

# Digital Inclusion in Brent

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report has been produced by Citizens Online to provide analysis of digital inclusion issues within London Borough of Brent.

The report aims to:

- Improve understanding of digital exclusion and inclusion issues
- Identify opportunities to improve delivery of Essential Digital Skills support
- Ensure stakeholders are equipped to develop their strategies and make business cases for digital and social change

*Motivating digitally excluded citizens to engage with the digital world can be difficult. To do this successfully requires compelling 'hooks' for each person, and each organisation.*

*Simply 'selling' or presenting a new digital service or technology does not create digital journeys. People and organisations need to understand what is beneficial for them and what an improved life or service might feel like in a digital world. Understanding people's motivations is key.*



Citizens Online promotes a collaborative partnership approach to tackling digital exclusion.

We collate information about current assets and resources, and promote working together in local areas, to improve the lives of residents. We have made recommendations in this report for how best to tackle digital exclusion in Brent.

We understand that things change quickly in the world of digital transformation and skills. During writing this report there may be more activity within the Council to support these issues not documented here.



### INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Brent Council (BC). BC is in the process of digital transformation with an aim to become ‘a truly Digital Council and making Brent a truly Digital Place’. The Council are aware that there are still significant numbers of residents that lack Essential Digital Skills<sup>1</sup> and have commissioned this research to try to change that. In the context of digital transformation, the Council is making a bold statement of support for inclusivity and accessibility. They recognise the importance of digital skills, and have the ambitious aspiration that their residents will not be left behind in the digital age. Digital inclusion must be the heart of any digital transformation program and central to any transformation conversation from the start. There is no point in having brilliant online services if your customers can’t use them.

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on the way we are living our day to day lives. It has amplified just how important digital technology is to help us get through these times. For those not online, especially vulnerable people who are shielding, it is an extremely difficult and worrying time. We talk more about this in the report.



The pandemic also highlighted to BC that many SMEs<sup>2</sup> in the borough do not have a digital presence. The Council wants to support businesses to improve digital skills to ensure they are resilient. It’s important for residents and businesses to upskill digitally to help aid economic recovery from COVID-19. Social Isolation and loneliness are also key concerns for the Council and we have included information on both these topics for how digital technologies and skills can help these groups of people.

The good news is that the number of people using the internet and digital technology in the UK is gradually increasing. However, those who remain offline or lack essential digital skills, are also increasingly harder to reach and motivate. Meaning that as the digital skills gap narrows, it also deepens.

As a result of our research, we’ve made recommendations for BC and other organisations in Brent to improve digital skills for their residents and workforce. We hope these are taken on board to embed digital skills and inclusion into business as usual. Helping to deliver fantastic digital customer service and enabling everyone to benefit from the digital world we now live in. We hope you enjoy the report.

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<sup>1</sup> The Essential digital skills framework defines the digital skills adults need to safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world: [Essential digital skills framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework) (gov.uk), accessed 16/12/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Small and Medium Enterprises

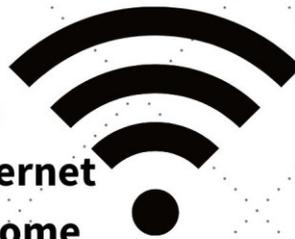
## Adults in Brent Digital Exclusion Stats



**Have no laptop**

**7%**

**Have no internet  
access at home**



**6%**

**Have no  
Foundation  
Digital skills**



**18%**

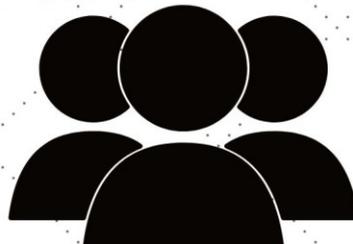
**Don't have the  
Essential  
Digital Skills  
for life**



**11%**

**Only use a  
smartphone  
to go online**

**7% Are offline**



## HEADLINE DIGITAL INCLUSION STATS

<b>Borough population:</b> <sup>3</sup>	330,795
<b>Approximate Number of households:</b> <sup>4</sup>	110,286
<b>Working age population (16-64):</b> <sup>5</sup>	220,379
<b>People aged 65+:</b> <sup>6</sup>	39,992
<b>Working age population in receipt of benefits:</b> <sup>7</sup>	49,697
<b>State Pension age population in receipt of benefits:</b>	37,609

## DIGITAL EXCLUSION-RELATED ESTIMATES FOR BRENT

<b>Non-internet users (adults):</b> <sup>8</sup>	17,600 (6.8%)
<b>Non-internet users aged 65+:</b> <sup>9</sup>	13,241 (5%)
<b>People without:</b>	
• <b>Essential Digital Skills</b> <sup>10</sup> :	<b>48,500 (18.4%)</b>
• <b>Foundation Digital Skills</b> <sup>11</sup> :	<b>40,000 (15.1%)</b>
• <b>All 6 Foundation Digital Skills</b> <sup>12</sup> :	<b>16,000 (6%)</b>
• <b>Transactional Digital Skills</b> <sup>13</sup> :	<b>40,300 (15.3%)</b>
<b>Adults with no laptop/PC at home:</b>	50,000 (18.7%)
<b>Adults with no internet access at home:</b>	17,800 (6.7%)
<b>Smartphone-only users:</b>	30,000 (11%)

<sup>3</sup> Population figures in this report are based on the ONS 2018 Mid-Year Estimate

<sup>4</sup> 2015 estimate of "[occupied addresses](#)" using experimental methodology. This is close to the number of households from the 2011 Census: 50,943

<sup>5</sup> This is 66.6% of population - higher than for England 62.6%

<sup>6</sup> At 12.1% of the population this is considerably lower than for England as a whole, 18.2%

<sup>7</sup> Excludes benefits administered by HMRC (Child benefit, Child tax credits). DWP StatXplore, Aug 19.

<sup>8</sup> 6.8% - lower than 9.2% across England

<sup>9</sup> 56.5% of all non-internet users

<sup>10</sup> [Essential Digital Skills](#) Framework is a Department of Education system, which informs the [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index](#), from which the estimates above are made.

<sup>11</sup> [Foundation Digital Skills](#) underpin all essential digital skills, e.g. ability to turn on devices, connect to Wi-Fi, access the internet, understand passwords and keep personal information safe.

<sup>12</sup> 2019 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index

<sup>13</sup> 2020 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Digital” permeates everything. How we communicate, work, learn, travel and entertain ourselves today is a world away from 20 years ago. Organisations transforming digitally must be clear in their culture that digital is everyone’s responsibility as it is an essential part of our lives both in and out of work.

The Coronavirus pandemic has also demonstrated the vital importance of digital solutions. They enable us to; have food delivered, work from home, claim benefits, order prescriptions, pay bills and videocall loved ones. Yet **17,600 (6.8%) of adults in Brent are not online** and **18% of adults don’t have all of the ‘Essential Digital Skills’<sup>14</sup>** for life. With groups of people more vulnerable to the virus (older, disabled and with long term health conditions) also more likely to lack digital skills, this is a worrying problem.

As well as the people classed as offline,<sup>15</sup> there are a larger group of people classed as ‘narrow’ users. These people only engage in up to 4 of 15 types of online use<sup>16</sup>. **We estimate there are 53,200 adult narrow users in Brent** (20% of the adult population).

We know that being online and having good digital skills has a wide range of benefits<sup>17</sup>. It helps people to connect and feel less isolated, save money, access better paid work, live healthier lives and help their children. These aims are also all within the BC Borough Plan<sup>18</sup> so supporting residents to improve their digital skills is a win-win situation.

From our research, there is now a clear picture for where those most at risk of digital exclusion are based. We’ve ranked wards<sup>19</sup> in Brent in order of **digital exclusion risk** and produced a Ward Risk Heatmap (pages 19-20). The top three are: **Harlesden, Stonebridge and Dollis Hill**. Digital exclusion is closely linked to poverty, disability, age and social isolation<sup>20</sup>. We would recommend focusing resources and marketing aimed at digitally excluded groups in these areas as a priority.

Like all local authorities across England, BC has faced significant funding cuts. Transacting online provides one way to make savings, yet continue to deliver excellent

<sup>14</sup> [Essential Digital Skills](#) Framework is a Department of Education system

<sup>15</sup> From Office for National Statistics data. This refers to people who have never been online or last used the internet over three months ago.

<sup>16</sup> The 15 types of use are: email; transactions; instant messaging; banking/ paying bills; social media; finding/ downloading information; news; health information; watching short video clips; local government sites; audio services; TV or film content; remote access e.g. accessing files through a cloud service; uploading content e.g. photos, blog posts; and playing games online.

<sup>17</sup> People with the highest digital engagement, who earn less than £20,000 per year, [save 42% on monthly utility bills compared to those with the least digital engagement](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Brent Council Borough Plan](#)

<sup>19</sup> Strictly speaking, we have used data at Census LSOA level and combined this to Ward level using the ONS best-fit lookup. LSOAs do not always nest exactly into wards, so ward-level results are a best approximation.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, [“The emergence of a “digital underclass” in Great Britain and Sweden: Changing reasons for digital exclusion”](#) (2017)

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services.<sup>21</sup> BC has already made progress on their digital transformation journey. The Council has a digital strategy and over 80% of services are now available online. There is a centralised transformation team and digital themes and leadership are of high importance.

It's important to recognise that when talking about people lacking digital skills and confidence online, this can also include staff. We identified some gaps in knowledge about staff digital skills and confidence; the extent to which the digital strategy and vision is embedded; how well the assisted digital process is working, and how technology supports staff to work more efficiently. We would recommend survey work to gather this information and help digital transformation.

Brent has listened to feedback from staff<sup>22</sup>, residents and Crisis<sup>23</sup> and is working with Nomensa to develop a new website and resident's portal. A user centred design approach has been adopted to ensure the new product meets end user needs. The recent Brent residents' survey revealed that 45% of respondents agreed with the statement, 'It is easy to carry out online Council transactions'. We would hope with improved design of the website, resident's portal and with digital champion support, which more residents will find it easy to transact digitally with Council services.

The COVID-19 outbreak has hindered our research, especially with health and third sector organisations. We have only engaged with 14 organisations to date so we acknowledge that there may be more information to emerge as the crisis passes. From our findings so far, BC could perhaps benefit from more connections with the health sector. There is a health and wellbeing board and various types of social prescribing, which potentially offer opportunities for digital champion approaches to support residents.

Brent Council is working hard to support digitally excluded residents, especially in response to COVID-19. They are working with CVS Brent and the Young Brent Foundation to provide laptops young people. Digital support and drop-ins are also available in BC Hubs. Brent Start<sup>24</sup> will offer courses based on the Essential Digital Skills Framework from September 2020. There is also a Financial Inclusion Group to support residents who are struggling financially.

With COVID-19 recovery in mind, BC were interested in research into: 1. Small businesses 2. Loneliness and Social Isolation. The Council is supporting businesses with COVID-19 recovery, as the pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in businesses that lack e-commerce and digital infrastructure. Brent surveyed businesses in Kilburn and found that 46% of independent businesses had no digital presence. A digital champion

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<sup>21</sup> Online services often result in improved customer satisfaction as many residents prefer the ease and convenience of 24/7 access in your own home.

<sup>22</sup> Brent staff were surveyed about the Council website but tellingly only 4% of respondents used the site solely for personal use as a resident. Also the sample size (47 respondents) was small so caution is required when analysing the results.

<sup>23</sup> Crisis raised concerns about the usability of the 'My Account' and 'Homelessness Portal' in a report.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/employment-training-and-skills/brent-start/>

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approach can also be used to support businesses to digitally transform. Enabling them to become more resilient and aid economic recovery of the borough.

With residents vulnerable to Coronavirus shielding, the risk of experiencing loneliness and becoming socially isolated is also increased. Digital skills are one potential way to alleviate these unpleasant conditions.

The Council acknowledges that more could be done to tackle digital exclusion by working in partnership with other organisations. **The problem of digital exclusion is deeply entrenched**, with those still offline often the most difficult to reach. Most people will need multiple prompts, support, nudges and interventions to raise confidence and skill levels with digital technology. We advocate that the best way to do this is through a cross sector network, as this problem is too big for a single organisation to tackle alone.

A digital inclusion group and a fully networked system would:

- grow the Digital Champion (DC) provision with both volunteer and embedded DCs
- create a clear triage and referral system
- centralise information for help with digital skills, potentially on the BC website
- promote digital skills training for staff

We would recommend that a **Digital Inclusion Network is put in place for the Borough**. This could be as light touch as a regular agenda item on another existing group meeting with similar aims (e.g. welfare, health and wellbeing, financial inclusion), or it could be a more formal group. Either way a network will need dedicated resource and the more resource that can be allocated, the more successful it will be.

There has been an amazing community response to the COVID-19 crisis forming mutual aid groups with many volunteers. We would urge these groups to ask the vulnerable people they are supporting about their digital capability and train volunteers to be digital champions and offer remote support.

Using Digital Champions (DCs)<sup>25</sup> to help people improve their digital skills is a proven method<sup>26</sup>. We advocate that the most sustainable way of digital skills support is by using 'embedded' DCs<sup>27</sup>. These are people already working within organisations. Brent recognises the importance of this support and work is already in place to support staff in Brent Hubs and Libraries to access the Digital Champion Training as part of this project.

