

Digital inclusion

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Executive summary

“The online world is the offline world. If you don’t have access to the internet in the UK, you are denied access to essential services.”¹

Internet access is fundamental to nearly every aspect of UK life (Figure 1): medical (test results, public health advice), housing, finances, employment/training, government services (universal credit journals), civil, education, entertainment, community, creativity, social connection (email and instant messaging), and mobility/access.¹

This report is grouped into four main sections, recognising that there is overlap between the themes. The sections reflect common elements of digital inclusion and exclusion definitions (What is digital inclusion – or exclusion?).

1. Connectivity and infrastructure – access to, and availability of broadband, super-fast broadband, or mobile data in residential premises. 1,653 (0.5%) residential premises in Suffolk can’t receive “decent” fixed broadband, while 4,836 (1.4%) aren’t covered by mobile data services. Take up of superfast broadband is lower in Suffolk than England.
2. Affordability– cost of living, access to devices, cost of data services. Nearly a third (30%) of UK consumers had difficulty affording communication services in October 2023). Data poverty is more likely to affect younger households, or households in receipt of benefits, with children, or with someone with a health-limiting condition. Social tariffs may be too slow or too expensive.
3. Digital capability and skills – how likely people are to use the internet (digital propensity), skills and ability, confidence, motivation. Suffolk lower tier local authorities score below the national median (93.8%) for digital propensity, meaning households are estimated to be less confident using Government online resources (Digital propensity index and confidence). Nationally, people without foundation level skills are more likely to earn under £13,500, people with low digital Capability are likely to be aged 70 and over, and, to be retired or not working, to be in a lower social grade and to have an impairment (Essential Digital Skills (EDS) – Foundation Level (8 tasks).
4. Accessibility: Services to meet all users’ needs– whether internet services and sites are available to everyone, including Accessibility for people who use assistive technology. An estimated 4.1% of Suffolk residents have sight loss, 1 in 7 may be deaf or hard of hearing, and around 6,050 are living with some dual sensory loss.

The Digital exclusion risk index (DERI)² estimates the Fressingfield ward contains an area with the highest risk of digital exclusion in Suffolk (6.139/10), with part of Kesgrave at lowest risk (0.257/10) based on an aggregate of demography, broadband and deprivation indicators.

Most areas in Suffolk are estimated to have 37-45% of families with children that do not meet the Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS, Meeting the MDLS). Stoke Park has the highest percentage of families with children who do not meet the standard (46%, based on the Main predictors of being below MDLS for households with children).

Definitions

Type of report

This profile is part of the Suffolk Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). A profile is a one-off analysis of specific data on a given subject, usually in response to a specific request for information. It should be used as an overview of the subject, rather than a comprehensive examination of the health needs of a population. Profiles do not include recommendations or user feedback.

Structure

This report is grouped into four main sections, recognising that there is overlap between the themes. The sections reflect common elements of digital inclusion and exclusion definitions (What is digital inclusion – or exclusion?).

1. Connectivity and infrastructure – access to, and availability of broadband, super-fast broadband, or mobile data in residential premises.
2. Affordability – cost of living, access to devices, cost of data services.
3. Capability and skills – how likely people are to use the internet (digital propensity), skills and ability, confidence, motivation.
4. Accessibility – whether internet services and sites are available to everyone, including people who use assistive technology.

Background - geography

The report covers the Suffolk County Council geography.

Middle layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) are geographical areas created for the Census³. They are made up of groups of Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), usually four or five, and cover between 2,000 and 6,000 households. They have a usually resident population between 5,000 and 15,000 persons.

Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) comprise between 400 and 1,200 households and have a usually resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons.

Language

- “Decent” fixed broadband (a download speed (DL) of at least 10MbS and an upload speed (UL) of at least 1MbS).
- Fixed broadband – an “always on” data connection with greater bandwidth, and provided via cable, satellite, fibre-to-the-home or other system that does not use mobile cellular networks.
- “Superfast” fixed broadband (>30mbS).

What is digital inclusion – or exclusion?

Digital inclusion and exclusion can be seen as two sides to the same coin. Neither has a universally accepted definition, and each comprises a range of inter-related issues. Different organisations use different definitions and include different issues.

Digital inclusion can be compared to physical connectivity – several elements need to work well together for success.

- Digital infrastructure (broadband, mobile data networks) – comparable to a decent transport network (roads, railways)
- Physical access to digital services (personal computers, smart phones, access through library terminals, work, or school IT) – just as people need to own a car or bike, or have local public transport
- Skills – like being able to drive
- Appropriate adjustments so that people with additional needs aren't discriminated against
- Confidence using the internet and digital services, as well as understanding how to stay safe and reduce crime
- Motivation

Digital exclusion happens when these elements are not met, or when costs for services are too high, meaning people can't afford to access digital services.

Government Digital Inclusion Strategy (2014) definition⁴

“Digital inclusion, or rather, **reducing digital exclusion**, is about making sure that people have the capability to use the internet to do things that benefit them day to day - whether they be individuals, SMEs [Small to Medium-sized Enterprise] or VCSE organisations [Voluntary, Community, or Social Enterprises].”⁴

According to the Government digital inclusion strategy, and the NHS,^{4,5} “**digital inclusion** is often defined in terms of:

- Digital skills - being able to use computers and the internet. This is important, but a lack of digital skills is not necessarily the only, or the biggest, barrier people face.
- Connectivity - and access to the internet. People need the right infrastructure but that is only the start.
- Accessibility - services should be designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services. Accessibility is a barrier for many people, but digital inclusion is broader.

Each of these definitions addresses a single specific barrier that some, but not all, people and organisations face. There is seldom just one reason why people are digitally excluded, and there is no single approach to solving it.”

Ofcom definition (2022)⁶

Ofcom recognises that in its broadest definition, **digital exclusion** among UK adults comprises three aspects that are often intertwined. These are:

- Access – those who are digitally excluded because they have no access to the internet at home or elsewhere.
- Ability – those who lack the digital skills and/or confidence to navigate the online environment safely and knowledgeably.

- Affordability – those who struggle to afford access to the internet, and so either go without it, or experience other financial strains to retain access.

These three related aspects encompass a range of issues that are connected to digital exclusion.

- Device poverty - insufficient access to devices
- Data poverty - the inability to pay for an adequate data package
- Lack of skills or knowledge so unable to navigate the online world alone
- Limited or narrow internet use
- Only using the internet via others (proxy users)
- Only being able to access the internet outside the home, e.g. at a library

Consumer Digital Index 2023, (Lloyds Bank)⁷

“A combination of access, trust, confidence and capability are core to digital inclusion.”⁷

Although 96% of the UK had been online in the previous three months, usage does not guarantee confidence and skills. The report focuses on skills and capability and identifies “three pain points” that contribute to people being **digitally disadvantaged**:

1. Cost of living. Over half (52%) said the Internet helped them save money, but nearly a quarter (23%) had to look for cheaper Internet or mobile data plans. “Access to data and connectivity more broadly remain a challenge, 10% of the offline do not have access to a device. Digital poverty is a growing challenge.” 31% of people with very high digital capability had looked shopped around online for cheaper deals, compared to only 21% of people with very low digital capability.
2. Fear of fraud. “Over four in five people [84%] are confident in their abilities to protect themselves online. Yet 32% of UK adults are unable to complete all nine essential tasks to remain safe online for daily life.”
3. Lack of motivation to learn. “Lack of interest is a barrier for 14% of those who are offline.”

House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee (2023)⁸

The Committee’s report on **Digital Exclusion** recognises there is no universal definition, and that digital exclusion “typically refers to sections of the population not being able to use the internet in ways that are needed to participate fully in modern society”.⁸ It references the Ofcom definition (2022)⁶, and reports that “digital exclusion arises from a complex interplay of factors including age, socio-economic status, disability, geography, educational attainment, literacy and language, and housing circumstances. It can take different forms, vary by degree, and fluctuate according to circumstance and life stage.” They use four indicators or measures, recognising that the measures aren’t exclusive, and that a person’s digital exclusion may vary depending on “circumstance and life stage.”

- Internet access at home
- “Absolute internet use” – how many people in the UK are online (using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey definition of “using the internet in the past three months”)
- “Relative internet use” – whether “people conduct limited or infrequent online activities, or rely on others to use the internet”

- Basic digital skills “to get online, such as connecting to wi-fi or updating a password.” As society becomes more digitally connected, more advanced skills may be considered “basic.”

Minimum Digital Living Standard (2024)⁹

“A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.”

Why does digital inclusion matter?

