

Submission to House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry: [How do we solve digital exclusion in a cost of living crisis?](#)

Summary

Good Things Foundation is a leading digital inclusion charity, delivering the [National Digital Inclusion Network](#), [National Databank](#), [National Device Bank](#) and [Learn My Way](#).

- 1 in 5 adults do not have foundation-level skills ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)).
- 1 in 20 households do not have home internet access ([Ofcom 2022](#)).
- Digital exclusion is linked with social and economic exclusion, and intersects with a range of characteristics including age, disability, geography, education, and housing. The cost of living crisis is creating impossible choices, and making it harder for those impacted to earn, learn, save money, or access online services.
- Looking ahead, we expect to see widening gaps between those digitally engaged, and those experiencing exclusion, with impacts on education, employment, economic growth, health access and outcomes.
- There are positive examples of industry and civil society partnerships (e.g. National Databank), political leadership prioritising digital inclusion (e.g. London and Greater Manchester), and community innovation (e.g. Wifi in a Box). There is evidence of 'what works' and new ideas.
- However, there has been a failure by the UK Government to recognise the scale and significance of digital exclusion, and take steps to address this. Coordinated, collaborative, cross-sector interventions are needed:
 - a. Vision, leadership and coordination from Government with a new Digital Inclusion Strategy, led from No.10, working across departments, and linking into the services on offer from private and third sector organisations;
 - b. Government co-funded investment in the social infrastructure to deliver digital inclusion, joining industry and civil society partners, and recognising the proven impact where action is both national (delivering efficiency at scale) and local (where people are);
 - c. Imaginative and bold responses to removing digital barriers at no or low cost to Government, such as removing VAT on broadband social tariffs and a circular economy in digital devices to unlock environmental and social value.
 - d. Establish the 'Minimum Digital Living Standard' as a nationally agreed benchmark for households;
- Research estimates that every £1 invested in interventions to build basic digital skills returns £9.48 throughout the economy ([Cebr 2022](#)). Without further intervention, 5.8 million people are estimated to remain digitally excluded by the end of 2032 ([Cebr 2022](#)).

Full Submission

Good Things Foundation, the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, is delighted to submit this response to the House of Lords Communication and Digital Committee inquiry into 'Digital exclusion and the Cost of Living'. Good Things Foundation has over 10 years experience in helping digitally excluded people gain the support and skills they need to improve their lives through digital. We do this through partnering in communities via the [National Digital Inclusion Network](#) with local organisations (including libraries, community centres, job clubs, refugee organisations), enabling them to respond to local need through accessing free mobile data connectivity ([National Databank](#)), suitable devices ([National Device Bank](#)), and basic digital skills support ([Learn My Way](#) platform, training and small grants). Critically this action is both local (where digitally excluded people are, and where direct support is best provided) and national (removing inefficiencies of duplicated effort or re-inventing the wheel; providing nationally available services that work for all, such as the National Databank partnering with UK-wide mobile operators).

1. What are the main causes of digital exclusion in the UK? What is the economic and social impact?

Digital exclusion is about not being able to access and use the internet to benefit from digital in everyday life. The main barriers people face are: not being able to afford to access the internet to get connected or stay connected (not having sufficient data connectivity; not having a suitable device), and not having the skills, confidence, and support to use the internet. A person's digital capability is hugely dependent on their skills and motivation to safely, confidently navigate the online world as well as having the 'hardware' to do so. Some people experience all these

barriers together. Some can afford data and a device, but lack skills; others may have the skills, but not be able to afford data connectivity, or afford a device.

1 in 5 adults do not have the basic foundation-level skills ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)). 1 in 20 households do not have home internet access ([Ofcom 2022](#)). Without further intervention, 5.8 million people are estimated to remain digitally excluded by the end of 2032 ([Cebr 2022](#)).