From our research we also know of DCs (most of which are now offering support remotely) in the following organisations: AgeUK Hillingdon, AbilityNet and Leonard Cheshire. There are also organisations where residents can access help with specific

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<sup>25</sup> A Digital Champion is someone who is confident to guide and support others to do things online

<sup>26</sup> [Recent NHS DC Study](#)

<sup>27</sup> Support for this comes from the independent evaluation of the One Digital programme test and learn phase (Sara Dunn Associates, *The One Digital collaboration: Evaluation of the 'test and learn' year 2016*, December 2016).

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tasks online i.e. benefits forms. These include: Personal Independence Payment Online, Catch 22, Citizens Advice, Job Centre Plus (JCP). BC could also signpost to these services if overwhelmed with demand.

In the 'digital age', digital skills are essential. We recommend that **digital skills and digital champion skills are written into all job descriptions**. We recommend that digital skills and inclusion are embedded into the HR process by being included in interviews, induction, appraisals and learning and development policy. A culture of lifelong learning and allowing staff time to improve digital skills should also be promoted by management. This will futureproof organisations for digital change and in turn help residents to improve their digital skills.

Senior Management should encourage and support the rollout of DC training using the Digital Champions Network.<sup>28</sup> We also recommend DCs in other organisations as part of a Digital Inclusion Network. Organisational policy regarding how to help residents with digital skills should be clarified and communicated to all staff. **Everyone must be aware of where they can signpost residents for help** if they cannot offer that help there and then. This would apply to any other organisation as part of a Digital Inclusion Network.

Senior leaders should ensure that digital inclusion and accessibility are embedded into policies and procurement frameworks. BC has a Social Value and Ethical Procurement Policy<sup>29</sup> which does include provision of digital skills training. We would suggest adding digital inclusion and accessibility to it where appropriate.

We've enjoyed working with Brent Council and are impressed to see how quickly action has been taken to initiate a digital champion programme. The Borough has great assets and a wealth of community groups. We would hope in time that a strong local digital inclusion partnership will develop to help digital skills support flourish in the Borough to improve residents lives.



<sup>28</sup> [An online training platform for digital champions](#). Access to the platform is included with this project.

<sup>29</sup> [BC Social Value Policy](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Set up an Brent Digital Inclusion Network

We have struggled to engage with as many organisations as we would've liked because of the Coronavirus. But we know that there are at least 12 organisations already offering some sort of digital inclusion support; such as free WIFI, access to equipment or digital champions. We expect that there will be many more. It's imperative that organisations work together to raise the digital skill levels of residents and a network is an ideal place to; encourage joint working, partnerships, sharing of resources and best practice. We must stress that **a network will require dedicated resource to run it**. Similar networks in other areas of the country have been successful in securing funding for inclusion projects.

Partner with other key strategic organisations in Brent to maximise impact for residents. Such as NHS North West London, a consortium of 30 organisations focussed on better health outcomes for residents which includes digital skills aims.

### 2. Increase the number of Digital Champions (DCs)

Including Brent Council staff and staff in other organisations in the digital inclusion network.



**Embedded DCs** are people who support others with digital skills as *part of their job*. Examples of this might include essential digital skills support given by:

- Welfare advisors while assisting something with benefits claim
- Library staff while helping someone access their e-books service
- Employment support workers as part of helping someone to look for a job

This is a more sustainable way of delivering digital skills support, as they are already employed by organisations. As their roles are often customer facing, they

also have good skills to be able to engage with residents who may have more complex needs or be higher risk of digital exclusion. Research indicates that digital inclusion projects that use an embedded digital champion approach were able to maintain participant engagement for longer.<sup>30</sup>

In our experience it takes a ratio of **around 1 DC to 100 digitally excluded people**, to record a significant amount of digital support activity and evidence that there is some **genuine impact in an area**. Recruiting DCs at a ratio of 1:100 is likely to increase any organisation's chances of being able to evidence and evaluate the positive impact of the work.

Brent Borough has around **50,000 residents that lack digital skills**, suggesting Brent should aim to recruit around **485-500 DCs** across the borough working in a range of contexts from senior leaders and customer facing staff to volunteers working in the community sector.

Brent Council has already thought about how to progress this and are talking with library, hubs, customer contact centre teams as a starting point to become digital champions.

Prior to COVID-19 the following organisations were offering face to face support. They are now offering **remote skills help and support**. Brent Council and other organisations in the Borough can signpost residents to:

- AbilityNet – 0800 269 545
- Leonard Cheshire – for disabled people – 0300 303 0074

**Volunteer DCs** are also valuable resource to help people with digital skills, often libraries run volunteer digital champion schemes. Again, we want to stress that volunteer DCs take dedicated resource to manage – even if they are being hosted by other organisations (embedded volunteer DCs), coordinating efforts and matching learner needs with available volunteers takes time.

**Brent could support community organisations by providing access to the Digital Champion Network (DCN)** to help train volunteer digital champions working in other community organisations. Funding to cover volunteer induction and room hire for sessions etc would also help to stimulate provision, if any funding is available.

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<sup>30</sup> SCVO Digital Participation Challenge Fund Review 2017 [https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-cms/digitalparticipation/reports/Charter\\_Fund\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-cms/digitalparticipation/reports/Charter_Fund_Review_Report.pdf)

3. **Create and embed a Brent Borough ‘Triage and Signposting System’** for Essential Digital Skills<sup>31</sup>. Empowering employees and volunteers in all sectors to know:
  - a) How to spot people who have barriers other than motivation
  - b) What questions to ask (and when)
  - c) Where to refer people to get help that they need

There are many referrals pathways from Council services to other support organisations, e.g. for health concerns or addiction. **Digital skills support could be added to these referral forms** to highlight when this support is needed and remind frontline staff about the need to consider digital inclusion. We understand that referrals are also often made incorrectly for example, JCP has referred people to the libraries where currently the provision isn't in place to support Universal Credit claimants. A shared triage and signposting system in the borough would help residents to get the support they need.

4. **Target the wards with the highest risk of digital exclusion. The three top wards are Harlesden, Stonebridge and Dollis Hill.** Postcodes in this high risk wards could benefit from targeted marketing to signpost to over the phone DC support such as the organisation listed in Recommendation 2.



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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework/essential-digital-skills-framework>

### 5. Be responsive to COVID-19 by engaging people in essential digital journeys and finding out about their digital capability.

Motivation is a key barrier for people doing more online. Over a third of those offline say the internet 'doesn't interest me' and 48% of the digitally excluded state that 'nothing' could motivate them to go online.<sup>32</sup> The current crisis has given many people clear reasons to go online - being able to order shopping and see family and friends on video, and so on.

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Brent Council and Mutual Aid groups, have been phoning vulnerable people to help with essential needs. They are asked if they need help with food delivery, medicine, walking pets etc but **we urge all organisations to also ask about people's digital capability**<sup>33</sup>. This is an ideal opportunity to start someone on their digital journey. Ask if they have a device to connect to the internet, an internet connection and the skills and confidence to get online. If they don't offer help or signpost to other agencies who can help such as those mentioned in Recommendation 2.

There is also potential to launch a digital champion remote volunteer help service within mutual aid groups but such a scheme will need resource to manage.

### 6. Strategic Leadership Recommendations

- a) **Ensure Senior Leaders** in all organisations involved in the digital inclusion network **support the work of the group and promote inclusion** within transformation programmes.
- b) **Ensure that digital inclusion and accessibility**<sup>34</sup> **is embedded in the policies, procurement frameworks and work programmes of all network members.** Include digital skills and inclusion clauses into procurement frameworks and contracts. Especially for any IT contracts, digital products and services, or support services for higher risk digitally excluded groups.
- c) Promote **Digital Leadership and a culture of life-long learning.** Senior leaders in all organisations of the network must lead by example to promote new skills and ways of working.
- d) **Include digital skills and inclusion in HR processes.** All job specifications, recruitment advertising, interviews, on-boarding, appraisals and learning and development policy should include reference to digital skills. The key

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.html>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.citizensonline.org.uk/we-all-need-to-be-asking-people-about-their-digital-skills/>

<sup>34</sup> [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#)

to changing culture is bringing your people with you. Highlighting the importance of digital skills to staff both new and old will convey the understanding that digital inclusion is everyone's responsibility. The role of a Digital Champion will not be seen as an additional responsibility, with time, it will be an agreed part of someone's role.

- 7. Centralise all information about digital skills in one place, such as BC Website.** The page could include links and information about how to access: online learning, remote support, 1-2-1 support, home help, learning sessions and courses, free Wi-Fi and computer access. **Promote this resources page** by ensuring every **member of the digital inclusion network is linking to them** from their webpages.
- 8. Support economic recovery in Brent by supporting businesses with digital skills.** Recommendations for action are made on page 21.



## 1. DIGITAL EXCLUSION RISK ANALYSIS

Our analysis identifies three Brent wards that are within the 30% of wards in England with the highest risk of digital exclusion, and within the 10% of wards in London most at risk:

- Harlesden
- Stonebridge
- Dollis Hill

Harlesden is in the 15% of wards most at risk nationally. This is due to higher numbers of:

- people with no qualifications
- people receiving benefits to top up low incomes (e.g. unemployed, in low-wage employment, or retired)
- older and/or disabled people.

Kilburn ward is fourth in our list as it has a relatively high numbers of older people living alone and a relatively high number of premises without access to Superfast broadband connections.

The table below shows the data that we've used for the calculations. In each case, people in these demographic groups are more likely to be offline and less likely to have digital skills. We also include the number of premises without access to Superfast broadband (SFBB). Even where there are a low number of premises without access, take-up of SFBB may still be very low due to affordability and other considerations.

Note that risk is calculated based on a combination of absolute numbers of people in each area within the risk-factor populations, *and* percentage of people within an area in the at-risk categories<sup>35</sup>. This means that a ward such as Harlesden can be ranked as a higher risk than, say, Stonebridge, despite having lower *numbers* in most categories shown in the table. Since its overall population is lower, the risk of digital exclusion is higher overall when percentage figures are included.

Additionally, because ward level risk is calculated from the subsidiary LSOA statistics, a ward containing one or two high-risk LSOAs, with the rest being moderate risk, may end up being ranked lower overall than another ward where all of the LSOAs are moderately high but none is especially high. Thus ward-level maps may omit smaller areas of high risk.

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<sup>35</sup> This approach aims to balance the *scale* of the issue, in terms of the numbers of people affected, against the *character* of particular areas (local prevalence). Areas that are not particularly highly deprived overall, but simply have larger populations, can dominate a numbers-only approach; areas that have smaller populations but higher prevalence of forms of deprivation would dominate a percentage-only system but fail to point to where there are actually more people at risk.

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Ward	Premises without Superfast (SFBB)	People aged 65+	People aged 65+ living alone	Disabled adults (estimate)	Adults with no qualifications	Housing Benefit and Universal Credit claimants	DE risk score decile (*London region)
Harlesden	20	1,739	461	1,202	1,971	4,195	1
Stonebridge	221	1,885	510	1,330	1,950	4,343	1
Dollis Hill	318	1,757	355	922	1,454	2,297	1
Kilburn	456	1,754	592	1,181	1,405	3,115	2
Welsh Harp	14	1,844	463	993	1,403	1,877	2
Willesden Green	82	1,521	447	948	1,434	3,063	3
Kensal Green	81	1,529	396	930	1,445	2,524	3
Barnhill	13	2,274	539	1,001	1,253	2,108	3
Wembley Central	329	1,870	232	1,020	1,552	1,694	4
Dudden Hill	206	1,927	366	932	1,464	2,409	4
Sudbury	16	1,887	425	925	1,227	1,668	4
Bronesbury Park	7	1,831	593	935	857	1,505	4
Queensbury	34	2,168	348	974	1,420	1,391	5
Kenton	64	2,622	426	769	731	582	5
Fryent	1	1,849	438	764	1,208	1,325	5
Preston	18	2,306	479	886	1,140	1,431	5
Alperton	19	1,767	271	779	1,680	1,473	6
Mapesbury	360	1,751	414	840	1,159	2,263	6
Tokington	750	1,984	374	926	1,351	1,651	7
Queens Park	0	1,615	380	798	941	1,378	8
Northwick Park	43	2,112	299	704	682	756	9

Table 1: Digital Inclusion Risk ranked by ward (\* risk decile refers to a London-wide ranking: 1 means the ward is within the 10% of highest-risk wards in London).

# DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

## Digital Exclusion risk by ward (Brent), with location of GP surgeries and community assets

Sources: Citizens Online, Brent Council, ONS OpenGeography

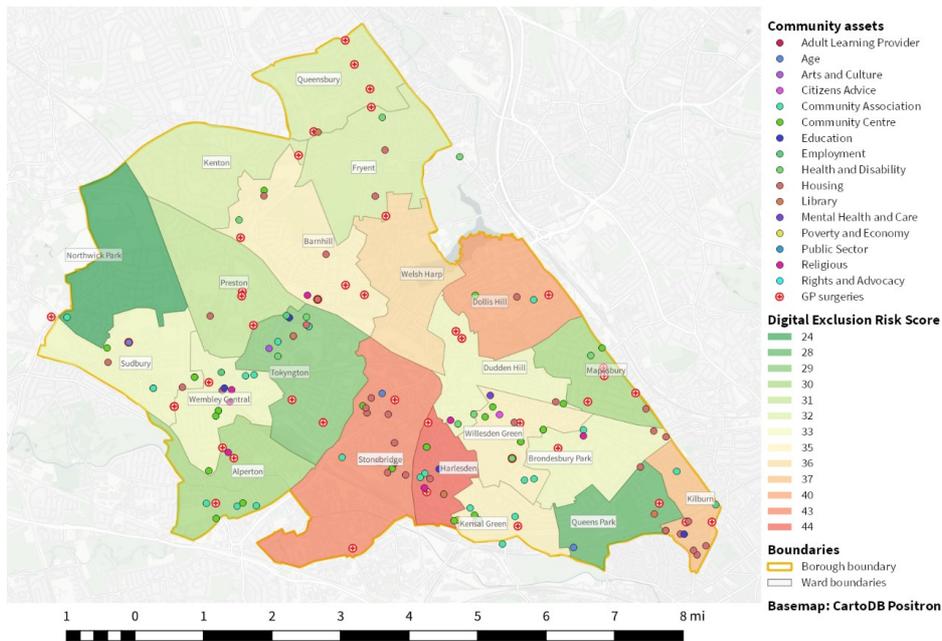


Figure 1: Digital Exclusion risk score by ward, Brent: red and orange are the wards with the highest levels of risk, with yellow areas being moderate risk overall and green areas being at lowest risk.

