

Consultation Response

'Digital Inclusion Action Plan' Call for Evidence

Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

April 2025

Nadine.Kennedy@ageuk.org.uk

All rights reserved. Third parties may only reproduce this paper or parts of it for academic, educational or research purposes or where the prior consent of Age UK has been obtained for influencing or developing policy and practice.

Age UK
7th Floor, One America Square
17 Crosswall
London
EC3N 2LB
T 0800 169 87 87 F 020 3033 1000
E policy@ageuk.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 7th Floor, One America Square, 17 Crosswall, London, EC3N 2LB.

About this consultation

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) is asking for feedback on the [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#), which sets out DSIT's approach to digital inclusion. The Action Plan aims to tackle digital exclusion with a particular focus on five groups of people, including older people. The five proposed actions for government relate to: local-level support, skills, devices, accessible government service and evidence. It covers four areas: opening up opportunities through skills, tackling data and device poverty, breaking down barriers to digital services and building confidence.

Key points and recommendations

Age UK welcomes the Government's 'Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps' as an opportunity to do more to support older people who are offline to access services, as well as helping those who want to go online to do so. For Age UK, tackling digital exclusion encompasses not only supporting more people to get online and build digital skills, but also preserving offline access via telephone lines, in-person services and ensuring staff are trained to be informed of all support options.

We are calling for:

- Older people to have a legal right to be able to access all public services offline, if they cannot use the internet successfully and confidently, or at all.
- A cultural shift whereby older people's views and experiences inform the design of digital approaches for which they are a key audience right from the start and then throughout the process of development into implementation.
- The Digital Inclusion Action Plan to catalyse a concerted national effort by Government, businesses and the VCSFE, to provide people of all ages who want to go online with the opportunities they need to do so, including programmes tailored to older people's specific needs, targeted especially at areas of deprivation where levels of digital exclusion are likely to be high.

Our 'Offline and Overlooked' campaign set out a range of policy asks:

- All public services, including the NHS, council services and other nationally provided public services, must offer and promote an affordable, easy to access, offline way of reaching and using them.
- The Government must make sure local government receives enough funding to provide offline services.
- There needs to be much more funding and support to enable people who are not internet users, but who would like to be, to get online.
- The Government should lead on the development of a long-term, fully-funded national Digital Inclusion Strategy, to support people of all ages who want to go online to do so.
- The Government should change the law to require banks to maintain face-to-face services.
- Banks must accelerate the roll-out of shared Banking Hubs to meet the high and continuing demand for face-to-face banking services.

About Age UK

Age UK believes every older person should be included and valued. We're working locally, nationally and internationally to change the way we age. Together with our partners, we're changing the day-to-day experience of getting older through essential services and local support. We transform older people's wellbeing in the ways that matter most to them – whether that's getting online or getting more active. Our specialist, impartial advice helps change older people's worries into answers. And our friendship services change loneliness and isolation into comfort and connection. We campaign to put older people at the heart of public policy and shift the way ageing is treated and represented.

Introduction

With more services going online, we know many older people are struggling to manage health appointments, access council services, apply for benefits and access banking. Over 100,000 people have signed our [Offline and Overlooked campaign](#) petition to demand that everyone has the right to a guaranteed, easy to use offline alternative.

- 2.3 million people aged 65 and over do not use the internet – that's around 1 in 5 of this age group.
- 4.7 million people aged 65 and over don't have the basic skills to use the internet successfully and safely.
- Around 3.3 million people aged 65 and over in the UK don't use a smartphone. 900,000 people of the same age don't use any sort of mobile phone.¹

There are also many examples of existing digital inclusion programmes to replicate, such as Age UK's [Digital Champion Programme](#) which tackles digital exclusion by recruiting and training Digital Champion volunteers, who support older people to improve their digital skills and provides loan technology to those without access.

While some older people are keen to learn more digital skills, others may be offline because they lack confidence or skills, are worried about scams and fraud, or are simply not interested. For others, health issues (including declining vision or cognitive abilities, or physical illnesses like arthritis) can be a huge barrier. The cost or lack of equipment, and poor connectivity, especially in rural areas, can also cause significant difficulties.

