
Digital Inclusion strategy and action plan

YOUR CRISIS **OUR**
ACTION



Digital Inclusion: our ambition

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Vision:

In line with the Mayor of London's Digital Access for All target, by 2025, we will ensure that everyone in our borough has the skills, tools and support to thrive in an increasingly digital world, leaving no one behind.



Problem:

'Digital poverty is the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where, and how an individual needs to.'

DPA, 2022

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More and more, this means not having access to the fundamentals of life – from healthcare, education and essential public services.

Solution:

'Digital inclusion is working with communities to address issues of opportunity, access, knowledge and skill in relation to using technology, and in particular, the internet.'

IRISS, 2020

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Digital inclusion intervention and policy ensures no one is disadvantaged by their ability to use technology and the internet.

Outcome:

Digital equity is having the 'minimum digital standard of living' needed to access opportunities and choices, and participate in an increasingly digital society.

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It will vary by individual, according to their personal barriers, needs and goals, but will always require: accessible internet, adequate equipment, and skills, knowledge and support.

Digital inclusion supports our priorities

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Health Inequalities

Digital exclusion is a social determinant of health inequalities, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation.

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Cost of Living

Digital poverty sets up a vicious circle: those without digital access lose out and become financially poorer (IDS, 2022).

Digital inclusion is a gateway to a fairer, higher quality of life, giving residents more/better paid work, cheaper goods, more social connections and access to help.

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Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

It's those already at a disadvantage – through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment – who are most likely to be excluded. Digital exclusion contributes to deeply entrenched inequalities in the borough.

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Investing in inclusion now compliments our customer service ambitions

Inclusive Customer Experience Strategy

Digital-by-default services make digital inclusion an essential utility, not a luxury. As we invest in the quality and breath of our online services, investing in inclusion in parallel will maximise the number of residents that can benefit from the flexibility of online services and access to their council data.

