Digitally well

A partnership approach to increasing digital inclusion in North Tyneside

2023 – 2028

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North Tyneside Council

NHS

VODA

healthwatch North Tyneside

Contents

1.   Foreword

We are delighted to introduce 'Digitally Well: A partnership approach to increasing digital inclusion in North Tyneside'.

North Tyneside's Health and Wellbeing Strategy Equally Well 2021-2025, makes clear the challenge of health inequalities in the Borough. Inequalities in education, training, income, employment, and health, some of which existed prior to the pandemic, have been amplified during it. Digital inclusion is firmly rooted in all of these; being digitally included involves being able to enjoy the benefits of being online and use technology confidently to improve your day-to-day life.

Increasing digital inclusion in North Tyneside is a shared ambition across our organisations. North Tyneside Council, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS) and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) are committed to delivering solutions to support residents to thrive. We want to ensure that we consider and implement digital inclusion in the design of new solutions, otherwise we could make the situation worse. Our population has a greater likelihood of health inequalities so we can make accessing services even harder by introducing digital technology. We are committed to understanding and removing the barriers that exclude people, helping us focus on increasing digital access and **digital use by choice**, leaving no one behind.

We know that more and more people are increasingly using digital technologies to manage their lives, but it is not the experience of everyone; indeed, many services delivered by the NHS, Local Authorities and VCS, will never be delivered 'digitally'.

Residents have told us that physical spaces and face to face services are still needed and are important to them. This strategy is not about forcing every resident and patient to get online, it's about ensuring that they have equal opportunity when and if they choose, and are supported to have access, skills, confidence, and motivation.

We encourage everyone reading this strategy, to consider how they can increase digital inclusion by choice for residents and help reduce inequalities for all in North Tyneside.

Cllr Karen Clarke, Cabinet Member responsible for Public Health, Safety and Wellbeing, North Tyneside Council

Professor Graham Evans, Executive Chief Digital and Information Officer, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Vicky Smith, VODA, Chief Executive Officer

2. Introduction

Since the introduction of the internet in the 1980's the digital revolution has gathered pace year on year with more elements of everyday life shifting online and people managing more of their lives online. There appears to be no limit to the ways people can live and better their lives, by being online.

However, we know that not everyone is online. In the UK there are 10 million people who lack the very basic foundation skills needed in a digital world[1], and one in 20 UK households have no home internet access.

Compared to people who are digitally included, excluded people, or limited internet users are:

- Four times more likely to come from low-income households
- Ten times more likely to be over 65 years
- Eight times less likely to have post-18 education

In the North East, 28 per cent of people are limited internet users (digitally excluded).

People are typically impacted by four key barriers that prevent them from being digitally included:

Access to a device to get online or access to the internet, particularly because of affordability. 20 per cent of people in the UK who are offline say it's too expensive

Having the **skills** to get online. 21 per cent of people in the UK say it's too complicated

Having the **confidence** to go online affects 11 per cent of people in the UK, who say they worry about online safety

Motivation also impacts 21 per cent of people in the UK who say they are simply not interested in being online and don't see the benefit

We know from listening to our residents and partners in North Tyneside there are people who feel left behind in this increasingly digital world, and who face barriers to taking part and getting online. There are also people who want choice in what they do online and how much they do online; choice is the key theme running through this Strategy.

- **Digital by choice** means that people can choose how and when they go online as well as what they do online, and that organisations and services don't force them online by default

[1] Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation UK 2022: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/building-a-digital-nation/

3. Vision and ambition

3.1. Background and context

North Tyneside's Health and Wellbeing Strategy Equally Well 2021-2025 is the Boroughs high level strategic plan for improving the health and wellbeing of our people. It identifies that digital exclusion was one of the key factors in creating inequalities during the pandemic, in terms of people being able to connect to education and training, access better jobs, increase their social interactions and support their access to healthcare and statutory services. Forty percent of what makes us healthy is based on socio-economic factors; the parts of our lives that cover education, income, employment, family or social support, community safety, and digital inclusion.