Digital exclusion among pensioners is not an issue that can ever be entirely solved. No matter what initiatives exist, there will always be some people who do not have access to connectivity, have never had sufficient digital skills or have not managed to keep up with changing technology, or who have developed a medical condition that prevents them from using technology. It is imperative that everyone in this position – for now and

¹ Age UK (March 2024) Offline and Overlooked: Digital exclusion and its impact on older people <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/offline-and-overlooked-report.pdf>

evermore – is enabled to take a full part in society through assistive technology, physical assistance, and/or offline access as appropriate.

Consultation questions

Question 5: Government has identified five population groups that would likely benefit greatly from digital inclusion initiatives, these are: Low-income households, Older people, Disabled people, Unemployed and those seeking work, Young people

- a. Do you agree with these five population groups? Yes/ No/ Don't know**
- b. If no, what changes would you make to the population groups?**

Age UK broadly agrees with the five specified population groups. To the best of our knowledge, all of these groups face some disadvantage with digital inclusion or barriers to connectivity that necessitate further action to improve outcomes. It is also important to note that there is a lot of overlap between the groups. Age UK's recent research also found a strong link between digital exclusion in later life and levels of deprivation: only half (52%) of older people living in the 20% most deprived parts of England use the internet everyday, compared to four fifths (80%) of people living in the 20% least deprived areas.²[\[1\]](#)

We especially agree that older people should be named as a target group, as there is overwhelming evidence that the current cohort of pensioners – particularly among older age groups – are much less likely than average to be digitally included.³ Although many older people fully embrace the digital world, digital exclusion increases with age. Age UK believes that people should be supported and encouraged to get online, but those who cannot, or do not want to do so should be able to access services and support in a way that suits them.

Our [briefing](#) provides further statistics on older people's internet usage, including prevalence, devices used, digital skills, activities carried out online and smartphone use. Older people are less likely to have been brought up with technology or used it in the workplace. Furthermore, using technology is not necessarily a skill you gain and retain, as technology develops all the time and skills become outdated.

Describing someone as either an internet-user or a non-user only provides part of the picture. Ofcom, in its annual report on media use and attitudes, asks which of 15 types of online activity people undertake. Older internet users are more likely to be 'narrow

² Age UK (18 March 2025) Press release <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/one-in-three-31-over-60s-say-life-is-harder-than-five-years-ago-because-more-services-are-now-online/>

³ Age UK Briefing: Facts and Figures about digital inclusion and older people (June 2024) <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/internet-use-statistics-june-2024.pdf>

users', so 41% of 65–74-year-olds and 54% of those 75+ engage in only one to four activities.⁴

Our '[Not like riding a bike](#)' report highlighted that 800 000 people in the UK are so-called 'lapsed users' who have used the internet in the past but not recently - most are in the older age groups: 150,000 are aged 55-64, 200,000 are aged 65- 74 and 320,000 are aged 75+.⁵

Factors for stopping using the internet include: difficulties in keeping up with changing technology, not having anyone to help when problems arise, health-related issues, lack of interest, cost and concern about scams. While technology may make life easier for some with disability and health problems, circumstances may change as part of ageing (such as general cognitive impairment, or the loss of physical dexterity) which makes carrying out some digital tasks more difficult.

While some people told us that nothing would encourage them to use the internet again, among those who would consider starting again, having someone beside them to help was a key factor.

Question 6: Are there examples of digital inclusion initiatives that could be scaled-up or replicated in other local communities? Please provide the name of the initiative (if known), the organisation (if known), a summary of what they do and contact details (if relevant).

Age UK's [Digital Champion Programme](#) tackles digital exclusion by recruiting and training Digital Champion volunteers, who support older people to improve their digital skills and provides loan technology to those without access. Working with 40 Age UKs/Cymrus to support older people between 2022 and 2026, the programme is delivered across 2 cohorts, each lasting 18 months.