“The online world is the offline world. If you don’t have access to the internet in the UK, you are denied access to essential services.”¹

“Every visit is really poor. I feel like a broken record. How many times do I have to say I have no email or internet (have borrowed someone’s phone to post this on my behalf) - ‘cause you may listen then.” Suffolk patient¹⁰

*“You’ve got to be on their [school] mailing list for their emails... He’s missed out on a lot because, obviously, I don’t use those sort of things very well”
Parent¹¹*

Digital Poverty Lab¹ research reports that access is even more important for people who are increased risk of disadvantage, such as people with a disability (including learning disabilities) or illness (including mental ill health), people who are neurodivergent or older, as well as people who fleeing domestic violence. For some people online shopping or online social connections may be essential, not just convenient.

The periodic table of internet elements¹ (Figure 1) shows how internet access is elemental to UK life. There are twelve domains (medical, housing, finances, employment/training, government services, civil, education, entertainment, community, creativity, social connection, mobility/access). Example elements include: test results and public health information (medical), universal credit journals (government services), email and instant messaging (social connection).

The impact of digital exclusion can be far-reaching and unexpected: the House of Lords Committee recommended that public service providers using predictive analytics should “consider the use of data and the impacts on those who are digitally excluded”⁸:

“As public-facing services become increasingly digitised, machine learning tools and predictive analytics are likely to influence policy choices and service delivery. Digitally excluded groups are at risk of being poorly represented in key datasets, and hence face further marginalisation.”⁸

Digital inclusion

Figure 1: Periodic table of internet elements



Source: Kat Dixon (the Data Poverty Lab), Good Things Foundation, 2022
View online: <http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/internet-periodic-table/>

Benefits of tackling digital exclusion

Reducing digital exclusion can improve productivity, support economic growth and alleviate pressure on some public services, as well as support the 2022 Levelling Up White Paper's aims to "spread opportunity more equally across the UK" according to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee⁸, who said "tackling digital exclusion would support a range of high-profile Government commitments, notably levelling up, improving public health and achieving net zero."

The following benefits are all taken from the House of Lords report⁸.

- Basic digital capability is set to become the UK's biggest skills gap: 5 million workers are likely to be "acutely under-skilled" by 2030, according to the Industrial Strategy Council.
- £1 invested in basic digital skills could generate an overall return of £9:48 by 2032 (Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR))
- Improving digital skills in schools, colleges and universities could help address educational inequalities. Schools communicate with parents and students through apps and online portals: those with lower digital engagement are "less able to engage with their learning."
- Digital skills are increasingly important in social mobility in young people.
- Internet users typically have easier access to support services, health awareness tools, and opportunities to avoid loneliness.
- Digital inclusion could save the NHS up to £899m by 2032 (by reducing GP appointments).
- Upskilling supports the shift towards digitised healthcare and improving health outcomes, e.g. helping patients manage long-term conditions at home through new technologies (The 2022 Plan for Digital Health and Social Care). Health inequalities among digitally excluded groups may increase with the growth in digitised healthcare.
- Digital inclusion can help the most vulnerable in society have a voice as political debate and engagement move online.

What does digital inclusion look like?

The Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) project aims to move digital inclusion policy beyond measures of access and skills, "looking to establish a UK benchmark for digital inclusion at a household level." A MDLS is seen as a "basket of 'digital goods, services and skills' that facilitate an individual's digital capabilities to effectively live a life they value."⁹

The MDLS project drew on Minimum Income Standard methodology to develop a definition with the public (including working-age people without children, pension-age people, parents, and young people to ensure that the resultant definition was relevant to many household types). It is meant as a "benchmark: below this level, it may be harder to take part in society."¹¹

The standard covers three areas:

- Critical skills to understand and manage digital risk – identification and evaluating information quality
- Functional and practical skills - for engaging online, using devices, managing data
- Digital goods and services - smartphones, large screen devices, Wi-Fi

MDLS for households with children

“A ‘minimum basket of digital goods, services, and skills’ that households with dependent-age children need to meet this standard” was created following further work with parents and young people. The project team hope to create standards for different household types such as households without children, or only containing older people.

Examples – equipment

- Home broadband - sufficient reliability and speed to support all family members to access the internet at the same time (digital goods and services)
- Mobile phone and data - one entry-level smart phone per parent or secondary school age child, plus 5GB data per month each (digital goods and services)
- Headphones for school age children (digital goods and services)

Examples – skills

These skills are needed by adults in the household, and also by children at different stages. The full list is on the MDLS website.¹²

- Using digital devices, programmes, and the internet (functional and practical skills) – using device functions (pre-school), using apps and programmes (early primary school)
- Engagement online (functional and practical skills) – Zoom/Teams/Google classrooms (late primary school), booking appointments and using forms (late secondary school)
- Managing and monitoring digital devices and data usage (functional and practical skills) – creating and sorting files and folders (early primary school); monitoring and managing phone data usage (early secondary school)
- Managing security (critical skills) – using secure passwords (late primary school)
- Interacting with others (critical skills) – identifying risks such as scams, unsafe links, groomers (early primary school); managing social pressures and time online (late primary school)
- Sharing and receiving information (critical skills) – evaluating quality of information such as mis/disinformation or unrealistic images (late primary school), understanding your digital footprint (early secondary school)

Meeting the MDLS

It is estimated that 45% households with children do not meet the MDLS (3.7 million households in the UK).

Although nearly two thirds (62%) of households with children met MDLS for functional and critical skills, 27% of households with children have parents missing critical skills (understanding and managing digital risk), and 17% have parents missing functional skills (practical skills).¹¹

Main predictors of being below MDLS for households with children

These measures are aggregated to estimate the percentage of families with children that might not reach the MDLS by MSOA.

- Low socio-economic status. Eight of the ten MSOAs with the highest counts of households with dependent children matching these criteria (using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC) for Routine occupations and “Never worked and long-term unemployed”) are in Ipswich. Westgate (Ipswich) has the highest number, other areas include: Lowestoft Central (East Suffolk); Gipping & Chantry Park (Ipswich); Maidenhall, Stoke & Port (Ipswich); Haverhill East & South (West Suffolk).
- Living in a deprived area (some urban areas in Suffolk, particularly in Ipswich, Lowestoft, and Felixstowe).⁴⁷
- Being a single parent household. In some parts of Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds, and Ipswich around one in ten households are single parent with dependent children: Howard Estate and Northgate (Bury St Edmunds); Lowestoft Central (East Suffolk); Stoke Park (Ipswich); Whitehouse (Ipswich); Gainsborough, Greenwich & Orwell (Ipswich); Maidenhall, Stoke & Port (Ipswich).
- A household with more than 2 children (47,115 across Suffolk).⁴⁸
- A household led by someone with disability and/or with non-white ethnicity. MSOAs with higher counts of households with dependent children matching these criteria include: Gainsborough, Greenwich & Orwell (Ipswich); Gipping & Chantry Park (Ipswich); Priory Heath (Ipswich); Lowestoft Central (East Suffolk).

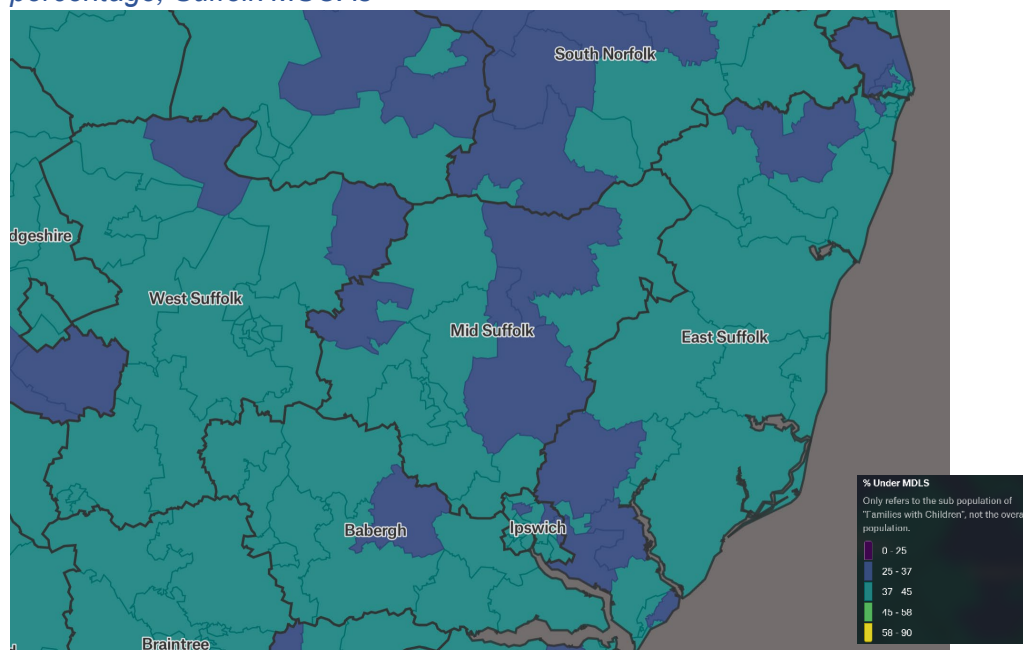
^{43,49}

Most areas in Suffolk are estimated to have 37-45% families with children that do not meet the MDLS (green colour on the map Figure 2). The five Suffolk MSOAs with the highest estimated percentages are:

- Stoke Park (46%) (Ipswich),
- Belstead Hills (45%) (Ipswich),
- Gipping & Chantry Park (45%) (Ipswich),
- Howard Estate & Northgate (West Suffolk, 45%), and
- Gunton West (East Suffolk, 45%).