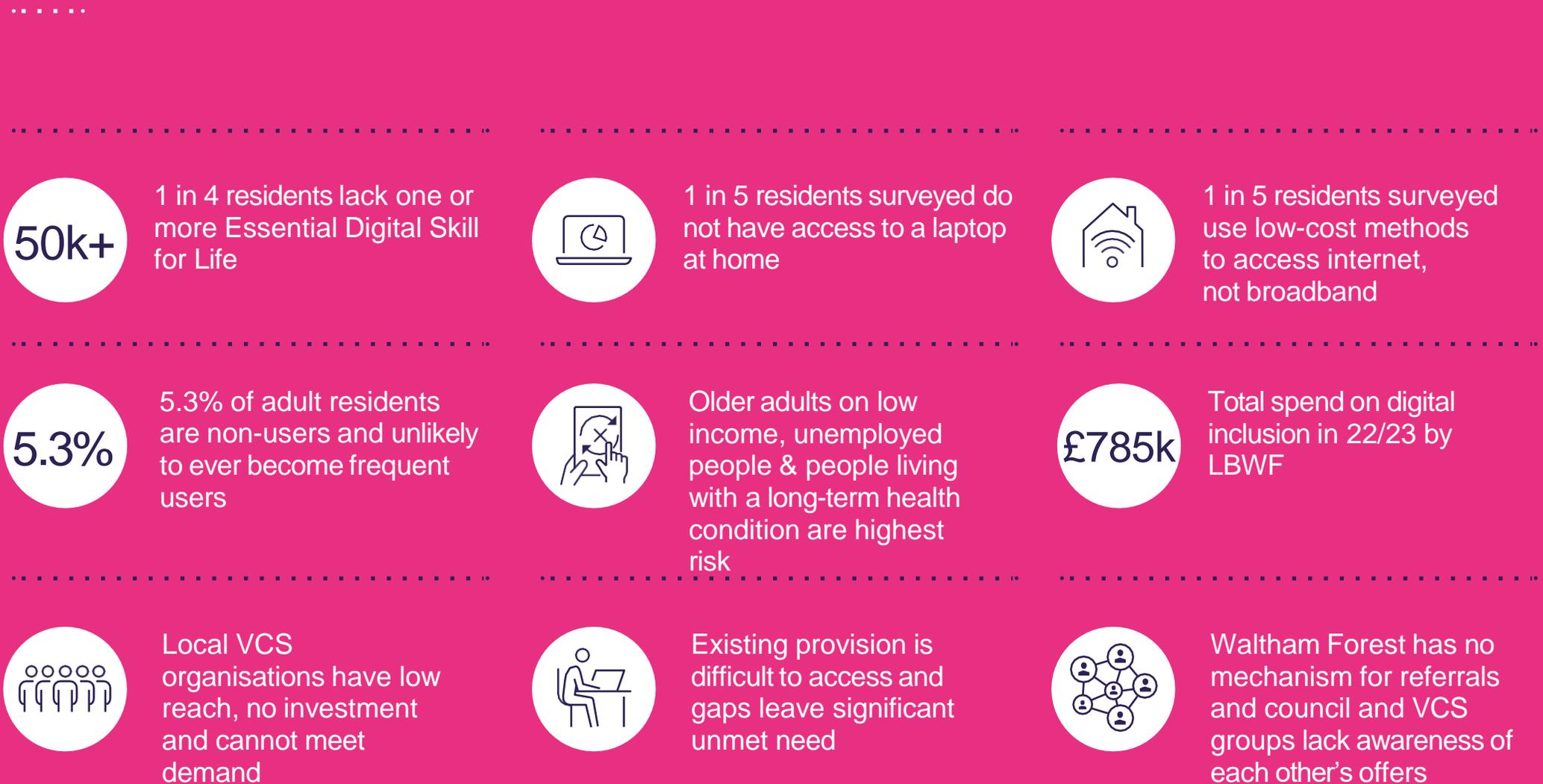
Understanding the problem

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From January to May 2022 we conducted interviews and engagement with 600 residents, 20 VCS groups and businesses and consulted teams across the council.



What we learnt about Digital inclusion in Waltham Forest



Scale of the problem

We found residents of Waltham Forest suffer from four key barriers. The scale of the problem marginally exceeds national averages.



Digital skills

- **55,380 (25.6%)** of adult residents lack the full **Essential Digital Skills for Life** which are needed to safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world.
- This compares with **21% nationally**.

ONS data 2020



Access to devices

- Boroughwide, **14%** of residents don't have a **smartphone** and **20%** don't have a **laptop**.
- Some residents don't have device access at all:
 - Walthamstow: **11%**
 - Leyton: **15%**
 - Leytonstone: **10%**
 - & Chingford: **4%**

Representative street survey



Motivation, confidence & trust

- **5.3%** of adults in Waltham Forest are not internet users at all.
- **9,200** have never used the internet, and **2,300** are lapsed users.
- This compares to **6.2%** for London and **8.1%** for England nationally.

ONS data 2020



Connectivity

- **98.9%** of the borough has coverage for Super Fast Broadband, but cost is prohibitive.
- **19%** of residents in **Walthamstow**, **21%** in **Leyton** and **18%** in **Leytonstone** are using **low-cost methods** to get online including mobile internet, hotspots and MiFi devices.

Representative street survey

Who is most affected?

Our digitally excluded are frequently residents living with other health and socio-economic risks. From our representative **on-street and online surveys**, we found:

Older adults on low income

No internet access at home:

37%

No device access at home:

39%

Not recent internet users:

47%

Non-users of the internet:

29%



People living with a long-term health condition or disability

No internet access at home:

30%

No device access at home:

27%

Frequent internet users:

47%

Representative street survey



Unemployed people

No internet access at home:

21%

No device access at home:

18%

Frequent internet users:

37%



Communities in Baker's Arms, Wood Street, Higham Hill and Leytonstone Southwest

Dominant risk factors: old age, high claimants of Universal Credit, Housing Benefits, and higher receipts of disability related benefits.



