

Report to Health Scrutiny Committee

Tackling Digital Exclusion in Oldham

Portfolio Holders:

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Purpose of the Report

This report provides an update to the Health Scrutiny Committee on the digital exclusion challenge both nationally and regionally within the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The report provides a summary of the current initiatives and support across Team Oldham including examples of council services, partners, anchor organisations, the VCFSE sector, and businesses working together with communities to tackle digital exclusion.

The report also provides a summary of future development and initiatives in Oldham to continue to tackle the digital divide. This includes:

- presenting this paper to the Oldham Leadership Board (and for digital exclusion to be a quarterly agenda item) to create visibility and ownership for digital exclusion with strategic leaders across the system and to continue the momentum to join up initiatives to have the most impact as a system moving forward;
- the Customer and Digital Lead as custodian of the digital strategy and roadmap will coordinate the digital inclusion offer and activity with services and will provide strategic leadership to drive forward our approach with momentum and to ensure a joined up and consistent approach across Team Oldham and beyond;
- tackling digital exclusion will be a key element of the Team Oldham COVID-19 Recovery Strategy;

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- embedding digital skills into the emerging Work and Skills Strategy for Team Oldham linked to economic development to ensure that we provide joined up support and opportunities for digital skill development and
 - developing a robust evidence base of digital exclusion in Oldham to demonstrate the difference we are making together as a system as well as understanding where we can have most impact moving forward.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- note the Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Strategy (*Appendix B*) and the opportunity to work across Greater Manchester to reduce the digital divide;
- note the summary of initiatives currently in place across Oldham and those in development;
- share whether there are any gaps in tackling the digital divide in Oldham that we need to consider as a system moving forward and to
- endorse that Digital Inclusion should be included as a specific item within the equalities section for all council decision making reports to ensure that it is considered sufficiently in the decision-making process.

Tackling Digital Exclusion in Oldham in Response to Coronavirus

1 Background

- 1.1 Digital exclusion is defined as when a person doesn't have one or more of the following: access to the internet (device, data or connectivity) or the skills, confidence or motivation to use technology (*UK Digital Strategy, 2017*).
- 1.2 According to the *Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2020*, 21% of the UK population (11.7 million people) do not have the essential digital skills outlined in the *Government's Essential Digital Skills Framework*. A lack of digital access, skills, motivation, or confidence can have a significant effect on a person's life, often impacting those who already face multiple inequalities. The follow extract is taken from the *Good Things Foundation, 2020*:
- 1.3 *"Digital inclusion is a social issue. A lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person's life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation and less access to jobs and education. It can mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion and an increased risk of falling into poverty. Digitally excluded people also lack a voice and visibility in the modern world, as government services and democracy increasingly move online. What's more, it's those already at a disadvantage - through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment - who are most likely to be missing out, further widening the social inequality gap."*
- 1.4 Further detail is included in the *Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation UK 2020* report included in *Appendix A*. The report also calls for a national strategy to reduce the digital divide reflecting on the challenges that Coronavirus has created.
- 1.5 Coronavirus has exacerbated already significant challenges for many people. As schools moved learning online, some families were faced with the challenge of how children and young people could participate in online lessons and access resources without a suitable device or connection. For those without digital access at home or the skills or motivation to use the internet, social isolation and loneliness (particularly for older people and those who have been shielding) has been a significant challenge. And for people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic and don't have either the skills, confidence or access to undertake job searches or apply for universal credit, life will have been extremely challenging.
- 1.6 The Good Things Foundation has estimated that at the height of the pandemic, 1.2 million people across Greater Manchester are digitally excluded. To tackle this challenge, the *Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Strategy* launched in late 2020. A copy of the strategy is included within *Appendix B*. The vision for the strategy is as follows:
- 1.7 *"We want everyone in Greater Manchester to have a fair and equal opportunity to access the benefits of operating online safely and confidently, regardless of their age, background or situation"*.
- 1.8 To deliver the strategy, a *Digital Inclusion Taskforce* has been established to understand the current digital inclusion offer and to develop a framework for delivery. Further activity will be developed to remove the barriers to digital inclusion and recommendations will be made to government around national initiatives. As GMCA Portfolio Lead for Employment, Skills, and Digital, Cllr Sean Fielding and Team Oldham are well placed to work across Greater Manchester to tackle digital exclusion together with communities, partners, anchor organisations, the VCFSE sector, and businesses as well as building on what we are already delivering now and in the future to reduce the digital divide here in Oldham.

