

**REPORT TO: CORPORATE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 8 DECEMBER 2020**

**REPORT OF: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (CORPORATE AND SUPPORT SERVICES) AND DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**REPORT TITLE: DIGITAL INCLUSION – EVOLVING OUR OFFER TO MEET NEED**

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## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The inequalities created through unequal access to, and lack of confident use of, the internet has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. This report aims to provide an update on the evolving demand and delivery of our digital inclusion offer to enable further consideration of next steps and feedback from members on performance measures.

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. A core value of the council is to put citizens at the heart of what we do when creating and improving services. As part of the Digital by Design programme we invested in new ways of working and pledged to design with our partners, our residents and our businesses, and we pledged to build our digital services to government design and accessibility standards. This is central to our wider transformation ambitions and is embedded within how we are ensuring we are not just ready for internet era living, but ensuring our citizens, communities and workforce are thriving and able to make the most of the opportunities that digital presents.
- 2.2. Accessibility and the development of support for those least digitally included was embedded from the beginning <sup>1</sup>as a key principle underpinning the development of the Digital by Digital programme. Our principles of designing with users in mind and testing and evolving our digital offer until our customers tell us it is right is an approach embodied in the Local Digital <sup>2</sup>Declaration which we signed in 2018. Stockport was one of the 30 public bodies who created the declaration in collaboration with the Ministry of Homes, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Government Digital Service (GDS).
- 2.3. Many citizens already have 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations of digital services and expect no less from their council. By improving customer experience and making our digital services as simple, accessible and reliable as possible, we hope to encourage even digital novices to choose to use our online services over traditional methods. By enabling the majority of citizens to complete simpler activities (finding out

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<sup>1</sup> CRMG 7 July 2015 – Agenda Item 7: Understanding the accessibility of digital services across the borough  
<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/g5926/Public%20reports%20pack%2007th-Jul-2015%2018.30%20Corporate%20Resource%20Management%20Governance%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

<sup>2</sup> <https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/>

information, paying for something, reporting something etc) online, at a time and from a place that suits them, staff time can be focused towards more complex cases.

### 3. How digital is helping us improve services for customers

3.1. Since the initial investment in Digital<sup>3</sup> we have been focussing upon improving services by investing in the development of new skills (including design and digital delivery) and creating re-usable technical capabilities designed around people (citizens, businesses and workforce). These are being re-used and scaled up and providing:

- A **website**, our publishing platform that allows service users to easily find out what they need to know
- **Transaction Services** to allow people to access council services online. This includes an online account that allows for personalisation of services and information, as well as the tracking and escalation of queries; and the creation of Form Builder, to allow us to more quickly create transactional forms
- **Contact and Case Management** improvements to support teams to work more efficiently and with a more joined-up view of people and issues
- **Business Intelligence** tools to better target and improve council services
- **Mobile Working** solutions to support teams to work out and about in the Borough while staying connected to the office

3.2. We are using digital to create seamless journeys for our customers where information passes between the website and back office systems directly, speeding up processing time considerably and reducing errors.

3.3. Image 1 shows a case study comparing the original journey on the left, with the new digital, simplified journey for a customer wanting to notify the council of a change of address so their council tax liability is updated and correctly calculated.

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<sup>3</sup> CRMG 7 July 2015 – Agenda Item 8: Digital by Design proposal  
<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/g5926/Public%20reports%20pack%2007th-Jul-2015%2018.30%20Corporate%20Resource%20Management%20Governance%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

## Case study: Impact of online reporting (Council Tax)



12

- 3.4. As well as streamlining transactional processes, digital is helping to deliver multiple benefits to children and young people<sup>4</sup>, supporting organisational change with new mobile working solutions and access to real time management information to improve outcomes and staff performance.
- 3.5. In July 2017 The Cabinet agreed a portion of funds from the Digital by Design programme be specifically allocated to develop a Digital Inclusion Alliance to work towards ensuring no one without digital skills or confidence is left behind.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. What is Digital Inclusion and why it matters?