The NHS long term plan is focused on making sure everyone gets the best start in life, access to world class care for major health problems, and support to age well. It acknowledges that making better use of data and digital technology is an enabler, ensuring that people have more convenient access to services and health information. The NHS Integrated Care System across the Northeast and North Cumbria, which includes North Tyneside, is committed to working together with the Council and partners in the VCS to improve services and the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Better Together Strategy sets out how North Tyneside Council, NENC ICS and the VCS will work together to build strong and sustainable partnerships that makes North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit. This well-established and trusted partnership approach will be key to reaching the right people and offering the right support to increase their digital access.

This strategy supports the strategic aims of the following:

- North Tyneside Council's Digital Strategy
- The North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care System: Digital Inclusion Strategy 2023
- The Connecting Communities: A Strategy for Community Hubs and Libraries 2023 – 2028
- The Raising Aspiration, Realising Ambition Strategy 2021-2024.
- The NHS Long Term plan

This Strategy is underpinned by:

- Understanding Digital Exclusion across North Tyneside February 2023
- Digital Inclusion in North Tyneside: Residents' views and practical solutions, March 2023
- IPPR North's Addressing digital exclusion in North East England 2021
- NHS Digital's Digital Inclusion guide for health and social care
- Making health and care digitally inclusive: A review of policy and literature around digital inclusion in health and care 2022

3.2.   What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion means having equitable access to and use of information and communication technologies to take an active role in social and economic life including education, social services, health, social and community activities.

In North Tyneside we want our residents and patients to have the skills, confidence, motivation, and capability to get online and enjoy the benefits of being online and using technology to improve their daily lives.

3.3.   What are the barriers to digital inclusion?

Access:
not having the ability to connect to the internet and go online

Skills:
not having the ability to use the internet and online services

There are four main barriers to digital inclusion.

Motivation:
not understanding why using the internet could be relevant and helpful

Trust:
fear of online crime, lack of trust or not knowing where to start online

Often the focus for tackling digital exclusion is on access to devices, connection to the internet and skills and training. However digital exclusion is more complex than this and people are rarely affected by only one barrier to getting online. Not having trust in the internet and being online, or not being motivated and not seeing the value in being online can be as significant.

It is true that people can be digitally included in parts of their life and then excluded in other parts. Using a mobile device is useful for accessing social media and connecting with friends and family, but it is less useful when carrying out online training or learning. Having a mobile phone contract with monthly data allowance keeps people connected, however if more than one person in the household needs to access the data it can quickly run out, and it can be costly to buy data add-ons.

3.4. What we are trying to achieve

We want everyone in North Tyneside to 'have the skills and capability to get online and enjoy the benefits of being online and using technology to improve their daily lives when **they choose**'

We want people to be digitally included by **choice** and not by default. People have told us this is important as they often feel forced to do things digitally or excluded by not being able to do things online. Being digitally included can improve your economic status and opportunities making it easier to find access education and employment. It can improve your health and wellbeing and support you to manage your health and lead a healthy lifestyle, and it can increase social inclusion and promote equal opportunity.

This strategy is directed by the following aims to deliver this ambition:

Proportionate universalism: action everywhere, with more targeted action where gaps and inequalities are widest

Evidence-based decisions and actions: making decisions based on the best available data and research to target interventions to address inequalities and exclusion

Innovation and maximising opportunities: maximising the opportunities to use existing and new technologies to benefit local people and communities

Capable workforce: ensuring our workforce and volunteers are adequately trained and understand their role in supporting digital inclusion and have the right tools to support people

Co-designed, inclusive and accessible for all: working in partnership with people, particularly those who experience health inequalities, to identify needs and design solutions

To do this we will:

- Coordinate activities and services,

- Carry out research and engagement,

- Attract funding opportunities,

- Collaborate and work in partnership, and

- Design accessible services that get people online.

3.5.   What's already been achieved?

In 2021, the digital inclusion working group was established with colleagues across the Local Authority, the NENC ICS previously North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and local VCS organisations.

