Archwilio Cymru
Audit Wales

Digital inclusion
Key questions for public bodies

March 2023

Our report on Digital inclusion in Wales sets out an overview of issues relevant to digital inclusion in Wales

7% of adults in Wales are 'digitally excluded', meaning they have not personally used the internet in the previous three months.[1]

Our report highlighted these main reasons for digital exclusion:

- Digital **infrastructure** not available.
- **Can't afford** to be digital.
- Lack of basic **digital skills**.
- **Accessibility, usability and language**.
- Some people **choose not to** use digital services.
- **Safety online** can be a barrier.

This document includes suggested questions for public bodies to ask themselves as they consider their approach to digital inclusion. We hope the questions will be particularly useful to senior leaders and those who scrutinise them.

The questions are informed by our work on digital inclusion as well as our ongoing work on strategic approaches to digital in local government. We will consider updating this document upon completion of our ongoing work.

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1   Welsh Government, National Survey for Wales, 2021-22. Adults are defined as people aged 16 and over.

Issues

Questions for public bodies

Awareness of digital inclusion as a challenge

Digital inclusion and exclusion is a complex, multifaceted issue that causes real difficulties for those experiencing it.

- Does your organisation recognise the importance of digital inclusion?
- Is your organisation committed to digital inclusion?
- Are senior leaders (and those who scrutinise them) aware of the impact that digital exclusion can have on individuals?
- Has your organisation identified which individuals and groups of people are most likely to be excluded from digital services?
- Is your organisation aware of, and using, the Digital Service Standards for Wales?

Digitising while meeting the needs of the excluded

7% of Welsh adults are excluded. Therefore, public bodies need a person-centred approach to digital change. This means focusing on individuals' preferences, rather than a blanket digital-by-default approach.

- Is your organisation balancing the need to digitise services at the same time as meeting the needs of digitally excluded people?
- When digitising a service, does your organisation understand and identify the specific barriers that may exclude people or groups of people from using that service?
- Has your organisation aimed to provide solutions or support for specific groups who might be more likely to be digitally excluded for example older people, people living in social housing, people living with long term health conditions or people living in rural communities?
- For each of your online services, is there an alternative, non-digital option for people to access?
- Is your organisation ensuring digital inclusion is built in as a standard consideration across all services?
- Do you have accurate and up to date data to understand the extent of digital exclusion from your services?
- Does the data help identify exclusion by different services, local areas or communities?
- While considering the data, are there any gaps? How are you addressing these gaps?
- Has your organisation considered the framework for future generations produced by the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner, which provides some questions to consider when developing service changes ?

Issues	Questions for public bodies

Support for public bodies
 	
Digital inclusion is an important topic for the Welsh Government with multiple programmes, cross-departmental working and funding streams. There is support available for public bodies.
	• Is your organisation accessing support from Digital Communities Wales? For example:
	
	  - A review of your organisation to help develop and deliver digital inclusion work.
	
	  - Training for staff and volunteers to help people in the community with digital skills.
	
	  - Loaning digital equipment like laptops and tablets to organisations to help deliver digital activities for users.
	
	  - Help to improve the digital skills and confidence of existing volunteers and support the development of digital volunteering programmes.
	
	• Where relevant, is your organisation accessing support from other organisations such as the Centre for Digital Public Services or Newid (the Third Sector digital skills / leadership project)?
	
	• Is your organisation accessing all relevant funding and support schemes that are available to help with digitising services and addressing digital exclusion?

Future challenges The rising cost of living is likely to have a further impact on those who are disadvantaged and digitally excluded. But the future will also bring opportunities from advances in digital.	• If people are unable to afford access to digital services, in part due to the cost of living crisis, how will your organisation ensure they are able to access the help and information they need? • Does your organisation have a good baseline understanding of the digital skills, knowledge and current needs of communities and staff? • As aspects of digital technology become more complex and advances, what steps will your organisation take to ensure the gap in knowledge and skills will not widen for people who are digitally excluded? • What steps is your organisation taking to ensure the digital skills of staff are kept up to date with advancing technology? • Does your organisation have a pro-active approach to horizon scanning for opportunities that will be delivered from future advances in digital technology?

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