

Research into Digital Exclusion in the Marches & Gloucestershire LEP areas

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Executive Summary

Introduction

RHCS was appointed by the Fastershire project, on behalf of the Marches & first Local Enterprise Partnerships to undertake research into the prevalence of digital exclusion within the two LEP areas. This was to be a targeted, time bound, concentrated piece of research with a report required within four weeks of appointment. By necessity, the aim was to gather views and opinions from as broad a range of contributors as possible, distil ideas and produce a concise report which captured key points and gave ideas about future interventions.

Some 59 organisations, in total, responded to our request for views on Digital Exclusion. We have been grateful for the support of leading infrastructure bodies for their support in circulating survey questionnaires to their membership. This elicited a useful response in Shropshire particularly.

Many more organisations were invited to contribute to research but chose not to do so in the timescale of our report. Response rates varied, with a strong response from Shropshire, from all sectors, but less so in other areas. Whilst the views of Housing Associations featured strongly in all areas, the voluntary and public sector were less so in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Useful cross sector views were gained from Telford.

Statistical overview

The total area covered by the research comprises some 7,423 sq miles (19,181 sq km), this is made up of the different counties as follows:

County	Area – sq miles	Area – sq kms	% of total area
Gloucestershire	1,045	2,700	32.3
Herefordshire	844	2,180	26.1
Shropshire	1,235	3,191	38.2
Telford & Wrekin	112	290	3.4
TOTAL	3,236	8,361	100.0

In terms of population, based on the 2011 census, the following figures apply:

County	Population	% of total pop'n
Gloucestershire	596,984	47.6
Herefordshire	183,477	14.7
Shropshire	306,100	24.4
Telford & Wrekin	166,641	13.3
TOTAL	1,253,202	100.0

The age breakdown reveals that Telford has higher proportions of younger people than the other counties. Similarly, the three shire counties have higher proportions of older people than Telford. This obviously has implications for use of digital technology

There are significant pockets of deprivation across the area under consideration. This deprivation can be mixed with areas of affluence, and can therefore comprise both larger areas and smaller pockets. The population, with the exception of Telford & Wrekin is generally spread amongst smaller urban areas and larger more rural tracts, each element bringing its own issues. Within urban areas, the deprivation is more apparent, in rural areas it tends to focus more on access to services, but income and employment are also factors here.

Looking at trends with regard to internet usage, it is apparent that age is the most notable factor, with those of an older age being less likely to use the internet. However, cost is also a limiting factor, as is access in the more rural areas – through lack of broadband compounded by lack of support services.

Research Findings

Research focussed on seeking views on five key points which are summarised below. The report also presents case studies, showcasing the views of organisations such as Severnside Housing, Bourneville Trust and the Beechtree Centre.

Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Lack of broadband connection in rural areas
- The costs associated with internet usage, those affected by digital exclusion are in many cases unable to pay
- Lack of confidence to take the first step towards digital inclusion
- Lack of opportunity to gain suitable skills due to lack of venue/support

Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- Older people; some of whom choose actively NOT to get involved
- Younger people who may be active in social media but lack work related skills
- People living in rural communities
- People on fixed/low incomes
- Unemployed people – the move to on line Universal Job Match will adversely affect them
- Middle aged people who do not update skills to keep abreast of technological advances (apps); they too, in time, will become digitally excluded
- Organisations/service providers:
 - through increasing costs due to rising support demands from service users if clients cannot secure benefits, rent arrears/debts may follow
 - inability to reduce costs to take advantage of on line communications

What results from digital exclusion?

- Inability to access an increasing range of on line services, notably benefits, house choices, job search, internet banking, on line shopping.
- Increasing costs due to lack of access to on line “deals”
- Inability to compete in the job market; many jobs are on line and many require a level of IT skills
- A range of health issues, notably mental health issues, depression
- Affects are felt more deeply in rural areas; as services are withdrawn/closed (libraries/post offices) the opportunity to access services (car tax registration) is lost
- Reduced community connectivity – digitally excluded people are unable to engage at the same level

What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Easily accessibly, supportive, community based venues; “soft” engagement
- One to one individual support; peer mentors/volunteers work well in offering basic introduction to internet/IT usage

- Longer term investment from public agencies to ensure consistent broadband connectivity and ongoing support from suitable organisations
- Targeted training; one size doesn't fit all, particularly for groups with distinct needs
- Ongoing support/advice given the proliferation and increasing speed of change in IT devices
- The move towards the use of touch screens, identified by several contributors, should be noted in terms of designing future support interventions.

What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Organisations which are well rooted, established, known in local communities
- Those which have the technical expertise/volunteer base and required equipment to offer support as necessary.
- Typically, Housing Associations which have a vested interest to take action on digital exclusion and voluntary/community groups. That said, partner working including Local Authorities and Colleges have also been mentioned as part of research.

Overview of research areas

There are strong partnerships in South Shropshire between Shropshire Housing Group, The Furniture Scheme and the Mayfair Centre. In the North, the Beechtree Centre and Oswestry Community Action offer support whilst centrally there is the, much mentioned by contributors, flagship project of Severnside's Digit@l Den. Shropshire Council has also invested in tackling digital exclusion and the work of Shropshire RCC in "Get Shropshire on line" is notable.

In Gloucester, it would seem Housing Associations are working together to put in place responses to digital exclusion, whilst Gloucester RCC has assisted older people.

The low response rate from Herefordshire prevents a fully accurate picture being presented. However, it would seem from comments gained, rural broadband is an issue and there are similar presenting groups and associated problems as those seen elsewhere.

Telford, whilst the smallest geographical area has the highest density of population, despite having only 30% of the borough being classed as urban; thus "rural" broadband remains an issue in parts of the borough. It is evident both the Local Authority together with Telford College of Arts & Technology, plus the VCS are well placed and poised to assist in addressing digital exclusion.

The Way Forward?

There is an obvious need for initial and on going support to enable people to gain sufficient skills to gain maximum benefit from becoming "digitally included". It has been said such support would be best offered in well known community based venues. Many such venues already exist throughout the area under research.

Whilst that may be sufficient for some, notably older (retired) people who typically wish/need to access on line services to keep in touch with relatives and take advantage of on line deals, there remains the continuing need to cover the ongoing costs of broadband connectivity and purchase of suitable hardware.

Additionally, for younger people the need to gain sufficient skills to compete in the job market and be able to search and apply for jobs at a time of their choosing, demands longer opening hours of existing community facilities or enabling them to fund the costs of broadband connectivity and associated hardware.

Severnside's Digit@l Den is worth mentioning; a partnership between the Housing Association and a Social Computing firm, it appears to fuse both the need for a community based venue and access to low cost on line services in a locality. To do one without the other, may lead to short term gains but less of a longer term impact. The project is still within its first year of operation with usage plus outcomes being monitored on an on going basis. Talking to other Housing Associations it is clear that most, if not all, are working on digital inclusion strategies. Whilst some will undoubtedly take a different approach to Severnside, all will have the aim of benefitting service users and reducing operational costs in the long term.

Thus the motivation for Housing Associations to take positive action to address digital exclusion has been notable. The recognition that failure to do so will lead to increasing operational costs is a key business imperative. Thus, such organisations would appear well placed to lead on innovative approaches to addressing digital exclusion.

However, the role of other partners, both in the voluntary and public sector (particularly those working in a consortia type approach on a geographic basis) is worth considering as a way forward. Harnessing the different expertise available could pay dividends in tackling the increasingly urgent problem of digital exclusion.

1. Research Requirements & Methodology

1.1 Introduction

RHCS was appointed by the Fastershire project, on behalf of the Marches & first Local Enterprise Partnerships to undertake research into prevalence of digital exclusion within the two LEP areas. This was to be a targeted, time bound, concentrated piece of research with a report required within four weeks of appointment. By necessity, the aim was to gather views and opinions from as broad a range of contributors as possible, distil ideas and produce a concise report which captured key points and gave ideas about future interventions.

1.2 Required Tasks

The tasks, as specified in the brief supplied, were as follows:

- Consult with a wide range of organisations from across Shropshire, Telford, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire which represent economically or socially excluded groups, including but not limited to; social housing providers and public sector service providers from across the areas, voluntary and community sector groups dealing primarily with the economically excluded
- Identify all the available evidence of digital exclusion among distinct groups. (The researcher would not be required to conduct any primary research but to understand what evidence of digital exclusion exists and what features of support will be important to include those groups.)
- Identify any synergy with the outcomes of other Task and Finish groups primarily those dealing with housing and social inclusion and the Land Based Subgroup of the ICT & Broadband Task and Finish group (results already available) *

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 A long list of likely contributors was developed and discussed with the appointing agency this list was amended as necessary. The list included social housing providers plus a range of organisations assisting those thought to be economically excluded from both the voluntary/community sector and agencies in the Public Sector.

1.3.2 Research questionnaires were established as follows:

- i. to guide telephone interviews held with a range of organisations
- ii. for use as a survey, a tick box approach being used

1.3.3 A request for distribution of the survey was made to:

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service
Shropshire Voluntary Sector Assembly
Telford & Wrekin Council for Voluntary Services

In addition, copies of the survey were distributed to a range of parish councils.

- 1.3.4 Desk research was undertaken, included sourcing statistics from websites including the Office for National Statistics, Neighbourhood statistics, NOMIS and the index of multiple deprivation.

We were also grateful to organisations which provided statistical evidence:

- Herefordshire Housing
- Shropshire Housing Group on behalf of Shropshire Landlords

- 1.3.5 It is important to note that given the breadth of research, comments were naturally drawn on the need to address social isolation and ensure digital inclusion to address a range of health issues. However, whilst these comments are referenced in the report, given the main focus was on researching the economic effects resulting from digital exclusion, they are considered to be of secondary interest.

- 1.3.6 Best efforts have been made to ensure the research base is as comprehensive as feasibly possible. However, given the geographic scope of the research and time constraints, it is inevitable that there may be some gaps in the evidence base. Additionally, a number of organisations invited to contribute, failed to do so within the time available.

2. Statistical overview of the LEP areas

The research undertaken has covered an area comprising Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. It is useful to preface statistical information about digital exclusion with an overview of the area to place it in context.

2.1 Geographical Position

The total area covered by the research comprises some 7,423 sq miles (19,181 sq km), this is made up of the different counties as follows:

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2.2 Population statistics

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Telford & Wrekin	166,641	13.3
TOTAL	1,253,202	100.0

As can be seen from the two tables above, whilst Gloucestershire has the largest population, Shropshire has the largest geographical area; Gloucestershire is more densely populated than Herefordshire, which is the least densely populated of the four counties. Telford, as one would expect, is also relatively densely populated.

When one considers the age breakdown of the population, the following picture emerges:

	Gloucester		Herefordshire		Shropshire		Telford		England
Age	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%
0-4	33,438	5.6%	9,580	5.2%	15,700	5.1%	11,344	6.8%	6.3%
5-9	31,540	5.3%	9,180	5.0%	15,600	5.1%	10,007	6.0%	5.6%
10-14	34,479	5.8%	10,494	5.7%	17,900	5.8%	10,594	6.4%	5.8%
15-19	37,131	6.2%	10,684	5.8%	18,900	6.2%	11,496	6.9%	6.3%
20-24	34,958	5.9%	9,431	5.1%	16,600	5.4%	10,863	6.5%	6.8%
25-44	150,033	25.1%	42,530	23.2%	71,000	23.2%	45,217	27.1%	27.5%
45-64	164,050	27.5%	52,562	28.6%	87,100	28.4%	43,031	25.8%	25.4%
65-74	58,210	9.8%	20,496	11.2%	34,300	11.2%	13,928	8.4%	8.6%
75-84	36,976	6.2%	13,196	7.2%	20,700	6.8%	7,481	4.5%	5.5%
85-89	10,671	1.8%	3,535	1.9%	5,600	1.8%	1,771	1.1%	1.5%
90 +	5,498	0.9%	1,789	1.0%	2,800	0.9%	909	0.5%	0.8%
TOTAL	596,984	100.0%	183,477	100.0%	306,200	100.0%	166,641	100.0%	100.1%

There are identifiable trends, as one would expect, with Telford having higher proportions of younger people (including as benchmarked against the England figure) than the other counties. Similarly, the three shire counties have higher proportions of older people than Telford and the national average. This obviously has implications for use of digital technology, as will become apparent later in the report.

2.3 Unemployment Statistics

When considering unemployment, the following table shows the numbers of claimants as at August 2013 and the proportion of the resident population these represent:

County	Claimants	Resident Population
Gloucestershire	8,926	2.4
Herefordshire	2,288	2.0
Shropshire	4,222	2.2
Telford & Wrekin	4,004	3.7

As can be seen, from these statistics taken from NOMIS, Telford & Wrekin has the highest proportion of unemployed claimants, whilst Gloucestershire has the highest number, in line with the population statistics. As a comparator, the England percentage of claimants is 3.3%, hence only Telford & Wrekin is above the national average.