# 1. FOCUS ON HIGHER RISK WARDS

## HARLESDEN

### Digital exclusion risk by LSOA, and community assets, Harlesden ward, Brent

Data sources: Brent Council, Citizens Online, NHS Digital, ONS OpenGeography

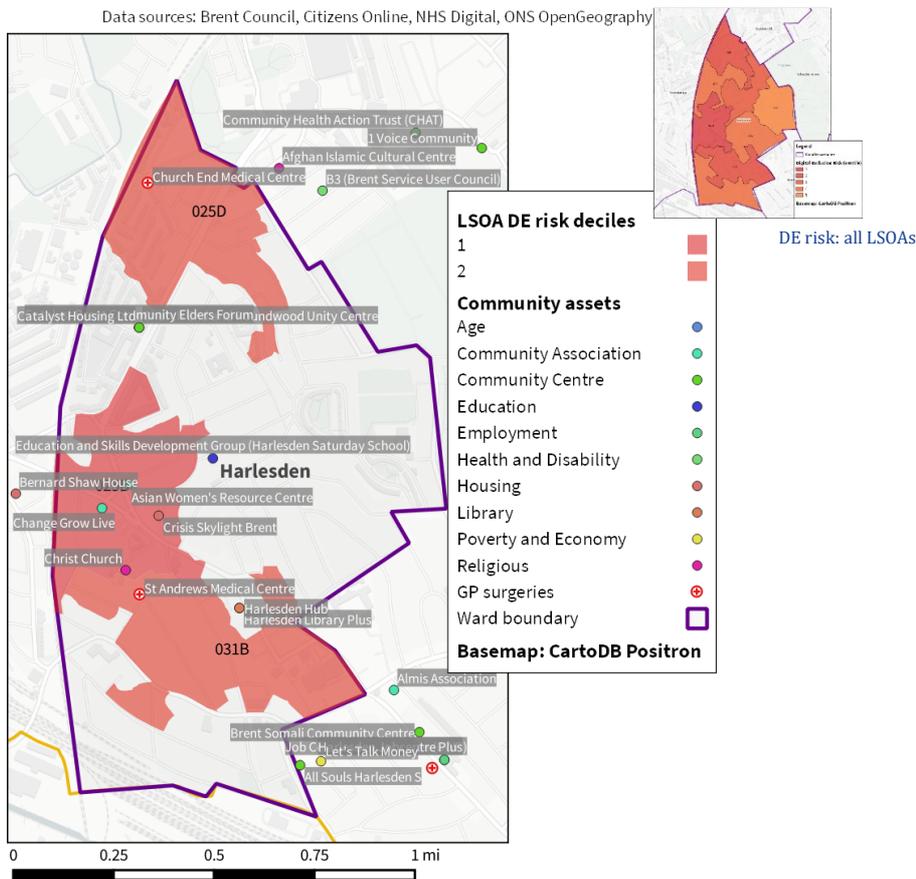


Figure 2: Digital exclusion risk by LSOA (highest risk only), and community assets, Harlesden ward

All 8 LSOAs in Harlesden ward are ranked as within the top 40% of areas at risk of digital exclusion in London. Three of these areas are found within the 20% most at risk, and these are highlighted on the map above.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

The majority of the community assets within Harlesden are found in or very near these areas of highest concern, and these cover a range of types:

- Community associations such as the **Asian Women's Resource Centre** and **Change, Grow, Live**, as well as **Let's Talk Money** just outside the ward in Kensal Green
- **Harlesden Library and Harlesden Hub**
- Community centres such as the **Church End and Roundwood Unity Centre**
- Employment and education resources such as the **Education and Skills Development Group** and the nearby **Jobcentre Plus** in Kensal Green
- Housing providers such as **Catalyst** and **Crisis Skylight Brent**
- GP surgeries: **Church End Medical Centre** in the north of the ward and **St Andrew's** in the south, as well as the **B3 Brent Service User Council** based in neighbouring Dudden Hill ward.

**St Andrew's Medical Centre** is one of the 10 surgeries in the borough with the lowest % of patients registered for GP online services (16.2%) while **Church End Medical Centre** has one of the lowest rates of usage of these services relative to the number of patients registered (0.2 transactions per patient in January 2020).

While Harlesden does not have a particularly high number of older residents, it does have a high number and of residents claiming disability-related benefits (PIP, DLA and/or ESA) and claiming Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. It also has a high number of residents who do not have any educational qualifications. This points to a high level of social need within the ward and a large number of residents likely to need support to carry out tasks online; such as online forms to initiate and maintain a claim for UC.

Support with employment-related training may be a crucial area of need in Harlesden. Due to the number of people on lower incomes, working on digital financial literacy – avoiding scams and using apps to help with budgets and to save money – through community associations including **Let's Save Money** may be a great and helpful hook for residents to get into digital.

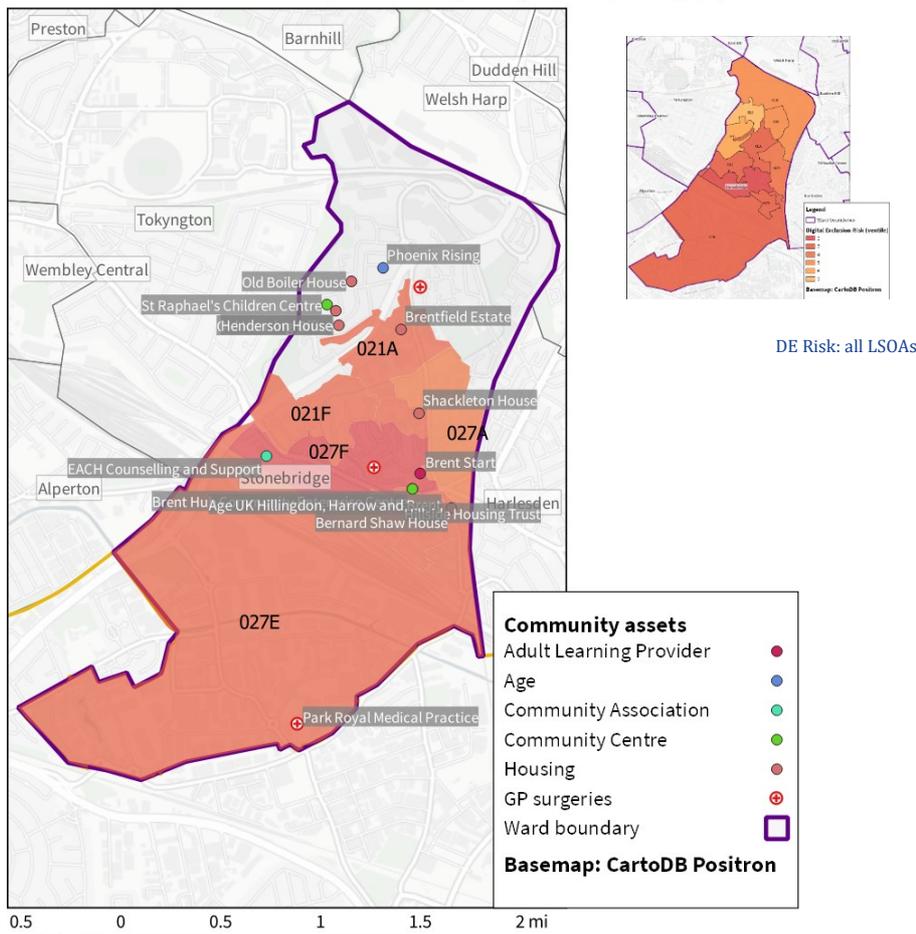
A joined-up approach involving the local council, statutory agencies and a network of local community and voluntary sector organisations is the most effective way of helping residents with the essential digital skills. Digital Champions working in GP surgeries, the local library, the Jobcentre and through housing providers can provide a multitude of touchpoints where residents can gain and reinforce their digital capabilities.

STONEBRIDGE

Of the 10 LSOAs in Stonebridge ward, five are within the top four ventiles (top 20%) for digital exclusion risk nationally. One of these (027F) is within the top ventile (5%).

Digital exclusion risk by LSOA, and community assets, Stonebridge ward, Brent

Data sources: Brent Council, Citizens Online, NHS Digital, ONS OpenGeography



DE Risk: all LSOAs

Figure 3: Digital exclusion risk by LSOA (highest risk only); community assets, Stonebridge ward

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

Within this high-risk neighbourhood are located the **Brent Start** adult education service, **EACH Counselling and Support** and **Hilltop Medical Practice**, with the **Brent Hub Community Enterprise Centre** – where the local Age UK office is located – and **Hillside Housing Trust** being located very close by.

Housing schemes such as **Bernard Shaw House** and **Shackleton House** are also found within the higher-risk areas of Stonebridge, along with the Brentfield Estate (including **Brentfield Medical Centre**). The **Asian People's Disability Alliance**, based on Alric Avenue in Stonebridge, may be able to support digital inclusion work in this area.

On the north side of the A406 North Circular, another estate, centred on Pitfield Way – home to **St Raphael's Children's Centre**, **Phoenix Rising** and **Henderson House** – is within the top 30% of areas at risk.

### DOLLIS HILL

Three of the seven LSOAs in this ward are within the top 6 ventiles (30%) at risk nationally, with one (O10F) in the west of the ward being in the top 10% at risk. This neighbourhood is home to **Kingfisher Youth and Community Centre**, a venue that may be able to host or provide digital skills support sessions for local residents.

There are very few community venues we are aware so far of in this ward: as well as Kingfisher, there is **Dollis Hill Residents' Association** and **Comber Close** (social housing); **Oxgate Gardens Surgery** is the only GP surgery in the ward itself.

While Dollis Hill does not have very high numbers of people in most risk categories compared to some other wards, in terms of the overall picture - and as a ward with a relatively low population – the digital exclusion risk here is still high. That said, the population at risk is probably very concentrated in the few LSOAs that are most at risk, with others being relatively low-risk, so digital inclusion efforts here will benefit from being especially tightly targeted.

**Digital exclusion risk by LSOA, and community assets, Dollis Hill ward, Brent**

Data sources: Brent Council, Citizens Online, NHS Digital, ONS OpenGeography

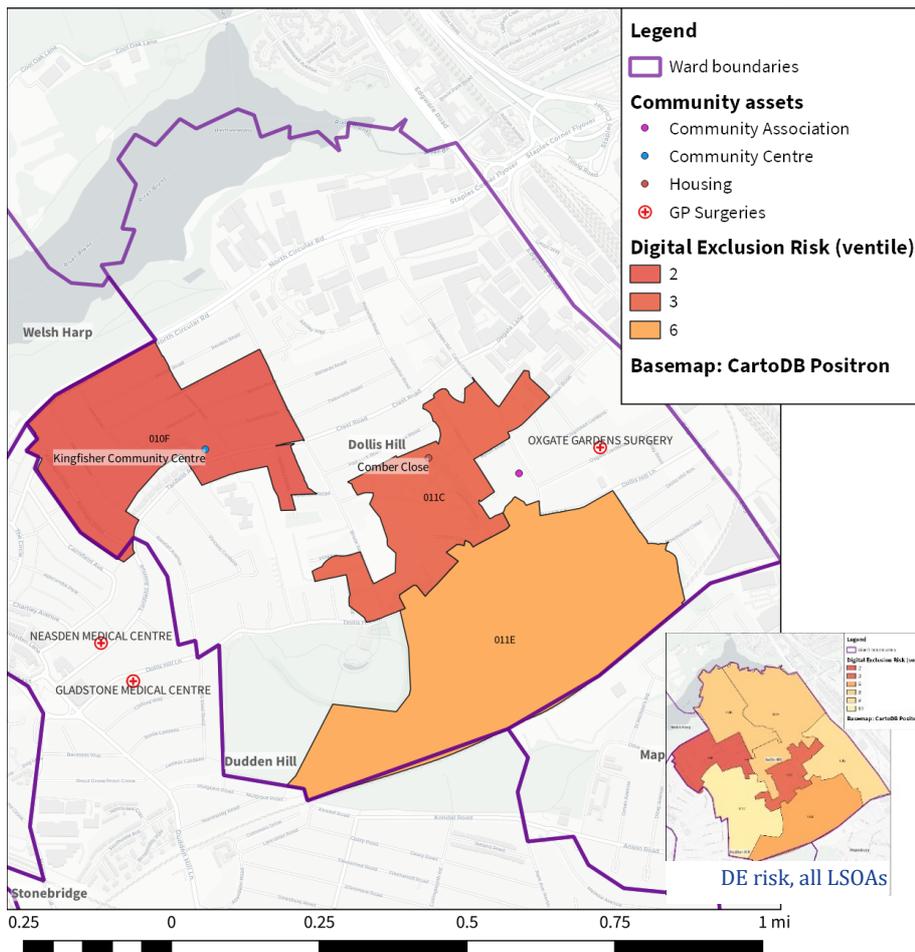


Figure 4: Digital exclusion risk by LSOA (highest risk only), and community assets, Dollis Hill ward

## 2. FOCUS ON SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The recent pandemic has highlighted how businesses need digital technologies to be resilient. This pathfinder would audit and attempt to improve digital support for small and medium enterprises. With the aim to increase the number of businesses with an online presence and using technology to run a business more efficiently. For example: having a website, using social media, cloud-computing, digital finance and HR systems, remote working and online booking systems.