Due to national lockdowns and restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, efforts were focussed on keeping people connected and support was provided to:

- **Care homes**, ensuring good quality digital connections whilst visiting restrictions were in place, allowing social work and health professionals to maintain contact and oversight of residents. Nhs.mail email accounts were rolled out to care home managers to ensure secure communication, and funding for digital tablets improved social connectivity for care home residents and families

- **Children and Schools**, to reach the most vulnerable children by providing laptops and connectivity to continue their education. Funding from the Department of Education provided 729 laptops and 162 4G Wi-Fi devices, and 1600 other devices to young people and Schools. Partners and the business community also provided another 760 laptops and devices

- **Residents**, through doorstep support to get online linked with organisations and services providing support to access food and medication. Living Well North Tyneside online directory was launched to help signpost residents to local support and services

- **Community groups and organisations**, through the North of Tyne Combined Authority funding to the Adult Education and Employability Service to give devices to local groups to support access to online training and employability support

As normal life resumed the focus was then on identifying the activities and support available to residents and patients to increase and improve their digital connectivity and tackle the barriers they face.

Many of our partners became members of the Online Centres Network through the Good Things Foundation giving residents better access to skills and learning to increase their digital skills. The North Tyneside library service delivered the Community Digital Skills Pathway Support grant offering residents a device and Wi-Fi connection to keep, to help them develop their skills and access. They also supported 15,000 residents who were digitally excluded to access the Council tax rebate support offered to residents in early 2022.

The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System in North Tyneside funded Northumbria and Newcastle Universities to undertake research in the borough, asking every household their digital capabilities and usage to gauge levels of inclusion. This research has improved our understanding of digital inclusion at a local level and will allow us to target support and activities in the right places and for those who need it most.

North Tyneside Council's Employment and Skills service launched 'Working Well North Tyneside' in partnership with the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the local VCS to make it easier for residents to access employment and skills support as well as devices with support from 'Digital Champions'.

The service also worked with the VCS as well as small to medium businesses to support over 550 residents with digital skills training, through the Digital Outreach Project.

Working well

NORTH TYNESIDE

Partners from the local authority, the NENC ICS and local VCS organisations launched Living Well North Tyneside, an online directory that helps people find out about local services and support in their communities. This directory has helped bring together information in one central place for residents and professionals alike, ensuring people understand the opportunities around them.

VODA delivered the 'Bridging the Digital Divide' project offering residents access to online services and support at local community centres, faith venues and VCS organisation buildings. Just under 100 residents were supported with digital access and skills and following this work they developed 'Help Me Be Digital' which shifted the focus to community locations like shopping centres with more footfall, as well as one to one support and support within people's own home.

In addition to all this work, the support offer to residents from the wider VCS continued to be delivered, offering skills, support, advice and confidence building to get online. This work has been mapped to understand the wealth of activity available at any time, but also to understand the impact and success of them.

3.6. Learning from others

Engagement with key organisations has helped understand what interventions are necessary to tackle digital exclusion and the barriers people face. Working with partners locally, we now have a better understanding of how, where and when people want to be supported, and we know one size does not fit all.

Nationally we have looked at good practice.

- 100% Digital Leeds work in partnership to improve digital inclusion, taking a 'furthest first' approach by working with health and care organisations to tackle the needs of those most digitally excluded first. This approach aligns with our strategic aim of proportionate universalism

- Good Things Foundation is a social change charity that supports socially excluded people to improve their lives through digital. Through initiatives like the Online Centres Network, the National Databank and 'Learn My Way' training they have supported access and campaigned for more support to digitally enable people worldwide. Many of our partners are members of the Online Centres Network

Strong links have also been established with local, regional, and national groups and organisations who are working to tackle digital exclusion, including The Academic Health Science Network for the North East and North Cumbria, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and the Cyber, Digital & Technology team at the Local Government Association (LGA).

4. What do we know about digital inclusion?

4.1. What data do we have?

Local research

Research, funded by the NENC ICS, was carried out by Northumbria and Newcastle Universities, which involved sending a survey to every household in North Tyneside asking about their digital usage and capabilities. This local approach has helped us better understand the issues, rather than making assumptions based on national and regional indicators.

Overall the research identified 12.3 per cent of respondents as digitally excluded. This means they have either no digital confidence, a lack of skills and/ or access, or they are not using any digital technology.

