INCA Response to [Digital Inclusion Action Plan](#)
Working document

1. Are you answering this survey as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or a group?

☐ I am responding as an individual
☒ I am responding on behalf of an organisation or group

2. Where are you or your organisation/group located?

☒North West
☒North East
☒Yorkshire and the Humber
☒East Midlands
☒West Midlands
☒East of England
☒London
☒South East
☒South West
☒Scotland
☒Wales
☒Northern Ireland

3. If you are an individual, please can you outline the reasons you have responded to this survey?

N/A

4. If you are an organisation, please can you specify the type (e.g. business, academia, government, charity) and sector in which you operate (e.g. service provider, academic research, not-for-profit)?

The Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) is the leading UK trade association representing organisations deploying independent digital infrastructure. Founded in 2010, INCA aims to foster a new approach to digital infrastructure, focusing on full fibre (FTTP) and high-quality wireless broadband whilst campaigning for the policy and regulatory support needed to maintain a healthy, competitive market that continues to attract investment to the UK. INCA has over 200 members and represents most of the full fibre infrastructure builders all over the UK, commonly referred to as Altnets. Members include network owners, operators, suppliers, and managers as well as access networks, middle mile networks, network hubs and exchanges and organisations (including public sector) that are developing or promoting independent networks.

Altnets have been busy building new networks at pace over the past few years, reaching areas which were underserved by the market incumbent. INCA and its members are committed to helping to bridge the digital divide across the UK.

5. Government has identified five population groups that would likely benefit greatly from digital inclusion initiatives, these are:

1. **Low-income households**
2. **Older people**
3. **Disabled people**
4. **Unemployed and those seeking work**
5. **Young people**

Do you agree with these five population groups?

Select either:

☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

6. If you answered no to the previous question, what changes would you make to population groups?

Whilst INCA does not disagree with the five demographic groups identified as being at risk of being digitally excluded, INCA contends that they lack sufficient depth and do not encompass further demographics which are known to be excluded. This includes rural communities and residents of social housing.

Despite acknowledging that 58,000 premises lack access to "decent broadband", the Action Plan needs to be amended to recognise the unique forms of digital exclusion experienced in rural areas. The more rural an area is, the older its average age and the faster its average age is increasing; 25% of the rural population was aged 65 or over in 2020, compared with 17% of the urban population in England; in Scotland, 26% of the population of remote rural areas is aged 65 or over, compared with 21% in accessible rural areas and 18% in the rest of Scotland (Depopulation in rural areas, House of Commons Library, 9 Sept 2024). Digital exclusion is compounded in rural areas as a result of not being able to access 'decent broadband', therefore, it would be remiss to not include this sizeable population as one of those demographics at risk of being digitally excluded

Altnets operate across the UK and have unique insight into these disparities. INCA members deliver services across many rural communities and have witnessed first-hand the digital disadvantage felt in this populations. Whilst great strides have been made in the provision of rural full-fibre broadband, digital confidence and inclusion is still lacking.

INCA contends that the inclusion of rural communities as a priority population group would reflect the government's own data. In Cornwall for example, the UK's most deprived and rural county, 62,000 people have never used the internet, while in Devon the figure stands at 78,000. The Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index (2022) found that 39% of people in the South West have low or very low digital skills. These are not marginal statistics; they represent structural inequality that must be addressed in the national strategy. These figures point to the pressing need for a place-based approach to digital inclusion which understands rurality as a driver of disadvantage.

The Action Plan must also consider the needs of residents within social housing. As identified within Ofcom's research looking into the demographic characteristics of groups of the UK adult population that are either offline entirely or those that have limited methods of accessing internet connectivity, the largest respondent (37.2%) for people who are "non-internet users" came from people who are living in accommodation which is rented from a Local Authority/ Housing Association/ Trust. This housing tenure significantly contributes to non-internet usage, and it would be remiss to not acknowledge this cohort as being at risk of remaining digitally excluded.

7. Are there examples of digital inclusion initiatives that could be scaled-up or replicated in other local communities? If known, please provide the name of the initiative, the organisation, a summary of what they do and contact details (if relevant).