### OUTCOMES

Increased:

- Uptake of Superfast Broadband for self-employed, Micro and SMEs
- Confidence in staff in using online services and business tools. Specifically in: wholesale and retail sectors, human health and social work, accommodation and food services.
- Uptake in business related online digital journeys
- Income and profit for individuals and businesses to improve economic development in the area

### BACKGROUND

There are 35,500 people in Brent who are self-employed. At 16% this is a considerably higher rate than across either London (13.2%) or Great Britain as a whole (10.9%). There are 15,485 Micro, Small or Medium sized enterprises (16,945 units). The largest portion of these will be employment either directly or related to wholesale and retail trade (19.4% of Brent employees – compared to 15.2% across Great Britain and just 12% across London as a whole).

Other significant sectors are human health and social work (15.3% - compared to 10.3% across London), and accommodation and food services (8.1% compared to 7.6% across Great Britain).

Earnings in Brent for full-time workers (£610.20/gross per week) are higher than those across Great Britain on average (£587), but are significantly below the London average (£699.20).

A higher proportion of employees in Brent are involved in so-called “Elementary occupations” – 20,500 people or 12.4% of employees – compared to 10.3% across Great Britain and just 8% across London. Earnings can potentially be improved by helping people improve their digital skills, and businesses to diversify their income streams including digital channels.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

UK Business Counts (2019)				
Enterprises	Brent	Brent	London	London
	(numbers)	(%)	(numbers)	(%)
Micro (0 to 9)	14,385	92.6	473,875	90.7
Small (10 to 49)	925	6	38,570	7.4
Medium (50 to 249)	175	1.1	7,650	1.5
Micro, Small and Medium Subtotal	15,485	99.7	520,095	99.6
Large (250+)	45	0.3	2,145	0.4
Total	15,530	-	522,240	-
<b>Local Units</b>				
Micro (0 to 9)	15,240	89.7	509,415	87.2
Small (10 to 49)	1,350	7.9	59,570	10.2
Medium (50 to 249)	355	2.1	12,885	2.2
Large (250+)	50	0.3	2,315	0.4
Total	16,990	-	584,185	-

Source: Inter Departmental Business Register (ONS)



New income sources increasingly rely on digital skills and connectivity. According to the recent Lloyds Bank Business Digital Index<sup>36</sup>, the **most digitally capable** small businesses are **more than twice as likely to report an increase in turnover**, than the least digital.

Digitally capable charities are also 28% more likely to report an increase in funding. However, a study by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) found that 25% of SMEs don't think digital skills are important for their growth<sup>37</sup> despite 22% believing that a lack of

digital skills within their organisation is preventing them from increasing their digital and online presence.

The study also found **more than a quarter of SME owners were not confident in their own basic digital skills**, and 46% of SMEs say their staff lack knowledge. Nationally, three-quarters (75%) of small businesses see talent as the biggest obstacle to their future success.<sup>38</sup> Retail sector small businesses are "nearly twice as likely as Service sector

<sup>36</sup> <https://resources.lloydsbank.com/businessdigitalindex/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/450431691/Quarter-of-SMEs-say-digital-skills-not-important-for-business-growth>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.dnb.co.uk/perspectives/small-business/sme-change-wakeof-brexite.html>

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

companies to say they lack the time to make their business more digital (39% to 22%)<sup>39</sup>. Many sectors including retail cite recruitment as the most significant factor that impacts their growth. This is unsurprising as the UK is suffering from a digital skills gap. It has been estimated that the UK has around [800,000 positions](#) left unfilled as 'digital vacancies'.

The 2019 Lloyds Business Digital Index reported that, in that year, small businesses who used Cloud-based IT systems, online accounting software and digital training tools had £262,000 higher annual turnover than those using none. This rose from a difference of £103,000 in the previous year - more than two and a half times in a single year. The report argued that, "whilst there is no silver bullet when it comes to increasing productivity for small businesses, we have identified five key digital ingredients that can help businesses to thrive":

1. Using data to make decisions on how to improve their online presence
2. Using cloud-based IT systems
3. Allowing customers to view products and services on their website
4. Planning to grow their marketing capabilities
5. Using or intending to use 'smart' devices in the next two years.

The Longitudinal Small Business Survey (LSBS) conducted by the Enterprise Research Centre in 2019 "aimed to build a representative picture of established micro-businesses in the UK and collect comparative data on representative groups of micro-businesses in the US and Ireland". This found that "Web-based account software and cloud computing are the most commonly used digital technologies among UK micro-businesses, with over 40 per cent of firms using these technologies. E-Commerce is used by 30 per cent of firms, with 25 and 18 per cent of firms using CAD and CRM respectively"

Figure 5: Percentage of micro-business adopters of digital technologies (2012-2018)

	2012	2015	2018
Customer Relations Management	7%	12%	18%
E-Commerce	12%	21%	30%
Web-based Accounting Software	15%	25%	42%
Computer Aided Design	13%	19%	25%
Cloud Computing	9%	22%	43%
Artificial Intelligence	1%	2%	3%
Machine Learning	3%	5%	9%

On a local level, Brent Council have recently conducted a "Digital overview of Kilburn town centre" in May 2020. This found that 46% of independent businesses in Brent had no digital presence (though 43% had their own website, and 54% were on social media). The proportion without a digital presence was significantly higher than in the Camden part of the town (39%) – though the proportion on social media was higher (50% in Camden). Across Kilburn, "Of the 134 independent businesses that have an

<sup>39</sup> Lloyds Business Digital Index 2019

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

active website, 106 (79%) also have a social media presence. Cafes, supermarkets and convenience stores catering for local audiences are less likely to have any digital presence”.

The document highlights that many businesses are utilising bespoke platforms for their sector, such as Treatwell for the (female) beauty sector, and Deliveroo, Just Eat and Uber Eats for takeaway food businesses: “44 (63%) out of 70 hospitality businesses are signed up to an external delivery platform... Of the 26 that are not, 15 (58%) have an active website. However 7 (27%) have no digital presence at all”.

Historically small produce sellers, retail and hospitality businesses would have had to commission their own websites and pay to have them updated, maintained and search-optimised by professionals. Increasingly the trend is away from this and towards sophisticated third party platforms that act as the intermediary and ‘do the tech’ including search optimisation, advertising and payment processing such as Shopify, BigCommerce or Squarespace. However, to use these platforms, people still need an internet connection and Essential Digital Skills. Users also need to know these approaches are available and how to use them.

Engaging with businesses is a huge barrier. BCs Town Centre Manager told us that it’s ‘difficult to speak with the right people’ in local SMEs. SME owners are incredibly busy and need good reasons to give up their time, if they can be contacted at all. In the recent pandemic 86% of business in Brent have applied for small business grants at the time of this report. In an ideal world these applications would provide a good opportunity to promote digital skills support available, but the business rates systems are not well linked to systems in the Economic Growth team and the data held across both is inconsistent. The Economic Growth team is trying internally to get this data.



### ACTION PLAN

Increasingly, there is no real boundary between the business community and local households. In order to develop understanding and mobilise support from SMEs the community will need to be engaged. Therefore work under this pathfinder would be well placed with employability and welfare reform work at BC or other key organisations. Support for improvement of digital skills and assisting people in finding employment, should also include training in order to access a wider variety of jobs – particularly with local SMEs - or even to start their own businesses.

Ultimately the aim is a community of individuals and small businesses that understand and actively support the development of digital skills and infrastructure development. Within this there will be a need to develop community, third sector and SME leaders, but ultimately the aim needs to be to develop and harness grass roots support.

**1. Consider working in partnership with similar business support agencies**, such as Federation of Small Businesses, Harrow Chamber of Commerce, The Local Enterprise Partnership for London. There is a lot of support aimed at economic support for COVID-19. SMEs can be difficult to engage with so a partnership approach may prevent SMEs being overwhelmed with similar offers from multiple organisations.

**2. Develop a diagnostic tool for businesses, to help prioritise** and decide where to focus resources in **developing digital journeys**. Trying to embark on too much digital change at once can be overwhelming. For example, moving to online HR software may free up more time to develop an online sales channel rather than the other way around.

The Lloyds Business Consumer Index report lists five top recommendations:

1. Using data to make decisions on how to improve their online presence
2. Using cloud-based IT systems
3. Allowing customers to view products and services on their website
4. Planning to grow their marketing capabilities
5. Using or intending to use 'smart' devices in the next two years.

**3. Offer Digital Champion support to businesses** to develop a recovery plan to include their planned digital journey from the diagnostic tool broken down into manageable steps.

**4. Signpost businesses to free training and support** from a wide range of sources such as: Google Garage, iDEA, Lloyds Bank Academy or Cisco Academy<sup>40</sup>. Use DCs to offer support with these resources.

**5. Facilitate peer to peer support, mentoring and sharing of learning**. For example businesses that have undergone successful digital transformation acting as mentors for others. This could be hosted in a Facebook group, Slack channel or WhatsApp group or use an existing business network that may now be online.

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of resources

### 3. FOCUS ON LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

**12% of people in Brent would like to see more money spent on help for older people, according to the 2018 Resident attitudes survey. This could include funding to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst older people – who can be at particular risk.**

The 2020 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index reports that:

- 38% of the online population agree that being online “helps me feel less alone”
- 47% identified feeling “more like part of a community” as a benefit of being online.
- “34% of those online benefit from using the Internet to manage their physical and mental health. Those with the highest levels of digital engagement are more than twice as likely to benefit from this (44% compared to 21% of the least digitally engaged).”



Photo by Siavash Ghanbari on Unsplash

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

In common with the Government's strategy for tackling loneliness<sup>41</sup>, we adopt the framework used by the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Jo Cox Commission, to define loneliness as:

*"a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want."*

The Government strategy notes though "Loneliness is often used interchangeably with isolation, [and] while they are linked and can often overlap, they are not the same."

*"It is possible to be isolated without feeling lonely and conversely to feel lonely while surrounded by people. Isolation is observable: for example, we may look at how many relationships someone has or how often they speak to other people to help us understand whether someone is isolated. We cannot measure loneliness in this way. Similarly, loneliness is not the same as solitude – which some people enjoy – as loneliness is an unwelcome feeling."*

### THE LOCAL PICTURE

It is difficult to identify geographic data that would identify people who are likely to feel alone. But, there are some proxy indicators that may be helpful to us. Across Brent there were in the 2011 Census, there were **8,808 single occupancy households where the resident was aged 65 or over**.

We can also look at Carer's Allowance (CA) as Carers UK report that 80% of carers have felt lonely or socially isolated<sup>42</sup>. There were 5,378 people with entitlement to receive Carer's Allowance in Brent as of November 2019, which suggests **there could be 4,300 carers in Brent who have felt lonely or socially isolated**.<sup>43</sup>

Entitlement to CA also acts as a "passport" to the carer premiums/additions in means-tested benefits such as: Income Support, Pension Credit and Housing Benefit. Under a third of Carer's Allowance claimants in Brent receive the benefit alone (1,538 or 28.6%). 2,514 also receive Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Pension Credit, Income Support or a combination of these. This indicates lower financial means and therefore greater risk of digital exclusion. Those who receive Housing Benefit will move to Universal Credit and be required to apply online, so this represents a group that are

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<sup>41</sup> [A connected society. A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change](#), published 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

<sup>42</sup> ["Alarming numbers of people feel isolated and lonely as a result of caring for their loved ones"](#), Carers UK, 2015, accessed 26/02/2019.

<sup>43</sup> The DWP explain on the StatXplore site that "Totals for all entitled cases show both the number of people in receipt of an allowance and those with entitlement where the payment has been suspended, for example if they are in hospital." There were over 813,804 recipients of Carer's Allowance in Great Britain in August 2017. To be entitled to Carer's Allowance, a person must be providing at least 35 hours of care a week for someone in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit, not be in full-time education, and, if in paid work, have earnings after certain deductions of no more than £110 a week.

likely to need digital skills support – as well as one that may be more likely to feel socially isolated or lonely.

Research by the South West Academic Health Science Network in 2014 found 45% of people over 75 admitted to A&E said they were socially isolated.<sup>44</sup> Triage sessions at GP surgeries to identify people who are socially isolated or lonely and who lack digital skills could be effective in signposting people to other support; including gaining digital skills which may be able to reduce perceptions of isolation or feelings of loneliness.

As indicated in the Lloyds Consumer Digital Index, being online may help people to feel part of a community, less lonely, and help them to manage and improve their health. Such a programme of work may need to involve the creation of bespoke courses on the Digital Champions Network for Digital Champions. Courses along the lines of “identifying and supporting people who are socially isolated” or “Supporting Carers with digital skills” could be developed.

