

**Children, Culture & Communities Scrutiny Committee    7 November 2023**

Report of the Director of Customer & Communities

**Digital Inclusion Update**

**Summary**

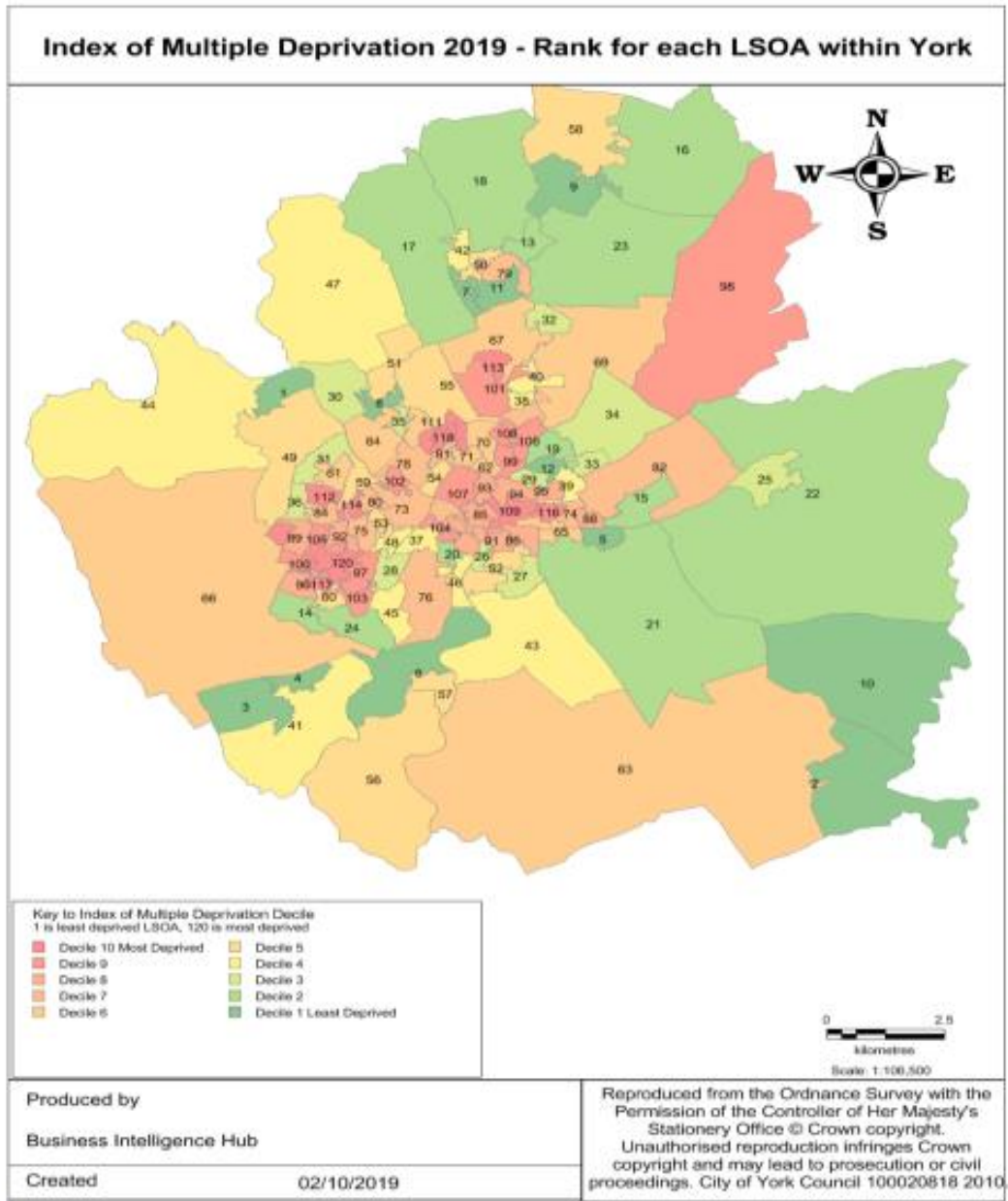
1. This report provides an update for Scrutiny Committee members on digital inclusion landscape in the city including the work of the city's digital inclusion partnership.

