

30 October 2025

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND ASSETS

DIGITAL INCLUSION INNOVATION FUNDING UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

1. To secure approval to accept funding from the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund from Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

Information

Policy Background

2. The UK Government's **Digital Inclusion Action Plan** (DIAP) sets out a clear national direction and objectives. These are: breaking down barriers to online services, improving digital skills, tackling device and data poverty, and building confidence. It prioritises groups most at risk, including older adults, low-income households, and disabled people.
3. The **Nottinghamshire Plan** includes ambitions that are directly supported by digital connectivity and digital inclusion. This includes reducing inequalities, supporting healthier, more independent lives, strengthening communities and families and also helps to facilitates good-quality jobs and thriving businesses.
4. The Council's **Economic Transition Plan** identifies three main priorities in relation to this decision, which means that Officers are working to bridge the digital divide, to enable economic growth and to support inclusive access to employment, education, and public services.
5. The **Nottinghamshire Digital Connectivity Framework** (DCF) envisions a digitally inclusive county where every resident, business, and community have the skills and opportunities to thrive in a connected world. The document recognises that reliable, high-speed internet is no longer a luxury but a necessity for learning, working, accessing services, and participating in modern life. The vision focuses on bridging the digital divide by ensuring robust county-wide connectivity, enhancing public service accessibility, and supporting local businesses. This approach aims to reduce inequalities and unlock economic and social potential through collaboration with public, private, and voluntary sectors.

Project background

6. Nottinghamshire County Council is committed to reducing digital inequalities across the county, as set out in our DCF. It is now widely recognised that being online is essential for education, work, health, and everyday life, but many people still face barriers such as lack of access to devices, poor connectivity, or limited digital skills. This is something that Officers are seeking to address within the Inclusion and Skills theme in the DCF. Officers are keen to take a collaborative approach across all areas of the Council and external bodies (such as District and Boroughs, NHS, Libraries, Telecoms providers) because of the contributory impact to the economy of our county.
7. In April 2025, we surveyed local organisations that help people get online. The results confirmed that digital exclusion is a serious issue in Nottinghamshire. While many groups are working hard to support communities, they often face challenges like limited resources and working in isolation. Here are some headlines from the survey:
 - 85% of respondents agreed that better local data would improve digital inclusion efforts.
 - Only 12.5% felt they currently have enough data to make informed decisions.
 - Stakeholders called for better coordination, shared resources, and stronger evidence for planning.
 - It was clear that the biggest gap is that collectively we don't fully know who is being missed by current support and how to reach them.
8. In order to address these issues (and in response to the UK's DIAP objectives), Officers are proposing to create a **Digital Inclusion Assessment Framework** to focus on specific local data. This will also:
 - map where digital inclusion services are available.
 - show which areas and groups are most at risk of being left behind.
 - highlight gaps in provision and who is affected.
9. This framework will help us, and our partners make smarter, evidence-based decisions about where to invest resources. It will also help to identify groups most at risk (such as low-income families, older adults, and disabled people) and support schools, businesses, health services, and community centres to deliver better digital access. The intention is this will also steer investment, to ensure every pound spent has maximum impact.
10. The resource will be shared through our Digital Opportunities Network: Nottinghamshire (DONN), which is one of the key actions in our action plans, so all partners can use it to plan and collaborate. It will also be designed to be repeatable, so we can track progress over time.

Funding background

11. As part of this UK wide strategy, the UK Government launched the **Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund (DIIF)**. The DIIF is designed to support projects that enhance digital inclusion and innovation across communities. It provides targeted funding to initiatives that reduce digital exclusion, improve connectivity, and foster skills development.
12. The total amount available is £7.242mn which is comprised of three types of funding:

- **Category 1:** £2.594mn to be allocated to support a wide range of projects with a particular emphasis on replicating or scaling examples of best practice in digital inclusion interventions.
- **Category 2:** £3.380mn to be allocated to support innovative interventions that produce new knowledge and help fill evidence gaps on effective digital inclusion interventions.
- **Category 3:** £1.267mn to be allocated to physical and intangible assets that can be capitalised. This equipment and inventory to support the delivery of digital inclusion activities may include laptops, devices, and new software.