Carers UK’s research with the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness<sup>45</sup> found that 32% of employees currently juggling work and care have felt lonely or isolated in the workplace because of their caring role. These employees may be more likely to be ‘sandwich carers’, caring for both sick, disabled or older relatives and dependent children, and as such “more likely to experience symptoms of mental ill-health (27%) – which can include anxiety and depression – than the general population (22%)”<sup>46</sup>. Carers UK report that carers’ top priority for workplace support is improved and consistent manager awareness of caring issues (37%) and more flexible / special leave arrangements (37%)<sup>47</sup>.

Loneliness and social isolation do not only affect older demographics and those who are carers. An ONS analysis of children’s and young people’s experiences of loneliness<sup>48</sup> found that 27.5% of children receiving free school meals (FSM) reported that they are often lonely, compared to just 5.5% of children who did not receive FSM. The report highlights children’s and young people’s suggestions for tackling loneliness:

- create a culture of openness about loneliness
- create opportunities to make social connections
- encourage positive uses of social media to alleviate loneliness
- prepare young people to understand loneliness and equip them to deal with it

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<sup>44</sup> “Top urgent care doctor: [Impact of loneliness at Christmas causes spike in A&E numbers](#)”, NHS England, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2014, accessed 26/02/2019.

<sup>45</sup> [The world shrinks: Carer loneliness \(pdf\)](#), CarersUK.

<sup>46</sup> [More than one in four sandwich carers report symptoms of mental ill-health](#), ONS, January 2019.

<sup>47</sup> [Caring and isolation in the workplace](#), CarersUK, March 2015.

<sup>48</sup> [Analysis of Children’s and young people’s experiences of loneliness](#), ONS, December 2018.

These suggestions highlight a key point. **While digital inclusion can help, through being an enabler or a catalyst, it cannot resolve these issues alone. Loneliness and isolation are usually more complicated and multi-faceted issues than can be addressed by relatively small amounts of support to use technology.**

Indeed, loneliness and isolation are major issues in our society despite the fact that we now live in the most digitally connected age our society has ever experienced. Over-use or even addiction to digital communication can result in the opposite—it can completely isolate people (whether at work or socially) and actually increase people’s experience of loneliness. So as well as building in more digital skills support, organisations should be mindful of “the need to plan for connection and design in moments of human contact” identified in the Ministerial Foreword to the Strategy:

*Government can also work with communities and other sectors on the way our neighbourhoods, public services, businesses and working environments are designed and run so they consider social relationships, not just efficient transactions.*

The loneliness risk map in Figure 2 is based on an approach developed by the Office for National Statistics’ [Data Science Campus](#), which uses NHS Digital GP prescription data to find areas with above-average prescriptions for five conditions where loneliness has been shown to be a risk factor (*Alzheimer’s, depression, high blood pressure, anxiety and insomnia*).

The data is available only at MSOA level<sup>49</sup>. These areas are roughly similar in size to council wards and in some — but by no means all — cases have similar boundaries and names to wards.

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<sup>49</sup> In this map we have used the [unofficial MSOA names](#) developed by the House of Commons Library; these names may not match local usage.

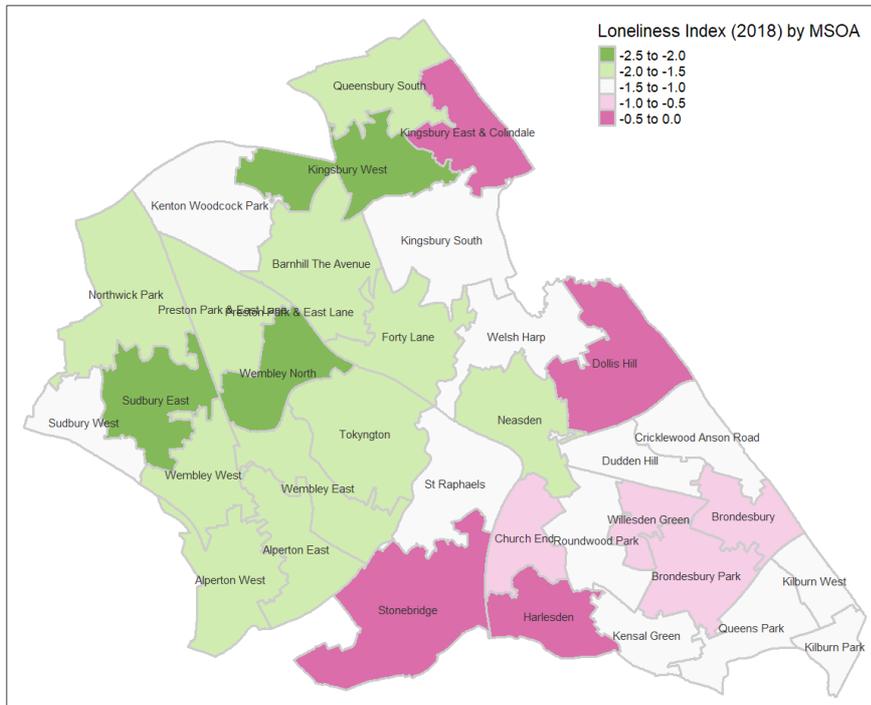


Figure 6: Loneliness Index (2018) by MSOA, London Borough of Brent. Source: ONS Data Science Campus, 2020

The darker pink areas on the map show MSOAs where the prescription data indicates the highest risk of residents experiencing loneliness. These are:

- Dollis Hill
- Harlesden
- Kingsbury East & Colindale
- Stonebridge

**What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?**

The ONS Community Life Survey (2016-17) enabled analysis of the characteristics and circumstances associated with loneliness in England. Results from this survey show that, nationally:

- 5% of adults in England reported feeling lonely “often” or “always”
- Younger adults aged 16 to 24 years reported feeling lonely more often than those in older age groups.
- Women reported feeling lonely more often than men.

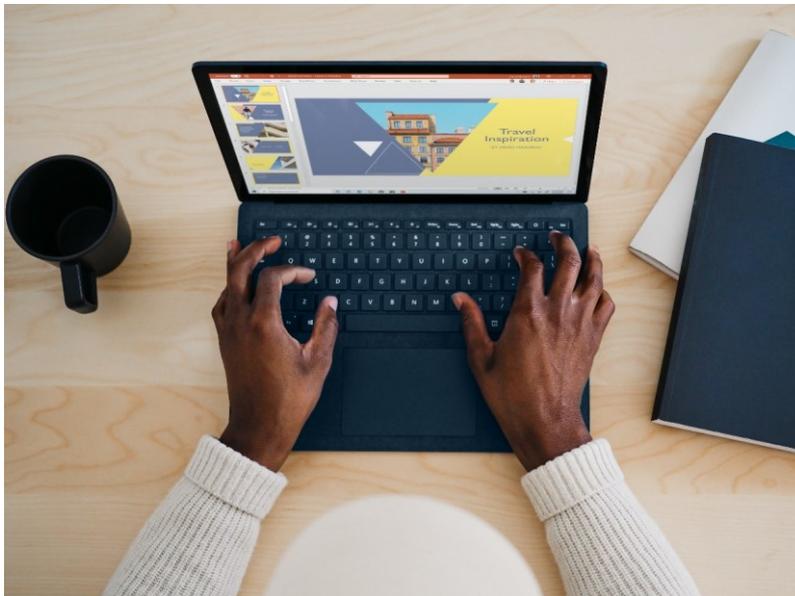
## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

- Those single or widowed were at particular risk of experiencing loneliness more often.
- People in poor health or who have conditions they describe as “limiting” were also at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.
- Renters reported feeling lonely more often than homeowners.
- People who feel that they belong less strongly to their neighbourhood reported feeling lonely more often.
- People who have little trust of others in their local area reported feeling lonely more often.

The Community Life Survey analysis enabled three profiles of people at particular risk from loneliness to be identified:

- Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions.
- Unmarried, middle-agers with long-term health conditions.
- Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area.

Further investigation of these factors among the population in Brent may enable us to pinpoint, to a greater degree of accuracy than the MSOA map, where pockets of residents at higher risk of loneliness may be found.



## 5. UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL EXCLUSION FACTORS

Digital exclusion is not something we can measure directly. However, we can explore factors which contribute to it so we can understand which people are more likely to be affected. **People who are older and/or disabled are less likely to be online, have a range of devices to access the internet, or have the full range of digital skills.**

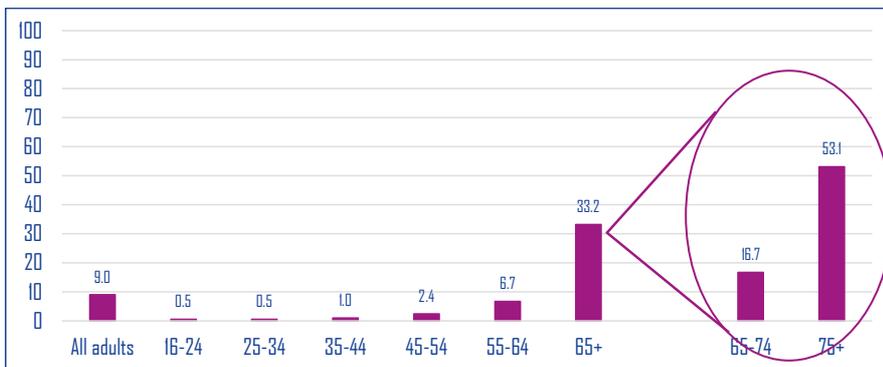
These issues are compounded by poverty – people on lower incomes, and receiving benefits such as Pension Credit – are more likely to be offline, to lack access to devices, and to have low/no digital skills.

### AGE

Older people are more likely to be digitally excluded – to be offline, to lack digital skills, and to be less likely to have access to digital devices.

- 33% of people aged 65+ have not been online *within the last 3 months* – hence they are effectively not online (ONS, figure 5).
- The great majority of these (86%, or 29% of all people aged 65+) have *never* been online.
- **More than half of the population aged 75+ (53.1%) are effectively not online** and most (89%, 47% of people aged 75 or over) of these have never been online<sup>50</sup>.
- We have used this age data as the basis of our estimates that **around 50,000 adults in Brent lack Essential Digital Skills**

Figure 7: Proportion (%) of people nationally who are not online, by age band



<sup>50</sup> [ONS: Internet Users, UK \(2019\)](#), accessed 25/09/2019

### LOWER INCOME AND BENEFITS

- Lower income is associated with lower likelihood to have all digital skills. **25% of people earning under £11,499/year have skills in each of the five Essential Digital Skills groups**, compared to 61% of people earning over £25,000<sup>51</sup>.
- We estimate that at least **12,600 people in Brent will need support making a UC claim, and 9,100 will need ongoing support**.
- 43% of applicants said they needed more help making a Universal Credit (UC) claim – which is almost always required to be done online (DWP survey).
- A third of claimants need ongoing support using their UC digital account (31%).<sup>52</sup>

In Brent, there are 42,500 people claiming either UC or Housing Benefit (HB). 29,400 of these are currently claiming HB, but will move to UC. In all but exceptional cases this will require a digital application and digital entries to an online journal. We estimate that **12,600 people will need support making their UC claim, and 9,100 will need ongoing support**. We think this is a conservative estimate as there will be other groups of people that need to claim UC, not just those already claiming HB.

### DISABILITY

- There are around 20,000 disabled adults in Brent (*estimate from disability-related benefit claims*).
- 21.6% of disabled people, nationally, are not regular internet users (2.7 million people) - *considerably higher than for adults who are not disabled (5%)*<sup>53</sup>
- Technological developments can help those with impairments to access services online, but **we estimate 4,300 disabled adults in Brent are offline**.

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<sup>51</sup> Lloyds [Consumer Digital Index, 2019](#). Likewise, The [2018 Lloyds CDI](#) found that just 64% of those earning under £17,499 a year had all five Basic Digital Skills, compared to 84% of those earning up between £17,500 and £39,999, and 94% of those earning over £40,000

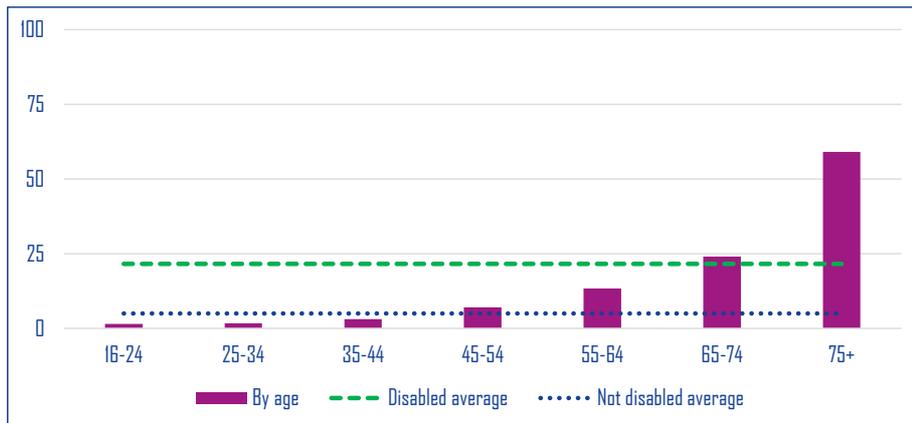
<sup>52</sup> Universal Credit full service claimant survey – DWP, June 2018, accessed 26/02/2019. The estimates of people who need help with UC claims may be underestimates as they only cover digital exclusion among those people claiming UC at that point of the rollout. The initial roll out cases were not expected to be the most difficult and may not overlap with the claimants or areas of the country that are most digitally excluded – particularly at a point when many people who would not have expected to need to claim UC are finding it is the only income stream available to them.

