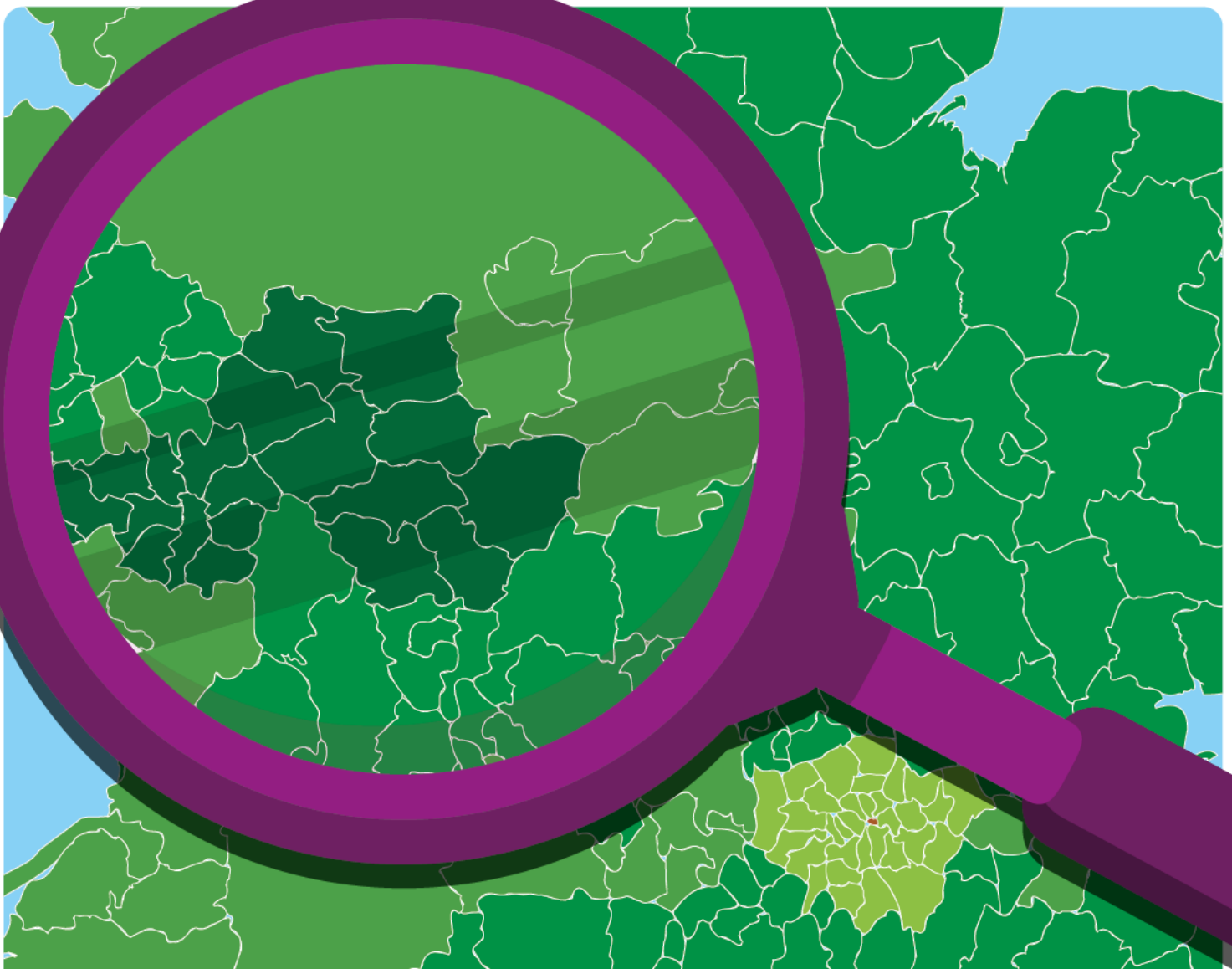


Digital Communities Survey

September – October 2025



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Summary

Background

In September to October 2025, the Local Government Association sent an online survey to all English local councils. This survey gathered insights into local authorities' approaches to digital inclusion, including how these intersect with connectivity challenges. The findings will inform how digital inclusion aligns with local government priorities and enables the LGA to effectively advocate for the sector and identify areas where support is needed. A total 83 local authorities responded to the survey, a response rate of 26 per cent.

Key findings

Response rate

- Overall participation rate in the survey was 26 per cent (83 out of 317 councils), with district councils having completed it at a lower rate than other types of councils.
- The response rate may have been influenced by the fact that some district councils are not actively engaged in digital inclusion work and therefore considered the survey to be outside their remit.
- However, it is not possible to conclude that low response rates directly indicated low levels of digital inclusion activity among district councils, as some may be involved but opted not to participate in the survey for other reasons.

Organisation approach to digital inclusion

- Eighty-two per cent of respondents reported that their councils worked in the area of digital inclusion and 10 per cent said that they did not.
- Fifty-six per cent of respondents have at least one member of staff responsible for

digital inclusion.

- Seventy-two per cent of respondents reported that in their council digital inclusion was addressed by a wide variety of individual staff members, including those not dedicated to this area.

