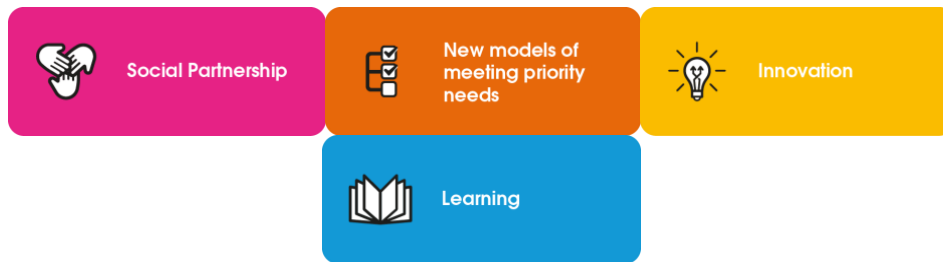




Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY



Sunderland City Council

Community Digital Health Hubs

In March 2023, Sunderland City Council published the Digital Inclusion Plan which outlines three pillars relating to developing a Smart Digital City, Smart Digital Workforce and Smart Digital Residents. The pillars have six shared priorities, building upon the Co-operative Council Values, with over 50 key actions to deliver. To download a copy visit www.sunderland.gov.uk/GoOnlineSunderland

Digital Inclusion landscape in Sunderland

In Sunderland it is estimated that 30,000 people have never been online, and a further 77,000 people are limited users (*UK Consumer Digital Index 2022*). With a population size of 277,846 (*Census 2021*) this means that potentially 1 in 3 people in Sunderland are at risk or experiencing some form of digital exclusion. Some of the biggest indicators for digital exclusion in the city are unemployment, low income, older people, people with disabilities and low educational attainment. The probability of digital exclusion increases for those who may have addiction issues, experiencing domestic abuse, have English as a 2nd language, suffer from long term health conditions, live in poverty or are socially isolated.

Sunderland Community Digital Health Hubs

The UK Government awarded over £580,000 to the Council through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to address digital exclusion by tackling key challenges, such as, limited connectivity, lack of access to digital devices and skills, the increasing costs to go online, with the need to improve trust levels and accessibility. 22 trusted community partners joined a Delivery Partnership between the Council and Boldyn Networks to establish Community

Digital Health Hubs across the city, with an aim to enhance digital inclusion and tackle health inequalities.

Friendly Approved Wi-Fi

Phase one involved carrying out an audit of each community building to assess the digital infrastructure and connectivity strength. Based on the findings, each community building had their existing Wi-Fi systems replaced with new architecture and coverage extended to all public and staffing areas to deliver optimal performance.

Sensors

In addition, sensors were installed to count footfall and maintain the health and integrity of the buildings. Data is fed into dashboards providing daily information on Wi-Fi usage, people count, humidity, atmospheric pressure, temperature and CO2 concentration.

Digital Devices

Each Hub received a budget to purchase digital devices for residents to access. Or if residents have their own devices, they can bring them along to the Hubs and use them to connect to the free Friendly Wi-Fi. This provides people with a choice to use their own device or borrow one from the Hub and go online to book appointments, save money, look for work, or even complete homework.

Tech Mates

Local people can receive support from other local people, who have been upskilled as Tech Mates. Tech Mates will be ready to help out, build confidence and share their digital learning and skills with others, who may have never been online before, for example, by showing people how to navigate around the web safely.

Databanks and Online Networks

Hubs have registered with Good Things Foundation as Online Centres, offering access to Wi-Fi, devices and basic digital skills support, and encourage progression by signposting people onto learning platforms like Learn My Way, or into local training providers funded by the Council's Learning and Skills Team. Hubs receive regular e-newsletters from Good Things promoting training and funding opportunities. Many of the Hubs act as Databanks, and distribute free SIM cards to eligible people to ensure they can stay connected at home or on the move.

Community eSports Hubs

Five of the Hubs, have received gaming kits to set up Community eSports Hubs, working alongside British eSports Federation. Believed to be the first of its kind, the Project raises awareness about the gaming industry and encourages people of all ages into education and employment pathways.

Operational Support

Five-year operational support is offered to each Hub, which includes connectivity to access a guest portal to analyse and manage the data received about Wi-Fi usage and sensors relating to the footfall and the integrity of the building. Costs for the Friendly Wi-Fi safe certification standards to ensure public Wi-Fi meets minimum filtering standards are covered, along with a contribution towards broadband fees, the supply of an on-site engineer fault fixer and a

Service Desk in relation to any loss of service and/or performance issues. Furthermore, there is a dedicated council officer aligned to the programme, who acts as the 'go to' person, and can provide access to free training and support.

For further information contact:

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