

# **STORIES OF CHANGE FROM THE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES INCLUSIVE BROADBAND PROJECT**

Research Evaluation of a Universal  
Basic Services Experiment

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RESEARCH EVALUATION OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES EXPERIMENT**

**IGP POLICY BRIEFING, JANUARY 2021**

**ABOUT THIS REPORT**

This report provides a qualitative research evaluation of the first phase of the *Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband* project launched in June 2020 by Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association (HARCA) in partnership with LETTA Trust Schools, Tower Hamlets Council, East End Community Foundation, and Internet provider Community Fibre. The project which will run for two years, is currently targeting 100-200 low-income households in Poplar, Tower Hamlets London borough. Each household family participating in the project is being provided with free broadband Internet connection, a Google Chromebook digital device, and basic information and communications technology (ICT) training and support.

The Institute for Global Prosperity at UCL was invited to support Poplar HARCA to research and evaluate the impacts of the first phase of the project. The objective of the research is to collect ‘stories of change’ through personal accounts exploring the expectations and short-term impacts of the project.

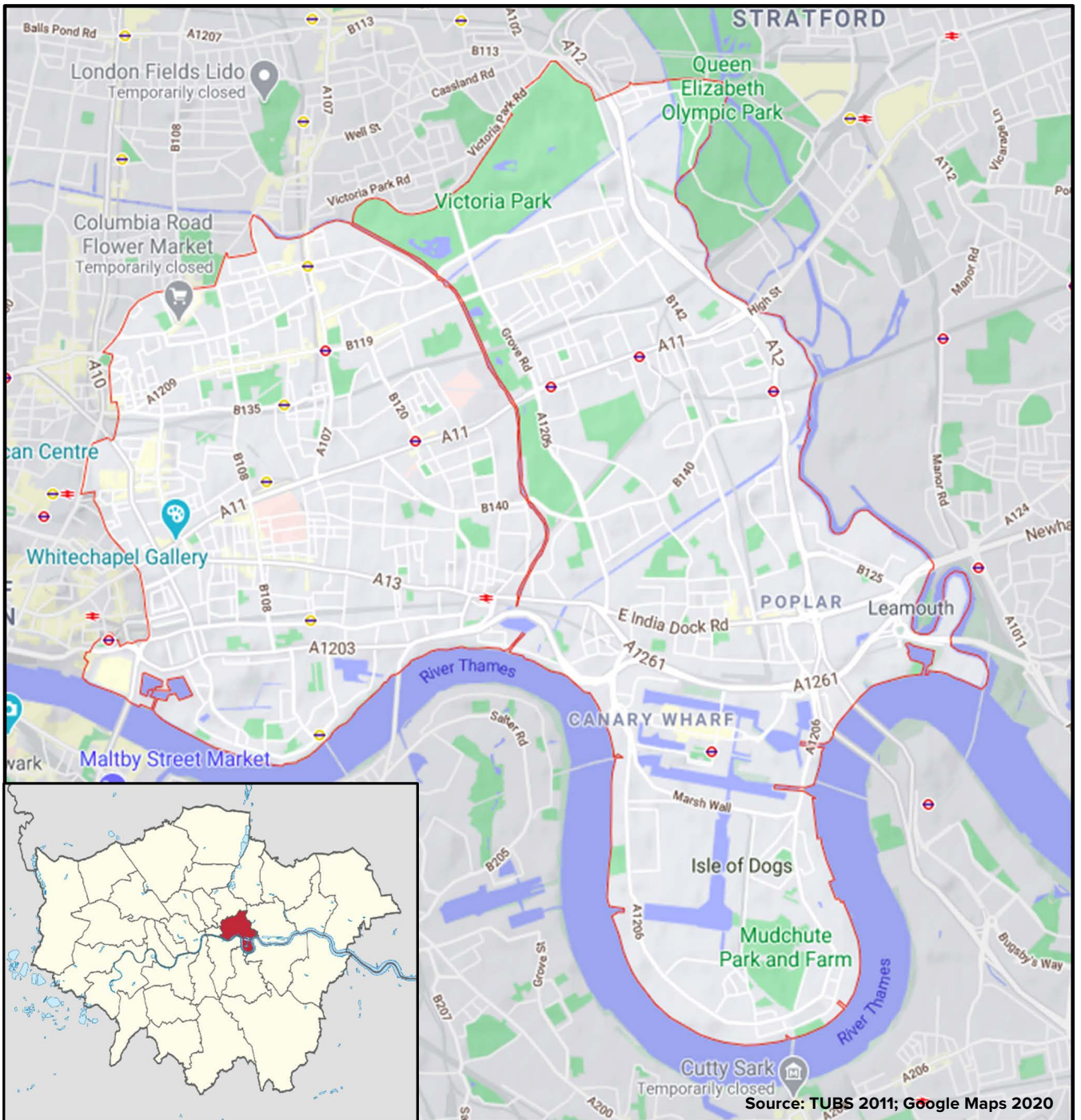
The findings of this research are intended for both policy, academic and wider public audiences, and will serve to build evidence for a system of Universal Basic Services (UBS) a radical, yet feasible and sustainable policy framework proposal developed by IGP’s Social Prosperity Network (SPN) to re-design a welfare system fit for the 21st century. This study, and the SPN, are part of IGP’s Prosperity Co-Lab (ProCol) UK initiative whose work is focused on rethinking prosperity and the future of the welfare state through citizen-led research and cross-sectoral collaborations.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Research for this report was conducted with the support of Citizen Social Scientists Kulsuma Islam (Stebon Primary School) and Sultana Yasmin (Poplar HARCA) who conducted the research data collection and supported the analysis of the evaluation. The project is being financed in partnership by Poplar HARCA, LETTA Trust Schools, Tower Hamlets Council, and East End Community Foundation. Inner Cover Photo: School student holding Google Chromebook (Credit: Poplar HARCA).



