

**Equality Impact Assessment :
Sefton Digital Inclusion Strategy 2022 - 2025**

Introduction

The Sefton Residents Digital Inclusion Strategy has been developed as a multi- sector approach to coordinate activity and learning between organisations to embed digital inclusion activities for the benefit of our residents. This strategy outlines why digital inclusion is an issue for Sefton residents and how the public, voluntary and private sectors can work together to help address the barriers that some of our residents face and need to overcome in order to access and embrace the digital world and the opportunities that it brings.

The strategy is focused on improving digital inclusion for residents and seeks to set out and adopt key principles and actions to help tackle the recognised digital exclusion barriers including:

- Digital Skills
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Motivation
- Trust and Confidence

Each of these address a single specific barrier that some, but not all, individuals may face, There is seldom just one reason why people are digitally excluded, and there is no single approach to solving it, nor can we expect that absolutely everyone can utilise digital technology. Digital inclusion is about overcoming a range of challenges and it is recognised that no single organisation in Sefton can address digital exclusion alone, so the aims within this strategy will be achieved by working collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders with the intention of creating positive outcomes for our communities.

Objectives of the Strategy

- 1 To align resources to tailor our offer of support to areas of greatest need
- 2 To develop clear branding and develop a communications plan to promote the work being undertaken
- 3 To increase the number of publicly accessible computers and other devices available to residents
- 4 Increase the number and range of places residents can access free Wi-Fi
- 5 To review the accessibility of person facing digital services, including websites, apps and video conferencing solutions
- 6 To explore opportunities around device recycling
- 7 Identify funding opportunities to improve digital offers to address inclusion
- 8 To minimise levels of digital exclusion by focusing on service design
- 9 To ensure opportunities are available to develop the next generation of digital skills
- 10 To increase access to internet and digital services through a range of initiatives
- 11 Provide access to consistent provision to increase levels of digital skill, through learning and support

Are there any protected characteristics that will be disproportionately affected in comparison to others?

Age

There is a generational divide when it comes to digital usage. The Office of National Statistics data shows that

since 2011 those over 65 years old have continued to make up the largest proportion of adult internet non users and over half of all adult internet non-users were over the age of 75 years in 2018. This gap is also prevalent in the digital skills gap. Of the 8% of the population with zero digital skills 76% are retired and over the age of 65. (source Office of National Statistics Opinions and Lifestyle Survey)

Sefton has a higher proportion of elderly residents compared to the UK, 23% over 65 compared to 18% in the UK. Of 326 local authorities Sefton is ranked 18th for number of residents over the age of 65. Therefore, this digital divide could be more pronounced within the borough.

Elderly residents can be difficult to engage and changing lifelong habits poses a challenge. However elderly people are a group that stand to significantly benefit from technological developments. Technology has the potential to have a huge impact on the lives of elderly people, the introduction of in-home assistance can reduce social isolation, the need for vulnerable elderly residents to leave their homes and move into care homes, and progress in the health sector is able to overcome some of the problems faced by the elderly when it comes to mobility and age-related illnesses. Lack of interest is a common self-reported reason for not engaging online but this can often mask a complex range of underlying barriers such as low confidence and lack of understanding. For this group of people, it is important to understand what each individual's needs are and what type of support is most effective for that individual. Prescribed solutions will not work for everybody. Co-production, partnership working, and a flexible approach is essential to engaging with this group of people

Positive impact

The Digital Inclusion Strategy sets out key questions in relation to engagement with this demographic, and seeks to ensure the collation of data and intelligence across Sefton to baseline current activity, and measure improvements. The Sefton Older People's forum is also engaged with the Digital Inclusion working group and will be linked into consultation and engagement activity.

	<p>The strategy also supports and linked to the work of the Technology Enabled Care team to ensure alignment and the provision of services to support discrete groups.</p>
<p>Disability (physical, visual, hearing, learning disabilities and mental health)</p>	<p>People with a disability are more than twice as likely to be offline as those without a disability. According to the Office of National Statistics 54% of the total number of people who have never used the internet are registered disabled. According to research carried out by Scope 78% of disabled people say that having access to digital technologies is helpful and 92% also said it helps them to live independently. Digital technologies can assist those living with a disability to be more independent and access to the internet can be particularly important in reducing social isolation and connecting disabled people to their friends, families, and other social groups.</p> <p>Attention must be paid to accessibility and usability for those with disabilities to do more to reduce the digital divide. As with other isolated groups there is a need to design access and services around the needs of individuals.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Positive impact</i></p> <p>The Digital Inclusion Strategy sets out key questions in relation to engagement with this demographic, and seeks to ensure the collation of data and intelligence across Sefton to baseline current activity.</p> <p>The strategy specifically mentioned the need to ensure compliance with guidance such as the Web Accessibility Guidelines. Having information in accessible formats will help to ensure people with disabilities have the equality of accessing the opportunities</p> <p>The strategy also supports and linked to the work of the Technology Enabled Care team to ensure alignment and the provision of services to support discrete groups.</p>