General population

No device access at home:
6%

No internet access at home:
6%

Frequent internet users:
78.6%

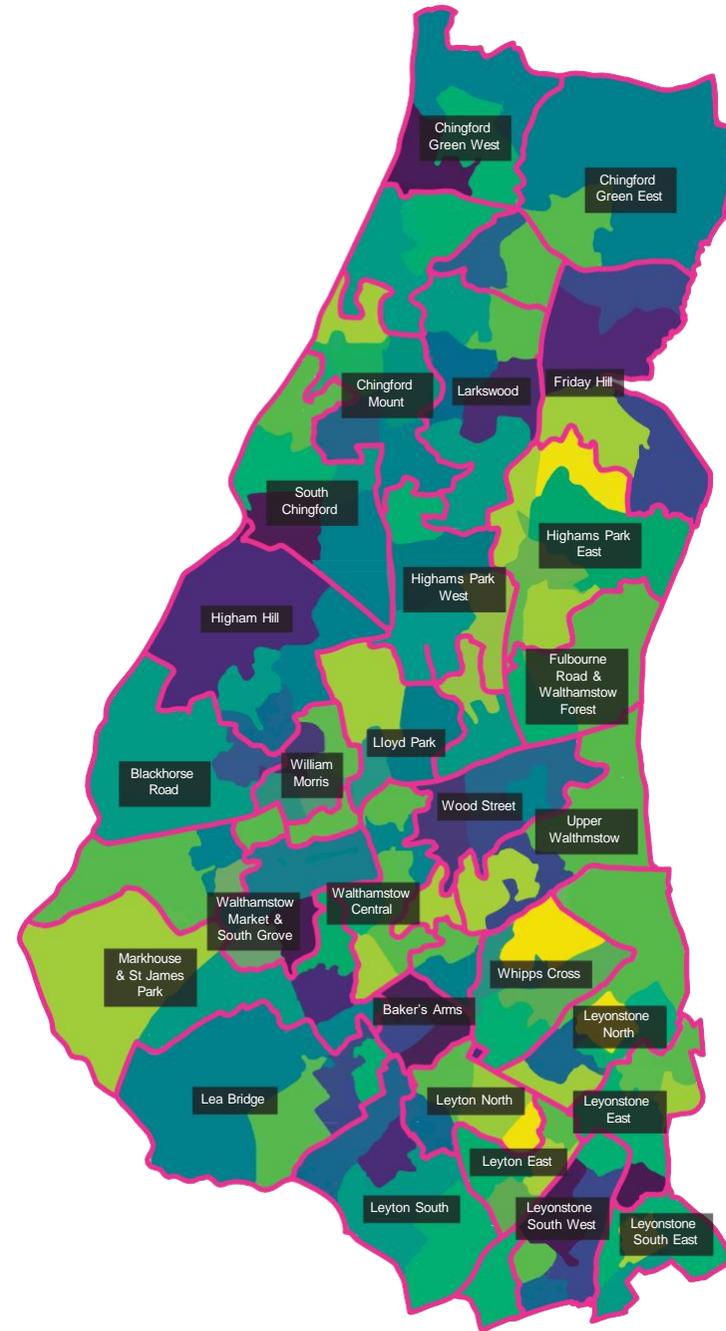


High Risk

Med Risk

Low Risk

No Risk



A vicious circle: those without digital access lose out and become financially poorer, worsening their health and life outcomes.

Risk Factors	<p>Older people</p> <p>All, over 75's greater risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On low incomes • Isolated or living alone • Complex medical needs • Receiving adult social care 	<p>Working age residents receiving other services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit or economically inactive • ESOL or low literacy • Temporary accommodation or at risk of homelessness 	<p>Residents living with a disability or health condition</p> <p>On low incomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual or auditory impairments • Learning difficulties • Complex care or respite needs 	<p>Low income families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most likely to be in arrears on broadband bills • Time poor, space poor • Carers and care leavers • Baker's Arms, Wood Street, Higham Hill & Leytonstone Southwest wards
				
Prevented from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing public services • Managing health and care • Online banking • Navigating public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching for work • Earning a decent living • Finding affordable housing • Managing money & benefits • Accessing cheaper deals online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing health and support services • Independent living • Equitable access to online world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home learning • Managing money • Accessing cheaper deals online • Finding low-cost family offers in the borough

47% surveyed not internet users.

20% living in data/device poverty.

30% living in data/device poverty.

27% lack suitable device and 51% no home broadband.

Connecting to family, friends and support networks locally and beyond the borough

By leading a boroughwide response, we can use digital inclusion as a preventative tool, tackling problems early and treating less.

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Multi-agency resident support

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- A range of organisations support Digital Inclusion in the borough, alongside the council, but there is **significant unmet need**.
- Investment is piecemeal and support is predominantly provided by small VCS groups with **low reach and capacity**.
- There is a **lack of awareness** across all partners, including within the council, about what's on offer.
- As a result, **support is difficult to find and access** and there is no system of referrals.

There is an underlying belief [in Waltham Forest] that voluntary sector will do everything with no support.

Age UK



We need the Council to acknowledge it [Digital poverty] is a problem.