Even the “best performing” areas were estimated to have around a third of families with children failing to reach the MDLS: Oulton Broad West (East Suffolk, 33%), and Bixley, Warren Heath & Nacton (East Suffolk, 33%).

Figure 2: Households with children that are likely to fail to meet the MLDS, estimated percentage, Suffolk MSOAs



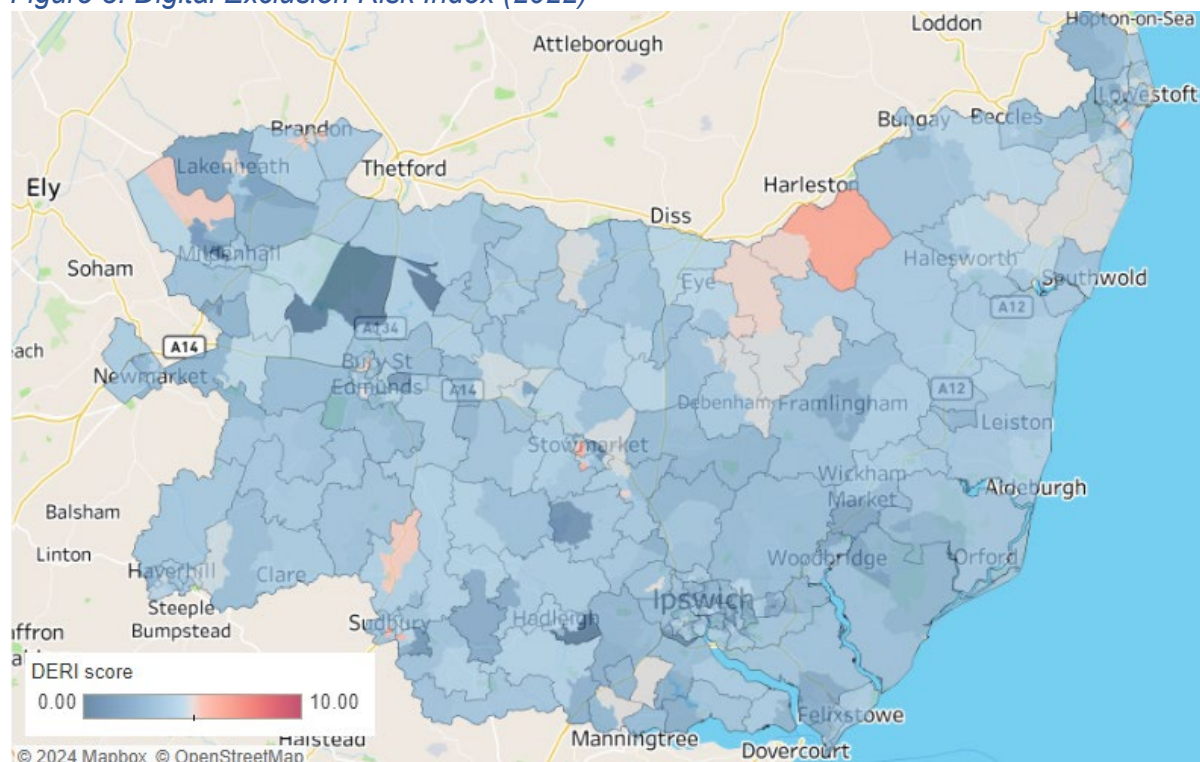
Source: A UK map of Minimum Digital Living Standard for Households with Children, 2024¹³

Digital exclusion risk index

The Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI)² comprises three dashboards: demography (population aged 65 and over), broadband (connection speeds), deprivation (Indices of Deprivation 2019, pension credit claimants, alternative claimant count) (Figure 3). A higher score indicates a greater risk of digital exclusion.

- Demography Score
 - Highest risk in Suffolk: part of Sudbury South East ward (Babergh) (8.527 out of 10)
 - Lowest risk score in Suffolk: part of Kesgrave (East Suffolk, 0.110)
- Broadband Score
 - Highest risk in Suffolk: Part of East Bergholt ward (Babergh) (8.707 out of 10)
 - Lowest risk score in Suffolk: part of Great Cornard (Babergh, 0.000)
- Deprivation Score:
 - Highest risk in Suffolk: Part of Combs Ford ward (Mid Suffolk) (9.073 out of 10)
 - Lowest risk score in Suffolk: part of Martlesham & Purdis Farm (East Suffolk, 0.088)

Figure 3: Digital Exclusion Risk Index (2022)



Source: DERI Digital Exclusion Risk index¹⁴

The LSOA in Suffolk with the highest overall risk of digital exclusion is in Fressingfield ward (Mid Suffolk) near Harleston (6.139, where 10 is highest risk), while the lowest is in Kesgrave (East Suffolk, 0.257).

Other Suffolk LSOAs with scores of 5 or over are in the following wards (descending order, highest risk first):

- St Peter's (Mid Suffolk),
- Combs Ford (Mid Suffolk),
- Sudbury North West (Babergh),
- Great Cornard (Babergh),
- Kirkley & Pakefield (East Suffolk),
- St Olaves (West Suffolk),
- Brandon West (West Suffolk),
- Brandon East (West Suffolk),
- Tollgate (West Suffolk),
- Hoxne & Worlingworth (Mid Suffolk),
- Sprites (Ipswich).

Connectivity and infrastructure

Digital exclusion: a review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK (2022)⁶ and the Government Digital Inclusion Strategy (2014)⁴ have identified that it is not enough to provide the right infrastructure, with good coverage of fast broadband. People must also have access to suitable devices to be able to access online information. If people do not subscribe to broadband or data, and cannot access the internet at home, they need easy access to the internet (and suitable devices) at convenient public spaces such as libraries. Some people may only be able to connect to the internet via others (proxy users)

because they lack connectivity (no broadband, insufficient devices) or because they lack skills or confidence.

Access to the internet at home (networks)

Nearly all (100% if rounded to 1 decimal place) residential premises in Suffolk and England are networked. Only 116 residential premises in Suffolk are not covered by any network (0.03%), statistically significantly similar to England (0.04%) (Table 2, counts in Table 1).¹⁵

Table 1: Coverage counts for fixed and mobile networks in Suffolk, residential premises, September 2023

Area	Not able to receive “decent” fixed broadband	BUSO	Not covered by any network	Fixed only	Mobile only
Babergh	329	79	21	576	286
East Suffolk	825	210	47	1,925	688
Ipswich	-	-	-	-	-
Mid Suffolk	499	121	20	1,180	396
West Suffolk	-	115	28	1,155	-
Suffolk (calculated)	1,653	525	116	4,836	1,370
England	207,045	25,364	8,957	-	161,729

Source: Ofcom, Connected Nations, 2023¹⁵

Fixed broadband coverage

4,836 residential premises in Suffolk are only on a fixed broadband network (1.4%), statistically significantly higher than England (0%). A statistically significantly lower percentage (97.9%) of Suffolk’s residential premises have “superfast” fixed broadband (>30mbS) available when compared to England (98.1%), although the percentage of homes that are not able to receive “decent” fixed broadband (a download speed of at least 10Mb (DL) and an upload speed of at least 1Mb (UL)) is also statistically significantly lower (0.5% Suffolk, compared to 0.8% England) (Table 2, Table 1).¹⁵

Table 2: Percentages (calculated figures in brackets to one decimal place) of residential premises covered by fixed and mobile networks in Suffolk, September 2023

Area	Superfast fixed broadband (>30mbS)	Not able to receive “decent” fixed broadband	4G coverage: premises (indoor)	Mobile & fixed network overlap	Fixed only network coverage	Mobile only network coverage
Babergh	97%	1%	99%	94%	1%	1%
East Suffolk	97%	1%	98%	94%	2%	1%
Ipswich	99%	-	100%	100%	-	-
Mid Suffolk	96%	1%	97%	93%	2%	1%
West Suffolk	98%	0%	99%	98%	1%	-
Suffolk	(97.9%)	(0.5%)	n/a	(95.9%)	(1.4%)	(0.4%)
England	98% (98.1%)	1% (0.8%)	99%	92%	(0.0%)	1% (0.7%)