B4RN (Broadband for the Rural North)
- With an extensive network of volunteers across the most challenging rural locations in Lancashire, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Norfolk, and the North-East, B4RN is in a prime position to connect individuals with the right resources. This network enables them to work with organisations best placed to help bridge the digital divide, as well as to educate, guide, and coach people on how to maximise the benefits of their connectivity. B4RN is playing a significant role in bridging the digital divide by delivering reliable full-fibre gigabit symmetrical broadband to some of the hardest-to-reach areas. They offer a Social Tariff, which allows those receiving certain benefits to access the same high-speed service at a reduced price, ensuring that affordability is not a barrier to digital inclusion.
- They have a dedicated connections team and help desk representatives that participate in community meetings, helping residents get the most out of their broadband.

City Fibre
- As part of the digital inclusion action plan, City Fibre have pledged to connect 170 community hubs across several rural areas. These hubs and residences are often the heart of the local communities they serve, and include pubs, village halls and community centres.

Community Fibre
- Community Fibre provides free gigabit broadband to over 500 community centres across London, offering residents without a home connection a reliable and local digital access point. This long-standing initiative forms part of its broader social mission to combat digital exclusion in the capital.

- Community Fibre also offers free or discounted broadband for vulnerable groups, delivers digital skills workshops, and works in partnership with local charities, schools and community organisations to ensure community-level impact.

WightFibre
WightFibre was the first UK ISP to offer a social tariff with automatic DWP eligibility checks. Over 8% of its customer base now benefits from this offer. Its Community Partnership Programme provides free or subsidised broadband to community hubs across the Isle of Wight, which host digital skills training and drop-in sessions. WightFibre have worked with local charities like Age UK and the Isle of Wight Youth Trust. Some of the programmes include:
- Provision of refurbished laptops and tablets to low-income families
- Deployment of Alexa devices to reduce loneliness in elderly residents
- Passive home monitoring for individuals with dementia
- Distribution of simplified tablets to digitally hesitant users

Wildanet
- Wildanet, a Cornwall-based Altnet, has developed a number of digital hubs across the South-West, providing local residents with shared access to broadband, equipment and support. The company also runs a device recycling scheme and offers social tariffs for low-income households.
- Wildanet argues that, in areas where individual home connections remain unaffordable or impractical, community hubs with wraparound services are an essential part of any national strategy. They recommend expanding social tariffs and introducing targeted subsidies to enable inclusive access in remote regions.
- In evidence to the House of Lords Digital Communications Committee, former CEO of Wildanet, Helen Wylde-Archibald made the following points.
    - "What we have also done in Cornwall, which has worked very well for us, is social digital hubs. When we build out in a rural area we do a free hub at the back of a church, church hall or charity. We give them broadband free of charge for life. We find that those are an important part of the solution around social tariffs and things, because then you get the community discussing how people might get their prescriptions online, how they log on and whether they need to worry about security.
    - "We found from working with the local council and other groups that that allows us to try to get rid of some of those issues, which are about digital confidence, and makes adoption of those tariffs come much more naturally, because you see the benefit, but you also overcome your fears."

Further examples
- INCA is aware of an Altnet who has partnered with a local community radio station serving diverse ethnic minority communities in Southampton. This collaboration has been instrumental in promoting digital literacy and technology adoption, particularly in underrepresented groups. It demonstrates how culturally sensitive partnerships can help tackle digital exclusion in urban communities where language, trust, or cultural barriers may deter engagement.
- Another Altnet has worked in direct partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide 12 months of free broadband to over 160 claimants across ten Jobcentre Plus (JCP) sites. This targeted intervention, backed by DWP staff training and promotion, shows how coordinated engagement between ISPs and government departments can deliver tangible digital inclusion outcomes. The success of this model points to the potential for wider roll-out through JCP networks nationally.

8. Are there examples of evaluation models for measuring the impact of digital inclusions programmes that you are aware of? Please provide details of these models and where they have been used (if known).

Altnets and digital inclusion organisations use a variety of different evaluation models and practical frameworks to measure the impact of localised programmes. However, current models must evolve if the Government is to overcome digital inequality, particularly in rural communities. Evaluation frameworks must include specific, measurable targets for rural areas, recognising the higher cost of installation, limited digital skills provision, and greater physical and social barriers to access.

INCA recommends that the government set specific, measurable targets for rural communities, reflecting the higher installation costs, greater physical barriers, and absence of local training provision in many of these areas. Altnets, who lead nationally on rural deployment, stand ready, willing and able to assist in designing and delivering those interventions.