- 4.1. Despite the growing use of our online services we know that across the nation an estimated 16% of people don't have the essential digital skills to transact, find information, problem solve or communicate safely online. Ensuring our web services are well designed and accessible is key to promoting usability.
- 4.2. Image 2: Assisted Digital Tiers showing how digital inclusion fits with our universal digital service offer built to EU accessibility standards

<sup>4</sup> Children and Families Scrutiny Committee 1 November 2017  
<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s127042/Digital%20By%20Design%20Phase%202.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> CRMG 4 July 2017, Agenda Item 6 - <http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/g23139/Public%20reports%20pack%2004th-Jul-2017%2018.00%20Corporate%20Resource%20Management%20Governance%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

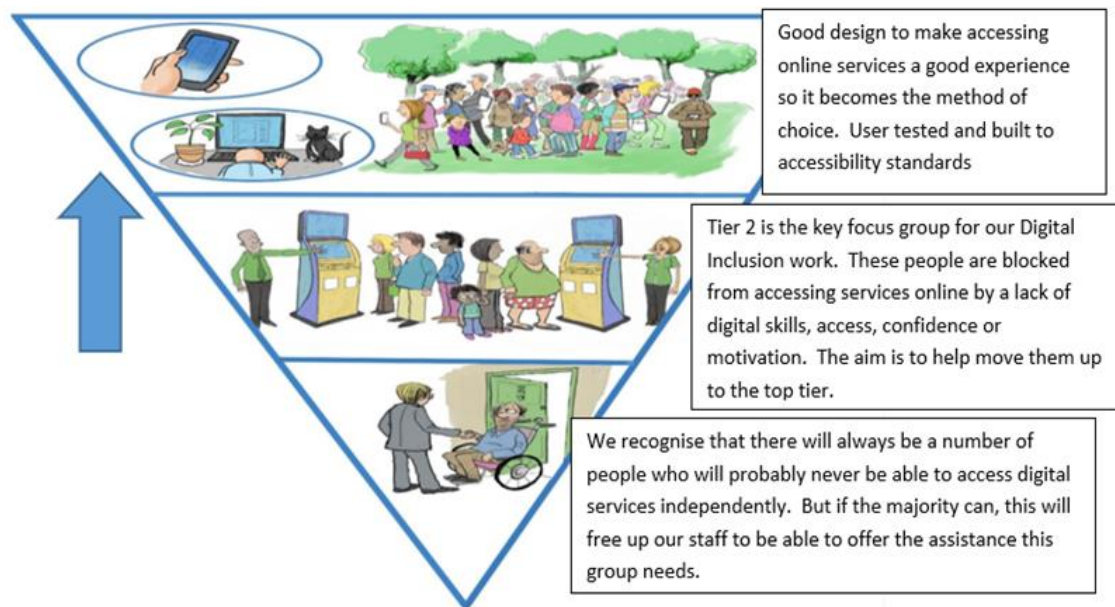
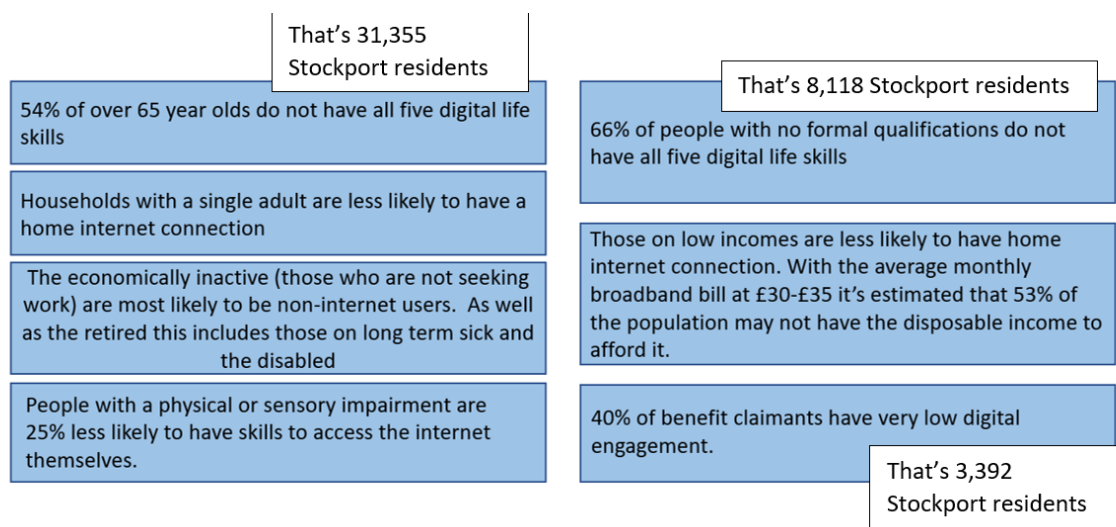


Figure 1 Image courtesy of KPMG & NYC Department of Social Services

4.3. Digital Inclusion is about equality. Those who are unable to confidently use or access the internet aren't just digitally excluded, they are socially excluded. This disproportionately affects vulnerable people, low-income groups, the elderly and the more marginalised communities in our society.