# MAP OF TOWER HAMLETS BOROUGH



## BACKGROUND

- Digital exclusion in the UK encompasses a series of entrenched gender, intergenerational, ethnic, socio-economic, and geographical inequalities in terms of Internet access and digital skills. The disparate experiences of the lockdown during Covid-19 have exacerbated these inequalities and prompted renewed political dialogue about the importance of universal access to critical services, such as digital infrastructures and digital training and literacy across the population.
- In this context, a system of Universal Basic Services (UBS) can be critical not just in reducing the everyday costs of living, thereby helping to tackle poverty and inequalities, but also by supporting and creating the capacities and capabilities that allow people to participate fully in society.
- UBS is a radical, yet feasible and sustainable policy framework proposal developed at the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at UCL which aims to support households across the country based on a re-designed welfare system for the 21st century. Based on the principles of collective responsibility and shared needs, the UBS policy proposal aims to provide sufficient, quality, and free public services at the point of use to all residents across seven areas: health care, education, transport, internet access and communication, housing, childcare and adult social care and legal services.
- The uncertainty and disproportionate impacts of Covid-19 have highlighted the critical importance of local public services in supporting people and communities through lockdown. Within this context, community anchor organisations, such as housing associations and social housing providers, have quickly moved to provide essential support for families and vulnerable individuals.
- In the UK, housing associations are uniquely positioned to design and deliver holistic, meaningful, and effective UBS experiments because of their long-term role in local asset ownership and management and direct relationship with tenants and communities.
- The Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband Project was launched in June 2020 by housing and community regeneration organisation Poplar HARCA in partnership with LETTA Trust Schools, Tower Hamlets Council, East End Community Foundation, and Internet provider Community Fibre. The project which runs for two years, is currently in its Phase 1, providing 100-200 low-income households with free broadband Internet connection and receive a Google Chromebook digital device, basic digital training, and information & communications technology (ICT) support. The objective is to scale the project up to 1,000 (Phase 2) and 10,000 (Phase 3) households in the medium to long term.
- Working with two citizen-social scientists, the IGP conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to examine and understand the experiences of nine families participating in the Project.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Findings from the research show the project is having rapid and **important beneficial impacts** on participating household families **in four key areas**:
  - *Home Schooling and Learning opportunities;*
  - *Work and Employability opportunities;*
  - *Physical and Mental Health Wellbeing and Behaviours;*
  - *Time and Costs Savings.*
- The findings also highlight **further improvement required in three areas**:
  - *Online Access to and Management of Basic Services and Utilities;*
  - *ICT Skills and Internet Safety;*
  - *Overall Broadband Connectivity and Project Reception.*

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunities presented by UBS experiments in Digital Inclusion within the housing sector, such as the *Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband* project, are very promising for improving the quality of life and wellbeing of communities.

We recommend accelerating and scaling up the learnings and impacts of local Digital Inclusion initiatives and other UBS-type experiments is crucial for the redesign of a welfare state for the 21st century aimed at supporting people's livelihoods security, tackling poverty and structural inequality, and building back better in a post Covid-19 world.

### This can be done by:

- Identifying a target population to better quantify and understand the dimension of digital exclusion at the borough and local authority level by, for example, using citizen led research methods such as IGP's [Prosperity Index](#);
- Working in partnership to narrow the existent 'Digital Divide' through integrated approaches within the housing and other sectors;
- Learning from and supporting existing Digital Inclusion initiatives and other UBS-type experiments;
- Developing a UBS Community of Practice through cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder collaborations and leadership to design, deliver and evaluate alternative, rapid, and influential UBS experiments through different modes of delivery.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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This report provides an initial evaluation of the *Connected Communities Broadband Project* launched in June in the Poplar ward of London borough of Tower Hamlets this year by housing and community regeneration organisation Poplar HARCA in partnership with LETTA Trust Schools, Tower Hamlets Council, East End Community Foundation, and Internet provider Community Fibre. The project is currently running its Phase 1 providing free Internet, a laptop and basic digital skills training and support for 100 households. The objective is to scale the project up to 1,000 (Phase 2) and 10,000 (Phase 3) households in the medium to long term.

The evaluation for the initial phase of the Project was conducted by a small team of researchers at the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at UCL in collaboration with two citizen social scientists (CSS) living and working in Poplar. The findings from the evaluation reveal important beneficial impacts of the Project on community residents' behaviours and capability during the Covid-19 lockdown months, such as the ability to do home schooling, work from home, conduct employment searches, the ability to learn new things, to communicate with friends and family, and pursuing hobbies and interests. The findings also provide important lessons for improvement to follow up into the Projects phases II and III scaling up.

The *Connected Communities Broadband Project* also forms part of IGP's ongoing collaborative work with multiple and cross-sectoral stakeholders to build up the evidence in support of a system of Universal Basic Services (UBS) that redesigns the Welfare State for the 21st century enhancing the capacities and capabilities of individuals and communities to make them more resilient to adapt to change.<sup>1</sup>



## 2. DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN THE UK

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The Covid-19 public health and socio-economic crisis has highlighted the extent and severity of inequality, poverty, and livelihoods insecurity across most vulnerable sectors of the UK population. The pandemic has brought to the fore the interconnections between inequalities in income, health, housing, education, working conditions, and digital engagement. In this sense, the challenges of digital exclusion, in particular, have been exacerbated by the pandemic both in terms of access, skills, education, costs and support networks.<sup>2</sup>

If we examine the UK as a whole, there are an estimated 9 million people (16% of the population) who are unable to use the Internet and their device by themselves, this includes being unable to undertake basic and foundational digital activities such as turning on a device, connecting to Wi-Fi, or opening an App.<sup>3</sup>

Inequalities in digital access and engagement are not a new issue in the UK but Covid-19 has drawn attention to the pernicious effects of the digital divide. Internet access is now an essential part of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Online access allows us access to social security services, government benefits and public health information, searching and applying for jobs, finding and taking professional re-skilling training opportunities, working from home, ordering food or joining food parcel delivery schemes, carrying out online bookings (e.g. for GP appointments) and reservations (e.g. for train tickets, eating out, or buying essential household items), connecting with friends and family, and accessing online entertainment, sports, cultural events and products.

Immediate responses to the pandemic by the UK Government, namely lockdown and social distancing measures, presupposed that households could shift to home working and home schooling. However, in the UK and across the world, digital exclusion is a major barrier for low-income households, vulnerable individuals, and those living in deprived areas as it can potentially hinder their participation in social, cultural, political, and economic life, as well as

people's health and wellbeing opportunities and outcomes.

This is particularly worrying given the fact that the Covid-19 crisis' harms are borne mainly by the poorest groups and communities, by people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, by women and by differently abled people.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup> Nearly 50 percent of BAME households in the UK live in poverty, and those in poverty are disproportionately vulnerable to job losses and pay cuts which are the result of the pandemic, increasing the severity and persistence of poverty going forward.<sup>8</sup>

The digital divide is also having an uneven impact on children's access and quality to educational resources and performance. Research by conducted by the Sutton Trust in April 2020<sup>9</sup> shows that during the first months of the lockdown, 23% of pupils were reported to be taking part in lessons online every day. However, pupils from middle class homes were much more likely to do so (30%), compared to working class pupils (16%). At private schools, 51% of primary and 57% of secondary students have accessed online lessons every day, more than twice as likely as their counterparts in state schools. Three-quarters of parents with a postgraduate degree, and just over 60% of those with an undergraduate degree felt confident directing their child's learning, compared to less than half of parents with A level or GCSE level qualifications. While 44% of pupils in middle class families were reported to spend more than 4 hours a day learning, this was true for 33% in working class families.