**Background**

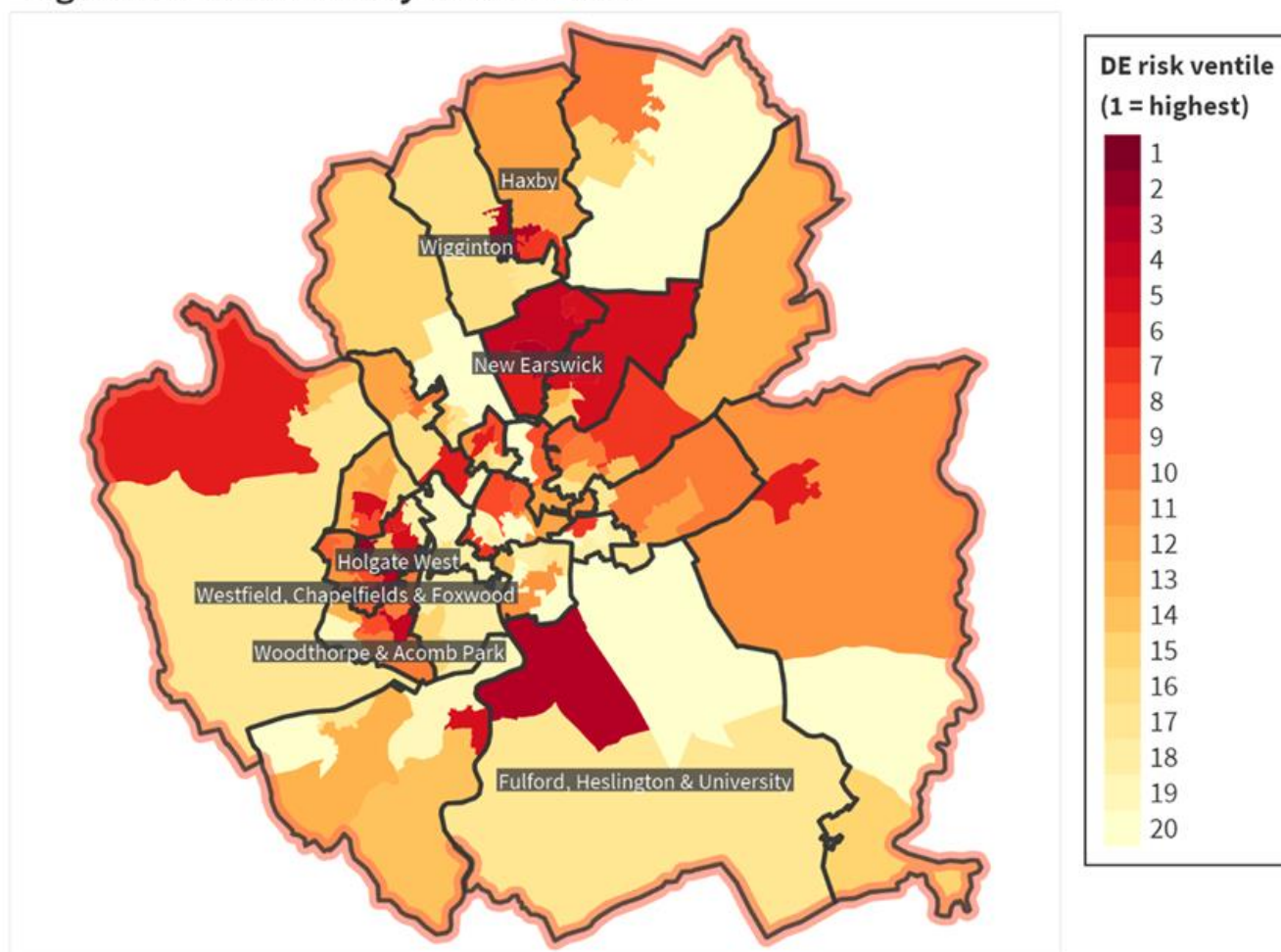
**Context & Landscape**

2. The pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has highlighted the importance of digital inclusion and the inequalities face by those without access. Without IT equipment and/or internet access the following is now more difficult:
  - Making new or managing benefits claims for vital support;
  - Accessing online discounts for essential household costs, fuel, insurance, phones, for example;
  - Connecting with family and friends;
  - Accessing education, training, and employment;
  - Accessing other help and support from organisations who have moved services online;
  - Children accessing schoolwork and other learning;
  - Accessing health -related support such as GP services.
3. The people most likely to be digitally excluded are those who have other challenges that make it more difficult for them to engage, such as being disabled, in poverty, homeless, addiction, language barriers, long-term health conditions, social isolation, memory problems or other factors.