2 Reshaping Support and Services across Team Oldham during the Pandemic to reduce Digital barriers

- 2.1 The following section outlines how Team Oldham, partners, anchor organisations, the VCFSE sector, and businesses across Oldham have come together during the Coronavirus pandemic to provide access to support and services to those who are likely to be digitally excluded. The examples used throughout this section are provided to share the breadth of support and services across Team Oldham rather than being an exhaustive summary of all support available.
- 2.2 To ensure that support and services remained accessible, Customer Service Bronze was quickly established in April 2020 with key services within Team Oldham. Customer Service Bronze provided coordination with services in reshaping how they offered support and services during the pandemic and to share learning and good practice.

Helpline and Place Hubs

- 2.3 Following the set-up of the Team Oldham Helpline and Place Hubs on 27 March 2020, 13,210 calls (as at 22 December 2020) have been received. The service was purposefully designed to be accessed via telephony only with no digital access as we were mindful to not exclude those without online access. Calls also enable customer service officers to engage with residents more broadly and to have quality conversations. Callers often call for support with food but following the decision trees in place and training the team have undertaken, conversations quickly turn to the root causes. Broader help is often needed, and referrals and signposting are made to a broad range of services around the themes of financial support, wellbeing and isolation and loneliness.
- 2.4 Having the Helpline in place also means that residents without internet access can call to ask for guidance around the latest government advice and restrictions as well as accessing local support and services without online access being a barrier to keep up to date with important information.
- 2.5 We have also promoted the Greater Manchester Text Hub which has been established to support residents who can't access local Helplines. We currently have the third highest uptake in Greater Manchester. Examples of its usage include residents with no credit to make calls or who have hearing difficulties or where there are language barriers. The Helpline Team receive a message from the Text Hub and make outbound calls within one working day of receiving a message to ensure residents receive the support and services they need.

Library and Information Service

- 2.6 The Library and Information service has continually adapted its approach at various stages of the pandemic. Upon the temporary closure of the Library network in late March 2020, the service established several support mechanisms to support those who may be digitally excluded.
- 2.7 The service set up a digital skills offer accessible via the phone. Referrals were made by the Contact Centre Team, Helpline and Place Hubs. Residents were supported to use council and partner services as well as advice and guidance on using devices.
- 2.8 The service has also supported residents to access digital content online at time when many people have felt lonely and isolated. Between March and mid-August 2020, the service had a 300% increase in e-book and e-audio downloads compared to the same period last year. A partnership with Age UK Oldham was also established to extend the Home Library Service to provide books to residents who couldn't get online.

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- 2.9 Over 300 Creative Care packs for children and young people were also distributed in partnership with OCL, Housing Associations, Schools, and Community Groups in early summer.
- 2.10 The service has worked together with the Good Things Foundation, Get Oldham Working and Action Together to issue mobile devices and data packages. To date, 40 devices have been gifted by the Good Things Foundation to those in most need. Below is an example from a resident who received a device:



- 2.11 The Library and Information service reopened access to public computers in early July 2020 to ensure residents could access the internet and online services. This continued to operate as an essential service during the November Lockdown offering PC usage and for click and collect book services across 5 Libraries. In the period from 6 July – 14 December, there have been a total of 9,736 public access computer sessions across the Libraries that were open. This demonstrates that there is demand in Oldham to access online support and services.

Education, Families, Children and Young People

- 2.12 A range of support has been available for the most vulnerable children, young people and families during the pandemic with a focus on digital access and skills.
- 2.13 Disadvantaged children and young people are at most risk of not having a suitable device for learning and not engaging with remote learning. From a recent research project, led by Louise Astbury from Oldham Sixth Form College, access to devices and data remain the key barriers to an inclusive learning offer.
- 2.14 Following the re-introduction of a national lockdown in early 2021 and the closure of schools, trusts, and colleges, it's imperative that we have accurate and up to date data on the number of children and young people without access to the internet or an appropriate device at home so that we can use our role to help influence the reduction of this barrier locally, regionally and nationally. Many schools, trusts, and colleges already hold this information which has already informed their access to DFE laptops and their own investment in remote learning. On 7 January 2021, each school, trust and college in Oldham received an email from Patsy Kane, CEO Oldham Learning to formally request this information within the next week. We will then analyse the findings and share the information with the GMCA who have asked to review the information as part of their future planning for supporting children and young people across Greater Manchester.
- 2.15 In Oldham, access to devices and data to date has been prioritised for children and young people with a social worker (including care leavers) prioritising those whose families or carers don't have access to suitable devices or data. Through Government funding from the DFE and GMCA funding, 1,036 devices have been issued in addition to 124 Wi-Fi

routers via maintained primary schools and academies. For disadvantaged Year 10 pupils, an initial allocation of 110 devices and 48 routers were provided to cover the 4 maintained secondary schools (including Kingsland) and through discussions and negotiations, we were able to extend this up to 192 devices and 58 routers.

