

## **Manchester City Council Report for Information**

**Report to:** Economy Scrutiny Committee – 9 September 2021

**Subject:** Digital Exclusion Index - cover note and presentation

**Report of:** Director of Inclusive Growth

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### **Summary**

The extent of digital exclusion and the impact on residents was highlighted during the Covid pandemic. Manchester City Council invested and worked closely with partners to improve access to digital for excluded residents. To ensure that resources were most effectively targeted, a Digital Exclusion Index has been developed. This will guide the future work of MCC and partners.

The purpose of this cover sheet and the presentation accompanied is for members to understand what the index is, how it works, some of the initial trends the index provides us in relation to residents and areas of the City with greatest likelihood of being digitally excluded and finally to provide a number of recommendations on how the index can be used to create better targeted interventions and more long-lasting change.

### **Recommendations**

Members are requested to consider and comment on the information within this report.

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### **Wards Affected: All**

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### **Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are

available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- The Real Digital Divide? Understanding the demographics of non-users and limited users of the internet an analysis of Ofcom Data (2017)
- Digital media use: differences and inequalities in relation to class and age (2015)
- Good Things Foundation COVID-19 Response Report (March - June 2020)
- Current version of the DE Index - Manchester DE Index v1.5

## 1.0 Introduction

National research evidence in detail the challenge that UK residents face in gaining the right skills, access, and motivation to engage with and benefit from the internet. Whilst useful in some contexts, digital inclusion national data sets are difficult to localise in order to demonstrate the challenge that is faced in Manchester, and more specifically within each ward and neighbourhood of the city.

A report produced by The Good Things Foundation and Liverpool University in 2020 suggests that levels of digital exclusion is much worse than previously thought –

- 1.2 residents in Greater Manchester could be excluded in some way to access the benefits digital brings
- Over 700,000 people Greater Manchester are only using the internet in a narrow or limited way
- A further 450,000 are classified as ‘non-users’

To mitigate this challenge for Manchester the City Council have developed the Manchester Digital Exclusion Index.

## 2.0 What is digital exclusion and who does it affect our communities?

The Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading digital inclusion charity and in 2017 defined digital inclusion as ‘having access to the internet and having the skills and confidence to use the internet safely’. Alongside Dr Simeon Yates, they identify that internet users can be split into seven individual categories, with the digitally excluded defined as:

- Non-Users – do not have access to the internet at home or elsewhere, or, do not currently use the internet even if they have access
- Limited Users – do very little with the internet and do it infrequently.

The most recent Good Things Foundation COVID-19 Response report tells the story of what has happened to people and community partners across our UK network as a result of COVID-19 and since the start of lockdown in the UK on 23 March 2020, and is based on data collected from a range of internal and external partners. Across the UK - essential support was provided through community organisations connected to Good Things Foundation to those facing the greatest risk:

- 29% have delivered food and medicines to people who are self-isolating
- 64% have made emotional support calls
- 71% have provided advice

- 72% have delivered learning and technical support to help people get online and remain online, including helping them learn how to work remotely.

The report also identified a number of groups who already faced social and economic exclusion pre pandemic who have felt a disproportionate impact –

- Deprivation has put people at greater risk. The mortality rate in the most deprived areas of England is more than double that in the least deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>
- Older people and communities experiencing racial injustice have experienced devastating levels of loss; the risk of death involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity.
- An estimated 7.6 million UK workers are at risk of layoff, temporary furlough, and reductions in hours and pay. Almost half of these workers earn less than £10 per hour;<sup>6</sup> they are also more likely to lack all the essential digital skills for life and work

From initial analysis of the City Council's Digital Device Scheme and Skills Support Service - phase 1 of evaluation, we have identified:

- Around 90% of beneficiaries were not in work or training
- Around 70% of beneficiaries were social housing residents
- A large majority beneficiaries identified themselves as disabled or having a long-term health condition, were diagnosed with a health condition, or asked to shield.
- Beneficiaries reported that their children used the laptop for school work and that the laptop given through the scheme was the only in the household
- Others expressed benefits of interacting with Government services, support with better budgeting and access to advice services.

### **3.0 What is Manchester's Digital Exclusion Index?**

The index pulls together a number of different data sets that either directly or indirectly demonstrate levels of digital inclusion across households in the city. These data sets are used as metrics (of which there are 17 across 9 categories), which in composite create a 'digital inclusion score' for each Ward and Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in Manchester.

The higher a LSOA's score, the more at risk its population is of digital exclusion. Multiple scoring methods have been used to reflect the diversity of the data sources, and the appropriate weighting required for each metric, making the model extremely robust and unique in its kind, in comparison to others regionally and nationally.

The index is presented as an interactive map and interface which shows each area of Manchester as having a particular level of digital exclusion and an accompanying score. The map shows the city both on ward level and lower super output area. Alongside the map the index also provides a breakdown of metrics for each area, thus showing which particular metrics are contributing most towards an area's digital exclusion score.

#### **4.0 Purpose of the Digital Exclusion Index**

Initially the index will support the council's Digital Inclusion Team to become more data driven - creating bespoke digital inclusion activities that support community's specific needs rather than national assumptions. This will enable resources to be better utilised. The index will also help to inform activity being delivered through the Future Shape - Digital Future workstream, ensuring council services created are user led, informed by insights from the index around residents' skills, motivations and varied levels of digital engagement.

Most importantly the index will serve as a tool for partners across the city, (particularly our third sector organisations who are at the heart of tackling the digital exclusion challenge) to identify need and specific challenges and barriers. The index will enable partners to become more data driven - adapting and re-directing service provision, as well as better tailoring services to better support priority groups and particular demographics.

Further to this the index will allow all partners to demonstrate the challenges they are facing and as a result will assist them in attracting additional resource towards their service.

#### **5.0 Conclusion**

The index is a very robust tool that will support the city to build and sustain impact, prioritising resources and supporting more residents to become and remain digital citizens.

As the challenge of digital exclusion is multi-layered and ever changing, we will be testing the tool with a number of key partners including – Health, neighbourhoods services, community-based learning providers and Housing.

The index is a complex tool, and we will continue to be agile and develop this tool and model over time – regularly updating metrics as and when available to ensure the most up to date data is provided, and thus allowing key partner organisations and decision makers to work more effectively with residents who most require digital inclusion support.

#### **6.0 Recommendations**

1. Test the data – it is important that the index is stress tested and that conversations are had a hyper local level to enable us to understand if in data is describing a picture of what is happening within our communities in reality.
2. Develop a Digital Inclusion Index User Guide - create a Manchester Digital Exclusion User Guide for details of all sources and scoring methodology used as well as tips on how to make best use of the tool.
3. Write a highlights report – a yearly key insights report will enable us to reflect. This will support the council with identifying any changes and or key trends. This report will also share information on how partners across the city are using the index to tackle the digital divide. Into year three will should be able to start to compare insights with the first- and second-year reports, to start to look into trends and impact.
4. Launching products to inform and support – the Digital Inclusion Index, a user guide and an initial report to be widely promoted during 'Get Online Week 2021' in October.
5. Create a performance management dashboard – the digital inclusion team will work with the Council's PRI team to create a performance management tool to start to measure the impact of the index and the wider activities being delivered through the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.