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Do you have an experience of digital exclusion you would be willing to share with us, or an example of how you have been helped to get online?

We would love to hear from you.

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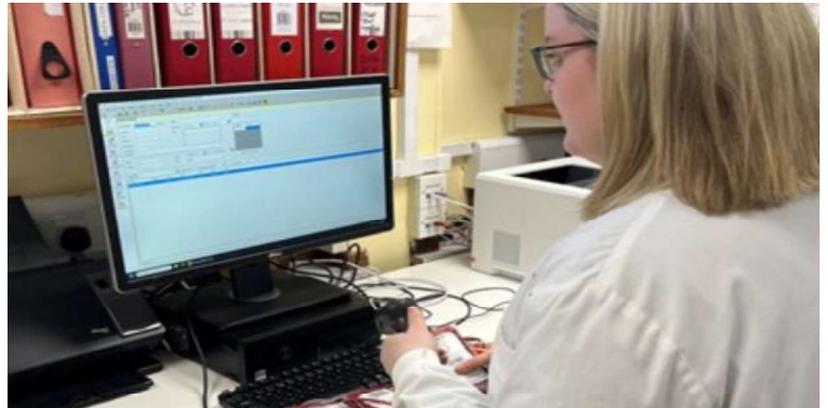
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Photograph (Credit: ABUHB)

A PARTNERSHIPS HELPS RESIDENTS TO GET ONLINE

Many local councils have set up groups concerned with digital technology in their areas. In Newcastle Upon Tyne the city council have a Digital Inclusion Steering group which meets every month. It discusses how the voluntary and community sector and the mainline services can help residents in regard to getting online.

At the most recent event there was a presentation about an organisation in the nearby town of Sunderland who had partnered with the Council. The scheme was setup when a local firm realized there was a need for both equipment and to encourage residents to get online. This was in 2021. It was demonstrated that there has been a lot of development since.

The firm called "BornGood " realizing there was a need, with the National Lottery help, are now in partnership with Greggs and Gentoo (the local housing group) have provided over 100 laptops to residents. They have a system whereby residents can be supplied with a laptop by post or a Trusted Link Worker or via a Smartlocker.

The organisation also helps small groups who need advice on completing grant applications. They also created an AI Bot to help individuals understand the workings of the laptops and supplied some sim cards too.

The presentation was well received and those present at the event were keen to copy the model in regard to their local areas.

Violet Rook



EDITORIAL

Looking ahead

Digital technology is moving fast. The progress of AI is an example. But there are more than four million people without Broadband in this country and over two million who do not own a smartphone.

Questions such as what do individuals do when the Digital Switchover occurs without a Broadband connection. Then there is the question about health. Without a smartphone will those individuals become the forgotten minority?

The future should look bright for everyone, we hope it does for all age groups and communities. Organisations such as the Digital Poverty Alliance are helping to provide equipment and give voice to the needs of the public. They are having an event in Newcastle in February in regard to the Digital Switchover.

Some local authorities are providing events and in partnership with the local Voluntary and Community organisations providing training and equipment for individuals and communities.

All this good work needs to continue because the problem of digital inclusion is both local and national and the NPC connects these sectors and gives a voice for the needs of its members.

Violet Rook



EDITORIAL

Looking back...

Eight years ago, an NPC Biennial Delegate meeting approved an NUJ resolution for a campaign to tackle the digital exclusion gap and to set up a digital working party to drive it.

Despite the COVID outbreak, the DWP produced a Four Nations Report with recommendations for a campaign to tackle the digital divide which was approved by the NPC's National Executive.

This newsletter was launched to further the campaign and: "Support and publicise existing policies aimed at enabling older people to get online, use computers, tablets and smart phones; to campaign for action where these policies or strategies are not being implemented, and to explore what could and should be done to prevent older people who cannot, or do not wish to go online – for whatever reasons – being disadvantaged and discriminated against."

