



Connectivity Now

Connect Four: Digital Inclusion Event Report

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The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted digital exclusion across demographics, postcodes and sectors throughout Scotland. With our lives and work moving online at an increased pace, the digitally excluded are being cut off from essential services, resources and support. It is clear that many organisations, regardless of sector, have joined the battle against digital exclusion to allow them to continue offering their services, products or support.

Eight months after entering into the first lockdown, we felt it was time to bring together representatives from the academic, public, third and business sectors, to share learning and build on the momentum of digital inclusion together. We named our event Connect Four: Digital Inclusion, using our model of cross-sectoral collaboration to encourage a discussion around digital inclusion, social isolation and, in particular, data poverty.

In December we published our [preliminary report](#), identifying data poverty or lack of connectivity as the biggest obstacle to digital inclusion. With the one-year anniversary of the first lockdown around the corner, we are now proud to present our complete report, compiled from the discussions held in our breakout rooms. These collective voices represent individuals and organisations from across the four sectors. Together with action-based research, this will be distilled into a manifesto, forming the foundation of our campaign for connectivity across Scotland, Connectivity Now.

The report and campaign use the word 'connectivity' as uniting term that covers internet, WiFi and data. We chose to use this terminology in the spirit of cross-sectoral collaboration, as the term can transcend sectors without losing meaning. Through connectivity we can combat data poverty. We also acknowledge the issue of network coverage, but this is not the focus of our report or campaign.



Who are we?

We are People Know How, a Scottish charity working with people and communities to develop innovative strategies and services to address social issues. Having delivered projects around digital inclusion for over five years, we are committed to sharing our learning and collaborating towards tangible change.

Our event Connect Four: Digital Inclusion was developed after our digital support service grew in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic, leading to the development of Computer Delivery, our emergency COVID-response project which has delivered over 1,200 refurbished devices to the community. Once a device is received, recipients can also join our established Learn Digital project, helping them to improve their digital skills to use the device. We also operate the Connecting

Scotland national helpline. With demand for all of these projects growing, the need for action in Scotland to combat digital exclusion has become increasingly clear.

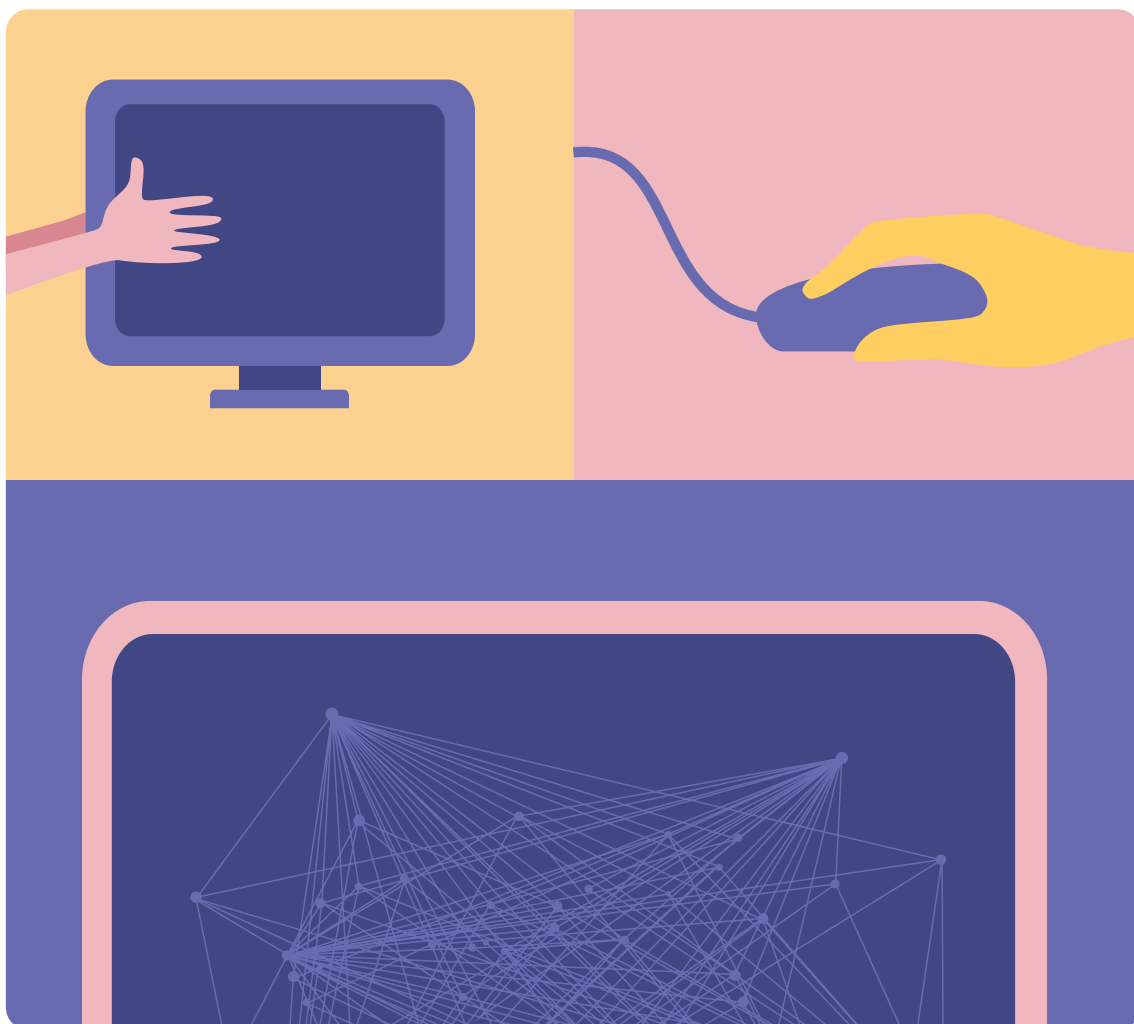
One of People Know How's key outcomes is eliminating data poverty through connectivity for all. We do this locally by delivering our Reconnect service, supporting adults to improve wellbeing and digital skills. We also do this on a national level, by initiating action-research derived from our local work in the community and taking part in various working groups. From these activities we run nationwide campaigns that aim to influence government policy, enhancing community development and acting as a catalyst for systems change across Scotland. Connectivity Now is one such campaign.