4. The landscape of poverty and digital exclusion can be seen below for York:



## Digital Exclusion risk by LSOA in York



Source: 100% Digital York

### York's Digital Inclusion Partnership

5. City of York Council (CYC) is part of the city's digital inclusion partnership currently named York 100% Digital led by Explore York. Since a facilitated workshop was held in Summer 2020 Explore York and CYC has worked in partnership with a range of voluntary and community sector partners to drive forward a range of activities to improve the opportunity for residents to connect and use services online. The partnership earlier this year revisited its Terms of Reference which is attached at Annex A to this report.
6. A joint action plan was developed by the partnership to help identify and tackle areas of digital and social exclusion. 100% Digital York acts as an 'umbrella' brand that aims to bring all the work happening across the city together. This work can be seen from the digital support pages on Live Well York (see <https://www.livewellyork.co.uk/information-and-advice/learning-training-employment/digital-inclusion-100-digital-york/>).

These web resources have been developed so that information for both organisations and potential users can be found in one place. It also provides a collaborative approach to event planning to support communities and residents can identify them easily.

7. Through the provision of grants CYC has funded a part time post (extended to March 2024) to support the partnership and co-ordinate its work. Using the experience and learning from Leeds digital inclusion work, the Digital York Partnership Co-ordinator has prioritised work on a community-based approach. This approach focusses on work with community organisations to support staff and volunteers with digital confidence who in turn can work with the community. In this way digital support is provided improving skills and confidence in local trusted spaces with local trusted people.
8. The Acomb area has been the initial focus for this approach as it has a developed network of community partners and volunteers. Taking this approach (Keeping Digital) Digital Cafes have been further rolled out in other community venues, supported by volunteers. Digital cafes are held monthly at Tang Hall Explore, Sanderson House, St Wulstan's Church, and the Community Stadium.

## Here For You

Despite the challenges of 2022 - the impact of the war in Ukraine and the cost of living pressures - Explore has remained responsive to the needs of our communities, providing warm, welcoming spaces where people find a place to belong and connect with each other.

### Information and Digital Support

Getting the right answers to questions is vitally important in challenging times. As well as regular digital support, we helped people access Household Support Payment and Energy Rebate Payments on-line, we also signposted to financial support and food banks through our website. Explore provides the right information at the right time as well as a warm welcoming space for all.

"I have two young children and honestly I think the libraries are sort of miraculous. To have so many amazing resources available not just books, but story sacks, toys, events and storytelling, is incredible both for them and for me. We love the library."



"Thank you for helping me print all these forms. I was at a loss how to do it as I've not got a printer ... brilliant service."



Confidence | Connection | Choice

### York: a digitally inclusive city for all

100% Digital York takes a collaborative approach to achieving its ambition of a digitally inclusive city for all. Explore is lead partner with City of York Council. We re-launched digital support sessions at all Explore Centres to complement this work. The partnership works with community groups and organisations to introduce digital inclusion as a tool to achieve their aims and to support identified outcomes and impact. Through the partnership, residents who meet specific criteria can access equipment through the IT Re-Use Scheme, free connectivity through the Good Things Foundation National Databank scheme, as well as the opportunity to grow their confidence through digital support sessions.

"I didn't know where to start...thank you for helping me to receive this much needed funding."

9. IT Reuse (<https://itreuse.org.uk/>) is a partnership project led by York Community Furniture Store and is part of the digital inclusion partnership. IT Reuse supports residents offering free refurbished computer equipment, mobile phones, wi-fi hubs and data sim cards and funding has been provided through the council-led Financial Inclusion Steering Group (FISG) and Household Support Fund (HSF) grant schemes. The project provided a vital service to residents during the pandemic when connectivity was so vital for people having to isolate in their homes, particularly those on low incomes and with complex needs. The project's Impact Report Published in February 2022 stated that:



10. More recently York Learning have been working on sessions available to community groups, organisations or centres looking for specific digital skills for their residents, service users or community. Community groups can choose from the menu of digital life skills (for example how to use Google Maps, QR codes, streaming services, how to stay safe online) - they can do up to three skills at any session lasting 30 minutes

a skill for a total of 90 minutes. York Learning will bring the technology, the staff, and the knowledge – the organisation bring their group.