Funding and resources

- Fifty-seven per cent have used core authority funding for digital inclusion activity and 50 per cent have used the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- In councils that reported that they were involved in digital inclusion, the mean number of FTE staff that worked in that area per week was 1.24.

Digital inclusion responsibility and strategy

- Responsibility for digital inclusion is most likely to sit with IT or Digital Services (28 per cent) when compared with other departments or directorates.
- Forty-two per cent reported that elected members champion digital inclusion in local authorities to a great or moderate extent.
- Forty-nine per cent of respondents reported having a digital strategy that references digital inclusion. Thirty-three per cent reported that digital inclusion is referenced within another type of strategy.

Partnerships and collaboration

- Sixty-two per cent of respondents reported that they regularly work with local branches of national voluntary and community sector organisations regarding digital inclusion. Fifty-five per cent of respondents worked with the NHS or wider health sector, and 54 per cent reported having worked with other local authorities.
- Forty-two per cent of respondents reported that their council had a formal mechanism in place to support digital inclusion partnerships.

- Fifty-eight per cent of respondents stated that their council's collaboration with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion was very or fairly effective.

Delivery and Impact

- Seventy per cent of respondents reported that signposting to external services were directly delivered to residents and the same percentage stated this regarding public Wi-Fi access. It was reported by 56 per cent of respondents that their local authority delivered Digital skills training.
- Forty-six per cent of respondents stated that participation data from programme delivery was used to measure the impact of digital inclusion activities to a great or moderate extent. Forty-four percent reported that partner feedback was used to measure the impact of digital inclusion activities to a great or moderate extent.

Support needs

- Seventy-seven per cent of respondents, said for elected members, training and awareness was the form of support that would be most likely to help them play a more active role in digital inclusion.
- Ninety per cent of respondents stated, for officers, dedicated funding streams was the form of support that would be most likely to help them play a more active role in digital inclusion.

Connectivity

- Forty-three per cent of respondents agreed to a great or moderate extent, when asked to what extent their authority's digital inclusion activity coordinates with digital connectivity initiatives.
- Forty-one per cent of respondents indicated, when asked whether their authority has a named officer or elected member who champions digital connectivity, such as broadband or mobile infrastructure, that they did.
- Sixty-one per cent of respondents reported that their council had at least one mechanism to identify areas with poor digital connectivity, such as 'not spots'.

Additional feedback

- Feedback focused on several key themes, including funding difficulties, the need for a clearer national direction as well as support from central government, and the lack of access to digital technology some local residents experience.
- There were also challenges highlighted in demonstrating impact due to limited data, the need to address digital inclusion as a socio-economic issue, and calls for more cross-sector collaboration.

Introduction

In September and October 2025, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted an online survey to build a clearer understanding of how councils support digitally excluded residents and address connectivity challenges across local areas.

This research aimed to capture insights into local authorities' approaches to digital inclusion, including how these intersect with connectivity and infrastructure. The findings will help understand how digital inclusion aligns with wider local government priorities, and will enable the LGA to advocate effectively for the sector, identifying where further support or resources are needed.

Methodology

The online survey was distributed by the Local Government Association's Research and Information Team, and responses were gathered between 10 September and 10 October 2025.

Of the 317 local authorities invited to take part, a total of 83 responded, which is a response rate of 26 per cent. This level of response means that these respondents should not necessarily be taken to be widely representative of the views of all participating local authorities. Rather, they were a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents. To make the results of this survey more representative of all English local councils, responses have been weighted by region and by the type of council. Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the unweighted number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases can vary throughout the survey.

Throughout the report, percentages may not appear to add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding. To calculate the number of respondents who provided a

certain response for other questions, simply multiply the percentage provided by the base.

The response rate may have been affected by some district councils not working in digital inclusion, therefore feeling that they had no need to respond to the survey. However, it was not possible to directly infer low participation in digital inclusion among districts having considered the low response rates. There was the possibility that districts have been involved in digital inclusion but, for various reasons, have chosen not to respond to the survey.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the response rate broken down by council type and region. When calculating the response rate, multiple responses from a single authority are treated as just one. The type of council with the highest response rate were metropolitan districts (61 per cent) followed by London boroughs (36 per cent). District councils, also known as shire districts, had the lowest response rate of 14 per cent. The region with the highest response rate was Yorkshire and the Humber (61 per cent). Councils from the North East (42 per cent) and London (39 per cent) had the second highest response rate, closely followed by those from the South West (41 per cent). The councils located in the East of England (16 per cent), the South East (16 per cent), and the West Midlands (15 per cent) had the lowest response rate.

Table 1: Response rate by type of council

Type of council	Number of questionnaires	Number of responses	Response rate
County	21	7	33%
District	164	23	14%
London borough	33	13	36%
Metropolitan district	36	22	61%
Unitary	63	18	29%

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Number of questionnaires	Number of responses	Response rate
East of England	50	8	16%
East Midlands	39	7	18%
Greater London	33	13	39%
North East	12	5	42%
North West	36	13	36%
South East	70	11	16%
South West	29	12	41%
West Midlands	33	5	15%
Yorkshire and the Humber	15	9	60%

Digital communities survey

This section of the report summarises the results of the Digital Communities survey.

