

Image credit: Tessa Mackenzie

Digital Inclusion in Housing

Stakeholder engagement summary

November 2023

Introduction

PRIORITISING DIGITAL INCLUSION IN HOUSING

The Scottish Government's Digital Inclusion programme aims to develop, test and implement a range of digital inclusion models that enable people to access mental health and housing services (and wider supports) to feel empowered, digitally confident and experience improved wellbeing. The programme delivery partner is the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the programme also works in partnership with Connecting Scotland.

As part of the programme development, an initial stakeholder engagement event was held in March 2023 to bring together people and organisations working across different areas of housing. Insights and learning from the event helped to identify existing digital inclusion work across the housing landscape, and shape the challenges and priorities that informed the programme focus.

The programme hosted a stakeholder engagement event in November 2023 to build on the learnings from the programme to date and explore how digital inclusion can be embedded as a core part of housing services and support.

This summary shares the insights and learnings shared during the engagement with stakeholders from across the housing landscape in Scotland.



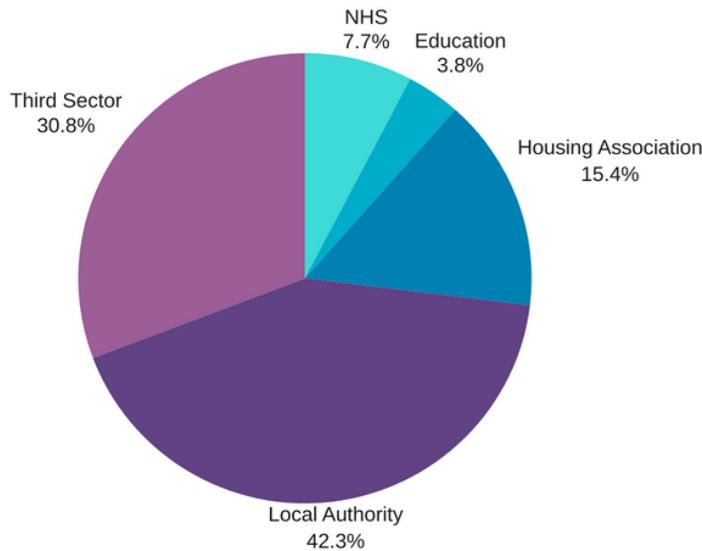
Stakeholder participation

33 people joined the stakeholder engagement from:

Glasgow Forfar East Dumbarton
Dumfries & Galloway Fife Perth
Cumnock Reading Lanarkshire
Dumfries Aberdeen Thurso
South Lanarkshire Birmingham

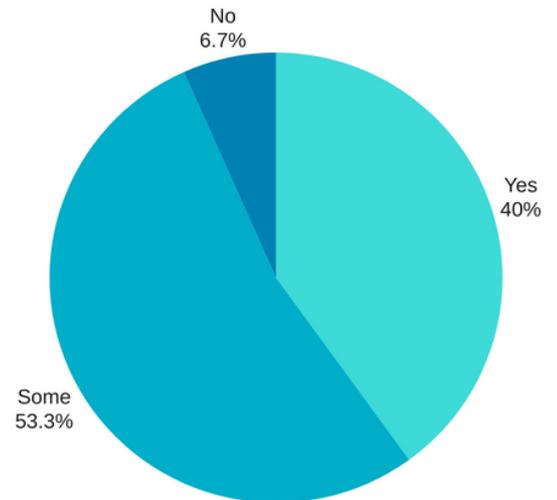
Organisations involved during the session:

- Third Sector
- NHS
- Representative Body
- Housing Association
- Local Authority



Do you feel the sector you work in is making progress towards supporting people to be able to use digital as part of their health and wellbeing?

- Yes
- Some
- No



Setting the Scene

We were delighted to hear from Gary Baillie from Bield Housing and Care who shared a video presentation about the TAPPI project approach to co-production, and the tenant digital champion model.

What we heard about embedding digital inclusion in housing services and support

In the first breakout conversation, stakeholders were invited to share their experience and ideas for how and where digital inclusion could be embedded in housing.

Discussion centred on how best to engage digitally excluded people. A range of methods were suggested including: community learning sessions, 'Tech and Tea' groups, housing support/tenancy assistance digital modules, internet cafes and tech libraries. Working with other services, such as employability services, was suggested as a way to ensure tenants could get the most out of being involved digitally.

