



Tackling Poverty Service

Proposal Summary

Digital Inclusion Steering Group

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Version	0.1
Date	14 June 2024

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to establish the proposal and justification for creating a new Digital Inclusion Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the key priorities for improving digital inclusion in Swansea.

2. Context

Definitions

Improving **Digital Inclusion** means that people can access and use digital technologies, services and opportunities in a safe, equitable and meaningful way. This includes people using digital technologies to participate in everyday life including for education, health, social services, community participation and social interactions. In Wales, the number of people who have never used the internet is about 8%, higher than England and Scotland.

Our focus should be on ensuring the digital technologies can benefit everyone, which means addressing the barriers that prevent people from using them (sometimes known as digital exclusion or digital inequality). For people in poverty, this means not having the **equipment** (such as mobile phones or tablets), **services** (such as fast, reliable broadband), **skills** (such as the ability to do online banking) and **support** (such as 'how to' information and training targeted at audiences that might struggle with their confidence and knowledge about digital).

Strategic Direction

In May 2023, Audit Wales published 'Digital Inclusion in Wales' report which highlighted that:

- 7% of adults in Wales are 'digitally excluded', meaning they have not personally used the internet in the previous three months;
- the percentage of households with access to the internet has steadily increased since 2012 but some groups in society are more likely to be excluded;
- while there is enough data to suggest high-level trends, there are data gaps that make it difficult to give a complete picture and gain an understanding of the 'lived experience' of people who are excluded;
- digital inclusion is complex and is not simply an issue of access to technology. It is not just an issue of rurality or just an issue for older people. Even when people have access and digital skills, some people may still prefer to access services face-to-face;
- there is a trend of public bodies moving some of their services online, which has many potential benefits but also risks disadvantaging digitally excluded people.
- While the UK Government is responsible for digital infrastructure across the UK, the Welsh Government is investing in broadband infrastructure;

- the Welsh Government has a specific mission around digital inclusion and is investing in digital inclusion projects.

Internet speed is a key measure of how effective and suitable internet access is for users. The greater the speed, the more users and activities that can be accommodated using that internet connection.

Broadband is a way of connecting to the internet, which is seen as generally faster and more reliable than older internet connections. Superfast broadband can be at least 30 Mbps whereas Gigabit Broadband can reach 1,000 Mbps.

The report highlights the main reasons for people being digitally excluded are:

Digital Infrastructure not available

It can be difficult for people to access the internet if there is not sufficient access to broadband or mobile internet services. As well as being able to get online at home, in public spaces or on the go, people require this infrastructure to be fast and reliable so the quality and speed of these services also affects digital inclusion.

Can't afford to be digital

The costs associated with having the right devices, data plans and/or broadband/mobile services can be prohibitive especially for people who are experiencing poverty or other hardships. The Cost of Living crisis has pushed more people into poverty meaning that people cannot afford digital devices or internet costs as they prioritise essentials like food and heating.

Lack of basic digital skills

Some people do not possess the skills, motivation or confidence to use the internet, and may not know how to find the necessary support, learning or training required to develop their digital skills.

Accessibility, usability and language

Some people need additional help or different solutions to enable them to use and access digital technologies and services. This includes allowing people to interface using the language of their choice (such as Welsh).

Choosing not to use digital services

Some people might have the right skills and access but prefer to access services in other ways, which is their choice and should be supported too. This may be just from time to time but there will always be people who are not digitally excluded but consciously decide not to use digital services (therefore are by choice not digitally included).

Safety online can be a barrier

Some people do not feel able or confident about using digital services because they are worried about online safety and security issues.

Minimum Digital Standard of Living

A minimum digital standard of living (MDSL) includes – but is more than having - accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.

Welsh Government commissioned a project to research and develop proposals for a MDSL in Wales. This is a citizen-centred definition of what counts as digital inclusion or exclusion, building on a UK wide project funded by the Nuffield Foundation and Nominet to develop a UK Minimum Digital Living Standard.

The outcome of this project was the following definitions¹ of a MDSL for urban households with children, based on three dynamics (Digital Goods and Services, Practical and Functional Skills, and Understanding and Managing Digital Risk):

Digital Goods and Services	
Home Broadband	With sufficient reliability and speed to support all family members to access the internet at the same time.
Mobile Phone and Data	An entry level smart phone per parent and secondary school age child plus 5GB of data per month. An extra 3GB of data per month if they have a pre-school or primary school age child.
Laptop / Tablet	An entry level laptop per household – parent(s) and first child share one device. An additional device for every further school age child.
Headphones	A set of headphones for school age children.
Television and TV Subscription	An entry level Smart TV, 32 inch screen. An entry level TV subscription service (e.g. Netflix, Disney+) in addition to a TV licence.
Smart Speaker	An entry level smart speaker.
Gaming Console and Subscription	A gaming console and an entry level gaming subscription.

