Council's Adult and Community Education service
  - **St Barnabas Church, Hattersley** – the Church has Wi-Fi connectivity and is planning to offer a number of sessions should Covid-19 allow. These sessions include: How to shop safely online; How to switch supplier for a better deal; How to look a price comparison website; Keeping connected with family and friends; and early evening film and gaming clubs for young people.
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# Approaches to tackle digital exclusion

Many local authorities promote projects to improve digital skills (for example, through the national Learn My Way centres and the iDEA project), but a number have placed further focus on the area and developed more specific initiatives and projects.

This section will explore this more specific work.

## **Leeds City Council**

Leeds City Council lead the 100% Digital Leeds programme alongside a number of voluntary sector partners. The programme aims to make Leeds a digitally inclusive city, through a lending library and a digital champions scheme. The programme can provide people and organisations with devices, equipment, data, grant funding, and technical support. The approach has seen the programme reach groups that have been traditionally harder to reach, such as gypsy/travellers and people with dementia. The programme is widely replicated in other areas and has won a number of awards.

## **Oldham Council**

Oldham Council have focussed on the impact of digital inclusion in schools and produced a report alongside Oldham and Tameside colleges. As a result, digital champions were placed within every school to support both parents and teachers with improving digital skills.

The Council – through its libraries team – also coordinate a lending library that loans out tablets to VCSE organisations and other partners working with disadvantaged communities.

The lending library was established through a pilot project that had only 10 devices available, but has since been expanded.

## **Rochdale**

Rochdale Council have set up a lending library, alongside voluntary sector organisations (primarily Rochdale Connections Trust) who are responsible for the devices. The library has received additional funding from Living Well and local housing associations. They have recently been allocated £120,000 from DWP to further develop the lending library. This funding has been used to purchase an additional 550 tablets. Devices are currently only loaned to community organisations who then lend them on to people they work with, which helps to ensure that they reach the most vulnerable or isolated residents. Digital champions have been trained to support people to use the devices.

The council also coordinate a Digital Inclusion Alliance group with community organisations to collaborate and identify where further support is needed.

## **Stockport Council**

Stockport Council have promoted themselves as a digitally inclusive council since early 2018. They have a number of schemes that support digital inclusivity:

- Digital Inclusion Alliance: In 2018, the council established the Digital Inclusion Alliance – or DigiKnow – to help digitally excluded residents gain digital skills and confidence. The alliance is formed from partners including housing associations, community centres, local businesses and colleges. The approach operates on an ethos of “trusted faces in local places”, delivering digital skills support through established and trusted community groups and organisations who already provide social support. The programme was initially led by the Good Things Foundation.
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- Lending Library: The council have set up a lending library alongside Starting Point. The library loans out digital devices and data packages to the community and has expanded to include around 150 devices, thanks in part to securing 50 devices from the DevicesDotNow scheme. Support is also provided to people that need it. To date the library has provided 350 loans, with some of these being long-term arrangements (especially for school-aged children).
- Digital Champions: to support residents with digital skills, Digital Champions were trained to provide telephone and video support to individuals and groups who need help getting online.

### **Salford**

Under the Digital You plan, Salford Council are aiming to get vulnerable and digitally excluded residents online. The council worked with the Good Things Foundation, who recruited community organisations across the city to join an Online Centres Network. Through the network, these organisations supported around 7000 residents to get online. Digital Champions were recruited and trained, and digital devices shared across the network.

To help identify digital exclusion hotspots, Salford mapped areas in the borough that were most likely to be digitally excluded. Areas were mapped using measures including Wi-Fi connectivity, Indices of Multiple Deprivation, employment, digital engagement with council services and age. This allowed the council to target the highest priority areas with additional learning sessions and resources.

### **Trafford**

Trafford Council are in the process of setting up a digital device lending library that will be run by the Council's library service. The lending library has 60 devices that can be loaned out for 3-week periods, but at present there is no data/internet package included in the loan. The lending library is also supported by voluntary digital champions.

### **Wigan**

Wigan Council coordinate a Digital Communities Partnership that connects and supports community organisations that help residents gain digital skills. Partners meet on a quarterly basis to share knowledge and collaborate.

The council also offer a digital buddy system that provides one-to-one digital support via telephone to residents who are unable to leave their home.