<sup>53</sup> According to the ONS Internet Users data for 2019, 18.2% of disabled people have never used the internet (2.3 million people), compared to 4.9% of those who are not disabled (1.7 million people). A further 3.4% last used the internet over three months ago, and may thus also be considered effectively offline. This makes a total of 21.6% of disabled people who are never, or not regularly, online (2.7 million people).

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

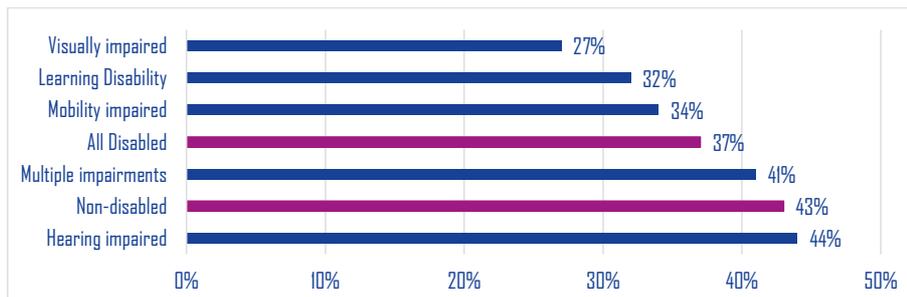
There is a clear intersection between age and disability: disabled people are less likely to be internet users the older they are (figure 9). **Among disabled people aged 75 and over, 59% are not internet users, more than ten times the rate for adults who are not disabled.**

Figure 8: Proportion of people who are not internet users: disabled people by age (ONS, 2019)



Disabled internet users are less likely to access public services online than non-disabled internet users: 37% vs. 43%.<sup>54</sup> This gap varies among people with different impairments: it is largest for visually impaired people (27% vs. 43%), while hearing impaired people are as likely as non-disabled people to use the internet to access public services (44% vs. 43%, see figure 9).

Figure 9: Proportion of people using the internet to access public services (benefits, government, council), by disability type



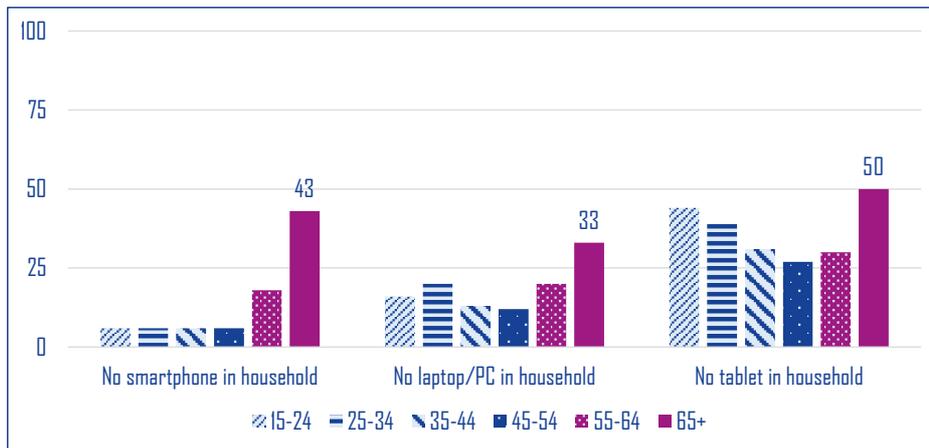
<sup>54</sup> Ofcom, 2018 Access and inclusion in 2018 report, available online at: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/accessibility-research/access-and-inclusion>, accessed 15/01/2020.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

### DEVICES

- Between **34,000 and 98,000 adults in Brent lack access to one or more digital devices** (between 13% and 37% of the adult population).
- Older people are on the whole less likely to have access to digital devices in their households.
- The 2019 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index<sup>55</sup> provides data on the proportion of households without smartphones, laptop/PCs, and tablets. In each case, the proportion is highest for people aged 65 or over (see Figure 9).<sup>56</sup>

Figure 10: Proportion (%) of people without certain devices in their household, by age band



In Brent, we estimate that between **34,000 and 98,000 adults lack access to one or more of these digital devices, between 13% and 37% of the adult population** (Figure 11). These are significant proportions, in line with the proportions for England as a whole. We can't tell from this data what proportion of the population lacks any type of device capable of connecting to the internet.

Smartphones are the most popular device. But people who only use a smartphone to get online can have problems with completing online tasks. Many sites are not formatted very well for mobile use and the screen and keypad on many smartphones is small. Ofcom research estimates that around a quarter of UK adults “only use devices other than a desktop or laptop to go online”.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Lloyds [Consumer Digital Index, 2019](#) – data derived from Appendix 24, based on an Ipsos MORI face-to-face Omnibus survey of 4,190 participants aged 15+ years in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

<sup>56</sup> The picture for tablets is marginally more complicated as younger people seem less likely to have these, likely due to preference for other devices, but

<sup>57</sup> [‘Smartphone by default’ internet users - A qualitative research report, Ofcom, 2016 \(pdf\)](#)

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

Figure 11: Number and proportion of adults in Brent without smartphones, laptop/PCs, tablets

	No smartphone in household	No laptop/PC in household	No tablet in household
Adults, Brent	34,808	49,494	97,234
% of adults, Brent	13.2	18.7	36.8
% of adults, England	16.0	19.9	37.6

Research by Citizens Advice Scotland found people reliant on smartphones to access the internet were less likely to say that they can use a computer 'very well' (28% compared to 41%), and less likely to access their email 'daily' (37% compared to 48%).<sup>58</sup>

The proportion of smartphone-only users who report they can complete a benefits application online 'no problem' is, at under a third – 31% - less than half that for users of all devices, 76%. This leaves a large proportion of smartphone-only users who experience some problem at least when filling in such applications.

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<sup>58</sup> [Locked out: the Smartphone Deficit, Citizens Advice Scotland, 2018 \(pdf\)](#)

## 6. CORONAVIRUS RISK AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION

The maps we present below use 2011 Census Output Areas (OAs). Rather than using percentages or raw numbers of people, in these maps we have used a risk ranking algorithm that combines:

1. The number of residents who had a long-term health condition that limited their day-to-day activity a lot (2011 figures). We've used this as a proxy for people self-isolating due to greater risk from COVID-19-19-19 related to an underlying health condition.
2. An age-adjusted risk ranking based on people aged 70 or over. We've taken the number of people in each 5 year age band over 65 (65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80+) and weighted these to show areas where a higher number of older people are at risk<sup>59</sup>.

We ranked each OA on those measures, where 1 is the area with the highest risk, and then added the ranks. Areas with lower numbers therefore contain a higher number of older people and/or people with a long-term health condition that limits their day-to-day activity a lot.

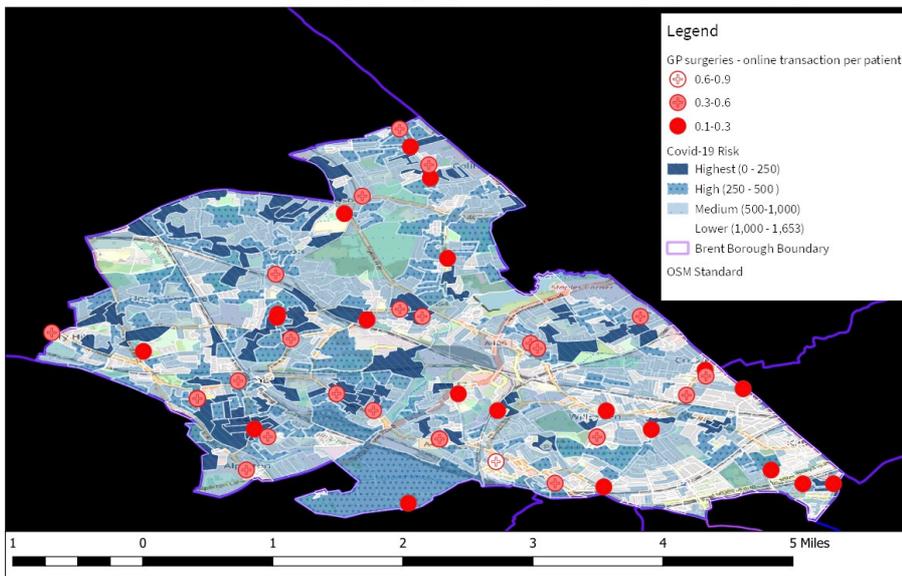
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<sup>59</sup> People aged 65-69 in 2018 multiplied by 0.5, aged 70-74 multiplied by 1, 75-79 by 1.1, and 80+ by 1.2

Figure 12: GP surgeries by online transactions per patient vs COVID-19-19-19 risk by Census Output Area

**Brent: GPs by online transactions per patient, vs Covid-19 Risk by Census Output Area**

Source: Citizens Online calculations based on data from NHS Digital (January 2020), ONS Mid-Year Population Estimate (2018), and the Census (2011)



This map shows the level of use of online services. It gives an indication of where surgeries will have to adapt most to a shift to online, regardless of how many patients are nominally registered for online services.

No surgery in Brent saw more than 1 online transaction per patient (TPP) registered for online services during January 2020. In 41 of a total of 53 surgeries in the borough, there were less than 30 transactions per 100 patients registered online. Most of these surgeries are in locations where the level of coronavirus risk in nearby Output Areas (likely members of the patient list) is highest.

The surgeries detailed below will require additional digital skills support to onboard patients to online services, and/or their local areas will require additional paper/post- or landline-based information about coronavirus and support available.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

Figure 13: GP surgeries with lower levels of online transactions per patient registered for the service

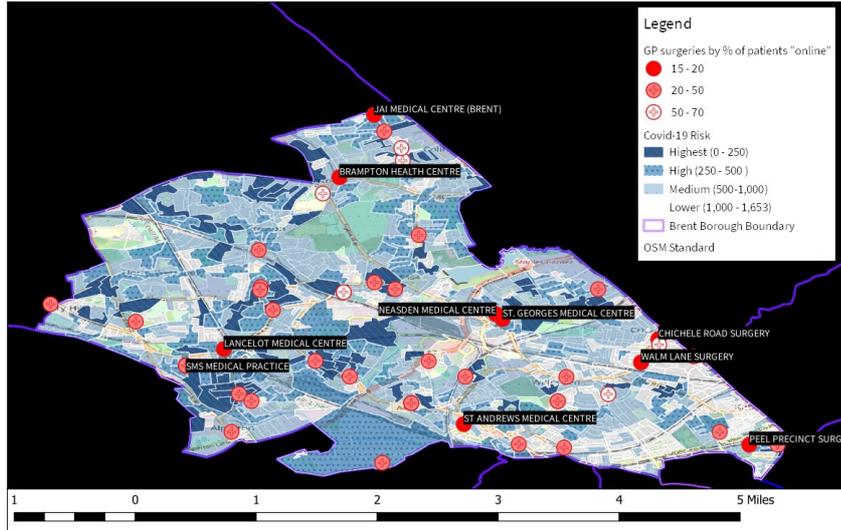
Practice Name	Number of Patients	Patients registered for an online service	Online transactions (January 2020)	Online transactions per online patient
PEEL PRECINCT SURGERY	1,240	211	11	0.1
KILBURN PARK MEDICAL CENTRE	8,093	3,114	414	0.1
CHICHELE ROAD SURGERY	5,807	1,073	164	0.2
STAVERTON SURGERY	9,025	5,871	927	0.2
THE FRYENT WAY SURGERY	8,478	5,956	942	0.2
CHURCH LANE SURGERY	8,963	3,421	570	0.2
CHALKHILL FAMILY PRACTICE	7,164	3,794	636	0.2
WILLOW TREE FAMILY DOCTORS	16,070	9,313	1,573	0.2
STANLEY CORNER MEDICAL CENTRE	6,250	2,519	432	0.2
GLADSTONE MEDICAL CENTRE	9,227	3,466	600	0.2
THE LONSDALE MEDICAL CENTRE	23,448	11,643	2,035	0.2
PEARL MEDICAL PRACTICE	4,773	2,001	351	0.2
SUDBURY SURGERY	8,833	2,933	529	0.2
THE LAW MEDICAL GROUP PRACTICE	18,004	8,289	1,497	0.2
CHURCH END MEDICAL CENTRE	8,048	3,651	666	0.2
PRESTON ROAD SURGERY	6,997	3,266	609	0.2
PARK ROYAL MEDICAL PRACTICE	7,586	2,791	526	0.2
BRENTFIELD MEDICAL CENTRE	9,106	2,029	402	0.2
ELLIS PRACTICE	8,975	5,234	1060	0.2
KINGS EDGE MEDICAL CENTRE	3,590	1,438	292	0.2
MAPESBURY MEDICAL GROUP	9,248	3,325	698	0.2
PRESTON MEDICAL CENTRE	4,253	1,601	341	0.2
ROUNDWOOD PARK MEDICAL CENTRE	4,171	2,583	554	0.2
THE WILLESDEN MEDICAL CENTRE	13,406	4,879	1,063	0.2
THE STONEBRIDGE PRACTICE	7,247	4,063	984	0.2
NEASDEN MEDICAL CENTRE	9,892	1,789	456	0.3
FORTY WILLOWS SURGERY	6,632	1,868	488	0.3
THE WEMBLEY PRACTICE	12,964	2,711	718	0.3
THE SURGERY	5,375	1,907	510	0.3
HILLTOP MEDICAL PRACTICE	4,026	978	264	0.3
FREUCHEN MEDICAL CENTRE	6,448	1,544	443	0.3
ALPERTON MEDICAL CENTRE	5,943	2,249	648	0.3
PREMIER MEDICAL CENTRE	8,374	4,398	1,328	0.3
AKSYR MEDICAL PRACTICE	7,455	1,975	602	0.3
LANCELOT MEDICAL CENTRE	6,822	1,021	312	0.3
KINGSBURY HEALTH AND WELLBEING	4,781	2,597	823	0.3
LANFRANC MEDICAL CENTRE	6,150	1,823	586	0.3
THE SUNFLOWER MEDICAL CENTRE	3,201	973	317	0.3
BURNLEY PRACTICE	8,908	2,427	807	0.3
UXENDON CRESCENT SURGERY	5,544	2,086	709	0.3
OXGATE GARDENS SURGERY	6,695	1,841	631	0.3

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

Figure 14: Census Output Areas by COVID-19-19-19 risk vs proportion of GP patient list "online"

### Brent: GPs by proportion of patients "online", vs Covid-19 Risk by Census Output Area

Source: Citizens Online calculations based on data from NHS Digital (January 2020), ONS Mid-Year Population Estimate (2018), and the Census (2011)



This map shows the potentially digital included/digitally excluded nature of each surgery's patient list. We can assume that patients registered for an online service are likely to be capable of using these services – even if they have not been using them previously or recently. The map identifies 10 surgeries in Brent where fewer than 20% of patients are registered for an online service (though in each case at least 15% are registered).