Digital exclusion correlates strongly with social and economic exclusion (poverty, unemployment), and intersects with a range of characteristics including age, disability, geography, educational attainment, literacy and language, housing circumstances. Digital exclusion is not only experienced by people in later life. Age (over 65 years) remains the strongest predictor of not being online or only using the internet for very few things, but – across all adult ages – there is a well-evidenced link between living in poverty and experiencing digital exclusion. (See: [Allmann 2022](#), [Dixon 2022](#), [Faith 2023](#), [Good Things Foundation 2023](#), [Helsper 2022](#), [Stone 2022](#), [Walker 2022](#), [Yates et al 2021](#)).

The experience of digital exclusion is worsened by a lack of understanding of how digital exclusion impacts individuals, households, and society. Assumptions that ‘everyone is online now’ result in poor design of digital or online services, and significant lack of investment in support for digital inclusion interventions.

When citizens have the right level of access, skills, confidence and support to use the internet, digital can be an enabler by opening opportunities to earn, learn, trade, and access the extensive services, support and resources available online. However, for the significant minority of citizens who face digital barriers, the acceleration of digital transformation now leaves them vulnerable to greater economic, social and health risks. Impacts are experienced at an individual, household, community, and societal level as digital exclusion compounds wider inequalities – social, economic, and health inequalities, and inequalities in and between regions (see [Good Things Foundation 2023](#) for an overview of the relationship between digital exclusion and health inequalities).

Although the benefits of digital inclusion need to be seen as both social and economic benefits, it is clear that without it public services are not being developed and implemented for the good of all citizens. People who cannot use online public services are denied the privileges of those who can use digital. The Cebr economic benefits research shows the increased usage of online public services would alone bring £1.4bn of benefit to the economy if we had a digitally included nation. This is not just about the provision of offline choices but the imperative to ensure the maximum number of people possible can access and use digital public services with confidence.

2. How has the rising cost of living affected digital exclusion? a) To what extent does digital exclusion exacerbate cost of living pressures? b) What are the long-term implications of this relationship?

The cost of living crisis has put pressures on households across the country, creating impossible choices between everyday essentials. These essentials include paying for internet connectivity (broadband, mobile data) and paying for devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops).

In September, Ofcom reported that around 8 million people were finding it difficult to pay for communications services, including 2.4 million facing difficulty affording mobile phone services ([Ofcom 2022](#)). In November, the UK Consumer Digital Index found that over 11 million people had already taken steps to reduce costs associated with the internet to afford other bills ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)); over 35% of adults said the cost-of-living crisis would impact their ability to go online ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)).

Digital exclusion exacerbates cost-of-living pressures in several ways. People who are not online, or struggle with limited connectivity, and/or skills and confidence, are held back from accessing financial, and wider, support to navigate through the current crisis. People facing digital exclusion:

- Can't find cheaper deals as easily to save money or switch services – the ‘online poverty premium’;
- Can't access support, including state support and entitlements, as easily;
- Can't access information, advice and guidance, including with problem debt or money-saving, as easily;
- Can't save valuable time through doing things online – compounding pressures for people on low incomes who are ‘time poor’ – juggling jobs alongside caring responsibilities and longer commutes.

This carries longer-term risks, as well as immediate risks to health and wellbeing for individuals and families.

We expect to see a rise in the number of individuals and households:

- Who face digital exclusion even though they have digital skills and confidence, because the main barrier they face is affordability of digital goods and services;
- Who experience anxiety and stress due to running out of data, or worrying about this for them or their family ([Blackwell et al 2023](#));
- Whose confidence to use the internet safely, and whose trust in online services and technology, is held back or harmed by limited engagement with the internet ([Good Things Foundation 2021](#));
- Whose experience of learning to use the internet is held back even further by worries about cost - around one third of people who were offline said that cheaper connectivity and cheaper devices would encourage them to go online ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)).

In the months and years ahead, we may also see:

- Widening gaps between those who are digitally engaged, and those experiencing exclusion, with impacts on children's education, adult employment and economic activity, health access and outcomes, and loneliness - making aspirations for levelling up even harder to achieve;
- A loss of trust and confidence among the population in government and wider public services, resulting from poor experience of offline services (e.g. where people are on hold on phonelines for long periods) and frustration with online services where these have not been designed for maximum inclusion;
- Increased demand on family and friends from people who rely on 'proxy' support to use the internet;
- Increased cost pressures to service providers, where anticipated efficiency savings are not realised.