Each Age UK/Cymru offers four key services to address the common barriers to digital inclusion, namely:

- **Digital Champions** (recruiting and supporting Digital Champion volunteers who will inspire and motivate others to get online, and encourage and support them to develop their digital skills and confidence.) - **training 480 volunteer Digital Champions by 2026.**
- **Awareness-raising activities** (reaching and informing people who are at risk of digital exclusion about how digital skills can help them personally and motivate them to take part in the service.) - **delivering activities to 96,000 older people by 2026.**

⁴ Age UK (March 2020) Not like riding a bike: Why some older people stop using the internet https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/reports-and-publications/lapsed_users_report_march-2020.pdf

⁵ Ibid. Source: Internet users 2019, ONS

- **Digital Skills sessions** (Digital Champion-led sessions that help people to develop their digital skills and confidence by providing flexible, learner-led digital skills sessions that focus on what they're most interested in.) - **assisting 12,000 older people through digital skills sessions by 2026.**
- **Provision of technology and connectivity** (providing loan technology and connectivity so that people who would otherwise not have access are able to 'give it a go' and see if it's right for them.) - **loaning technology to approximately 3000 older people by 2026.**

The Digital Champion Programme aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- *Older people will feel more inspired and more motivated to get online.*
- *Older people will develop digital skills and confidence and gain longer-term access to technology equipment.*
- *Older people will feel less isolated and more socially connected.*
- *Volunteer Digital Champions will benefit from increased confidence and skills.*
- *Local Age UKs will be better equipped to provide a wide range of high-quality digital support to a greater number of older people.*

The Digital Champion Programme model has been tried and tested by Age UK through our previous programmes [One Digital](#), [Think Digital](#), and [Connected Age](#).

Question 7: Are there examples of evaluation models for measuring the impact of digital inclusions programs that you are aware of? Please provide details of these models and where they have been used (if known).

Age UK commissioned Research Works Ltd to conduct an evaluation of Cohort 1 of the Digital Champion Programme, which ran between June 2022 and November 2023 across 25 local Age UK partners. The [Digital Champion Programme Cohort One evaluation](#) involved research with participants, staff and volunteers, as well as monitoring data analysis, looking at 'sustainable engagement and benefits' as well as 'high-risk beneficiary groups'.

The evaluation found that the Digital Champion Programme was very successful in supporting older people to achieve their learning goals with regards to using digital technologies. Enabling factors included: tablet loan; home visits; learning on clients' devices; one-to-one support tailored to individuals; adjusting to clients' pace; volunteer Digital Champions' patience and reassurance; and supporting resources.

Meanwhile, initial barriers identified to overcome included: fear of breaking a device / doing something wrong, lack of confidence, worries about scams, cost of devices and connectivity, and for some, a negative attitude to learning (where older people had been referred into the programme).

The evaluation also found improved digital skills positively impacted older people's lives through: improved social connections, help with day-to-day practical tasks, improved mood and wellbeing, help with managing health, cost savings and managing money, greater independence, and enabling participation in leisure, community and work activities.

The Digital Champion Programme evaluation was able to take advantage of a longer delivery period and focus on high-risk groups, as well as the general older population, and took a deep dive into the sustainability of the model beyond the funded period, flexibility of the model, particularly supporting high-risk groups, medium-term (6-12 months) impact that the programme has on the wellbeing and loneliness of older learners.

The evaluation includes findings from seven local partners in Cohort 1 who supported high-risk groups, which included: older people living on low income, those living alone; older people who were housebound; older people with mobility problems. There is a separate [Digital Champion Memory Loss evaluation](#) that explores the experiences of older people with dementia or memory loss as well as Digital Champion Programme [case stories](#).

Question 8: In what ways could the government partner with industry, charities and community organisations to promote digital inclusion?

There is a significant scope for the Government to work with the charity sector. Following many years of researching and conducting practical work on digital inclusion we believe that Age UK has a lot of expertise to feed in, and we are happy to work with the Government to bring its work to fruition.

We have used the evidence and insight we have amassed from helping older people and conducting research into different aspects of digital inclusion to develop a series of policy proposals. We believe that collectively these will help mitigate the impact of increasing digitalisation of our society, and work towards ensuring that no-one is left behind.

We are calling for:

- Older people to have a legal right to be able to access all public services offline, if they cannot use the internet successfully and confidently, or at all.
- A cultural shift whereby older people's views and experiences inform the design of digital approaches for which they are a key audience right from the start and then throughout the process of development into implementation.
- The Digital Inclusion Action Plan to catalyse a concerted national effort by Government, businesses and the VCSFE, to provide people of all ages who want to go online with the opportunities they need to do so, including programmes tailored to older people's specific needs, targeted especially at areas of deprivation where levels of digital exclusion are likely to be high.