Specific examples
1. **Social Value Portal (via BDUK)**
    a. The *Social Value Portal* provided through BDUK procurement frameworks, helps quantify the broader benefits of their projects beyond connectivity, including skills training, environmental sustainability, and economic uplift. While not digital inclusion-specific, the model supports reporting under established pillars and aligns with government procurement standards.
    b. One Altnet also noted the following benefits created in their assessment relate to:
        i. Remote Health & Social Care Access (consultations, daily health checks, monitoring)
        ii. Digital Inclusion (facetime with friends and relatives, online church, and other groups)
        iii. Digital Education (home schooling, extra lessons, adult education, self-improvement, "how to")

2. **B Corp Certification Pillars**
    a. Internal initiatives may also be informed by the metrics and governance structures underpinning B Corp certification. These criteria assess social and environmental performance and help ensure their digital inclusion activities align with values-based delivery, including work on accessibility, affordability, and community engagement.

3. **Impact surveys via Digital Ambassadors**
    a. Following digital skills workshops, Digital Ambassadors complete a social impact survey that captures qualitative and quantitative data. This includes changes in confidence levels, awareness of online services, and new digital behaviours (e.g. using email, accessing GP services online, applying for benefits). These surveys provide a valuable real-world feedback loop and help identify where further support is needed.

4. **Social Tariff Uptake Tracking**

     a. Altnets surveyed indicated that they actively monitor the take-up their social tariff, including eligibility, demographic breakdown, and reasons for non-participation. This helps identify barriers - whether technical, financial or attitudinal - that prevent vulnerable households from engaging with subsidised broadband offers.

     b. INCA members noted that they work with local authorities, housing associations and charities to try to identify households in need of a social tariff. For example, in evidence to the House of Lords Digital Committee's inquiry into digital inclusion, Community Fibre noted that "somewhere between 1% and 5% of households are offline. We try to work with them to identify which households that is, and it is extremely difficult. Typically, through a combination of perhaps those bodies not having the data or concerns around them sharing the data with the GDPR, they cannot provide us with a list of people who are currently offline and might need our help. If we had that, we could far more effectively target our help to those particular households".

5. **Community engagement**
     a. Anecdotal evidence is also important to consider, especially around shifting perceptions around broadband relevance. In one of project, an Altnet encountered a community group known who initially resisted engagement, believing broadband "wasn't for people like them."
         i. Following targeted outreach through a coffee morning and tailored demonstrations, several members signed up for the service. Capturing these qualitative shifts is crucial for understanding how to challenge digital disinterest, particularly in isolated or older populations.

6. **Partnerships with industry digital inclusion leaders**
     a. INCA members also collaborate with FutureDotNow and the Good Things Foundation to align activity with national frameworks and build evidence across providers. These partnerships offer valuable shared methodologies, and INCA would encourage wider participation.

9. In what ways could the government partner with industry, charities and community organisations to promote digital inclusion?

Government partnerships with industry represent the best possible avenue to improve digital inclusion and skills at pace. As defined by Deloitte Canada, there are three key areas that industry and government can work together to boost digital inclusion, namely access; participation; and ecosystem.

'Access' refers to the fundamental ability of people to have the physical connection to the internet. Through initiatives like Project Gigabit, the UK has already made significant success in delivering 78.5% gigabit-speed availability as of July 2024. Given that broadband is provided commercially in the UK, access is and always will be the primary way in which government and industry can work together to boost digital inclusion. 'Access', and subsequent connectivity, is the most important, foundational aspect, which if not resolved, the Action Plan collapses. The importance of network competition at a wholesale level is of

critical importance to this. Without competition provided from enterprising Altnets, the pace of the rollout of digital infrastructure from the incumbent would have been far slower and many communities would still be languishing in the digital slow-lane, unable to access rudimentary digital services.

'Participation' measures the digital literacy of people to use technology safely and effectively. According to the 2024 Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index, 31% of people have low or very low digital capabilities, potentially representing 16.8 million people throughout the UK. However, this is 3% lower than 2023. Industry has a key role to play in reducing this further and there are a number of schemes underway to help address this both in the UK and overseas. For example, a number of INCA members facilitate partnerships with local charities to provide localised training on digital tools and run workshops and digital skills training opportunities. All of which help their customers receive the most out of their broadband and boosts the digital skills of the communities Altnets serve.

Finally, 'ecosystem' refers to the wider digital landscape and the ability for users to feel safe in accessing digital services. This is an area that government themselves must take a lead on in providing a clear legislative and regulatory framework to protect people online. However, industry has a role to play in offering a friendly-face to customers where they can ask questions on the digital services they use and have confidence that their data is being managed effectively.