13. The Digital Connectivity Team found that there were several areas where there was a lack of collaboration due to the breadth of the demand and competing issues. An opportunity to use an innovative Spatial Equity Analysis Mapping approach could help solve this issue. This would involve taking data like internet access, plotting it on a map and then it would highlight the areas that are underserved or disadvantaged compared to others this includes access to existing schemes. This will then help decision-makers target funding or interventions where they're most needed, and use information based on very local data (rather than ONS census-based data).
14. Based on our findings we submitted a bid for funds within Category 2 as the Spatial Equity Analysis Mapping of Digital inclusion met the innovative and intervention that produces new knowledge and evidence gaps.
15. The Council has been successful and secured £91,748 of funding to undertake detailed mapping and analysis. This will create a clear spatial equity map and analysis showing where people have poor access to digital services, provision and location of services and the needs is a far more effective combination. It will give Officers the evidence they need to target help where it's needed most, work better with partners, and make sure everyone has a fair chance to get online.

Next Steps

16. The Council will need to accept the offer (as the accountable body). This will be via an MOU signed between DSIT and NCC to be actioned by 31 October 2025. The MOU will be issued 27 October 2025.
17. Once the funding has been accepted and confirmed, Officers will undertake the necessary procurement to commission the work.

Other Options Considered

18. Do nothing option: To refuse the funding would mean that Officers cannot continue with their understanding of digital exclusion. This would mean that there is less information available to steer where future investment and further resources go.
19. Do something else option: Officers could look at changing what the funding is spent on, but this would not be in the spirit of the original bid. Officers had carefully considered how the funding could be spent to ensure the maximum impact for our residents, businesses and communities.

Reasons for Recommendations

20. By accepting this funding, Officers will support the Nottinghamshire Plan ambitions (as identified in paragraph 3) and will help to ensure our residents, businesses and communities can maximise the opportunities that digital connectivity brings them.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been prepared following consideration of potential implications relating to digital inclusion and exclusion, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability, and environmental impact. Where these implications are significant, they are outlined in the sections below. Appropriate consultation has taken place, and expert advice has been sought where required.

Financial Implications

22. There are no additional costs to the Council arising from the recommendation. The £91,748 funding from the DSIT will be used with existing revenue budgets to undertake work on detailed mapping and analysis as set out in the report.

Environment and sustainability Implications

23. The proposed project to apply Spatial Equity Analysis Mapping to digital inclusion in Nottinghamshire aligns with broader sustainability commitments of the Nottinghamshire County Council by promoting equitable access to digital services, which support positive environmental outcomes. These include reducing emissions-intensive travel by increasing access to online services; minimising waste and overuse of resources through targeted interventions and enabling digital-first service delivery models; and helping residents and businesses to manage their energy usage through digital infrastructure and smart technologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Director of Economy, Environment and Assets approve:

- 1) the acceptance of the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund grant and the entry into the MOU;
- 2) any other necessary ancillary documents DSIT required to facilitate the transfer of the grant funds to the Council.

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Constitutional Comments (LPW 30/10/25)

24. Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 allows Central Government to distribute grants to local authorities for specified purposes. The terms of the MOU detail how the Council may use the funding. Any onward commissioning will be carried out in line with the requirements of the MOU and the Council's financial regulations. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Director for Economy, Environment and Assets by virtue of PL.1 of the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, as further delegated in accordance with paragraph 2 of the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Financial Comments (PAA 29/10/25)

25. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 22 of the report. There are no Local Government Reorganisation implications arising from the recommendation.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Decision Details: Nottinghamshire Digital Connectivity Framework](#), December 2024

[Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund - GOV.UK](#)

[Digital Inclusion Action Plan - First Steps](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All