

Digital Inclusion Strategy Refresh

Corporate Select Committee

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CERI SUMNER & GEOFF CONNELL

Introduction

In 2018, Norfolk County Council agreed a 3 year Digital Inclusion Strategy with the following vision

Every Norfolk resident has ability to take full advantage of the opportunities and benefits of accessing online services and harnessing internet technology

The strategic priorities identified were as follows:

- Prioritise activity that will have the highest impact, both for individual outcomes and NCC cost avoidance
- Improve communication and co-ordination of activities related to digital inclusion
- Focus on initiatives that will reduce barriers to digital exclusion by harnessing the motivations of digitally excluded individuals
- Work with partner organisations, public, private & 3rd sector, to agree local priorities and maximise impact

Whilst the strategy and priorities remain relevant, the pace of change has accelerated and therefore the extent to which people can become digitally excluded, as more services and activities are digitised, has increased.

Accountability for Digital Inclusion at NCC

Geoff Connell – Director of IMT

Better broadband and mobile connectivity

Technology and infrastructure within NCC and across Norfolk

Collaboration with business

Core offers to NCC service provision, such as Adults assistive technology

Ceri Sumner – Director Communities, Information and Learning

Resident facing offers via libraries, adult learning and link to VCSE sector

Addressing inequality

Supporting communities

Skills agenda and support for local employers

Delivery mechanisms

- Libraries,
- Adult Learning
- Customer Services
- Norfolk Assistance Scheme
- Partnerships with NHS, Districts and VCSE section

Context

Use of technology has been pivotal to helping society and business to function throughout the covid pandemic, however for some people, digital exclusion has been exacerbated and they find themselves increasingly struggling to keep pace with the world and access vital services

“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, less access to jobs and education.

It can mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion, and an increased risk of experiencing poverty. People who are digitally excluded 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”.

[Good Things Foundation 2021](#)

Progress to date (including accelerated efforts during the pandemic)

- **Staying healthy: NHS Connect:** NHS funded, **device gifting with library wrap-around** support for patients referred with longer term conditions (2 projects : cancer and mild mental health problems)
- Adult Learning supported 7,000 learners online in 2020/21 with **formal qualifications** and courses to support **mental health and wellbeing**
- NHS Accelerated Digital Transformation funding- for **Digital Health Hub, linked to** Good Things Foundation: **Better Health Outcomes**
- Norwich **Good Economy Commission** funding : families on low-income, improving their money management & online skills
- **Libraries Online Shopping** phone support for online during Covid and help to use online library services
- **Every Child Online** campaign – with the support of the EDP, Norfolk Community Foundation, Norfolk schools, charities and other partners. The scheme provided laptops and technical assistance to over **5,500 digitally disadvantaged children** and assisted hundreds of Norfolk's schools to tackle IT issues. The scheme also attracted hundreds of thousands of pounds of donations from Norfolk businesses and charitable organisations.
- **Libraries Education Support** - staff provided additional assistance to families on how to use the devices for online learning.
- **Norfolk Assistance Scheme** supported 500 Norfolk residents in 2020/21 with devices, and Wi-Fi access to help them to look for jobs and access support online
- **TEC Lending Library** – Adult Social Care, the Innovation Team and Libraries are piloting a new approach to loan care support devices to residents to build knowledge, confidence and skills in using digital technology.
- **ALCOVE project** – Adult Social Care and the Innovation Team are supporting day service users with Video Carephones. These are simple devices for people with no or low digital skills that allow them to access video calls.

The real-life impact of these activities

“Thank you soooooooooo much for my laptop. It helps me do school work for my class dojo so then I can research my facts for my powerpoint and can access my young carers zoom meeting”

“I really had not done Excel before as I had never had the facility to learn it. It has given me the confidence to work out home budgets which, in this Covid19 time is essential to get by.....I learnt so many formulas to work out numerous things that will always help me in life and in documents.”

“The course has made a difference in many aspects of my life.I feel more confident at work as well as in my personal life and now I have hope for a better future. I am sure that having good English language skills will improve my employability prospects and will help to change my current very hard manual job at a factory to a better one”.

“I work with a young boy in Year 9.....he found it embarrassing that he didn't have a laptop as all his friends did. He and his mum were so grateful. Mum said she never believed they would own one, and couldn't believe people wanted to help them”.