Practical and Functional Skills	
Using digital devices, programmes and the internet	Skills ranging from using device functions (Level 1) to Changing Settings (Level 4).
Engagement online	Skills ranging from using online classrooms such as Google, Teams or Zoom (Level 3) to creating an email account and sending mail (Level 5).
Managing and monitoring digital devices and usage	Skills ranging from turning off devices properly (Level 2) to monitoring and managing mobile phone data usage (Level 4).

Understanding and Managing Digital Risk	
Managing security	Skills ranging from using secure passwords (Level 3) to monitoring banking activities online (Level 5).

¹ 'Towards a Welsh Minimum Digital Living Standard' – Welsh Government (February 2023)

Understanding and Managing Digital Risk				
Interacting with others	Skills ranging from evaluating what details to share online (Level 2) to managing social pressures and time online (Level 3).			
Sharing and receiving information	Skills ranging from evaluating the quality of information (Level 3) to understanding your digital footprint (Level 4).			
Skill Level 1	Skill Level 2	Skill Level 3	Skill Level 4	Skill Level 5
<i>Pre-school</i>	<i>Early primary school</i>	<i>Late primary school</i>	<i>Early secondary school</i>	<i>Late secondary school</i>

The goods, services and skills listed in the tables above present what this research identified was needed for reaching MDLS. However, MDLS is not intended to be prescriptive; it does not set out how these needs should be met, nor what should be provided by any organisation or government body. Establishing what people need to reach MDLS informs potentially wide-ranging efforts to support families to feel confident, safe, and included in the digital world.

This project is currently in its second phase and looking at what is required for achieving the MDLS in Wales.

Digital Community Wales

Digital Communities Wales (DCW) is a Welsh Government funded programme which is delivered by Cwmpas in partnership with the Good Things Foundation and Swansea University. The programme began in 2019 and will run until June 2025. The programme objectives are:



- Work intensively with targeted organisations to co-produce approaches that engage directly with people requiring basic digital skills support;
- Build and strengthen strategic relationships as a route to embedding digital inclusion activity across Wales;
- Support Health Boards in Wales to engage staff and volunteers with technology to improve health outcomes for patients;
- Support public and third sector organisations to embrace and embed digital inclusion into their strategies and practices;
- Promote and increase basic digital skills volunteering across Wales;
- Work with each Local Authority in Wales to embed digital inclusion into their service delivery, with a focus on Social Care;
- Engage with the private sector to embed digital inclusion activity into their services and training staff as volunteers;
- Create, develop and share training resources and toolkits to support digital inclusion with a focus on health and social care;
- Increase number of Online Centres and take-up of Learn my Way in Wales.

3. Proposal

Our proposal is to co-produce and establish a new governance model which provides cross-council coordination on efforts to improve digital inclusion in Swansea. The main focal point of this governance model will be a **Digital Inclusion Steering Group** that provides a focal point for collaborative working and implementing actions that will achieve improved outcomes.

To create an effective governance model that meets local needs and aligns with the strategic direction for tackling poverty in this region, we need it to provide:

- a clear route for escalating decisions and delegation of actions;
- a platform for colleagues across the Council to work together on common issues and challenges;
- oversight of monitoring, performance and reporting across the organisation;
- ownership and accountability for the Council's Digital Inclusion Action Plan and any appropriate tasks;
- a forum to share stories, insights, learning and experience.

We recognise the challenges we must tackle around Digital Inclusion will include:

- Bridging the gap by using non-digital channels and services to improve people's digital skills and confidence;
- Ongoing programmes of skills development ranging from novice (such as helping people to order shopping online) to more advanced accredited schemes for digital careers such as Software Engineers;
- Infrastructure developments that will enable easier access to digital services and opportunities (such as public Wi-Fi connectivity in rural areas);
- Targeting support and resources such as 'loan' digital equipment to help people in poverty;
- Engaging with the move towards development of a Minimum Digital Standard of Living (MDSL) in Wales;
- Better use of data and intelligence not only help people and communities directly but to inform the wider strategic approach to tackling poverty.

4. Approach to co-production

Our intention is to embed the principles of co-production in our approach to tackling poverty. To achieve this, we plan to identify and recruit people with lived experience to be a part of the delivery of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan. It is our intention that these **Lived Experience Volunteers** will be invited members of the Digital Inclusion Steering Group.

In September 2023, Swansea Council conducted a short public survey with people and organisations across Swansea about our strategic approach to tackling poverty. The findings of this survey have been used to inform the refresh of the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy (last published in 2017).

We captured comments such as the ones below, which has helped us to identify that digital inclusion is a key theme for the refreshed strategy to take forward:

Digital poverty is a major problem that impacts on many other aspects of poverty including education, employability, cost of living savings. This must be addressed as a priority.

'Poverty' re. digital skills especially amongst seniors & awareness of where people are discriminated against because of no smartphone or internet access.

Increasing digital skills is often targeted at the very elderly and is overly simplistic. A tech hub (perhaps (in) the new library/resource centre in the city) could offer drop-ins where people can ask for help or could phone in also.