The disparate experiences of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic have prompted renewed political dialogue about the importance of universal access to critical services, such as digital infrastructures and digital training and literacy across the population.

Digital exclusion in the UK, is not just an issue concerning the intergenerational divide in terms of digital skills, but a series of entrenched gender, ethnic background, socio-economic, and geographical

inequalities, all of which were problematic long before the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>10</sup>

To date UK government policies on digital inclusion, such as the UK 2017 Digital Strategy,<sup>11</sup> have largely focused on material access (availability and quality of broadband infrastructure) and those who are ‘offline’ (the training and re-skilling of non-users and the digitally disengaged). However, digital exclusion is a problem that goes beyond of those who are ‘online’ and ‘offline’; it is rather a problem of social, cultural, and economic capital disparities to ‘be digital’ and the ‘spaces to be digital’, the latter referring to the physical and material spaces (workplace, desk) and social spaces (confidence, privacy, time) to go online.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, data from the Ofcom 2019 Children’s Media Use and Attitudes Survey showed that as many as 23.4% of 5-15 year olds living in the poorest households did not have access to a device to go online (laptop, desktop or tablet computer) and broadband Internet.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, amongst UK adults, Internet non-users tend to be

older and in lower socio-economic groups: 40% of non-users were aged 75 years old or over, and 53% of non-users were living in either low-income occupations or unemployed households.

The socio-economic divide was also visible among those of working age (16-64), with those in low-income and unemployed households much more likely to be offline (13% compared with 3% of those in working age from households with higher-income, managerial and skilled professional occupations).<sup>14</sup> At the same time, many Internet non-users demonstrate a lack of appetite for going online in the near future: 77% say that nothing would encourage them to go online in the next 12 months, and 61% say they do not currently go online due to a lack of interest or need. One in five state a reason either related to cost (19%) or difficulty (‘being too complicated’) (17%) as a barrier to their going online.<sup>14</sup>

**Box 1** below summarises the latest figures from the UK Digital Consumer Index,<sup>3</sup> showing that it is often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who are most likely to be digitally excluded:

#### BOX 1 – GENDER, INTERGENERATIONAL, ETHNIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIGITAL DIVIDES

- While women and men have achieved parity in terms of Essential Digital Skills for Work, there is still a big gap among those who are retired with men more likely than women to achieve all Foundational tasks (62% vs. 43%).
- People from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are less likely to have all five Essential Digital Skills for Work than those from a White background (42% to 49%).
- Only 7% of those over 70s years old are likely to have the capability to shop and manage their money online.
- People with an impairment are 25% less likely to have the skills to access devices and get online by themselves.
- People with an annual household income of £50,000 or more are 40% more likely to have Foundation digital skills, than those earning less than £17,499.
- 4-in-10 benefit claimants have Very Low digital engagement.
- Those who work part-time are significantly less likely to have Essential Digital Skills for Life or Work than those who work full-time. This is important because 24% of the workforce works part-time, of which 82% are female. They are also less likely to have access to the Internet at work (38% compared to 54% full-time), meaning that they have less opportunity to improve.
- Those who are least digitally engaged are more likely to be paying higher household bills irrespective of income, household, or age (for utilities alone, they are spending an average of over £348 more per year), and they are less likely to earn as much (digitally enabled manual workers are earning an average of £2,160 extra per annum).
- Finally of those who are online, only one-third 34% say that they are using the Internet to manage their physical and mental health. Those with the highest levels of digital engagement are more than twice as likely to benefit from this (44% compared to 21% of the least digitally engaged). Conversely, over two-thirds of those who get online (66%) do not feel that they benefit from managing their health online, either because they are yet to discover what could support them, or because existing apps are inappropriate, or related activities are not working for them.

Source: Lloyds Bank (2020) UK Digital Consumer Index

## BOX 2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown, 78% of those online agreed that the pandemic had escalated the need for digital skills and 80% agreed that using technology has been a vital support to them. However, more than half (55%) of people believe that there are key services they need in their day-to-day lives that cannot be fulfilled by technology alone. Only 32% agreed they felt more confident about their digital skills or had the necessary skills to help with life and work now and in the future.

Source: Lloyds Bank (2020) UK Digital Consumer Index

## 2.1 WHY UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES ARE NECESSARY FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION AND LIVELIHOODS SECURITY

The above figures show some of the factors underlying digital exclusion in the UK, as they relate to gender, intergenerational, ethnic, socio-economic, and physical and mental disability inequalities. As the pandemic continues, these are likely to be further exacerbated as the ongoing pace digital transformation continues to accelerate making necessary to tackle these deep-seated inequalities through new approaches that are fit for the 21st century.<sup>15</sup>

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis, research conducted by the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) in east London had highlighted the importance of livelihood security as a pathway to prosperity for individuals living in low-income households.<sup>16</sup> Secure livelihoods are identified as an infrastructure of interrelated assets that people can rely on to prosper, including: secure income and good quality work; affordable, secure and good quality housing; access to key public services - healthcare, education, childcare and transport; inclusion in the social and economic life of the city with social and community support networks playing a particularly important role.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, a system of Universal Basic Services (UBS) can be critical not just in reducing the everyday costs of living, thereby helping to tackle poverty and

inequalities, but also by supporting and creating the capacities and capabilities that allow people to participate fully in society.

UBS is a radical, yet feasible and sustainable policy framework proposal developed by IGP's Social Prosperity Network,<sup>17</sup> and which aims to support households across the country based on a re-designed welfare system for the 21st century. Throughout 2019/2020, the IGP has developed concepts and modelled forms of sustainable funding, and with its existing partners in local government, housing, and academia, have tested approaches and developed preliminary evidence of positive impact.<sup>18</sup>

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UBS is a promising policy proposal that is beginning to gain traction.<sup>18,1</sup> High-quality and universally accessible basic services can be critical not just in reducing the everyday costs of living, thereby helping to tackle poverty and inequalities, but also by supporting and creating the capacities and capabilities that allow people to participate fully in society.<sup>1,18</sup>

Based on the principles of collective responsibility and shared needs, the UBS policy proposal aims to provide sufficient, quality, and free public services at the point of use to all residents across seven areas: health care, education, transport, internet access and communication, housing, childcare and adult social care and legal services.<sup>1,17</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of investment in UBS is to extend and enhance the capabilities and capacities of individuals and communities, strengthening their resilience in the face of current and future challenges, such as those posed by the Covid-19 crisis, and promote resident access to civic participation and economic opportunity.