- 2.16 Ultimate Products generously donated 90 tablets which have been gifted with referrals coming from Young Carers, Careers, Integrated Health and Early Help services.
- 2.17 Vodafone have provided 250,000 data SIMs across the country for children and young people with 30GB to use for up to 90 days. This offer is delivered via schools and trusts and the scheme was promoted by the Council via existing communication channels to encourage schools and trusts to take up the offer to reduce barriers to learning particularly for children and young people who have been required to self-isolate enabling them to continue their learning from home.
- 2.18 A Digital Families offer has been established to reach families with very young children who are unable to access face to face support and where children are too young to access most mainstream digital learning. This has been shared with families and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) providers. As part of this, an online festival was developed with partners from Oldham Theatre Company. Launching on 11th May for 4 weeks, the website had over 2000-page views and the YouTube videos had a total of over 100 views. Below is an example of feedback from a teacher:
- 2.19 *“The songs and rhymes from the gallery were amazing, the story sharing and the act it out made for a really comprehensive EYFS resource. As an early years teacher, I was happy to share with friends and colleagues - and at a time where there's so much 'stuff' online I felt like this cut through and hit the nail on the head”*
- 2.20 The Oldham Digital Skills Programme has been developed through a partnership between the Oldham Opportunity Area, the Rio Ferdinand Foundation and BT Skills for Tomorrow. The programme offers a range of activities as part of a suite of digital and personal development activities to support local young people. From July – September 2020, a range of digital skill development activities were delivered to 40 children and young people in Oldham with targeted activity in Glodwick, Holts and Lees to address digital exclusion where young people have less access to digital skills development opportunities. Below is an example of how one of the children and young people who attended the development opportunities is now using their digital skills:
- 2.21 *“x, aged 16 took part in wellbeing, filmmaking and leadership and is current receiving weekly 1-2-1 mentoring with the Rio Ferdinand Foundation to develop her anti-bullying workshops using digital skills which she is keen to deliver within Oldham Sixth Form College to other students using drama and forum theatre”.*
- 2.22 Targeted work remains ongoing. This includes the full Digital Skills programme using Positive Steps as the venue as well as other bespoke opportunities such as Saddleworth School, Fatima Women’s Association and Greenhill Community Sports Club.

Lifelong Learning, Employment, and Skills

- 2.23 Lifelong Learning, Employment and Skills services have adapted their support and provision to support digital access, confidence, and skills. The service is also maximising regional funding streams and opportunities to collaborate on initiatives across Greater Manchester.
- 2.24 The Get Oldham Working service has adapted its approach throughout the pandemic with a blended approach of face to face, digital, and telephony support. Residents who use Get

Oldham Working services have access to computers by appointment to undertake employability activities.

- 2.25 Providers of the Adult Education Budget including the Lifelong Learning Service have moved many courses online and are offering digital skill courses. The Lifelong Learning Service currently has 258 learners on role accessing ICT and digital courses with a target audience of learners with low level digital skills and those who want to retrain or upskill. This covers entry level courses such as using devices, handling information online, e-safety and communicating online, to level 1 and 2 courses and qualifications including Microsoft Office programmes and business administration studies. Several providers have also created tablet lending schemes to reduce the barriers to access learning online.
- 2.26 The Employment and Skills service has successfully been awarded £100k of GMCA funding in recent months. This includes £50k for a Digital Skills Officer to map digital courses in Oldham, to research training needs, and to work together with providers to develop a fit for purpose digital curriculum and £50k to issue 40 laptops to be used by providers to deliver support and services in the community and 40 data dongles to gift to residents in most need.
- 2.27 GMCA have approved several digital skills initiatives known as the *Fast Track Digital Provision* to be delivered across Greater Manchester open to Oldham residents.