	Where appropriate information in appropriate languages and in accessible formats can be available to mitigate and barriers. Working closely with trusted organisations and individuals, in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way to ensure opportunities are promoted will help to ensure that Digital access, skills and training are accessible to all.
Religion and Belief (includes no belief)	The objectives of the Digital Inclusion Strategy will provide positive impacts for all members of the community and fully includes individuals within the protected characteristic of religion and belief.
Sex	The objectives of the Digital Inclusion Strategy will provide positive impacts for all members of the community and fully includes individuals within the protected characteristic of sex.
Sexual Orientation	The objectives of the Digital Inclusion Strategy will provide positive impacts for all members of the community and fully includes individuals within the protected characteristic of sexual orientation.
Pregnancy and Maternity	The objectives of the Digital Inclusion Strategy will provide positive impacts for all members of the community and fully includes individuals within the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity.

Consultation:

To ensure alignment of the strategy to the wider Liverpool City Region, (LCR) the author has reviewed associated strategies from LCR colleagues as well as local and regional strategic documentation and consulted on the Strategy Document with the LCR lead for Digital Inclusion.

To ensure alignment to the Integrated Care Programmes associated with Digital Inclusion the author has consulted with the ICS Lead for Digital Inclusion

To ensure alignment to Sefton Place priorities consultation has taken place via the Multi Agency Partnership Meeting.

The Senior Manager for ICT and Digital also met with the Sefton Older People's forum to listen to their challenges and views on this topic.

Further consultation has taken place with key partner agencies via email including; One Vision Housing, the Department for Work and Pensions, VOLA, Sefton CVS and the CCG.

Feedback from all parties has been welcomed and incorporated into the final version of the

Digital Inclusion Strategy.

Further consultation and engagement around deliverables within the strategy is planned to ensure that the actions implemented are inclusive and meets the requirements of all sectors of the community.

Is there evidence that the Public Sector Equality Duties will be met?

The Equality Act 2010 requires that those subject to the Equality Duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- 1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.*
- 2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*
- 3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*

The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.*
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.*
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.*

The objectives of Sefton's Residents Digital Inclusion Strategy will help provide positive impacts for individuals, through the delivery of a cohesive programme of work across partners to provide support for residents who are currently digital excluded.

The implementation of the Strategy aims to develop a place where all Sefton Residents understand the benefits of digital, feel safe and confident online and are supported to develop their skills and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Partnership working is essential to develop strong, well-established partner relationships in Sefton and to further develop local initiatives for wider social good. These strong partnerships will help Sefton to develop digital services and a focused action plan, which includes developing the benefits that this work brings. Key partners have committed to the following principles as outlined in the strategy

- Put people at the heart of everything we do
- Design for the outcome and be inclusive to build trust
- Test assumptions, make, learn and iterate
- Do the hard work to make it simple

- Ensure staff and volunteers understand what basic digital skills are and provide opportunity to learn and improve on their own basic digital skills
- Commit support and resources to a co-ordinated approach to Digital Inclusion and Digital Skills activities across Sefton
- Share best practice to ensure digital inclusion activity impact is maximised and measured.
- Leave no one behind by ensuring there is support for those who cannot or choose not to use online to enable equal opportunity for everyone to use our services
- Provide a framework which enables residents to have access to digital equipment, skills training, and opportunities for them to learn and have support
- Promote the benefits of digital in ways that residents can see how this will help them
- Keep things simple by using common language and create trust with our online services
- Ensure our residents understand how to protect themselves online
- Where possible, use our responsibilities under the Social Value Act to use commissioning as a tool to drive Digital Inclusion
- Maximise and align funding opportunities that could progress Digital Inclusion
- Ensure that our strategy is fit for purpose, supporting the radical changes in technology, demand, and skills by committing to annual reviews

What actions would follow if this proposal accepted by Cabinet & Council?

Following strategy approval a programme of work will developed to support the detailed action plan, which will include measurable outcomes to evidence impact and improvement, the development of the programme as a multi-agency place based priority should remove duplication of effort and ensure the efficient deployment of local capacity.