## 2.2 THE ROLE OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS IN DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING UBS

In the UK, the opportunities for UBS are best exemplified by the long history of universal health (NHS) and state education system. While we rely on these services, they cannot address deep-seated

social inequalities without a system appropriate for the 21st century, specifically the numerous challenges brought forth by globalisation, technological innovation, automation, climate change, and now the Covid-19 crisis. As the pandemic unfolds it has become clear that new kinds of universal services designed and delivered by cross-sectoral partnerships are urgently needed to improve quality of life and wellbeing in contemporary society.

Digital Exclusion in terms of access to the Internet and digital skills for life and work, is perhaps the most obvious in terms of our individual and collective capacities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic: enabling people to stay connected and continue to participate in school, college, work, access healthcare, stay in touch with family and friends, seek employment, manage isolation, enable volunteering, increase access to advice and information and much more. Households without digital access have been, and will continue to be, disadvantaged in multiple ways that resonate long into the future.<sup>9,19</sup>

As community anchor organisations, housing associations across the UK are uniquely positioned to design and deliver meaningful and effective UBS experiments in Digital Inclusion and other areas. Housing associations and social housing providers are in frequent contact and communication with tenants, residents and the wider community offering support and essential services across a wide range of issues including housing specific, welfare service advice, social initiatives, economic opportunities, and education and culture events.<sup>20</sup> In the context of Digital Inclusion, housing associations and social housing providers can work in partnership with multiple stakeholders from the public, private and charity sectors to pull together networks, capabilities and material resources, to help the community getting online and access to public services, pay rent and bills, report repairs, find out about useful community information and events, and connect with friends and family. DI initiatives can be a real enabler, giving people who are marginalised through unemployment, low income, disability or old age, a much-valued sense of control over their lives.<sup>21</sup> This is also of importance for those sectors of the population who feel excluded and marginalised by the increasingly 'digital-by-default' of welfare services, so called

'e-government', due to interrelated demographic, physical and mental health, socio-economic, cultural, political, and infrastructural conditions.<sup>22</sup>

The opportunities and benefits from DI are equally beneficial for housing associations. Housing associations with developed DI strategies reportedly benefit from reduce costs and improved service efficiencies. However, in the UK a third of housing associations surveyed do not currently have any kind of coherent DI strategy in place.<sup>23</sup> A 2016 report by Housing Technology finds several factors hindering housing associations developing and implementing DI strategies and initiatives, including: the cost and complexity of integrating digital inclusion services, IT equipment and broadband connectivity. There is also the fact that most housing associations are currently spending only 0.1-1% of their annual turnover on digital inclusion projects. Of those which invest in DI projects, most of their digital inclusion budgets and resources are directed towards IT training for tenants. Only a third of housing associations offer tenants free or reduced digital hardware and software, and broadband connectivity packages.<sup>23</sup>

# 3. CONNECTED COMMUNITIES INCLUSIVE BROADBAND PROJECT

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The uncertainty and disproportionate impacts of Covid-19 have highlighted the critical importance of local public services in supporting people and communities through lockdown. Within this context, housing associations and social housing providers, have quickly moved to provide essential support for families and vulnerable individuals.

In this sense, the provision of Digital Inclusion initiatives by housing associations that are inclusive and holistic in their approach and seek to integrate not just access to Internet and a digital device to get online, but also relevant digital literacy, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills training and a wider range of easy-to-use software for differently abled persons, has become fundamental.

One such effort is the Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband Project currently running in the ward of Poplar, in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. The project was launched in June 2020 by housing and community regeneration organisation Poplar HARCA in partnership with LETTA Trust Schools, Tower Hamlets Council, East End Community Foundation, and internet provider Community Fibre.

The project is currently undergoing a Project Phase 1, which will run for two years. The Project was launched in June this year and is targeting 100-200 low-income households providing them with free broadband Internet connection, a Google Chromebook digital device, basic digital training, and basic ICT support.

Following Phase 1, the aim of the partners in the coming months is to scale up the project to a second phase targeting up to 1,000 households, and a third phase with up to 10,000 households across the borough of Tower Hamlets.

## DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN TOWER HAMLETS

Located in the East of London, Tower Hamlets has an estimated population of 324,745 residents.<sup>24</sup> The area struggles with poverty and inequality issues (see **Box 3** below). The borough has one of the youngest and fastest growing populations in the country, it is highly ethnically diverse, and currently underperforms across most poverty and inequality metrics. It has the highest child poverty rate (57%) in London boroughs, while the unemployment rate is at 6%, with an estimated 8.1% of residents on unemployment benefits.

Latest data on digital exclusion is only available from 2014 showing big intergenerational, socio-economic and disability/illness condition disparities in access to the Internet. For instance, 96% of those aged 14-38% have access, only 38% of those aged 60 and over do. Those with a disability or health problem are 30% less likely to have access to the Internet, while those in social grades DE are less likely to connect compared with those in C1 social grades.

### BOX 3. TOWER HAMLETS POPULATION, POVERTY AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION PROFILES

#### Population (2017-2019 figures)\*

Tower Hamlets has an estimated population of 324,745 residents. The borough has one of the youngest and fastest growing population in the country with more than two-thirds (69%) of the borough's population belonging to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups

Including 32% Bangladeshi, and more than 4 in 10 residents were born outside of the UK. GLA has projected the borough's population trend will continue, rising to 372,766 in 2030. With the highest % increase amongst the pension age (65 and above) from 2019-2030 (41% increase), followed by the young adults (19-24) with an increase of 18% in the same period (GLA projection 2020 (2018-based), using housing-led population (table: persons)). There were an estimated 129,000 households in the borough in 2017 and this is projected to increase by 30% to 168,000 by 2030.

#### Poverty (2020 figures)\*\*

Latest data collated by the Trust for London borough underperforms across most People, Living Standards, Housing and Work, Worklessness and Benefits, and Shared Opportunities metrics. The borough has the highest rate of children living in poverty (57%) and the overall poverty rate (39%) is worse than average. The unemployment rate is at 6%, while 8.1% of residents are estimated to be claiming out-of-work benefits. The GCSE attainment rate is of 68.2%, while the percentage of working-age adults without formal qualifications is 9.7%.

#### Digital Exclusion (2014 figures)\*\*\*

86% of adults surveyed said they had Internet access. Levels of access varied with age: 96% of those aged 18-34 had access compared with just 38% of those aged 60 and over. Those with a disability or health problem were far less likely (60%) to have access to the Internet compared with those with no disability/health problem (90%). Households from social grades DE (typically lower income households) had lower levels of internet access compared with those in social grades AB and C1. Of those residents with internet access, most said they accessed the internet at least once a day (93%). The most popular online activities were email (80%); browsing for information about goods and services (79%), social media (68%); buying and selling online (61%) and internet banking (59%). Contact with the Council was predominantly via telephone, with 21% using online methods (either email and/or website) to make contact. The percentage of residents who said they used the internet to pay for Council services was 37%.