#### 4.4. Image 3: National demographics and cohorts



<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

4.5. If people don't have these basic skills or suitable access, they are **more likely** to:<sup>6</sup>

- pay more for their utility bills, shopping and holidays as it's harder to shop around for deals or switch suppliers - It's estimated shopping online is on average 13% cheaper

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

- have trouble finding and applying for work and being able to work remotely – it's estimated that in the next couple of years 90% of jobs will require some degree of digital skill
- become isolated as keeping in touch with friends, family and activities is harder to maintain

4.6. They are **less likely** to be able to:

- stop their children from falling behind in education as they don't have access to a suitable device or sufficient data to complete homework and parents who are digitally illiterate are less likely to be able to help their children stay safe online
- find a better paid job – people with digital skills earn 3-10% more than those without
- have a voice and to play an active part in their community

## 5. How do we measure digital inclusion?

5.1. The five foundation digital skills are:

- Communication.
- Handling information and content.
- Transacting.
- Problem-solving.
- Being safe and legal online.

5.2. These are described in more detail in Appendix 1 (The Essential Digital Skills Framework).

5.3. The indicator we provide is based on a national study and provides an estimate of how many people have the five foundation-level digital skills. This figure is provided annually via the Lloyds Digital Consumer Index.

5.4. We can measure locally how many people we have helped achieve the foundation level skills through DigiKnow, but it's unreliable to relate it back to the national figure with any confidence.

5.5. We are working on a draft Digital Inclusion Pathway (see Appendix 2: Digital Inclusion Pathway) which shows on a page our target cohorts, what their barriers are and how DigiKnow is helping with the Essential Digital Skills framework. It also shows the importance of having a pathway so that once we have helped people with their acute need, we can look at progressing them on through the framework via signposting them to other services that are part of DigiKnow and how this also fits in with our aspiration to have a thriving digital economy with the specialist digital skills.

## 6. DigiKnow – Stockport's Digital Alliance Approach



- 6.1. The Digital Inclusion Alliance, or DigiKnow, was formed in April 2018 and its approach is aligned with One Stockport's community first approach.<sup>7</sup>
- 6.2. Recognising that Digital Inclusion is about equality and social inclusion helped us collaborate, shape a shared vision with partners and join up service provision across the borough. Their observations brought an improved insight and a wider set of resources to tap into. We now have over 40 partners made up of voluntary sector organisations, public sector and local businesses.<sup>8</sup>
- 6.3. The people most likely to be digitally excluded are typically those less likely to engage with adult learning due to specific barriers such as financial difficulties, health and disability issues, language barriers or social isolation. The DigiKnow approach is to deliver digital skills support through established and trusted community groups and organisations who already provide social support. By using our 'trusted faces in local places' we have a greater chance of engaging these hard to reach groups.
- 6.4. The aim is to give people the digital skills, confidence and access they need to use the internet in ways that help them to achieve positive outcomes for work, health and life.
- 6.5. Stockport's DigiKnow approach is celebrated nationally as a pioneering approach to digital inclusion:
  - Starting Point, our delivery partner, appeared alongside leading national Digital Inclusion charities FutureDotNow and Good Things Foundation, giving evidence on the subject to the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee - <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/6f2194ae-053e-48c1-b38b-ae16f8bb53aa>
  - Leading Digital Inclusion charity, Good Things Foundation said: "the DigiKnow Alliance is seen as an exemplar in area-based digital inclusion" in their report examining the DigiKnow approach in March 2020.
  - Stockport won the **MJ Digital Transformation of the year award 2019** with the judging panel specifically referencing the collaboration on digital inclusion.
  - A Stockport DigiKnow representative was on the panel at GMCA's Digital BluePrint launch and follow up Digital Leaders conversation this October.
  - Stockport featured in the LGA report on 'Digital Innovation in ASC during Covid' <https://www.local.gov.uk/digital-innovation-adult-social-care-how-weve-been-supporting-communities-during-covid-19>

## 7. Covid-19 and Digital Inclusion

- 7.1. Covid-19 has exacerbated the digital divide. When the country went into lockdown, digital became an essential utility overnight.