When looking at age of claimants and duration of claims, it is interesting to note that, once again, Telford & Wrekin has the highest proportion of all age groups claiming for 2 years or more, and the most detrimentally affected age group is the 25-49. Hereford has the smallest proportion of people long term unemployed in all age categories:

County	16-24		25-49		50-64	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gloucestershire	155	0.2	710	0.4	360	0.3
Herefordshire	40	0.2	140	0.2	85	0.2
Shropshire	55	0.2	310	0.3	170	0.3
Telford & Wrekin	105	0.5	380	0.7	125	0.4

Comparing this to those unemployed over 6 months, and the picture is not dissimilar in terms of ranking:

County	16-24		25-49		50-64	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gloucestershire	840	1.3	2,320	1.2	910	0.8
Herefordshire	250	1.4	545	1.0	215	0.6
Shropshire	405	1.3	1,030	1.1	435	0.7
Telford & Wrekin	505	2.5	1,090	1.9	320	1.1

It is important to note that rates are falling across the area and nationally, but there is clearly still a significant issue for those long term unemployed individuals.

2.4 Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a tool for identifying deprivation in small local areas across the UK. In terms of an overview for the area, the following table shows the relative rankings of the local authorities (please note, Gloucestershire is split between 6 district local authorities):

Local Authority	Ranking (of 326)
Cheltenham, Glos }	214
Forest of Dean, Glos }	164
Cotswolds, Glos }	263
Gloucester }	142
Stroud }	255
Tewkesbury }	275
Herefordshire	145
Shropshire	166
Telford & Wrekin	105

As can be seen, Telford & Wrekin ranks as the most deprived local authority of the area, with parts of Gloucestershire – Tewkesbury and The Cotswolds - featuring as least deprived in the area. However, it is important to note that the overarching Local Authority scores can hide the smaller pockets of deprivation that occur.

- 2.4.1 Gloucestershire - 12,698 Gloucestershire residents live in neighbourhoods which have been classified as being amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. There are 8 neighbourhoods in this top bracket, the eight can all be found in Cheltenham and Gloucester. Just under 45,000 Gloucestershire residents are living in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country. Almost a third of county residents live in the least deprived 20% of areas nationally.

Over 16,000 Gloucestershire residents live in neighbourhoods which have been classified as being amongst the 10% most income deprived neighbourhoods in England.

- 2.4.2 Herefordshire – In 2010 there were 8 areas (LSOAs) in Herefordshire that were amongst the 25% most deprived nationally in terms of multiple deprivation out of a total of 116 in the county. Five of the most deprived areas are in South Hereford, two in Leominster and one in Ross-on-Wye. 'Golden Post - Newton Farm' was the most deprived area in the county – the only LSOA to be in the 10% most deprived nationally – not only overall, but also in terms of income deprivation and employment deprivation. There are a further 14 LSOAs that are in the 25% least deprived nationally. These areas are in Hereford City and the surrounding rural area, Ross, Leominster and Ledbury.

In terms of employment deprivation, there are 10 small areas (LSOAs) in the county which are amongst the 25% most deprived in England for employment. Half of these areas are in the south of Hereford City, three are in Leominster, one in north Hereford and also in Ross-on-Wye.

There are 22 LSOAs that are amongst the 25% least deprived nationally, they have 5% or less of their working age population that are employment deprived. These are spread across the county with some in Hereford City and the market towns of Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye as well as a number in rural areas.

When looking at income deprivation, there are 10 areas (LSOAs) in Herefordshire that are amongst the 25% most deprived nationally, all having just over 1 in 5 people living in income deprived households. Half of these areas are in the South of Hereford City, a further three in Leominster and one each in Bromyard and Ross-on-Wye.

- 2.4.3 Shropshire – In terms of overall deprivation, 2.8% of Shropshire's population live within the most deprived areas in England. This has increased from 1.6% in 2004 and 2.1% in 2007. Only 5 SOAs fell within the most deprived 20% nationally, these were located in Shrewsbury at Harlescott, Meole Brace, Monkmoor, Battlefield & Heathgates and Market Drayton East. 14.6% of the county's population live in areas which fall within the least deprived 20% of England.

When considering Shropshire's population, 4.4% of children and 4.4% of older people live within the most deprived 20% in terms of income deprivation, and 6.6% of Shropshire's population live in areas which are classified as the 20% most deprived in terms of employment. Generally there is more deprivation in urban areas than rural.

- 2.4.4 Telford & Wrekin - The borough is in the top 30 most deprived in the West Midlands and 40% most deprived local authorities nationally - levels of deprivation have increased with 13% of the population living in the 10% most deprived areas in 2010 compared to 5% in 2007. There are stark contrasts within the Borough, with some areas in the top 10% most deprived, whilst others are in the 10% least deprived.

Over a third of the Borough's SOA's are in the most 20% deprived for education, skills and training, with half of these in the most 10% deprived. In terms of income deprivation, 10,200 children (aged 0-15) live in areas ranked in the 20% most deprived nationally, almost a third (31%) of the Borough's child population. Similarly, for older people, it is some 24% of the older population who live in the 20% most deprived areas.

2.5 Housing tenure

A relevant issue to consider is the housing tenure within the area. It is apparent that those in social housing are often living in more deprived areas and are generally less affluent than those in their own homes. These are all factors that can contribute to digital exclusion, as highlighted later in the findings of this report.

Area name	All categories: Tenure	Owned outright	Owned with a mortgage or loan	Shared ownership (part owned & part rented)	Social rented: Rented from L A	Social rented: Other	Private rented: Private landlord or letting agency	Private rented: Other	Living rent free
Households	No.	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
ENGLAND	22,063,368	30.6	32.8	0.8	9.4	8.3	15.4	1.4	1.3
WEST MIDS	2,294,909	32.3	32.6	0.7	10.9	8.1	12.8	1.2	1.5
Herefordshire	78,319	39.4	28.3	1.0	3.4	10.5	13.6	1.9	1.9
Shropshire	129,674	38.6	30.6	0.6	5.0	8.5	13.1	1.9	1.8
Telford & Wrekin	66,608	27.2	36.5	0.4	8.1	11.6	13.6	1.4	1.2
Gloucestershire	254,615	35.5	33.9	0.8	5.9	7.0	13.8	1.6	1.4
Cheltenham	50,929	32.1	32.4	0.7	8.0	4.2	20.1	1.3	1.1
Cotswold	36,236	37.8	27.9	1.2	1.7	13.1	13.2	2.1	3.0
Forest of Dean	34,167	40.9	33.4	0.5	2.3	10.1	9.5	1.7	1.6
Gloucester	50,363	29.2	38.0	1.1	7.8	5.5	15.9	1.5	1.0
Stroud	47,794	38.1	35.2	0.6	10.1	2.7	11.1	1.1	1.3
Tewkesbury	35,126	38.1	35.5	0.9	2.1	9.9	10.3	2.1	1.2

As can be seen, there are significant proportions of the population living in social housing and private rented accommodation. Only Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire have higher than the England averages in terms of living in “social rented other”. However, this does not preclude the fact that a significant proportion of the population, who do not own their own homes, are therefore likely to, potentially, have less income and less opportunity to access computer hardware.

2.6 Digital Exclusion

As one would expect, the above statistics confirm that there is a correlation between housing tenure, unemployment and deprivation. Given the findings highlighted later in this report, it is also clear that these are all factors which can relate to digital exclusion. If one considers digital exclusion, there is less detailed analysis of statistics, however an overview can be seen below, taken from the Office for National Statistics.

- 2.6.1 It is useful to consider the numbers of people who have used, or not used, the internet. The following table shows figures from 2011 and 2012:

INTERNET USAGE	Ever used %		Never used %	
	2011 Q2	2012 Q3	2011 Q2	2012 Q3
UK	82.3	84.7	17.4	15.1
West Midlands	79.2	81.4	20.5	18.4
Gloucestershire	81.5	85.7	18.2	14.2
Herefordshire	79.3	74.2	17.8	25.4
Worcestershire	79.7	81.5	20.2	18.4
Telford & Wrekin	85.3	87.2	14.7	12.3
Shropshire	81.1	84.9	18.7	14.5

As can be seen, all areas, with the exception of Herefordshire, have shown increasing proportions of the population using the internet. This is in line with most counties in the West Midlands – only Hereford, Coventry and Walsall & Wolverhampton also show a fall in users.

- 2.6.2 When looking at the age breakdown, it is not possible to identify the county level view, but on a national basis, the generational divide becomes obviously apparent:

INTERNET USAGE	Ever used %		Never used %	
	2011 Q1	2012 Q3	2011 Q1	2012 Q3
All adults	82.2	84.7	17.5	15.1
Age group (years)				
16-24	98.8	98.9	0.9	0.8
25-34	97.5	98.3	2.1	1.5
35-44	95.4	96.6	4.3	3.2
45-54	89.5	92.1	10.2	7.8
55-64	79.0	83.6	20.8	16.3
65-74	57.1	63.4	42.6	36.4
75+	23.8	30.1	76.1	69.6

A significantly higher proportion of people have never used the internet as age increases.

2.6.3 A concerning perspective emerges when considering disabled people:

INTERNET USAGE	Ever used %		Never used %	
	2011 Q1	2012 Q3	2011 Q1	2012 Q3
DDA disabled	63.9	66.3	35.8	33.4
Work limiting disability only	88.3	90.1	11.2	9.6
No disability (no declaration)	87.9	90.2	11.9	9.6

Clearly, those claiming DDA are noticeably more digitally excluded than those who only have a work limiting disability or those without a disability. On a positive note, the percentage of disabled never using the internet has shown a drop over the 18 months highlighted.

2.6.4 It is interesting to consider use of the internet for purchasing. The following table breaks down types of purchases by age group, and it is easy to see the percentage trend for less usage as people age:

	Age group %					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Clothes, sports goods	62	68	59	52	40	14
Household goods	32	65	63	46	38	18
Films and music	46	52	52	38	29	9
Books, magazines, newspapers	28	42	47	37	35	18
Holiday accommodation	19	45	46	39	34	15
Other travel arrangements	24	41	41	38	34	15
Tickets for events	30	44	43	36	27	11
Food or groceries	15	35	34	23	14	6
Electronic equipment	20	31	28	22	16	7
Video games software and upgrades	30	33	29	18	8	2
Share purchases, insurance policies etc	8	26	26	22	18	7
Other computer software and upgrades	19	22	23	22	14	8
Telecommunication services	10	21	21	19	13	6
Computer hardware	10	12	17	12	9	4
Medicine	5	10	9	11	8	4
E-learning material	10	7	9	4	2	1

2.6.5 Similarly, when considering the use of public authority websites, it is interesting to note that there is the same recognisable pattern for older people. However, here it is also interesting to note the dip in usage by young people 16-24 (other than for enrolling in higher education/university, as one would expect):

	Age group %					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Requesting personal documents/certificates	7	16	14	13	9	8
Income tax declaration	1	6	11	10	9	4
Using public library services	4	7	7	7	7	3
Claiming social security benefits	4	5	7	2	3	1
Change of address	4	7	6	4	2	1
Enrolment in higher education / university	9	3	2	2	-	1

- 2.6.6 When thinking about young people, one of the key factors for internet access is recognised as use of devices other than computers. Clearly, the advent of mobile phone access, tablets and readers is having an impact:

	Age group %					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Mobile phone or smartphone	89	83	70	51	29	9
Portable computer (laptop, tablet)	42	43	41	34	26	11
Other handheld device (eg PDA, MP3, e-book reader, games console)	21	15	14	10	7	2

The picture which is shown above, is as one might expect, but it is interesting to note, as referred to later in the report, that some providers are finding that older people are becoming very responsive to tablets and e readers.

- 2.6.7 It is useful to compare, in line with the above statistics, the make up of households having internet access:

	Have Internet access %		No Internet Access %	
	2012	2013	2012	2013
1 adult Aged 16 to 64	76	74	24	26
1 adult Aged 65+	36	40	64	59
2 adults Aged 16 to 64	93	96	7	4
2 adults, 1 at least 65+	69	74	31	26
3+ adults all Ages	95	97	5	3
Households with children	95	97	5	3
All households	80	83	20	17

As can be seen, in the majority of categories, those having internet access has increased over the last year: the exception being households with 1 adult aged 16-64, which has slightly decreased. Clearly, those with children and with 2 or more adults, have the greatest percentage accessing the internet.

2.6.8 Of those with internet access, the method of access is shown below:

%	2012	2013
DSL broadband	57	45
Broadband via cable, optical fibre, ethernet, PLC etc	30	42
Broadband via satellite, public wifi	6	8
Mobile broadband via mobile phone network (handset or dongle/card)	12	17
Dial up access over a normal telephone line or ISDN	1	-
Mobile narrowband connection (less than 3G)	1	1

As can be seen, the vast majority are able to access via broadband.

2.6.9 When considering why households do not have internet access, there is a surprisingly high percentage which state they don't need or have any interest:

	2006	2013
Don't need Internet (not useful, not interesting, etc)	34	59
Lack of skills	-	20
Equipment costs too high	21	13
Access costs too high (telephone, broadband subscription)	16	12
Have access to the Internet elsewhere	10	7
Privacy or security concerns	8	2
Physical or sensorial disability	3	2
Other reason	13	13

Also of relevance here, is the significant proportion who state cost as a factor – again replicated later in the findings of this report.