Lessons learned

- The pace of digital progress has increased exponentially over the last 15 months. Whilst many in society have experienced the benefits of this, or at the very least kept pace with and accepted the changes, many others are left even further away from digital engagement and inclusion
- By targeting our support offer at those we can clearly identify we can have rapid, wide ranging impact, demonstrated by the device roll out to Schools and children alongside the 121 supported provided by Libraries and the digitisation of courses via Adult Learning
- Creating clear distribution and access channels to digital inclusion support and a clear offer is imperative to targeting those most left behind
- The VCSE sector has been impacted by rapid digitisation of services, many have struggled to access devices skills and connectivity to enable them to support residents online

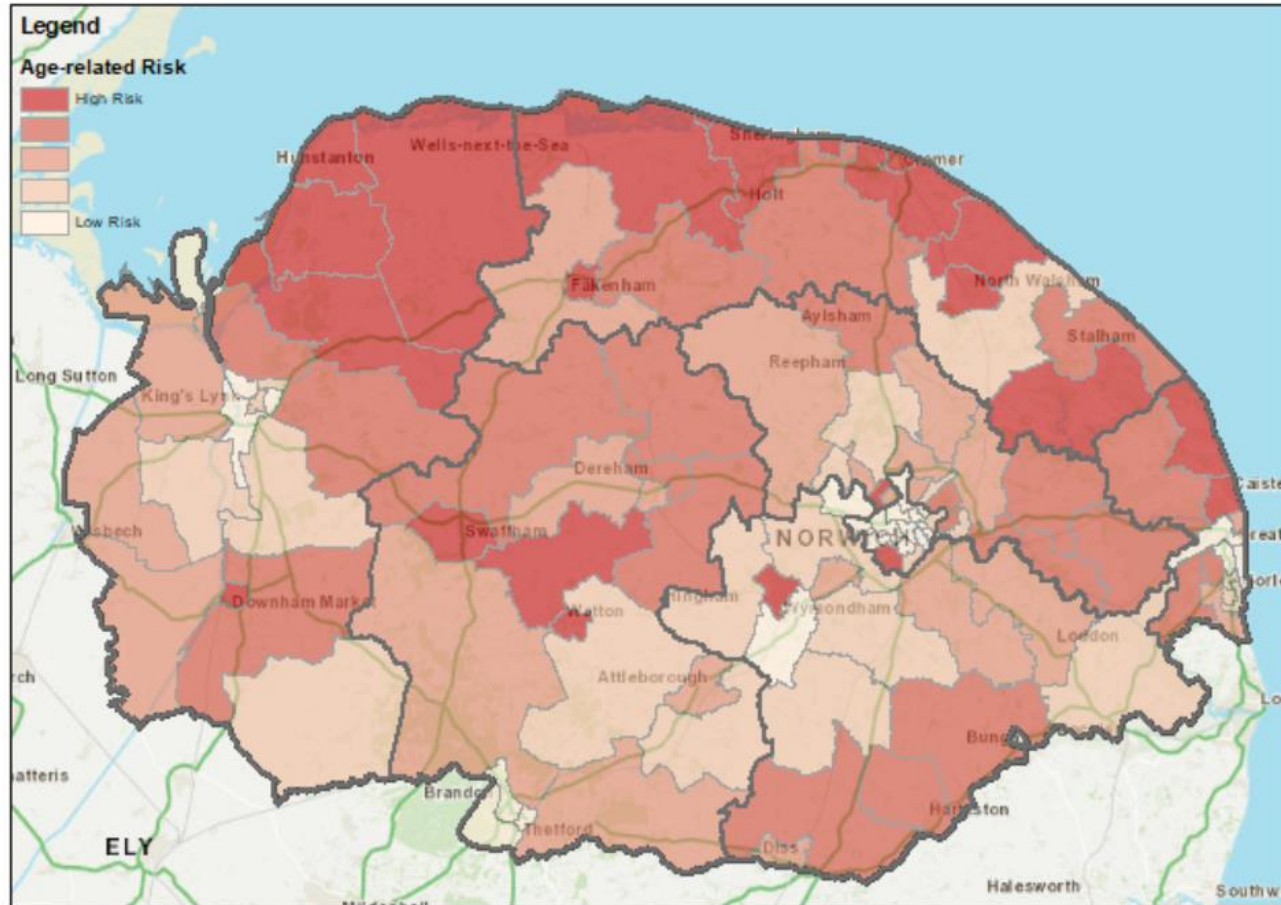
Current state analysis

The population groups identified previously as being at greatest risk of digital exclusion remain largely the same, although the need to be digitally-engaged has become more urgent. However, the economic and societal impacts of Covid-19 have meant that those groups that were previously identified as being digitally-disengaged are also at much greater risk of being excluded from society.

The following slides detail the groups most likely to be digitally disengaged, based on their circumstances. The basis of their disengagement will then form our strategy to address the main issues of access, skills and inequalities.