3. What are the obstacles to greater digital inclusion? Where is policy intervention likely to have the greatest impact over the next 12 months and 5 years?

The pace of digital transformation is far outstripping the pace of delivering digital inclusion in communities, homes and schools. The obstacles to digital inclusion include a failure by the UK Government to recognise the scale and significance of digital exclusion, and to recognise that this issue will not go away or be reduced without policy intervention and investment.

Coordinated, collaborative, cross-sector interventions - sustained over time to help fix the country's digital divide - are needed now, and beyond the current crisis. Without state funding, as co-funding alongside support from industry and civil society, digital exclusion will not be overcome. The recommendations below build on tried-and-tested approaches, alongside new approaches, to meet the scale and seriousness of the task at hand. (We can provide more details if needed on the recommendations below).

- (1) Clear vision, leadership and coordination led from No. 10, and working across Government departments to deliver a Digital Inclusion Strategy. This should identify clear responsibilities for the Government with regard to UK digital inclusion infrastructure (recognising reserved and devolved powers). It should address all the main barriers to digital inclusion (data connectivity; devices; and basic digital skills), alongside standards for inclusive design of online services to reduce barriers for people with limited skills and access. The last Digital Inclusion Strategy published by UK Government was in 2014. Last year's UK Digital Strategy (July 2022) was a missed opportunity to address digital inclusion. There is no ministerial position which directly addresses the issue, and no effective cross-departmental group to drive action on digital inclusion, despite the importance to departmental responsibilities. The new Digital Inclusion Strategy should seek ownership from across Government Departments (in particular: DSIT, DWP, DfE, DHSC/NHS, DCMS, Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, DLUH&C) as well as a commitment to work together in tandem to realise departmental benefits as well as benefits for society as a whole.
- (2) Leadership and coordination at all levels of government, including Combined Authorities. This should recognise and resource the leadership already evident in Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West Midlands Combined Authority, Greater London Authority, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, and established or emerging in other parts of the country. A clear vision for digital inclusion from Government, a

nationally agreed benchmark, and financial commitment - including but not limited to funds for levelling up through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, would create a stronger framework for taking forward cross-sector interventions at scale on digital inclusion across the UK nations and regions.

- (3) Direct co-funded investment in the social infrastructure to deliver digital inclusion in communities - recognising that the best impact will be in interventions that are both national and local. The UK Government should consider joining industry partners to grow and strengthen the National Digital Inclusion Network. Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone have already committed to supporting Good Things Foundation to help deliver our strategy and reach our goals of helping 1 million people with digital inclusion, and growing the network to 5,000 Digital Inclusion Hubs. This will enable access to free support with basic digital skills, devices and connectivity to local organisations, so they can better support their service users, clients and communities towards digital inclusion. Such investment has the potential to unlock economic growth, and enable digitally excluded people to improve their lives and acquire the means to benefit from digital. (Please contact us for more information as we are developing a costed proposal for a digitally included nation).
- (4) Imaginative and bold responses to removing digital barriers, for example:
 - (a) Good Things Foundation's National Device Bank promotes a circular economy in digital devices to tackle digital exclusion at scale. This involves partnering with corporates and public sector bodies to identify unused/unwanted digital devices which can then be expertly and securely wiped, refurbished, and distributed for re-use by digitally excluded people. This innovation can unlock environmental benefits (reducing e-waste) for social good (reducing exclusion). Government departments could lead the way - a tangible action to support [Greening Government](#) commitments;
 - (b) Reassess the VAT on broadband social tariffs, reducing VAT from 20% to 0% on social tariffs, with industry pledges to ensure the financial benefits are directed into the pockets of the end consumer. This would be a targeted tax cut for people on the lowest incomes, putting £3 a month back into people's pockets based on a £15 per month social tariff. This decision would have the added benefit of raising public awareness about the availability of social tariffs to increase uptake.
- (5) Establish the [Minimum Digital Living Standard](#) as a nationally agreed benchmark for what 'good' looks like. Although we live in a digital age, the measures we use for 'living standards' lag behind. Strategies, policies and action on digital inclusion are held back by lack of a vision and a north star metric for digital inclusion.
 - The Minimum Digital Living Standard, developed by the [MDLS team led by Prof. Simeon Yates](#), is what members of the public have said a household needs to be digitally included;
 - The definition and every item on the list of digital goods, services, and skills was deliberated through a series of focus groups and distinct stages to arrive at a robust consensus;
 - Welsh Government is leading the way, having commissioned the MDLS team to help develop the Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales ([Yates et al 2023](#)). Implementing the MDLS for Wales is one of five priorities of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales (DIAW 2023, 2nd edition forthcoming).