2.7 Other information accessed/provided

2.7.1 Herefordshire Housing customer data analysis

During 2013, Herefordshire Housing has compiled a data analysis of its service users. This identified its top 5 digitally excluded user groups as: elderly people reliant on state support; active elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations; families in low rise social housing with high levels of benefit need; residents with sufficient incomes in right to buy social homes; and, young people renting flats in high density social housing. These categories represented almost 65% of their tenants.

The total numbers of identified digitally excluded tenants is 3,483. Of these, the highest proportion live in the Newton Farm area – which, as shown above, is the most deprived area in the county – some 637 people – over 18% of HHL's digitally excluded residents. These are drawn from four of the five categories noted above: the notable absence is elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations. Other significant areas include: Hunderton (443), Redhill (359), Ross on Wye (339) and Putson (322). Hence, just over 60% of the digitally excluded tenants live in 5 areas: the remainder are spread across 36 other areas in the county.

They can also identify that in August 2013, 55% of their service users are regular internet users, with the remaining 45% classifying themselves as infrequent or non-users.

A detailed copy of the HHL analysis can be seen at Appendix II – this will be trackable on a monthly basis.

2.7.2 Shropshire Housing Group's STAR survey

From this survey carried out in November/December 2012, the main Shropshire landlords were able to identify the following facts:

- overall 40% of households have internet at home – this appears consistent across other housing providers
- those in the age group 26-44 have the most access – at 73.5%
- 16-24 age group only have 63%, but this may relate to access via mobile phones
- Older age groups are significantly the lowest: 65-74 at 33% and 75+ at 15%
- Within SHG, 43% of general needs tenants have access to the internet at home, but only 21% of sheltered housing tenants have access.

2.8 Summary

As can be seen from the above statistics, and as is well recognised, there are significant pockets of deprivation across the area under consideration. This deprivation can be mixed with areas of affluence, and can therefore comprise both larger areas and smaller pockets. The population, with the exception of Telford & Wrekin is generally spread amongst smaller urban areas and larger more rural tracts, each element bringing its own issues. Within urban areas, the deprivation is more apparent, in rural areas it tends to focus more on access to services, but income and employment are also factors here.

Looking at the trends with regard to internet usage, it is clear that age is the most apparent factor, with those of an older age being less likely to use the internet. However, cost is also a limiting factor, as is access in the more rural areas – through lack of broadband compounded by lack of support services.

3. The views of contributors

Some 59 organisations, in total, responded to our request for views on Digital Exclusion. Common themes emerged in terms of those at risk of digital exclusion, likely effects resulting from digital exclusion and suggested interventions. Comments from contributors have been amalgamated, where necessary, and are presented by County and by sector/provider type. Organisations of particular interest are noted at section 3.5. Contributors which took time to complete a comprehensive questionnaire are noted in the addendum in terms of area served and services offered, separately to those who took part in the wider survey.

It is true to say that, other than customer feedback and surveys of tenants and residents by Housing Providers, there is little “hard” evidence of digital exclusion. That said, anecdotal evidence, based on first hand experience in the field by contributors, does allow conclusions to be drawn and the same are detailed at the close of this section.

3.1. Organisations offering services in Gloucestershire

3.1.1 Housing Providers

- Organisations responding to requests for information are detailed below. In Gloucester, these organisations consisted of:
- Bromford Housing, Gloucester City Homes and Two Rivers Housing (also serves South Hereford).

3.1.1.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Low and fixed income makes choice difficult in terms of affording on line services.
- Lack of knowledge, fear of computers & social media, fear of change, poverty
- Gloucester City Homes has undertaken recent research which revealed only 44% of households had access to the internet at home. It believes digital exclusion can be caused by a lack of confidence to use IT/internet and the costs associated with doing so.

3.1.1.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion:

- Different groups, older people including those who feel they lack the skills/confidence/interest to get involved. The “Tech savvy” (view of Two Rivers) younger people (with smart phones) can generally look after themselves.
- People in rural communities are adversely affected as services such as local libraries are withdrawn; access to on line services are reduced. Staff (of Two Rivers) are now equipped with IPADs which they take out in an effort to address some of these issues.
- That said, surveys (from Two Rivers) have shown that numbers of people who feel they have access to the internet has grown considerably in recent years to 44% in the most recent survey.

- Poorer households, the elderly, the vulnerable, those who are poorly educated.
- As changes under Welfare Reform are implemented, the pressure on organisations will grow.

3.1.1.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Inability to access services such as on line deals to reduce household costs.
- Missing out on jobs/benefits, lack of knowledge & awareness, residents feeling excluded from the community.

3.1.1.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Two Rivers is considering establishing wi-fi hubs in sheltered housing complexes and in its offices e.g. making it easier for people to get on line and learn how to use the internet.
- To tackle issues of digital exclusion, Gloucester City Homes hosts internet sessions in its' sheltered housing complexes and has ensured the internet has been showcased at summer roadshow events. It also has internet connections for residents to use at its head office in the City Centre and internet services can be accessed via its' digital TV system which some householders have in their homes. It is working on a training programme currently which will be made available to residents in due course.
- Training (on using email/websites/social media), support, raising awareness of facilities offering internet access, expansion of facilities offering free internet access (particularly in rural areas), cheap PC's/laptops for poorer households, improved broadband speed.

3.1.1.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Housing Associations, with an interest and motivation to do something. Two Rivers has a social enterprise arm and is interested in developing its activities further.
- Colleges, Resource Centres, Job Centres, Libraries, Local Councils, Social Landlords.
- Bromford & Gloucester City Homes are members of Gloucestershire Affordable Landlords Digital Access subgroup. This Group is working together to share good practice about digital access. It also explores how members can work together to raise digital awareness/knowledge amongst residents in the County. It is also understood local libraries are involved to identify digital access points.
- Bromford offer new customers the "Bromford Deal" it is a Skills Coach service. Skills Coaches can help customers create an email address, provide information on where to get free internet access and sign-post to relevant training courses. It also has a Connect website which helps customers build their own CV's and search for jobs.

3.1.2 Voluntary Community Sector

In Gloucester, Gloucester Rural Community Council (GRCC) commented on behalf of the VCS generally. It did not issue the tick box questionnaire to member organisations, despite being requested to do so. That said, it provided in depth information on digital exclusion in the County, from its' perspective.

Specific projects from GRCC aimed at addressing digital exclusion include Connect and At800; both focus specifically on older people. Connect recently concluded, aimed at people aged 55 and over. Each person was entitled to 8 hours free experience on the computer assisted by volunteer mentors.

It also notes the Age UK "Magic Mouse" project (free structured sessions at a community centre) and Gloucestershire Libraries "Buddy Scheme" (one hour free access at the library) also aimed at assisting older people in the County.

It should also be said that assistance was received from Gloucestershire County Council who provided details of individual community contacts/groups which might have a view on digital exclusion in the Country. Despite a number of emails being sent (some 25), this elicited only two responses.

3.1.2.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- There is clearly an issue with lack of signal for access to broadband in particular areas of Gloucestershire – these include parts of the Forest of Dean and areas within the Cotswolds.
- Also, linked to the above point, because there are less facilities and services in the more remote areas, people who do not have their own hardware are not able to access the internet.
- There is also a cohort of people who are not willing to engage with the internet, either through fear or lack of interest – again, a significant number of these are of the older generations.
- There is also the issue of cost – and many older people particularly do not have the means to purchase a computer. They may have been "given" a computer but cannot use it.

3.1.2.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- It is felt that largely older people struggle to access the internet.

3.1.2.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- In the case of older people, isolation and loneliness are two key results of digital exclusion which can lead to depression. It also means that people are unable to gather information about vital services with ease and may be excluded from opportunities or important messages.

3.1.2.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- There need to be opportunities for people to meet and learn about new technologies. In addition, information events and training sessions in accessible and friendly surroundings are important.

3.1.2.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Voluntary sector organisations, including the GRCC and village and community agents – who are well embedded in the community.

3.1.3 Public Sector

One comment was received, via the email survey questionnaire, from a councillor from Tewkesbury made key points:

There is no “superfast” broadband in the area, thus disadvantaging SMEs locally. However, there is not only a digital divide, there is an increasing gulf between the have and have nots, not only in terms of access but in levels of digital literacy. A plea was made that policy should be developed to include the majority of people; a piecemeal approach risked leaving some sections of the population “behind”.

3.2 Organisations offering services in Herefordshire

3.2.1 Housing Providers

Contributions were sought from:

Herefordshire Housing, Festival Housing, Kemble Housing, Marches Housing and Two Rivers.

Whilst Herefordshire Housing provided a useful statistical report (available at Appendix II), no information was received regarding what activities the organisation is implementing to address digital exclusion. Despite repeated emails and phone calls, no information was received in the timescale from Kemble or Marches Housing; the response from Two Rivers has been reported in the preceding Gloucestershire section.

3.2.2 Voluntary Community Sector Providers

HVOSS distributed the tick box survey on our behalf whilst Community First asked specific organisations to contact us with their views. Well rooted community organisations such as Marches Access Point, the Hope Centre in Bromyard and Herefordshire CAB talked to us separately to give their views.

3.2.2.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Lack of broadband in the rural areas, no 3G in the (Kington) area, cost is very prohibitive. Income deprivation, social isolation, lack of confidence in and awareness of technology, essentially lack of opportunity to gain suitable skills.

3.2.2.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- Older people, some of whom are terrified of the technology; many have been given a second hand computer but have little idea how to use it. Also young people, whilst they have access to the internet via their phones, they cannot download or save information. Those on low incomes who cannot afford broadband charges.
- Those who are vulnerable, including disabled people, families living in poverty, particularly the children in those families, those with health issues; essentially anyone in need of additional support.
- Unemployed people who are at risk of benefit sanctions due to having no opportunity to submit on line job applications to meet terms of jobseeker's agreements. The looming implementation of Universal Credit is forecast to have severe repercussions for disadvantaged people.
- NB: made the point that with the changes due to Welfare Reform, there is concern that VCS organisations will be inundated with requests for help in terms of gaining on line skills and organisations will be unable to help.

3.2.2.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Greater isolation, particularly for older people who are losing the skills to communicate with grand children.
- Social isolation, ill health, poverty, unemployment; as there is a move to "digital by default" more people will become disadvantaged and excluded – this will have financial, social and educational impacts for people affected. Predominantly people are unable to access on line services.

3.2.2.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Longer term investment and planning by authorities so community groups can offer consistent support. One to one support more useful than class based approach, people are unwilling to admit their difficulties. Workshops and training which gives individual, personalised support at a basic level to help people overcome initial fear when using computers. The view is that short term courses have not worked in the past; there is a need to build ongoing relationships.
- Raise awareness of the uses and benefits of getting on line – ensure people know how to deal with possible internet fraud.
- Access to internet at low cost/free access.
- Access to technological solutions for visually impaired people – improved websites/affordable free access technology.

3.2.2.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Third sector organisations which are known to the local community. Important that such organisations have the equipment and skilled staff to offer suitable support.

- Organisations which have specific expertise with distinct client groups.
- The point was made that there is a need for partnership working and signposting to most appropriate services.

3.2.3 Public Sector

JCP in Herefordshire commented, as did the Council's South Wye Regeneration Partnership.

3.2.3.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Locality, rural areas are more likely to suffer with poor broadband access and access to local community internet facilities.
- Choice – some (older) people, choose not to get online, they are concerned about illegal access to their information.

3.2.3.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- People aged 50+.
- People living in rural areas.

3.2.3.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Poor access to services – banking, shopping, benefits – therefore miss out on cost savings.
- Job prospects adversely affected – many employers recruit on line and job postings are via online search engines.

3.2.3.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- More access to internet computers within the local community, particularly in rural areas.
- More free access to training and tutoring in using the internet.

3.2.3.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Colleges and training providers as they have the facilities to equip people with the skills needed to operate in the digital world.
- NB: JCP refer customers to www.getonlineathome.org people claiming benefits can get computers for as little as £99 and internet access for as little as £2.99 per month.

3.2.3.6 It is worth mentioning two initiatives, current as at October 2013, available in Herefordshire.

One is a schools education programme which is being piloted with Forest View Primary School in Cinderford and John Kyrle secondary in Ross on Wye. The aim is to train young people to train members of their family.

- The other is the Go-On@Fastershire grant scheme which provides small grants of up to £750 to support community groups and clubs to raise awareness of the benefits of using the internet. This initiative is not prescriptive and is intended to target funding at those organisations which already have a relationship with the client base.

3.3 Organisations offering services in **Shropshire**

3.3.1 Housing Providers

The approach of Severnside Housing is featured separately at section 6. Other comments in this section include those from Shropshire Housing Group and Shropshire Housing Alliance.

3.3.1.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Connectivity is a huge issue in rural Shropshire.
- Lack of knowledge/experience of using IT leads to fear of making mistakes on on-line forms. Clients (homeless people) have been made to feel unwelcome in public areas.

3.3.1.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- Those who are most vulnerable, old and infirm and street homeless. There is a huge disparity in people's ability to work with on line forms rather than on an individual personal basis.
- Older people who are less likely to have home computers. (Shropshire Housing Group is working in its sheltered housing complexes to address this issue by having wi-fi access and support available.)
- Middle age people – but cannot generalise, some are very capable; others due to health issues cannot deal with going on line.
- People who can't afford to get on line, those on benefits, those who are furthest from labour market.
- Also important to note the effect on service providers – e.g. people who cannot get on line can be a drain on resources, therefore Housing Providers aim to digital inclusion strategies.

