Doing Digital Inclusion:
Social Housing Handbook

Tinder Foundation works with social housing providers across the country, through the UK online centres network and the Digital Housing Hub. Housing providers face very specific challenges to support tenants to get online and gain basic digital skills. This handbook outlines these challenges and offers some tips and resources for how social housing providers can tackle digital exclusion.

Key stats:

9.5 million UK adults lack basic digital skills[1] and 6.4m of those have never been online.[2]

- **4.1 million** adults living in social housing are offline

- **60%** of adults living in social housing are economically inactive

- **31%** are retired and **29%** are either disabled, full-time students or care for a family member at home (England)

- **21%** of 65+ year-olds live in social housing (England)

- **44%** of single parents live in social housing (England) .[3]

These statistics present a breakdown of the population living in social housing and highlight some of the challenges tenants face in getting online and gaining basic digital skills.

1. BBC Media Literacy: Understanding Digital Capabilities follow-up, September 2013 and March 2014
2. Internet Access Quarterly Update, Q1 2014 by ONS
3. Digital by Default 2012: The Case for Digital Housingby Housing Technology and Race Online 2012

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Emerging themes from our 2014 Digital Deal Project:

Access:
• **Access at home:** A large proportion of tenants haven't got internet access in their homes (and not all social housing providers have internet access in their communal areas for tenant use).

 - **Affordability:** Tenants may not be able to afford internet enabled kit & connectivity, may face restrictive payment and contract options and/or lack credit rating to secure a contract.

 - **Hidden costs:** Some tenants may feel they are not in control of their finances and are worried about hidden costs of home access, including kit and connectivity, especially where data usage is involved.

 - **Variable needs:** Individuals will have highly variable kit and connection needs but can lack awareness of all the home access options, and how to get support to make the right decision for them. Without a landline, mobile broadband may be the best option, but they'll need clear information about all the various possibilities.

• **Lack of convenience:** Some tenants face longer distances between where they live and the digital inclusion activities on offer from their housing provider, making it more difficult and expensive for them to access support.

Motivations and skills:
• **Lack of interest:** Tenants can be deterred from going online because they can't see the relevance for them. They might think the digital world has nothing to offer them. They've survived this long without it, why should they bother?

• **Jargon:** Those who aren't online can be put off by technical terminology and language such as 'IT', 'downloads', 'broadband' and 'training'.

• **Social isolation and fear:** Some tenants lack contact with people and the trusted support to get to grips with digital. Fear of online dangers - e.g. fraud or data theft when undertaking online transactions and online banking - and fear of 'getting it wrong' can lead to a lack of digital confidence and reduced motivation to go online.

• **Lack of skills:** Lack of literacy and numeracy skills can further compound feelings of fear and disinterest when engaging with the digital world.

• **External influences:** Services like Universal Credit can be a key motivator, although delays to roll out mean it's less effective at compelling certain tenants to take an interest in digital skills sessions.

Access:
• **Lack of digital infrastructure:** Not all providers have broadband connectivity and some don't have the space to set up digital training or are unsure what types of space are appropriate.

• **Software and equipment limitations:** Many social housing providers are constrained by the software they can install on organisational devices, limiting access to support and tools the internet offers, such as training webinars.

• **Damage/theft of equipment:** Concerns over the potential for damage to or theft of equipment can lead to apprehension about running informal digital training sessions.

Motivations and skills:

• **Marketing methods:** Social housing providers can find it difficult to attract tenants to their IT centres and digital activities, and to maintain interest. Traditional ways of promoting digital skills provision - through posters and leaflets, adverts in tenant magazines, social media and word of mouth - are only attractive to a small set of tenants, and not necessarily those who stand to gain the most from getting online.

• **Limited resource:** Some social housing providers don't have dedicated digital inclusion resource. Some providers may not have worked with volunteers or Digital Champions before and therefore may require guidance and training on how to recruit, train, retain and manage them.

• **Staff digital skills and confidence:** Staff that don't specialise in digital inclusion may feel they don't have the skills and knowledge to establish digital training sessions or to maintain devices and connections for this learning.

• **Pressure to deliver one-to-one support:** Digital inclusion tutors and Digital Champions can find that a lot of tenants want one-to-one support, especially at the early stage, but do not have the resources to provide this level of support.