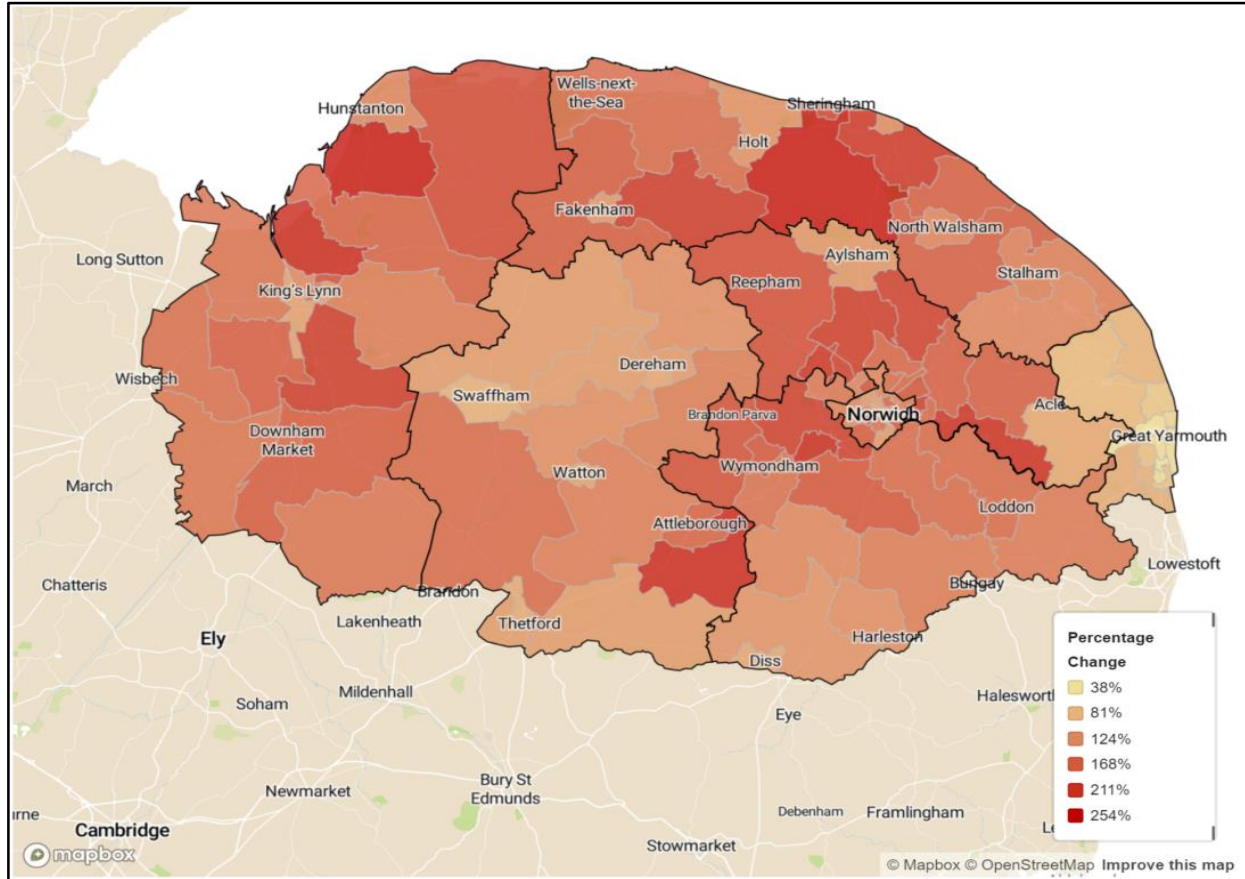
Older age



Areas with the highest proportions of older people (70

- There is a greater proportion of older people living in Norfolk (24.5% aged 65+, 2019) than the national average (18.4%).
- Behavioural data from the Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2020 shows that only 7% of over 70s are likely to have the capability to shop and manage their money online without additional support.
- Without digital skills it is more difficult to order food deliveries; finding health advice on how to stay safe is similarly challenging
- Many of the services that older people rely on for social contact (such as community groups, library visits, etc) have moved online exacerbating the risk of social isolation and loneliness.
- Recent surveys carried out by the library service in Norfolk of over 5,000 (largely elderly) service users identified as vulnerable indicate that around 46% do not have access to the internet.

