

# Surrey's Digital Inclusion Strategy

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## Digital Inclusion for Surrey County Council

**Introduction:** Using digital technology to access information and services online is an essential skill for living in society today. Surrey County Council recognises this and wants to help those who do not have the ability or confidence to use the internet.

This strategy describes how we will make sure that no one is left behind by helping everyone to access technology and be part of our digital world. Although the strategy focuses on the role of the Council, many other private and voluntary organisations are also involved.

**Surrey County Council's Vision:** By 2030, we want Surrey to be a uniquely special place where everyone has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, are enabled to achieve their full potential and contribute to their community, and no one is left behind.

### Ambition for Digital Inclusion and Accessibility

**Every resident in Surrey has the ability and confidence to access digital services and information.**

**Rationale and Benefits:** The government considers digital skills to be essential to live in our society today. Yet a report carried out by Citizens Online revealed that 18% of adults in Surrey lack all essential digital skills, 19% lack digital skills for work and 5.7% are entirely offline.

The economic and social benefits of digital inclusion are substantial, ranging from improved health and wellbeing to enhanced employment opportunities and cost savings. Recent research estimates the return on investment (ROI) for every £1 in digital inclusion to be £9.48 aligning with Surrey County Council's ambition to create an inclusive and prosperous community by 2030.

For the council, supporting this work will drive digital transformation, modernisation, and channel shift. Improving digital maturity, culture and working practises will future proof the Council to deliver outstanding public services in a more efficient way.

### **Independent Research – [Citizens online June 2023](#)**

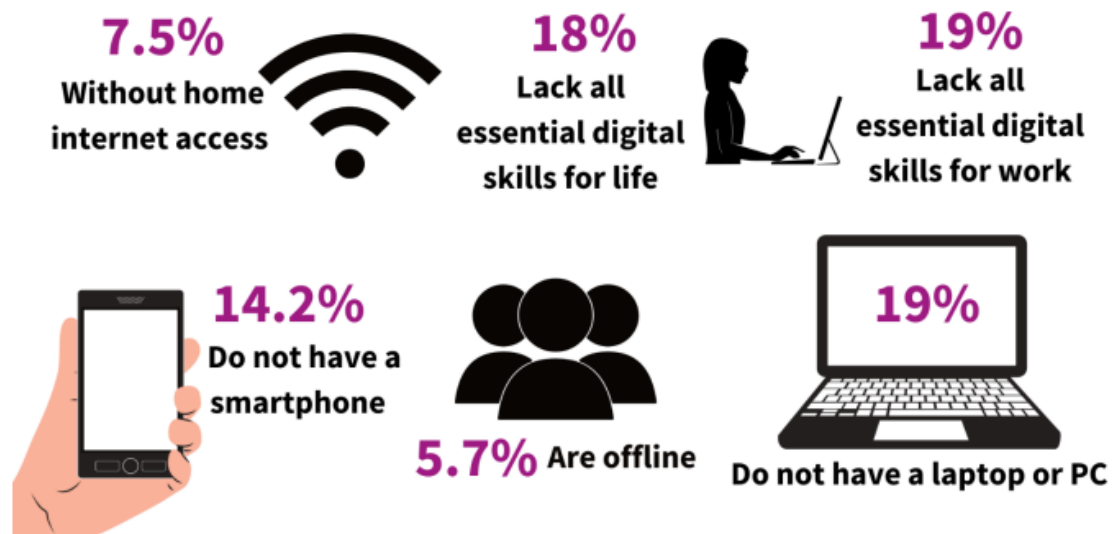
#### *Executive Summary (Extracted from Report)*

*'Digital' permeates everything. How we communicate, work, learn, travel, and entertain ourselves today is a world away from 20 years ago. Digital skills are classed by the government as 'essential' to live in our society today.*

*The social benefits for residents are significant: improved health and wellbeing, social inclusion, better employment opportunities and saving money. Recent research calculates the ROI for every £1 in digital inclusion to yield £9.48 in economic benefits. These positive outcomes support Surrey County Council's 2030 ambition to, 'make Surrey a uniquely special place for people to live, work and learn, and where no one is left behind'.*

*..... The problem of digital exclusion is not going away, it is only changing. For example, changes in technology such as assistive technology, remote working, a cashless society, the switch-off of analogue phone lines will bring new challenges to inclusion. There is a misconception that this issue will be solved with changing generations.'*

## Digital Exclusion Stats - Adults in Surrey



### Alignment with organizational priorities & transformation

Our recommendations align with the four priorities in Surrey County Council's organisational strategy:

- **Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit:** Ensuring our customers have digital skills will contribute to sustainable economy and allow organisations to scale as they work in a more efficient way.
- **Tackling health inequality:** With increasing use of digital health tools, digital skills are an important part of accessing health care and reducing inequalities in access to support.
- **Enabling a greener future:** Reducing the number of journeys people make to access services, as well as device recycling and refurbishing are all part of creating a greener future.
- **Empowering & thriving communities:** Supporting digital inclusion will empower residents to come together to improve their communities.
- **High Performing Council:** Our Customer Operating Model, Team Around the Community (TAC) model for key neighbourhoods, towns & villages programme all require digital inclusion and accessibility to be successful.