a) To what extent would these changes help unlock economic growth?

In 2022, Good Things Foundation with Capita commissioned Cebr to update their report on 'The Economic Impact of Digital Inclusion in the UK' (2022, 2018). This estimates a significant return on investment when digital inclusion is well-financed. The research calculated that, for every £1 invested in interventions to enable digitally excluded people to build their basic digital skills, a return of £9.48 is gained throughout the economy, with a returned net present value of £12.2 billion ([Cebr 2022](#)). The research found:

- Savings to the public purse are strong, with estimated benefits to the government of £1.4 billion through efficiency savings alone, plus £483 million in increased tax revenue, with the NHS expected to save £899 million in addition;
- A proportion of working-age adults still need digital skills support to gain work or better work. Meeting this need is estimated to generate £2.7 billion for corporations through filling basic digital skills vacancies, as well as £586 million in increased earnings, a further £179 million in additional earnings from finding work, and £76 million in environmental benefits;

- Citizens of all ages also benefit through time saved from using online government and banking services (valued at £3.9 billion) and money saved through online shopping (£3.5 billion).

Research by FutureDotNow, PwC and Lloyds Bank has also explored the economic case for closing the digital skills gap ([FutureDotNow 2022](#)), citing:

- A potential £3.2 billion uplift to the UK economy through digital upskilling ([World Economic Forum 2021](#));
- Evidence that digital skills hold the key to 2.4% minimum of a company's bottom line - which equates to £24 million every year for an organisation with an annual profit of £1 billion ([Microsoft 2022](#)).

As well as closing the skills gap to unlock economic growth, there is potential to support the emergence of a green circular economy (as with Good Things Foundation's [National Device Bank](#)), and support industrial policy and infrastructure investment to unlock growth in regions facing higher levels of economic and social disadvantage.

[Between 2014-2021, the Future Digital Inclusion programme](#), funded by the Department for Education, covering England only, was delivered by Good Things Foundation. This programme ended in 2021 having supported over 1 million people to improve their basic digital skills and confidence since 2014. Although this was a programme focused on building digital skills alone, 20% of people supported went on to get a job; this demonstrates that building basic digital skills and confidence has a direct link to people's digital skills to search for work but also their confidence and self-esteem to believe that they can find a job relevant to them. Increasing employment, in particular amongst people over 50 currently not working, will have a direct link to improving economic growth.

4. How effective are Government initiatives at addressing digital exclusion? What further action is needed, and what should be done to provide offline access to services?

While more evaluation research is needed, available evidence suggests that, where Government has made political and financial commitments to improve basic digital skills by funding national programmes with reach into local communities, the results have consistently been positive - indicating the effectiveness of digital inclusion support provided locally and coordinated nationally ([Allmann 2022](#), [Good Things Foundation 2019](#)).

Strong examples of government funded initiatives include:

- [Future Digital Inclusion](#), funded by the Department for Education, covering England only, delivered by Good Things Foundation. This programme ended in 2021 having supported over 1 million people to improve their basic digital skills and confidence since 2014. More than 80% of people supported faced one or more barriers related to social exclusion. The programme provided tailored support, with a focus on motivation and building confidence. This approach helped people progress to further learning and employment;
- [Digital Communities Wales](#), funded by the Welsh Government, delivered by Cwmpas with Good Things Foundation and Swansea University. This is currently in its fourth year, with funding for a further 2 years;
- [Connecting Scotland](#), funded by the Scottish Government, delivered with Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations and partners. This was a pandemic response. The Scottish Government is assessing options;
- [Digital Lifeline Fund](#), funded by Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as a pandemic response, delivered by Good Things Foundation with AbilityNet and partners. This successfully gave a data-enabled device and digital skills support to 5,500 people with learning disabilities facing digital exclusion in 2021. Nine in ten people supported achieved at least one positive outcome;
- [HMRC digital support](#), funded by HMRC to Good Things Foundation to support a small number of local organisations to provide digital support with using HMRC online services, and gain insights to improve the design and delivery of HMRC online services. To date, 47,910 people have been supported since 2015. Between 2021-24, the aim is to reach a further 18,750 people who face digital barriers to HMRC services.