3.3.1.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- People unable to access benefits to which they're entitled; in the long term, on line services could reduce benefit fraud but people need help to navigate the system.
- If you are not IT literate, access to services are severely restricted, e.g. jobsearch and all social housing allocations are made through House Point.

3.3.1.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- More access to knowledgeable advisers to assist people to gain skills. Shropshire Housing Alliance is a charity and has raised funds to buy laptops for use in interview rooms.
- There is a need to link low income households to networks such as E Bay, face book etc..
- Shropshire Housing Group is developing “digital advocates”, matching volunteers/staff to work with older people. Local community places are the way forward, but many small communities in Shropshire do not have such venues.

3.3.1.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Support services, advice agencies, colleges and training providers.
- Community based organisations with good local knowledge.

3.3.2 Voluntary Community Sector Providers

Views were drawn from across the County, from providers offering support to jobseekers, to those offering advice on benefits and debt management and organisations working from community centres whose clientele included older people. Key contributors include: Oswestry Community Action, Rural Community Council of Shropshire, Strettons Mayfair Trust, and The Furniture Scheme in South Shropshire. The views of the Beechtree Centre, in Whitchurch, North Shropshire, is detailed separately at Section 6.

The following is a précis of their views:

3.3.2.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- There was general agreement that lack of access to broadband, particularly in rural areas of Shropshire remains a considerable barrier. Where broadband is available, connectivity can be patchy and cost prohibitive.
- People of a certain age have few IT skills, given they had no introduction at school, have little or no work history or have held low skilled seasonal type jobs. Many will have found “a way round it” – using a friend or relative to book tickets on line etc.
- Poverty, lack of knowledge, poor educational achievement, an anti computer mentality, those who are on low or fixed incomes with little aspiration to improve.
- Digital exclusion is part of social exclusion and is becoming more apparent as more services migrate to on line.
- Restricted opening hours of community venues, including libraries can be an issue. There are a falling number of “drop in facilities” available with straightforward help to address simple problems.
- Age, social exclusion factors.

3.3.2.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- Older people who lack basic knowledge and have not had the benefit of becoming familiar with computers. There are other older people who cannot afford to get on line and others who are actively resistant to getting on line. Older people lack confidence to actually purchase computer equipment. Diversity of equipment is also an issue with the range constantly increasing. Peer teaching “works”.
- Young people who, whilst they are adept at social media, may lack skills required in work.
- Unemployed people who need help with accessing benefits, uploading CVS etc..

3.3.2.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Inability to access services, including searching for jobs, (due to introduction of on line universal jobmatch) isolation and exclusion are exacerbated.
- Higher living costs (inability to access on line “deals”), lack of access to local services, poor job prospects.
- Digital exclusion increases rural isolation for all, particularly in an era when front line services are being cut; an example is closure of rural post offices and the move to car tax on line.

3.3.2.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Improve community based provision to widen access. Increase informal and qualified support to those who need help. There is a need for soft engagement activities for those confident with IT.
- Better broadband in rural areas, more help and education to give people confidence to get on line which are relevant to their age and needs.
- Targeted training, e.g. skype to carers reduces isolation, links to relevant blog/websites.

3.3.2.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Community groups which are less threatening than formal establishments which offer accredited training. People simply want to learn the basics to feel confident and progress at their own speed.
- Locally based organisations which “know” local people but low numbers in rural areas can make targets difficult to achieve.
- NB Age UK offer computer classes to older people

3.3.2.6 It is worth mentioning the experience of Shropshire RCC particularly. It has run various IT based initiatives in the County, notably “Get Shropshire on Line”.

To groups: ensuring groups have an on line presence – e.g. important to ensure that services users (such as young carers) can find the information they need about organisations which may be able to assist.

To individuals: through “Get Shropshire on Line” – have around 35/40 volunteers, use libraries and other community venues. The team offer friendly and informal IT sessions including how to turn on a computer, using a mouse/keyboard/internet and email. Sessions are available in Bridgnorth, Church Stretton (Mayfair Centre) Ellesmere, Market Drayton, Shifnal, Shrewsbury and Wem.

It has found that people affected by digital exclusion can be young people. Whilst they can use a smart phone or tablet and therefore wouldn't necessarily consider themselves as digitally excluded, to an employer, if they lack basic IT skills (in word, excel, database) they lack skills of use in a work setting. Young people in the NEETs group are particularly at risk. Such IT skills are generally required now for roles which would not appear to need them.

The point was made that digital exclusion is thought to be time limited by some, but as technology improves (introduction of apps etc) if people don't adapt, they too, in turn will become digitally excluded, hence the need to ensure people continually update their skills. Much of the advancements in tele health checks are moving in this direction

In tackling digital exclusion, RCC has found the move towards IPADS and tablets rather than desk based computers can benefit some people – e.g. touch screens are easier to use – the fear of “breaking” something by pressing the wrong button has been removed.

Shorter, 1:1 sessions work as do those offered on a peer basis – e.g. many people want to find something that's of interest to them and they are more likely to find help (and accept it) from people of their own age.

3.3.3 Public Sector agencies

Various departments of Shropshire Council, including County Training, were helpful in giving their views which are summarised below. Jobcentre Plus serving Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin also commented.

3.3.3.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Poor access to the internet (internet speeds and broadband coverage).
- Fear of and access to new technology.
- Lack of awareness of benefits of new technology.
- Availability of learning and support to get started.
- Many people who access County Training services particularly more mature job seekers will shy away from any jobs which require the use of IT, this is becoming increasingly problematic as many jobs even those that require lower skill levels need some element of IT literacy.

3.3.3.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- People in rural communities.
- Older people and people with disabilities, notably sensory impairment.
- Service providers – it is much more expensive to provide face to face contact compared to a website.

3.3.3.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Young people and organisations being economically and educationally disadvantaged by poor access to facilities, this can lead to businesses' moving out of rural communities and the resultant lack of employment for young people.
- Feeling left out of current affairs, consultations and social opportunities. This is becoming more an issue as social media gathers pace; reduced community connectivity.
- Isolation leading to depression and mental health issues.
- Financial hardship if unable to access e-billing, special offers etc..

3.3.3.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Good fast broadband coverage would significantly help young people in rural areas.
- Different solutions for different people; perhaps 80% of people have got some basic understanding, remaining 20% don't and will be much harder to address.
- Hard to reach groups do not learn in a classroom setting; it needs to be one to one which is time consuming and expensive – good tutors and mentors are imperative rather than excellent IT skills – not necessary for basic introductions.

3.3.3.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Community organisations supported by capable staff.

3.3.3.6 It is worth noting the comments of County Training: with colleagues in Adult and Community Learning have been providing training to support unemployed people to access Universal Jobmatch which is the DWP portal to link CVs to job vacancies. Many unemployed people do not have the skills to engage fully with the wider digital agenda and many do not have access to home PC or broadband. The support also identifies a wider skills gap with many people having low confidence in accessing any electronic or learning technologies or able to link to employers through email or website.

3.3.3.7 NB: an indication of the investment and effort made by the Council in recent years to tackle digital exclusion can be illustrated by a synopsis of Shropshire Broadplaces, noted below:

Shropshire Broadplaces are a network of 34 community IT facilities throughout the county. Broadplaces offer local residents, businesses and visitors access to broadband, computers and a range of other equipment. Most of the Broadplaces offer a wireless network and meeting facilities, so local businesses and organisations are encouraged to hire the venues which helps to sustain local activities.

The Broadplaces offer IT training to people who are new to technology. Many learners are older people, however there are also adults who have not needed to use a computer for work but now find that they need the skills now. We have run projects to support job seekers or those who are isolated. The facilities available for businesses or local organisations to hire. Being based in community venues they are very good value and benefit from wifi. Training is delivered by a mixture of staff and experienced volunteers. Many centres are UK online centres.

3.3.3.8 Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

JCP confirmed that each office is set a target for number of job seekers accessing jobsearch on line. The minimum target is 80%; most of the Shropshire offices are hitting the target, average rate is 86%. NB, RHCS view, of course these figures include ALL jobseekers and would therefore not disaggregate into UNEMPLOYED job seekers as opposed to those simply wishing to change jobs. JCP estimates there are 20% who do not access digitally – this affects all age ranges. It is a priority for JCP because it is far cheaper to serve clients on line rather than by phone. Additionally, when Universal Job Match is fully implemented, those digitally excluded will be severely affected. JCP work with partners including the County Council and community based centres in Shropshire. Broadband coverage in rural areas is not good and one hour free access at local libraries is insufficient.

3.4. Organisations offering services in Telford & Wrekin

3.4.1 Housing Providers

Housing providers commenting are: Bromford Housing, Sanctuary Housing, STAY, and Wrekin Housing Trust whilst Bourneville Trust is shown separately at Section 6. Bromford have properties in Shropshire whilst Sanctuary Housing also serves the Marches.

3.4.1.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Within Telford, a major factor is the lower income brackets of many of their beneficiaries – whilst there is easier access to broadband and facilities than in Shropshire, there is more income deprivation in Telford. In Shropshire, it is more about access to services in more isolated areas – and the associated support.
- No interest, no money and no support. Their beneficiaries do not want to learn and people use mobile phones to access to internet as necessary.
- Low income families may struggle to afford internet access and as many use cash for day to day spending and bill payments they don't always have reason to have to access the net for online payments, bill payment, online banking etc..

3.4.1.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion

- Those on lower incomes, and those who are excluded by their location. The former can be younger people – although these do tend to have access to the internet via mobile phones, and the latter tends to be older people.
- Younger homeless people – can access the internet but don't know how to use Microsoft packages and are therefore disadvantaged in the job market.
- Older people lack skills but both generally do not want to admit they can't use computers effectively.
- Those on a low income, in receipt of benefits and elderly tenants who have not had the same experiences of growing up in a digital world.
- NB: In South Telford there is a particular issue of using public transport to access community venues.

3.4.1.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- People are not able to access the information they need to make informed choices and access services and support.
- Employability for young people, they need to be motivated and have the right level of support.
- Possible benefit sanctions: the need to prove job search (on line searching is one way where it can be evidenced).
- Organisations – inability to cut costs via use of on line communications if customers are unable to access required information.

3.4.1.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- There is a need for more 1:1 support, particularly for older people – it is not so easy to deliver on the phone. Group sessions are also helpful, in comfortable user friendly surroundings.
- Small group work, one to one where possible – support needs to be taken to people, their beneficiaries don't like going out to get help.

3.4.1.5 What types of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- This should not be limited – a comprehensive range of organisations can provide support in different but complementary ways.
- People are seemingly unwilling to go out to get help; therefore social housing schemes would appear to be a good route. Some form of community partnership would seem to work best.

- Housing Associations: they have a unique relationship with customers and there is the business case of supporting tenants to claim Universal Credits in order to claim benefits.

NB: Sanctuary Housing has run various pilot schemes across the UK to tackle digital exclusion. Gigs and Megs ran in many areas, including Telford, this was primarily aimed at older people but included Microsoft learning support programmes for young people, this element of the programme has been run at their Foyers.

In Birmingham, it is looking at a “get on line at home” package – e.g. provision of cheap computers and broadband but early indications were that older people not really interested and younger families could not commit to ongoing monthly expenditure.

It is developing a national programme but has identified risks which need to be addressed such as slinking to the internet and providing secure broadband connections for residents.

3.4.2 Voluntary Community Sector

In Telford, the Council for Voluntary Services participated, together with A4U whilst organisations such as CHEC in Madeley, Landau in Wellington and Age UK added comments to the survey questionnaire. However, despite our best efforts, no response was received from the Park Lane Centre in Woodside, a well known local centre.

3.4.2.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Perceived cost of broadband.
- People struggle to connect to broadband when the facility is available. This requires a certain degree of IT knowledge.
- Lack of broadband facilities (especially in rural areas).
- Disabled people can struggle to concentrate due to health issues, claiming benefits can require on line completion of complex forms. Other reasons include lack of access to digital hubs, suitable transport and poor education.
- Older people who fear they will be mis-sold products if they venture to buy anything, therefore they simply choose not to get involved.

3.4.2.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?

- Older people in rural areas are becoming increasingly digitally excluded.
- People on fixed/low incomes.
- Young people – social communication can be conducted via smart phone, for work related activities they need access to computers plus support.

3.4.2.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Higher living/communication costs skype, email and even social media can be a free means of communication with family and friends. These costs are even higher when family and friends live abroad.
- Lack of access to required services which will grow as more services require on line registration/completion.
- Inability to access on line job applications.

3.4.2.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Reducing the fear of the technology is a user friendly way. This does not need to be accredited training.
- Identifying affordable and user friendly means to access the internet – e.g. tablets, mobile phones.
- For distinct client groups, there is a need personal attention, individual support.

3.4.2.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Those with specific knowledge which could be voluntary, community sector working with private and public sector.
- It depends on the client group, but charities and community groups are best placed to understand the needs of specific groups.
- Local organisations which can identify and use individuals who are passionate about the benefits of using the internet to support.