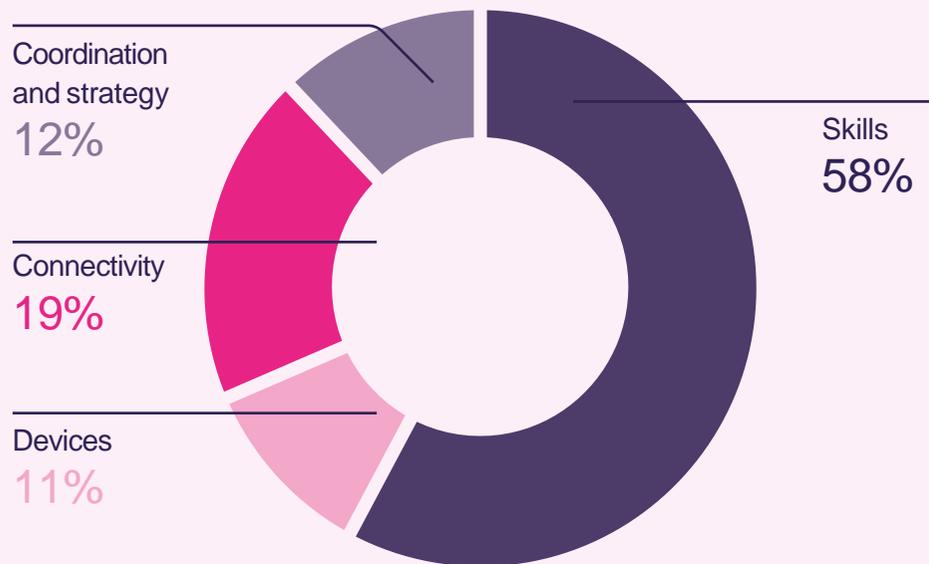
Disability Resource
Centre



What is LBWF spending on Digital inclusion this year?

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£ spend by outcome area

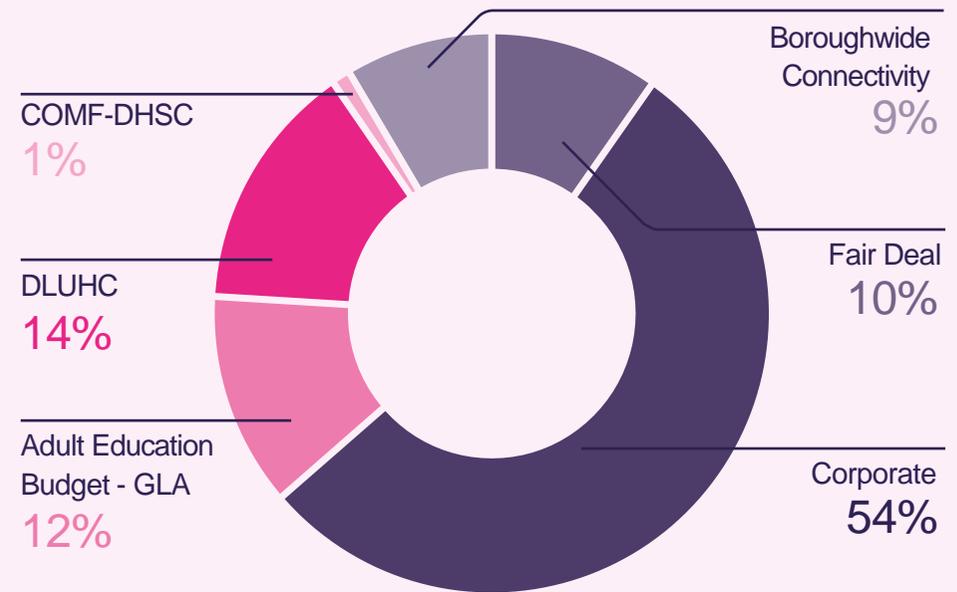


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As the barrier faced by the largest proportion of residents (25.6%), and the outcome area shown to create lasting change for residents, **it is positive that skills is our biggest investment at 58%**.

26% of our provision is targeted. Totalling £203k, these programmes are: DHLUC funded digital skills for south Asian woman, Early Help drop-ins for at risk families and Totally Connect for a target group of staff.

£ spend by revenue source



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54% of our digital inclusion expenditure is internal corporate investment. Of that £431k, 63% is our library provision.