It is too soon to assess whether the UK Government's current [Help For Households](#) campaign has been successful in raising awareness of broadband social tariffs and increasing uptake among eligible customers.

Regionally, UK Community Renewal Funds have been used effectively for digital inclusion by combined and local authorities. For example: during 2022, Good Things Foundation delivered a pilot Digital Skills Partnership programme with the combined authorities in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and North of Tyne. This tested

development of a pathway into further learning or employment which would allow community organisations to engage people who were digitally excluded, providing more informal, relatable support to reduce digital barriers. The target group was digitally excluded adults for whom formal options (e.g. enrolling in a college) would be out of reach – perhaps reflecting poor past experience of education, low confidence, or practical barriers.

- All adults received digital skills support; a large proportion also received a device and data connectivity;
- 5,347 adults were supported through 82 of Digital Inclusion Hubs across the three areas;
- 94% felt their digital skills were better; 92% felt more confident using the internet, and more confident in general; and 86% said they felt more able to stay safe online;
- 79% were motivated to keep on learning; 44% felt they had better prospects for employment; and 33% applied for a job.

The Government's work around the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) Framework has been important. However, with around 10 million adults lacking the foundation-level EDS skills ([Lloyds Bank 2022](#)), the Essential Digital Skills Qualification is too big a step, and unlikely to meet the needs of a diverse range of digitally excluded people who do not seek formal qualifications but would benefit from digital skills support in familiar, community settings.

5. How well are existing industry initiatives (for example cheaper internet tariffs) addressing digital exclusion? How could they be enhanced?

Industry is ahead of the UK Government in addressing digital exclusion through initiatives such as discounted 'social tariffs' and partnerships with civil society organisations.

Despite the development of voluntary social tariffs, uptake is low. The latest data from Ofcom estimates that only around 3.2% of eligible customers are using these tariffs ([Ofcom 2022b](#)). Many eligible households may be paying significantly more than they need to in order to meet household needs. It is too soon to assess whether the UK Government's Help For Households campaign is succeeding in raising awareness of social tariffs and increasing uptake. Meanwhile, there are further steps that could be taken by industry and government to address this:

- Reassess VAT on broadband, in particular for those on lower incomes, by reducing VAT from 20% to 0% on social tariffs, with industry pledges to ensure the financial benefits are directed into the pockets of the end consumer. This would be a targeted tax cut for people on the lowest incomes, and would raise awareness;
- Ensure that wholesale broadband (eg that sold by Openreach onto operators) that is then used for social tariffs also receives the VAT cut, and that this is passed onto their wholesale customers to enable social lower tariffs which benefit end customers on low incomes;
- Improve social tariffs – some households struggle to afford even discounted tariffs; for some households, the cheapest social tariffs would not provide sufficient connectivity for their everyday needs;
- All Government Departments who engage with relevant customers (eg DWP, HMRC) should promote the existence and the wider benefits of social tariffs – such as penalty-free exits, flexibility from rolling monthly contracts, and protection from mid-contract price rises;
- Use customer service support to identify customers who may benefit from a social tariff;
- Make it easier for individuals – and those who support them – to navigate the complex marketplace (even MoneySavingExpert.com has not found a way to include social tariffs in standard searches for the best deals). (See [Good Things Foundation and People Know How 2022](#)).

