

DIGITAL INCLUSION & CAPABILITIES IN KENT

Background

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) emphasised the digital divide within our county. Particularly as many jobs and services, including public services, were driven to digital delivery due to government restrictions.

It is likely that after the pandemic, many services will continue to be delivered digitally, due to many pressures and challenges faced by service providers.

In February 2021, Kent County Council's Leader, Roger Gough announced £10m allocated to the Helping Hands Scheme. The funding comes from government COVID-19 Emergency Grant. £2.5m of this £10m fund was assigned to tackling digital poverty.

Following this key decision (21/00024), the local authority recruited and appointed their Digital Lead, who joined the authority in June 2021 as part of the Financial Hardship team.

In the same month, an additional £2.5m of Contain Outbreak Management Fund was assigned to improving digital inclusion and capabilities in the county.

Kent County Council's analytics team produced a county-wide report on Digital Exclusion with the data and information that we have available, along with district-level reports. If you would like a copy of these, these are available on request.

The Workstream: Digital Inclusion & Capabilities

The digital workstream, sitting within the Financial Hardship Programme, is being led by Sam Lain-Rose (Digital Lead), with Zena Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance) as the Senior Responsible Officer.

The entire workstream is focussed on improving digital inclusion and capability within Kent, including working closely with Medway. The workstream early on developed four key principles that will embed all their projects and schemes, as well as, supporting the allocation of the funding.

Contact the Team:

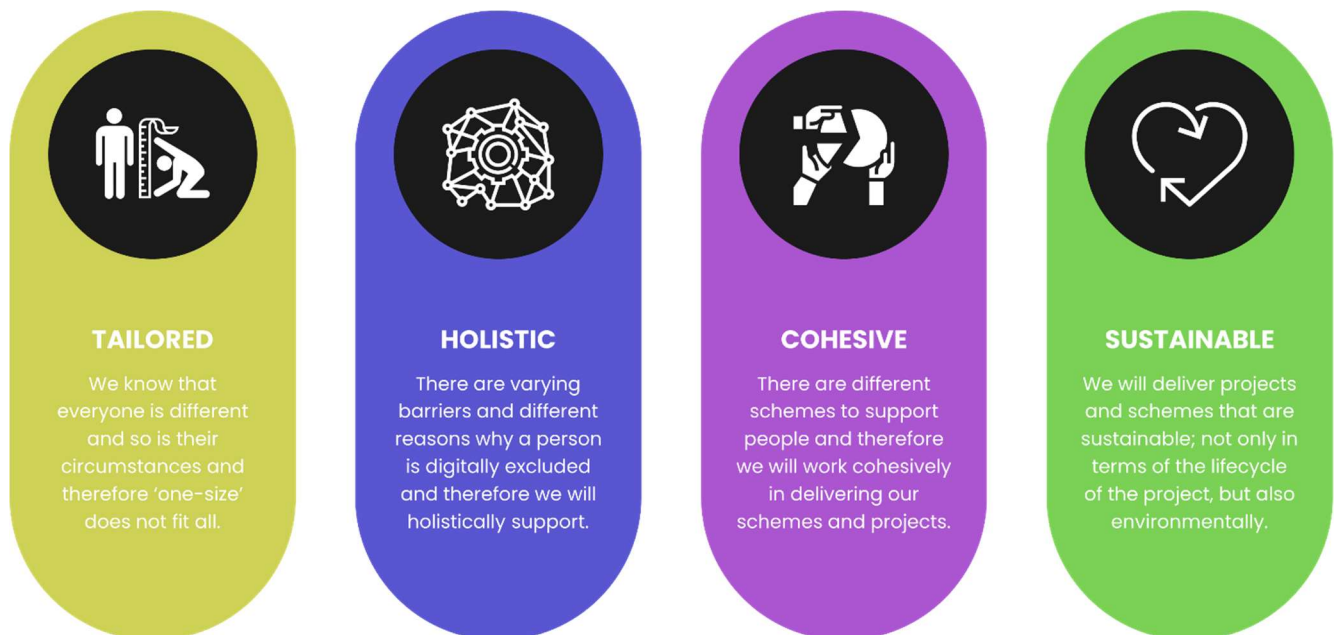
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Digital Inclusion & Capabilities