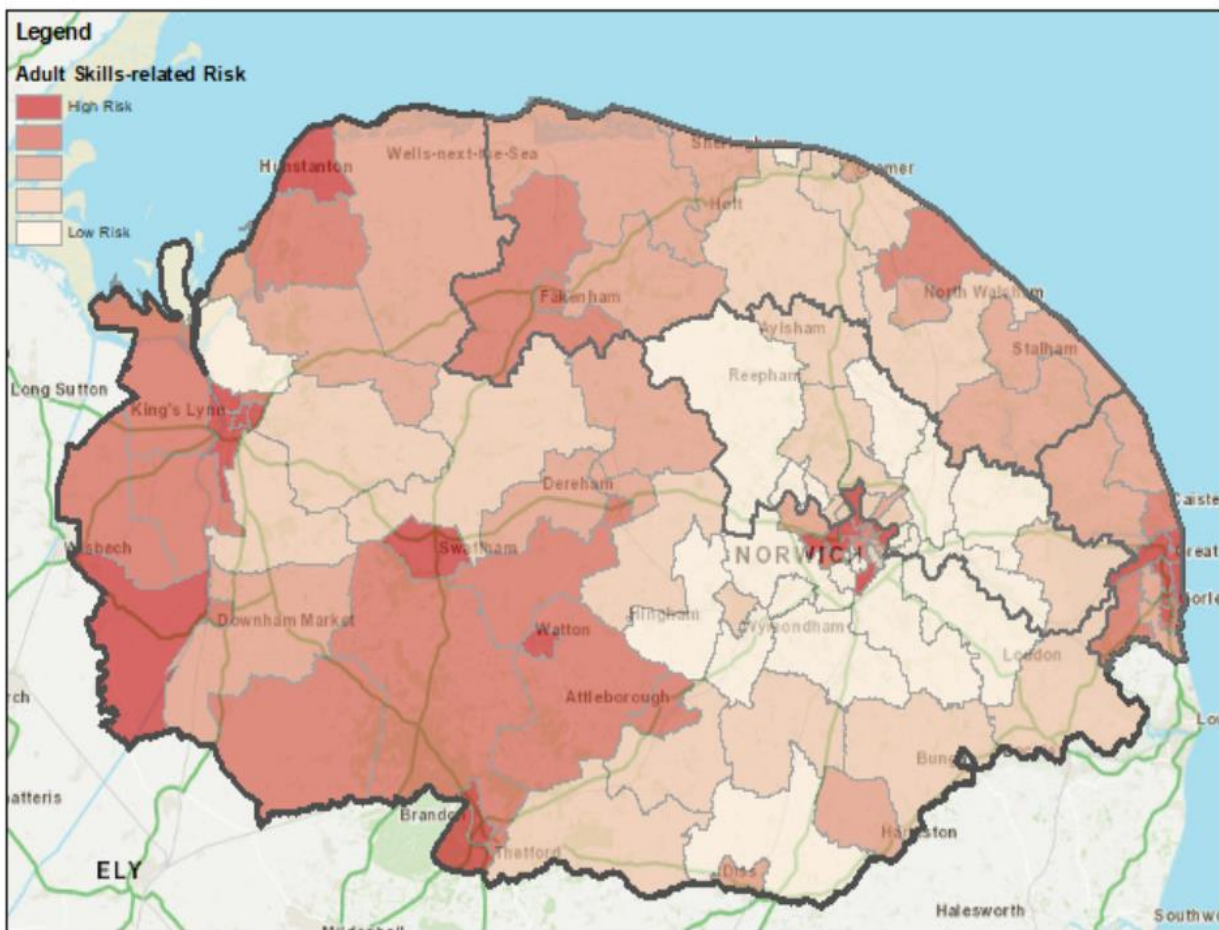
Low income



% increase in Universal Credit Claimants by MSOA

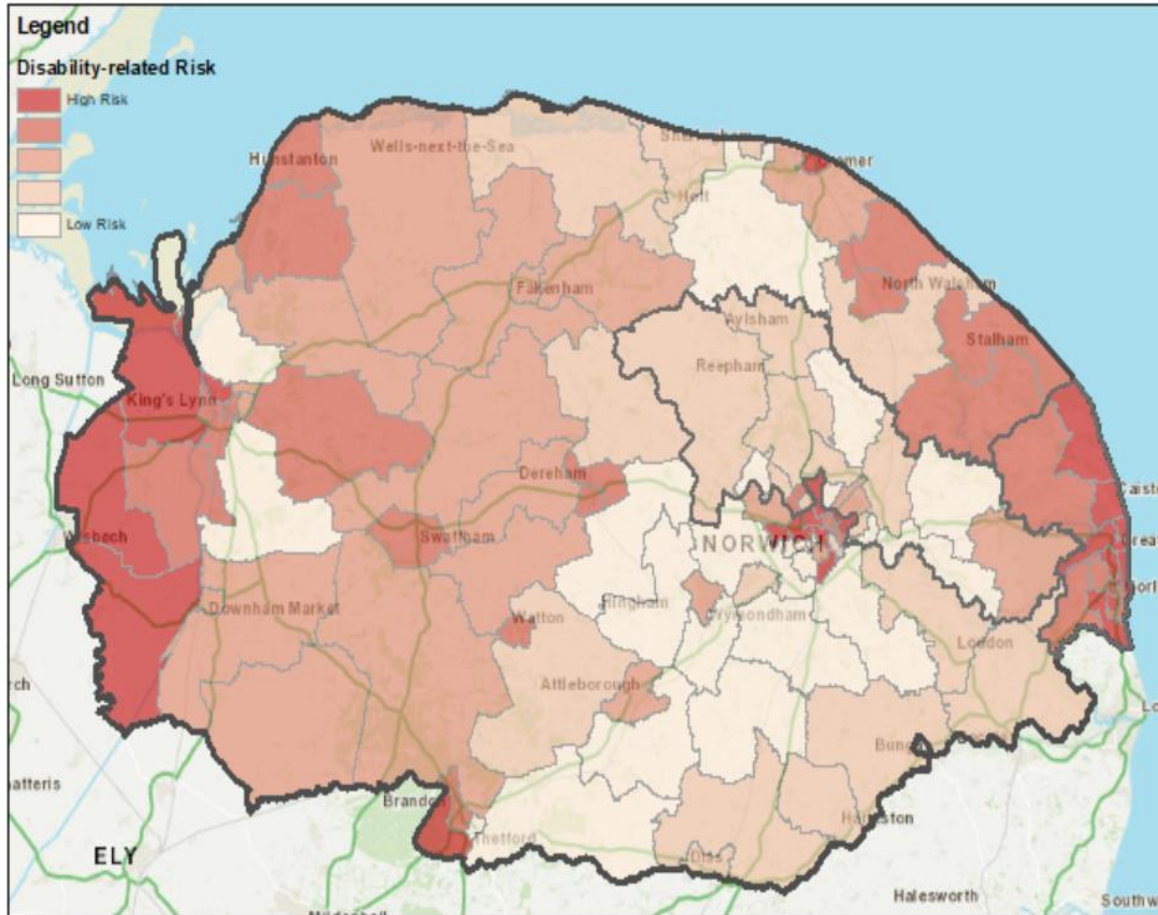
- People on low incomes are already financially disadvantaged as they often have to pay more for their utilities as they go.
- Benefit claimants are more likely to belong to the *Very Low* segment of digital engagement when compared to the UK average (40% compare to 33% overall).
- They are more likely to be paying higher household bills irrespective of income, household or age; for utilities alone, they are spending an average of over £348 more per year. This means they are even less likely to be able to shop online to find the best deals, putting unnecessary pressure on tight finances
- An Ofcom Report from 2020 estimates that nationally between 1 and 1.8m children do not have access to a laptop, desktop or tablet at home this had led to them falling further behind that children who do have access to technology