Community Health and Adult Social Care Service

- 2.28 The Community Health and Adult Social Care Service (CHASC) has taken an innovative approach to engaging and supporting vulnerable adults throughout the pandemic, utilising digital technologies and approaches to ensure an inclusive responsive. A reduction in face to face contact whilst ensuring individuals are safeguarded and health and care needs are met has led to new and innovative ways of supporting individuals to realise the best possible outcomes. The service has actively worked with partners, the ICT service and residents to enable digital inclusion. Examples in this section include direct digital inclusion activities to vulnerable adults as well as indirect digital inclusion activities, i.e. via care providers.
- 2.29 CHASC have worked with the Oldham Virtual Hospital to develop a protocol for patients at The Royal Oldham Hospital to enable them to return home with health care equipment (pulse oximeters) and access to a text messaging service (Florence) for them to send in blood oxygen readings; enabling a quick and safe clinical response to any change in their health condition. Over 70 patients have been supported to date.
- 2.30 CHASC Client Finance have continued to support vulnerable adults who lack capacity to maximise their financial security through attendance at virtual court hearings and tribunals. The team have provided equipment and access to vulnerable residents to access the hearings and have been with them during the process (following robust risk assessments and adoption of Covid secure measures). This has led to several resident's financial security positively improving. One individual's benefit income increased by 150% and the court also ruled that they were entitled to an additional £16,000 in backdated payments.
- 2.31 Video Consultation software (AccuRx) has been rolled out to clinical teams so they can undertake patient consultations remotely and safely. This included supporting individual patients to access the software.
- 2.32 Keyring have increased access to Zoom licenses so they can hold more sessions online. This has included the Oldham face to face hubs moving to a remote hub. They are now delivering skill building courses online including Money Management to vulnerable adults. The provider has also ensured they can engage and support vulnerable adults in telecalls with GPs, social workers, DWP, and other professionals. Staff have also been trained in

using video conferencing, such as Microsoft Teams to enable remote attendance at meetings including annual reviews, learning disability annual health checks, Child Protection conferences, and multi-disciplinary meetings. Keyring have also established a Facebook group for vulnerable clients, staff and volunteers to share information about the pandemic as well as supporting mental wellbeing and sharing stories. This is now predominantly owned by the clients they support. Lastly, Keyring set up online activity Zoom meetings with vulnerable clients supporting each other through a peer support model to access the offer. These are now run predominantly by those individuals Keyring supports via a dedicated Zoom line. The sessions include quiz night, bingo, silent bingo, singalong and social brew. For Keyring service users there have been many positive impacts of using the technology available particularly around feeling connected with family, friends and other Keyring members. An example of the support provided was a member who was quite distressed at not being able to see her Mum during the first lockdown as her Mum didn't have a phone that could have WhatsApp installed. Keyring staff safely visited the Mum's house and called the daughter to they could see each other and talk. The Mum was supported to purchase a suitable phone and they were then able to call each other via WhatsApp whenever they want to.

- 2.33 Day service providers working with people with a learning disability and/or autism have found several creative ways to work with their customers during the pandemic. In the initial lockdown, all customers were contacted regularly by providers to offer remote support where possible. Many providers used Facetime and Zoom to keep in touch and to try to keep up 'face to face' contact, albeit on phones and laptops. One provider created online content for customers on YouTube, such as exercise classes, dance sessions, cooking lessons, and quizzes. Since services reopened, they have adapted again to support people who are unable to physically attend, or who have been shielding. They have continued to use Facetime and Zoom to stay in touch with individuals. One service is running physical sessions with a reduced number of people but running the sessions on Zoom. People attending remotely appear on the screen at the day service so they can be part of the whole session. The approach is very successful as it is inclusive and ensures that individuals can take part, see their friends and reduce social isolation whilst keeping safe.
- 2.34 CHASC's Safeguarding services held a multi-agency Facebook Live event with GMP and other partners. The event was well attended by members of the public which focussed on offering support, answering any immediate questions and reaching people where there may be cases of hidden harm. Two of these events were held through the first lockdown and due to the positive response future sessions are being explored.
- 2.35 The Safeguarding Service has seen an increase in engagement from individuals and families in safeguarding meetings via Microsoft Teams. This has been really positive, and families have been able to support individuals, which previously had been challenging due to geographic locations. As these have been mainly remote meetings via Microsoft Teams, families and individuals have been better engaged.
- 2.36 CHASC has continued to support co-production with vulnerable adults and their carers through its Partnership Board model of engagement. Representatives across the Learning Disabilities and Carers Partnership Boards have received support to access ICT, advice on ICT, and assistance to engage in meetings, ensuring local voices continue to shape delivery of CHASC services.
- 2.37 The CCG have set up a Digital Hub for Care Homes at the start of the pandemic and our commissioning service worked closely with all Care Homes to ensure they were provided with a smart phone, thermometers, and pulse oximeters to use and were able to link with the Digital Hub. This enabled clinical support for Care Homes to take place remotely and safely. Care Homes were provided with a clear pathway process.