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<sup>7</sup> DigiKnow webpages – A digitally inclusive council <https://www.digitalstockport.info/digital-inclusion-in-stockport/>

<sup>8</sup> DigiKnow partner members as of 13.11.20 <https://www.digitalstockport.info/digital-inclusion-in-stockport/digiknow-partners/>

- 7.2. 46,990 residents in Stockport were asked to shield at the end of March 2020, but an estimated 1 in 6<sup>9</sup> couldn't use digital, meaning an estimated 8,000 people were at risk of being both unable to leave their homes whilst also having no or limited access to the internet. This left them unable to buy food, order medication, monitor changes to advice or keep in touch with services, family and friends without help and led to a surge in demand for volunteers in neighbourhoods and calls to the council's Covid Helpline for help with accessing food, prescriptions & befriending services.
- 7.3. The digital inequalities in our borough and all boroughs across the country has meant that people are more reliant than they need to be on volunteers and council services to provide for their basic needs.
- 7.4. In addition:
- Organisations have had to close or shift to provision of services online;
  - Office workers suddenly needed to be connected to continue working from home, and those furloughed or at risk of losing their job suddenly needed to improve their digital skills to start the hunt for a new one;
  - The education of children has been particularly negatively affected as a result of the pandemic. Schools have, for a time, closed and although Stockport's schools have worked hard to put remote learning in place, this is only accessible to those with a suitable device and connectivity.

## 8. Stockport's DigiKnow Response

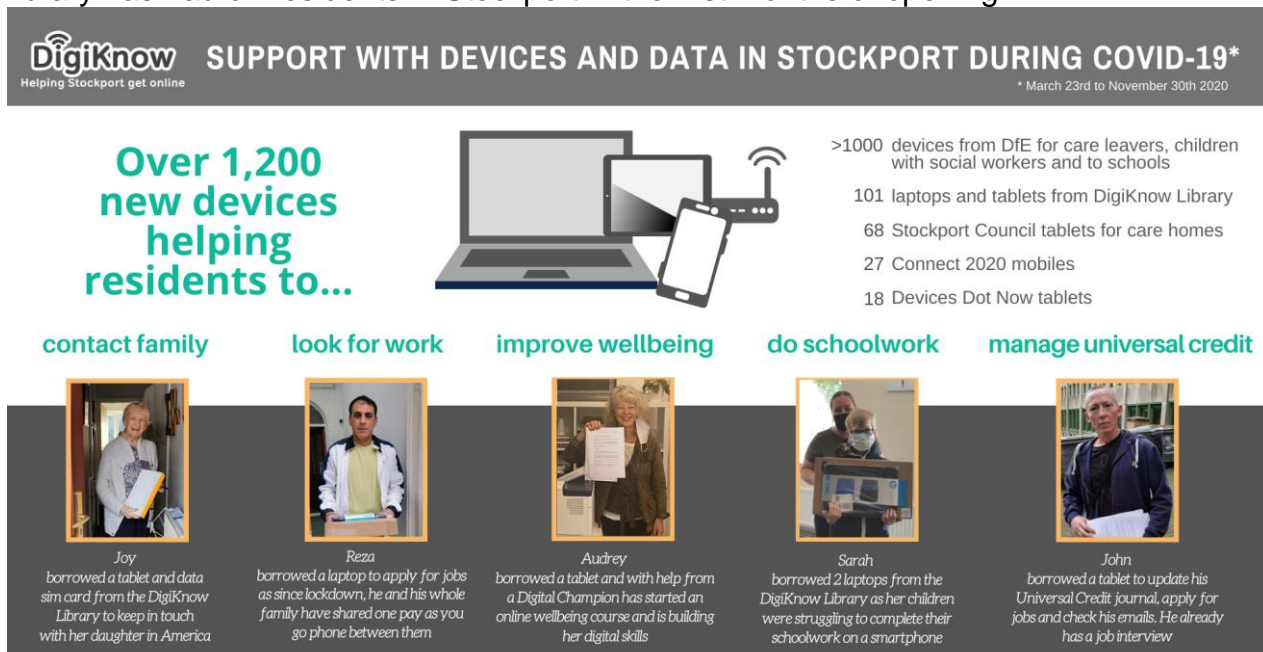
- 8.1. Our response since Covid-19 has focused on two key areas:
- Providing digital skills support remotely
  - Increasing access to digital devices and data
- 8.2. Digital skills – Starting Point's DigiKnow Digital Champions were re-trained and started to provide their digital skills support remotely online. They created a dedicated DigiKnow Helpline as an easy way for the less confident to call for help.
- 8.3. In addition to helping residents directly, DigiKnow has taken to helping voluntary sector organisations to reach their most vulnerable clients by training them in the use of Zoom and other digital support techniques to build their resilience and capability during this crisis.
- 8.4. Access to digital devices and data - Across England, libraries and community buildings where public computers and wifi were previously provided free of charge were required to close for a time following government advice, cutting off access to those who could not afford it.<sup>10</sup> Starting Point, who operate the DigiKnow helpline, reported hearing cases of parents having to choose between eating or paying their 'pay as you go' data bill in order for their children to continue their school work. Those with low incomes or with poor credit scores often can't secure broadband contracts so need to pay more for their data.