This strategy intersects with other strategies and services, including those related to:

- equality, diversity, and inclusion
- customer service
- health and care
- education
- adult education.

An initial group has been formed and the first meeting took place in June 2024. This group of Surrey County Council staff will focus on this area and contribute to the action plan. We intend to re-engage with partners as there have been funding changes and we wish to build on improved relationships.

## Approach

Digital inclusion is vital to create a society where everyone can participate and thrive.

The lack of **Ability** and **Confidence** to go online is the most important area of focus because research shows that 19% of adults in Surrey lack these vital skills. To help improve this we must consider:

- **Infrastructure** – is the necessary infrastructure in place to allow connectivity to get online?
- **Finance** – can people afford the device and pay for internet access?
- **Design for digital inclusion** – are we ensuring that our information is accessible and easy to use by everyone?
- **Digital literacy (training and support)** – do people have the skills and confidence to access information and services online?

Surrey has many rural areas and so ensuring access to high-speed internet infrastructure underlies anything that we do. Some years ago, Surrey invested in this via its Superfast Broadband Programme. Since then, the Government support has become available via initiatives such as the Superfast Broadband National Project and Gigabit rollout.

We recognise that there will always be residents who are either unable, or will choose not to, access digital services. We will retain non-digital access for these residents, such as our Contact Centre where staff mediate enquiries and support residents as part of our customer model.

### Objectives that Surrey should focus on in the next 24 months:

The objectives below are based on the recommendations in the Citizens Online report and on good practice in other areas. Some objectives will be delivered by Surrey County Council, but some may be better delivered through a partnership approach.

We have developed a short-term action plan (see appendix A) to define this, which will help to develop a roadmap for longer term work.

#### 1. Digital Literacy

**Objective: Enhance digital skills and confidence among residents and staff and increase awareness of available support and services.**

This is a priority area in the Citizens Online report which highlights a significant number of people that do not have sufficient (or any) digital skills (19%). There are various existing partnerships working in Surrey to address skills issues and it is essential that this work is aligned with existing activity.

#### Approach

- Analyse insight and data from communities and our staff to identify need and agree a framework for prioritising activity and measuring impact.
- Encourage our staff to engage in their local community on their volunteering days (This is an activity that is being taken forward as part of the Customer Champions network). A framework for this is being created to ensure a consistent level of training and support and this activity will take place in October to support the National “Get Online Week” initiative.
- Verify minimum standards for [digital skills training](#) on available courses and implement the measures of success with defined outcomes and benefits.

- Identify organisations, both voluntary and private such as Barclays Digital Eagles, who are already delivering training sessions and understand their effectiveness.
- Leverage Social Value commitments to skills within current contracts and highlight need within procurement for upcoming contracts.
- Use resources such as the Essential Digital Skills Framework and digital maturity assessments.

## 2. Financial Exclusion

**Objective: Enable access to the internet to residents facing financial challenges.**

Approach:

- Continue and promote the partnership with organisations such as ‘The Good Things Foundation’ and libraries who offer access to free data and SIM cards via schemes such as [The National Databank](#).
- Analyse insight and data from communities to identify localised need and work with other SCC teams alongside priority communities to pilot and test approaches in these areas.
- Expand and promote SCC initiatives to deliver digital skills training and support to economically disadvantaged communities including the work in libraries, adult learning and our lifetime of learning commitment.

## 3. Design for Digital Inclusion

**Objective: Ensure that all Surrey County Council’s online content is designed with inclusion in mind – start with user needs**

20% of users have an impairment which makes accessing non-complaint online services difficult or impossible.

Approach:

- Validate and communicate our design principles with everyone who creates online content.
- Continue to provide support and funding to meet our legislative requirements around digital accessibility. This enables work to continue around the [Public Sector Accessibility Requirements](#)
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## 4. Partnership and Collaboration

**Objective: Work in partnership with key partners to maximise impact**

Approach

- Work with existing partnerships focusing on Digital Inclusion in Surrey.
- Build on work done by Surrey Heartlands to improve access to digital health resources, working alongside voluntary organisations, private sector and district and borough councils.

Identify organisations, both voluntary and private such as Barclays Digital Eagles, who are already delivering training sessions and understand their effectiveness.

## 5. Social Value

**Objective: Extract social value from our procurement contracts to create opportunities to reduce digital exclusion**

As a large council with significant expenditure, we should ensure our contracts enable us to create opportunities to reduce digital exclusion.