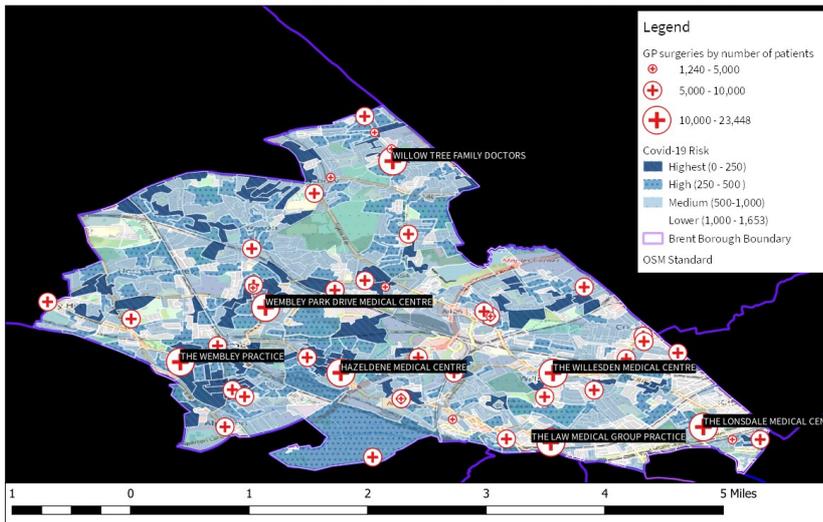
Figure 15: Ten GP surgeries where under 20% of patients are registered for an online service, Brent

Practice Name	Number of Patients	Patients registered for an online service	Proportion of patients registered for an online service
SMS MEDICAL PRACTICE	4,587	675	14.7
LANCELOT MEDICAL CENTRE	6,822	1,021	15.0
ST ANDREWS MEDICAL CENTRE	1,956	321	16.4
PEEL PRECINCT SURGERY	1,240	211	17.0
JAI MEDICAL CENTRE	6,163	1,102	17.9
ST. GEORGES MEDICAL CENTRE	2,278	411	18.0
NEASDEN MEDICAL CENTRE	9,892	1,789	18.1
BRAMPTON HEALTH CENTRE	4,860	889	18.3
CHICHELE ROAD SURGERY	5,807	1,073	18.5
WALM LANE SURGERY	8,149	1,614	19.8

Figure 16: Census Output Areas by COVID-19-19-19 risk vs size of GP patient list

**Brent: GPs by number of patients, vs Covid-19 Risk by Census Output Area**

Source: Citizens Online calculations based on data from NHS Digital (January 2020), ONS Mid-Year Population Estimate (2018), and the Census (2011)



This map shows which GP surgeries have the highest numbers of patients from the local area. The map identifies six GP surgeries (figure 6) with over 5,000 patients on their list (up to 11,700 patients). Two of these are among those with the lowest proportions of patients registered for online services, and the lowest numbers of online transactions relative to their number of patients.

Figure 17: GP surgeries with over 10,000 registered patients, Brent

Practice Name	Patients	Patients registered for online services	Proportion of patients registered for online services	Online transactions January 2020	transactions / online patients
THE LONSDALE MEDICAL CENTRE	23,448	11,643	49.7	2,035	0.2
THE LAW MEDICAL GROUP PRACTICE	18,004	8,289	46.0	1,497	0.2
WILLOW TREE FAMILY DOCTORS	16,070	9,313	58.0	1,573	<b>0.2*</b>
HAZELDENE MEDICAL CENTRE	14,304	3,046	21.3	1,117	0.4
THE WILLESDEN MEDICAL CENTRE	13,406	4,879	36.4	1,063	0.2
THE WEMBLEY PRACTICE	12,964	2,711	<b>20.9*<sup>60</sup></b>	718	0.3
WEMBLEY PARK DRIVE MEDICAL CENTRE	12,639	4,163	32.9	1,490	0.4

<sup>60</sup> \*The Willow Tree Family Doctors Practice has the third lowest level of online transactions relative to the number of patients who are registered for online services. Wembley Practice is the eleventh lowest proportion of patients registered for an online service in Brent.

## 7. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 A BRENT DIGITAL INCLUSION NETWORK

Citizens Online advocates a partnership working model as the most effective way to sustain digital skills provision. Many organisations are already offering some sort of provision that is helpful for improving digital exclusion, such as free Wi-Fi, access to technology, digital champions or help in people's homes. A network facilitates organisations working together to share resources and avoid duplication. Information is shared so that people are clear where they can signpost those who need help with digital skills.

In other projects where the network is a stand-alone project, we have found they have worked well with a 'three tier' approach (adopted by our projects in Brighton & Hove and Gwynedd). This is constituted of:

<b>Board</b>	Organisations who finance activity and projects.
<b>Steering Group</b>	Board members + organisations with a large stake in digital inclusion and skills work e.g. Citizens Advice, DWP etc.
<b>Network</b>	Any organisation including voluntary organisations, individual independent digital champions, third sector support, training providers that have an interest in digital inclusion and skills.

In practice, the Board and Steering Group may end up being the same and may not need to meet separately. There may be benefits to splitting these groups out as above if the Steering Group membership is large.

It is worth stressing that a network requires resource to run. This resource could be shared with another, or group of steering group organisations. There may be key organisations that are funded by BC to carry out similar support needs that would fit with digital inclusion. There may be joint initiatives such as with local CCGs or JCP where digital inclusion would fit with the agenda. Ideally we would recommend a full-time project manager as detailed in the Digital Brighton & Hove (DBH) case study below. A network and digital champions programme could also still be successful with a part-time role but obviously the more resource, the more that can be achieved.

### CASE STUDY - THE DIGITAL BRIGHTON & HOVE NETWORK

In Brighton & Hove the network has grown over almost four years to include 241 organisations, of which 90% are actively engaged in the project. There is a steering group consisting of: Brighton & Hove City Council, the local DWP office/JobCentre Plus, Citizens Online, Possability People, Brighton & Hove CCG, Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice, and Brighton Housing Trust. The steering group meets quarterly.

The wider network also meets quarterly, with the DBH Project Manager organising and facilitating the meetings. The Project Manager is also a Super Champion, training DCs in partner organisations and reporting to the steering group on progress. Producing case studies and marketing the project is also part of their full-time role.

The PM has organised a range of guest speakers for the network events to share knowledge and good practice on digital inclusion and digital transformation themes. External speakers have included people from organisations such as AbilityNet, Diversity and Ability (DnA), SCVO Digital, the Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology (CAST) and Lloyds TSB.

Digital Brighton & Hove (DBH) has also taken part in a series of citywide working groups to ensure that digital support needs were monitored and addressed in different areas. For example, they have been represented on the Work and Learning Working Group chaired by BHT, which led to new connections being made with number of local charities such as YMCA, The Passage, Just Life and The Clocktower Sanctuary.

DBH has also played an active role on the Citywide Connect Partnership Board, which brings together key stakeholders to tackle social isolation, delivering two Digital Showcases at the Citywide Connect Hub Events and leading on a collective presentation at the inaugural Ageing Well Conference.

Digital  
BRIGHTON  
& HOVE



# Steering Group



# Organisations engaged



... and  
more!

### 7.2 RECOMMENDED DIGITAL CHAMPION NUMBER ESTIMATE

We have estimated that a ratio of 1 DC to every 100 digitally excluded people is a good benchmark to make an impact on digital skills in a local area. There are number of caveats about this approach.

- We're not suggesting that the problem of digital exclusion can be solved once a certain number of Digital Champions are recruited. The issue is systemic and continually changing, as we detail elsewhere in this report.
- Registering people as members of an online learning platform like the Digital Champions Network (DCN) is a positive way to track the number of Digital Champions in an area who are 'signed up' to the cause – but it doesn't mean that all of these DCs are actively helping people.
- There is wide variability in how active DCs are, and not all DCs in an area are likely to be registered on a learning platform like the DCN. Digital help activity is likely to be happening that is not being recorded.
- The estimate of digitally excluded people across areas is only an estimate and is also subject to change and influence from other factors such as age, local policy changes and new support services coming on / going off line.

However, from our previous experience we do know that the 1:100 ratio can be a useful guide to help areas understand the scale of the challenge and provide an aspirational number of Digital Champions to aim for that, if recruited, trained and supported, could then evidence significant impact across an area.

Figure 18 shows Digital Champion recruitment over the duration of three different Citizens Online projects. Figure 19 uses the same underlying data to provide a comparison of the number of digitally excluded people in the local area<sup>61</sup> per Digital Champion recruited.

This shows that in our Digital Gwynedd project we were able to recruit 1 Digital Champion for every 70 digitally excluded people. By comparison in Brighton & Hove we were able to recruit one Digital Champion for every 112 digitally excluded people. Projects with higher DC: Excluded Population ratios are better able to evidence impact.

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<sup>61</sup> For consistency, this is based on a simple estimate: 21% of adults without all five Basic Digital Skills.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BRENT

After three years, a figure of 1 Digital Champion to every 100 digitally excluded people (between the Gwynedd and Brighton & Hove project numbers), would suggest **485-500 DCs registered to the DCN in Brent.**

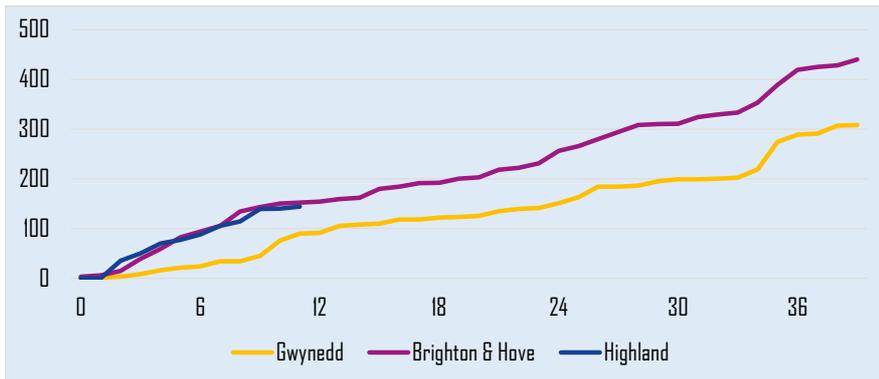


Figure 18: Cumulative DCs recruited to DCN from Month 0

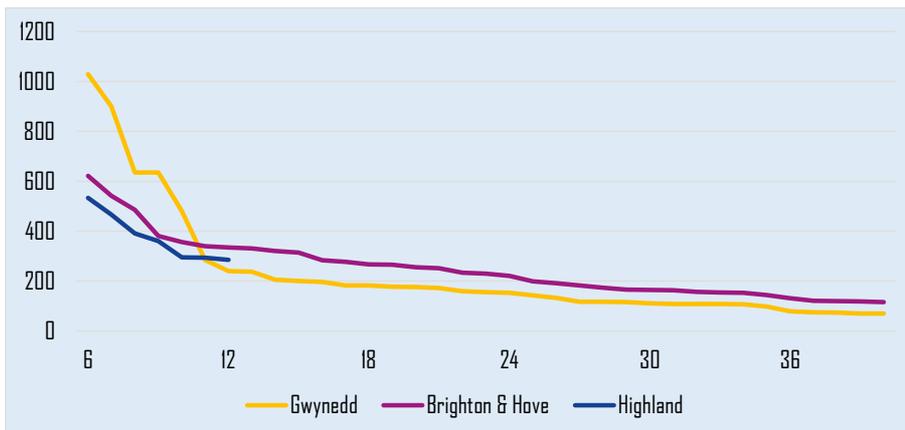


Figure 19: Digitally excluded people per DC recruited to the DCN.