Organisational approach to digital inclusion

Respondents were asked if their authority does any work in the area of digital inclusion. Eighty-two per cent said that they did, and 10 per cent said that they did not. A further 8 per cent of respondents stated that they did not know. The results for this question are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Does your authority do any work in the area of digital inclusion, as defined above?

	Per cent
Yes	82%
No	10%
Don't know	8%

Base: all respondents (87).

As shown on Table 4, respondents were asked about their authority's approach to digital inclusion. Over half (56 per cent) reported that their authority had at least one dedicated staff member working in digital inclusion, whilst 43 per cent said this was not the case, and 1 per cent did not know. Similarly, 59 per cent stated that there is at least one team within the council with responsibility for digital inclusion, compared with 39 per cent who said no and 2 per cent who did not know. Seventy-two per cent indicated that digital inclusion is addressed by a wide variety of individual staff members, including those not specifically dedicated to this area, while 25 per cent said this does not apply and 3 per cent were unsure. Likewise, 73 per cent reported that digital inclusion is addressed by a wide range of teams across the council, even

those not primarily responsible for this area, with 24 per cent indicating this was not the case and 3 per cent saying they did not know.

Table 4: Which, if any, of the following apply to your authority’s approach to digital inclusion?

	Yes	No	Don’t know
We have at least one dedicated staff member working in digital inclusion	56%	43%	1%
We have at least one team in the council with responsibility for digital inclusion	59%	39%	2%
Digital inclusion is addressed by a wide variety of individual staff members, including those not dedicated to this area	72%	25%	3%
Digital inclusion is addressed by a wide variety of teams across the council, including those not primarily responsible for this area	73%	24%	3%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (74-76).

Funding and resources

As shown on Table 5, respondents were asked which funding sources their authority had used for digital inclusion activity. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents’ authorities have used core authority funding, with 52 per cent having made use of it in the previous 12 months. Half (50 per cent) of respondents’ authorities have used the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to fund digital inclusion. Forty-four per cent had used this funding source in the last 12 months. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents have used social value clauses as a funding source, with 30 per cent having used it in the last 12 months. A similar proportion of respondents have used private sector partnerships, health sector funding, combined authority funding (if applicable), and

voluntary sector contributions (between 21 per cent to 27 per cent) as funding source for digital inclusion activity.

Table 5: In the previous 12 months which funding sources, if any, has your authority used for digital inclusion?

	Yes - Total	Yes – within the last 12 months	Yes – not within the last 12 months	No
Core authority funding	57%	52%	6%	43%
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	50%	44%	6%	50%
Social value clauses	38%	30%	8%	62%
Health sector funding	27%	20%	7%	73%
Combined Authority funding (if applicable)	27%	17%	10%	73%
Private sector partnerships	26%	23%	3%	74%
Voluntary sector contributions	21%	13%	8%	79%
Other government grant(s)	29%	14%	15%	71%
Other external grant(s)	25%	23%	1%	75%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (45-63).

When taking the survey, respondents had the options to report any other government or external grants their authority may have used to fund digital inclusion. Below are some of the grants that have been mentioned.

Other government grants included:

- Adult education
- Borderlands
- Council capital funding
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)
- Grant funding from central government.
- Household support fund
- Kickstart jobs scheme
- Library Improvement Fund
- Strategic investment programmes

Other external grants included:

- Arts Council England
- Big Lottery Fund
- Europe Challenge
- Good Things Foundation
- Self-funding via profit share mechanisms in broadband delivery contracts.

Respondents whose councils are involved in digital inclusion were asked to estimate the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff that council employees currently dedicate to digital inclusion activities per week. The mean number of FTE staff per council that work on DI per week was 1.24.

Table 6: Please estimate, in hours, the total full-time equivalent (FTE) that council employees currently dedicate to digital inclusion.

FTE staff	
Mean	1.24

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (66). The mean number of hours worked in digital inclusion per council was around 46. One outlier response was removed from the calculations to avoid skewing the data. The calculations assumed that the average working week was 37 hours.

Digital inclusion strategy and responsibility

As shown on Table 7, respondents were asked which department or directorate holds primary responsibility for digital inclusion. The most frequently cited department was IT or digital services, reported by 28 per cent of respondents. This was followed by customer services at 12 per cent, whilst 9 per cent identified economic development as having this responsibility. Smaller proportions said communities or neighbourhoods (6 per cent), libraries (5 per cent), and other departments (11 per cent). Two per cent mentioned work and skills, 1 per cent identified corporate strategy or policy, and 1 per cent said public health or health. Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) stated that no department or directorate holds primary responsibility for digital inclusion, and 1 per cent said they did not know.

Table 7: Which department/directorate, if any, has primary responsibility of digital inclusion?