It also identified that people are more likely to be digitally excluded the older they are, with over 94 per cent of digitally excluded residents in North Tyneside aged over 60 years. But this is not the only characteristic. **Digital exclusion can also be greater for:**

- **females**

- **those with lower educational achievement**

- **those on lower incomes**

- **those living with a disability, or live in a household with someone with a disability**

- **people in smaller households**

- **people not in work**

Where you live is not necessarily an indicator of whether you are digitally included or not. The research found that the usual difference between north and south or urban and rural do not apply to digital inclusion, and in North Tyneside there are smaller groups within larger 'digitally connected' communities that are digitally excluded. Those living in higher socio-economic areas (generally people with higher education attainment, income, and employment) are not always more digitally excluded, and in this research they were actually more digitally excluded with least access, use, confidence and skills.

The research identifies that being digitally excluded can increase the social inequalities people face. Not being able to reach and use online information and resources about health services, finance, and benefit advice, for example, can increase the issues they may already be facing.

People responding to the survey identified that the biggest barriers are often:

- The cost of being digitally connected in their own home and out and about, because of broadband infrastructure and costs, and mobile internet access
- Concerns around online security and privacy, particularly when accessing financial and health services
- Being forced online by organisations and services that offer limited offline access to services instead opting for 'digital by default' approaches

National research

The Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC)[2] has developed an **'internet user classification'** to describe how different groups of people interact with the internet. This data tells us that:

- people who rarely go online or go online once a week or less are more likely to live in the Riverside ward
- people with rare access to the internet or none at all are more likely to live in the Howdon ward, both in the south of the Borough
- people who don't have any access or have access to the internet but don't go online are most likely to live in Weetslade ward in the west
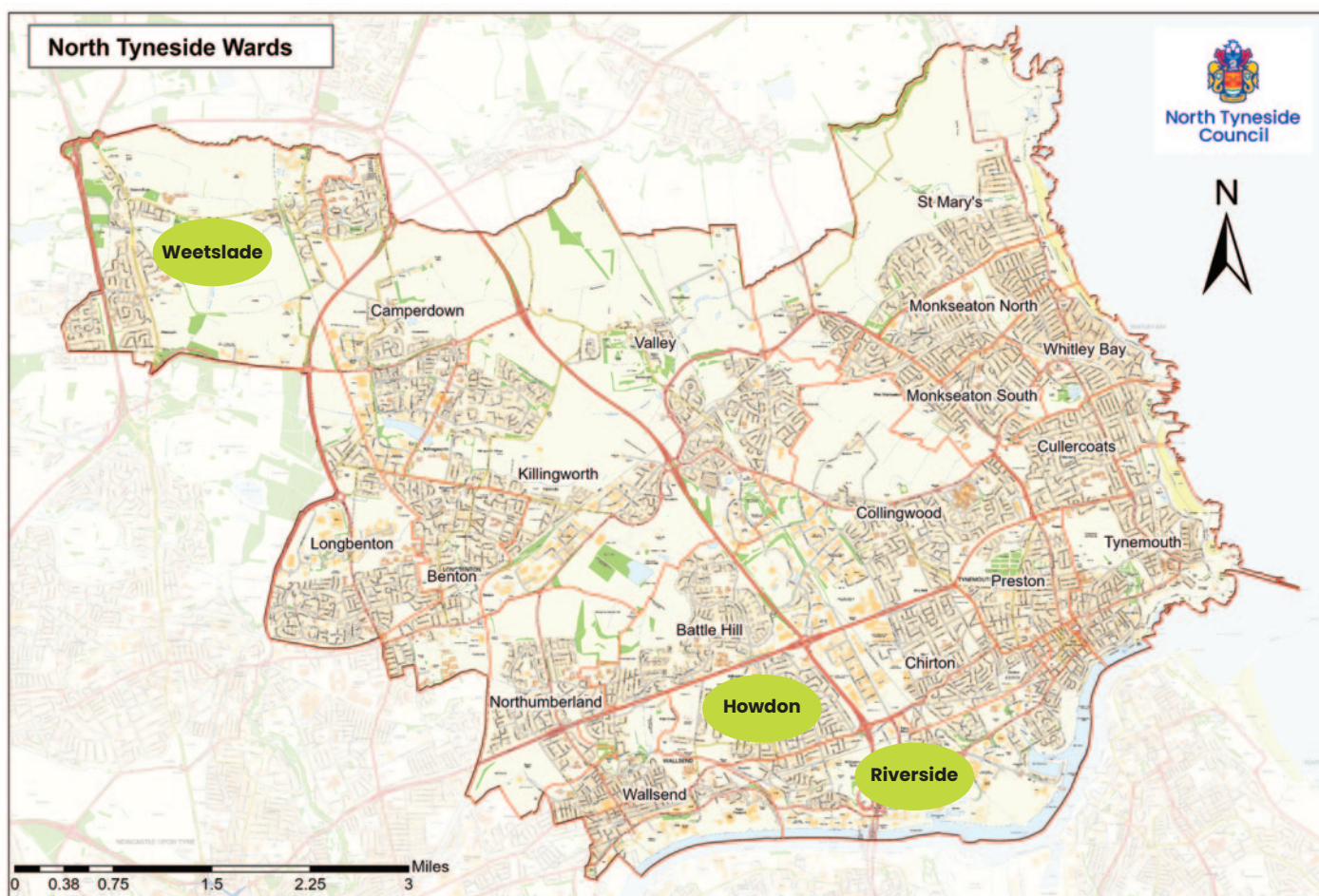
Produced by Policy, Performance and Research Team, June 2023