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- 2.38 The Commissioning and Quality Service have supported Care Homes to access free tablets through offers from charities and NHS Digital. Following the completion of delivery of the NHS Digital iPad offer, all Care Homes in the borough will have at least one tablet device (with most homes having more than one). These are being used both to support resident care but also to allow residents to maintain contact with friends and family whilst visiting to the homes is so restricted.
- 2.39 We have started a roll out of the Safe Steps CV19 Tracker across Care Homes in Oldham. The tracker is accessed via a website and therefore accessible in all homes. It allows carers to record the current position of residents within the home which can then be viewed by clinicians. It is intended to act as an early warning system in terms of Covid outbreaks, but the same software can also be used for outbreak monitoring around any infections e.g. influenza. It should enable clinicians to quickly provide additional support or input in the Care Home where required. Roll out is currently in phase one, with 5 Care Homes 'onboarded' and inputting data into the system. There is an option to add in the Restore 2 Mini, a deterioration tracking tool and the Safe Steps falls prevention tool at a later stage of roll out as they are all based within the same web platform. Health Innovation Manchester have secured funding for the tool until at least March 2021 so there are currently no associated costs.
- 2.40 All Care Homes and care at home providers have been able to access an NHS Email account without completing the full *Digital Security Protection Toolkit* in advance. The Commissioning Service provided support to our providers to assist them to sign up to this and have worked with the NHS Digital North Team to run training and troubleshooting sessions to ensure that providers are able to access these accounts. Having an NHS email account means that NHS services can send referral and other resident information securely via email rather than fax, the care home has access to the NHS Directory – all NHS email addresses across the country and the care home can access Microsoft Teams for free.
- 2.41 The Care at Home and Care Home Provider Forums have continued to meet virtually via teams throughout the pandemic. The Provider forums are designed to bring care at home, care home managers and senior staff together with partners across health and social care, to provide a support network and an opportunity to share experiences, showcase good practice, discuss any issues and challenges, and identify any support and training needs. Where providers reported difficulty in utilising Microsoft Teams to access these meetings, ICT individual training and support was arranged for providers to address any issues and concerns they may have around accessing and participating at the forums and other ad-hoc events via Microsoft Teams. This approach was invaluable and helped build staff confidence in using Microsoft Teams. The virtual provider forums have been well attended and incredibly productive as managers and staff have been able to directly get answers to questions and issues like PPE, swab testing, hospital discharges, additional expenditure, and finance support.
- 2.42 A series of specialist events have been held to engage providers on specific issues such as the Infection Control Fund, PPE, and more recently to seek their views on the implementation of the Lateral Flow Tests, and the development of the *Care Home Visitors Policy*. Over 55 provider representatives participated at the last forum which was for Care Homes in relation to rapid testing.
- 2.43 The Integrated Community Equipment Service have ensured all new prescribers based within acute and community settings still receive training on how to order equipment by running monthly virtual training sessions via Microsoft Teams. 46 new prescribers have been trained virtually between March and December 2020 to ensure that they are confident
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with ordering equipment via Ross Care which will avoid delayed discharges, help to prevent admission, or prevent deterioration. The training also ensures they are aware of internal policies and procedures. Product training sessions have also been delivered via Microsoft Teams to train Northern Care Alliance (NCA) clinicians on prescription of complex equipment such as tilt in space shower chairs and specialist seating to ensure they are able to confidently adjust the chairs to meet the needs of their clients and ensure their safety.

- 2.44 Throughout the pandemic CHASC has continued to ensure its workforce is highly skilled and this has included delivery of core, essential training such as the Mental Capacity Act. Virtual deployment of this training meant the service was able to facilitate large numbers of staff and deliver the training on how to undertake virtual assessments; ensuring compliance with changing statutory requirements. The focus on completing meaningful assessments, meeting legal and statutory responsibilities, and supporting individuals were essential themes. This training package has been seen as a model of best practice and is being rolled out across Greater Manchester.
- 2.45 Housing21, who manage our older persons housing stock have developed a specification for the replacement of the alarm and door entry systems between 2022 and 2024/2025. This specification focusses on digital inclusion through the adoption of fully digitalised systems and Wi-Fi capability.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

- 2.46 In November, DWP established the Flexible Work Fund. The offer has been established for residents who are unemployed, actively seeking work, and in receipt of work-related benefits when access to a suitable device or connectivity is a barrier to searching and applying for jobs. To apply for the scheme, residents can ask their work coach of place a request through their work journal. This offer has been shared widely across the council, partners, anchor organisations and the VCFSE sector to ensure awareness of the scheme. This scheme is significant, as *the Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Strategy* (included in *Appendix B*) identified through its research with The Good Things Foundation that 40% of benefit claimants in Greater Manchester had very low digital engagement.