46% was a mix of local, national and grant funding. **The only recurring external funding is the drawdown from the Adult Education Budget from GLA.**

Gap Analysis: council provision

Our analysis exposed gaps and systemic challenges:

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Strategy and coordination

- Waltham Forest has no mechanism for signposting, referral or convening.
- We're focused on short term fixes like completing forms for residents but failing to create lasting change or savings for our services. Investments in connectivity just allow us to 'keep up'.
- We have very little evaluation data about the effectiveness of our digital inclusion services.
- Social value initiatives are sporadic and not connected to our wider offer, diminishing the value and impact to residents.



Skills

- ALS provide a good range of digital skills courses but is hard to find.
- We have only have a tenth of the necessary 100+ Digital Champions to meet the need. Field visits found council services advertised and signposted wrongly with out of date information (March 2022).
- Interviews found an overreliance on the VCS sector. Our ALS supported only 193 residents, with VCS filling essential gaps in 1-2-1 support.



Data and devices

- Access to devices and Wi-Fi is available in libraries and community hubs, but schemes to give residents access at home are very limited. Existing IT suites are underutilised.
- National offers to supply free data and devices are underutilised. Social Value contributions do not find their way to residents in need.



We need to increase the impact of existing services and assets and leverage new funding streams

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We need to take a leadership approach that combines partner skills and increases quality and capacity of support

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Digital Inclusion Strategy 2022-25

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Vision for Waltham Forest

By 2025, we will create digital equity in Waltham Forest and ensure that every resident has the skills, tools and support to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Resident impact

Economic – ability to make a decent living, develop skills and manage money

Social – a fair and equal borough, connected neighborhoods, civic engagement

Individual – increased independence, resilience and ability to find help and support

Our role

Our approach

To lead a boroughwide response to Digital Inclusion through coordination, campaigning and the provision of essential support to communities most at risk of digital poverty.

Leading from within; inclusion for our staff

Enhancing community capacity

Test & Scale

Working in partnership and systems leadership

Maximising use of existing council & community assets

Workstreams


Internal coordination and capability


Convening a boroughwide response


Skills and support


Data and devices

Council outcomes

Early intervention – More independent, less isolated residents are better equipped to find the help they need, before more complex needs develop.

Customer Experience – Residents are better equipped to interact with us digitally and self-serve.



Internal coordination and capability raising

Barrier: Difficulty accessing
and finding support

Target: All residents,
front-line staff

Activity

1. A digital inclusion **triaging** tool for staff and residents

A digital tool for use by staff, residents and partners that enables the user to assess residents needs and goals and find up-to-date information about available support.

2. Digital Champion **training** pilot for library staff

A training pilot for library staff to develop their digital skills and understanding of digital inclusion so they can effectively support digitally excluded residents.

3. Impact and Process **Evaluation**

An evaluation framework to enable us to quickly evaluate, adapt and scale our digital inclusion provision.





Convening a boroughwide response

Barrier: Lack of awareness and coordination

Target: All residents, front-line staff

Activity

4. Waltham Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership

A new partnership to harness the combined capabilities of the sector to tackle digital exclusion and create a more coherent system of support that reaches those most in need.