The event

The event was run in partnership with the [Carnegie Trust](#), [Good Things Foundation](#) and the [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations](#). On 26 November key voices in digital from across the academic, public, third and business sectors turned on their webcams to take part in discussions to facilitate tangible change towards digital inclusion for all. The first half of the event included talks from speakers including Ben Macpherson MSP, Gavin McLachlan from the [University of Edinburgh](#), Claudia Baldacchino from People Know How and Adam Lang from [Nesta Scotland](#).

These speakers represent the heart of Connect Four, facilitating collaboration across sectors, this time with the focus set on digital inclusion. What we heard were commonalities between issues and solutions around digital inclusion in organisations from different sectors.

This first half of the event reinforced our previous findings that there are three main aspects of digital inclusion: **getting the devices, improving digital skills and staying connected**.





“About 800,000 people and over 300,000 households in Scotland still do not have any form of internet access at home. For some this will be a question of simple economics – the inability to afford a device or the cost of ongoing access. Others may have some form of device but are among the 20% of the population that have low or no essential digital skills, and People Know How has been very active in that space.” - **Ben Macpherson MSP**

Many organisations represented at the event, including People Know How and initiatives like [Connecting Scotland](#), have been addressing the first and second of these aspects by providing devices and running services offering support to improve digital skills. This support includes learning how to use a device, navigate the web, stay safe online, improve financial health and increase employability. However, in order to use a device or improve digital skills, we first need to address the aspect that ties the three together – connectivity.

The solutions that organisations are currently able to provide are temporary. For example, MiFi devices distributed by Connecting Scotland provide 2 years of data in Phase 2 of the programme. This is already a great improvement from their initial data provisions of 6 months and 1 year – but it is still temporary. In knowledge of this, and the possibility to provide more data as proven by Connecting Scotland, attendees throughout our breakout rooms pressed the need for a sustainable solution to data poverty that will continue to function beyond the coronavirus pandemic.

With restrictions changing from week to week, society has had to adapt quickly. Communities have found new ways to support one another online, while organisations are using processes that might have otherwise taken years to roll out. Due to necessity, we have built up momentum and adaptability, but we must not lose this as vaccination numbers rise and restrictions ease. This heightened recognition of digital exclusion and data poverty is an opportunity for us to build a comprehensive plan for a future beyond coronavirus. The pandemic has not created data poverty, it has increased the awareness of its existence and we must use this momentum as a catalyst for change and social mobility.

We have derived three main points from our attendee discussions that transcend boundaries between sectors, postcodes and demographics. We believe that through cross-sectoral collaboration these points can eliminate data poverty and bring about connectivity for all.

The following sections will expand on each of these points using the conversations we recorded in our breakout rooms.