The poster features a circular photograph of a woman with glasses and a man with a beard and glasses looking at a laptop. To the right, a brown circle contains the text 'Bookings available from September 2023'. Below the photo, the word 'FREE!' is written in large, bold, black letters. The main title 'Community Digital Menu' is in a large, bold, brown font. Below the title, there is a paragraph of text: 'For community groups, organisations or centres looking for specific digital skills for their residents, service users or community. We'll bring the technology, the staff and the knowledge - you bring your group!'. A list of topics follows in a smaller, brown font: 'How to use the NHS app', 'How to use the First York bus app', 'How to use Apple App/Google Play store on a device', 'How to video call - Zoom or Skype or FaceTime or Google Meet', 'How to send an attachment like a photo in an email', 'How to use Google Maps for directions', 'How to use streaming services like BBC iPlayer or ITVX', 'How to use podcast services like BBC Sounds', 'How to use a music player like Spotify', 'How to stay safe online - a beginners guide', 'How to use a smart device like Alexa or Google Home', and 'How to use QR codes'. At the bottom left, it says 'To book on call 01904 554277 or email York.learning@york.gov.uk'. At the bottom right, there is the 'YORK Learning' logo and a '100% DIGITAL YORK' badge with the tagline 'Confidence · Connection · Choice'.

**Bookings available from September 2023**

**FREE!**

## Community Digital Menu

For community groups, organisations or centres looking for specific digital skills for their residents, service users or community. We'll bring the technology, the staff and the knowledge - you bring your group!

- How to use the NHS app
- How to use the First York bus app
- How to use Apple App/Google Play store on a device
- How to video call - Zoom or Skype or FaceTime or Google Meet
- How to send an attachment like a photo in an email
- How to use Google Maps for directions
- How to use streaming services like BBC iPlayer or ITVX
- How to use podcast services like BBC Sounds
- How to use a music player like Spotify
- How to stay safe online - a beginners guide
- How to use a smart device like Alexa or Google Home
- How to use QR codes

To book on call 01904 554277 or email [York.learning@york.gov.uk](mailto:York.learning@york.gov.uk)

**YORK Learning** **100% DIGITAL YORK**  
Confidence · Connection · Choice

York Learning also offer a range of free courses on computing and digital skills available on their website here:

<https://book.yorklearning.org.uk/page/findcourse>.

## Relaunch of the Digital Inclusion Partnership

11. York Explore after three years of leading the partnership are handing the reins over to a steering group of members moving forward. These are City of York Council, York Learning, and IT ReUse. The partnership's Co-ordinator's priorities will be managed through this group with direct support from York Learning. The wider partnership group will continue to meet as previously with meetings recommencing

in December this year to discuss future priorities including opportunities for future funding.

## **Digital infrastructure in York**

12. The Digital City Team within the council's ICT Service work with all broadband infrastructure providers to maximise connectivity for residents and businesses to broadband services – working hard to push those developments particularly into areas where connectivity is less available and/or poor such as in rural areas. Whilst this work is related to ensuring all residents have access to that infrastructure, members may wish to consider whether this falls within the remit of digital inclusion and more detail can be included in any requested in future updates.

## **Access to Free Wi-Fi and affordable broadband services**

13. For a number of years, City of York Council has been undertaking extensive public free Wi-Fi implementation within council-owned buildings including its libraries, sports centres, sheltered housing schemes, community centres and hubs and council offices. In York City Centre, there is a free Wi-Fi concession in operation for all visitors and residents to use with free Wi-Fi also available on bus services.
14. Within affordable housing developments free Wi-Fi does not offer the bandwidth for home based requirements and so the council are looking at affordable internet provider offers and possible expansion of 5g networks as possible solutions, as well as other opportunities as they arise (for example working with suppliers on offering affordable broadband within multi dwelling housing stock).

## **Council Plan**

15. The City of York Council's Council Plan (2023-2027), includes the following 2 out of 4 core commitments which are particularly relevant for this report and the work of the digital inclusion partnership:

### **Affordability - Tackling the cost-of-living crisis**

We will find new ways so everyone who lives here benefits from the success of the city, targeting our support at those who need it most, supporting communities to build on their own strengths and those of the people around them.

## Health - **Health and wellbeing**

We will improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities, taking a Health in All Policies approach, with good education, jobs, travel, housing, better access to health and social care services and environmental sustainability. We will achieve better outcomes by targeting areas of deprivation, aiming to level opportunity across the city.

### **Risks and Implications**

16. There are no implications such as financial or legal in this report given that it is for information only.

### **Recommendation**

17. Members are asked to note and comment upon the digital inclusion update and future plans for the digital inclusion partnership.

Reason: So that members are aware of future plans for the digital inclusion partnership.

### **Contact Details**

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**Chief Officer Responsible for the  
report:**

Pauline Stuchfield  
Director of Customer & Communities

**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 30 October  
2023

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** None.

**Wards Affected:** List wards or tick box to indicate all

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Annexes**

Annex A – Terms of Reference for the 100% Digital York Partnership