Our newsletter has successfully raised awareness of many digital exclusion issues, continually signposted members to the UK-wide help available to learn digital skills and promoted and worked in partnership with the Digital Poverty Alliance, the Good Things Foundation and other campaigners.

Our DWP has also helped advise and support the NPC respond to various government consultations, including the Digital Inclusion Action Plan which led to the NHS 10-Year Health Plan (for England) published July 2025. I thank all my fellow DWP members, past and present, for their commitment and hard work on the campaign and the newsletters we've produced.

Jenny Sims (Editor issues 1-16)

The Digital Switchover Event

The Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA) will host a training session on the digital landline switchover on Wednesday 4 February at [The Catalyst in Newcastle](#), delivered with the BT Digital Voice team. The session is for organisations beginning to support residents through a change that is already shaping daily practice across housing, community, health, and care services.

Many people want clarity on whether their current phone will continue to work, how to check a pendant alarm, and how the transition applies in homes without broadband.

This training will set out the essential technical points, outline the checks households can complete in advance, and give attendees the chance to see the equipment that may be used during and after the change.

It will also offer time to discuss local issues.

There are printed leaflets produced by the BT Digital Voice team are available. These provide clear information and can be requested ahead of the event by clicking on the link and going to the website.

<http://digitalpovertyalliance.org>

The training will be from **2-4pm on Wednesday 4 February 2026** at The Catalyst in Newcastle.

Concerns about the Switchover

Virgin Media failed to properly identify and record the status of Telecare Customers. Ofcom found that the company and its methodology for recording the status of telecare customers was inadequate and inconsistent with its own company policy. It exposed vulnerable consumers to a direct risk of harm and prevented their devices from connecting to alarm monitoring centres while the disconnection was in place. A fine of £23.8 million was made on Virgin Media, with a 30% discount because Virgin Media reported themselves to Ofcom and thereafter gave their full cooperation.

Digital Divide Specialist Group

A hybrid (online and face to face) event to discuss the Apps used by GP Surgeries to communicate with their patients. Date to be advised. It will be in April at their Moorgate City of London Offices. Cophthall Avenue

Please contact Maureen Childs for further information at mchilds.bcs@gmail.com

NHS's shift to neighbourhoods could flounder without strengthening the workforce, Health Committee tells Govt

The Health and Social Care Committee has warned that the Government's 10 Year Workforce Plan for the NHS – shifting services from hospitals to neighbourhoods – won't succeed without improving the working conditions of district nurses and other professionals working in the community.

Health and Social Care Committee Chair Layla Moran MP said:

"There is broad support for the principle of shifting NHS services back to neighbourhoods. The forthcoming workforce plan needs to contain concrete action to improve conditions for community-based clinicians and allied health professionals so that these careers will be properly valued and seen as more attractive."

The workforce of allied health workers such as physios, pharmacists and occupational health staff, is similarly highlighted as facing shortages due to poor recruitment and retention. This is blamed on the community sector offering staff worse pay, fewer opportunities to advance their careers, and poorer training than the acute sector. The cross-party Committee's warning comes in a letter to the Minister of State for Health, Karin Smith. It includes recommendations based on evidence MPs heard from workforce representatives of different professions within the NHS, who will be key to making the transition to neighbourhood health services a reality.

Changes from 'Analogue to Digital' in the NHS

10-Year Plan:

Luke Howard,

The Government's NHS 10-year Plan was published in July 2025 and proposes three strategic shifts in the provision of health care:

- from 'hospital to community'
- from 'analogue to digital'
- from 'sickness to prevention'.