Source: Ofcom and KI&E calculations based on Ofcom figures, published in Connected Nations, 2023¹⁵

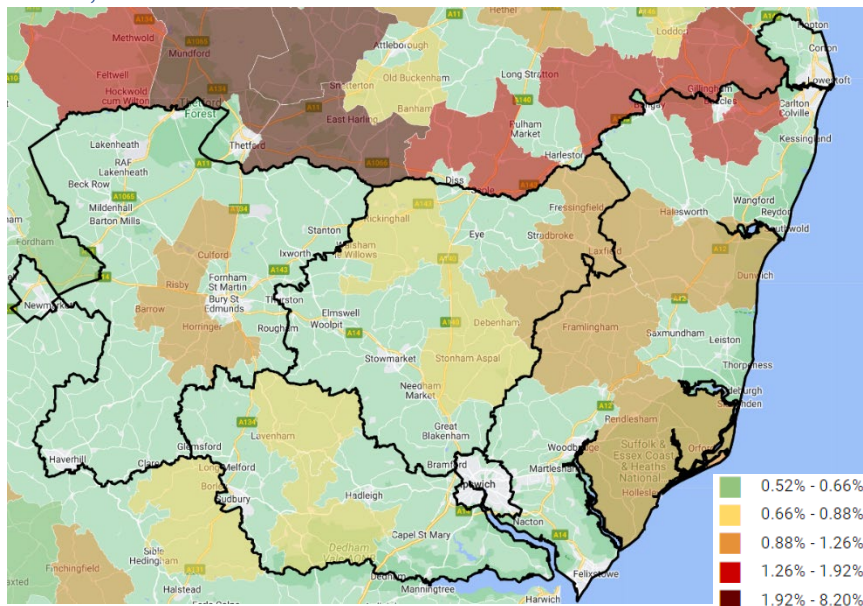
Notes:

- Percentages are published as whole numbers by Ofcom and used in the table where available.

- ‘decent’ broadband is defined as a fixed broadband download speed of at least 10Mb (DL) and an upload speed of at least 1Mb (UL) or an indoor 4G mobile service with a connection speed of at least 2 Mbit/s
- Network overlap will not add to 100% due to rounding and as the small percentage of premises covered by “mobile, fixed and WISP (wireless local loop) networks” has been omitted from this table (4% residential premises in Babergh and East Suffolk, 3% in Mid Suffolk, None in Ipswich or West Suffolk and 7% in England)

525 residential premises (0.1%) in Suffolk are eligible for the broadband universal service obligation scheme (BUSO, Table 1), statistically significantly similar to England (0.1%)¹⁵. This allows eligible addresses to request a ‘decent’ broadband connection from BT¹⁶ that is “affordable” (less than £54 per month). However, connection costs over £3,400 per premises are passed onto the requester. MSOAs in East Suffolk and eastern Mid Suffolk have higher percentages of eligible premises (Figure 4). 1% of residential premises in rural West Suffolk, and 2% of homes in rural East Suffolk, Babergh, and Mid Suffolk had fixed broadband speeds that were not “decent”. No urban areas in Suffolk had 1% or more residential premises with broadband speeds that weren’t “decent”.

Figure 4: MSOAs in Suffolk with highest percentage of residential premises eligible for BUSO, 2023



Source: Local Insight (using Ofcom data)¹⁷

As might be expected, urban areas have higher percentages of residential premises able to access superfast fixed broadband (>30mbS): 100% urban residential premises in West Suffolk have superfast fixed broadband, compared to 99% in each of the other Suffolk LTLAs.¹⁵

Access to the internet: take up

Decent digital infrastructure is only part of the picture.

Although most Suffolk homes have access to superfast broadband (97.9%, Table 2), only around two thirds of all premises (business or residential) have an active superfast connection (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of all lines with an active fixed broadband connection, by connection speed, Suffolk, May 2023

Area	<10Mbit/s	10-30Mbit/s	>30Mbit/s
Babergh	2%	12%	66%
East Suffolk	3%	10%	63%
Ipswich	2%	7%	67%
Mid Suffolk	3%	11%	66%
West Suffolk	2%	10%	67%
England			75%

Source: Ofcom, Connected Nations, 2023¹⁵

People using around a third of Suffolk premises may experience disadvantage through lack of access, or slow access to the internet and digital services. However, some premises may not have active connections as they are not needed for the business, or the property is empty.

Mobile data network coverage

1,370 residential premises in Suffolk (Table 1) are only on a mobile network (0.4%), statistically significantly lower than England (0.7%) (Table 2). All Suffolk (“landmass”) has mobile data and 4G coverage. 100% urban residential premises have 4G coverage indoors, compared to 93-97% in rural areas (93% rural residential premises in East Suffolk, 97% for Babergh, and 96% for the others).¹⁵

Affordability

The Consumer Digital Index⁷ identified the cost of living as one of three “pain points of digital enablement”: over half the people surveyed said the Internet helped them save money, but nearly a quarter (23%) had to look for cheaper Internet or mobile data plans. “Access to data and connectivity more broadly remain a challenge, 10% of the offline do not have access to a device.”⁷

In October 2023, nearly a third (30%) of consumers had difficulty affording communication services; 10% households with fixed broadband found it difficult to afford the service¹⁸. Many contracts (over 60% broadband, over 50% mobile) are linked to inflation. Ofcom estimates inflation-linked price variation terms increased prices for affected customers by an average of £62 per year for dual-play broadband customers in 2023 and between £28 and £69 per year for mobile customers.¹⁸

27% low-income adults only go online by smartphone¹⁹. 35% of mobile internet only households experienced communications affordability issues in the previous month (October 2023 data).²⁰

In the first half of 2022, 0.8% of broadband customers and 1.3% of mobile customers in the UK were disconnected for not paying²¹. National Citizens Advice debt data (January 2024, for England and Wales)²² shows that debt problems are complex – and that they often help people with more than one debt issue, for example:

- 51% of people they helped with mobile phone debt also needed help with council tax arrears,
- 24% of people they helped with Universal Credit advance payment also needed help with mobile phone debt.

Data poverty is more likely to affect younger households – younger people have not traditionally been seen as at risk from digital exclusion.

“The households that were most likely to have affordability issues were younger households (with members aged between 18 and 24), those in receipt of benefits, those with children, and those with a resident with an impacting/limiting condition”¹⁸

- 15% of households had made changes to their service (e.g. changed package or tariff)¹⁸
- 14% reduced spend elsewhere (e.g. on food and clothes) to afford communications services¹⁸
- 10% had cancelled a communications service¹⁸

Social tariffs are available for fixed broadband and mobile services to people on means-tested benefits such as universal credit and pension credit.²³ However, most (55%) UK adults who had a fixed broadband service and were eligible for a social tariff did not know they were available. Around 8.3% of eligible households were on a social tariff in September 2023 (estimate by Ofcom, using the number of households on Universal Credit as a proxy for eligible households).¹⁸

MDLS research¹¹ suggests that social tariffs may not be fit for purpose – either too expensive (the ideal cost in 2023 was £10-12) or too slow. Sample quotes from parents:

“I’ve tried a couple of broadband, especially ones for people on Benefit. So cheaper broadband... Fantastic financially, but useless for internet, because it’s like the lowest speed”

“Realistically, I choose paying for the internet over feeding myself because the need is so massive for my children”

Costs may also be an issue for people who do not qualify for means-tested benefits:¹⁰

*“Why do I want to go on broadband? My mobile phone costs me £20 a year, if I go onto a smartphone, I have the cost of buying a more expensive mobile plus it is £8 a month which is a big difference for some people”
(Health or Social Care Professional)*

Table 4: Suffolk households likely to be affected by affordability issues, Suffolk compared to England²⁰

Type of household	Suffolk (count)	Suffolk (%)	England (%)	Comparison
Younger households (with members aged 18 to 24) – Census 2021, household reference person under 25 ²⁴	7,547	2.3%	2.6%	Suffolk is statistically significantly lower than England, as are Suffolk LTLAs except Ipswich (2.7%) and West Suffolk (3.5%) which are statistically significantly higher
In receipt of benefits: Universal Credit (Suffolk cost of living dashboard) ²⁵	52,200 households	10.3% of the population aged 16 and over		Ipswich has the highest proportion of 16+ claiming UC (15.7%), but in some parts of Lowestoft over a quarter of people receive UC (Lowestoft Central 31.2%, Harbour & Kirkley 28.7%)
In receipt of benefits: pension	14,339	8.3%	11.8%	Suffolk is statistically significantly lower than

Type of household	Suffolk (count)	Suffolk (%)	England (%)	Comparison
(caseload) (May 2023) ²⁶				England, as are Suffolk LTLAs except Ipswich which is statistically significantly higher (12.4%)
With dependent children (2021 Census) ²⁴	83,909	25.2%	28.5%	Suffolk is statistically significantly lower than England, as are Suffolk LTLAs except Ipswich which is statistically significantly higher (29.2%)
With a resident with an impacting/limiting condition (Equality Act, Census 2021) ²⁴	107,470	32.2%	32.0%	Suffolk is slightly, but statistically significantly, higher than England. This is driven by statistically significantly higher percentages in Ipswich (32.4%) and East Suffolk (34.9%)

Source: Ofcom affordability tracker²⁰, as well as Census²⁴, Department of Work and Pensions²⁶ and other data²⁵

Support to access networks

The Good Things Foundation National Databank²⁷ provides free mobile SIM cards for people who need internet connectivity, distributed by network members to people experiencing data poverty or living on a low income.