The Principles



- **Tailored:** We know that everyone is different and so is their circumstances and therefore 'one-size' doesn't fit all. That is why we have not decided to pre-build any hardware we are supplying with software or automatically provide routers, because some beneficiaries will require this, others will not. Therefore, we will provide an entirely tailored approach to tackling digital inclusion in Kent.
- **Holistic:** There are varying barriers and different reasons why a person is digitally excluded and therefore we will holistically support. That is why when it comes to supporting someone that is digitally excluded, we will not ignore or discount other social barriers, such as financial capability and therefore we will refer into wider Financial Hardship schemes being developed or delivered.
- **Cohesive:** There are different schemes to support people and therefore we will work cohesively in delivering our schemes and projects. That is why our own projects and schemes work well together and we will ensure that we do not compete with other third-party schemes and projects, as we want to ensure that the time-limited funding we have available is maximised.
- **Sustainable:** We will deliver projects and schemes that are sustainable; not only in terms of lifecycle of the project, but also environmentally. That is why we have decided to supply remanufactured laptops that are carbon-neutral and in some cases carbon-positive.

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Digital Inclusion & Capabilities

Digital Inclusion & Capabilities Team



Above shows the structure of the wider-digital inclusion and capabilities team and below are the details of the team:

- Sam Lain-Rose, Digital Lead
- Uwaila Uwaechia, Strategy Development & Engagement Adviser
- Chloe Johnstone, Engagement & Skills Manager
- Alexandra Pack, Project Officer
- Hannah Brown, Project Officer
- Simon Sim, Social Connectivity Officer
- Brooke Ardley, Engagement Officer (West Kent)
- Jake Huggett, Engagement Officer (East Kent)
- Steven Holdcroft, Engagement Officer (South & East Kent)
- Sophie Mackenzie, Engagement Officer (North Kent)
- Christopher Reddy, Engagement Officer (North & West Kent)
- Doris Shaba-Jeffries, Engagement Officer (South Kent)
- Tayla Doherty, Systems Development Coordinator

The Role of Engagement Officer

Coordinate and implement activities within their geographical area of Kent, championing the voices of people we support, our partners and our workforce and communicating news, achievements and challenges to different audiences to drive participation and engagement.

Engagement Officers will recruit, onboard and retain digital champions and deliver engagement and skills sessions directly and indirectly. Engagement Officers will also keep partners, stakeholders and clients up to date with projects and schemes being developed and available.

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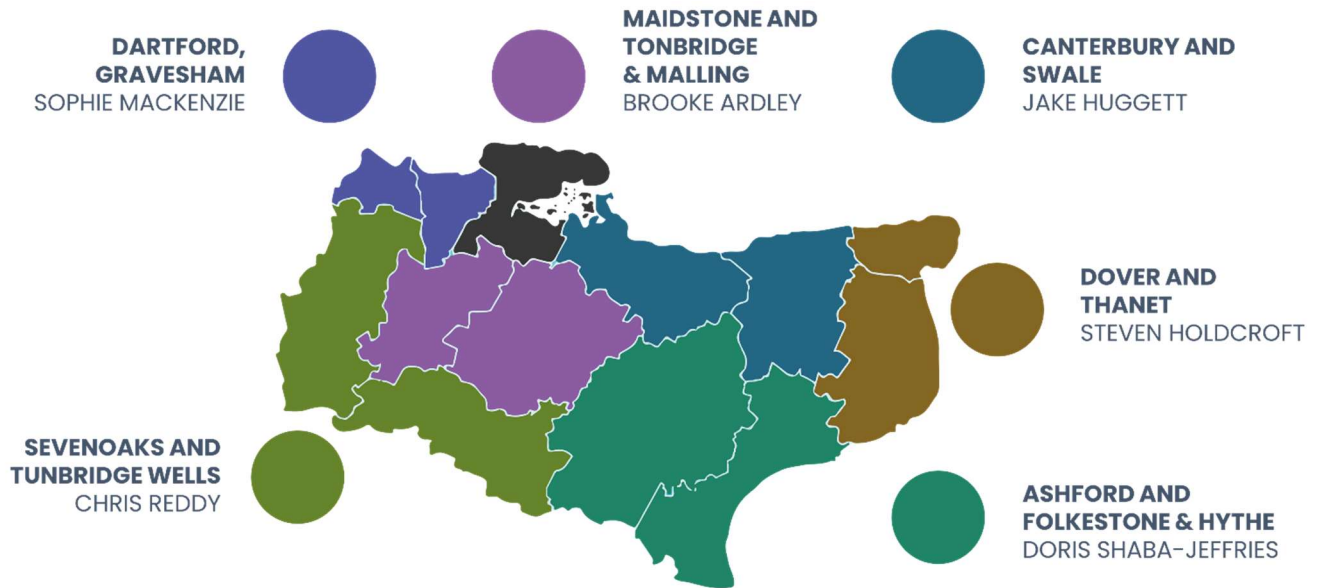
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Area Allocations