3.4.2.6 NB: Telford CVS has run the highly successful Mix & Match BASIS Lottery funded project for the last 4 years. The aim is to help VCS groups get a web presence as part of a wider sustainability strategy. It is in the process of seeking funding to support a project “Tablets for the Terrified” – aimed at people aged over 60.

3.4.2.7 NB: Shropshire Enterprise Partnership offers business support services and entrepreneurial events to SMEs, sole traders, remote workers and home based business operators. In its view the causes of digital exclusion is a market failure – it is not economic for providers to supply Broadband technology to low numbers of users. Unless the lack of broadband is addressed, further economic degeneration will follow with the predictable impact on communities/society. What is needed is public sector investment to make schemes worthwhile for the private sector to supply.

3.4.3 Public Sector agencies

In Telford, various departments of the Council sent comments. We have also added the views of Telford College of Arts of Technology at the close of this section.

3.4.3.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Finances, motivation, lack of skills and knowledge plus lack of access to public facilities.

- Many service users use the Council's Job Junction drop ins because they cannot access the internet at home and have to prove they are searching and using job seeking sites as part of their agreement with JCP.

3.4.3.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?:

- Those on low incomes, low skilled people and many people aged over 50. These people are worried that they do not have the skills e.g. they will "break equipment". That said people aged 30 plus are much less likely to have good computer skills and an internet connected computer. (Older people likely to have children who access computers at home).
- Younger people who cannot afford to keep updated with "moving" technological advances.

3.4.3.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Jobseekers – exclusion from the labour market because they are unable to compete in the job market, possibly benefit sanctions which could lead to increase in crime rates.
- Those aged 50 plus – cannot perform everyday tasks such as on line options to reduce bills.
- Housebound or disabled people become more socially isolated.

3.4.3.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Easily accessible IT facilities, (some community venues in Telford have such facilities) free at the point of use, engagement activities to show how people will benefit from becoming IT literate, promotion within partner agencies plus those serving distinct client groups, more on line training for shift workers.
- Specifically targeted courses appear to work better e.g. computing for job seekers, IT in retail.
- NB the point was made regarding the proliferation of devices – people can learn on one system but can become confused when presented with a different operating system.

3.4.3.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Those with experience of working with the client group.

3.4.3.6 A comment was made, that the Council had heard from concerned residents that the new development of Lawley Village did not include digital infrastructure discussions at the pre-development stage. However, it has not been possible to confirm if this is the case.

3.4.3.7 Telford College of Arts & Technology (TCAT)

Telford College of Arts and Technology is a large to medium sized college and operates from a single campus in Wellington but provides much of its provision in community venues and on employers' premises. It is primarily a vocational education and training institution. Telford College of Arts and Technology, uniquely for the region, has an Employer Responsive provision which accounts for roughly the same size as the Learner Responsive provision. It employs 637 full time staff. In terms of IT related training available, it delivers a wide range of courses relating to IT and digital media. It has delivered the usual suite of courses that relate to IT user packages including Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. Alongside of this it uses laptops to deliver Photoshop and Digital Camera's. It found that a lot of people do want to have access to Digital media regardless of age and gender. It has had a large number of older learners who wish to use the internet to contact children and other family members across the world. It has also had a number who wish to use eBay.

Digital exclusion can be caused by a lack of access to a computer and the internet. It may be that an individual does not own a computer or it may be they live in an area where there are no local facilities and a poor broadband connection. Another factor is confidence. People may lack confidence in using computers and the Internet. They may not have ever received training and may feel left behind. They may be part of a community that is disengaged from technology (typically the elderly) and will thus not have a network of friends that could help support them to develop their skills. Others may not see its relevance and may reject technology in favour of traditional methods such as the telephone, post and high street shops.

It primarily affects the elderly, those living in rural communities and people with learning difficulties. Although there are adaptive technologies available for the visually impaired, they may also experience barriers to using Information Technology.

The short term effects of digital exclusion are that people will be paying a premium for goods and missing out on some of the good value offers that are available online. They may start to lose access to services such as the television and radio. In the long term they may struggle to participate and operate in a society where more services are only available online. For example the growth of the Universal Job Match and Universal Credit.

In terms of what is needed to tackle digital exclusion, more training and education should be made available in schools, colleges, universities and libraries not only for standard desktop IT but also for mobile technology and other digital media. Awareness needs to be increased of services that are already in existence. Access to public facilities could be opened up to the general public for a small fee (i.e. creating Internet cafes) with staff available to provide guidance. It believes that the best places to offer activities to tackle digital exclusion are places like Libraries, local Colleges, Community Centre's, Churches, Local Government Offices. Each of these could be offering different activities to engage with them.

3.5 Relevant Case Studies

3.5.1 Severnside Housing

Digit@l Den in Meole Brace Shrewsbury

The Digit@l Den is located in Maesbrook Road, Meole Estate, Shrewsbury. It is a partnership between Severnside Housing and Social Telecoms – a CIC. It opened in February 2013. In less than 6 months it has had 3,000 visits, offering 3,500 sessions; figures include multiple visits by some residents, but it is an indication of the popularity of the Den.

It is viewed as a pilot by both parties – essentially Severnside is a social landlord based on an estate with acknowledged social issues. Social Telecoms is an IT company with technical expertise. Severnside was keen to address digital exclusion issues – notably financial exclusion which was an issue for many residents on the estate. To address the issue, it refurbished a vacant flat and shop to provide the Den premises. The location was deliberate, intended to attract attention and secure footfall. It knew that those who cannot access or use the internet (essentially not IT literate) are at risk of not being able to access on line services such as universal job match at Jobcentres or applying for benefit or applying for a new home.

Social Telecoms, a successful commercial IT company, saw establishing the Digit@ Den as a way to contribute to Severnside's social objectives. However it also knew the benefits that a company which could demonstrate genuine "social value" could gain in relation to Government procurement frameworks. It believes it has gained competitive advantage by investing in providing the technical elements of the Den.

What makes the approach very different from traditional IT training is the input of Social Telecoms. It makes brand new technology accessible and affordable to residents on the Estate. The 6 touch screen computers in the Den are designed to ease users into becoming familiar with computer usage. It also has a small training room available for hire to others. A wireless mesh network on the Estate is making IT access possible – a mesh box is "given" to selected house holders (people known to the Den) which then allows other residents close by to pick up wi-fi. "Pay as you go" services are available - £8 per month for home broadband, 30p per day, no contract required. Tablets and refurbished computers are offered at low cost. Memory sticks are available which have weblinks to a range of information such as Benefit entitlement check, Universal Job Match plus a range of Severnside services; it is a new way to make information quickly accessible.

Whilst social telecoms provides the technical input, Severnside staff (2 dedicated officers) provide support which ensures help is available in terms of money advice, job clubs and social media. Users range from school children doing their homework to older people wanting to keep in touch with relatives. Courses are free to Severnside residents and offered at low cost to non Severnside residents. Severnside is also installing computers in its Community Rooms in sheltered housing schemes elsewhere in Shrewsbury and is intent on refurbishing the existing Cyber Café at Castlefields Shrewsbury into another Digit@l Den. It also has an IT resource centre at its' Head Office in Brassey Road Shrewsbury.

The Den is also part of Severnside's 8 week work experience placement (under contract to JCP); Social Telecoms has subsequently employed people as a result of the placement. Both partners are committed to creating job opportunities for local people. The partners view the Den model as a franchise opportunity and are keen to create a "mobile den" to tackle issues of rural exclusion. When asked what they would do differently, the answer is make it bigger. The demand for the small training room has meant some organisations have been turned away. An important aspect for Severnside is the reduction in anti social behaviour on the Estate, which it believes must be due to the success of the Den.

3.5.2 Beechtree Community Centre

Beechtree has been offering digital support since 2006 with the help of Switch on Shropshire. It has 9 lap tops, has worked with Walford & North Shropshire College and has volunteers assisting its tutor. A range of different computer courses are offered. It offers activities to clients of all ages and abilities and over the last year has offered practical digital support to those who are seeking work. The government policy of reassessing disability has led to a large number of people in poor health who have not worked for many years needing help to use the new Universal Jobmatch site, produce a CV and set up an email account. This has expanded the user demographic by offering services to those aged 20-50 who previously did not use the centre. It has been of particular concern to learn that many 20-40 year olds do not possess sufficient computer skills to surf the net and send emails. These people have been employed in mainly unskilled manual work where computers have not been required.

The need to offer support to the growing number of unemployed people became apparent in the summer on 2012 when a steady trickle of clients came from the job centre asking for support to email their CV's in support of job vacancies. Further support became necessary in Oct 2012 when the government launched the Universal Jobmatch site which although it was not mandatory for clients to register, entry to the site became implicit. Despite many clients being in the 20-40 age group a large proportion of them had never learned to use computers. Those in the older age bracket who had worked in manual occupations throughout their lives also struggled to meet the requirements of the job centre. Information supplied by them shows that 25% of job vacancies are only available online and so clients with no IT skills are severely disadvantaged when searching for work.

The future for those unemployed people with no IT skills is particularly concerning as from 2014 the new Universal Credit system is to be rolled out so those needing to apply for benefits can only do so online. At some point, it is likely that those needing to apply for retirement age benefits will also need to apply on line which may result in many people being unable to access the help they need. It concurred with views expressed elsewhere about the causes of digital exclusion; in response to what can result from digital exclusion, it believes:

- More and more goods and services will only be accessible online or at a premium cost.
- Young people feel isolated when their peers have access to the internet and miss out on social networking.
- Schools increasingly put work online and college students have to access Moodle for tutorials. Without access these students would be severely disadvantaged.
- Job seekers will be penalised for not applying for sufficient jobs as they find it difficult to access on line vacancies.
- Older people feel like they are not in touch with society as they are unable to access the internet.
- Less and less information is available in leaflet form as organisations choose online promotion to save their costs. This means that many people will not be able to access important information.
- The biggest concern for any organisation offering internet access is the launch of the Universal Credit system which will start rolling out this year. People on benefits will have to apply on line and many of them will need support to do so.

In terms of what is needed to tackle digital exclusion

The biggest priority has to be the impending launch of universal credit as those of working age will only be able to apply for benefits online.

The unemployed need help with access to telephones and the internet as technology is too expensive for them particularly if they are long term unemployed. Job Centres no longer provide telephones and the cost of mobile contracts may be prohibitive for long term unemployed. Arrangements to support unemployed people with learning in rural areas leave them having to travel up to 25 miles on public transport. Eg a bus from Whitchurch to Shrewsbury takes 1hr 45m.

The 2012 reassessment of those on incapacity benefit has left many people with substantially reduced income and they do not have the funding to pay for tuition. Many people need practical support and a significant number with learning difficulties will **never** be able to access the internet independently.

All school age young people need access to the internet to help with school work and remain included in social networks. Some schools only have 45m lunch break leaving insufficient time to go to library and schools in rural areas prohibit after school usage due to the bus services. This helps with their self-esteem particularly when they come from a low income family.

Elderly people will be able to access goods and services at more favourable rates. The ability to order shopping online will offer those living in isolated areas with limited transport the opportunity to remain independent for longer. Our aging population means that despite people living longer, they are not always fit enough to continue with ordinary tasks such as the weekly shop.

It has also found that it is necessary to revise provision in line with changing client needs – an example here is that more clients are looking to buy tablets rather than laptops and many own smart phones. It is therefore shortly to run a course to incorporate these needs.

In terms of the type of organisations which can help, it was said that voluntary sector organisations are well equipped to offer activities with very low costs providing funding is factored in for time to manage volunteers. This represents excellent value for money with unit cost being vastly reduced. Using voluntary sector premises also provides excellent value as they are not solely used for IT and can offer good value as there is not a building that needs to be maintained. It was also said that some people may struggle to use institutions such as schools and colleges if they have had previous “unsatisfactory” learning experiences.

3.5.3 Bourneville Village Trust (BVT)

BVT's vision was to create a second Bourneville urban village, (the first being established by the Cadbury family in 1878 just outside Birmingham) in Lightmoor, Telford. The aim was to recreate the ethos of George Cadbury by also building a village centre with a school, community centre, shops and green space. Alongside Lightmoor, BVT also owns a number of ex Telford Development Corporation properties, small developments and a number of new homes at Lawley. The Trust also leases out a number of "group homes" to providers of services to vulnerable client groups. Currently BVT owns circa 700 homes in Telford.

Telford has a younger client group (than Birmingham) and whilst no current reliable data is available, it is felt that there is less digital exclusion in this area. However, it is the intention to back up thoughts with stronger data through conversations with residents. The development of our Digital Inclusion Strategy and Tenant Census Survey will better inform us of our tenants' access to IT. In turn, this will help us shape services moving forward.

In terms of what causes digital exclusion: Lack of infrastructure (broadband), location, isolation, ignorance, fear, accessibility, affordability, lack of support and provision. It can affect everyone, but specifically the elderly, vulnerable people, unemployed/low income families.

In terms of the effects of digital exclusion:

Short term:

Lack of access to the job market, inability to present professionally eg CV for interview, no access to affordable shopping sites including energy, food, luxury goods, loans.

Long term:

Lack of community capacity, higher levels of unemployment. Households being more detached from the world at large and education. Less well informed, poorer communities, lack of contribution to the economy at large.