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[2] Internet User Classification | CDRC Data

The **Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI)**[3] tool was developed to benefit local authorities in providing detailed insight into where digital inclusion initiatives are needed most. It brings together a set of indicators to calculate a score for each area based on three components: demography, deprivation and broadband. This data suggests that:

- people living in Monkseaton North ward are less likely to be digitally excluded compared to those living in Weetslade and Camperdown wards in the west of the Borough

4.2.   What are people telling us?

Resident, partners and stakeholders have told us about their digital experiences and what changes would better support them. This feedback has been gathered through engagement events and sessions with residents, workshops with partners and services, and by listening to those who currently support our residents. Healthwatch North Tyneside were also asked to gather views feedback from residents and community organisations and have co-produced solutions to support people with digital issues[4].

In general people told us that often those who need the most help with technology are very reluctant to ask for it. They feel awkward talking about it and put on the spot. The words 'online' and 'digital' are very off putting.

Many people feel technology is racing ahead and leaving them behind and the pressure to be online is increasing. Some people feel excluded and that their choices are being taken away. Many people feel they struggle at times with technology, irrespective of their age, level of skill or confidence. Key themes people told us:

- They need **help with a wide range of technology**, like TVs, phones and even digital washing machines. They felt that 'digital' support generally should focus on digital options that build on what they want to do better for example, keeping in touch with friends and family or accessing their GP

- They want **choice** and don't want to feel pressured to move to online options. Changes to universal credit and housing applications mean they can only be accessed online, and people are concerned about being left behind.

- They **lack confidence** and fear being online particularly when it comes to their own safety and their personal information. Privacy settings, passwords, bank details, viruses and scams were some of the issues raised, and they are especially important for children and young people and those who are vulnerable

- Some felt ashamed because of **lack of skills and knowledge** and poor past experiences meant people worry about making a mistake and not being able to fix it, or not being able navigate poorly designed websites and online forms

- People want help with kit as they struggle to know **what to buy, how to make it work**, how to connect it to the internet and carry out updates or even repairs

- **Cost is a real limiting issue** and not just the price of kit and equipment but the cost of mobile phone contracts for themselves and their children. Increasingly Wi-Fi connection is seen an essential utility and not a luxury, however people were managing their access with pay as you go data plans to help with their cash flow

- Access to **reliable Information and help** is important and knowing where to get help is often a problem. Many rely on family or a trusted person or organisation for help

They also told us what support or solutions would help tackle digital inclusion.