Sources: \*Tower Hamlets Borough Profile 2020 (Population); \*\*Trust for London Tower Hamlets Poverty and Inequality Profile; \*\*\*Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey Topic Briefing 2014.

Participating households for the Phase 1 include 100 children and families currently living in Poplar HARCA-managed homes and attending the Stebon and Bygrove Primary Schools.

In addition to the free broadband and Google Chromebook, participants are given a free ICT training through face-to-face, live remote and pre-recorded sessions designed to develop knowledge and skills of computing fundamentals, raise awareness of Internet safety, access the Internet, email, and social media to stay connected, support children with online home learning, and basic word processing and data entry skills.

The programme was to be delivered through three stages:

- **Stage 1** – The basics (covering most basic functions from how to use the Google Chrome

device to getting online and accessing the training portal, through creating user accounts and sending and receiving e-mails);

- **Stage 2** – Home learning (including access to the school's websites, Google Classroom, YouTube and BBC Bitesize) & Staying Safe (including managing online risks, cyberbullying, and theft, protecting your device and children); and
- **Stage 3** – Staying connected (how to connect to the GP, local services, online courses, and accessing Universal Credit). Poplar HARCA and LETTA Trust conducted a baseline study and impact survey to further evaluate the likely impact of this initiative on the development of computing skills and knowledge of participants, including their ability to connect and engage with school, employment, and other community opportunities.

# 4. RESEARCH EVALUATION OF PHASE 1 OF THE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES INCLUSIVE BROADBAND PROJECT

## 4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The data collection and analysis for the evaluation of Phase 1 of the project presented here was conducted between July and November by researchers from the Institute for Global Prosperity's (IGP) Prosperity Co-Lab (PROCOL) UK initiative with the support of two Citizen Social Scientists (CSS) (see Box 4).

### BOX 4. CITIZEN SOCIAL SCIENCE (CSS)

Citizen Social Science (CSS) is a well-established research practice involving the public in large-scale scientific research, where people from the community take part in volunteer monitoring and crowd-sourced projects.

IGP's approach to citizen science is different. Local residents are trained as citizen scientists in research ethics, qualitative and quantitative methods, and data analysis. CSS help develop, support and implement the research methods and analyse data, often conducting interviews with policy-makers, community leaders and other residents. They use their own knowledge of the local area to inform, influence and shape the direction of the research. This collaborative approach ensures local knowledge is embedded in the research findings the IGP produces. Moving forward, citizen scientists are engaged in co-designing effective policy recommendations to propose new pathways to prosperity.

The IGP draws upon citizen science in many of its projects and is currently developing a Citizen Science Charter. The Citizen Science Charter is a tool for supporting best practice in citizen science-led research. It is co-produced with citizen scientists in Lebanon and the UK, as well as London Prosperity Board members. It is for citizen scientists, organisations who work with citizen scientists, and for funding institutions to use, to guide their research processes and administrative practices.

The data collection for the study was carried out by the CSS through online, telephone and in-person interviews, while the analysis of the findings was done using a thematic analysis. CSS worked in closed collaboration with the IGP researchers to co-design the research questions and analyse the data.

**Box 5** summarises all of the participants who provided evidence and case studies for the study. Overall, a total of 9 households participating in the study were interviewed.

### BOX 5. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (RPS)

**Aalia Ahmed**, female parent, single, four children ages 14, 11, 8 and 5

**Kareem Gupta**, male parent, married, four children ages 17, 15, 13 and 7

**Leyla Miah**, female parent, married, two children ages 5 and 2

**Nazir Basu**, male parent, married, one child

**Nadja Busra**, female parent, four children ages 10, 7, 5 and 2

**Esra Mallick**, female parent, three children ages 8, 7 and 8-month baby

**Sheena Ram**, female parent, one child age 10-11

**Erin Young**, female parent, one child age 7-8

**Romuz Singh**, male parent, two children ages 10-11 and 7-8

**Samir**, male student, age 10-11

**Jaiya**, female student, age 10-11

**Suki**, female student, age 8-9

Prior to taking part in the study, all participants were provided with information about the research evaluation project and its purpose and asked to give informed consent in writing. For the purpose of this study, all participants' names have been pseudonymised to safeguard their identify. In addition, all the data provided in the participants' accounts have been anonymised. Where known and consented by the participants, their gender, marital status, and number of children and their ages are included.

The aim of the evaluation is to understand the impact of the broadband Project capturing the personal experiences and stories of change from a small number of households participating in the Burdett Estate in Poplar.

The purpose of the 'Stories of Change' case studies presented in this section is to demonstrate how involvement in the *Connected Communities internet Project* benefitted families as well as identify opportunities and areas for improvement for Phase II and III.

## 4.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings from the research with participants of the *Connected Communities Broadband Project* reveal important and beneficial impacts and opportunities for improvement in terms of seven key areas: (a) *Home Schooling and Learning opportunities*; (b) *Work and Employability opportunities*; (c) *Physical and Mental Health Wellbeing and Behaviours*; (d) *Online Access to and Management of Basic Services and Utilities*; (e) *Time and Costs Savings*; (f) *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Internet Safety Skills*; (g) and *Overall Broadband Project Connectivity and Performance*.

These are described below with case studies from participants

### HOME SCHOOLING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Uses for broadband and the Chromebook varied. Aside from connecting with friends and family, and

accessing various entertainment media, broadband was mostly used by children and their parents for helping them do their homework and other learning activities, such as distance language courses and online physical education sessions.

Three children participating in the scheme, highlighted the beneficial impact of the Google Chrome device to do their homework, access the Google classroom which they use in the school, and stream videos and tutorials:

*"It helped me with searching for educational work by using the internet broadband. I use the Chromebook for google classroom work and to do my Spanish homework that is set on google classroom. It has helped me with my Maths and English work"*

**Samir, male student, age 10-11**

*"The Chromebook has helped me send work on my google classroom. The school gave us internet which we did not have at home. Google classroom did not work on the iPad but after I got the Chromebook, I could do my school work. Without the internet it was very boring and I have to stay at my grandmother's house during the beginning of lockdown so that I can do my work on google classroom"*

**Jaiya, female student, age 10-11**

*"It's been great, it has helped me with completing my maths and English work. I also use the Chromebook to watch YouTube videos. I use the internet to learn about Tudors and I am learning about the Tudors in school. My brothers use the Chromebook to do their school work. The internet is very fast"*

**Suki, female student, age 8-9**

Parents were also able to help their children with their schoolwork. One participant said himself and his son were both using the Chromebook regularly:

*"My son uses the Chromebook for schoolwork and sometimes game as well. [...] Most importantly I am checking my son for study, some online video. How to improve my son"*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**



*“My daughter is able to do her homework easily and efficiently. I feel very comfortable using the Chromebook and the internet. It has helped because the internet speed is good and it’s free. Also, the Chromebook is good because it’s very easy to use”*

**Erin Young, female parent, one child**

Another participant added that they all used the Internet and that one of their sons was using it for learning Arabic:

*“Everyone in my household uses the broadband, I use it for work and leisure time and so does my wife. My three daughters use it for schoolwork most of the time and for entertainment, and my son uses it for Zoom calls with his Arabic teacher from Egypt”*

**Kareem Gupta, male parent, married, four children**

Some participants shared how much of a difference made to their children having a reliable Internet connection and especially the Google Chromebook device to do their school homework during the lockdown, especially in households where more than one or two children need to share a device:

*“Before this it was really difficult to do home-schooling. The kids have tablets and we had one old laptop which doesn’t work very well, which they had to share. Our internet connection was also very poor, so they couldn’t all do everything they needed to at the same time. It was always cutting out, if one was doing one thing, and another started doing something else, our broadband couldn’t handle it. My sons often had to try to watch their online tutorials on my phone, as it was the only way around it. The new broadband connection is a lot better. It means all three of my children can get online and do their classes at the same time, and it also works in every room now too. It’s made it a lot easier for them to do their work, so I’m really happy with it”*

**Nadja Busra, female parent, four children**

*“It’s been such a struggle. I was having to link devices to get internet through my phone and my son and daughter, who both have schoolwork to do, were having to take turns. They’ve not been able to do a lot and they were falling behind. Having a proper broadband connection has made a big difference”*

**Esra Mallick, female parent, three children**

## **WORK AND EMPLOYABILITY OPPORTUNITIES**

For most parents, the provision of free, reliable, and fast broadband Internet also meant the possibility of doing searching for jobs and applying online, as well as working from home.

Three parents said they had been using the Google Chromebook regularly for work, emails, doctor appointments, internet banking, or contacting the school.

*“I use it myself for work as well, and banking. Sometimes emailing, very important. To contact the doctor or the school. It is very important for me”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

*“Entering the Broadband Project was very helpful as our laptop had broken and we were about to buy a new one when we heard about the scheme with a free Chromebook. [...] It has been positive for us. Obviously for searching and applying for jobs during the Covid-19 lockdown. It has been very good because the connection is much faster. We used to have a lot of problems with the previous [broadband provider]. That has been very helpful to do job applications, [as it] doesn’t take a long time”*

**Leyla Miah, female parent, married, two children**

Other parents, however, while overall satisfied with the scheme offered some caveats. One mother, RP-A, said that they were using the Chromebook only for entertainment (watching movies), and that they preferred using their mobile phone for everything else that was related to job searches, online banking or managing and bills.

## PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING AND BEHAVIOUR

Having a fast and reliable Internet connection has also had immediate positive impacts in terms of physical and mental health wellbeing and behaviour for both parents and their children. As one participant reported:

*“For my husband it was really good having the Internet during the Covid lockdown. He got some gym equipment online to use in the back garden during the lockdown, as he was shielding as he is in a risk-group because of his heart condition. I don’t use the gym equipment, [but] I do join my son when he does online physical workouts in the morning. Sometimes his little brother joins! He loves it, he would say ‘Mom, let’s do PE session!’”*

**Leyla Miah, female parent, married, two children**

The same participant said that having the Internet was also beneficial for their oldest son as it allowed him to carry out other physical training activities through online videos beyond school PE:

*“It was also positive for swimming and boxing. Before the lockdown, my son used to go boxing and would try out Jujitsu lessons. When the lockdown started, he couldn’t continue, so he started following class exercises online. We also have boxing pads at home, so sometimes we would train together, I would help him out. [...] He’d do 45-minute sessions and then he’s basically relaxed, and a lot more calm”*

**Leyla Miah, female parent, married, two children**

Another parent also shared how important having the Internet at home was for their daughter:

*“She is in a high-risk group as she suffers from asthma, so I’m having to keep her at home for longer, even now schools are reopening, so we really needed this”*

**Esra Mallick, female parent, three children**

Several participants also expressed how having the Internet had made things easier and helped coping with anxiety and stress during the lockdown months. RP-F said the broadband Project had also made a big difference to the whole family:

*“About a month into lockdown, we had to self-isolated as my baby was ill and then I was struggling to keep up with bills because I couldn’t make payments online. Now I’ve got broadband, I can get on my accounts and do that anytime, it’s made things much easier”*

**Esra Mallick, female parent, three children**

Another participant, RP-C, shared that they had lost their job during the lockdown and their husband was on furlough, and that having a fast and secure broadband connection had made things easier, especially as they were struggling with the local Job Centre to find jobs and relevant opportunities.

## ONLINE ACCESS TO AND MANAGEMENT OF BASIC SERVICES AND UTILITIES

Beyond online shopping and job searching, the use of Internet for accessing and managing other services (e.g., online banking, utilities, and government benefits) was limited or seldom reported by participants.

One participant said that they sometimes used the Internet for online shopping, banking, emailing and sometimes for contacting the GP:

*“Sometimes online shopping. Most importantly I am checking my son [for study], some online video. How to improve my son. And banking, sometimes emailing, very important. Contact the doctor or the school, very important for me”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

Another participant also expressed how having the Internet had made things easier and helped coping with anxiety and stress of staying up to date with bills and services during the lockdown months. RP-F said the broadband Project had also made a big difference to the whole family:

*“About a month into lockdown, we had to self-isolated as my baby was ill and then I was struggling to keep up with bills because I couldn’t make payments online. Now I’ve got broadband, I can get on my accounts and do that anytime, it’s made things much easier”*

**Esra Mallick, female parent, three children**

## TIME AND COSTS SAVINGS

When asked whether having the Internet broadband had allowed them to save some money and/or time for doing other activities, at least two participants, RP-A and RP-B confirmed that having the broadband internet was saving them some money that they could put to other use:

*“The broadband money yes, I can use [the money] for something else”*

**Aalia Ahmed, female parent,  
single, four children**

*“Yes, I’m saving roughly £7 a month from my initial broadband company”*

**Kareem Gupta, male parent,  
married, four children**

One other participant also shared that the Internet broadband Project had saved them time, allowing them to buy food and clothes online, and money with the free Chromebook:

*“Our laptop had broken, and we were about to buy a new one when we heard about the scheme with a free Chromebook”*

**Leyla Miah, female parent,  
married, two children**

## ICT SKILLS AND INTERNET SAFETY

There was a very low uptake of the ICT training provided; only six families taking part in the training, and the majority of participants did not mention or seemed to be entirely unaware of the training provided. Very few showed concerns with issues around internet safety.