In terms of what is needed to address digital exclusion: Low cost broadband, access locally to IT equipment, support and learning delivered locally. Low cost hardware provision. Data to understand needs.

BVT has established the Oak Tree Centre at Lightmoor Village in an effort to address digital exclusion. It is a UK Online Centre which means offer free online training, support and guidance is offered to those that are digitally excluded in its' community. It has 12 high specification desktop computers and a range of software. The Centre and services are open to all with help and support provided UK online centres use the Learn My Way website to help new or nervous users get online for the first time. As well as 'tasters' and fun stuff to try out, the Learn My Way website also hosts the Online Basics and Online Plus packages. Online Basics will help learners get to grips with the basics of computers and the internet, including getting to grips with using a mouse, using a keyboard and email. Online Plus is designed to help learners become confident internet users, able to fill in forms, shop and bank online. One of the most popular services for older residents is online grocery shopping.

Good partnership working is in evidence with JCP making referrals for clients who need help with CVs and mandatory job searches. BVT also works with TCAT and the Local Authority's community team. Every year there is a national 'Get Online Week' this is used to attract new users and host special sessions for existing users. Last year it had 'Tea, Toast and T'Internet' and 'Computers and Cupcakes' sessions. This enables BVT to show that IT is fun and not to be scared of.

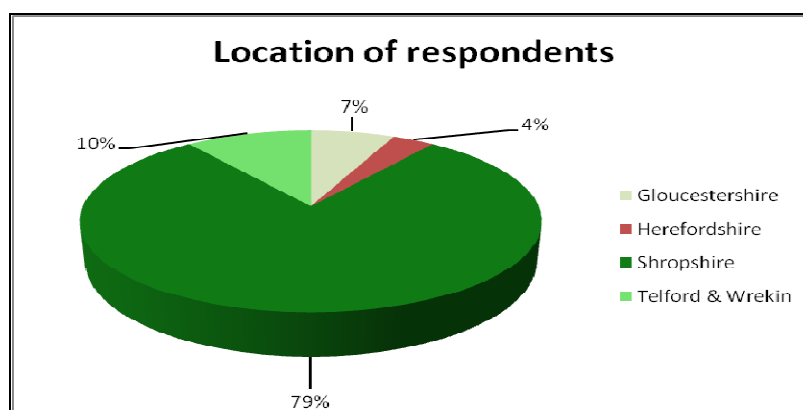
Digital Inclusion needs to take place locally and should be accessible to all, anyone can be a digital champion and can go from learner to teacher very quickly. It's about passing on knowledge, getting communities involved and creating good partnerships with other organisations.

BVT provided short case studies of local people which had benefitted greatly from being IT aware.

3.6 Results of the Survey

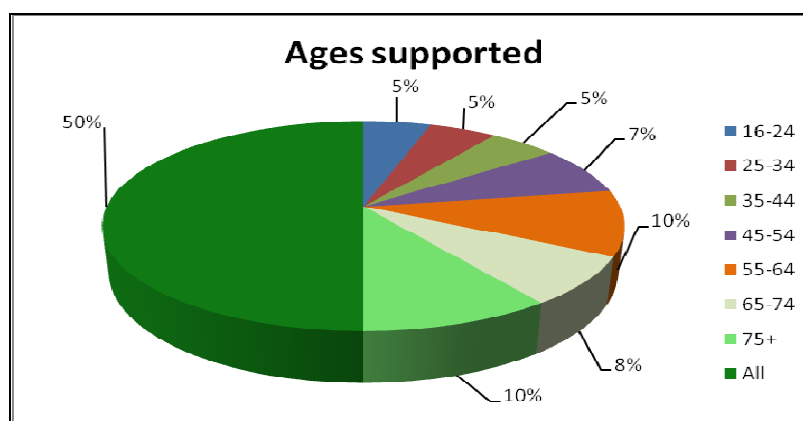
3.6.1 An opportunity was given to a wide range of organisations across the area to contribute to the research via a short tick box questionnaire. A total of 26 responses were received. The profile of respondents is as follows:

3.6.1.1 Area from which responses were received. As can be seen below, the majority were from Shropshire, with limited numbers from the other counties:



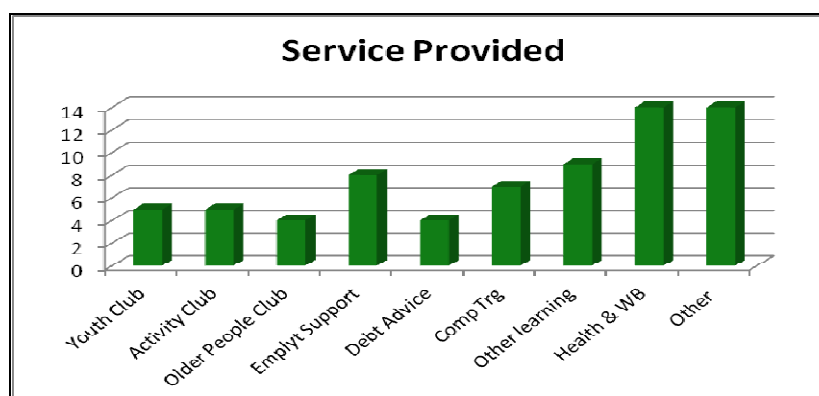
Within the largest representation, Shropshire, over 60% provided services across the whole county, with South Shropshire next best represented at 13%. Of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire responses, all were countywide, with the exception of 1 in Cheltenham.

3.6.1.2 When asked the age groups served, again the majority represented all ages:



Of the remainder, the majority supported older people, with only 5% supporting 16-24 year olds.

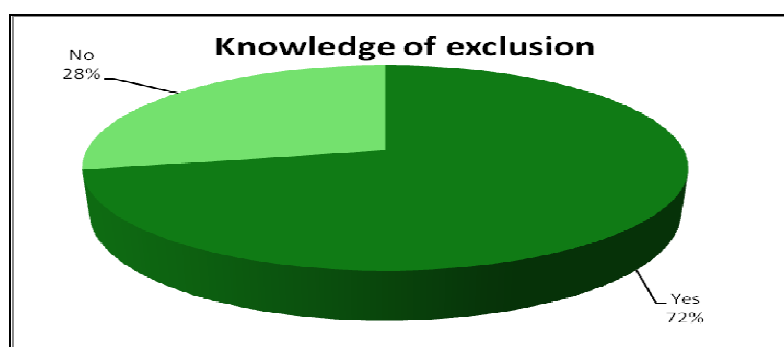
3.6.1.3 The types of services being offered by respondents fell into a range of categories:



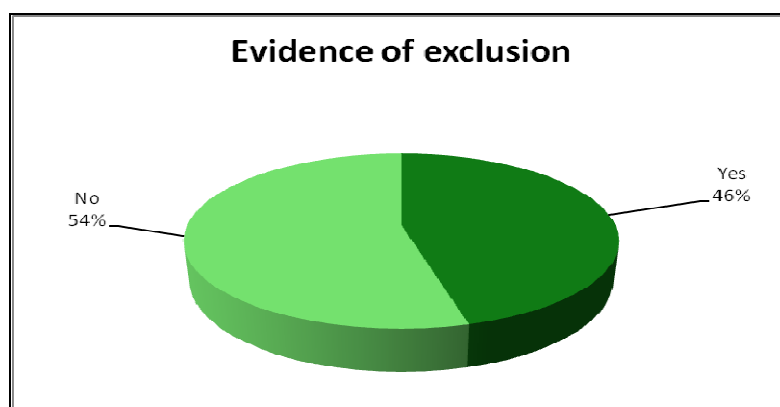
Other included arts and crafts, sight loss services, library services and empowerment.

3.6.1.4 When asked if they help tackle digital exclusion, 58% of respondents confirmed they did.

3.6.2 Turning to the main purpose of the survey, respondents were then asked about their knowledge of digital exclusion, the majority stating that they have knowledge:

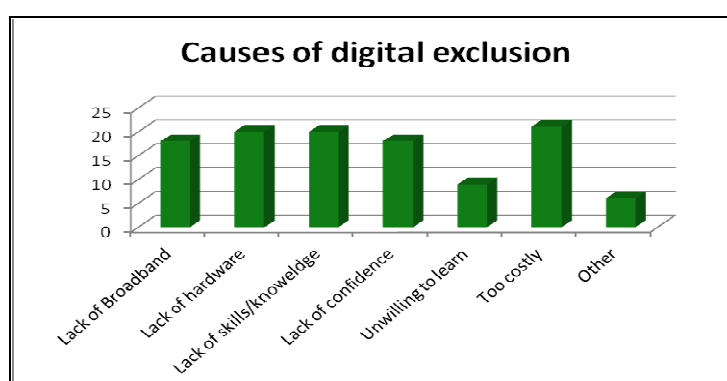


Similarly when asked if they had evidence, there was still a significant proportion – almost 50% - that did – albeit anecdotal evidence rather than quantitative:



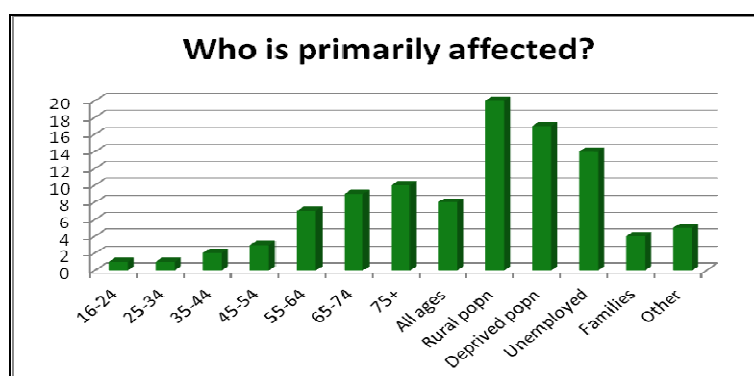
Some 35% of these stating they had evidence, commented that they had other research reports highlighting digital exclusion as an issue.

3.6.3 People were requested to identify what they believed to be the cause(s) of digital exclusion. Here, results were not dissimilar to those referred to in the interviews above:



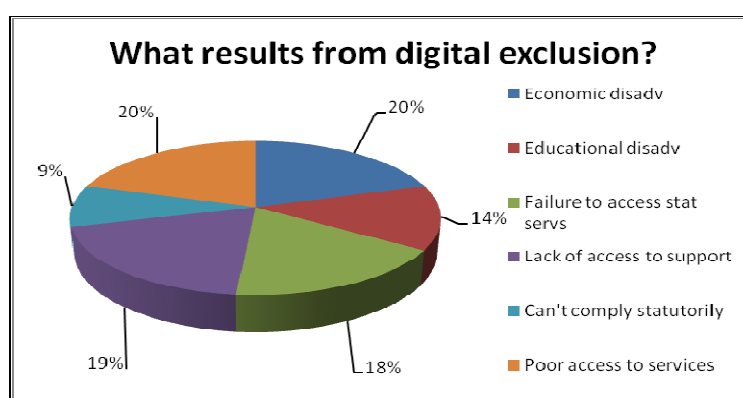
Most respondents identified several of the options as likely causes.

3.6.4 When asked who is primarily affected by digital exclusion, the following profile of results emerged:

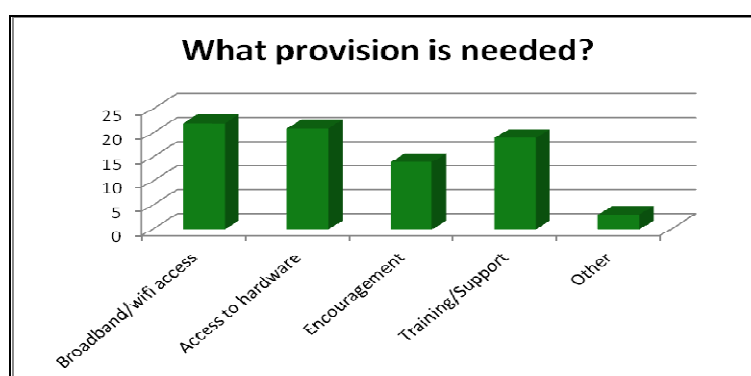


As one would expect, given the profile of respondents, the rural population is seen to be the most detrimentally affected, closely followed by those living in deprived neighbourhoods and those unemployed. Whilst there is an increase across the age ranges, it is notable, that age is not the most frequently cited reason for being affected.