- **Engaging People**; use inclusive language and take a person-centred approach understanding what the person is interested in and wants to do online, delivered by trusted people or organisations. Embed digital opportunities in other activities so people become more familiar and make it make sense by using it in context with people.

- **Getting access to kit**; support with the cost of buying or accessing devices and kit, particularly for those on low incomes, and free public Wi-Fi is vital inside and outside public buildings. Impartial advice and support to understand what device or kit is right for them based on what they want or need to do online.

- **Information about what's available**; a central resource showing all the places you can get support with digital and opportunities to learn new skills. One-stop-shops like libraries, community centres and hubs where they can get help and support, all promoted across the Borough and in different ways.

- **Getting help or support**; people need different types of support depending on their situation, skills, confidence and what they want to do. A tiered approach to support ranging from self-help and peer support through to one-to-one support would better meet their needs.

5. Recommendations and next steps

5.1. Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations based on the feedback, data and research presented.

1 **Ensure that digitally excluded groups are involved in decision and policy making, and the design of services.**

When making decisions, creating policies or designing services it is important that those who are most likely to be excluded are involved. Consider those smaller excluded groups in larger, more connected communities, as well as those facing significant socio-demographic inequalities across the borough.

2 **Work together to target those who need the most help.**

Working collaboratively across organisations and services is vital to increasing digital inclusion. Sharing data and knowledge across services, as well as codesigning activities and support that tackle the biggest barriers will ensure that those most excluded are best supported.

3 **Review policies and services aimed at tackling digital inclusion.**

Reviewing the accessibility of services aimed at the community and those who are digitally excluded will ensure equal access for all. Policies and services should consider both online and offline access proactively so that no one is left behind.

4 **Develop the skills and confidence of the workforce to support people to get online.**

Ensuring that employees and volunteers have the right skills but also the confidence to meet the needs of local people and support them to develop digital skills, and improve their access, confidence and motivation.

5 **Tackle the quality and affordability of digital access within the home and community.**

Prioritise the reliability and affordability of broadband within homes across the Borough, as well as access to free Wi-Fi in the community and public spaces. Long term policies should prioritise high speed connections for homes and businesses across North Tyneside, and local campaigns should promote the availability of social tariffs for broadband connections, as well as access to free databank schemes.

6 **Develop digital support services that tackle the biggest barriers to being online.**

Ensure that digital support services tackle each and every one of the barriers people are facing; access, skills, confidence and motivation. These services should consider what people have told us about:

- Knowing where they can go for help and support,
- Having opportunities promoted widely across the borough using a language they understand
- Wanting help and support that suits their needs or the specific tasks they need to complete,
- Having access to devices and connections