Skills and support

Barrier: Skills, confidence & motivation

Target: Older people on low incomes, then residents with ESOL

Activity

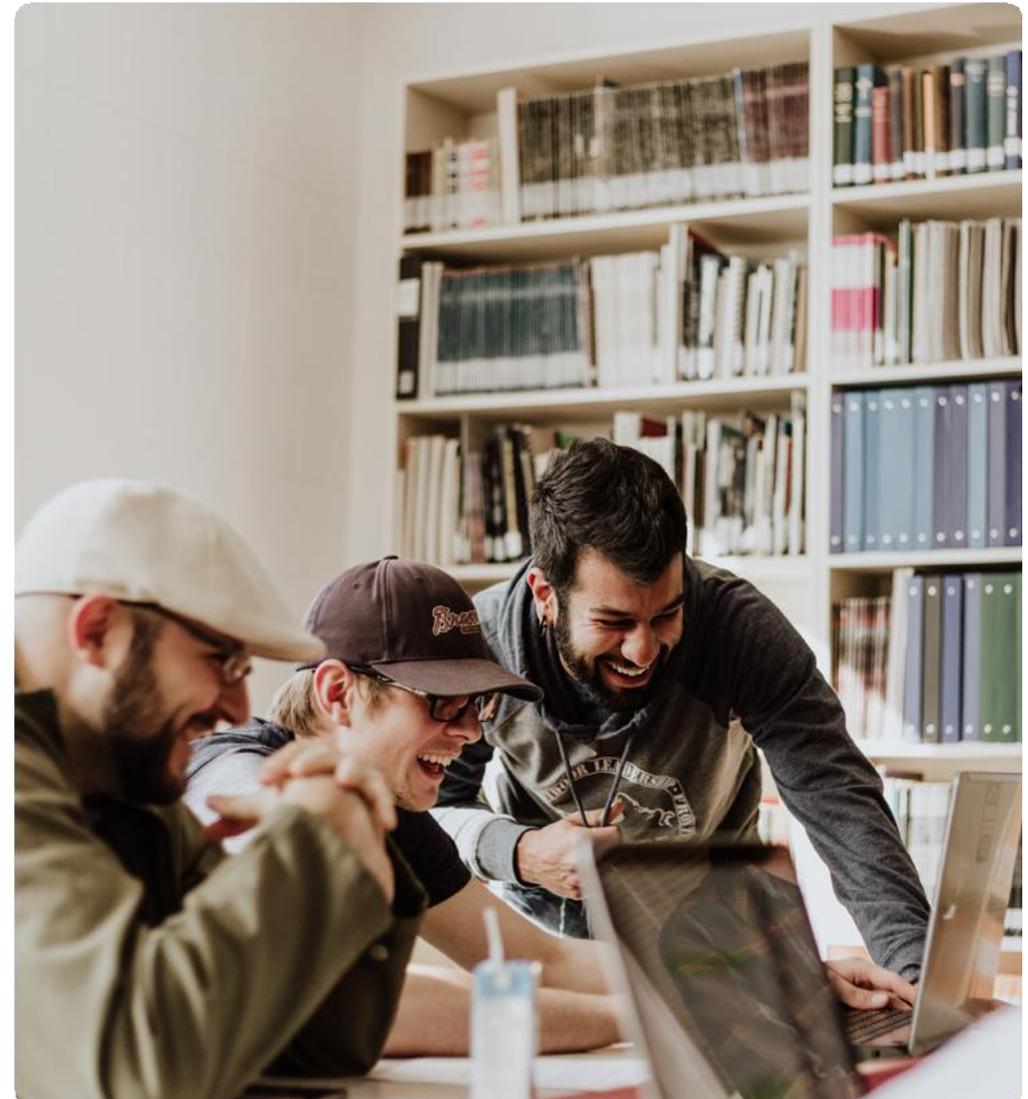
5. Digital **Champions** Network programme & fund

Digital Champion drop-ins in libraries across the borough, supported by local volunteers, providing 1-2-1 informal opportunities for residents to develop skills and confidence in digital.

A £90,000 fund for our voluntary and community sector to increase the number of Digital Champions in their volunteer base and provide 1-2-1 support alongside their existing services.

6. Design a digital **skills** triaging service

An exploratory project to build relationships with Adult Learning providers in the borough and assess how our combined digital skills courses offer can reach the residents most in need.





Data and devices

Barrier: Financial poverty

Target: Low income households, temporary accommodation, newly arrived residents.