Public Wi-Fi

In 2023, people who were more likely to use public Wi-Fi were more likely to be:⁷

- aged 18-34 (48% compared to 28% general population)
- not in paid work but not retired (30% compared to 15%)
- earning less than £30,000 (40% compared to 29%)

Free public Wi-Fi access in Suffolk is available at a range of locations, including:

- [libraries](#) (45 permanent sites across the county)
- [NHS properties \("NHS free Wi-Fi"\)](#) such as Ipswich hospital ([ESNEFT](#)), mental health service sites (NSFT), GP practices
- [town centres in East Suffolk](#)

Devices: connectivity

Healthwatch Suffolk identified "lack of access to devices", sometimes due to cost, as an issue in their 2021 Digital Health and Care report for Suffolk and North East Essex ICS.¹⁰

Lack of equipment was also identified as an issue during the pandemic when schools were closed. During the pandemic, Suffolk County Council provided around 1,000 laptops (and 150 4G hotspots) to vulnerable children²⁸, as well as "digital care phones to continue reablement services".²⁹

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee noted that "devices can quickly become obsolete, and if individuals do not have the skills to install updates or upgrade, simply owning a device will not make them digitally included".⁸ However, device distribution schemes can help. The Committee recommended that local authorities (as well as industry and businesses) should donate devices for reuse. Manchester City Council's donation

schemes have provided over 1,000 devices to Manchester residents since 2020, using libraries as donation points and commissioning local organisations to refurbish old devices and sell them at low cost to Manchester residents.

Support to access devices

- [National device bank](#) recycles donated devices for distribution to people in need through the [Good Things Foundation's Digital Inclusion Network](#).
- Some [Suffolk libraries lend iPads and eReaders](#).
- [All Suffolk libraries have computers that can be booked in advance](#) to be used for up to two hours. Most libraries also have computers that can be used without booking.

Digital capability and skills

Around 29% of internet users are classed as 'narrow users' by Ofcom, meaning they have not performed more than four of 13 online activities (from: online banking or paying bills; paying for council tax or another local council service; looking for public services information on government sites; finding information for work/ business/ school/ college/ university; looking or applying for jobs; finding information for leisure time; completing government processes; signing a petition or using a campaigning website; using streamed audio services; listening to live, catch-up or on-demand radio through a website or app; watching TV programmes/ films/ content; watching or posting livestream videos)³⁰.

Digital propensity index and confidence

People may be able to access digital services, but this does not mean they will be likely to use them. The Digital Propensity Index (DPI)³¹ is a measure of how confident households are using government online resources, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It considers the percentage of Census 2021 responses that were online, the likelihood that households would respond to the Census online, willingness of households to respond to the Census within 10 days, age of household reference person, urban/rural classification, region, and the indices of deprivation.

The ONS modelling suggests all lower tier local authorities (LTLAs) in Suffolk are below the national median (93.8%) for DPI (Table 5). The lowest score in England was 90.6% (North Norfolk). The ten LTLAs with the highest scores were in greater London (highest score: Tower Hamlets, 97.3%).

Table 5: Digital propensity scores for Suffolk lower tier local authorities, Census 2021

Local authority	Digital Propensity Score	National (England) quartile
East Suffolk	92.1%	Bottom (fourth) quartile (lowest, worst)
Babergh	92.9%	Third quartile (second lowest, second worst, below median) quartile
Mid Suffolk	93.5%	Third quartile
West Suffolk	93.5%	Third quartile
Ipswich	93.6%	Third quartile

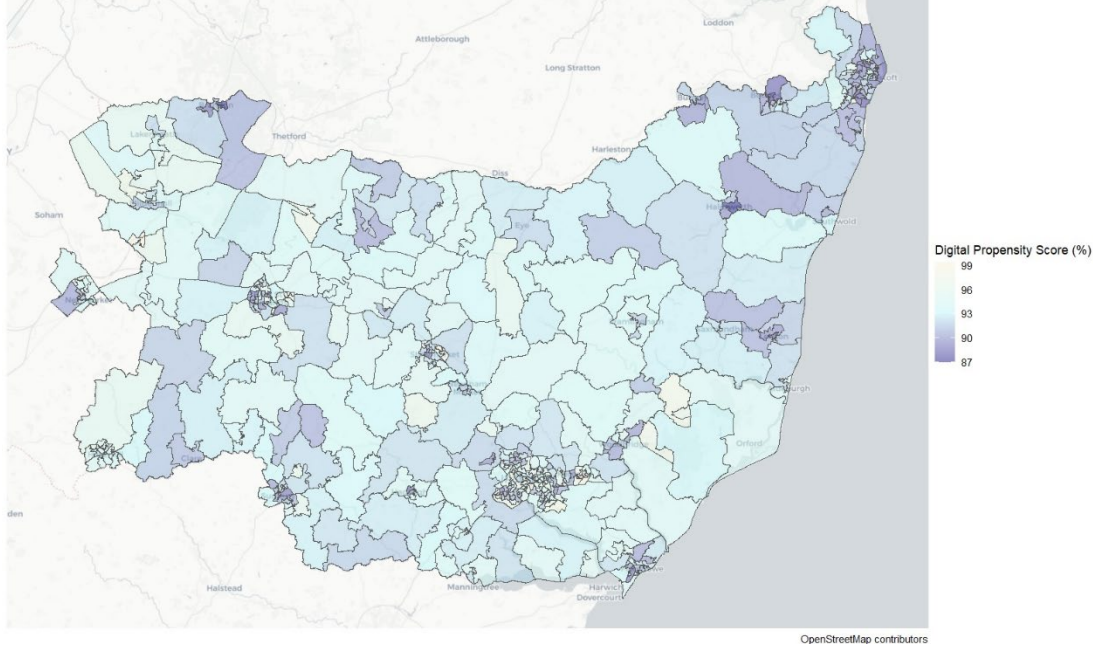
Source: Digital Propensity Index (DPI)³¹

Small areas (lower level super output areas, LSOAs) had greater variation (from 74.8% to 100%). Suffolk LSOA scores ranged from 87.0-99.4% (Figure 5). The two LSOAs with the highest and the lowest DPI scores in Suffolk were both in East Suffolk:

- highest 99.4% E01033444, part of Kesgrave,
- lowest 87.0% E01030244, part of Halesworth.

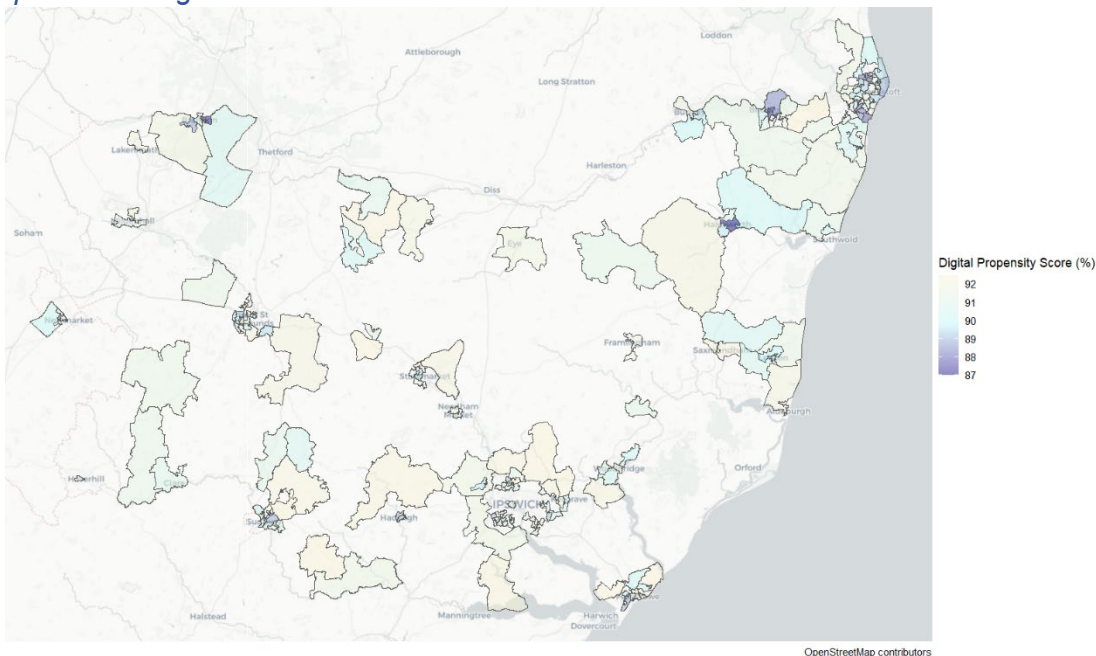
Areas of Suffolk that were in the lowest (worst performing) 25% of areas in England were found in and around market towns such as Halesworth, Beccles, Newmarket, Felixstowe, Sudbury, and Stowmarket, as well as much of Lowestoft, and parts of Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Digital propensity index scores, 2021 Census, LSOAs in Suffolk