A short-term initiative that can help address digital inclusion, however, is for government to better facilitate interaction between industry and local authorities. There are examples of INCA members attempting to provide free broadband provision to lower-income households that were blocked due to the inability or unwillingness of local authorities to engage. This must be addressed in order for industry to properly be able to facilitate and lead digital inclusion programmes.

10. How can the government ensure the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund best supports local communities across the UK?

Altnets represent the best opportunity to have local companies deliver targeted services for local people. Many Altnets providers were founded because their communities were not being adequately served by major network operators. There are numerous Altnets who are leading numerous social value initiatives to improve digital skills across their respective counties.

As such, the best possible way for the government to ensure that the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund supports local communities is to ensure that funding is awarded to companies and charities that are operating in local areas as they know their communities, thus will have a greater chance of successful outcomes. However, we understand that this is not always practicable and that it can be a challenge for departments to know where best to direct funding. As such, INCA would be pleased to work directly with departments to address this challenge and support funding roll outs.

11. The government has identified four focus areas for how it will drive up digital inclusion, these are:

Opening up opportunities through skills
Tackling data and device poverty
Breaking down barriers to digital services
Building confidence

Do you agree with these four focus areas?
Select either:
☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

12. If no, what changes would you make to the areas of focus?

Whilst INCA does not disagree with the four focus areas, we do contend that the order in which they are listed is incorrect. Whilst it may not be the intention of the Action Plan to have listed them in any kind of hierarchy, it appears as if the top priority is 'opening up opportunities through skills' followed by the other three priorities in cascading order. INCA calls for the Action Plan to be explicit in saying that the focus areas are not in the order of importance and that they all hold merit individually.

INCA does, however, believe that tackling data and device poverty must be identified as the foundational priority. Without reliable, fast and affordable access to the internet and access to suitable devices, efforts to upskill individuals or build their confidence to engage with digital services are fundamentally limited.

Government must ensure that universal access to fast, affordable and secure internet connections is not a theoretical goal but a practical starting point for digital inclusion policy. Without it, ambitions around education, health reform, economic growth and participation and public service transformation will fall short - not for lack of intent, but for lack of foundational access.

New action is being proposed to address device poverty, but the information included on data poverty is repeating previous announcements. For example, the Action Plan states that government will "continue to encourage investment in gigabit broadband", "continue its investment to bring gigabit broadband to hard-to-reach parts of the UK via Project Gigabit" and "continue with our focus on Very-Hard-to-Reach (VHTR) locations". INCA is supportive of these endeavours, the BDUK programme has been very successful, and this must continue to champion competition in its procurement processes so government can connect those where digital infrastructure is currently lacking.

In comparison, to overcome device poverty, the government has proposed a significant new scheme to donate ex-government devices from various governmental departments to the Digital Poverty Alliance. INCA supports the device-donation proposal and applauds the government's innovativeness in overcoming device poverty but calls for the government to be equally innovative in terms of overcoming data poverty. Industry has undertaken extensive work already to reach those harder to reach locations and provided significant investment to do so. Industry should be commended for their efforts to date, but the job is not complete, and the sector requires government action to get there.

As acknowledged within the Action Plan, "an individual needs 3 core things – a broadband line or mobile signal, a telecoms service, and a device" to be able to participate in the digital society and economy. If one of these aspects is overlooked, then participation is not possible, and an individual remains outside of the digital society. To reach 100% coverage and subsequently turn coverage into physical connections, government must demonstrate ingenuity and provide funding and leadership to move forward. INCA suggests that government ensure that connectivity and affordability are prioritised, measured rigorously, and addressed in tandem with broader digital inclusion efforts. INCA would like to work with government to develop a plan-of-action to meet 100% coverage and encourage adoption of networks.

Furthermore, INCA recommends a programmatic approach to benchmarking exactly where society is, how it segments, and collate the data initiatives which require specialist skills into programmes. The government must establish a clear framework for:

- Benchmarking digital exclusion, by segmenting the population and understanding where the gaps lie;
- Mapping local initiatives, with a focus on those requiring specialist skills or targeted support; and
- Collating impact data, to inform investment decisions and direct funding to where it will have the greatest return.

INCA also suggests that public awareness campaigns would be particularly beneficial, especially for the groups who would gain the most from digital inclusion - refugees and asylum seekers, carers, and care leavers. Funding would be helpful primarily for staffing costs, enabling the establishment of dedicated digital inclusion teams for each local authority.