**Regulate
connectivity**



**Link connectivity
to shared spaces**



**Zero-rate essential
service websites**



1. Regulate connectivity



“Nobody should be without heat and water, and nobody should be without internet access.”

Connectivity as a basic utility

An internet connection should be regarded as a basic utility. It is not a luxury but a necessity and yet it is often regarded as second to other basic utilities like water, gas and electricity. There are a plethora of resources and activities that only take place online. And for those that are also accessible offline, their online counterparts are frequently much faster and easier to access, use and understand.

Furthermore, social activity essential to mental health and wellbeing has also become digital, moving something that we would traditionally practice in person into the online space. As a result, those without an internet connection are cut off from all aspects of society – essential services, social activities and any form of support that may help to alleviate this isolation.

The poverty premium

The poverty premium is defined by the [Citizens Advice Bureau](#) as “a term used to describe how those on low incomes often pay more for essential goods and services”. Essential goods and services are considered to be things like water, gas and electricity – also known as basic utilities. The poverty premium also applies to connectivity, with those on low income often paying more for internet packages that they do not have the time or resources to research. This becomes a paradox, with the main obstacle to purchasing an affordable internet connection being an inability to



get online to efficiently research and make an informed choice. Additionally, common ways of saving money such as browsing price comparison websites or setting up direct debits online are not available as options. In this case, many may turn to the telephone, but in doing so a long queue time is almost guaranteed.

The catch-22 of needing connectivity to research internet connection tariffs is only made more paradoxical by coronavirus, with support for organisations to help improve financial health readily available... online. This is just another factor in the way the pandemic has exacerbated social and economic inequalities, and with no connectivity social divides only widen. However, there are ways to address the poverty premium that can be applied tangibly to the world of telecoms.

“I found that BT offer some options for people who are on benefits or pension credit, but that was after hours of research. The schemes aren't widely advertised. Even then, there are layers of paperwork people need to go through, phoning specific numbers, and filling in forms to get checked with DWP. It's a lengthy process - it needs to be quicker and more streamlined.”

Addressing the poverty premium

Through regulation of the telecoms market through cross-sectoral collaboration, we can offer better deals and packages to people on low incomes.

Some companies already offer this, but they are hidden behind tariffs that companies find more profitable to market. These more visible contracts may also contain small print that heightens costs after a period of time, which can frighten consumers. Even once found, there can be many obstacles on the road to obtaining such a tariff including layers of paperwork, forms and evidencing. If you add the lack of an internet connection into the mix, the process is even more drawn out.

The solution to this is to regulate how tariffs are shown and accessed. By removing marketing labyrinths and making affordable tariffs more visible and accessible, there will no longer be the possibility of paying more than your neighbour for the same or lesser service. This will allow more people to access connectivity, helping them to get online, receive support and continue to make further informed decisions to improve their financial health.

“This reminds me of how it used to be with train tickets. You've probably been through the nightmare - 500 versions of a train ticket and you can't find the best one. But a few years ago, that was changed. There are still lots of different ticket types, but they have to show you the cheapest first. And if you go to the ticket booth they have to sell you the cheapest one. The laws actually changed and they couldn't sell you a more expensive one than you needed.”



2. Link connectivity to shared spaces



Sharing connectivity

Like all resources, connectivity costs money. So far, this report has proposed that it should be affordable and regulated. However, to some, the recurring subscription it demands is the largest obstacle of all. One way to overcome this is through linking access to connectivity to public or shared spaces.

“Think about all the companies whose employees have been working from home who now don’t need the office space. A potential solution could be centres, hubs and communities where people could go to get access.”

Other options include developing ways to gift, share or subsidise data. Many of us might not use all the data in our package and there should be a way in which to gift it forward.



Community hubs

Community hubs form a space in society where community members can get together and improve wellbeing. They often provide services addressing local need, for example childcare, health and wellbeing activities, advice and information, etc. These spaces are the perfect location to offer secure connectivity to the community. By consistently providing connectivity through community hubs, individuals can gather to securely share data.



Social housing

Social housing or any shared housing spaces also have the opportunity to securely share connectivity. Some have already taken up this opportunity and others should be encouraged to follow suit. It is nonsensical that someone might benefit from a high-speed internet connection, while a few metres away their neighbour is completely disconnected. The pandemic has given us stories of neighbours sharing connections of their own accord, but there is no guarantee the next neighbour to move in will do the same.

If housing associations were to take on this responsibility, or if regulation or guidelines were put in place, connectivity could be rolled out to support each resident in a complex. With correct security measures in place, shared connectivity could transform the lives of those on low income, improving health, wellbeing, employability and financial health.