Education level and employment



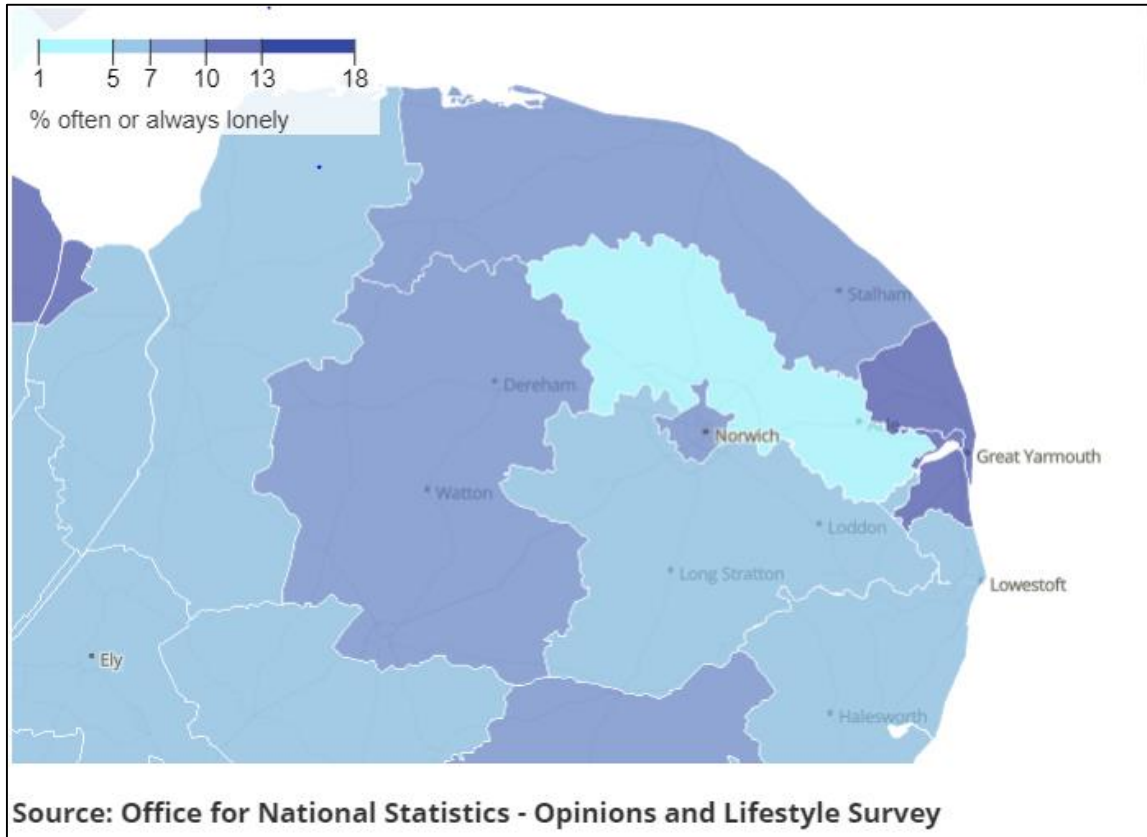
- Many of the jobs at risk of disruption due to Covid-19 include those that are already low-paid and
- Studies indicate that employees in Retail, Manufacturing, Services and Construction have lower levels of Essential Digital Skills, making them key areas requiring support
- New Anglia estimates there are around 177,000 people employed across Norfolk and Suffolk whose jobs are at high risk of disruption due to Covid-19. It is therefore essential that people employed in these sectors can access training, advice and support and likely that they will need to develop their existing digital skills to do so.
- In addition, access to online learning for school age children (and older learners) will continue to be a key factor in education as outbreak control management may require a blended approach to learning for at least the next 18 months