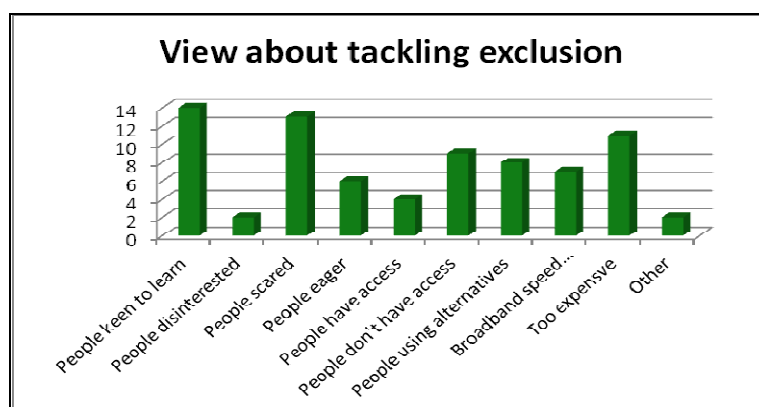
- 3.6.5 Having identified who is affected by digital exclusion, the survey next turned to what results from digital exclusion. As can be seen in the chart below, the range of options were reasonably even in responses, with the least chosen being the ability to comply with statutory requirements:



- 3.6.6 When asked to identify what sort of support and services would help tackle exclusion, some commonality again surfaced:

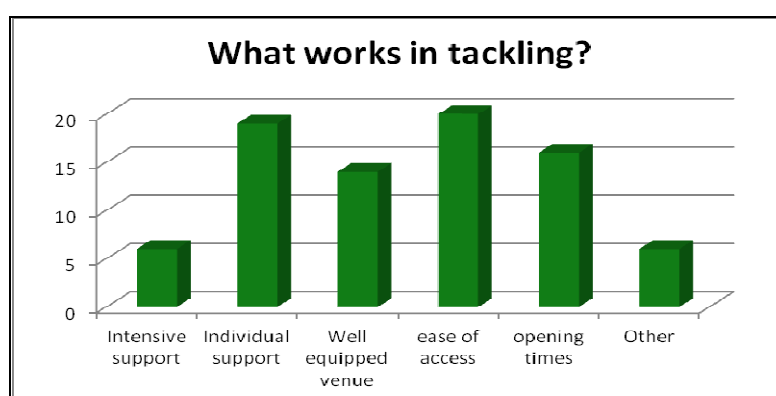


It highlights that particularly the tangible equipment and broadband access are vital, however, when asked a subsequent question about the perspective of people needing help, there were clearly other factors impacting:

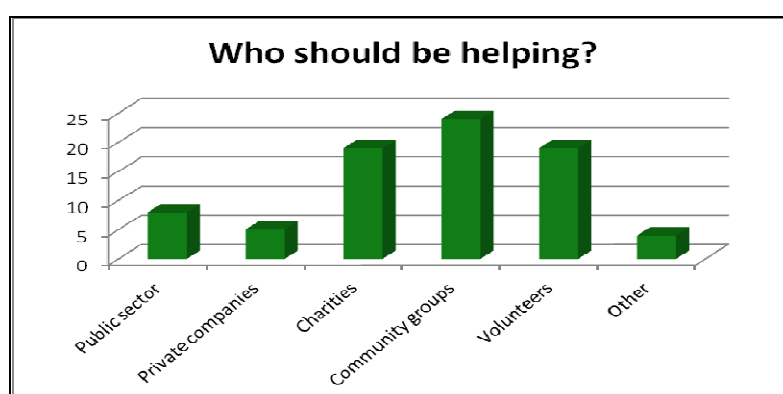


It was commented that the issues are very personal, and often relate to the age and situation of the individual – hence the somewhat contradictory results e.g. people can be keen to learn, but some can be scared and disinterested..

- 3.6.7 We wanted to gather people's views about what works when tackling digital exclusion, again a range of factors appear to apply:



Access is the most frequently cited, with adequate support also featuring highly. A further question related to who might be best placed to offer the support required. Here the resounding response was the third sector in all its guises:



It was felt that they were best placed to help as they understand and belong within the communities they serve. Other oft mentioned responses included a range – as each sector has its part to play.

- 3.6.8 Clearly, the survey results suggest that knowledge and awareness of digital exclusion is common, with many smaller voluntary and community groups trying to support increasing inclusion. Whilst anecdotal evidence is plentiful, tangible evidence is less easy to come by, although the ONS statistics do go some way to indicating the levels of exclusion.

In line with statistics, the survey confirms that age, rurality and deprivation are all key factors leading to increased likelihood of digital exclusion. It also confirms that this can have significant impact on the lives of those who struggle to access the internet. Effective broadband coverage, community facilities and support (which are accessible and personally directed) are all key elements needed to reduce digital exclusion.

3.7 Overall conclusions relating to the above

3.7.1 Reasons for digital exclusion:

- Lack of broadband connection in rural areas
- The costs associated with internet usage, those affected by digital exclusion are in many cases unable to pay
- Lack of confidence to take the first step towards digital inclusion
- Lack of opportunity to gain suitable skills due to lack of venue/support

3.7.2 Who is affected by digital exclusion?:

- Older people; some of whom choose actively NOT to get involved
- Younger people who may be active in social media but lack work related skills
- People living in rural communities
- People on fixed/low incomes
- Unemployed people – the move to on line Universal Job Match will adversely affect them
- Middle aged people who do not update skills to keep abreast of technological advances (apps); they too, in time, will become digitally excluded
- Organisations/service providers:
 - through increasing costs due to rising support demands from service users
 - if clients cannot secure benefits, rent arrears/debts may follow
 - inability to reduce costs to take advantage of on line communications

3.7.3 What results from digital exclusion?

- Inability to access an increasing range of on line services, notably benefits, house choices, job search, internet banking, on line shopping.
- Increasing costs due to lack of access to on line “deals”
- Inability to compete in the job market; many jobs are on line and many require a level of IT skills
- A range of health issues, notably mental health issues, depression
- Affects are felt more deeply in rural areas; as services are withdrawn/closed (libraries/post offices) the opportunity to access services (car tax registration) is lost
- Reduced community connectivity – digitally are unable to engage at the same level

3.7.4 What is required to tackle digital exclusion?

- Easily accessibly, supportive, community based venues; “soft” engagement
- One to one individual support; peer mentors/volunteers work well in offering basic introduction to internet/IT usage
- Longer term investment from public agencies to ensure consistent broadband connectivity and ongoing support from suitable organisations
- Targeted training; one size doesn’t fit all, particularly for groups with distinct needs
- Ongoing support/advice given the proliferation and increasing speed of change in IT devices
- The move towards the use of touch screens, noted by several contributors, should be noted in terms of designing future support interventions.

3.7.5 What type of organisations are best placed to offer such support?

- Organisations which are well rooted, established, known in local communities
- Those which have the technical expertise/volunteer base and required equipment to offer support as necessary.
- Typically, Housing Associations which have a vested interest to take action on digital exclusion and voluntary/community groups. That said, partner working including Local Authorities and Colleges have also been mentioned as part of research.

3.8 County coverage

It is difficult to offer definitive conclusions on the likely “position” of each of the areas within the research base. As section 2 comments, there are variations in geographic size and population demographics.

However, it is true to say that there has been a greater response from Shropshire and this may in part be due to the nature of the VCS in the County. There are strong partnerships in the South of the County between Shropshire Housing Group, The Furniture Scheme and the Mayfair Centre. In the North, the Beechtree Centre and Oswestry Community Action offer support whilst centrally there is the, much mentioned by contributors, flagship project of Severnside's Digit@l Den. Shropshire Council has also invested in tackling digital exclusion and the work of Shropshire RCC in "Get Shropshire on line" is notable.

In Gloucestershire, it would seem Housing Associations are working together to put in place responses to digital exclusion, whilst Gloucestershire RCC has assisted older people.

The low response rate from Herefordshire prevents an accurate picture being presented. However, it would seem from comments gained, rural broadband is an issue and there are similar presenting groups and associated problems as those seen elsewhere.

Telford, whilst the smallest geographical area but has the highest density of population, despite having only 30% of the borough being classed as urban; thus "rural" broadband remains an issue in parts of the area. It is evident both the Local Authority together with Telford College of Arts & Technology, plus the VCS are well placed and poised to assist in addressing digital exclusion.

3.9. The needs of disabled people

Several organisations got in touch to highlight the specific needs of disabled people in relation to digital exclusion. The need for tailor made interventions by specialist organisations was made clear, notably by organisations working in sensory impairment.

It was said provision for visually impaired people particularly was sadly lacking in Shropshire and Telford with a real need to recognise this was a waste economic resource. Technology could make huge differences to visually impaired people in terms of assisting independence and enabling them to participate in the workplace. The point was also made, with an aging population in Shropshire with sight loss a probable health risk, action needs to be taken.

Similarly the needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were also highlighted. The need for reasonable adjustments to be made to accommodate them was stated. Similarly the need for sympathetic, ongoing support was a requirement.

3.10 Synergy with the findings of the Land Based Sector Task & Finish Group.

In terms of synergy with other Task & Finish Groups, the findings of the Land Based Sector Group has some resonance with the conclusions noted above. This group use the number of email addresses held for members as a proxy for digital exclusion. Therefore, the figures for the National Farmers Union in Shropshire & Herefordshire show that collectively across the Marches, the figure stands at 52.5% (Shropshire stands at 53.8% and Herefordshire at 50.27%). In the West of both Counties, the percentage with email addresses falls to as low as 30%. This may suggest that access to rural broadband is a particular barrier in some areas. Such findings would imply that the rate of digital exclusion is considerable. The age profile within the NFU

has not been provided, therefore it is not clear whether age is a key factor. The move to online submission of a range of required information, from 2015, could well mean that financial hardship could ensue with possible delays to payment resulting from digital exclusion.

4. Proposed interventions to meet the identified needs

- 4.1 There is an obvious need for initial and on going support to enable people to gain sufficient skills to gain maximum benefit from becoming “digitally included”. It has been said such support would be best offered in well known community based venues. Many such venues already exist throughout the area under research.

Whilst that may be sufficient for some, notably older (retired) people who typically wish/need to access on line services to keep in touch with relatives and take advantage of on line deals, there remains the ongoing need to cover the ongoing costs of broadband connectivity and purchase of suitable hardware.

Additionally, for younger people the need to gain sufficient skills to compete in the job market and be able to search and apply for jobs at a time of their choosing, demands longer opening hours of existing community facilities or enabling them to fund the costs of broadband connectivity and associated hardware.

Sevenside’s Digit@l Den is worth mentioning as it appears to fuse both the need for a community based venue and access to low cost on line services in a locality. To do one without the other, may lead to short term gains but less of a longer term benefit. The project is still within its first year of operation and usage and outcomes being monitored on an on going basis. Talking to other Housing Associations it is clear that most, if not all, are working on digital inclusion strategies. Whilst some will undoubtedly take a different approach to Sevenside, all will have the aim of benefitting service users and reducing operational costs in the long term.

Thus the motivation for Housing Associations to take positive action to address digital exclusion has been notable. The recognition that failure to do so will lead to increasing operational costs, is a key business imperative. Thus, such organisations would appear well placed to lead on innovative approaches to addressing digital exclusion.

However, the role of other partners, both in the voluntary and public sector (particularly those working in a consortia type approach on a geographic basis) is worth considering as a way forward. Harnessing the different expertise available could pay dividends in tackling the increasing urgent problem of digital exclusion.

APPENDIX I - REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Interviewees

Organisation	Clients served/services offered	County base
Bromford Housing	Social housing provider	Gloucester & Telford & Wrekin
Gloucester City Homes	Social landlord - manages 4,800 properties of behalf of Gloucester City Council; homes are within the City hence broadband connectivity is not an issue	Gloucestershire
Gloucestershire Rural Community Council	Leading infrastructure organisations serving groups and individuals County wide	Gloucestershire
Two Rivers Housing	Social housing Association - responsible for stock transfer from Forest of Dean properties, also has new build in Gloucester City and South Hereford	Gloucestershire/Herefordshire
Herefordshire CAB	Advice provider	Herefordshire
HOPE Family Centre	Runs training courses and ICT drop in for the local community	Herefordshire Bromyard
Jobcentre Plus (part of DWP)	Serves over 20 million UK customers providing welfare and pension services	Herefordshire
Marches Access Point	Community Centre offering training - all members of the community are offered use of Microsoft packages. MAP also provide a number of courses some accredited, some not.	Kington, North Herefordshire.
South Wye Regeneration Partnership/Kindle South Wye Development Trust	Delivers a range of support activities to residents of South Wye - beneficiaries live in the most deprived areas of Herefordshire with high numbers of unemployed people, families living in poverty, with ill health and literacy issues. The organisation offers services from the Kindle Centre which offers drop in computer use, debt advice, healthy lifestyle activities etc.	Herefordshire
A4U Action Advice Advocacy	Empowers disabled people and their families to make informed decisions	Shropshire
Age Concern Shropshire	Offers advice and support to residents aged 55 plus	Shropshire & Telford
County Training	Training provider	Shropshire
Job Centre Plus		Shropshire & Telford
Oswestry Community Action	Main client group is older people and those with mobility and other health and social care needs. Befriending and	Oswestry, Shropshire

	shopping services are offered. Other ages are served through arts based provision. Has an IT learning centre.	
Revive	Furniture recycling social enterprise working with homeless people	Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin
Rural Community Council of Shropshire	Infrastructure organisation assisting groups throughout Shropshire It has run various IT based initiatives in the County, notably "Get Shropshire on Line"	Based in Shrewsbury, offers outreach across Shropshire
Shropshire Council	Shropshire Broadplaces	Shropshire
Shropshire Council	Provision of Adult Care Services	Shropshire
Shropshire Enterprise Partnership	Social enterprise and young entrepreneur start up support	Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin
Shropshire Housing Alliance (SHA)	Assists people in housing need, aged 18 up, particularly those who are homeless, offering advice and support to enable them to change their circumstances.	Works across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin; is part of Wrekin Housing Trust.
Shropshire Housing Group	Offers housing management and housing support including statutory landlord duties.	Works in North and South Shropshire,
Strettons Mayfair Trust	Rural community and healthy living centre in Church Stretton, South Shropshire – offers services to the "Strettons" population 7,000 and elsewhere in Shropshire. Services/activities include: information and advice. Has high percentage of retired people, but also works with JCP to reduce unemployment and is working with GP practice. It is a UK Online centre.	South Shropshire
The Furniture Scheme	Based in South Shropshire, operates services from Craven Arms Community Centre and the Rockspring Centre in Sandpits Ludlow. It has established a community hub based approach in local communities. Also offers refurbished furniture. Focuses on those in need of help to find employment and offers community based activities. At Craven Arms, a range of rooms are available for hire by businesses and local community groups.	South Shropshire
Beechtree Community Centre	An independent community centre which is a registered charity offering activities and services in a rural community. Activities are community lead and are designed to enhance clients physical and mental wellbeing.	Whitchurch, North Shropshire