Activity

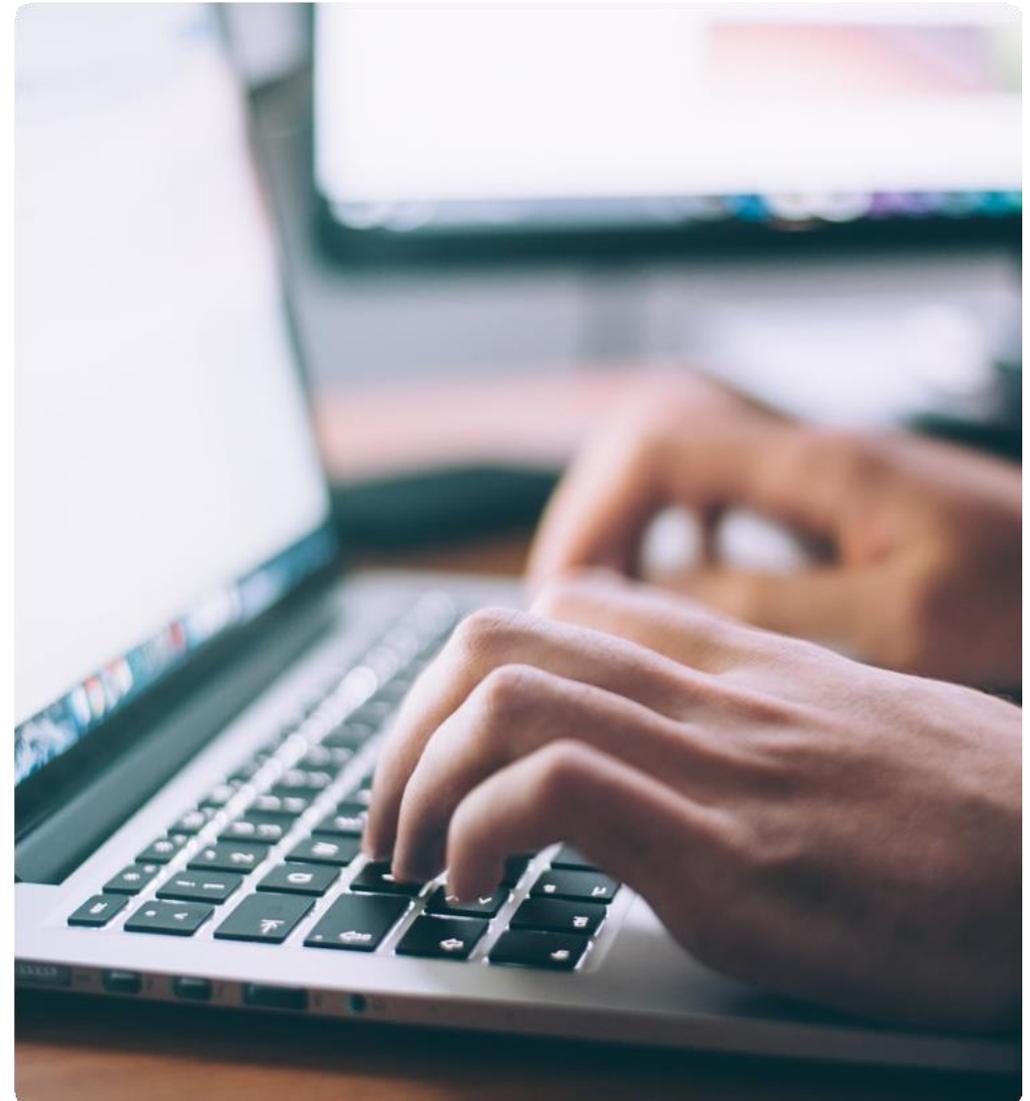
7. National **Data Bank** in four WF Libraries

Introduce the National Data Bank scheme in four libraries to distribute SIMS with free data, calls and texts to reduce mobile data poverty.

8. **Wi-Fi provision** for key community settings and **portable router** lending scheme

A new Mi-Fi lending scheme to provide at home broadband to residents going through transition and in need of temporary at home broadband access.

Collaboration with fibre broadband providers to donate free lifetime broadband connections to community partners.





Data and devices

Barrier: Financial poverty

Target: Low income households, temporary accommodation, newly arrived residents.