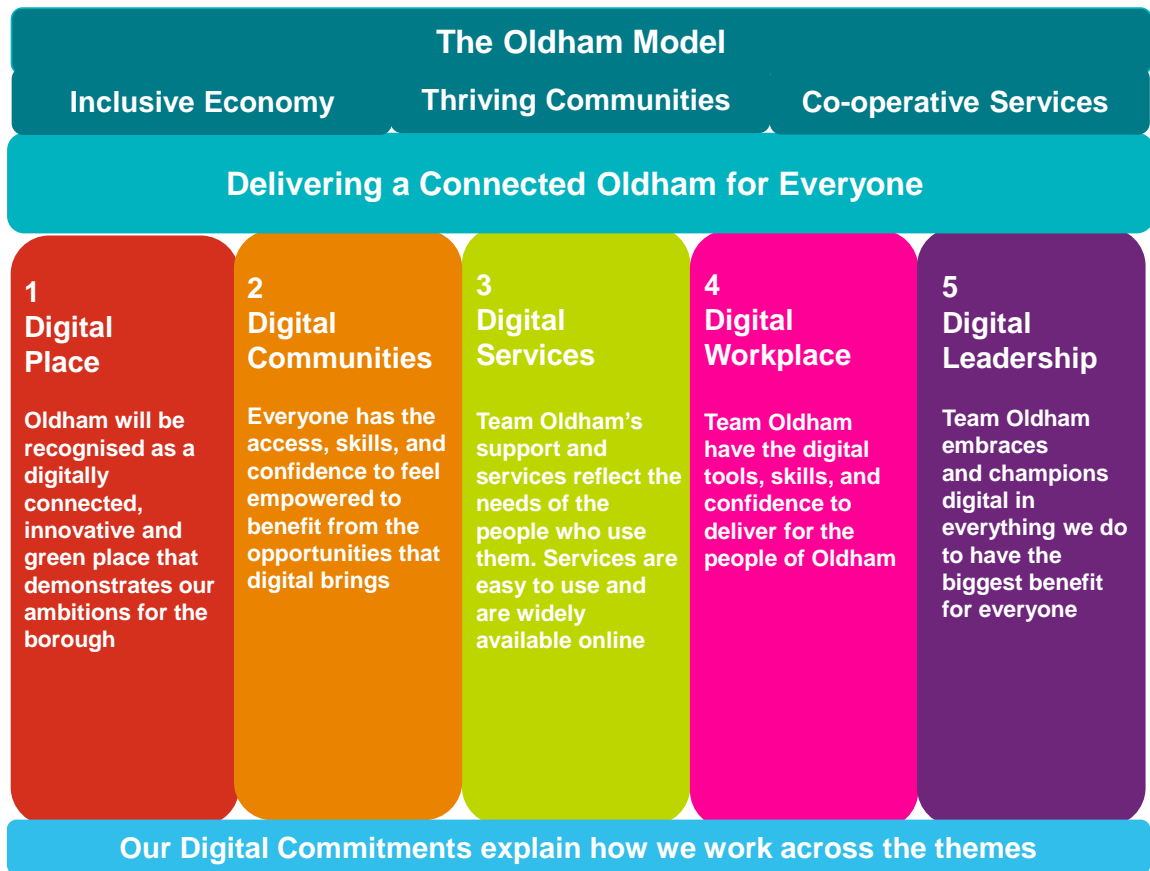
Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise

- 2.47 Action Together have donated £39,950 between March and December 2020 to a broad range of VCFSE organisations across Oldham to enable them to ensure that their members are supported with digital access and connectivity.