	Per cent
IT/Digital Services	28%
Customer Services	12%
Economic Development	9%
Communities/Neighbourhoods	6%
Libraries	5%
Work & skills	2%
Public Health/Health	1%
Corporate Strategy/Policy	1%
Other, please specify	11%
Not applicable – No department/directorate holds primary responsibility for digital inclusion	24%
Don't know	1%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

In relation to departmental responsibility for digital inclusion, responses under 'other' showed a diverse range of arrangements across authorities. Several respondents highlighted shared responsibility between multiple areas, such as communities and development, or collaboration between libraries, IT and digital, and work and skills. Some also noted specific programmes or teams unique to their local areas.

Others reported that digital inclusion operates as a corporate programme, with leadership sitting in children's services, while additional references included smart cities, economy and external funding, resident experience and participation, transformation, and adult social care.

As presented on Table 8, respondents were asked which types of strategies their authority have in place relating to digital inclusion. Almost half (49 per cent) reported having a digital strategy that references digital inclusion, while a further 4 per cent said they have a digital strategy that does not explicitly reference digital inclusion specifically. Thirteen per cent indicated that their authority has a dedicated digital inclusion strategy, and 33 per cent reported that digital inclusion is referenced within another type of strategy. Meanwhile, 12 per cent of respondents said they did not know, and 9 per cent stated that none of the listed strategies apply to their authority.

Table 8: Which of the following does your organisation have?

	Per cent
Digital strategy (referencing digital inclusion)	49%
Dedicated digital inclusion strategy	13%
Digital strategy (without digital inclusion explicitly referenced)	4%
Other strategy where digital inclusion is referenced, please specify	33%
Don't know	12%
None of the above	9%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

The respondents, who provided comments for other strategies where digital inclusion was referenced, most commonly mentioned council plans and customer experience plans and strategies, including departmental plans for customer service and library services. There were also mentions of poverty, equality, and fairer council strategies.

Respondents were asked if digital inclusion is a named priority in any elected member's portfolio. Twenty-four per cent of respondents selected 'yes', and 45 per

cent said 'no'. Thirty-one percent said they do not know. Table 9 displays these results.

Table 9: Is digital inclusion a named priority in any elected member's portfolio?

Per cent	
Yes	24%
No	45%
Don't know	31%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

As shown on Table 10, respondents were asked to what extent elected members champion digital inclusion within their authority. Forty-two per cent stated that elected members champion digital inclusion to a great or moderate extent. The same proportion, 42 per cent, indicated that elected members champion digital inclusion only to a small extent and a further 6 per cent stated that elected members do not champion it at all. Nine per cent said they did not know.

Table 10: To what extent, if at all, do elected members champion digital inclusion in your authority?

	Per cent
Net: To a great or moderate extent	42%
To a great extent	15%
To a moderate extent	27%
To a small extent	42%
Not at all	6%
Don't know	9%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

Partnerships and collaboration

As shown on Table 11, respondents were asked which partners have their authority regularly engaged with as key stakeholders in digital inclusion activity. The most commonly mentioned partners were local branches of national voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (62 per cent), the NHS or wider health sector (55 per cent), and other local authorities (54 per cent). Forty-nine per cent of respondents stated that grassroots VCS organisations were regularly engaged with. A similar proportion of respondents reported that job centres (37 per cent), education providers (36 per cent), housing associations (35 per cent), and national VCS organisations (34 per cent) were partners who were regularly engaged with in regards to digital inclusion. Thirty per cent of respondents reported engaging with telecoms providers, 29 per cent stated this about local businesses, 25 per cent said this regarding faith organisations. Sixteen per cent of respondents reported that their local authority regularly engages with other partners, 6 per cent said that their authority does not engage with partners in relation to digital inclusion, and 5 per cent did not know.

Table 11: Which partners does your authority regularly engage with as key stakeholders in your digital inclusion activity?

	Per cent
Local branches of national VCS organisations	62%
NHS/Health sector	55%
Other local authorities	54%
Grassroots VCS organisations	49%
Job centres	37%
Education providers	36%
Housing associations	35%
National VCS organisations	34%
Telecom providers	30%
Local businesses	29%
Faith organisations	25%
Other, please specify	16%
Not applicable – My authority does not engage with partners in relation to digital inclusion	6%
Don't know	5%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

The respondents who provided other partners engaged with mentioned the following:

- Academic researchers
- Banks
- Businesses
- Chamber of commerce
- Citizens Advice
- Combined authorities
- Council suppliers
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)
- Digital Poverty Alliance
- Good Things Foundation
- Health Watch
- local Area co-ordinators employed by the council
- Parish councils
- Police forces
- Social enterprises

As shown on Table 12, respondents were asked whether their local authority has a formal mechanism in place to support digital inclusion partnerships. Forty-two per cent reported that they had a very or somewhat formal approach. Forty-seven per cent stated that their local authority had informal approach or no approach at all. A plurality of respondents stated that while they do not have a formal mechanism, they do have an informal approach to support digital inclusion partnerships (37 per cent). A further 11 per cent of respondents said they did not know.

Table 12: Does your authority have a formal mechanism in place to support digital inclusion partnerships?