In addition to social tariffs, there is a growing number of initiatives led by or with industry to address digital exclusion in partnership with charities and civil society, including:

- Good Things Foundation's [National Databank](#) developed with Virgin Media O2, and supported by donated free mobile data (SIMs, vouchers) from O2, Vodafone and Three UK. The National Databank provides free mobile data, texts and calls to people who need it, distributed through Good Things Foundation's National Digital Inclusion Network. For people who cannot afford sufficient home broadband – and people for whom mobile data connectivity is a lifeline (including those who cannot access home broadband because, for example, they live in temporary accommodation, or are seeking refugee status, or live with an abusive partner). Community organisations can apply to join and become a local databank partner, enabling them to provide data to people in their communities who need it. Nearly 1,000 organisations have joined so far;

- O2's Christmas Campaign to raise awareness of data poverty through a national campaign, and piloting O2 high street stores joining the National Databank to be local databank partners alongside others;
- Vodafone's [Great British Tech Appeal](#) with Barnardo's;
- [Greater Manchester CA social housing pilot](#) with BT, Hyperoptic, TalkTalk, Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone
- Curry's support for Digital Poverty Alliance, including the Tech4Families pilot initiative.

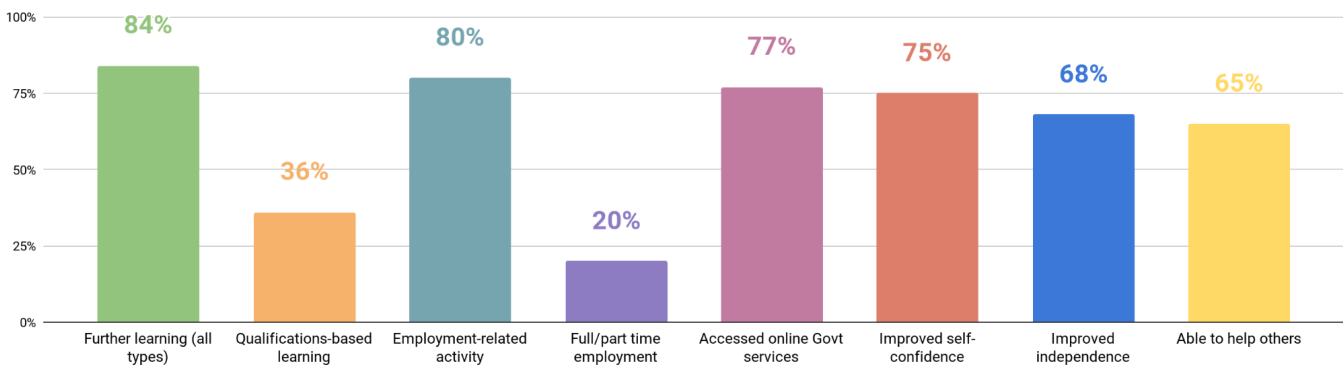
Other areas where industry innovation is needed include support for community organisations and small charities. Small charities and community organisations can struggle to provide and afford internet access themselves, but having reliable, fast broadband access is essential for operating and providing support to digitally excluded people. A new tariff for community organisations could go a long way towards helping community organisations to address digital exclusion ([Dixon 2022](#)).

6. How effective is civil society at supporting digital inclusion? How could this work be enhanced, and what is the appropriate balance between civil society and Government intervention?

Since 2011, Good Things Foundation has worked with charities, social enterprises and other civil society partners to advocate for and deliver digital inclusion in communities. The National Digital Inclusion Network includes over 2,000 Digital Inclusion Hubs which are actively providing some support to address exclusion in some way. We aim to grow this to 5,000 active Digital Inclusion Hubs by the end of 2025. This is about delivering national 'social infrastructure' that can help fix the digital divide for good - achieving impact efficiently through a national network of local partners supporting people in communities.

This builds on evidence from evaluation research and experience of the effectiveness of the model, and of civil society organisations in supporting digital inclusion - *where they have the resources and support to do this well.*

For example, between 2014-2021, Good Things Foundation delivered the [Future Digital Inclusion programme](#), funded by the Department for Education, which resulted in over 1 million people receiving support through the Network model. Evidence from a major evaluation project in 2018/2019 ([Good Things Foundation 2019](#)) found community-based basic digital skills learning saw people progress to the following outcomes:



Outcomes from three UK Community Renewal Fund pilots in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and the North-of-Tyne Combined Authorities demonstrated comparable outcomes (see above also).