Despite the low uptake, however, most participants interviewed, including both parents and their children, expressed that using the Google Chromebook was easy for most members of the family, especially children who were very confident in using the device and different learning applications. Conversely, some said that some members of the family suffering from

health conditions were not able to use the device.

One participant described how confident their sons were with using the broadband for doing homework and using different learning applications in the Google Chromebook:

*“My sons are very confident with using the Chromebook and internet. They can do their online homework including watching school online videos and using different learning applications. They practice their English, maths, history and other learning”*

**Romuz Singh, male parent two children**

One participant, RP-I, mentioned that the mother had attended the course. While another, RP-D, thought that they did not think that they needed more training as they had quite some knowledge prior to receiving the Google Chromebook. However, speaking about their son, they said

*“My son, I think he needs to double up his skills”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

The same participant also shared that his wife had some medical issues and therefore could not make use of the device:

*“My wife has some medical issue, so she’s not able to do anything”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

Regarding Safety, one parent seemed to know about one of the schools having added some parental control to the Chromebook device:

*“Basically, I cannot tell you exactly, but from school they developed some restriction. I checked it and there is some restriction. Me, personally, I am checking what he is doing all the time. If there is something [I don’t like] I say don’t do it. But, essentially the computer has some restriction”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

Another participant said that they were able to monitor what and how their children were using the internet by monitoring their browsing history:

*“Yes, I’m able to monitor what my child is using the internet by checking browsing history”*

**Kareem Gupta, male parent,  
married, four children**

*“Broadband is a bit slow, but OK. [...] Everyone is comfortable using the internet. Sometimes it stops working and we have to wait until it comes back. But it’s OK. They [the children] are comfortable, yeah”*

**Aalia Ahmed, female parent,  
single, four children**

## OVERALL BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Overall, out of the 100 households targeted to take part in the Project, at the time of writing this report there were a total of 76 families who had received broadband connection and a Google Chromebook device. Of those who had yet to be connected, some had shown reservations about participation as this meant having to cancel their current broadband provider and incurring fees, while others said they were experiencing delays as the Internet provider for the Project, Community Fibre, did not have sufficient permissions to access or there was no fibre infrastructure available for specific house of residents or postcodes. Yet one other family, who have now joined the scheme, said that they had initially rejected to participate in the Project as they did not believe it was free, in other words that it was ‘too good to be true.’

For the majority of participants, the broadband Project has been hugely beneficial and positive in many ways. As some of the cases above show, the scheme has allowed children to continue with their studies, access learning via video streaming, and carry on with extracurricular activities like language learning or physical activities like swimming or boxing. For parents it has made things faster and simpler for some including searching for jobs, doing online shopping, and it has saved time and money for others.

More specifically, responses to satisfaction about the Google Chromebook device and the broadband internet speed and quality were somewhat mixed.

For some, the internet was slow and stopped sometimes, however they thought it was OK:

For others, the internet was fast and very easy to connect:

*“It is very easy to connect and use the device. [We are] very comfortable using it”.*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

One parent said that everyone was happy and felt comfortable using the Google Chromebook but added that they would like if software such as MS Word could be included for work and study:

*“I would like it if you could provide Microsoft Word, etc., so my children can use it for their schoolwork”*

**Kareem Gupta, male parent,  
married, four children**

*Conversely, other parents felt that the Chromebook was easy for “creating and editing word documents”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

One participant was eager that the project continued and was expanded to other families, and hoped that the support that Stebon Primary School had provided to parents – through training, internet parental restrictions – continued next year:

*“It is very helpful for the people. But if you continue, my recommendation, my advice, it’s gonna be very helpful for the children and the families that don’t have the ability to use it. So, I’m very happy that you provided me with laptop and internet. I’m very satisfied. And I can develop my son, and his future is gonna be bright I think. [...] If you continue, if you support more people, it’s gonna be good for the families and good for future and for this country as well, I think”*

**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

Several parents emphasised how important the Project had been for their children, including some who had never had Internet broadband in their homes:

*“Broadband is a bit slow, but OK. [...] Everyone is comfortable using the internet. Sometimes it stops working and we have to wait until it comes back. But it’s OK. They [the children] are comfortable, yeah”*

**Aalia Ahmed, female parent, single, four children**

For others, the internet was fast and very easy to connect:

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**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

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**Nazir Basu, male parent, married, one child**

Several parents emphasised how important the Project had been for their children, including some who had never had Internet broadband in their homes:

*“According to me, community broadband project is a great idea to improve children’s learning. Through this project children have been able to access their online learning during school closures. It has brought a positive impact in the community”*

**Romuz Singh, male parent two children**

*“I never had broadband at my flat. It’s been great so far. Having a free connection and being able to surf the net at the same time. My daughter had issues doing Google classroom. However, since the Chromebook was gifted, she was very content and completed her class work successfully. She gets to do other activities on there with delight. We are all privileged to be offered such a great project all free of charge! Feel lucky that we got selected. It’s on very rare occasions you get opportunities like that. We are glad we was one of them. Thank you”*

**Sheena Ram, female parent, one child**

Reflecting on the overall rollout of Phase 1, children’s engagement at school, and the feedback from parents, the Stebon Primary School’s Inclusion Leader said that the Broadband Project had “opened up access to children who previously wouldn’t have been able to work online at home. It’s levelled out the balance for those without internet at home so they can access programmes to support them to practising key skills - such as mathematics, lexia and accelerated reader. It’s also meant they can carry out research. It definitely helped engagement for those who received the Chromebooks.”

# 5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The findings from the research show that the Phase 1 rollout of the Connected Communities broadband Project has been very successful in a number of areas with beneficial impacts to children and their families.

Out of the seven emerging areas where the Project is having an impact, the experiences and case studies shared by the participants reveal four areas showing beneficial impacts, and three areas where further improvement is needed.

We summarise these below, and we suggest a series of recommendations for future scaling up phases.

## AREAS SHOWING BENEFICIAL IMPACTS

### • Home Schooling and Learning Opportunities

The provision of the Google Chromebook device and related ICT training significantly have improved children's online access to carry out with their schoolwork and engage with other learning activities during the lockdown months and beyond. It has also improved children digital skills and confidence to use the Internet.

### • Work and Employability Opportunities

While the evidence is limited, parents have benefit from having access to a faster and more reliable Internet connection to search for jobs and online opportunities, as well as to work from home.

### • Physical and Mental Health Wellbeing & Behaviours

Both parents and children in the households participating in the Project have been able to engage with physical activities through online video streaming sessions, shop online for house workouts, continue with PE sessions (even and especially for those in high-risk groups once the lockdown was over), and experienced less stress and anxiety by being able to stay connected to

carry out essential online tasks (e.g., pay bills, contact the GP, do online banking).