Social Housing Digital Inclusion Toolkit

The Social Housing Digital Inclusion Toolkit at **www.ukonlinecentres.com/socialhousing** has plenty of case studies, research links, and resources to help you tackle digital exclusion in social housing.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

How To Engage and Recruit Learners in Social Housing

1. Trial different session formats
Test out a variety of session formats to see what works. Some tenants might prefer regular sessions they can rely on, some might prefer informal drop-in sessions or support in their home, especially where there is no communal area.

2. Label it carefully
Marketing your offer as computer classes may not attract people. Engage specific audiences by highlighting what the internet can offer them - technology as the means, not the end. For example hobbies and interests, keeping in touch with family and friends and skills for jobseeking.

3. Make it fun and interactive
Make the learning space a place people want to go - if it's an informal group, get people sat around a table with devices, rather than in rows, so they can interact and share as they learn. Use a big screen so that tenants can start learning in a group and introduce 1-to-1 support a few sessions in.

4. Make online tenants your ambassadors
Seek out tenants who already have online skills and access, but who don't choose online services by default. Encouraging them to use your online services could generate cost-savings which can be reinvested in to digital inclusion work *and* they can influence friends and neighbours.

5. Deliver digital skills training with other support
Embed digital into wider support services by establishing a two-way referrals process with financial inclusion, housing and employability teams.

Things to Consider Before You Deliver

1. Get the technology right

• Ensure sufficient kit and reliable broadband are in place in communal areas well in advance of organising digital inclusion support. Tablets are good because they're portable, often relatively inexpensive and good for people who struggle to use a mouse.

• When sourcing hardware for your sessions, do your research and try a variety of devices. Consider computer recycling companies who will often do deals for bulk purchase. Weigh the pros and cons of high quality kit over more affordable devices and do budget for wear and tear and breakages as this will happen!

Your Housing in Manchester use tablets and mobile wifi hubs to take digital inclusion to where tenants are

• Consider which devices your tenants are most likely to have access to at home.

• Consider which is the right device for a particular learning theme. For instance, laptops might be better than tablets for employability sessions and creating CVs etc.

Thirteen Group encourage use of online services through self-serve kiosks

2. Make websites and online transaction services fit-for-purpose

As well as providing better internet access and training for tenants, ensure your digital services are so simple and intuitive that they become the preferred channel for tenants, including those who are getting online for the first time.

3. Support staff and tenants to become Digital Champions

Invest time and money into training your staff. Enthuse staff and tenants and be positive about the benefits of digital. Ensure Scheme Managers (or their equivalents) have sufficient basic digital skills and confidence to support residents. Digital Champion training can be used to boost staff confidence and inspire them. Encourage tenants to help each other, or even to self-organise!

4. Work with partners and integrate digital with existing provision

Partner with local support organisations like Citizens Advice Bureaux, employability organisations and UK online centres. Establish external partnerships in order to offer the best and most complete support service for tenants and invite them to deliver outreach in your centre - it could increase the footfall of people coming to your communal areas.

5. Find the right training provider for your tenants

UK online centres are local community organisations who are skilled at inspiring, motivating and supporting local communities in digital skills. They offer free/low-cost digital support, often specialise in specific audiences (e.g. jobseekers or older people) and can offer outreach training for groups of learners. You can find a local centre on our Centre Search.

Where matching with a UK online centre isn't possible or suitable, undertake research to identify **other local training providers** to suit the needs of residents, for example Pitman Training, The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Age UK.

6. Support tenants to feel confident with their kit

• Encourage tenants to get their own devices where possible, so they can use it in their own homes. If you don't have access to a lot of kit, try 'bring your own device' sessions which make sure tenants are making the most of what they have.

Yarlington Housing Group run a laptop and dongle equipment loan scheme for tenants

• Make sure it works first time. If providing kit, give tenants a good induction - don't just hand them the box!

• Consider equipment loan schemes. Alongside structured peer-to-peer support and low-cost borrow-to-buy partnerships with credit unions, this can accelerate learning and confidence, and make digital an affordable and accessible option for tenants.

See **www.ukonlinecentres.com/socialhousing** for more information or contact us at **hello@tinderfoundation.org** if you'd like to talk to us about digital inclusion.