### **London Councils**

The Mayor of London and London Councils launched a digital exclusion taskforce. The taskforce will map out the need for devices and connectivity cross the city, allocate investment in digital infrastructure to support areas with poor connectivity, and help people gain digital skills. £1.5 million has been allocated to better understand the levels of digital exclusion across London.

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# Challenges/Opportunities

## **Strategic Approach**

There is a broad range of work to tackle digital exclusion currently taking place in Tameside & Glossop. However, this work does not sit within one single place-based strategic vision or direction. This means that the capacity to support the range of current work (e.g. training support for people who have been provided with a digital device) may not be in place. A place-based strategy would bring together this work and ensure that duplication is avoided and resources are used effectively, whilst also building up the supporting infrastructure that is required to sustain this work in the future. Collaboration with the range of partners and organisations working to tackle digital inclusion will enable the sharing of expertise and allow support to be provided to residents through groups and organisations that they trust.

## **Evidence and Data**

There is minimal data or evidence available about digital exclusion at a Tameside & Glossop level. This makes it difficult to identify which groups or communities experience it and therefore makes it challenging for action to be targeted at the groups and areas that are most in need. Further developing our understanding of the experiences of those people who face digital exclusion would also be beneficial. There is an opportunity to more effectively capture data and gather insight from people with lived experience at a Tameside & Glossop level by engaging with the broad range of projects and groups that are currently tackling digital exclusion.

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# An approach to digital inclusion in Tameside & Glossop

A digital inclusion approach in Tameside & Glossop should focus on expanding access to digital devices and building up capacity to support residents with digital access. Although a range of work is already being undertaken, this current activity does not match the scale of the shift to online services. The approach should bring together the range of partners and organisations that are already working to tackle digital exclusion and expand upon it in a collaborative way. A number of options could be considered to expand access to digital devices:

- Establish a lending library that could loan out devices to people who are referred to it by partner organisations.
- Place digital devices in venues and locations of partner organisations to expand the footprint of public digital devices across Tameside & Glossop
- Enable community access to college and school computer facilities at selected times outside of school hours

There will need to be additional capacity to support people with digital devices should access to devices be expanded. This capacity could be built through:

- An area wide network of Digital Champions, building upon the existing work of PCrefurb and the Digital Wellbeing Project. Digital Champions will be trained to support residents with technical and skills based issues. Ideally, Digital Champions should be embedded within a range of VCSE organisations.
  - Producing communication campaigns that promote the benefits of digital access, encourage the use of publicly available digital devices and raise awareness of the range of support available.
  - A programme of public training sessions to improve digital skills and confidence.
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# Recommendations and next steps

To tackle digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop, the Inequalities Reference Group makes the following recommendations:

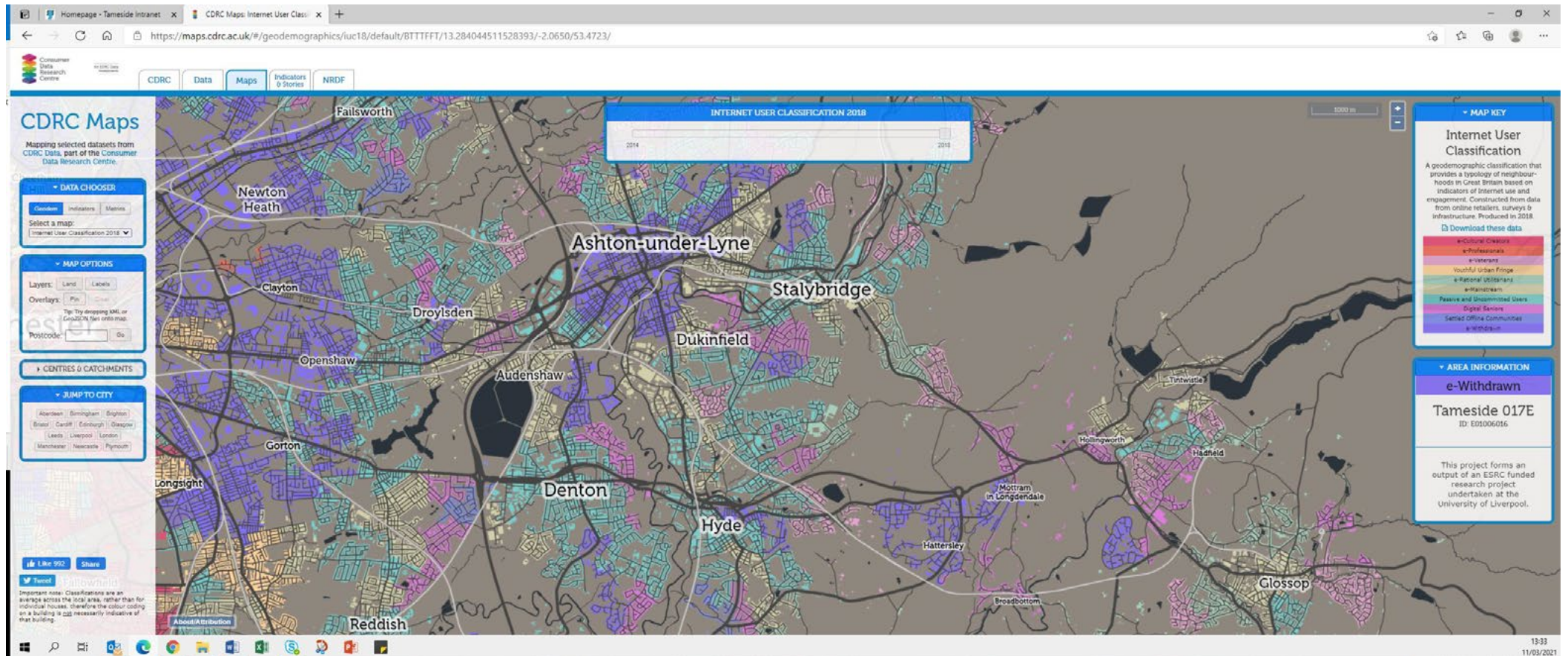
- 1.** Identify a Strategic Lead for Digital Exclusion in Tameside & Glossop and establish a digital exclusion working group. The Strategic Lead and working group will be supported by digital leads from individual public sector organisations. The experiences of those who face digital exclusion will feed into the working group.
  - 2.** Develop a place-based strategy and action plan to tackle digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop. The strategy must be informed by the voices of people with lived experience of digital exclusion, through coproduction and engagement. The strategy should aim to increase the provision of digital devices and connectivity, improve digital skills and confidence, and expand the capacity to support residents who are digitally excluded.
  - 3.** Develop an investment plan that will support the place-based strategy and action plan. This investment plan needs to address access to digital devices and connectivity in the area (for example, through a devices lending approach or additional free public access points). The plan should also support the improvement of digital skills and confidence of people who are digitally excluded, which could be achieved through training sessions or support from digital champions.
  - 4.** Build a strong evidence base to inform the strategy and investment plan. This evidence base should comprise of lived experience, data, and benchmarking. Engagement and coproduction with those who have experience of digital exclusion will be essential to ensure that the strategy and working group are informed by the personal experiences of people in Tameside & Glossop. Mapping digital exclusion and the services that support digital access within Tameside & Glossop will be a key piece of this work.
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# References

1. [Accounts Commission for Scotland, 2021, Digital Progress in Local Government](#)
  2. [Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2017, UK Digital Strategy 2017](#)
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  5. [World Skills UK & Enginuity, 2021, Disconnected? Exploring the digital skills gap](#)
  6. [Office for National Statistics, 2019, Exploring the Digital Divide](#)
  7. [Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2015, The economic impact of digital skills and inclusion in the UK](#)
  8. [Ofcom, 2021, Adults' media use and attitudes](#)
  9. [CDRC Maps, 2018, Internet User Classification 2018.](#)
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# Appendix A:

CDRC Map of digital exclusion in Tameside & Glossop. Link to full, interactive map: [CDRC Maps, 2018, Internet User Classification 2018.](https://maps.cdrc.ac.uk/#/geodemographics/iuc18/default/BTTTTFT/13.284044511528393/-2.0650/53.4723/)





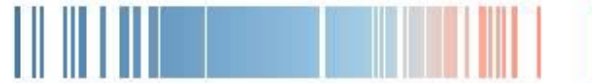
## Appendix B:

Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) map for Tameside and Glossop (this map also includes parts of High Peak Borough Council).  
Link to interactive map: [Workbook: 210325 DERI \(gmtableau.nhs.uk\)](https://workbook.210325.DERI.gmtableau.nhs.uk)

E01019736: High Peak 013B

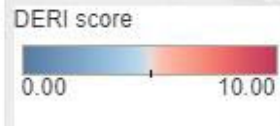
3.514

Low risk



High risk

Edit score weighting



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