	Per cent
Yes – total	42%
No – total	47%
Yes – a very formal approach	14%
Yes – a somewhat formal approach	28%
No – the approach is informal	37%
No – there is no approach in place	10%
Don't know	11%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

As displayed on Table 13, respondents were asked how effective, or not, their authority's collaboration with neighbouring authorities is on digital inclusion. Fifty-eight per cent stated that it was very or fairly effective. However, a plurality of these respondents said it was fairly effective (41 per cent). A smaller proportion, 13 per cent, felt that collaboration was not very effective, and 18 per cent said they did not know. A further 11 per cent reported that their authority does not collaborate with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion.

Table 13: How effective, if at all, is your authority’s collaboration with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion?

	Per cent
Very or fairly effective	58%
Very effective	17%
Fairly effective	41%
Not very effective	13%
Don't know	18%
Not applicable – our authority does not collaborate with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion	11%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

Delivery and impact

As shown on Table 14, respondents were asked which digital inclusion activities are currently delivered directly to residents by their local authority or through its libraries. The most frequently mentioned activities were signposting to external services and public Wi-Fi access (both 70 per cent). Digital skills training was reported by 56 per cent of respondents. Forty-four per cent said their authority provides one-to-one support, 39 per cent mentioned the involvement of digital champions or volunteers, and 36 per cent stated that community outreach events are delivered. Smaller proportions cited lending devices (22 per cent) and other activities (17 per cent). Five per cent reported that none of these activities take place, and another 4 per cent said they did not know.

Table 14: What activities, if any, are directly delivered to residents by your authority or within your authority’s libraries at present?

	Per cent
Signposting to external services	70%
Public Wi-Fi access	70%
Digital skills training	56%
One-to-one support	44%
Digital champions/volunteers	39%
Community outreach events	36%
Device lending	22%
Other, please specify	17%
None of the above	5%
Don't know	4%

Base: all respondents (87). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

Under other activities delivered to residents, respondents highlighted a wide range of initiatives extending beyond the standard list. Several authorities reported device and data gifting programmes, including SIM-gifting through the National Databank and device donation schemes for residents facing financial hardship.

Some councils referenced device and data banks, social value gifting schemes, and refurbished phone distribution. Others described partnerships with organisations such as the Good Things Foundation, enabling SIM and tablet gifting, as well as broader data access initiatives.

Library services were frequently mentioned as key delivery points, providing digital skills support, device loans, and public access to online learning. In some areas, councils operated warm spaces or used libraries as hubs for community-based digital inclusion offers.

A few respondents cited more innovative or specialised activities, including AI-driven social inclusion initiatives, QR-coded community walks, and webinars or one-to-one support for businesses exploring the impacts of digital exclusion.

As shown on Table 15, respondents were asked to what extent their authority uses various methods to measure the impact of digital inclusion activities. Combining those who said 'to a great extent' and 'to a moderate extent,' participation data from programme delivery was the most commonly used method, cited by 46 per cent of respondents. Partner feedback followed closely, with 44 per cent indicating that it is used to a great or moderate extent. This was followed by case studies (40 per cent) and surveys (32 per cent). Only small proportions reported using longitudinal tracking (8 per cent) or other methods (13 per cent) to a great or moderate extent.

Table 15: To what extent, if at all, does your authority use the following methods to measure the impact of digital inclusion?

	To a great or moderate extent	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a small extent	Not at all	Don't know
Participation data from programme delivery	46%	25%	21%	19%	17%	18%
Partner feedback	44%	11%	33%	26%	14%	16%
Case studies/anecdotal evidence	40%	16%	24%	33%	10%	17%
Surveys	32%	7%	25%	36%	15%	17%
Longitudinal tracking	8%	0%	8%	12%	36%	43%
Other, please specify	13%	6%	7%	3%	31%	53%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

Under other methods used to measure the impact of digital inclusion activities, respondents highlighted a range of additional approaches beyond standard metrics. Several mentioned the use of quantitative and qualitative data, including online transaction data and system monitoring to assess engagement with digital services.

Some authorities reported using social return on investment (SROI) calculations and financial valuation of device recycling, alongside data from the Good Things Foundation and analysis of offer take-up rates.

A number of respondents also referred to academic research, partner feedback, and reports to scrutiny boards as means of assessing progress, while others cited website user testing, feedback sessions, and participation in national surveys.

A smaller number mentioned collaboration with employers and trusted delivery partners to capture qualitative insights into outcomes.

As presented on Table 16, respondents were asked about the main barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in their area. The most commonly reported barrier was local authority financial challenges (77 per cent). This was followed by a lack of wider funding opportunities and staff capacity (both 65 per cent). Financial sustainability of initiatives was highlighted by 48 per cent, while developing successful bids or funding proposals was mentioned by 38 per cent. Thirty-three stated that a lack of data was a barrier. Smaller proportions reported national strategic direction (22 per cent), difficulty coordinating partners (21 per cent), digital literacy among staff (19 per cent), and connectivity issues (15 per cent). Thirty-four per cent stated that there were other barriers (34 per cent). One per cent of respondents reported that there were no barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in their area, and 6 per cent said they did not know.

Table 16: What are the main barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in your area, if any?