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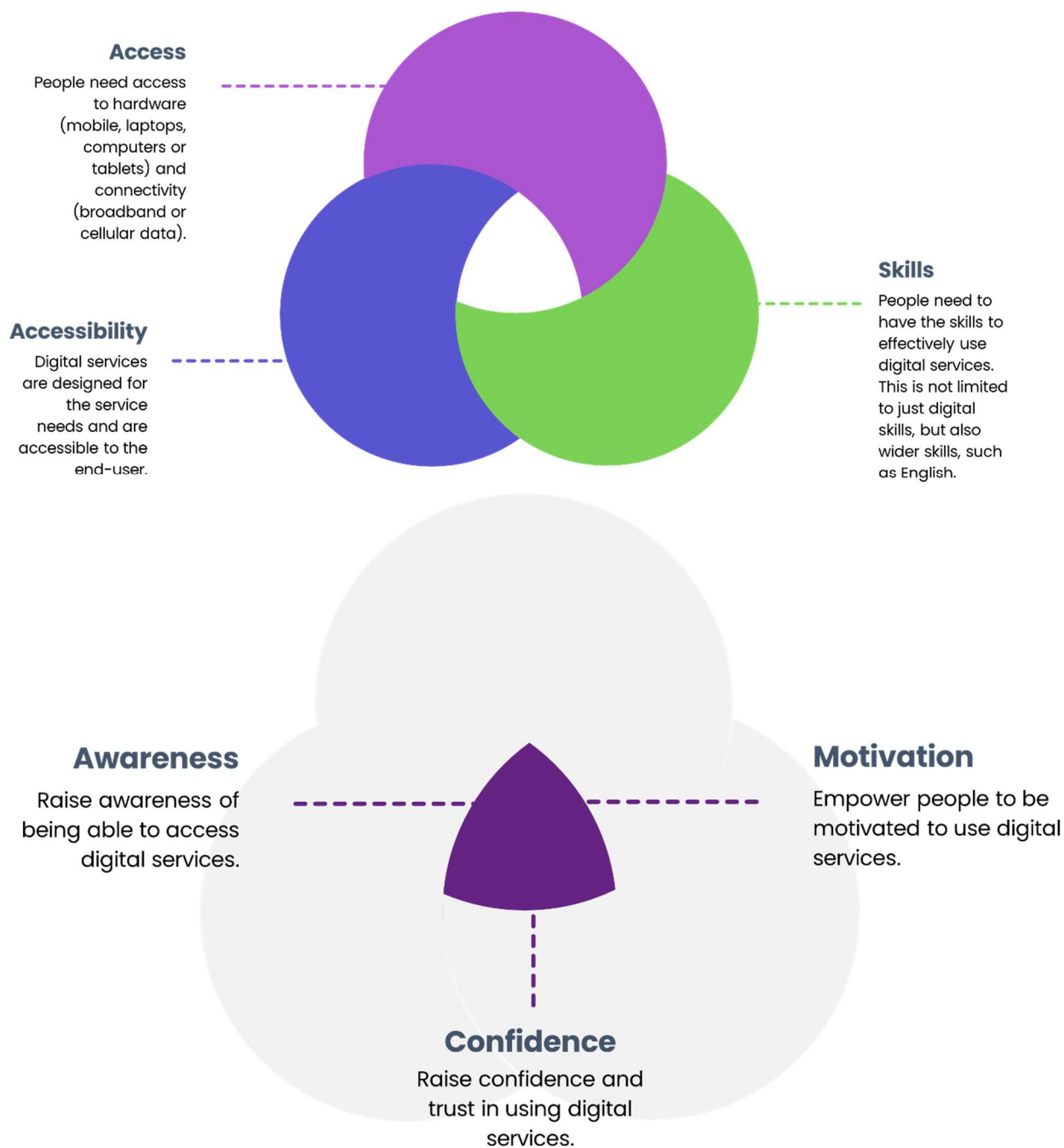
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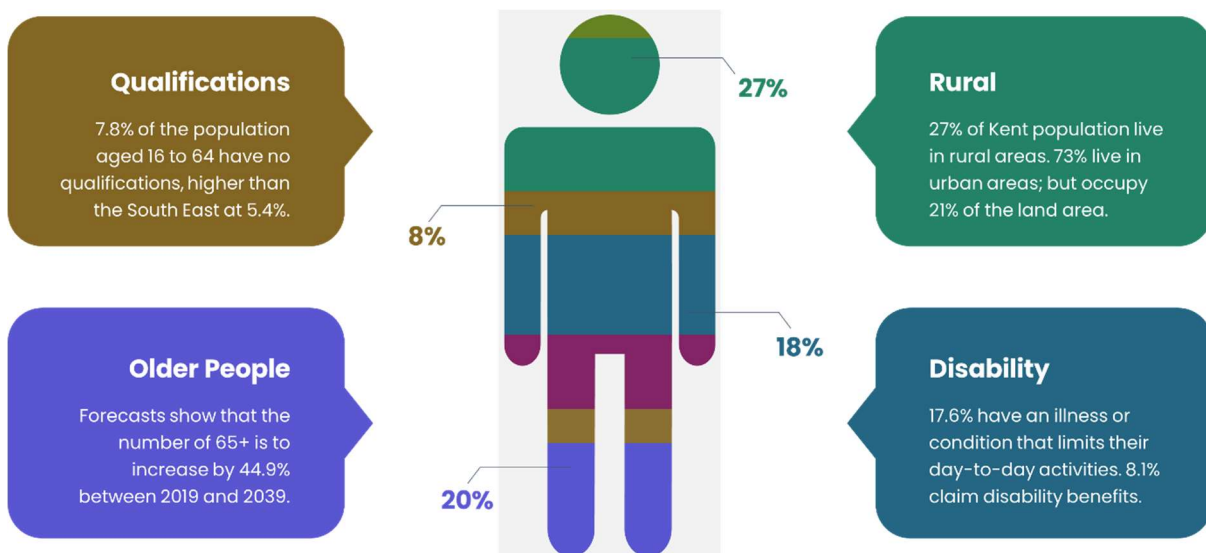
Key Elements and Barriers to Digital Inclusion & Capability