### 7.3 ENGAGING LEARNERS

From our experience of running digital skills sessions, we know that it can be difficult to encourage learners to attend. Drawing from our work in other areas we would recommend the following pointers for advertising sessions:

- **Using images of real people that look like they come from target populations when possible** – to create a sense that sessions are for ‘people like me’
- **Including the DC helpline phone number** on all posters

- Wherever possible **communicating** with learners **via SMS**
- **Avoiding jargon** – some examples below:
  - **Avoid using 'Android/Apple'** – often people refer to their tablets as 'iPad', no matter who made it or what system it is on. Using 'device' is a catch all.
  - **Using the word 'Internet' rather than 'computers'**. People can be uncomfortable with the use of the word 'computers' as it gives the idea of high tech/office work/spread sheets/beyond their ability – and they may not think of their tablet or smartphone device as a computer. However, do bear in mind that often potential learners do not understand that applications such as 'Facebook' use the internet so internet isn't a universally understood word. Being specific about workshops to help people with Facebook / WhatsApp / Online Banking / Universal Credit application is more useful than generic offers about help with 'the internet'.
- **Changing 'we can help you' to 'we can show you how'** - otherwise potentially you will get people attending with no interest in learning
- **Being safe online is a key concern for many people.** Especially when dealing with finance they are wary of falling victim to a scam. Addressing these concerns can be a good way to hook people in
- **Finding a hook is important.** Family / local history, hobbies (online knitting patterns), access to archive TV footage, streaming music and skype can be enticing to first time internet users

The BBC Media Literacy research<sup>62</sup> is now a little dated but emphasises approaches that we continue to endorse around the need to disarm common concerns about the internet, using language carefully to emphasise:

- the ease of getting started and making progress
- taking steps at a pace set by the learner – guiding them to gradually build confidence
- 'discovering the benefits' – communication and convenience stand out initially
- 'enjoying the benefits' – that it can enhance and empower their lives or businesses
- avoiding judgements that it will make their life 'better' - they want to discover that

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<sup>62</sup> Media Literacy – Language & Branding Qualitative Research, 2013 - BBC Audiences North & Optimisa Research

**Phrases that work well include:** 'World at your fingertips', 'At your fingertips', 'Discover a new world', 'Explore', 'Open opportunities', 'Find out more', 'Explore more'. There is further information on language in the BBC Media Literacy research report.

### 7.4 DIGITAL CHAMPION PROJECT CASE STUDIES - WHERE DO YOU START?

**To successfully launch a DC programme it's essential that there is a 'Super Champion'** in the first instance to train and support other DCs and be a point of contact. There could be multiple 'Super Champions' in various organisations keen to be part of a network. Running a formal DC programme with reward and recognition is also a good motivator for staff and can encourage more digital skills provision.

**In Digital Brighton and Hove** network, the 'Super Champion' has trained staff in Brighton and Hove City Council services including; Revenues and Benefits, Libraries, Housing, Healthy Lifestyles, Health and Adult Social Care to become DCs. The training was online training through the Digital Champions Network and face-to-face.

**Revenues & Benefits:** Working collaboratively with the Revenues & Benefits Service Manager contributed to supporting Revenues & Benefits Officers (frontline staff) delivering a 'self-help' customer service, switching from face-to-face to online services in the council's Customer Service Centre. This involved providing both face-to-face and online 'Digital Champion' training to over 20 Revenues & Benefits officers. The collaboration also involved collating and sharing activity records and other relevant data to help us monitor digital support activity and provision in the Customer Service Centre.

**Libraries:** All Library Officers and Connect Volunteers were trained as DCs. They monitor activity, demand and provision using the Digital Champions Network.

**In Dorset, the network is called 'Routes to Inclusion'.** A Digital Inclusion Officer manages a network of over 100 volunteer DCs. The funding for this post and recruitment came from the rollout of Superfast Broadband across the county. The Digital Inclusion Officer recruits and inducts volunteer Digital Champions who work in a variety of locations across the county. Another part of the remit is to liaise with new venues and develop relationships with community groups and other stakeholders to allow volunteer DCs to run drop in sessions within the venues. There has been a coordinated marketing campaign to recruit the volunteer DCs and promote the sessions including a phone number to call to book residents onto sessions. Dorset Council Customer Contact Team are also known as 'Digital Advisors'; essentially they are embedded DCs and can signpost residents to the volunteer DC sessions if they can't help the resident to transact online over the phone. The Digital Advisors follow a script to help residents.

The Digital Champions in Dorset as part of the Routes to Inclusion group are well publicised, with a coordinated marketing campaign county wide for residents and employees of Dorset Council, to 'normalise' digital skills. The campaign features 'Digital Norm' who is encouraging residents to take up superfast broadband and improve digital skills.

# Case Study:

## Customer Service Centre

Our Community Digital Champions have provided digital skills support in the council's Customer Service Centre on a regular basis over the past year, helping customers to manage their queries digitally. This work focused primarily on filling the gaps in provision in the Customer Service Centre on non 'self-help' days, that is when Embedded Digital Champions from other councils teams were not present in the Customer Service Centre.



*Glenn (right) helping a customer to get online.*

Based on the data recorded on the Digital Champions Network (DCN), 383 digital support sessions took place at the Customer Service Centre.

A further 444 interventions were recorded by Embedded Digital Champions who received training between March and November 2018, namely staff from the Revenues and Benefits team helping customers during the 'self-help' days.

“

“It was useful to learn about the free online resources that are available and to think about how to engage people to get online. It helped to discuss case scenarios where we might be able to signpost a customer to an online service.”  
(BHCC Revenues & Benefits Officer)

“The training course was brilliant, really enjoyed it – the signposting website is very useful.” (BHCC Customer Service Officer)

”

### 7.5 SETTING UP A DIGITAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME CHECKLIST

**Recruit and train 'Super Champions' (at least one)** – these are go-to people for other Digital Champions

**Agree your induction list for Digital Champions using the Digital Champions Network (DCN).** For example, DCs may be required to complete the 'Digital Champions Essentials' and 'Using your role to help customers online' training modules.

**Decide on a name and brand for the Digital Champions.** They are often called digital friends / advisors / helpers etc. When promoting the digital champion role to internal staff, do stress that not everyone will be able to do things online. So the more people transacting online, the more people your staff can help 1-2-1 with assisted digital. If possible promote internally with events and a marketing campaign.

**Ensure a Senior Leader is supporting the programme** to champion to senior management. Some courses on the Digital Champions Network are CPD accredited so this could also be part of staff development. A reward and recognition programme may be appropriate.

**Communicate to managers to get them on board.** Often staff will be able to perform a DC role as part of their day job. It can be a very light touch interaction such as raising awareness by letting residents know that they can do something online as part of a conversation, or signposting residents to get help to get online elsewhere. In some cases, DCs may be released from roles for a couple of hours a week to 'floor walk' in customer centres, asking residents waiting if they knew they can do certain services online and DCs can help them. Or, drop in sessions within council buildings, where residents can bring anything they like online for help i.e. using Skype, streaming music, using Google Maps etc.

**Start with those most interested in being a DC.** Often a DC programme is launched within a team. However, inviting all staff who have expressed an interest will start to embed DCs into part of the culture across departments. DCs can also help colleagues. Shared learning with peer to peer sessions can also aid roll out of new internal technologies and can also be a part of the DC role.

**Keep persevering.** Keep communicating with DCs and tracking activity using the DCN to report to management and more importantly to give DCs a pat on the back. The DCN has lesson plans, supporting materials and resources to help DCs and make it as easy as possible for them to perform this role. Showcase successes with case studies and videos of learners. Use recognised digital events such as, 'Get Online Week,' 'Safer Internet Day', 'Ada Lovelace Day', or 'World Emoji Day' to keep momentum going. The DC programme will grow over time.

**Work in partnership.** Through a network, encourage other organisations to use the DCN and encourage their staff and volunteers to become DCs. A network will also help to

standardise signposting with lists of where residents can get help locally. Also to triage residents, depending on what type of help do they need?

### 7.6 SIGNPOSTING AND TRIAGE

Effective triage relies on people being able to identify the different levels of digital skills need that customers may present with. Effective signposting relies on people understanding where other help and resources can be found in an area. Effective referral relies on organisations having good working relationships with each other and referral pathways being in place.

Supporting staff to triage, signpost or refer people to the digital help that they need is essential. There are often many organisations providing digital skills support and in order to reach people, all organisations need to understand where they can find information about what help is available.

**We recommend adopting a universal triage tool for Brent, ideally designed in partnership within a digital inclusion network, which can be embedded within training and support information** (e.g. procedure documents, inductions, presentations). Having a central information resource available such a webpage or signposting and resource website would be preferable. All partner organisations need to review their websites to ensure there is easily accessible information for staff and the public on where to find digital skills help and free access points across the Borough. Ideally they are linking to one agreed central place such as the BC website.

The diagrams below illustrate the workflow for basic essential skills triage (Figure 20), starting with first assessing if a resident can turn on a device. Figure 21 outlines the Essential Digital Skills Framework, which can be a useful reference in triage and monitoring of digital skills support work.

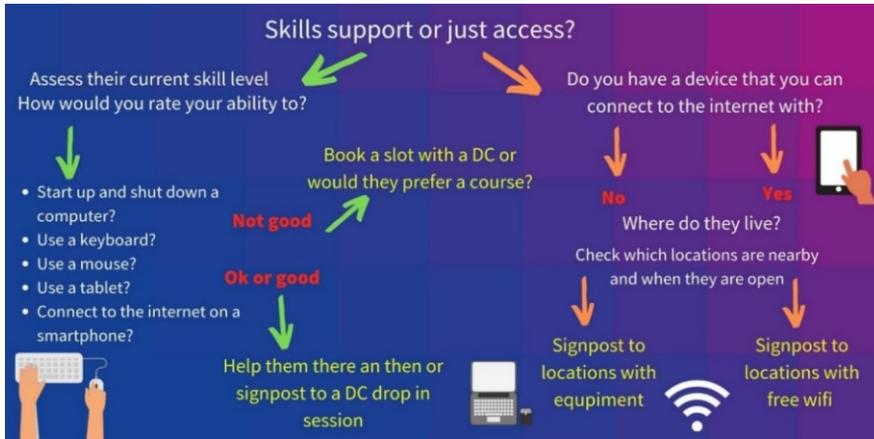


Figure 20: Workflow for essential digital skills triage



Figure 21: The Essential Digital Skills Framework

### EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASSESS LEARNER SKILLS AND NEEDS

Where can you access the internet? (If at all)

- Home / Work / Public place / Friends or families home / I don't have access to the internet

Do you have access to a device that can connect to the internet? If so, where? (This could be through family, or at a library for example.)

- I have my own device / I use a friend or family member device / I use devices in public places

How would you rate your ability to do any of the following? [Scale from: Very good /Quite good /Ok /Not great /I can't do that /I've never tried this]

- Switching on a computer
- Using a keyboard
- Using a mouse
- Using a tablet
- Accessing the internet on a mobile phone

How would you currently rate your confidence in being able to complete the tasks below? [Scale from: Very confident /Quite confident /Neutral /Not very confident /Not at all confident /I need help /I've never tried this]

- Scale from: Very confident /Quite confident /Neutral /Not very confident /Not at all confident /I need help /I've never tried this
- Searching and using the internet (e.g. using Google)
- Using LBBB online council services
- Using a word processor to write documents (e.g. letters and CV)
- Shopping and saving money online
- Sending and receiving emails -plus attachments
- Understanding how to fill in online forms
- Searching for work online (using Job boards and Find a Job)
- Using social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Skype, WhatsApp etc.)
- Being safe and secure online
- 

Are there any areas in particular you would like additional help with?

**7.8 BRENT STAFF WEBSITE SURVEY**

Brent conducted a survey amongst staff about the website. The survey sample size was relatively small compared to staff numbers with 47 responses. The key take away for us reading this survey was that it cannot be used as ‘user’ research, as 60% of respondents do not use the site as a resident.

Only 4% of staff used the site solely for personal use as a resident. 36% used it for both personal and work use. Also only 2 people said that they accessed the site on tablet or mobile, with the vast majority accessing the site on desktop. Again, this does not match with residents’ web traffic behaviour.

**7.9 BRENT RESIDENTS’ SURVEY**

When asked ‘It is easy to carry out council transactions online?’:

45% agree, 22% neither agree nor disagree, and 26% disagree, with 14% don’t know / no opinion.

**Q12. Which of the following online services have you used or would be happy to use in the future?**

	Used	Likely to use	Not likely to use	Unsure
Make a payment to the Council	46%	22%	27%	5%
Look for information about services	41%	30%	24%	4%
Report an issue or problem	30%	34%	30%	6%
Make a complaint	21%	38%	33%	8%
Apply for a service	32%	32%	29%	6%
Make an appointment	20%	34%	35%	11%

**Q13. Have any of the following prevented you from doing more on the council website?**

I didn't know I could	6%
I haven't needed to	40%
I don't think it's secure	4%
The website is difficult to use / I can't find what I need	7%
I am not confident it will work / do what I need it to	3%
There is no online option to do the thing I want	2%
I don't know how to use the internet	4%
I prefer to talk to a real person	18%
I do not have internet access	3%
My partner does it	*0%
My parents do it	*0%
Prefer offline methods	*0%
Other	1%
None	32%

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Q17. How much time do you spend on the internet per day?	
Do not use the internet	11%
Less than 30 minutes	4%
30 minutes to 1 hour	8%
1 - 2 hours	19%
2 - 3 hours	21%
3 - 5 hours	18%
5 - 7 hours	11%
7 - 10 hours	6%
Over 10 hours	2%
Unsure	1%

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**Television is still the most popular place to get news and info**

Where you use the internet Q17A. How do you access the internet?	
Laptop or PC	63%
Tablet	46%
Smartphone	85%
Internet TV	10%
Other	*%

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**Are you a member of the following social networks?:**

Facebook	72%
YouTube	59%
Whatsapp	76%
Linkedin	17%
Twitter	20%
Instagram	26%
Google	*%
Snapchat	1%
Other	*%
None of the above	9%

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