	Per cent
Local authority financial challenges	77%
(Lack of) wider funding opportunities	65%
Staff capacity	65%
Financial sustainability of initiatives	48%
Developing successful bids/funding proposals	38%
Lack of data	33%
Difficulty coordinating partners	23%
National strategic direction	22%
Digital literacy among staff	21%
Lack of internal buy-in	19%
Connectivity issues	15%
Other, please specify	13%
Not applicable – There are no barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in your area	1%
Don't know	6%

Base: all respondents (87). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

Under other barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery, respondents consistently emphasised funding challenges, particularly the reliance on short-term or externally sourced funding. Several noted that while core funding sustains existing capacity, it limits the ability to expand delivery, with external funding requiring significant

resource input to secure and manage. The need for long-term, sustainable investment was repeatedly highlighted as essential to achieving best value and lasting outcomes for residents.

Some respondents referred to broader structural and strategic barriers, including uncertainty around the role of district councils in digital inclusion, competing priorities, and a lack of senior leadership. Others highlighted the short-term nature of roles within digital inclusion teams and the absence of consistent, multi-disciplinary partnerships to coordinate delivery.

A few responses pointed to systemic issues, such as fragmented activity across sectors, limited national resources or training, and the challenge of 'reinventing the wheel' locally. Broader contextual barriers, including high levels of local deprivation and the complex relationship between digital connectivity and inclusion, were also noted.

Support needs

As shown on Table 17, respondents were asked what support would help elected members and officers play a more active role in digital inclusion. For elected members, training opportunities were the most frequently cited by respondents (77 per cent). A similar proportion reported peer learning opportunities (71 per cent) and local data and evidence (70 per cent). For officers, dedicated funding streams (90 per cent) was the most popular form of support. Similar proportions reported toolkits or frameworks (82 per cent), training and awareness (81 per cent), local data and evidence (80 per cent), and case studies (78 per cent) would help support a more active role in digital inclusion.

Table 17: What support, if any, would help elected members and officers play a more active role in digital inclusion?

	Members and / or Officers	Members	Officers	Don't know
Training and awareness	92%	77%	81%	8%
Dedicated funding streams	92%	45%	90%	8%
Local data and evidence	91%	70%	80%	9%
Case studies and best practice	87%	61%	78%	13%
Peer learning opportunities	88%	71%	63%	12%
Toolkits or frameworks	87%	35%	82%	13%
Other, please specify	22%	4%	22%	78%

Base: all those who responded to the question (24 to 72). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

Under other forms of support to help elected members and officers play a more active role in digital inclusion, respondents consistently emphasised the need for longer-term, sustainable funding. Many noted that while training, toolkits and peer learning opportunities are valuable, multi-year funding awards are essential to ensure continuity of service and meaningful impact.

Several respondents stressed the importance of effective governance and decision-making, noting that support measures are only effective if there is clarity about who makes funding, policy and delivery decisions, and how best practice and evidence are identified and applied locally.

Others pointed to broader enablers, including national leadership and the embedding of digital inclusion within statutory responsibilities and equality frameworks. A few highlighted practical challenges, such as the need for elected members to support

infrastructure improvements, including mobile connectivity installations, rather than oppose them.

Connectivity

Respondents were asked to what extent their authority’s digital inclusion activity coordinates with digital connectivity initiatives, such as broadband rollout or mobile coverage improvements. Combining those who reported “to a great extent” and “to a moderate extent”, 43 per cent indicated that their authority coordinates with these initiatives to some meaningful degree. In contrast, 18 per cent said coordination occurs to a small extent, 22 per cent reported that there is no coordination at all, and 17 per cent said they did not know. The results for this are shown on Table 18.

Table 18: To what extent, if at all, does your authority’s digital inclusion activity coordinate with digital connectivity initiatives (e.g., broadband rollout, mobile coverage improvements)?

	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	43%
To a great extent	19%
To a moderate extent	24%
To a small extent	18%
Not at all	22%
Don’t know	17%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

As shown on Table 19, respondents were asked whether their authority has a named officer or elected member who champions digital connectivity, such as broadband or mobile infrastructure. Combining those who reported having either an officer, an elected member, or both, 41 per cent of respondents indicated that they have a

named champion for digital connectivity. Thirty-seven per cent said there is no such champion, and 22 per cent of respondents did not know.

Table 19: Does your authority have a named officer or elected member who champions digital connectivity (e.g., broadband/mobile infrastructure)?

	Per cent
Yes – an officer and/or elected member	41%
Yes – an officer	23%
Yes – an elected member	2%
Yes – both	17%
No	37%
Don't know	22%

Base: all respondents who answered the question (86).

Respondents were asked which teams or departments are primarily responsible for digital connectivity in their authority. The most frequently cited department was IT or Digital Services, mentioned by 55 per cent of respondents, followed by Economic Development at 32 per cent, and Planning/Infrastructure at 19 per cent. Smaller proportions reported Corporate Strategy (9 per cent) and Communities or Neighbourhoods (5 per cent). Twelve per cent said they stated it was another department and 5 per cent said they did not know. Five per cent indicated that the question was not applicable to their authority. These results are show on

Table 20.