Government can fast track the promotion of digital inclusion by utilising the already existing network of connections created in communities nationwide, including those developed by Age UK and our partner organisations and local council digital inclusion initiatives. Age UK has long-running programmes to help people in later life gain the skills and confidence to use the internet. We can share our experience of what has worked, for example:

- Learners need ongoing, open-ended support, allowing for reflection and repetition, rather than a one-off intervention. This helps people retain information, develop skills and increase confidence.
- Taking a person-centred approach, focusing on the learner's interests and needs, can work better for some people than following a general curriculum in structured, skills-focused courses.
- While some individuals prefer one-to-one support, as they can develop a strong and trusting relationship with the volunteer, others tell us they enjoy group work for the social aspects.
- Home visits may be needed in rural areas and with older people who are housebound.

To deliver real impact requires a focus on quality not quantity. Home visits, one-to-one and ongoing support are resource-intensive, so must be properly funded. Equipment must be user-friendly and accessible, and programmes must ensure users can continue to successfully use any loaned devices or try out different equipment after their initial taster sessions.

Question 9: How can the government ensure the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund best supports local communities across the UK?

In our experience, the more crossover support between sectors, government and charities the better, as we can share resources and expertise. It will be important to utilise the role of sector specialist organisations, federated organisations who can take a national and local perspective, as well as links to industry.

Critically, the Innovation Fund should look to how to address areas of deprivation, where the need is greatest. With 1.9 million pensioners living in poverty, Age UK is concerned that digital exclusion is compounding the barriers they face in living well and deepening the inequality they experience in their daily lives.

Our latest research found links between digital exclusion in later life and levels of deprivation: only half (52%) of older people living in the 20% most deprived parts of England use the internet every day, compared to four fifths (80%) of people living in the 20% least deprived areas.⁶

In an increasingly digital world being able to use computers must not be the preserve of the affluent, so it's important that digital inclusion programmes are targeted at poorer areas, as well as tailored to meet the needs of different groups, including older people. It may also be helpful to consider how LINK use geographically targeted measures of digital exclusion in their assessment processes to understand cash access needs, as summarised here: [access-to-cash-assessment-process.pdf](#)

⁶ Yonder telephone polling of 1001 adults aged 60+ in Great Britain, commissioned by Age UK and conducted between 14th March and 15th April 2024 <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/one-in-three-31-over-60s-say-life-is-harder-than-five-years-ago-because-more-services-are-now-online/>

Question 10: 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**
- a. Do you agree with these four focus areas? Yes/ No/ Don't know**
- b. If no, what changes would you make to the areas of focus?**

While the four focus areas broadly mirror Age UK's key delivery principles for our Digital Inclusion programme, we think more emphasis should be placed on the role of the Action Plan in guaranteeing equal and fair access to essential services for those not online.

The Action Plan goes some way to address efforts to enable people to get online and sets out the first steps towards a Digital Inclusion Strategy. However, the Plan must also lead to much more consideration for the needs of those who are not computer users and who never will be, many of them older people.

Age UK believes the shift to 'digital first' in public and private services has created significant barriers for older people who are not comfortable with using technology, leaving many struggling to access essential NHS services like GP appointments, hospital treatment and financial services. Age UK polling unearthed a raft of negative feelings when older people are recommended to access services online rather than in person or over the telephone. More than half (53%) of respondents felt frustrated, 29% felt left behind and 38% said they believe the shift to make everything online is ageist.⁷

1 in 3 (31%) over 60s – equivalent to 5.1 million say life is much harder compared to five years ago because the things they want to do are online. Older people have repeatedly told Age UK that they want to stay in control of how they live their lives but difficulties with using the internet are forcing some to rely on others, undermining their independence and self-esteem.

We are currently running our 'Offline and Overlooked' campaign, which aims to secure a right to offline access for people, in addition to other policy asks:

- **All public services, including the NHS, council services and other nationally provided public services, must offer and promote an affordable, easy to access, offline way of reaching and using them.**
- **The Government must make sure local government receives enough funding to provide offline services.**

⁷ Age UK (18 March 2025) Press release <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/one-in-three-31-over-60s-say-life-is-harder-than-five-years-ago-because-more-services-are-now-online/>

- There needs to be much more funding and support to enable people who are not internet users, but who would like to be, to get online.
- The Government should lead on the development of a long-term, fully-funded national Digital Inclusion Strategy, to support people of all ages who want to go online to do so.
- The Government should change the law to require banks to maintain face-to-face services.
- Banks must accelerate the roll-out of shared Banking Hubs to meet the high and continuing demand for face-to-face banking services.