On the Digital Working Party, we are particularly concerned with 'analogue to digital', which includes digitization of records; digital service delivery; data integration and interoperability; use of AI and automation; and empowered patients. Christine Sanders of the NPC Health & Social Care WP and Maureen Childs of the DWP produced a report on the impact of this, which unfortunately could not be considered fully by the NPC Executive

The report concluded that the 'analogue to digital' approaches **could offer significant advantages** in patient experience, diagnosis, treatment and service efficiency. However, there are also substantial **challenges**, including:

- **Digital Divide:** Some populations (e.g., elderly, low-income, or rural groups) may lack access to digital tools.
This is a particular concern for the DWP as we know that levels of access to digital services and expertise to get the best from these are particularly low among elderly people
- **Privacy & security:** Handling sensitive health data demands robust cybersecurity measures and strong data governance.
- **Cultural and Organizational Change:** Shifting workflows and retraining staff can face resistance or slow adoption.

The role of **apps in the NHS under the Plan** includes a central role for an enhanced NHS App as the 'front door' for patients; and other specialised apps and services delivering digital services across a comprehensive app 'ecosystem'. There are several important concerns that are not addressed in the plan, including:

- Increased risk of two-tier healthcare, with those unable to use apps or to afford alternative private treatments being disadvantaged;

- The Plan does not appear to take account of people who lack the devices, skills or ability to use these (or do not wish to). Some support may be provided (for instance, through the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan) but it remains a concern that the NHS Plan does not say there must be off-line provision for digitally excluded groups;
- Significant risks to confidentiality of patient data;
- The insistence that app-based solutions are always appropriate (for instance the BMA does not believe they are suitable for mental health services);
- Systemic problems with social care services and the lack of coordinated developments of integrated health and social care networks;
- The challenges for staff and support for the transition from legacy systems;
- The over-optimistic view of AI that does not recognise the limitations and difficulties of these technologies, which include the issues of responsibility for AI-led decisions;
- A view that these plans are primarily about reducing costs rather than improving services.

The problems include over-ambitious application of AI, video consultations etc; misdiagnosis based on patient description of symptoms rather than discussion with a clinician; confidentiality and security concerns; lack of resilience once services depend on computer-based technologies. The report highlights previous experience of good NHS policies being very different from what is happening on the ground.

We recommended to the NPC Executive that NPC should welcome the potential benefits of the Plan but drew attention to the concerns. We were especially worried by the danger of significant digital exclusion which will particularly affect large numbers of elderly people.

There will be an ongoing need for face-to-face and in-person interactions, and for measures to improve levels of digital access, affordability and skills. These needs are not adequately addressed in the Government's plans. Other bodies that have highlighted this issue, is the statutory Care Quality Commission which emphasised this in its Annual Report in July 2025.

THE BRITCARD CONTINUED

By Violet Rook Editor.

Digital Working Party

The NPC's General Secretary requested, the Digital Working Party produced an executive summary and recommendations for November's NPC Executive meeting. Here is a summary.

In January 2026 Keir Starmer's digital IDs will no longer be required for right-to-work checks, and will instead be simply a tool to manage access to public services. The following is a summary of the main details of the Britcard.

SUMMARY

1. A new digital ID scheme will make it easier for people across the UK to use vital government services.
 2. The roll-out will in time make it easier to apply for government and private sector services, such as helping renters to quickly prove their identity to landlords, improving access to welfare and other benefits, and making it easier for parents to apply for free childcare.
 3. The digital ID will be stored securely on a smart phone of each citizen and will help to prove your identity, including age and residency status, simplifying access to government services and a range of uses across the private sector.
 4. It is expected to be rolled out to all UK citizens and legal residents. The new digital ID will be the authoritative proof of who someone is and their residency status in this country. It will come into force by the end of this Parliament 2029.
 5. It will therefore include: name, date of birth, information on nationality or residency status, a photo – as the basis for biometric security – just like an eVisa or Passport, but updated for the modern digital world we live in.
 6. Work is now underway to draw up the design and technical details of the scheme to ensure it is inclusive, fair and follows best practice for security and data privacy, including drawing on examples of where digital IDs are already delivering benefits internationally.
- The government will be launching a public consultation it was said in 2025.**

The consultation will consider if any additional information, like address, would be helpful to include.