Table 20: Which teams or departments are primarily responsible for digital connectivity in your authority?

	Per cent
IT/Digital Services	55%
Economic Development	32%
Planning/Infrastructure	19%
Corporate Strategy	9%
Communities/Neighbourhoods	5%
Other, please specify	12%
Not applicable	7%
Don't know	5%

Base: all respondents (86). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

Under other departments responsible for digital connectivity, responses included that responsibility is often distributed across multiple teams or linked to externally funded programmes, and departments unique to specific local authorities.

Several respondents noted shared responsibility between IT, housing, highways, and resident services, with some highlighting input from skills and work or digital infrastructure teams. A few authorities reported that senior leadership or corporate digital teams oversee connectivity strategy, often working with communities or part-time posts embedded locally.

Some respondents stated that no single department holds primary responsibility for digital connectivity within their authority, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of this area.

As shown on Table 21, respondents were asked whether their authority has any mechanisms to identify areas with poor digital connectivity, such as broadband, or mobile “not spots”. Combining all the responses indicating a “yes” in any form, 61 per cent of respondents reported having at least one mechanism in place. Individually, 36 per cent said they use partner organisations, 27 per cent use GIS mapping tools, 24 per cent rely on internal data collection and analysis, 22 per cent gather resident feedback or complaints, and a slightly smaller proportion make use of community-led mapping (9 per cent). Eighteen per cent use another method to identify so called “not spots”. In contrast, 10 per cent reported having no mechanisms, and 21 per cent said they did not know.

Table 21: Does your authority have any mechanisms in place to identify areas with poor digital connectivity (e.g., broadband/mobile ‘not spots’)?

	Per cent
Yes	61%
Through partner organisations (e.g., telecoms, community groups)	36%
Through GIS mapping tools	26%
Through internal data collection and analysis	24%
Through resident feedback or complaints	21%
Through community-led mapping	9%
Through another method, please specify	18%
No	18%
Don't know	21%

Base: all respondents (87). Please note that respondents could select more than one answer option.

Responses describing other mechanisms used to identify areas with poor digital connectivity highlighted a mix of local innovation, partnerships, and data-led approaches. Several authorities reported using Ofcom or national datasets, as well as tools such as ThinkBroadband and Building Digital UK's Open Market Review (OMR) data to map coverage.

A number of local authorities noted collaboration with county councils, digital infrastructure boards, or local external organisations, often through digital forums or regional partnerships. Others described more localised methods, including street-level mapping, signal surveys, and the use of Streetwave data from refuse lorries or mapping linked to bin collection routes.

Some respondents mentioned bespoke or pilot projects, such as a custom signal survey app used across several northern local authorities, while a few said they were aware of connectivity assessments being undertaken but were unsure of the methods used.

As presented on Table 22, respondents were asked to what extent connectivity challenges, such as a lack of broadband or mobile access, are considered by their authority when planning or delivering digital inclusion initiatives. A majority (57 per cent) reported that connectivity challenges were considered to a great or moderate extent. A further 28 per cent indicated that connectivity challenges are taken into account to a small extent, 6 per cent said they are not considered at all, and 10 per cent of respondents did not know.

Table 22: To what extent, if at all, are connectivity challenges (e.g., lack of broadband/mobile access) considered by your authority when planning or delivering digital inclusion initiatives?

Per cent	
To a great or moderate extent	57%
To a great extent	24%
To a moderate extent	33%
To a small extent	27%
Not at all	6%
Don't know	10%

Base: respondents whose authority works in the area of digital inclusion (77).

Additional feedback

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to share additional comments on digital inclusion. Feedback focused on several key themes, including funding and sustainability, national leadership and coordination, affordability and access, and local delivery and evidence.

Many respondents emphasised that short-term and fragmented funding continues to limit impact, with several citing upcoming programme closures in 2026. There was a strong call for long-term, sustainable investment and more flexible funding criteria that reflect the time and resource required for local authorities to bid effectively.

A number of comments highlighted the need for clearer national direction and stronger central government support, including a unified framework for local authority roles, expectations and funding. Respondents also stressed that while connectivity infrastructure is improving, affordability remains a major barrier, particularly for low-income residents.

Other themes included challenges in demonstrating impact due to limited data, the need to address digital inclusion as a socio-economic issue, and calls for cross-sector collaboration. Several authorities described local best practice, partnerships with voluntary and community organisations, and innovative regional initiatives, while reiterating that greater funding stability and strategic leadership are vital for long-term progress.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Digital Communities Survey

Section 1 – Organisational approach to digital inclusion

Q1. Does your authority do any work in the area of digital inclusion, as defined above?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q2. Which, if any, of the following apply to your authority's approach to digital inclusion?

Rows

- We have at least one dedicated staff member working in digital inclusion
- We have at least one team in the council with responsibility for digital inclusion
- Digital inclusion is addressed by a wide variety of individual staff members, including those not dedicated to this area
- Digital inclusion is addressed by a wide variety of teams across the council, including those not primarily responsible for this area

Columns

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Section 2 – Funding and resources

Q3. In the previous 12 months which funding sources, if any, has your authority used for digital inclusion?