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<sup>9</sup> Lloyds Digital Consumer Index 2020 estimates 16% of the UK population are without sufficient digital skills to be able to use the internet unaided. <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index/key-findings.html>

<sup>10</sup> Digital Inclusion work closely ties in with our wider approach to financial inclusion

- 8.5. In response, the council worked with national initiatives such as DfE's 'Get help with tech' programme to get laptops into schools, to care leavers and to any child with a social worker who needed one.
- 8.6. Through this scheme 764 laptops from DfE were distributed by the council to care leavers, children with social workers and to children who were in year 10 (now in year 11) in early summer. This was sufficient for every care leaver and child with a social worker at that time who needed a device and router to get one. Also, laptops provided to schools were sufficient to cover every year 10 child listed as being in receipt of free school meals according to the Jan 2020 census.
- 8.7. In order to help more children and residents in need Starting Point, through Stockport Local Funding and support from DigiKnow set up Stockport's first Digital Lending Library. To date, 101 devices have been loaned out. 69 of these have been loaned to families with school age children to support their education.
- 8.8. In addition, DigiKnow is working with Good Things Foundation's Connecting Families scheme to deliver an additional 11 devices to families.
- 8.9. We worked with DevicesDotNow to get tablets 7 devices to families. An additional 11 devices through this scheme have helped elder people who felt increasingly isolated, like Florence Mable in Bredbury, ([short video](#)) connect with family. 02's Connect 2020 and Age UK Stockport helped get 27 smart phones to the elderly Stockport residents and the council purchased 68 tablets to ensure every care and nursing home in Stockport could help their residents keep in touch with family when visiting was curtailed.
- 8.10. An overview of the scale and impact of this work is outlined in Image 4.
- 8.11. Image 4: Infographic giving a highlight of the positive impact the digital lending library has had on residents in Stockport in the first months of opening





## 9. Measuring Impact

9.1. The demand for digital and breadth of delivery has changed since the indicators were created in 2018. This is an opportunity for a review to reflect on this and Scrutiny feedback to provide a wider view of the impact we are, collectively with our partners, having on digital inclusion. Outlined below are a series of recommendations for future digital inclusion measures:

9.2. Current indicators are:

- CFE 2.1 Number of individuals supported to get online or improve their digital confidence and skills
- CFE2.2 Number of community groups to join the DigiKnow network
- CFE2.3 Number of digital champions
- CFE2.4 % of residents with all five basic digital skills (GMS)

## 10. PPRA Recommendations:

Indicator	Change?	Recommended amendment	Reason for suggested change
CFE2.1	No change	Number of individuals supported to get online or improve their digital confidence and skills	
CFE2.2	Yes	Remove the word 'community' so it is: Number of organisations joining DigiKnow network	<p>The amended indicator will look wider than community organisations, to include all partners. A narrative will be provided which breaks down the type of organisations.</p> <p>Involvement of local community groups is vital to the approach of the DigiKnow alliance. Our 'trusted faces in local places' approach is to deliver digital skills support through established and trusted community groups and organisation who already provide social support. However, as the range and demand for digital support increases, we need to strategically target organisations that will be beneficial to the alliance – including businesses and organisations with the skills we need.</p> <p>During Covid-19, although many organisations have had to withdraw support at their physical spaces, DigiKnow has helped 21 organisations reach out to their client base remotely. Many other organisations are joining and showing an interest in DigiKnow as they now see the importance of being online to maintain vital support for residents.</p>
CFE2.3	Yes	Add 'Level 1' so it is: Number of digital champions: Level 1 and provide a narrative giving an overview of the work ongoing to improve number in Levels 2 and 3.	<p>The figures we currently measure only account for digital champions that have registered with our main delivery partner Starting Point as they deliver digital training to a level that aligns to the government's Essential Digital Skills framework. Consideration is being given to how we can collect a better picture of the wider digital support activity that is ongoing in the borough and build on the strengths of support given from our own workforce and council members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level 1 – Digital Champion with Starting Point focusing purely on digital support and training</li> <li>• Level 2 – Digital Champion with other organization offering digital support as just one element of support</li> </ul>