7. Police will not be able to demand to see your digital ID
8. Digital credentials will be stored directly on the individual's own device - just like contactless payment cards or the [NHS App](#).
9. User control is at the heart of proposals. Sharing of information contained in the ID should be instigated by the citizen and will be transparent with whom information will be shared.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DWP WORKING PARTY ON THE TOPIC OF THE BRITCARD AND THE DIGITAL ID CARD.

1. This report should be discussed by the Executive Committee of the NPC at the next meeting in November 2025. It should be then circulated to members and affiliates for to provide information and encourage discussion thereof prior to the government consultation which is due to be announced soon.
2. Said members and affiliates should be encouraged to make comment on the consultation to ensure that all citizens are included in this scheme and no one is left out because of age, low economic background or skillset.
3. The government should be encouraged to research and be transparent in regard to the alternative methods of ID cards for those unable to use Smartphones. There are reported to be 4.5 million individuals who do not have a smartphone.

The legislation finally got onto the statute book as the Identity Cards Act (2006). Implementation started in 2008 with a pilot in Greater Manchester airport. The cost of the scheme was said to be about £50 million in 2006. The scheme will come into force by the end of the parliamentary term in 2029

Tax APP

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has reported a large increase the use of its app for taxpayers over the course of 2025. It said there had been over 4.2 million downloads of the app, with 136 million log-ins, up by 20% on 2024, and the number of users rising from 5.09 million to 7.18 million.

Among the trends in usage was a big rise in the number of older and retired people checking their pension information, with 2.38 million people viewing their forecast in 2025, up from 1.72 million in 2024.

The facility to save national insurance numbers in the app also became more widely used, with 383,000 people using it, up from 313,000.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's chief customer officer, said: "The HMRC app has become one of the quickest and easiest ways to check your tax affairs and we've seen even more customers embrace it this year. If you choose to use the app you can access the information you need straight through your phone."

<https://www.ukauthority.com/articles/hmrc-reports-increase-in-app-usage-over-2025>

The New Digital Champions Code of Best Practice

The new code offers practical advice and guidance on recruiting, training, and supporting Digital Champions, plus resources – fundamental to Digital Inclusion work. It is from the **Digital Support Derbyshire**. A Zoom event being held on 14th January, 2026 represented the code. There was also information on funding and future plans of the Derbyshire network.

Trusted Spaces

Libraries Advancing the Digital Inclusion Action Plan – with charity Good Things Foundation and development consultancy WSA Community, From November 2025 and will run to March 2026 in Newcastle, Northumberland, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire.

Broadband Social Tariff

The NPC has expressed support for the charity, Independent Age's call for the UK Government, Ofcom and broadband providers "to continue to work together to better proactively promote broadband social tariffs." It is one of five calls for action in its recent report, Living not Surviving.

<https://www.independentage.org/policy-and-research/surviving-not-living>

Latest scam warnings -WHICH

A dedicated team of fraud experts are always on the lookout for scams targeting people across the UK.

Recent scams to be aware of include an EE points scam and a dodgy NatWest email. [Check out the full list](#), based on reports from customers to Which? Scam Action Alerts Facebook community and scam sharer tool.

A scam text claiming to be from mobile operator EE tells an individual that they have thousands of 'EE Points' which, once redeemed, offer 'exciting rewards.' The message includes a link to redeem these points, which leads to a copycat EE website waiting to grab personal data. The message also says that the points are about to expire in an attempt to get quick action. Do not be Scammed.

Connecting GP's and Care Homes digitally

A project by Health Innovation, a part of the NHS in Newcastle is conducting a project to connect Care Homes in the area with GP Connect. This is so both have up to date information about patients. There are to be webinars where all staff can listen and learn about the digital connections. A podcast produced by North Tyneside Radio also includes information. It is broadcast to hospitals in the area.