5.2. Next steps

The recommendations will inform a detailed action plan that address the six recommendations. This action plan will be multi agency and leads from each partner organisation will form the Digital Inclusion Steering Group which will lead and monitor progress.
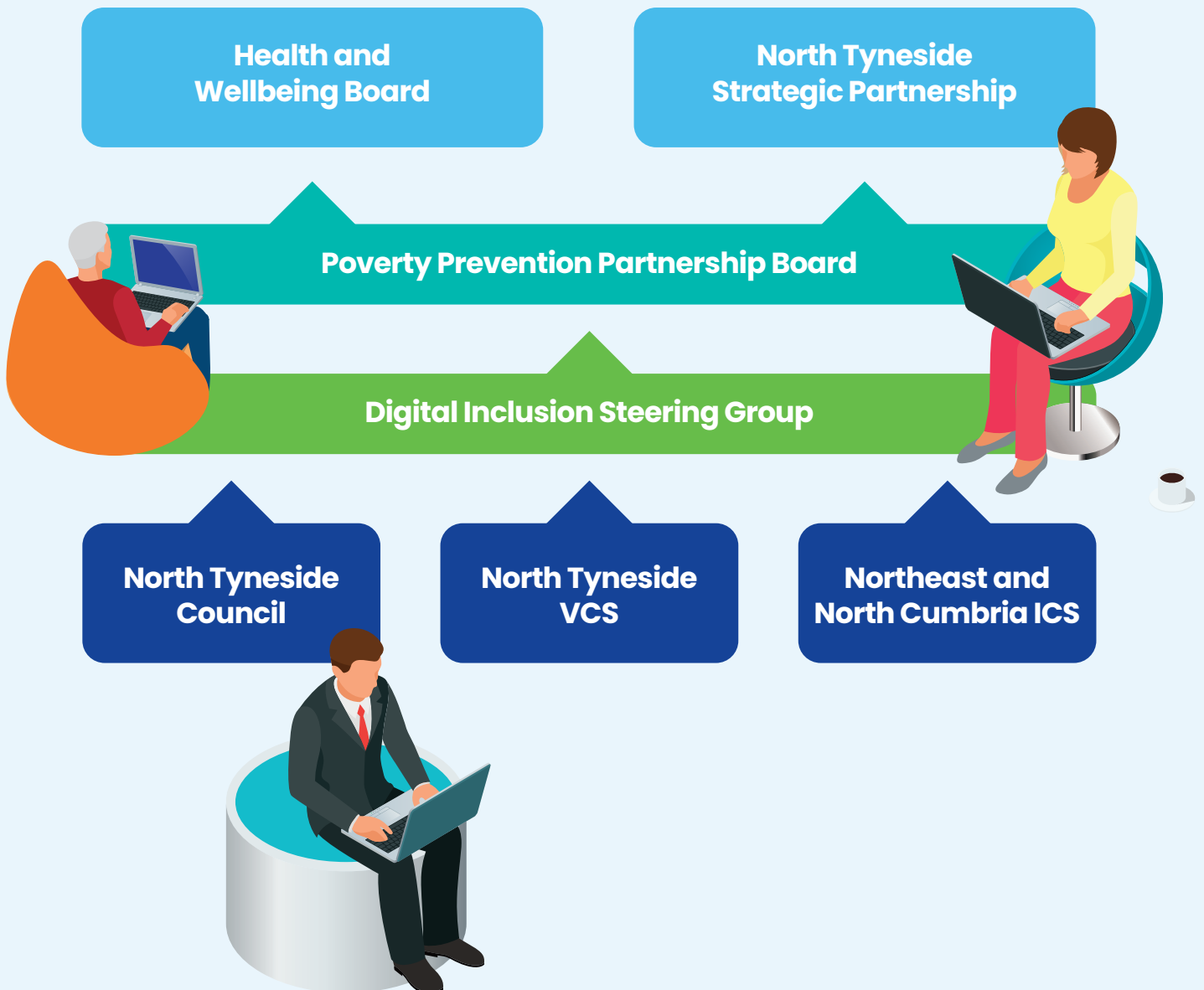
6. Monitoring and review

6.1. Governance

We need to know if our ambition for digital inclusion is being realised and is making a difference. Delivery of the action plan will be the responsibility of the Digital Inclusion Steering Group, who will report into the Poverty Prevention Board.

The Poverty Prevention Board reports into the Health and Wellbeing Board who will have oversight of progress and will monitor the action plan through its 'Healthy standard of living for all' theme, as part of monitoring the Equally Well action plan.

Health and Wellbeing Board

North Tyneside Strategic Partnership

Poverty Prevention Partnership Board

Digital Inclusion Steering Group

North Tyneside Council

North Tyneside VCS

Northeast and North Cumbria ICS

6.2. Communicating the strategy

A communication plan sharing the key messages and recommendations from this strategy will be developed. It will be aimed at the following stakeholders:

- Colleagues, volunteers, teams and services across the partnership, including those directly delivering digital support,
- Elected Members in North Tyneside
- Wider health and voluntary and community partners in North Tyneside

The plan will help partners and local services understand the key barriers to digital inclusion, the potential solutions to digital exclusion, and help them work collaboratively to design and shape support and services that target those with the greatest needs.

References:

- Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation UK 2022
- Internet User Classification | CDRC Data
- Digital Exclusion Risk Index
- North Tyneside Council's Digital strategy
- The North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care System: Digital Inclusion Strategy 2023
- The Connecting Communities: A Strategy for Community Hubs and Libraries 2023 – 2028
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