13. For each focus area, has the government identified the right objectives? Please refer to the objectives in the Action Plan document.

Has the government identified the right objectives for "Opening up opportunities through skills"?

Select either:
☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

14. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

15. Has the government identified the right objectives for "Tackling data and device poverty"?

Select either:

☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

16. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

Whilst INCA agrees that the government's objectives around gigabit broadband coverage, affordability, and device access are directionally correct, these objectives are insufficient as currently presented and simply restate pre-existing commitments. INCA recommends reframing them to prioritise adoption over access.

Headline infrastructure coverage is only part of the story. Whilst it must be applauded that gigabit broadband coverage has grown significantly from 6% in 2019 to c.80% today, many homes, including in urban centres, are technically passed but practically unconnected. In Greater London alone, over 600,000 premises are designated as 'white', referring to premises which have no gigabit network infrastructure and where none is likely to be developed within three years. In fact, London and the South-East, the two regions having the highest median household wealth and boasting the highest GDP per capita sit at the forefront of urban digital inequality. The objectives must shift from "coverage" to "adoption", ensuring that people are not just within range of services, but connected to them. The digital divide will not be closed when a network is left at the garden gate.

INCA believes a government-led national campaign to support the digital transformation is needed. This should outline the benefits that the adoption of gigabit capable infrastructure will offer to consumers, businesses and the resulting societal gain. Moving from copper to a full-fibre networks represents a significant change which will require end users to change their telecoms equipment and necessitate a new network installation into the premise; this will undoubtedly lead to a level of confusion and resistance in some quarters which in turn, if government messaging around this is non-existent or not appropriate, it will only exacerbate the digital divide.

17. Have government identified the right objectives for "Breaking down barriers to digital services"?

Select either:

☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

18. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

19. Have government identified the right objectives for "Building confidence"?

Select either:

☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

20. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

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21. For each focus area, has government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? Please refer to the next steps in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan document.

Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Opening up opportunities through skills"?

Select either:

☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

22. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

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23. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Tackling data and device poverty" ?

Select either:

☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

24. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

INCA recommends that government significantly expands its approach beyond device redistribution schemes to proactively address data poverty and connectivity issues. Device donation schemes, while valuable, do not individually tackle the fundamental barriers faced by many digitally excluded communities. Key additional steps include:

- Enhanced data affordability measures

- Government should actively promote affordable connectivity options through social tariffs and broadband voucher schemes, specifically targeting low-income households and vulnerable groups. This should be paired with increased awareness campaigns to ensure uptake. However, INCA notes that social tariffs need to be implemented using DWP data to ensure Altnets can target their most deprived customers.
- INCA recommends local approaches be implemented; many Altnets already offer social tariffs, and their flexibility must be maintained so providers can offer targeted digital inclusion programmes in their communities rather than government or Ofcom mandating social tariffs.
- Community-driven initiatives
  - Increased investment in localised programmes delivering holistic digital inclusion solutions is essential. Government should partner closely with community groups, charities like the Good Things Foundation, and local authorities to provide integrated support covering devices, connectivity, digital skills, and confidence-building. Such initiatives should leverage existing local networks, such as digital inclusion hubs and trusted community intermediaries.
  - The introduction of locally-led digital inclusion teams and digital champions, under the jurisdiction of local authorities. The costings for these departments should be prioritised and ringfenced to ensure they remain focussed on their remit and have long-term capacity for action. These teams would work with partners within the DWP to identify and contact residents who are vulnerable and promote the take-up of connectivity as a means to engage with digital society and deliver tangible digital inclusion outcomes.

25. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Breaking down barriers to digital services"?

Select either:

☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

26. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

While improving government digital services and user interfaces is beneficial, we recommend additional strategic steps to ensure genuinely inclusive digital access and participation:

- Investment in local digital support
  - Provide robust support for locally delivered digital skills training and confidence-building programmes, particularly targeting older adults, disabled individuals, and unemployed groups. Effective approaches include community-based workshops, digital ambassador schemes, and one-to-one

support in familiar community settings (as highlighted earlier in this consultation).