Source: Digital Propensity Index for England and Wales LSOAs: Census 2021³²
 Darker colours indicate a lower (worse) Digital Propensity Index value

Figure 6: Digital propensity scores, 2021 Census, Suffolk LSOAs in the lowest (worst) quartile in England



Darker colours indicate a lower (worse) Digital Propensity Index value, all the shaded areas are in the lowest quartile of England
 Source: Digital Propensity Index for England and Wales LSOAs: Census 2021³²

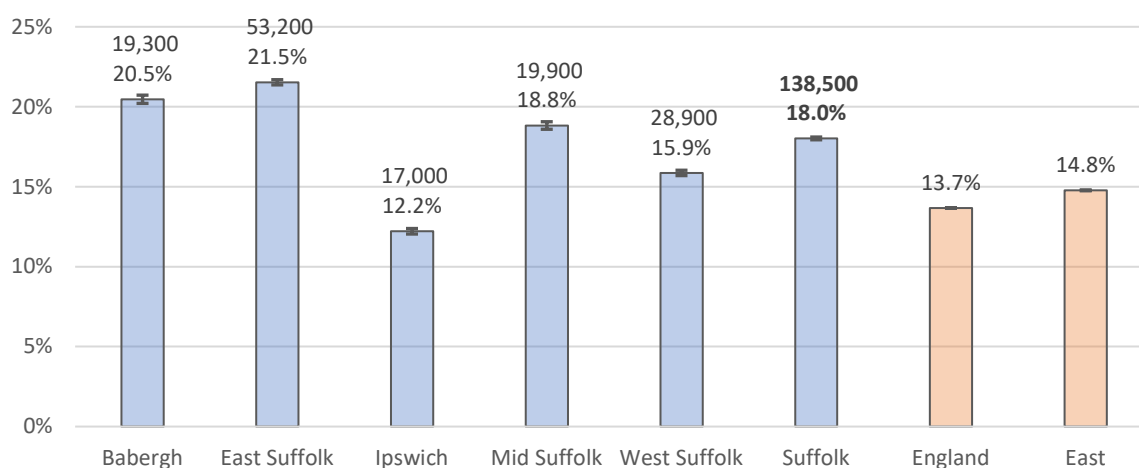
Capability

The Essential Digital Skills benchmark is produced on behalf of the Department for Education. Capability is measured across interactions, spend and technology, with reference to transactional and survey data.⁷

- 65% of adults in the UK have high or very high digital capability.
- 25% of the population are estimated to have very low digital capability and as a result are likely to struggle interacting with online services.
- 13% of the population are estimated to have “ultra-low” digital capability (a subset of the 25% with very low capability) – nearly three in five people (59%) in this group earn less than £20,000 a year.⁷

Those with “ultra-low” capability are more likely to be over 70 years old. Suffolk (18.0%) has a statistically significantly higher percentage of people aged 70 and over than England (13.7%) according to the mid-2022 population estimates (Office for National Statistics)³³.

Figure 7: Population aged 70 and over, 2022 mid-year population estimates



Source: mid-2022 population estimates (Office for National Statistics)³³

80% of people have remained in the same capability group for the past 12 months (2022 to 2023). Over a quarter (28%) of people in the “very high” capability segment moved up into it from other groups. However, 60% of people in the ‘ultra-low’ group have been in this lowest segment since 2020, indicating it is hard for people with the lowest digital capability to improve. Although most people’s digital capability did not change, people in younger age groups were more likely to improve (19% of people aged 18-24 upgraded, compared to 6% of people aged 80 and over).⁷

People with low capability may miss out on the benefits of being online, for example only around one in five (21%) with “very low” capability are likely to shop around online for cheaper deals, compared to nearly a third (31%) who have “very high” digital capability.

Essential Digital Skills (EDS)

16% of the population are estimated to lack fundamental online skills – that is, they cannot complete all eight tasks that form the Foundation Level of the Essential Digital Skills framework (84% can). This is an improvement on 2022 (80% could complete Foundation Level). The number of people who could complete none of the foundation tasks has fallen significantly from 2.4 million (4%) in 2022 to 1.3 million (2%) in 2023.⁷

Essential Digital Skills (EDS) – Foundation Level (8 tasks)

- You can turn on the device and enter any account login information as required
- You can use the available controls on your device (e.g. mouse, keyboard, touchscreen, trackpad)
- You can use the different settings on your device to make it easier to use (e.g. adjust font size, volume settings, brightness of screen, voice activation or screen readers)
- You can find and open different applications/ programmes/platforms on your devices (e.g. opening a web browser, messaging applications)
- You can set up a connection to a Wi-Fi network on your devices (e.g. when at home, work, out in public or visiting family and friends)
- You can open an internet browser to find and use websites (e.g. Safari, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge)
- You can keep your login information and passwords for a device and any accounts secure (e.g. not shared with anyone or written down or left prominently near a device)
- You can update and change your password when prompted to do so

The two Foundation Level tasks people are most likely to struggle with are: setting up a connection to a Wi-Fi network, and keeping login information and passwords secure. People who were less likely to complete all eight tasks to achieve foundation level were more likely to:

- Have a lower income: 77% of people earning up to £13,499 have Foundation Level, compared to 96% of people earning £75,000 or more
- Be retired (66%) or not working (70%) compared to 95% of people working full time
- Be in the DE Social Grade (71%) versus AB Social Grade (92%)
- Have an impairment: 75% of people with an impairment have the Foundation Level, compared to 90% of people with no impairment. People with a physical (67%) or sensory (69%) impairment are least likely to have Foundation Level. People with a vision impairment are more likely to have Foundation Level than people with a hearing impairment (69% compared to 64%). (see also Suffolk context)

Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for Life and Work⁷

92% of people could complete at least one task within the five life skills (Table 6). 3% people have no life skills (5% in 2022).

Table 6: EDS 2023 tasks for life by skill area, completion, UK, 2023

Life skill area	Tasks (count) - EDS for life	People (%) completing at least one task	People (%) completing all tasks
Communicating	6	96%	72%
Handling information & content	5	96%	70%
Transacting	4	95%	82%
Problem solving	2	93%	85%
Being safe & legal online	9	96%	68%
In every skill area	1	92%	52%

Source: Lloyd's Bank, UK Consumer Digital Index 2023.⁷

Those who could not complete all the EDS life skills are more likely to be:

- white (52%),
- female (49%),

- not working (41%),
- have a learning or memory impairment (35%), and
- be aged 65 and over (31%).

“Access to a device, alongside connectivity, remain crucial factors for digital engagement. Of those with zero Life skills, only 33% have a smartphone and 55% are without any digital devices (compared to 96% of those with Life EDS having a smartphone).”⁷

5% of the UK labour force (adults aged 18 and over) could not complete any work EDS (compared to 8% in 2022). 82% of people aged 18 or over who are not retired could complete at least one task in each of the five essential digital skills for work areas; 46% could complete all twenty tasks. Being Safe and Legal Online was the skill where people were least likely to complete all the tasks: 64% completed all nine tasks (Table 7).