5. Stakeholders

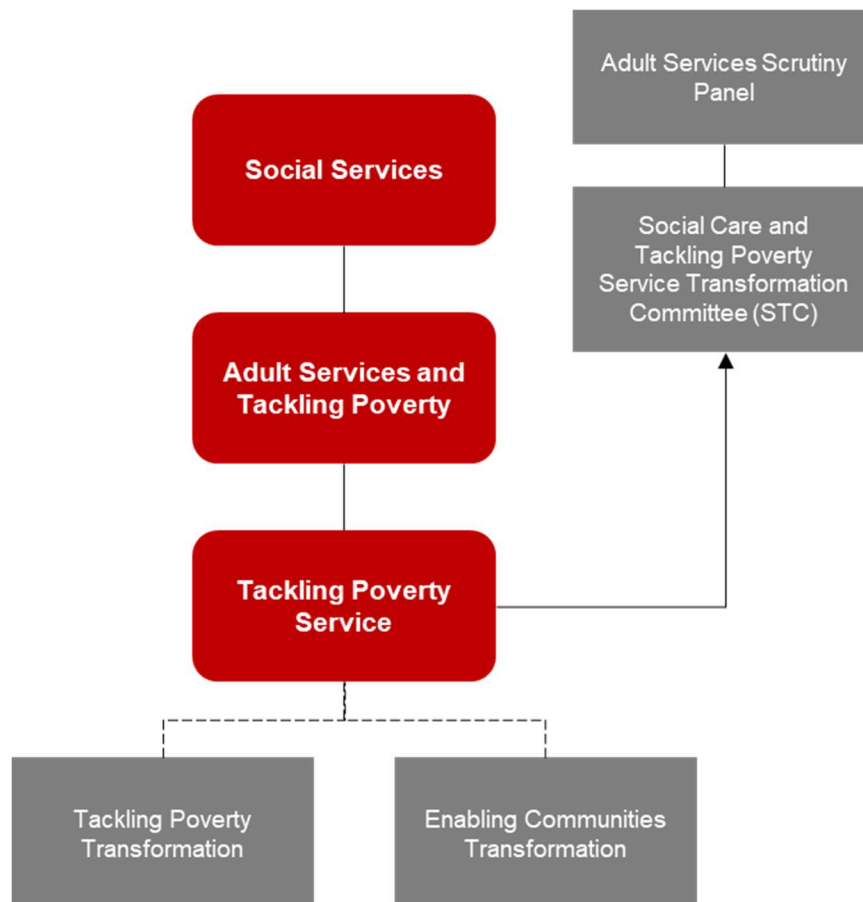
Our proposal is focused on driving collaborative working across the region in relation to digital inclusion. While a key part of the proposal will be to identify and engage with relevant stakeholders, our initial stakeholder analysis includes:

Council team/group	Potential contact
Community Engagement	Rhys Thomas
Tackling Poverty Development	Yvonne Bennet / Sian Denty
Lifelong Learning Service	Nigel Rees
Local Area Coordination	Jon Franklin
Library and Culture Services	Karen Gibbins
Web Development	Liz Shellard
Partnership and Involvement	Julie Gosney
Education – Achievement and Partnership	Rhodri Jones/Ian Meredith
Digital Connectivity	Laura Jenkins
Digital Infrastructure Support and Engagement	Claire Hughes
Elected Members	Cllr Lesley Walton
Elected Members	Cllr Hayley Gwilliam
Lived Experience Volunteer	TBC
Lived Experience Volunteer	TBC

Early tasks for establishing the Child Poverty Steering Group will include identifying a Chairperson and developing a Terms of Reference (ToR) for the group, which will formalise membership of the group in consultation with relevant officers.

6. Governance

To ensure robust oversight and governance arrangements, the Child Poverty Steering Group will report into the Tackling Poverty Transformation Group, one of two oversight groups that is responsible for coordinating delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities'.



We are also keen to explore other links and connections outside of Swansea Council, where this group could play a key role in collaborative working to address digital inclusion. Such opportunities may include:

- Digital Inclusion Unit, which is part of Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families Division;
- Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales (DIAW), a partnership of organisations across Wales working together to make Wales a digitally-inclusive nation (Swansea Council is recognised as a member of this partnership);
- Swansea Bay City Deal's Digital Infrastructure Programme, which is delivering regional improvements around digital technologies and connectivity;
- Working with local and regional organisations that are directly supporting people in Swansea with digital inclusion and related forms of help and guidance.

7. Next Steps

We will submit this report to relevant governing bodies and decision makers to gain commitment to implementing the Digital Inclusion Steering Group.

We will engage with the identified stakeholders from this report and schedule an initial workshop to define the Terms of Reference for this group.

We will work with colleagues to identify suitable candidates for the role of Lived Experience Volunteers.

We will finalise the draft Digital Inclusion Action Plan to be presented to the inaugural meeting of this group, for them to accept and adopt the plan as the focal point for their steering group responsibilities.