3 Moving Forward Together to Tackle Digital Exclusion

- 3.1 Moving forward, we are keen to build on the energy and momentum that reshaping access to services and tackling the barriers to digital inclusion presented by Coronavirus has enabled by expanding the collaboration across services, partners, anchor organisations, the VCFSE sector, and businesses working together with communities. By working together as a system, we can maximise the local, regional and national funding streams available to create economies of scale and to communicate and share a clear and accessible approach with residents. To help make this a reality, this paper will be presented to the Oldham Leadership Board (and for digital exclusion to be a quarterly agenda item) to create visibility and ownership for digital exclusion with strategic leaders across the system and to continue the momentum to join up initiatives to have the most impact as a system moving forward.

3.2 *The Team Oldham Digital Strategy* and implementation roadmap are in the final stages of development. The digital strategy is broad and ambitious and focuses on the various digital elements that delivered together will realise our ambition of delivering a connected Oldham for everyone. This is illustrated in the diagram below:



3.3 The Customer and Digital Lead as custodian of the digital strategy and roadmap will coordinate the digital inclusion offer and activity with services and will provide strategic leadership to drive forward our approach with momentum and to ensure a joined up and consistent approach across Team Oldham and beyond.

3.4 Tackling digital exclusion will also be a key element of the Team Oldham COVID-19 Recovery Strategy. Please see *Section 5* for further detail.

3.5 Digital skills will be embedded into the emerging Work and Skills Strategy for Team Oldham linked to economic development to ensure that we provide joined up support and opportunities for digital skill development.

3.6 Learning and evidence is now being gathered and shared nationally around the impact of Coronavirus on digital exclusion with the aim of influencing government policy. We are keen to learn from this and build it into our work regionally and locally. An example of the emerging recommendations is *Build Back Fairer*, a report produced by the Institute of Health Equity and commissioned by the Health Foundation published in December 2020. The report suggests several recommendations to consider when re-building society and the economy post-Coronavirus. This includes addressing inequalities in access to laptops for children and young people and a national programme to enable the provision of laptops to more deprived pupils should be expanded and resourced appropriately. Wolverhampton Council have already established and funded a scheme for schools when children are

required to isolate at home to ensure that they have access to ICT equipment and data to continue their learning.

- 3.7 The following initiatives are currently in development for delivery across Team Oldham in the coming weeks and months:

Tablet Lending and Gifting Scheme for Adults in most need

- 3.8 We are committed to reducing the barriers to accessing suitable devices and connectivity. Part of our focus is establishing a blended tablet lending and gifting scheme for adults that will be managed by the Library and Information service. Funded by a successful bid of £40k funding from GMCA from the Local Growth Fund and £10k from the Library and Information Service budget, the offer entails developing a cost-effective tablet gifting scheme that will benefit those in most immediate need of digital kit and connectivity, blended with a tablet lending scheme to widen digital participation beyond the scope of a gifting scheme alone. This will be supported by Oldham Libraries' digital skills offer with clear pathways to further training for example via the Lifelong Learning service.
- 3.9 Building on the success of Oldham Libraries participation in the Good Things Foundation project (as outlined in *section 2.10*), recipients will be prioritised based on need including those who are on a low income or Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or have a physical or learning disability, or over 65 or are an unpaid carer. Criteria will be based on reducing the barriers to digital access and the impact that receiving a device could have for a household or organisation. Exact data sources to proactively identify recipients in addition to a nomination or referral request both directly and on someone's behalf will need to be established. This requires further definition and debate across the system.
- 3.10 We aim to establish a range of cost-effective devices over time to meet several levels of confidence in using devices and to meet a range of learning or physical needs.
- 3.11 We are currently working with CCG colleagues to establish whether the lending scheme can come together to create economies of scale as part of a single scheme that meets the needs of older people, dementia and learning difficulties.
- 3.12 We also aim to consolidate (where this makes sense), the offer from across the council and partners into a single tablet lending and gifting scheme to ensure those who most need devices can access them. This will also help us to communicate a clear approach to residents and partners to access the scheme.
- 3.13 We aim to start the scheme by late February 2021. We are currently working with ICT colleagues to identify suitable devices and to manage risks around insurance and lending and to establish referral pathways.
- 3.14 We know that the number of devices and data packages that we can obtain with £50k funding will not solve the access to digital barrier. Moving forward, we will seek to identify additional regional or national funding streams to continue to build up our tablet lending and gifting programme.

Wi-Fi Packages for Independent Care Leavers

- 3.15 Childrens Services are aiming to provide a mobile Wi-Fi package for our independent Care Leavers. This would be a significant investment from the Council and a pledge to ensure that all our Care Leavers had access to the internet would really support our engagement

with Care Leavers and improve education, employment, and training opportunities. Greater Manchester is working on securing an offer from one of the five big internet companies as part of a Care Leaver covenant pledge.