			<p>such as TPA's key workers and library workers helping with public computer queries etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level 3 – Digital champions who are front line workers or volunteers who are able to signpost to where digital support is available but don't provide training themselves. This could include council members and community connectors etc</li> </ul>
DFE2.4	No change	% of residents with all five basic digital skills (GMS)	The GMS measure is a national figure which does not allow us to break it down further into Local Authority or even GM level. It is a useful indicator painting a national picture, but its value beyond this is unclear as the borough's performance cannot be measured against this. Any recommendations that come out of the newly formed GM Digital Inclusion Taskforce will be brought to this committee for discussion.

10.1 In addition to these four indicators, the DigiKnow Alliance has considered including an indicator on the number of hours of training delivered. However, by counting the number of hours delivered it is feared this could lead to more importance being placed on length of contact rather than staying focused on the type of help that is needed.

10.2 For example: The Prevention Alliance build digital into their work with people in acute need. A digital training course is not appropriate for that individual at that time, but by helping them address their problem in a restorative manner by using basic digital tools with their clients the keyworkers can enable them to see the benefits of digital and hopefully take the first steps towards addressing future problems themselves. This work usually involves a number of intensive hours over a period of sessions whereas library staff may only need to assist for 10 minutes to get someone started on a public computer. There is a huge difference in the number of hours provided but each is appropriate for the need and both are vital in addressing digital exclusion. The nature of the work is that individuals need different types of support from different organisations.

## 11 Next Steps

11.1 An effective digital inclusion offer is essential to achieving Stockport's vision and ambition for a resilient and thriving borough.

11.2 Over the past nine months we have witnessed the inspirational response of local communities, businesses and partners across Stockport in the face of unprecedented challenges. The foundations laid in the creation of the DigiKnow Alliance two years beforehand, enabled the borough to react quickly to the emerging needs of our communities during this time.

11.3 A lot has been done in a short space of time and needs to continue. We will continue to address the digital divide by building on joint working and collaboration that has been prominent throughout the response to Covid-19. The Digital Inclusion Alliance is now considering:

- how best to sustain and grow its digital library offer;
- how to get more devices to any child who needs one for their education;

- how it gets a better picture of free/public wifi across the borough and how we can enable more affordable home wifi packages;
- how as a council we can harness the collective power of our staff, volunteers and councillors so everyone who is frontline facing can become a digital champion or signpost someone to where digital help is available and make a difference;
- to ensure our assisted digital offer is robust, we will be testing whether people who need to access support funds and other urgent assistance can find and complete the required online forms;
- Looking further ahead, we will return to Scrutiny with the developing digital strategy in the new year. Our ambition to become a radical **digital borough**<sup>11</sup> has been supercharged through flexible and home working at pace and scale as well as the expansion of our digital inclusion response. We will build this learning and momentum into our developing One Stockport Borough plan capturing the aspiration, opportunities and cross-sector collaboration to ensure Stockport gets the most out of the opportunities presented by the third industrial age. This is shaped around three core strands – Digital Communities (citizens are able to connect to innovate and receive support), Stockport’s Digital Economy (resilient and thriving economy responding to and creating opportunities), and a Digital Council (designed round people, fit for purpose and able to respond to the future). However, this can only be achieved through a strong and cross-cutting focus on digital inclusion for our communities; where no one is left behind.

## **12 Scrutiny Committee is asked to:**

- 12.1 Consider the suggested amendments to performance indicators;
- 12.2 Note the Next Steps outlining future direction of travel for Digital Inclusion work;
- 12.3 Given the value of council members in assisting the community to access the information they need and signposting to places of support; it is recommended the committee feedback how they would like to be involved, any additional training that might be beneficial for members and any other opportunities they’ve identified to address digital inclusion;
- 12.4 Support for a digital inclusion showcase for council members where DigiKnow training can be made available based upon feedback received on point 11.3.

### ***Further Information:***

***Appendix 1 – The Essential Digital Skills Framework***

***Appendix 2 – Digital inclusion pathway***

### **Contact officers for accessing background papers and discussing the report;**

#### ***Digital Inclusion***

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.digitalstockport.info/>

