



Image credit: Tessa Mackenzie

# Digital Champion Training

## Exploring digital inclusion with the housing sector



Digital Health  
& Care Scotland



mhor  
collective

# Contents



## INTRODUCTION

### KEY INSIGHTS

At a tenant level

Devices

Data and connectivity

Motivation and skills

At a staff level

Service/organisation level

### DIGITAL CHAMPION TRAINING

Requirements

Preferred Delivery Model

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to inform co-design

Recommendations to inform the Digital Inclusion Programme

# Introduction

Digital exclusion is one of the reasons why many people are unable to secure and maintain a tenancy, or to access key services offered by housing associations. Lack of digital skills and understanding can also impact on an individual's health and well-being, on their access to employment; education; financial security and social connection. Conversely, someone with digital skills and understanding can apply such skills positively, and might also be able to stay at home for longer or to live more independently.

The aim of the co-design was to explore digital inclusion in the context of housing and to glean insights from those delivering services and support to allow the development of meaningful digital champion training for frontline staff, to help them embed digital inclusion work in their everyday roles. The programme seeks to harness the knowledge and learning from previous work to avoid 'rediscovering or re inventing' and ensure opportunities for impact are maximised.

## Process

This summary report explores key insights and recommendations from the two housing co-design sessions held in July 2023. The session involved seven participants, representing five housing organisations. Organisations were offering mainstream housing, as well as sheltered and supported housing. The sessions were held over Zoom, and data was gathered from participants using Mentimeter, as well as scribed conversations.

# Key insights

## At a tenant level

Staff felt that there are a number of ways in which tenants can benefit from increased digital participation, including improving their health and wellbeing; maintaining tenancies; minimising the impact of the cost of living; supporting sustainable, independent living (especially when digital inclusion support is extended to the use of smart devices, building in TEC tools). Digital inclusion activity can also contribute to tenant engagement, empowering community-led approaches.

Research conducted by housing associations in attendance highlighted that many tenants expected to communicate with their housing association digitally, requesting contact through email and that the number of people requesting paper contact is declining. For those who prefer and are able to use these digital innovations and communication the tools are extremely beneficial and of value, however, for those who can not or won't, interactions become difficult and can leave the tenant vulnerable and unrepresented.

**Digital Champion Training recommendation: highlight the opportunities and benefits of tenant engagement in digital in core training; encourage peer-to-peer support and learning amongst specific tenant demographics.**

# Key insights

## Devices

Access to devices is varied with device ownership sometimes contributing to digital exclusion, especially with regard to maintaining devices. Some organisations have offered support through device lending and library models. There were no examples of partnership approaches to device access. It was noted that there is a need for inclusion work to consider a broader range of devices and to support people in exploring what might be useful for them. Separately, it was also noted that personalising devices at first point of engagement significantly impacts on the likelihood of sustained use. This includes accessibility tools (visual tools having the most impact) and simple steps like bookmarking favourite sites.

The participant group had no knowledge of local device refurbishing/recycling schemes.

**Digital Champion Training recommendation: facilitate discussion on local opportunities; include application of smart devices in training (with case studies if possible); highlight the basics of accessibility tools embedded in devices and the importance of person-centred support.**

## Data and connectivity

Access to data/connectivity was noted to be an issue with different solutions. Some organisations have identified solutions (e.g., databanks) or are exploring options directly with providers themselves (an example being that one organisation is negotiating directly with Vodafone). Supported accommodation providers in attendance are offering wifi in communal spaces (though the age of buildings can cause issues in terms of distribution of the connection). These shared spaces afforded the opportunity for 1:1 support. Discussion on accessing wider community spaces for connectivity seemed to be a relatively new theme but one that might be explored in more detail.

**Digital Champion Training recommendation: information shared on affordable broadband and social tariffs, as well as opportunities including National Databank; possible training on 'mapping' local services. Encouraging organisational advocacy for citizen connectivity in the community.**

**Beyond Digital Champions: Encouraging the housing sector to see wifi as an essential part (and cost) of offering tenancy. Use case studies as they emerge to encourage others to follow.**

# Key insights

## Motivation and skills

Demonstrating digital was a key theme in the sessions - participants felt that tenants would benefit significantly from opportunities to experience different devices etc. in community settings. Participants also felt it would be helpful to draw on existing community-based support that might be able to offer 1:1 although there is a lack of certainty on what these might be and as cost of living and funding cuts take hold these services are increasingly limited.

Skills support also requires recognition of particular diverse needs and should focus on supporting people with accessibility needs, and speakers of languages other than English. Online safety was also a key consideration.

The lack of staff skills/confidence/time (discussed below) impacts on the ways in which staff engage directly. When staff have low levels of digital confidence they do not and will not support tenants in a meaningful way.