Question 11 and 12: For each focus area, has the government identified the right objectives/ medium and long-term next steps? Please refer to the objectives in the consultation document.

a. “Opening up opportunities through skills”

- Has the government identified the right objectives/medium and long-term next steps? Yes/ No/ Don't know*
- If no, what should be the objectives of this area?*

We agree with the statement that *“Increasing digitisation of public services without adequate skills provision risks limiting vulnerable groups’ (including older adults’ and deaf and disabled people’s) access to the NHS, social care and social security support.”* Immediate actions should not only focus on those in education or employment, but value everyone’s right to be online in an informed and safe way, including older people.

Despite more older people going online over recent years, around 1 in 6 of people aged 65 and over, equivalent to 2.3m⁸ do not use the internet at all – and almost half (48%) of these people are aged 75+.

Additionally, [more than 1 in 3 over 65s \(4.7 million\) in the UK lack the basic skills to use the internet successfully](#).⁹ This means they are unable to complete all eight of the most fundamental tasks required to use the internet successfully. These include being able to turn on devices and enter account logins, use settings and controls on your device, open applications, set up connection to wifi, open internet browsers, keep passwords secure and change passwords when prompted to do so.

For those older people who have got over the barriers of using the internet, further analysis by Age UK shows that among those over 65s who are online, around 2.5

⁸ Age UK analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13 (2021-22).UK Data Service. SN: 6614, [DOI: http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-19](http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-19)

⁹ Lloyds Bank. 2023. *2023 Consumer Digital Index. Essential Digital Skills data tables* <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index/essential-digital-skills.html>.

million¹⁰ are unable to complete tasks required to **thrive in a digital society** in day-to-day life. These key skills include being able to communicate, to store and access information and content, carry out transactions, search for information and be safe online.

b. “Tackling data and device poverty”

i. Has the government identified the right objectives/ medium and long-term next steps? Yes/ No/ Don't know

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

Learning from our digital inclusion programmes shows how tackling data and device poverty must ensure donations are good quality and do not become quickly obsolete, especially as old and outdated devices reduce users' ability to download apps or access features. Outdated devices can increase frustrations and put people off longer-term, for example when they crash or there is no ongoing support to accompany the device it can be a setback for new users. Banking apps, for example, have been known to only work on the latest devices, meaning many people with older hardware, including people who received devices as part of a donation scheme, are unable to manage their money online, which would be the case even they had the skills to do so.

We are concerned that people's limited knowledge of connectivity data can be taken advantage of – people can be put on very expensive contracts with huge data allowances, that they will never get close to using. Unless this is identified and resolved, a lot of older people decide they cannot afford to be online, so choose to cancel their contracts and therefore lose their connectivity. Some pockets of the country are unable to get any form of connection, making it very difficult to access the online world.

Finally, Government must ensure consumers, particularly telecare users, are informed, supported and protected through digital infrastructure upgrades, such as the PSTN, 2G and 3G switchover activities.

Some important statistics that describe the scale of the issue are:

- 29% of people aged 75 & over in the UK, around 1.7m, do not use the internet.
- 9% of people aged 65 to 74, around 0.6m, do not use the internet.
- 18% of people aged 65 & over, around 2.3m, do not use the internet.
- 67% of people in the UK aged 65 & over and 88% aged 55 to 64 use a smartphone.
- 26% of people in the UK aged 65 & over and 9% aged 55 to 64 use a standard mobile phone.

¹⁰ Lloyds Bank. 2023. *2023 Consumer Digital Index. Essential Digital Skills data tables*
<https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index/essential-digital-skills.html>.

- 7% of people in the UK aged 65 & over and 3% aged 55 to 64 do not use a mobile phone.¹¹

c. “Breaking down barriers to digital services”

- Has the government identified the right objectives/ medium and long-term next steps? Yes/ No/ Don’t know***
- If no, what should be the objectives of this area?***

We want to ensure inclusive digital services are easy to use and save people time and money; with appropriate and well-supported alternative pathways for those who need them.

