POLICY BRIEF · IFB GAMING RESEARCH · NOVEMBER 2026

Stress-testing 2026's digital inclusion evidence: seven questions from the frontline

A one-page summary for policymakers, funders and councils. Full digest: ifbgaming.com/critical-reading-2026-digital-inclusion-evidence

1 in 3
UK adults are "comfortably online"

34m
adults online but facing barriers or vulnerabilities

72%
of adults lack confidence using AI

45%
of households with children below the Minimum Digital Living Standard

THE R&D LENS. Good Things Foundation's 2026 research tells us, better than ever, **who** is digitally excluded. Building on it, we ask **why**, **for how long** and **who is responsible**:

1. **Exclusion is a journey, not a state.** People move in and out of it every month.
2. **Systems exclude, not just skills gaps.** Service design can shut people out.
3. **Organisations can be excluded too,** and the people they serve inherit it.

Seven questions from the frontline

Q1 **Journeys or snapshots?** People fall out of inclusion when data runs out or a SIM expires. Only 11% of responding councils use long-term outcome tracking to a moderate or great extent (LGA, 2026).

Q2 **The person or the system?** Indicators measure what people lack, not the forms and portals that shut them out.

Q3 **Who is excluded inside the home?** One shared phone can make a whole household look connected.

Q4 **Is confidence the right test for AI?** Some of the most confident users are the most at risk. Measure safe, critical use.

Q5 **What difference did support make?** Self-reported outcomes need funded follow-up and comparison data.

Q6 **Who has a say before services change?** Councils face funding pressure and expectations to digitise; residents need a voice in decisions, not just help afterwards.

Q7 **Are organisations included?** Some community organisations can't access their own website or accounts. Their exclusion becomes their residents'.

Data gaps from south London. Around 4,200 Southwark households live in temporary accommodation, but no data shows how many can get online. And nothing we reviewed links language to digital exclusion.

Asks of national government

DWP
Keep a supported non-digital route into Universal Credit, with data and device support for claimants who need it.

NHS ENGLAND
An equal offline route for every digital route to care; fund digital inclusion as a health inequalities measure.

MHCLG
Treat connectivity as part of a decent home, including temporary accommodation.

DSIT
Measure inclusion over time, and fund community organisations' own digital capacity.

ACROSS GOVERNMENT
Tackle data poverty as an ongoing cost, not a one-off.

Learning from Greater Manchester

The UK's most joined-up model: an open taskforce, a resident survey, a social housing pilot and the Digital Exclusion Risk Index, which covers every council in England. We are testing it alongside our Southwark Digital Inclusion Ecosystem Atlas to map where need and local support don't meet.

Testing together in 2027. We are sharing these questions with Good Things Foundation and would like to see them explored across the National Digital Inclusion Network. Share your view: **cas@ifbgaming.com**

IFB Gaming Ltd, company no. 12374867 · ifbgaming.com · Sources: Good Things Foundation (Digital Nation 2026; Minimum Digital Living Standard 2025; Indicators of Digital Inclusion; Strengthening a place-based approach, 2026); Local Government Association Digital Communities Survey 2026; Southwark Council Executive report, 15 September 2026; GMCA Digital Exclusion Risk Index. Interpretations are IFB Gaming's own.