

Digital Inclusion Delivery Plan 2024-25

Executive Summary

Introduction

There is a digital divide in the UK, and it means that those who are digitally excluded are unable to access a range of vital services, information, and support that their digitally included counterparts can. This can lead to social isolation, worsening of financial circumstances, lack of effective engagement with health services, and more.

Recent studies by the UK Parliament Communications and Digital Committee, and Ofcom, have highlighted significant barriers to digital inclusion - including access, ability and affordability.

This plan has been designed to provide sustainable, place-based support to digitally excluded people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is the result of extensive research and engagement with cross-sector partners, as well as directly with residents.

This plan aligns with Connecting Cambridgeshire's broader Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2025. It integrates feedback and insights from existing and the ongoing digital inclusion efforts in the county.

Holistic Digital Inclusion Support for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

It is important that we work together with partners across all sectors within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, as well as directly with our residents and communities, to deliver a wide range of digital inclusion support that covers all needs, ambitions, and circumstances.

We will enable support across the three pillars of digital inclusion which are:

Connectivity – Making sure that all our communities have the physical ability to access fast, reliable, and affordable fixed broadband and mobile connectivity. We also want to ensure that our communities are informed about what connectivity is available to them, and what will suit their needs.

Devices – we want to ensure that everyone who lives, works, studies, and does business in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has suitable access to a suitable device. This means making a wide range of devices available locally, and raising awareness of accessibility technology that can support a range of needs.

Skills and Confidence – we want to empower our communities with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to navigate the online world effectively and safely. A

wide range of support is required to ensure that the diverse needs and ambitions of our communities can be met.

We also recognise the importance of delivering support that fits in with the existing behaviours, attitudes, and motivations of our communities. Therefore, we will be undertaking research and engagement to better understand this, as well as co-developing solutions directly with communities to ensure they are fit for purpose, local, and sustainable.

We want to create a process where individuals, groups, and organisations can seek support that is relevant to their needs and wants and can adapt and evolve with them as their circumstances do, alongside the development of new technologies.

Key principles for Delivering Digital Inclusion

There are 6 key principles that we believe will enable the successful delivery of holistic digital inclusion support across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough:

1. **Better Engagement** – we want to begin all our work from engaging directly with communities and those already delivering support. This will help us to understand the needs, wants, and circumstances that exist, what support is currently available, and what resourcing and/or support is required to deliver effective support to communities.
2. **Place-based Solutions** – our communities are so diverse, and so are their circumstances. It is important that we recognise this when seeking to deliver digital inclusion support, as different communities will require different support.
3. **Better Use of Funding and Social Value** – digital inclusion is not centrally funded, and often the groups delivering support have over-stretched resources. We want to enable the better use of funding opportunities, as well as the delivery of social value from private sector businesses, to help ease the resourcing burden on these groups and deliver sustainable digital inclusion support.
4. **Collaboration and Partnership** – it is critical that we work together with as many partners as possible to deliver digital inclusion. So many groups and organisations are already delivering digital inclusion, or other, support and services to communities. By working in partnership with these groups we can build on existing relationships and success to deliver better solutions, faster.

5. **Creative and Innovative Solutions** – we want to work quickly, providing fast solutions to problems evidenced by community engagement. We will evaluate the impact and success of this work regularly, making changes and amendments where needed.
6. **Integration into Local Authorities** – we want to embed digital inclusion into the fabric of the local authorities providing key services, information, and support to the communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Digital is a part of so much of our lives, that it has to be considered in every part of service delivery.

Ambitions

We are aware that we will not be able to deliver all the work that is required to close the digital divide for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in a single year of delivery.

However, we are committed to making a start and to do so we have 12 ambitions to progress throughout the year:

1. **Provide General Digital Inclusion Support** – we will provide general support, knowledge sharing, and anything else that we can to our partners, stakeholders, and communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
2. **Prepare for the Digital Switchover** – we will work to ensure that all residents, communities, and businesses are fully prepared for the Digital Switchover, and the switch-off of the PSTN and 2G and 3G networks taking place until 31st January 2027.
3. **Develop the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership (CDP)** – we are proud to be partnering with Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service to help deliver the CDP for this year. We will collaboratively deliver network meetings, sessions and talks on topics around digital inclusion, and seek to grow the network so that it is truly Cambridgeshire-wide.
4. **Develop a Peterborough Digital Partnership/Network** – we will work with Peterborough City Council and Peterborough Council for Voluntary Service, as well as other stakeholders across the city, to ensure there is suitable digital inclusion support for everyone who lives, works, studies, or does business in Peterborough.

5. **Develop Wider Access to Free Public Wifi** – we will strive to widen the availability of CambWifi to more areas across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, providing free and easy-to-access Wifi outdoors and in communal spaces.
6. **Develop a Digital Skills Plan** – we will work with employers, educators, and communities to enable clear, easy to navigate, effective pathways into employment, using digital support to digitally enable the workforce.
7. **Assign Digital Champions in Local Authorities** – we will work with local authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to identify suitable Digital Champions who will work to integrate digital inclusion into the fabric of the local authorities that serve our communities.
8. **Develop a Digital Inclusion Volunteer Network** – we will work together with the voluntary and community sector to develop opportunities for volunteers to support digital inclusion across the region.
9. **Enable Digital Hubs** – we will enable community spaces with free public access Wifi, access to suitable devices, and support communities to deliver effective, sustainable skills and confidence support. Ensuring our most digitally excluded communities have access to local, holistic support.
10. **Undertake Research** – we will work with research specialists to better understand our most digitally excluded communities, and what will best support them to become digitally included.
11. **Improve Digital Inclusion in Social Housing and Temporary Accommodation** – we will work collaboratively with providers to ensure that residents have access to fast, reliable, affordable connectivity, suitable devices, and the skills and confidence support they need.
12. **Improve the Use of Funding Opportunities** – we will raise awareness among partners of the availability of external funding to deliver better digital inclusion, as well as supporting applications, bringing together groups and partnerships, and enable the sharing of knowledge and learning to improve the chances of bids being successful.

Post-2025

Although this delivery plan is only for May 2024 to March 2025, we are committed to delivering digital inclusion support for as long as we can to close the digital divide in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The Connecting Cambridgeshire Programme will be releasing their strategy for the next delivery period in the first part of 2025, and a key workstream of the continued work of the programme will be digital inclusion.

We will evaluate the impact of our work on a regular basis to ensure that whatever we are delivering is effective, efficient, and relevant to the communities we serve.

Get Involved

If we are to be successful in delivering holistic digital inclusion support for the people who work, live, study, and do business in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, then we need the support and collaboration of our stakeholders and partners across all sectors in the region.

Closing the digital divide is not the responsibility of one single organisation or individual, but we can all make it our responsibility to help our friends, family, neighbours, and wider communities become more digitally included in many ways. If we all work together, we can close the digital divide for good, and make sure that everybody can get online safely, confidently, and competently.

If you think you could support digital inclusion, or perhaps you're already delivering some kind of digital inclusion support, or indeed if you think you or a loved one might benefit from receiving digital inclusion support, we want to hear from you.

Please get in touch at contact@connecting.cambridgeshire.co.uk and get involved today!