If we are moving towards becoming a digital society, people should have the right to have devices and connectivity. Additionally, all new buildings should include an internet connection as a standard. Technologies should also be developed to meet the needs of users with varying ability levels.

It was recognised that staff require digital training and upskilling to allow them to coach and give confidence to people being supported. Staff skills development should include understanding individual tenant's needs.

Some people have a fear that digital will take the place of other forms of support, which should be addressed.

WHERE CAN DIGITAL INCLUSION BE EMBEDDED IN HOUSING TO SUPPORT LINKS WITH HEALTH & WELLBEING SERVICES?

Promote Near Me with rural areas and landlords, and ensure tenants are able to make best use

Home and care support

Staff and tenants can both benefit greatly from digital champion training, as this is already happening ad hoc but it's not targeted

More digital champions, linked to TEC and awareness of what can be done to support independent living

A platform that shows available resources for housing and care/support providers available to families, social care professionals and commissioners wanting to provide services under the "Coming Home" programme

What we heard about the barriers preventing digital inclusion from being embedded in services

Attendees identified several barriers that can prevent digital inclusion from being embedded in housing. Many of these are related to issues people may have with moving to digital ways of accessing services.

- Most digital services are designed for the majority of people, which can make it harder for people with disabilities to participate in the digital world. Many mobile devices have accessibility features, but some people find it difficult to do certain things without support.
- Digitally excluded people may have underlying literacy issues, preventing them from going online.
- There can be nervousness about potential scams and reluctance to go online.
- People's ability has not matched the speed of the move to digital services during COVID-19. An example given was ordering repeat prescriptions online. Some people won't want to admit they can't do this and miss out on medication altogether.
- Online applications (for example, for housing) can be challenging to complete, and some people will give up before finishing. There should be a paper option or a simplification of online forms. Services may assume everyone has a digital device, such as a mobile phone, but this is only sometimes true.

People choosing not to be online and the desire for social connection through in-person services was also highlighted. Services will not be inclusive if everything is automated, with no human interaction.

There can be perceptions and mistaken assumptions about ability. The example was given of older people who may be seen as not wanting to be online when many are comfortable with this.

Getting the message across through communication channels can be challenging. Social media may advertise local engagement sessions, but people must be digitally included to see the information.

Culture was viewed as another barrier when trying to embed learning and change working methods. Translating training into the day-to-day job can be difficult, making it harder for staff to apply learning.

What we heard about how to support digital inclusion through integration and partnerships

In the second breakout conversation, stakeholders were invited to share their experience of partnership and integrated working across housing, health and social care and how this approach could support digital inclusion.

In relation to health and care services, access in rural areas can be difficult; sometimes, relationships between housing and health services could be better. Housing officers can feel they take on the mental health professional role (when dealing with a crisis), which can cause difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. Greater access to digital information and support would ease the pressure on housing officers/frontline staff and health/care services.

Working with health practitioners is beneficial. There are valuable assets in medical centres and GPs. Health settings could promote digital inclusion uptake, for example, in waiting rooms.

Initiatives should be community/people-led, with services co-designed with communities based on their needs. Other services should be involved, for example, local libraries helping people become digitally included. People should be made aware of the resources available to help them, nationally and locally. Peer-to-peer support was also given as an example which works well as it allows people to decide how they'll get together in a way that works for them.

Related to this, there is a need to have a better understanding of who is excluded. Where are the gaps? What is causing digital inclusion? For example, is it skills gaps, geography, or connectivity?

A DigiKnow project has been started in one area to help digitally excluded people access online platforms. How training will be rolled out is currently being considered. Local community hubs are one option. There have also been positive experiences of using Near Me, which can be used in housing.

A collaborative approach would enable housing landlords to work with other organisations to support the tenants using devices. Landlords could identify the tenant and refer to another organisation for support.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the stakeholders who took part in the event for sharing their expertise, experience and insights on embedding digital inclusion in housing. Thank you to Gary Baillie from Bield Housing for the video presentation. We also thank all colleagues who supported the event to help us facilitate and capture the conversations.

For more information about the programme or to be kept up to date on programme activities please contact:

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Digital Health
& Care Scotland

