



FROM THE CHAIR OF THE ASSOCIATION
CLLR LOUISE GITTINS

23 April 2025

Jan Shortt
General Secretary
National Pensioners Convention

Dear Jan,

Thank you for your letter of 5 March 2025 outlining the significant challenges faced by older people in accessing local council services due to increasing digital exclusion.

At the receipt of your letter, the Local Government Association (LGA) was in the process of agreeing its response to the consultation on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP), so please do excuse the short delay as we wanted to ensure that our response reflected the most up-to-date position.

To the letter itself, we acknowledge the validity of the concerns raised and recognises the critical importance of ensuring equitable access to essential services for all residents, including older people.

We appreciate the National Pensioners' Convention's long-standing advocacy on behalf of over a million pensioners and your commitment to ensuring their voices are heard. The LGA shares your concern that a digital-first approach, without robust offline alternatives, can disadvantage those without internet access or digital skills. The examples provided regarding Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Blue Badges, and car parking payments outline the practical difficulties experienced by many.

The LGA is actively working to support local authorities who are addressing digital exclusion through a multi-faceted approach, both internally within councils and externally within their communities. We firmly believe that local government is central to achieving digital inclusion goals, possessing unique insights into local needs and established relationships within communities. [You can read more about the role councils play in closing the digital divide here.](#)

To support local government in this role, and ensure all communities can benefit from local efforts, the LGA is undertaking the following activities:

Inclusion within service standards: The LGA is working with LocalGov Digital to ensure the [Service Standard](#) reflects the need for digital inclusion within service design and delivery. This is paired with research on the use and uptake of this standard to understand the challenges local authorities face when designing truly inclusive services.

Equality Impact Assessments: Recent engagement has demonstrated a desire for council officers to have a greater understanding of the levers available to ensure cross-organisation responsibility for digital inclusion. We are currently planning a workshop to explore how EqlAs can play a role in this and look forward to the practical outcomes.

Facilitating peer learning and knowledge sharing: The LGA's Digital Inclusion Network provides a valuable platform for local authorities to share good practice, learn from each other's experiences, and explore existing levers to prevent digital exclusion within service delivery. This network,

comprising over 400 members, is a collaborative environment for addressing strategic challenges related to digital inclusion, and we would welcome NPC representatives to join this group. Last week, Age UK joined a session to discuss their 'Offline and Overlooked' campaign, and facilitated a productive discussion about the work happening to ensure older people are not excluded from council services.

Championing sustainable investment: We are actively advocating for long term and sustainable investment in local authority-led digital inclusion initiatives. We recognise that consistent resourcing is essential for building robust local ecosystems and achieving lasting positive impact within communities. Our engagement with central government emphasises the need to empower local authorities as strategic partners through appropriate funding mechanisms.

Promoting a whole system approach: The LGA is committed to fostering a more integrated and collaborative approach across the public sector, where local government, the NHS and central government all play key roles in supporting digitally excluded residents. Our response to the Digital Inclusion Action Plan call for evidence calls for genuine cross departmental collaboration to reflect the action plan being co-badged by five government departments.

Providing adult social care information and advice: For people seeking this, we recognise a personalised approach is vital. Our [Partners in Care and Health \(PCH\)](#) improvement support and [adult social care information and advice toolkit](#) for councils encourage digital inclusion efforts and recognise the importance of both online and [offline provision](#) to meet Care Act requirements (with Section 4.4 stating that information and advice must be "accessible to, and proportionate to the needs of, those for whom it is being provided").

Connectivity and inclusion are inherently linked: We recognise that access to reliable digital infrastructure is a foundational element of digital inclusion. The LGA advocates for a more integrated national approach that aligns digital infrastructure rollout with digital inclusion efforts, prioritising underserved areas and ensuring that connectivity initiatives consider the needs of residents who face challenges in both mobile and broadband connectivity.

Outcome focused evaluation: We are working to promote evaluation that prioritises the real-world impact of digital inclusion initiatives on people's lives. This includes encouraging the adoption of metrics that go beyond simple usage statistics, and instead reflect the multifaceted nature of digital exclusion, where motivation, access, confidence and skills should all be considered when interventions are being developed.

The LGA understands the importance of local context and the invaluable knowledge that councils, and their partners, possess to meet the needs of their communities. Our approach seeks to empower local leadership and support the scaling of effective, locally driven solutions, while supporting councils' own capabilities to ensure the increased digitalisation of interactions and the opportunities for smarter, more efficient public services, do not create new barriers to vulnerable residents. This is key to ensuring local government effectively addresses digital exclusion and provides accessible services for all older people.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Louise Gittins
Chair, Local Government Association