Table 7: EDS 2023 tasks for work by skill area, completion, UK, 2023

Skill area	Tasks (count) - EDS for work	People (%) completing at least one task	People (%) completing all tasks
Communicating	3	92%	68%
Handling information and content	2	89%	74%
Transacting	2	86%	71%
Problem solving	4	92%	65%
Being safe & legal online	9	92%	64%
In every skill area	1	82%	46%

Source: Lloyd’s Bank, UK Consumer Digital Index 2023.⁷

People who were less likely to complete all twenty work tasks were more likely to experience inequalities that are also associated with worse health outcomes. Inequalities often combine, increasing disadvantage – for example, people with a disability are more likely to receive lower pay (regardless of level of qualifications).^{34,35}

- **Lower income:** 36% of people earning up to £13,500-£24,999 completed all tasks (compared to 66% of people earning £75,000 or more). 8% of people earning up to £13,499 could not complete any work tasks, compared to 1% of people earning £30,000-£39,999, £40,000-£74,999, or £75,000 and over). “Areas with more income deprivation are more likely to have a range of health conditions including serious mental illness, obesity, diabetes, and learning disabilities.”³⁶
- **No formal qualifications:** 20% of people with no formal qualifications completed all tasks compared to 55% of people with a degree, master’s, or PhD. 20% of people with no formal qualifications could not complete any work tasks, compared to 2% of people with a degree or higher qualification. “Educational attainment is a key determinant of health throughout the life course.”³⁷
- **Out of work:** 35% of people who were not working completed all tasks compared to 53% of people working full-time. 13% of people not in paid work could not complete any work skills tasks, compared to 2% working full-time. “Higher healthy life expectancy is strongly correlated with higher employment rates.”³⁸
- **Have an impairment:** 37% of people with an impairment completed all tasks compared to 52% of people with no impairment. 12% of people with a physical impairment could not complete any work skills tasks, compared to 3% with no impairment.

- **Work in retail** (35% could complete all work tasks) **or medical industries** (38% could complete all work tasks), compared to 73% people working in the technology industry.

Issues with digital skills

The MDLS grouped parents' concerns into four main issues.¹²

1. Limited engagement – they did not need to use social media platforms and apps in their everyday life, so were not engaging with or learning about them.
2. Limited time to learn about new apps.
3. Fast pace of change makes it difficult to keep up to date.
4. It is difficult to know where to go for trustworthy, reliable information - online searching was described as “overwhelming” and a “minefield!”

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee⁸ found that formal qualifications are not always the best way to help adults obtain basic digital skills: a qualification may be “too big a step”, some digitally excluded people “do not seek formal qualifications but would benefit from digital skills support in familiar, community settings”, while others have had “poor education experiences resulting in a lack of literacy and confidence in the education sector”. The Committee recommended:

- Use the Essential Digital Skills Framework to set basic digital skills targets at different education stages, including for school leavers
- Businesses should invest in training employees
- Support local interventions and informal engagement delivered through community hubs and trusted local organisations to reach individuals, and build the motivation, confidence and skills needed to get online
- Local authorities and national Government should work to review the criteria and systems for distributing funding for basic skills support to ensure smaller organisations can access the resources needed to deliver local-level interventions.

Skills support to use the internet and online services

Although the Government established the Digital Entitlement in 2020, providing adults with no or low digital skills the statutory right to undertake specified digital qualifications up to level 1 free of charge, the Good Things Foundation found only 22% of eligible people expressed an interest in taking part in a digital skills programme.⁸

It is important to recognise that some groups may need additional support to feel confident to access library services and training: “It takes confidence to sign up and go on a course, especially if it’s in a location that people don’t know. To achieve real change, you have to take digital to them”.⁷

Suffolk examples

Suffolk InfoLink is an online directory of community information with a section listing support available to local people: [Do you need help to get online?](#)

- Suffolk Digital Champions Programme (funded by Public Health & Communities) and run by Communities Together East Anglia (on our behalf) [Digital Workshops - Communities Together East Anglia](#)
- Suffolk Libraries [Computer and IT courses](#)
- [East Suffolk Digital Champions](#) (trained customer services staff) support people (in-person appointments) to use council services online as well as food shopping, setting

up email and online accounts, accessing medical services – part of the Suffolk Digital Champions Programme.

- [Mid Suffolk's Digital Skills Team](#) run drop in sessions at various locations (also [Babergh digital skills sessions](#))
- Free digital skills training and support (part of the [Good Things Foundation's Digital Inclusion Network](#) for training and digital Inclusion hubs), including Felixstowe Salvation Army, Hourglass (Sudbury), Ipswich New Skill Centre, Gainsborough Library, Lowestoft Library, East Suffolk Council (Lowestoft offices)
- Free digital support services (Digital Inclusion hubs, part of the [Good Things Foundation's Digital Inclusion Network](#)): O2 (Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds), Communities Together East Anglia (Stowmarket)

National schemes (examples)

- [The Digital Helpline \(advice as well as 1-2-1 telephone or video appointments\)](#), tailored training might include setting up online banking, setting up a device and connecting to the internet.
- [Lloyds Bank Academy](#) – free online learning, on-demand or live, for businesses, charities, and individuals. Topics include “Stay safe and secure online,” and “Manage and save money effectively online.”
- [Barclays Digital Wings](#) – free online learning from “How to get started online” to “Master your skills with Microsoft 365 applications”.
- [Lloyds Bank provide free training](#): 1-2-1 telephone sessions (for adults living in the UK) as well as digital skills (how to stay safe, how to be more productive).

Internet User Classifications (IUC)

Some areas that score lower on the Digital Propensity Index are also identified in the CDRC 2018 Internet User Classification (IUC)³⁹ as having lower levels of Internet engagement (see descriptions in Table 8): “Passive and Uncommitted Users” (Code 7), “Settled Offline Communities” (9), e-Withdrawn (10).

The IUC uses quite old data, but comparing the two maps (Figure 6, Figure 9) suggests that some small areas, particularly in and around our towns (such as Brandon, Halesworth, Bungay, Beccles, Sudbury, Felixstowe, Newmarket, Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich, and Lowestoft) may have experienced low levels of internet engagement for some years.

Input data for the 2018 IUC included:

- British Population Survey (BPS): behavioural characteristics of the population regarding Internet use (estimated)
- online retailers' transactional data for online shopping behaviour of populations (small area)
- infrastructure characteristics, such as average download speed per postcode from Ofcom
- administrative and Census data at LSOA

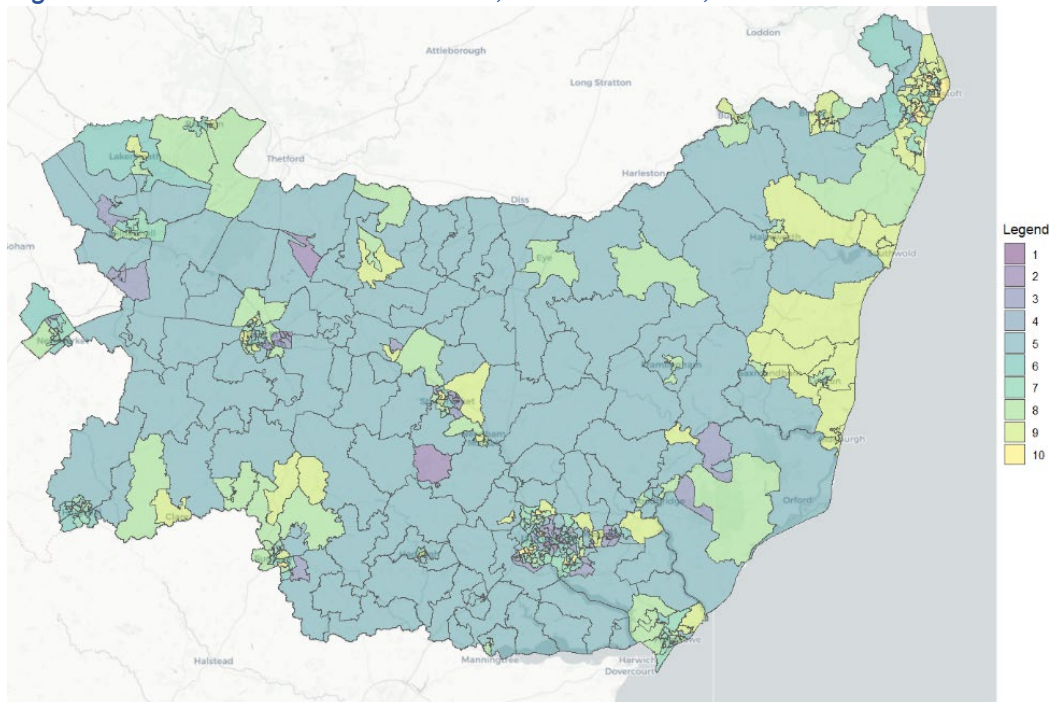
Table 8: Internet User Classifications, 2018