Census 2021

- 3.16 A Census Working Group has been established to bring together several officers from across Team Oldham to ensure we maximise the response rate in Oldham.
- 3.17 A number of workstreams have been established including 'Assisted Digital Service'. The Library and Information Service made a successful bid to the Good Things Foundation. This includes funding 2 members of staff for 35 hours per week for the duration of the census to provide support at Oldham and Crompton Libraries to provide assisted digital support for people to complete the census. Working with Action Together, the service is also arranging for digital champion volunteers across the other Libraries that are currently open to provide support to complete the census.
- 3.18 The Strategy and Performance service are working with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) who are responsible for running the census, to ensure that Oldham receives a sufficient number of paper copies for those where access to digital or digital skills is a barrier to completing the census. ONS have shared their calculations with us and we are currently compiling an evidence base with the aim of checking the volume and locations that the paper copies will be sent to and, if necessary, challenging this and obtaining more paper copies and/ or a re-think of the areas that paper copies are directed to.

Developing a Robust Evidence Base on Digital Exclusion

- 3.19 Moving forward, we are keen to develop a robust evidence base to inform which parts of the borough we need to deliver and/ or commission digital inclusion activity based on an up to date understanding of where local support is needed. We are keen to create impact in a more targeted and joined up way informed by the data we hold. This will be at a hyper local level based on the Thriving Communities Index. No individuals will be identified within the data.
- 3.20 In a dashboard and webmap format, this would bring together a number of evidence bases collated nationally and locally to ensure we have up to date information. This will likely include age data as the *Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Strategy* (see *Appendix B*) estimates that 52% of those offline are between 60 and 70. It will also include deprivation data. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD) data contains historic data sets stretching back as far 2011) and we therefore feel that we are better placed to use our own local data that is up to date. This may include local data on pension credit, qualifications, unemployment, households in receipt of discretionary payments, and disability payments as examples. We will also collate information about those in Oldham who engage with the council digitally such as residents who have signed up to e-billing. Lastly, we will pull together information about broadband connectivity and those who are less likely to have an internet connection.
- 3.21 Next steps include engaging with the Council's Information Governance Team and continuing the debate and discussion at pace around which data sets are in scope. Following this, a commission will be developed for Strategy and Performance and ICT colleagues to deliver and maintain the dashboard and web-map. We aim to have a minimum viable product in place by the end of March 2021 at the latest. This will be funded by a

successful bid of £10k funding from GMCA from the Local Growth Fund. Not all of this funding may be needed to develop and maintain the dashboard and web-map. If funds remain, they will be added to the tablet lending and gifting scheme.

4 Key Questions for Health Scrutiny to Consider

- 4.1 What gaps to Health Scrutiny consider there to be in tackling the digital divide in Oldham?
- 4.2 Do Members endorse that Digital Inclusion should be included as a specific item within the equalities section for all council decision making reports to ensure that it is considered sufficiently in the decision-making process.

5 Links to Corporate Outcomes

- 5.1 As a Co-operative Council, Oldham is committed to tackling the impact of COVID-19, protecting out most vulnerable residents and communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups who are often most impacted.
- 5.2 Building on the learning so far and the anticipated events to come, we are developing a comprehensive COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, which will help shape our approach and vision for Oldham moving forward. The strategy is in development with key initiatives being prioritised due to the existing challenges posed by COVID-19, with the full twelve-month Strategy in place for April 2021. Key to this will be maintaining the delivery of all essential public services, providing modern, accountable services, shaped around the needs of Oldham's communities.
- 5.3 Unequal access to digital services threatens to make the multiple impacts on the COVID-19 pandemic worse for communities that remain offline, so digital inclusion will form a key theme of the Recovery Strategy, ensuring Oldham's residents are able to use and access the internet and online technologies to meet their needs and to access support and services.

(Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead)

6 Additional Supporting Information

- 6.1 Please refer to *Section 8*, Appendices.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 A broad range of services and partners have contributed to the content of this report as outlined in *section 2*.
- 7.2 Services have engaged widely to adapt services for people who use support and services during the Coronavirus pandemic including making they remain accessible. Moving forward, we are keen to use feedback and lived experience alongside the evidence base we are building on digital exclusion to better join up the system in Oldham to ensure that together, we can tackle the barriers.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation UK 2020



digital-nation-2020.
pdf

8.2 Appendix B – Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Strategy



GM Digital
Inclusion Strategy PI