**Digital Champion Training recommendation: exploring challenges for staff, building on their skills and providing reassurance around what a Digital Champion should know; discussing local opportunities for face-to-face support to consolidate skills; accessibility; working with speakers of languages other than English; online safety.**

# Key insights

## At a staff level

It was noted by those attending that staff digital skills and confidence varied, and there had been no benchmarking of digital skills. Furthermore, it was noted that, in some instances digital transformation often contributed to a fear of change, and that senior leadership buy-in to support the development of staff digital skills is inconsistent. Digital is rarely if ever, included in job descriptions. It was clear, however, that participants felt that digital is very much a part of housing, both in terms of services offered by housing associations and in supporting tenant engagement and community participation.

The impact of staff turnover is also relevant here, the participants noted. Sometimes there is 'one-off training' and participants highlighted a need for rolling, ongoing training to ensure that digital inclusion is embedded. Participants suggested a level of Digital Inclusion training be included in their mandatory onboarding training (much like health and safety, equal opportunities etc). A short live/interactive session for new staff would be beneficial.

**Digital Champion Training recommendation: Over and above Digital Champion training staff need digital skills and confidence-building sessions, supporting their skills in a holistic way - not driven by Housing Association systems.**

# Key insights

## At a service/organisational level

Participants highlighted that organisations were increasing their digital services and that these offered real opportunities for both the individual and for the organisation. It was also noted that digital transformation requires change management. Of the organisations represented, more than 50% said they needed management support for, and understanding of, digital inclusion to increase.

**Beyond Digital Champions: Digital Senior Leaders Programme: an SCVO programme which explores leadership; culture; design; impact; cyber threats and security and. road mapping**

## Digital inclusion at a locality level

In the sessions, a number of place-based digital solutions on apps and websites were highlighted (such as [Smart Life Fife](#)) and local solutions, such as the Ayrshire and Arran Digital Hub. This supports the existing understanding of the need for digital resources and opportunities to be included in digital champion training which reflect community and locality. If any data of such offerings exist, this would be helpful.

**Digital Champion Training Recommendation: offer space within training to share local opportunities. Share the resource and training to quickly build a community-led map.**



# Digital Champion Training: Housing

The insights from this group suggest that digital champion training should cover:

- The essential digital skills framework (a useful benchmarking tool, as requested in the first session)
- Digital champion basics (including first steps; accessibility; working with speakers of other languages; resources; printable elements and safety/security, especially scamming)
- Exploring local solutions and community engagement
- Case studies (as shared in training, but with supplementary studies to ensure appropriate themes are covered)

## Preferred delivery model

- Digital delivery was noted to be the most practical for frontline staff.
- It was suggested that digital inclusion training sit alongside mandatory training such as Equality and Diversity training. This training would ensure an organisation-wide 'base level' understanding of digital inequality and would then lead to digital champion training.
- Digital Champion Training should be supported by a dedicated peer-to-peer space offering case studies, resources and space for digital inclusion learning and an editable leaflet for those who are new to the internet explaining why the internet might be useful, as well as a playbook (guide) for staff.

# Recommendations

## Further recommendations to inform co-design

Future work should be informed by tenant consultation. Some of the attending participants offered to consult with tenants directly.

As the session involved a smaller number of participants and some of the organisations were relatively new to digital inclusion work, it would be helpful to run the same questions via some larger housing associations that are perhaps further on in their digital inclusion journey.

## Further recommendations to support the Digital Inclusion Programme

While Digital Champion training can and will play a large role in supporting a Digital Inclusion programme across Scotland's Housing network, it is suggested that Digital Champion training success would be bolstered by the following support package:

- Senior leaders programme to ensure that senior leadership understand and embrace the digital inclusion agenda as part of wider digital developments.
- Digital motivator sessions for middle management, to highlight why digital inclusion is crucial and how housing organisations can benefit and impact.
- A full sustainable digital skills programme for staff, supporting holistic skills (which will then transfer to workplace and Digital Champion support).
- Replicate the digital support programme to tenant participation groups.

## Evolving the training through learning-based design

The Digital Champions training in housing will continue to evolve as part of ongoing learning-based design. Sessions with 'Digital Pioneers' projects who are funded as part of the Digital Inclusion programme will refine the content through initial roll out to staff involved. Further sessions with the housing workforce will also deepen insight into specific aspects of the training such as building trust and onboarding to digital tools. The Digital Champions training will be rolled out to the housing workforce more widely in 2024.

# Further information

To cite this summary report:

Mackintosh I. and Munro S. (2023). Digital Champion Training: Exploring digital inclusion with the housing sector. Summary Report. The Digital Inclusion Programme. [weblink]

For more information about the Digital Inclusion Programme please visit:

<https://tec.scot/programme-areas/digital-inclusion>

Contact: [NSS.DigitalInclusion@nhs.scot](mailto:NSS.DigitalInclusion@nhs.scot)



Digital Health  
& Care Scotland



mhor  
collective