Activity

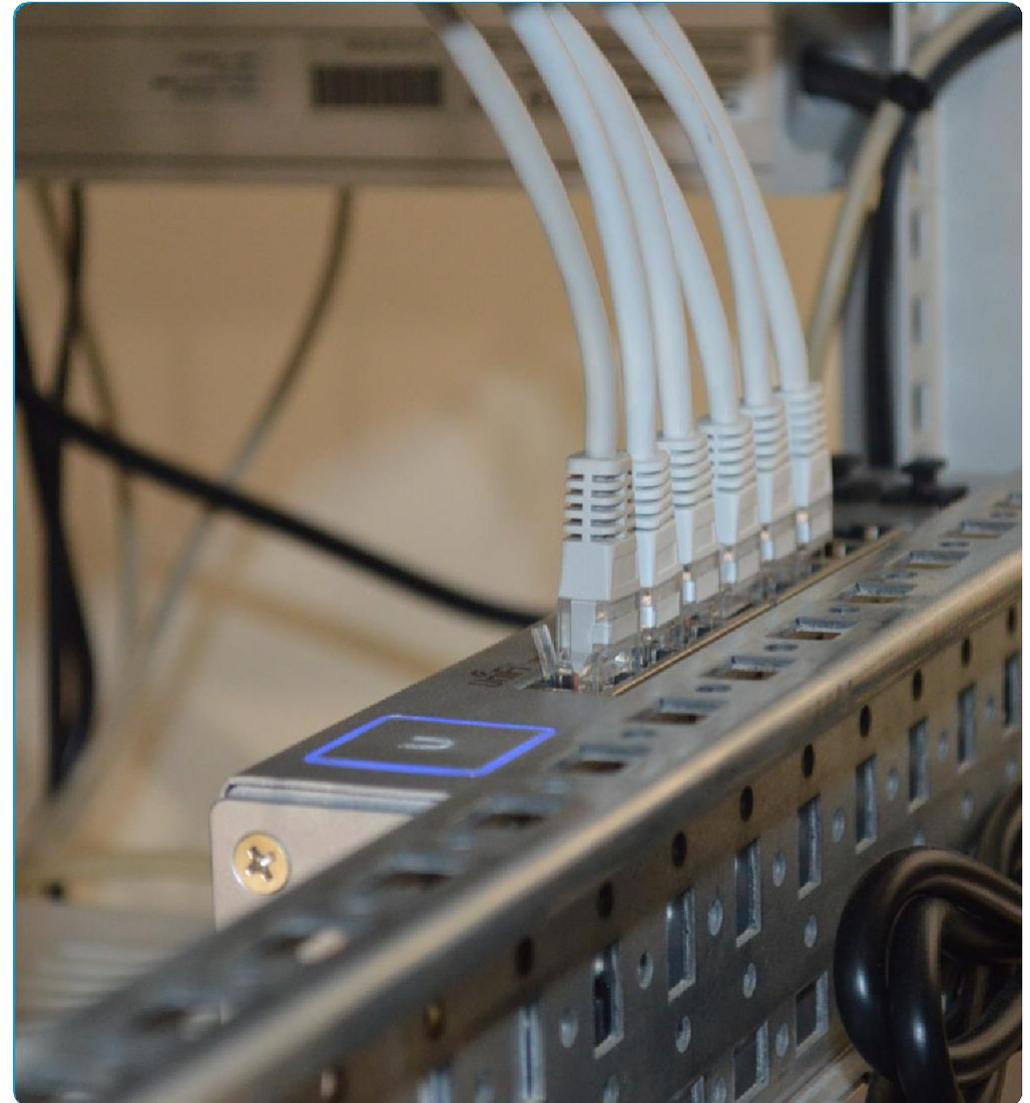
9. Affordable **connectivity** campaign and broader campaigning

Get Online campaigns to raise resident awareness of affordable connectivity options, available support and the money-saving benefits of being online.

10. Improve access to **devices**

An exploratory project to learn how public IT suites, like those in our libraries, can be more useful to residents.

Campaigning to widen the use of public support funds to provide essential devices like laptops and tablets to our most vulnerable residents.



Joining up delivery

We will leverage the existing relationships, networks and expertise of service teams to extend the reach and impact of initiatives.



Adult Learning Service

Our ALS courses are high quality but are limited in range and reach. We will review the ALS offer, embed learner pathways between Community Learning and Digital Champions and expand choice by working with a broader range of AEB providers.



Front line delivery

We will scale our staff training and triaging tools to front-line teams to provide support to digitally excluded residents and deploy Digital Champions into existing touch-points.



Customer Experience

We will triage residents from customer services into support services, ensuring residents get the support they need, and collect data on channel shift.



Strategy and Communities team

The Public Service Unit's mission-based volunteering offer will provide core volunteer training, quality assurance and promotion to expand our Digital Champions Network and align with wider initiatives, including the EDI strategy and cost of living winter reponse.



Public Health

We will tackle digital inclusion as a social determinant of health inequalities, responding to Marmot through joined-up working with Public Health and ACS. This will include influencing local health providers and reviewing how telecare changes can support digital inclusion.



Boroughwide Connectivity

We will continue to deliver the roll out of super fast fibre cables, 5G and low cost broadband into social housing, extracting and delivering maximum social value for our most at-risk residents.



Libraries

As the primary place residents can access digital inclusion services in person, we will enhance our library offer by training staff, hosting digital champions sessions and improving use of free PCs and wifi.



Housing

We will work with Housing, social landlords and housing compact to identify residents most in need and deliver support directly to households, with a long-term aim of eradicating digital exclusion in our own housing.



People

Through our Totally Connected project we will test how to support our digitally excluded workforce and reduce the population of staff with low digital skills and access.

WF Digital Inclusion Partnership



YOUR CRISIS OUR ACTION

www.walthamforest.gov.uk