Disability



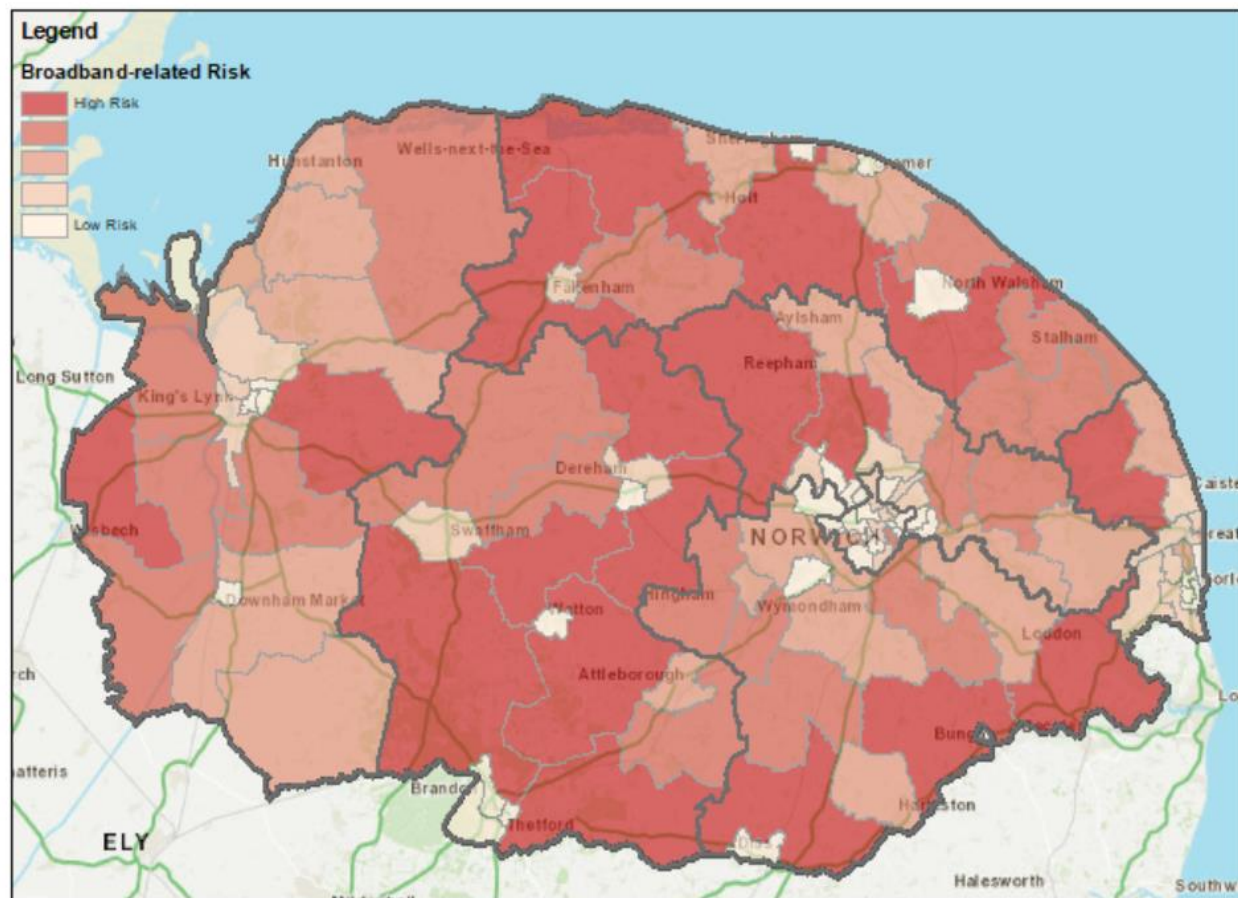
- Studies suggest that those with a physical or sensory impairment are 22 percentage points less likely to have the Foundation Digital Skills than those without.
- People with learning disabilities are also shown to be more likely to have poorer health than the general population, much of which is avoidable and related to issues with identifying health problems early (which means that if they cannot access health literacy or health appointments online, they will continue to be disproportionately affected).
- It is estimated that there are around 16,500 adults in Norfolk that have a learning disability, of which 12,000 are of working age.
- Many people with disabilities will be disproportionately affected in terms of accessing employment, support services and the means to stay connected with family and friends.