Code	Label	Description (extracted quotes)
1	e-Cultural Creators	high levels of Internet engagement, particularly social networks, communication, streaming and gaming...young, typically aged 18 - 24, with a strong presence of multicultural and student populations
2	e-Professionals	high levels of Internet engagement, fairly young populations of urban professionals, typically aged 25 - 34. experienced users
3	e-Veterans	affluent families, usually located within low-density suburbs, with populations of mainly middle-aged and highly qualified professionals. They are more likely to be frequent and experienced users of the Internet, having the second highest levels of Internet access at work after the e-Professionals users. They engage with the Internet using multiple devices and in a variety of ways.
4	Youthful Urban Fringe	often young and drawn from ethnic minorities... Access through desktop devices is particularly low, suggesting a young and mobile profile of individuals...levels of Internet engagement are average over-all, with high levels of social media usage
5	e-Rational Utilitarians	Users undertake online shopping, particularly for groceries. Tend to be late middle-aged or elderly, and ... include a high percentage of retired home owners. Preferred method of engagement with the Internet is personal computers at home, with low levels of mobile access. In addition to shopping, users search for information or access online banking rather than engage with social networks or gaming: Internet used as a utility rather than for entertainment.
6	e-Mainstream	Average level of engagement across most attributes, the typical user.
7	Passive and Uncommitted Users	higher levels of employment in semi-skilled and blue-collar occupations. Individuals are rarely online, and most commonly report use once a week or less. Access to broadband is well below average, and for those online, there is mild preference for access via smartphones. The Internet is typically used for social networks, gaming, and some limited online shopping.
8	Digital Seniors	ageing and predominantly White British, retired and relatively affluent. They make average use of the Internet, typically using a personal computer at home. Despite being infrequent users, they are adept enough to use the Internet for information seeking, financial services and online shopping, but less so for social networks, streaming or gaming.
9	Settled Offline Communities	Most members of this Group are elderly, White British and retired, and tend to reside in semirural areas. Undertake only limited engagement with the Internet, they may have only rare access or indeed no access to it at all. Online behaviour tends to be through home computers rather than mobile devices, and focused upon information seeking and limited online shopping (particularly for more bulky items such as white goods)
10	e-Withdrawn	the least engaged with the Internet... the highest rate of unemployment and social housing among all other Groups...the

Code	Label	Description (extracted quotes)
		highest ratio of people that don't have access to, or have access but never engage with, the Internet. It also expresses the lowest rates of engagement in terms of information seeking and financial services, as well as the lowest rate in terms of online access via a mobile device. Online shopping is also particularly low, with the exception of clothing on credit, suggesting an opportunistic dimension to Internet usage. higher than average access to broadband by TV provider...

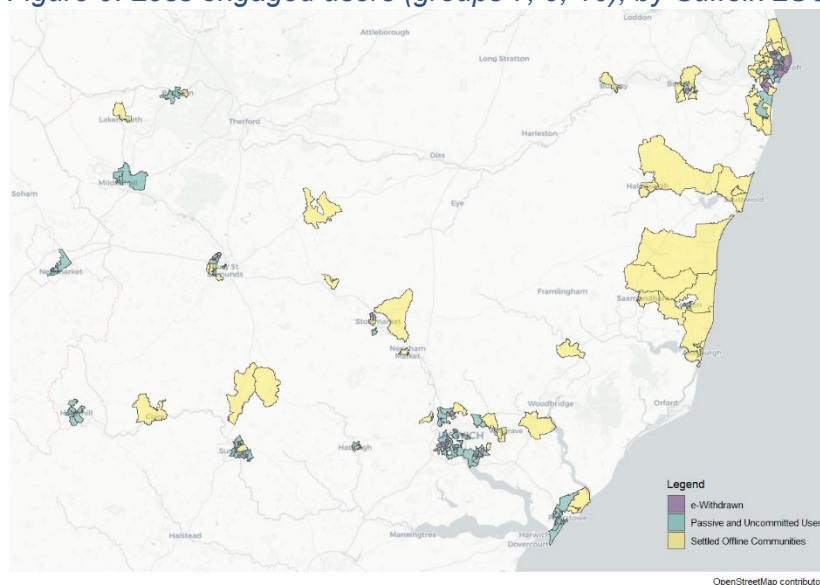
Source: IUC 2018 user guide³⁹

Figure 8: Internet User Classifications, Suffolk LSOAs, 2018



Source: IUC 2018 user guide³⁹

Figure 9: Less engaged users (groups 7, 9, 10), by Suffolk LSOA, IUC 2018



Source: IUC 2018 user guide³⁹

Accessibility: Services to meet all users' needs

Accessibility is not just about creating websites that can be used by people with physical impairments. It's about designing digital content and tools (apps and software as well as websites) to be as inclusive and easy to use as possible. This might include ensuring material can be used by people with learning disabilities, with neurodiversity, with English as an additional language, with lower levels of literacy, older people as well as people with physical or sensory disabilities.

Improving accessibility enables more individuals to use digital services (such as health, financial, housing, and government) with independence and privacy. Privacy can also be compromised if people can only access services on, for example, public library terminals. Where organisations may be providing devices for work or education purposes, usage policies could be reviewed and permitted sites widened to support digital inclusion.

Findings from Digital exclusion, House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, 3rd report of session 2022-23:⁸

- The Government's 2012 'Digital By Default' strategy for public service aimed to make central government smaller, faster, and more accountable. However, in 2020 the National Audit Office found that only around 20% of Universal Credit applicants were able to verify their identity online, and highlighted concerns that people with low digital skills might find it particularly difficult to provide the evidence required. In 2023, the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee heard that it had created "too many hurdles where, if you cannot provide an email address, you cannot claim."
- The shift towards digital has increased social and economic exclusion among many groups, although it was seen as a positive by many businesses and service providers, "it left many customers frustrated, reduced in-person interactions and rendered sections of the population unable to use valued services."
- The shift towards digital by default public services has meant libraries and community organisations have taken on additional responsibilities to support those who struggle with digital access, but without sufficient resources and training.

The Committee recommendations included:

"The Government's digital inclusion strategy refresh should include support for place-based in-person initiatives to help those who cannot navigate online access to essential services. This could include boosting the role of libraries, community centres and local amenities as inclusion hubs, in partnership with businesses.

Not everyone wants to be online, or online all the time. And some services are better in person. Private and public service providers should avoid viewing digital as a cheap substitute for good customer service. Adequate provision must be maintained for those who cannot or do not wish to use online services."

Accessibility for people who use assistive technology

“78% of disabled people say that having access to digital technologies is helpful or very helpful” [although] disabled people are over 50% more likely to face barriers to accessing digital and online services than non-disabled people. if you have an impairment you are 3 times more likely not to have the skills to access devices and get online”⁴⁰

“Digital products should be accessible and inclusive not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it makes good business sense. An estimated 15-20% of the world’s population live with a disability of some kind, and we cannot afford to exclude these users from our target markets”⁴¹

Suffolk context

People may use assistive technology for many different reasons, not all of which can be easily quantified; some reasons may be temporary.

In 2022, the estimated prevalence of sight loss in Suffolk was 4.1%, this is 0.8 percentage points higher than the England estimate of 3.3%. It is estimated that 1 in 7 of the Suffolk population are deaf or hard of hearing. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimate that 6,050 people are living with some degree of dual sensory loss (for example, a hearing and a vision impairment) in Suffolk. Of these people, it is estimated that 2,440 are living with severe dual sensory loss.⁴²

In Suffolk, 23.6% of residents are 65 years or over, five percentage points higher than England (18.6%). This indicates that the risk of sensory impairment and demand for supporting health services may be high in Suffolk. Across Suffolk the prevalence of visual and hearing impairment is projected to increase over the next 10 years.⁴²

In Suffolk, 83,903 people self-reported that they were “a little” disabled under the Equality Act (10.6% age-standardised percentage of the population), a higher percentage than the East of England (10.0%) and England (10.2%). The age-standardised percentage of the population that is disabled under the Equality Act a lot (6.7%, 55,084 people) is higher than the East of England (6.6%) but lower than England (7.5%). 21,951 (6.6%) households have 2 or more people that are disabled.⁴³

Standards

- The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 require public sector (including some charities) websites and mobile apps to meet the WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standard (or give valid reasons why not) and publish an accessibility statement that explains how accessible the website or mobile app is.⁴⁴
- The Government’s Service Standard⁴⁵ sets digital service provision and inclusive design standards.
- The European Accessibility Act (EAA) seeks to ensure equal access to digital products and services throughout Europe. The EAA sets minimum accessibility standards for digital products and services to meet WCAG2.1AA. It covers a range of goods and services and applies to any business (with 10 or more staff and turnover over €2million) that wishes to trade in the EU, wherever it is based. It becomes law in all EU member states in June 2025. The UK government has not confirmed it will pass the European Accessibility Act (EAA) into law.⁴⁶

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