Approach

- Collate existing social value commitments within contracts and support contract managers to deliver them.
- Review social value commitments in current contracts to identify those relating to digital inclusion and work with contract managers to understand their impact.
- Engage with national networks and initiatives to collaborate on broader digital inclusion efforts. Put in place a way of measuring its impact.
- Output will deliver Social Value ROI and Social Value benefits and insights to allow further informed decisions to service provision and community activity.

**Conclusion:**

This strategy underpins our digital inclusion ambition. It sets out five objectives on which the Council should focus resources over the next 24 months.

To do this effectively, the Council must target activity where it is most needed and have a clear framework for assessing the impact of interventions. The Council must also identify and obtain the resources required to deliver the agreed activity, as this area of work currently does not have any associated funding.

We have set out below the actions that will be taken in the short term (3-6 months) to develop the evidence base and framework for a longer-term approach (6-24 months). These are set out against the five objectives in this strategy.

See Appendix A below for short term action plan.

## Appendix A – Digital Inclusion action plan

### Overarching activity

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
Evidence base established via Citizens Online report, <a href="#">Digital Inclusion Index</a> , and <a href="#">Understanding Digital Inclusion in Surrey report</a> .	Finalise digital inclusion framework informed by trailblazer authorities around UK and develop agreed evaluation framework for Surrey-based activity.	Digital Inclusion project officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framework finalised and agreed</li> </ul>

### Theme 1: Financial Exclusion

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
370 computers provided across 52 libraries in Surrey.	Promote free computing resources in libraries as part of 'Get Online Week' 2024.	Libraries, external communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of participants</li> <li>• Feedback from participants</li> </ul>
Provision of 'data banks' via SCC libraries for people who are financially excluded to access data sims for internet connectivity.	Where possible extend provision to include device banks. Seek funding for data and device bank activity, including offers by telecommunications providers. Work with other SCC teams and partners to identify areas and communities in most need.	Libraries Good Things Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update of data banks</li> <li>• Update of device banks</li> <li>• Funding leveraged for additional provision</li> <li>• Number of community groups engaged</li> </ul>

### Theme 2: Design for Digital Inclusion

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
Digital transformation in SCC provides support and advice on digital matters including design for inclusion.	Provide guide on digital inclusion for smaller change programmes not supported by the digital transformation team.	Transformation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of change projects using design guide</li> </ul>
Digital accessibility work including web audits against statutory requirements, ongoing website user testing	Implement measures to prevent 'under threshold' procurements from purchasing non-compliant software/applications.	Web and Digital team Orbis Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of non-compliant software applications purchased</li> </ul>

and use of ‘accessibility bot’ for automated accessibility checking.	Embed Digital Inclusion considerations in Equality Impact Assessment framework.	Corporate Strategy and Policy EDI Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of EIAs referencing digital inclusion</li> </ul>
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### Theme 3: Digital Literacy

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
Digital Surrey website provides list of support services in Surrey.	Work with partners to establish future plan for sustainability of website.	Surrey Heartlands Digital Inclusion project officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable future for Digital Surrey website established</li> </ul>
Support provided in libraries – digital wellbeing support project ended in March 2024. Independent skills courses starting in June 2024 will have a digital inclusion element.	Plan and seek resourcing for a pilot approach to improving digital literacy in a digital exclusion hotspot with clear evaluation framework to measure outcomes.	Libraries Customer Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot project established and evaluated</li> </ul>
Lifetime of Learning Strategy for Surrey.	Map landscape of provision of digital inclusion skills in Surrey including DWP, colleges and Adult Learning and Skills team.	One Surrey Growth Board Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills map produced</li> </ul>
Tech Advocates provide support and training to SCC staff.	Identify staff in non-knowledge based roles who lack key digital skills to engage with current training offers and identify future training needs.	Tech Advocates Commercial services teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of staff engaged</li> <li>Number of non-knowledge based staff engaged</li> </ul>
Member Digital Skills approach being presented to September Member Development Steering Group.	Test personal development plans for Members.	IT& Digital and Democratic Services working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of personal development plans</li> </ul>

### Theme 4: Partnership and Collaboration

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
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SCC internal Digital Inclusion working group established.	Expand work to include further key departments including Local Skills Partnership and Team around the Community.	Web and Digital Digital Inclusion working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement of key departments with working group</li> </ul>
SCC engage with Heartlands-led Digital Inclusion steering group.	Establish sustainability of the group and future partnership working framework for Surrey.	Web and Digital Customer Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of steering group</li> </ul>

#### Theme 5: Social Value

Current activity	Planned 3–6-month activity	Key partners and responsible officers	Success measure
New Social Value framework being established for SCC.	Work with new framework to establish ways of embedding digital inclusion into social value offer.	Customer Transformation Communities and Prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of social value commitments referencing digital inclusion</li> </ul>

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