Digitally Excluded Populations



Kent in Statistics



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Projects and Schemes

PROJECT NAME		PROJECT STATUS	DESCRIPTION
	ENGAGEMENT & SKILLS	☐ ☐ ☒	12 month project, with a team of 6 Engagement Officers, 1 Manager and 2 Support Assistants to tackle digital skills.
	SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY	☐ ☐ ☒	6 month project working with KCC's Broadband team to break down the barriers in connecting social housing and MDUs.
	COMMUNITY WI-FI FEASIBILITY	☐ ☐ ☒	Feasibility studies being conducted to expand the KPSN network to create free Wi-Fi for communities in each district.
	SYSTEM & PLATFORM	☐ ☒ ☐	Initially 6 month project to create a digital inclusion and capability system/platform for professionals.
	HARDWARE ACCESS	☐ ☒ ☐	12 month project to support people in gaining access to the hardware (laptops) to access digital services.

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PROJECT NAME		PROJECT STATUS	DESCRIPTION
	HARDWARE LOANING	☐ ☐ ☒	24 month project to provide hardware (tablets) to identified Public Health groups, run across Kent and Medway.
	SOCIAL SECTOR SUPPORT	☐ ☐ ☒	£250k grant pot held by Kent Community Foundation for the social sector to assist in tackling digital exclusion.
	HARDWARE RECYCLING	☐ ☒ ☐	12 month project to enable residents and businesses to recycle their hardware and provide hardware to those most in need.
	SOFTWARE ACCESS	☒ ☐ ☐	12 month project to support people in accessing software that is right for them, e.g. Microsoft Office, Dragon Accessibility, etc.
	4G/5G CONNECTIVITY	☒ ☐ ☐	12 month project to support people in accessing the internet, where broadband is not an option for them, but 4G/5G could be.

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PROJECT NAME		PROJECT STATUS	DESCRIPTION
	DIGITAL STRATEGY	☐ ☒ ☐	12 month project to develop a digital inclusion and capabilities strategy for Kent County Council, which partners can link to.
	DIGITAL INNOVATION FUND (C&YP)	☒ ☐ ☐	6 month project to provide monies for groups and organisations that will support children and young people to combat digital exclusion.
	DIGITAL EVENT	☒ ☐ ☐	A county-wide event, held at Kent Events Centre (Detling) that will attract local councils, businesses and consumers.
	DIGITAL SKILLS COURSES	☒ ☐ ☐	Commissioning training providers and other qualifying organisations to create engaging skills course content.
	DIGITAL GATEWAY HUBS	☒ ☐ ☐	12 month project to support the creation of digital gateway hubs for digitally excluded rural communities.

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