Social isolation



- The impacts of Covid-19 have been felt disproportionately by groups who already face social and economic exclusion, but it has also moved many others into crisis for the first time.
- Whilst digital support offers have been vital for some, for others it has created further isolation as normal face to face groups are not operating the route to solving this lies in providing access to technology, and continued support to use it.
- This support might be for those who have lost their jobs, educational prospects or livelihoods, for whom a lack of digital skills will present a barrier, but it also includes those without access to their usual support networks.
- This group is much more likely to be digitally-engaged to some extent, but may lack the specific skills they need to fulfil tasks previously completed in person. They are likely to be able to be supported via existing Council services, such as the Library Service or Adult Learning, by providing Essential Digital Skills training and information, advice and guidance services.

Rurality



- Although 95% of Norfolk Residents have access to Superfast (or better) broadband, there are areas where it is not yet available, also cost & contract duration is a barrier to many.
- We do not yet know overall broadband take-up figures in Norfolk but we do know from BBfN phase 1 & 2 that 75% of residents paid for the service when it became available.
- 4G mobile coverage is available across approximately 85% of the county, but again this can be expensive when used for data in the absence of fibre broadband.
- NCC has some 4G data Sims & MiFi units available to loan out through NAS & Libraries.
- Broadband is becoming cheaper and coverage improving (For example BT & Virgin offering “social” tariffs for households on low incomes.

Connectivity

- In 2011 only **42% of properties** had access to broadband above government targets of 24Mbps. This coverage was heavily biased towards Norwich, Kings Lynn and Yarmouth since then the “Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) project has increased this to **95% by the end of the project** this will be **97% (Spring 2023)**
- Norfolk is regarded by DCMS, LGA and the Market as an exemplar in enabling and delivering improvements in rural mobile coverage
- Norfolk County Council was announced as the winner of ‘Digital council of the year 2020’ at the Connected Britain awards. This is great news for Norfolk, our residents and businesses as we’ve improved digital learning in schools, built the UK’s largest LoRaWAN network, and we are engaging fully with government and industry to take advantage of the Local Full-Fibre Network programme and the Shared Rural Network; all of which will have a long-lasting effect on the county’s digital future.
- Significant investment by mobile providers across 89 key sites where mobile coverage was poor
- Shared Rural Network – £1bn investment in Norfolk Mobile network split between the mobile operators and central Government)



Draft digital inclusion approach

Improve access - IMT to formalise its Covid response period role as digital inclusion “**Delivery vehicle**” for refreshing and distribution of devices across the County. Anchored by 1,500 ex-NCC corporate laptops per annum

Improve access - An ongoing **campaign** to recycle devices from other large public & private sector Norfolk organisations

Improve access –provide **connectivity** through the Norfolk Assistance Scheme to provide broadband &/or mobile connectivity to selected cohorts, facilitating access to **employment and social inclusion opportunities**

Increase skills and confidence- A **wrap around support offer** provided by Libraries to help residents to access devices, and the opportunity to provide support for people using these devices face to face, over the phone or online

Increase skills and confidence - **Digital skills learning opportunities** provided by Adult Learning, and these will be targeted at referrals from Libraries, Schools, NAS and the VCSE sector (will include implementation of a referral pathway as well as **loan devices** and enhanced **funding and grants** to enable digital access

Increase skills and confidence - Enable the **VCSE access** to digital support, training and devices so that they can continue to support Norfolk residents effectively

Address Inequality- **advanced use of data and mapping** from all Norfolk DI stakeholders to baseline need, target resources and measure progress

Questions for strategy development

1. What are your priorities in terms of digital inclusion?
2. What is the vision for the strategy, do we want to eradicate Digital Exclusion or target specific cohorts who are disproportionately disadvantaged?
3. What are you seeing in the communities you serve as issues and does this resonate with the data and draft approach?
4. Is the draft offer appropriate, what else would you expect to see?

Next Steps

- Conduct further research and analysis, in alignment with NHS, on impacted cohorts/ places
- Continue to work with partners and collaborate to align plans
- Take feedback from today and incorporate into strategy development
- Develop strategy ready for September corporate select committee with onward approval by cabinet