Rows

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Combined Authority funding (if applicable)
- Health sector funding
- Social value clauses
- Core authority funding
- Other government grant, please specify
- Other external grants, please specify
- Private sector partnerships
- Voluntary sector contributions

Columns

- Yes – within the last 12 months
- Yes – not within the last 12 months
- No

Q4. Please estimate the total FTE that council employees currently dedicate to digital inclusion.

Section 3 – Governance and strategy

Q5. Which department/directorate, if any, has primary responsibility of digital inclusion?

- IT/Digital Services

- Communities/Neighbourhoods
- Libraries
- Economic Development
- Public Health/Health
- Work & skills
- Corporate Strategy/Policy
- Customer Services
- Other, please specify
- Not applicable – No department/directorate holds primary responsibility for digital inclusion
- Don't know

Q6. Which of the following does your organisation have? *Please tick all that apply*

- Digital strategy (referencing digital inclusion)
- Digital strategy (without digital inclusion explicitly referenced)
- Dedicated digital inclusion strategy
- Other strategy where digital inclusion is referenced, please specify
- Don't know
- None of the above

Q7. Is digital inclusion a named priority in any elected member's portfolio?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q8. To what extent, if at all, do elected members champion digital inclusion in your authority?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Section 4 – Partnerships and collaboration

Q9. Which partners does your authority regularly engage with as key stakeholders in your digital inclusion activity? *Please tick all that apply*

- Grassroots VCS organisations
- Local branches of national VCS organisations
- National VCS organisations
- NHS/Health sector
- Local businesses
- Faith organisations
- Education providers
- Job centres
- Other local authorities
- Telecom providers
- Housing associations
- Other, please specify
- Not applicable – My authority does not engage with partners in relation to digital inclusion

- Don't know

Q10. Does your authority have a formal mechanism in place to support DI partnerships?

i.e. governance, working groups, forums, steering groups

- Yes – a very formal approach
- Yes – a somewhat formal approach
- No – the approach is informal
- No – there is no approach in place
- Don't know

Q11. How effective, if at all, is your authority's collaboration with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion?

- Very effective
- Fairly effective
- Not very effective
- Don't know
- Not applicable – our authority does not collaborate with neighbouring authorities on digital inclusion

Section 5– Delivery and impact

Q12. What activities, if any, are directly delivered to residents by your authority or within your authority's libraries at present? *Please tick all that apply*

- Digital skills training
- Device lending
- Public Wi-Fi access

- One-to-one support
- Signposting to external services
- Digital champions/volunteers
- Community outreach events
- Other, please specify
- None of the above
- Don't know

Q13. To what extent, if at all, does your authority use the following methods to measure the impact of DI activities?

Rows

- Case studies/anecdotal evidence
- Participation data from programme delivery
- Partner feedback
- Longitudinal tracking
- Surveys
- Other, please specify

Columns

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Q14. What are the main barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in your area, if any? *Please tick all that apply*

- National strategic direction
- Local authority financial challenges
- (Lack of) wider funding opportunities
- Developing successful bids/funding proposals
- Difficulty coordinating partners
- Lack of internal buy-in
- Financial sustainability of initiatives
- Connectivity issues
- Staff capacity
- Lack of data
- Digital literacy among staff
- Other, please specify
- Not applicable – There are no barriers to effective digital inclusion delivery in your area
- Don't know

Section 6 – Support needs

Q15. What support, if any, would help elected members and officers play a more active role in digital inclusion? *Please tick all that apply*

Rows

- Training and awareness
- Local data and evidence

- Case studies and best practice
- Peer learning opportunities
- Toolkits or frameworks
- Dedicated funding streams
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

Columns

- Members
- Officers

Section 7– Connectivity

Q16. To what extent, if at all, does your authority's digital inclusion activity coordinate with digital connectivity initiatives (e.g., broadband rollout, mobile coverage improvements)?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Q17. Does your authority have a named officer or elected member who champions digital connectivity (e.g., broadband/mobile infrastructure)?

- Yes – an officer
- Yes – an elected member
- Yes – both

- No
- Don't know

Q18. Which teams or departments are primarily responsible for digital connectivity in your authority? *Please tick all that apply*

- IT/Digital Services
- Economic Development
- Planning/Infrastructure
- Communities/Neighbourhoods
- Corporate Strategy
- Other, please specify
- Not applicable
- Don't know

Q19. Does your authority have any mechanisms in place to identify areas with poor digital connectivity (e.g., broadband/mobile 'not spots')?

- Yes – through internal data collection and analysis
- Yes – through resident feedback or complaints
- Yes – through partner organisations (e.g., telecoms, community groups)
- Yes – through GIS mapping tools
- Yes – through community-led mapping
- Yes – through another method, please specify
- No
- Don't know

Q20. To what extent, if at all, are connectivity challenges (e.g., lack of broadband/mobile access) considered by your authority when planning or delivering digital inclusion initiatives?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Section 8– Additional feedback

Q21. Is there anything else you would like to add?



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