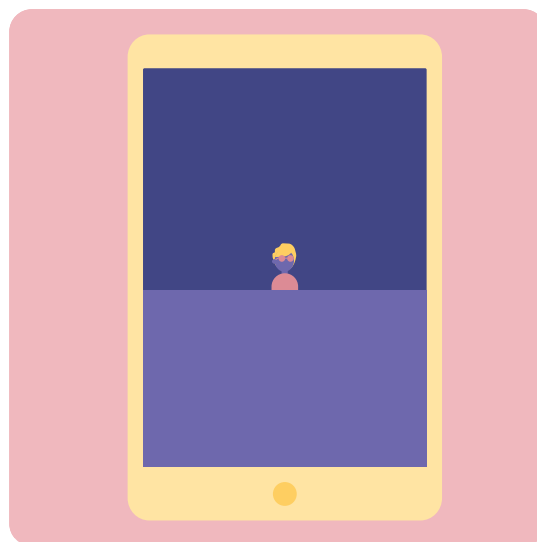


3. Zero-rate essential service websites



Digital exclusion is social isolation

The pandemic has hastened the move to provide more services online. The shared goal of this move is to make access easier, faster and more efficient but service providers seldom ask themselves whether all their service users have an internet connection. For those who do not fit this expectation, access to these services becomes near impossible. Despite this, online service adaptation often feels like a final frontier, with some completely retiring any offline alternative.



“We’ve asked every single person if they’re having to claim their benefits, if they’re having to go to the doctors, to the pharmacy, to do their shopping. To keep away from people and do these things, if they can, using technology. So how can you possibly not have social inclusion as a part of any argument going forward? If you cannot access any of those normal day-to-day services, you’re isolated.”

It is not possible to address data poverty or digital exclusion without also addressing how they link into wider societal issues such as social isolation and loneliness. This report has demonstrated that connectivity plays a large part in accessing services, an issue exacerbated by the pandemic. Offices of GPs, local authorities and utility providers are closed and places that may have offered public WiFi such as libraries are shut. Combined with government guidelines to isolate or shield, this all amounts to heightened isolation.



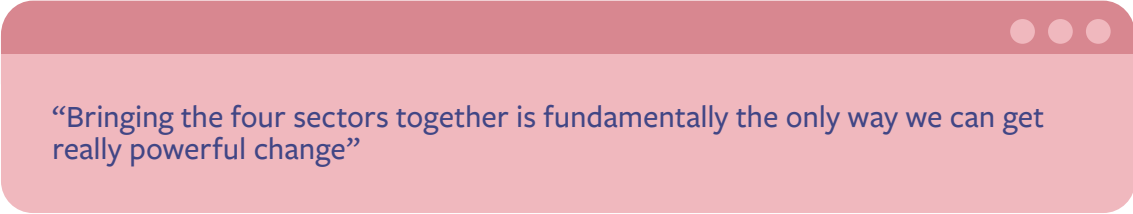
Zero-rating

Zero-rating is the act of allowing access to certain websites for free, or in other words, without spending any additional data. Similar to dialling freephone 0800 or 0808 phone numbers from a landline to access core services without being charged, zero rated websites could provide essential access to welfare, health and educational content. Like freephone numbers which require you to have a landline installed, zero-rated websites

still require an existing internet package. Therefore, this recommendation must be implemented alongside our call to regulate connectivity. With this in place, those who mainly go online to access core services can take advantage of low tier internet packages. This means that users would no longer need to pay out of pocket to access key information and resources they should already have a right to access. Hosting and maintenance of the websites themselves can be funded through advertising.

Conclusion: a call for collaboration

This report was created from recorded breakout room conversations that took place at our Connect Four: Digital Inclusion event. A vital element to all suggestions here is collaboration. At People Know How we believe that through socially innovative cross-sectoral collaboration we can come together to solve social issues and be a catalyst for real change. Our three key points can develop a consistent approach between sectors and local authorities.



“Bringing the four sectors together is fundamentally the only way we can get really powerful change”

Moving forward People Know How will run a nationwide campaign entitled Connectivity Now. The campaign forms a call to action across sectors, to unite our experience from this pandemic and do something about data poverty. As we share pledges of your support, we will also be conducting action-based research derived from our experience of providing devices and digital skills to the community.



**Pledge your support today and join
our campaign for #ConnectivityNow.**

[www.peopleknowhow.org/connectivity- now](http://www.peopleknowhow.org/connectivity-now)



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