### • Time and Costs Savings

Having free broadband Internet, has allowed participants to save up the money that they would have spent on a private broadband service. Having a free laptop provided was also essential for many households where either there was no device, or one was being shared between two or more children. This in turn benefited children to catch up and stay engaged with their schoolwork.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### • Online Access to and Management of Basic Services and Utilities

While there have been certainly households who have engaged with various services (e.g., doing online banking, paying for bills, contacting their GP), several households were not digitally engaged in this manner. In fact, some households mentioned that they were only using the Google Chromebook for entertainment only, and their mobile phone for other things.

This finding is in line with literature on digital exclusion which shows the use of e-Government and 'digital-by-default' welfare services is one of the deepest gaps that exists in the Internet activities used by the citizens, and which threatens to further exclude those sectors of the population who are most vulnerable, differently abled, and marginalised.<sup>22,23</sup>

### • ICT Skills and Internet Safety

While the majority of participants found using the broadband and the Google Chromebook device easy and convenient for various tasks, there was a very low uptake in the ICT training with only six families participating and an overall lack of

awareness on issues of Internet Safety among many parents.

In addition to this, not everyone in the participant households was able to use the Internet or the Chromebook device. In one reported case this was due to a health condition

- **Overall Broadband Connectivity and Project Performance**

Out of a total of 100 households targeted, at the time of writing up this report there were 76 who had managed to be connected. Of those who are yet to be connected, this was either because of costs of having to pay cancellation fees with current broadband providers, the Internet provider for the Project, Community Fibre, could not reach them (due to lack of permissions or insufficient fibre infrastructure), or because they did not believe the scheme was free.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendations highlighted below emerge both from the findings in this report through the participant interviews and the desk-based review of existing literature. They are a call to action for UBS experimentation in the housing sector, as well as in other areas, to share learning, exchange capabilities and experiment in the design of different models of delivery, in order to build a robust, locally led, evidenced case for welfare reform based on a system of UBS.

**We recommend accelerating and scaling up the learnings and impacts of local Digital Inclusion initiatives and other UBS-type experiments is crucial for the redesign of a welfare state for the 21st century aimed at supporting people's livelihoods security, tackling poverty and structural inequality, and building back better in a post Covid-19 world.**

We suggest that going into the rollouts of phases II and III of the project, involved partners continue to work in collaboration with multiple and cross-sectoral stakeholders through a series of steps:

- **Identifying a target population to better quantify and understand the dimension of**

### **digital exclusion at the Borough level.**

As it was described in this report, housing associations and social housing providers have a key role to play in promoting more inclusive and sustainable Digital Inclusion initiatives by drawing together local and strategic networks and resources. This capacity should be directed at more accurately quantifying the need for digital inclusion at borough level. While national and regional level data on digital exclusion is up to date, latest available estimates for Tower Hamlets date back to 2014.<sup>27</sup>

Adapting and implementing the citizen-led Prosperity Index (PI) developed at the IGP to collect and examine quantitative and qualitative data could help fill this gap.

The PI measures what local people say supports their prosperity and quality of life across five main domains: foundations of prosperity; opportunities and aspirations; health and healthy environments; power, voice, and influence; and belonging, identities and culture.<sup>27</sup>

The five domains and the respective fifteen headline elements which composed them are based on extensive interview, focus group and survey work. The PI itself is compiled from these detailed local investigations combined with indicators and metrics from data sets at LSOA, LA and national levels. The aim is to create a composite index that combines elements that make sense to local communities themselves and are close to the life experiences of individuals and different groups, with structural and systemic economic, social, and political resources and constraints. One of the key insights from this work is that it is not just the identification of domains and components that matters, but how they relate to each other, and the complexity and density of relations between elements.

- **Working in partnership to narrow the existent 'Digital Divide' through integrated approaches**

Our research shows that successful DI interventions require integrated approaches through the provision of free access to broadband Internet at home along with the necessary hardware technology and software and ICT training and support.

The *Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband* project is a good example of how to do this through cross-sectoral collaboration. To further improve its impact, more work could be done in terms of: (a) adapting and promoting its ICT training programme to get those hardest to reach groups (e.g., those suffering from a health condition or disability, the digitally disengaged, the homeless); (b) integrating more specific support for jobseekers or those at risk of becoming unemployed to access and profit from services and opportunities online.

- **Learning from and supporting existing interventions**

Housing associations and social housing providers and other community anchor organisations developing Digital Inclusion interventions ought to connect and share expertise, learning from best practice and ongoing challenges. For example, like partners for the *Connected Communities Broadband* Project, Camden City Council are approaching local businesses to donate laptops to support children's learning during Covid-19, while Wandsworth Council is collaborating with Battersea Power Station in a project called "Power to Connect" to source tech kit, data provision, and provide digital expertise to residents across the borough.

- **Developing a UBS Community of Practice through cross-sectoral collaboration and modes of delivery.**

In the UK, there are already many local UBS-type initiatives taking place in many sectors, including community-led housing (e.g. Safe Regeneration's Liverpool City Region [Community-led Housing Hub](#)), free legal advice (e.g. [LawWorks](#)), digital inclusion projects (e.g. Good Things Foundation's [Power Up Initiative](#)), free public transport schemes (e.g. [Manchester City Metroshuttle free city-bus scheme](#)), and food security (e.g. Kentish Town Community Centre's ['The Pantry' foodbank](#)).

However, although these local efforts are promising, they remain isolated and lack coordination. More systemic and sustainable change cannot happen with local governments or community initiatives alone.

Facing the current pandemic crisis and the challenges brought forth by rising economic insecurity, structural inequality and poverty, and the lack of labour market realignment to automation, technological change, the green economy, and climate change, necessitates a redesign of the welfare-state for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One that is based on locally situated but also coordinated transformative strategies, is guided by local and central government leadership, as well as cross-sectoral stakeholder collaborations, and considers the complexities of each place.<sup>28</sup>

Accelerating the learning and impact of local UBS-type interventions, such as the *Connected Communities Inclusive Broadband* project on Digital Inclusion, could be achieved through the creation of a cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder UBS Community of Practice. Drawing from a diverse range of knowledge, expertise, capabilities and leadership, such UBS CoP would be able to deliver rapid and measurable impacts for the worst affected communities through more effective mechanisms for knowledge exchange, co-design of experiments, and evaluating different models for delivery, that make meaningful contributions to local, regional, and national policy interventions.

The IGP is already working with Poplar HARCA, and other partners in local government and academia, to develop such a CoP.



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ISBN: 978-1-913041-17-5