Sanctuary Housing	National housing association.	Serves the Marches area with one site in Telford.
A4U - Telford	Empowers disabled people and their families to make informed decisions	Telford & Wrekin
Telford & Wrekin Council Community Learning Team.	Aims to engage new clients and set up community based courses in response to local need.	Telford: Work on an outreach basis promoting adult education opportunities. It has a strong focus on Arleston, Brookside, College, Cuckoo Oak, Donnington Malinslee and Woodside.
Bourneville Village Trust	Social Housing provider: general needs housing- rented and shared ownership, sheltered housing, residential and nursing home, Learning Difficulties homes, Extra Care housing, Almshouse Trust.	Telford & Wrekin
STAY	Supported housing for young people	Telford & Wrekin
Telford College of Arts and Technology	Training provider	Telford & Wrekin
Telford & Wrekin CVS	Infrastructure support to the voluntary sector	Telford & Wrekin
Wrekin Housing Trust	Social housing provider	Telford & Wrekin

Survey Respondents

Organisation	County/type
Age UK	Shropshire/VCS
Bridgnorth District Furniture Scheme	Shropshire/VCS
CHEC, Madeley	Telford
Churchdown Parish Council	Gloucester Parish Council
Citizens Advice	Shropshire
Citizen engagement CIC	Shropshire
DASH	Shropshire/VCS
Grow Cook Share	South Shropshire
Hadley & Leegomery Council	Telford/ Parish council
Herefordshire Artisans	Herefordshire/VCS
Home-Start	Shropshire/VCS
Landau	Telford/VCS
Pisces	Operates throughout the Marches
SSAFA	Shropshire/VCS
Services for Independent Living	Leominster, Hereford
Severnside Housing	Shropshire/VCS
Shropshire Carers Info. Central	Shropshire/VCS
Shropshire Disability Network	Shropshire/VCS
Shropshire Infrastructure P'ship & RCC	Shropshire/VCS
Shropshire Libraries	Shropshire/Public
Shropshire MIND	Shropshire/VCS
Sight Loss Shropshire	Shropshire/VCS
South Shropshire Furniture Scheme	Shropshire/VCS
Stirchley & Brookside Parish Council	Telford /Parish Council
Taking Part	Shropshire/VCS
Trefoil Guild	Shropshire/VCS
Wylde Woods	Shropshire/VCS
YSS 16	Shropshire/VCS

Organisations given opportunity to contribute but did not:

Organisation	County/Type
Herefordshire Council (communities/housing/rural services)	Herefordshire
Herefordshire Housing Ltd	Herefordshire
Kemble Housing	Herefordshire
Marches Housing Association	Herefordshire
29 Parish councils	Various
15 Voluntary organisations	Various

Plus:

- 230 survey recipients via Telford & Wrekin CVS;
- unknown number of survey recipients distributed by HVOSS
- unknown number of survey recipients distributed by Shropshire Voluntary Sector Assembly

Appendix II – Herefordshire Housing Ltd – Client Data

Digitally Excluded Mosaic Types By Locality - HHL Customers	Number	Percentage of Digitally Excluded Profile	Locality - HHL	Number	Percentage of Overall HHL Digitally Excluded Profile
Bartonsham	12	0.34%	Newton Farm	637	18.29%
L 55	1	0.03%	Hunderton	443	12.72%
M 56	11	0.32%	Redhill	359	10.31%
Belmont	16	0.46%	Ross-On-Wye	339	9.73%
K48	1	0.03%	Putson	322	9.24%
L 55	4	0.11%	Hereford	164	4.71%
M 56	8	0.23%	Hinton	160	4.59%
M 57	3	0.09%	College	153	4.39%
Burghill	16	0.46%	Moor Farm	127	3.65%
L 52	1	0.03%	Kingstone	83	2.38%
L 54	1	0.03%	Whitecross	81	2.33%
M 56	14	0.40%	Tupsley	51	1.46%
Clehonger	43	1.23%	Moorfields	45	1.29%
K48	1	0.03%	Clehonger	43	1.23%
K49	1	0.03%	Fownhope	39	1.12%
K51	3	0.09%	Holmer	39	1.12%
L 54	2	0.06%	Weston-under-Penyard	36	1.03%
M 56	13	0.37%	Madley	34	0.98%
M 57	1	0.03%	Withington	33	0.95%
M 59	21	0.60%	Portfields	30	0.86%
N61	1	0.03%	Credenhill	28	0.80%
College	153	4.39%	Westfields	25	0.72%
K48	36	1.03%	Coughton	21	0.60%
K49	2	0.06%	Marden	21	0.60%
K50	8	0.23%	Hampton Park	19	0.55%
K51	67	1.92%	Moreton-on-Lugg	19	0.55%
M 56	34	0.98%	Ewyas Harold	18	0.52%
N61	5	0.14%	Belmont	16	0.46%
O68	1	0.03%	Burghill	16	0.46%
Coughton	21	0.60%	Cusop	13	0.37%
K48	1	0.03%	Bartonsham	12	0.34%
L 52	1	0.03%	Goodrich	9	0.26%
L 54	6	0.17%	Much Dewchurch	6	0.17%
M 56	10	0.29%	Kings Capse	5	0.14%
M 58	1	0.03%	Holme Lacy	4	0.11%
M 59	2	0.06%	Longtown	3	0.09%

Credenhill	28	0.80%	Peterchurch	3	0.09%
K49	2	0.06%	Stretton Sugwas	2	0.06%
K51	4	0.11%	Llangrove	1	0.03%
M 56	22	0.63%	Walford	1	0.03%
Cusop	13	0.37%	Whitchurch	1	0.03%
L 52	8	0.23%		3483	100.00%
L 53	5	0.14%			
Ewyas Harold	18	0.52%			
L 53	2	0.06%			
L 54	16	0.46%			
Fownhope	39	1.12%			
K49	1	0.03%			
K50	1	0.03%			
L 54	10	0.29%			
M 56	27	0.78%			
Goodrich	9	0.26%			
K50	5	0.14%			
K51	3	0.09%			
N61	1	0.03%			
Hampton Park	19	0.55%			
M 56	4	0.11%			
M 57	14	0.40%			
M 59	1	0.03%			
Hereford	164	4.71%			
K48	8	0.23%			
K49	4	0.11%			
L 54	7	0.20%			
M 56	35	1.00%			
M 57	23	0.66%			
M 58	1	0.03%			
M 59	75	2.15%			
N60	3	0.09%			
N61	6	0.17%			
O67	2	0.06%			
Hinton	160	4.59%			
K48	5	0.14%			
K49	1	0.03%			
K50	3	0.09%			
K51	58	1.67%			
L 55	1	0.03%			
M 56	13	0.37%			

M 57	13	0.37%		
M 59	2	0.06%		
N61	42	1.21%		
O67	3	0.09%		
O68	13	0.37%		
O69	6	0.17%		
Holme Lacy	4	0.11%		
M 56	4	0.11%		
Holmer	39	1.12%		
K48	7	0.20%		
K50	2	0.06%		
L 55	1	0.03%		
M 56	4	0.11%		
M 57	1	0.03%		
M 59	24	0.69%		
Hundertton	443	12.72%		
K48	15	0.43%		
K49	18	0.52%		
K50	15	0.43%		
K51	72	2.07%		
M 56	32	0.92%		
M 57	61	1.75%		
M 58	2	0.06%		
M 59	5	0.14%		
N60	7	0.20%		
N61	140	4.02%		
N66	2	0.06%		
O67	47	1.35%		
O68	13	0.37%		
O69	14	0.40%		
Kings Caple	5	0.14%		
L 52	1	0.03%		
L 53	4	0.11%		
Kingstone	83	2.38%		
K50	64	1.84%		
K51	1	0.03%		
L 53	1	0.03%		
M 56	2	0.06%		
O67	2	0.06%		
O68	5	0.14%		
O69	8	0.23%		

Lea	22	0.63%			
K49	3	0.09%			
K50	6	0.17%			
L 53	1	0.03%			
L 54	3	0.09%			
M 56	7	0.20%			
M 59	2	0.06%			
Llangrove	1	0.03%			
L 53	1	0.03%			
Longtown	3	0.09%			
L 53	2	0.06%			
L 54	1	0.03%			
Madley	34	0.98%			
K51	12	0.34%			
L 54	2	0.06%			
M 56	20	0.57%			
Marden	21	0.60%			
K49	2	0.06%			
L 53	1	0.03%			
L 54	16	0.46%			
M 56	2	0.06%			
Moor Farm	127	3.65%			
K48	4	0.11%			
K49	1	0.03%			
K50	20	0.57%			
K51	32	0.92%			
M 56	6	0.17%			
M 57	3	0.09%			
M 59	18	0.52%			
N60	5	0.14%			
N61	4	0.11%			
O67	1	0.03%			
O68	33	0.95%			
Moorfields	45	1.29%			
K48	5	0.14%			
K51	3	0.09%			
L 55	4	0.11%			
M 56	14	0.40%			
M 57	17	0.49%			
N61	1	0.03%			
O67	1	0.03%			

Moreton-on-Lugg	19	0.55%			
K50	3	0.09%			
K51	13	0.37%			
M 56	3	0.09%			
Much Dewchurch	6	0.17%			
L 54	6	0.17%			
Newton Farm	637	18.29%			
K48	11	0.32%			
K49	28	0.80%			
K50	34	0.98%			
K51	101	2.90%			
M 56	9	0.26%			
M 57	12	0.34%			
N60	14	0.40%			
N61	242	6.95%			
O67	38	1.09%			
O68	19	0.55%			
O69	129	3.70%			
Peterchurch	3	0.09%			
M 56	3	0.09%			
Portfields	30	0.86%			
K48	8	0.23%			
K51	1	0.03%			
L 54	2	0.06%			
M 56	6	0.17%			
M 57	2	0.06%			
M 59	11	0.32%			
Putson	322	9.24%			
K48	7	0.20%			
K49	3	0.09%			
K50	23	0.66%			
L 54	1	0.03%			
M 56	25	0.72%			
M 57	106	3.04%			
M 58	1	0.03%			
M 59	14	0.40%			
N60	9	0.26%			
N61	76	2.18%			
O67	36	1.03%			
O68	3	0.09%			
O69	18	0.52%			

Redhill	359	10.31%			
K48	26	0.75%			
K49	19	0.55%			
K50	146	4.19%			
K51	16	0.46%			
M 56	37	1.06%			
M 57	1	0.03%			
M 58	4	0.11%			
M 59	46	1.32%			
N60	3	0.09%			
N61	21	0.60%			
O67	27	0.78%			
O68	2	0.06%			
O69	11	0.32%			
Ross-On-Wye	339	9.73%			
K48	4	0.11%			
K49	10	0.29%			
K50	15	0.43%			
K51	83	2.38%			
L 54	4	0.11%			
L 55	14	0.40%			
M 56	70	2.01%			
M 57	28	0.80%			
M 58	7	0.20%			
M 59	35	1.00%			
N61	25	0.72%			
O67	13	0.37%			
O68	21	0.60%			
O69	10	0.29%			
Stretton Sugwas	2	0.06%			
L 55	1	0.03%			
M 56	1	0.03%			
Tupsley	51	1.46%			
K48	6	0.17%			
K50	1	0.03%			
K51	18	0.52%			
M 56	9	0.26%			
N61	8	0.23%			
O68	9	0.26%			
Walford	1	0.03%			
L 54	1	0.03%			

Westfields	25	0.72%			
K48	9	0.26%			
K49	2	0.06%			
K51	5	0.14%			
M 56	9	0.26%			
Weston-under-Penyard	36	1.03%			
L 52	15	0.43%			
L 53	12	0.34%			
L 54	6	0.17%			
M 56	2	0.06%			
M 59	1	0.03%			
Whitchurch	1	0.03%			
L 53	1	0.03%			
Whitecross	81	2.33%			
K48	26	0.75%			
K49	1	0.03%			
K50	2	0.06%			
K51	10	0.29%			
M 56	42	1.21%			
Withington	33	0.95%			
K50	12	0.34%			
K51	20	0.57%			
M 56	1	0.03%			
Grand Total	3483	100.00%			