Older people’s views and experiences must inform the design of digital approaches for which they are a key audience right from the start and then throughout the process of development into implementation.

We would like further information about the new standard on inclusive digital services and efforts to create “*enhanced service standards and guidance, measuring service performance, and supporting departments to reduce duplication between services to give users a better experience of government.*”

Ideas around highlighting the challenges of different user groups and establishing targeted support and extending and expanding assisted digital services could also be positive steps, requiring further input from service-user groups.

Age UK would also welcome more engagement on efforts to identify better ways of working to align support. The role of trusted members of the community to give informal help will be critical. We would also be keen to input into the conversation on how key private sector services could better meet future inclusion standards.

d. “Building confidence”

- Has the government identified the right objectives? Yes/ No/ Don’t know***
- If no, what should be the objectives of this area?***

Age UK has found that 37% of those aged over 65 who do want to be online more often, do not trust the internet.¹² We would be keen to contribute to efforts to build the evidence base to better understand why older people choose to be offline, and what might need to change for them to be more motivated to get online.

¹¹ Age UK Briefing: Facts and Figures about digital inclusion and older people (June 2024)
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/internet-use-statistics-june-2024.pdf>

¹² Age UK [Press release](#) (Sept 2023) Age UK analysis reveals that almost 6 million people (5,800,000) aged 65+ are either unable to use the internet safely and successfully or aren’t online at all

However, it will be vital to listen to and respect those who choose not to be online for whatever reason, including the real threat of online scams, misinformation and misuse of AI, and ensure this does not put older people at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing services.

We agree that the voluntary sector has a crucial role to play in “*instilling and encouraging a sense of confidence, motivation and trust*” through our person-centred approach and strongly recommend the Digital Inclusion Action Plan builds on the established local, community infrastructure, best practice and established evidence base.

Question 13: If you have any additional ideas on what government should be doing, please tell us more.

Older people are increasingly frustrated by being locked out of essential services as services move online or are required to engage in ways they are uncomfortable with, posing real risks to their health, wellbeing, finances and ability to participate fully in our society. Over the past few years we have published a raft of policy reports detailing how older people are struggling to access council services.¹³ Age UK's [Offline and Overlooked campaign](#) petition has now received over 100,000 signatures, including thousands of examples of real-life testimony detailing the day-to-day frustration and discrimination experienced by older people. The Government must ensure that people are not left behind and critically do not miss out on much-needed support.

There will always be some people who cannot, or choose not to, use the internet. Public and private service providers need to ensure that there are suitable alternative ways to access essential services and support.

¹³ Age UK's '[Everything is online nowadays](#)' report (2018) revealed through a mystery shopping exercise that 41 out of 100 councils contacted in England told people they needed to access the internet in order to claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. Fourteen of these did not offer support that would enable someone who has never used the internet to make a claim.

An Age UK London report [Access Denied](#) (Jan 2023) used Freedom of Information requests and found a third (31%) of councils in London do not offer a way to apply for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction without using the internet.

Age UK's '[Help with housing costs](#)' report (May 2024) highlights the difficulties that some people with low incomes face who want to claim Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction to help meet their rent and council tax, but who cannot use online systems. It encourages councils to review their services and ensure everyone has equal access to support.

Age UK's (June 2023) [report on blue badges](#) and other council services included findings from a survey of local Age UKs, which indicated many areas require residents to use online options to apply for a Blue Badge in their area and that people are also having difficulties accessing other council services if they cannot do so online. Offline options are not promoted and it was hard for people who were offline to find out about and apply for a Blue Badge in their area.

Age UK believes all public sector organisations should be expressly mandated to offer offline access and make people aware of the different options in order to ensure that they are providing a good service for all citizens. There are also legal requirements with which public sector bodies need to comply that require them to avoid discriminating, for example the Public Service Equality Duty and the Human Rights Act.

Government must play a role in ensuring local authorities continue to provide offline access through setting clear standards and adequate funding to do so.

Councils must offer easy to use alternatives to online systems and work with local organisations to make sure their services are fully accessible to everyone. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan provides opportunities to work together to ensure consistent offline access and support, which will result in less discrimination and ageism in access to services, and more equality for those currently excluded.