- Proactive outreach and engagement campaigns
  - o Run targeted, demographic-specific national awareness and engagement campaigns that clearly articulate the tangible benefits of digital participation. These campaigns should utilise trusted local channels (community radio, schools, NHS facilities, local charities) to effectively engage communities historically reluctant or disinterested in digital technology.
- Maintain assisted digital access
  - o Ensure non-digital support options remain available and adequately resourced, especially during the transition to fully digital services. This includes telephone helplines and in-person assistance points, preventing exclusion among those currently unable or unwilling to access services digitally.
- Industry and third-sector collaboration
  - o Facilitate structured partnerships between government, Altnets, community organisations, and charities already successfully addressing digital exclusion. Leveraging existing networks and experience, such collaborations can effectively deliver local solutions and drive higher adoption rates for gigabit-capable broadband.

27. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Building confidence"?

Select either:

☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

28. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

Next steps should focus on building confidence through community engagement and sustained support:

- Empower trusted local partners to lead initiatives.
  - o People gain digital confidence best via familiar, community-led support. Programmes delivered by organisations they trust – such as libraries, charities, community hubs – create a comfortable environment for learning. INCA's members have experienced that individuals are far more willing to get online when helped by friendly local initiatives who understand their needs. The Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund should therefore prioritise grassroots projects (e.g. training local digital champions or volunteers) that provide patient, face-to-face guidance and ongoing encouragement in the community.
- Tackle social and psychological barriers directly.
  - o Many digitally excluded people are held back by fear of scams, low self-belief ("I'm too old for this"), or a sense that the internet has no benefit for them. Government should support targeted awareness campaigns to clearly show how

being online can improve people's lives – whether by keeping in touch with family, accessing healthcare, finding jobs or saving money – and do so in ways that resonate with each group's values and needs. Crucially, combine these campaigns with practical, hands-on help in safe spaces. Funding local "tech buddy" schemes or drop-in digital clinics can let beginners learn at their own pace with one-to-one help, ask questions without embarrassment, and receive easy guidance on online safety. This dual approach of motivation and personalised support will help overcome anxieties and build lasting digital confidence.

- Ensure successful programmes are scaled and sustained.
  - o The Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund must be more than a short-term pilot scheme – it should pave the way for long-term solutions. Government should commit to scaling up effective local projects and providing follow-on funding or resources to embed them permanently. For example, if a community-led training programme succeeds in boosting residents' confidence, it could be expanded to new areas or integrated into ongoing services (like libraries or adult education) rather than ending when initial funding runs out. INCA also urges reducing red tape so that Altnets and community groups can easily collaborate (for instance, making it simpler to offer free connectivity or run classes in partnership with councils). By planning for sustainability from the start – including clear success metrics and evaluation - the fund can ensure its impact continues to grow over the medium and long term.
- Identify and spread best practice across the country.
  - o A deliberate effort is needed to capture what works and share it widely so others can replicate it. Government should establish a best-practice network or knowledge hub for digital inclusion, fed by the Innovation Fund's projects. This could include publishing case studies and toolkits from funded initiatives and convening regular workshops or webinars for practitioners to exchange ideas. INCA suggests creating a central repository (in collaboration with industry and charities) where organisations can share lessons learned, resources and even offer mentorship to new projects. By quickly disseminating successful approaches – for example, how a particular rural scheme built trust among isolated older people – we can enable every region to adopt proven methods for building digital confidence, ensuring no community is left reinventing the wheel.

29. If you have any additional ideas on what government should be doing, please tell us more.

The multifaceted nature of digital inclusion means that it cannot be pursued as a standalone initiative. INCA welcomes the government's leading role in this area and looks forward to contributing to advancing its objectives in the action plan.

Throughout this consultation INCA has suggested achievable areas for improving the action plan. We believe the government should also be considering the following initiatives.

1. Public information campaign

    a. A significant challenge lies not in the lack of support available, but in the lack of awareness among those who would benefit. Many individuals, including

refugees, asylum seekers, carers and care leavers, are simply unaware that free, community-led initiatives exist. A coordinated national campaign, co-led by government and the telecoms sector, could help signpost services and promote the personal benefits of digital engagement.

2. Introduction of Local Digital Inclusion Teams

    a. Government funding should support the establishment of dedicated digital inclusion teams within local councils, with staffing costs prioritised to ensure long-term capacity. These teams would lead coordination across schools, libraries, community groups, and service providers — and could be embedded in levelling up or digital transformation plans.

3. Introduction of digital skills into the curriculum

    a. A future-focused strategy must embed digital skills into the school curriculum, preparing the next generation to thrive in a digital society. Alongside this, we recommend a national initiative to deliver simplified onboarding for first-time internet users, including pre-set security and step-by-step guides, aimed at older people, disabled users, and those with limited confidence.