The approach of coordinating and partnering with community organisations is effective because it:

- Provides friendly, local, trusted support in places where people already go - this can be library branches, community centres, housing associations, hostels, community cafes, job clubs, GPs, foodbanks, and more;
- Takes a trust-based approach - due diligence when organisations apply to join the network and distribute devices or SIMs removes the requirements for individuals seeking support to 'prove' need;
- Allows local organisations to tap into nationally available free services (such as the National Databank) and resources, and embed these in their wider provision and support - tailoring how they do this to meet the needs of their communities or clients;
- Benefits from national coordination so that it can operate at scale while reaching deep into communities;
- Addresses the three main digital barriers of lack of devices, data connectivity, and basic digital skills.

As a result of the strength of this model, and the commitment, passion and creativity of community organisations, the achievements made have been significant. But the current cost of living crisis, following hard on the pandemic, and continued under-resourcing of community and social infrastructure means that it is increasingly difficult for community organisations to attract the funds they need for staff and volunteers who can deliver support.

Some community organisations have been effective innovators, especially in the Covid-19 pandemic. In a fellowship report for the Data Poverty Lab, which explored existing and emerging community solutions to address data poverty specifically, Kat Dixon concluded that strong solutions to data poverty exist in the UK and some are ripe for scaling. For example, 'Wifi in a Box' (small devices offering broadband speeds and connection to multiple devices, via a portable device in the home fitted with a SIM card made by humanitarian tech charity Jangala). However, Dixon also concluded that community-led solutions can only be understood and scaled within the context of a wider ecosystem:

'The ecosystem of internet access is complex: telecommunications companies, government at all levels (local, regional and national and central Government), regulation, global investment, local communities, philanthropy and the individual intersect to create access to what has become a human right. The internet is now equivalent to a utility, a pipeline to essential state-delivered services, like the NHS. Community interventions are vitally important, but they are liberated or hindered by the wider conditions. To scale up community-led solutions, we have to look at the wider ecosystem and conditions for a sustainable future.' ([Dixon 2022](#)).

Progress has been made. Research from Cebr (2022) estimated the number of people without basic digital skills in the UK fell from 12.4 million at the end of 2019 to an estimated 10.6 million by the end of 2022 ([Cebr 2022](#)). Civil society organisations, alongside industry and government, family and friends, will have played their part. Importantly, the same research estimates that, without further intervention, 5.8 million people will still remain digitally excluded by the end of 2032 ([Cebr 2022](#)).

7. What lessons can the UK learn from abroad?

In Estonia, the [E-Estonia](#) programme invested in digital inclusion of citizens (alongside digital transformation of public services) long before the Covid-19 pandemic, so Estonia's healthcare, education, government bureaucracy, and other public services, were already part of a resilient infrastructure ([World Economic Forum 2020](#)). Estonia has pioneered the use of digital identity so that citizens can perform tasks with safety and ease: signing contracts, viewing their pension contributions, obtaining prescriptions, and voting online. This approach is considered to have helped build trust in technological advancement and belief in public institutions.

The EU Commission has annually indexed member states' progress on digital economy and society ([EU Commission 2023](#)). Sweden has performed consistently well since the DESI launched in 2014 ([EU Commission 2022](#)). Sweden's general population has both a high degree of basic and above-basic digital skills and the country is on track to hit the decade target of 80% of the population with at least basic digital skills by 2030. Sweden ranks above the EU average regarding connectivity, as broadband continues to roll out in remote areas, as well as e-Government users.

In Singapore, government-funded initiatives supporting people to get online include [Hawkers Go Digital](#) and [Seniors Go Digital](#) programmes ([Centre For Public Impact 2022](#)). Last but not least, in Australia, our Good Things Foundation digital inclusion model (a national network of independent and hyperlocal community partners which provide local people and communities with digital inclusion support) has been funded by the Australia Federal Government as '[Be Connected](#)', delivered by [Good Things Foundation Australia](#).

Research references

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For more information about Good Things Foundation and our submission:

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