



## CASE STUDY

# Bridging the Digital Divide in Manchester



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL





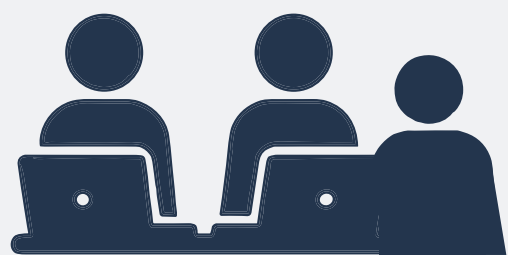
# Manchester

## A City Striving for Digital Equity

Manchester is officially the UK's top digital tech city and is home to a £5 billion digital ecosystem.<sup>1</sup> It is a vibrant city, home to a multitude of individuals, communities, and organisations dedicated to enhancing digital access for everyone.

However, this ambition faces hurdles. Many residents, local services and charitable groups grapple with the realities of the digital divide – the gap between those who have access to digital technology and skills, and those who don't. In fact,

**1.6 million**  
people in the UK are  
currently living offline.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>[Why Manchester is the Top City in the UK for Digital Tech Startups - Benoit Properties](#)

<sup>2</sup>[lb-consumer-digital-index-2024-report.pdf](#)



To drive an inclusive economic recovery and address post-pandemic challenges, Manchester City Council's 2021-2026 Digital Strategy relies on a dynamic, partnership-based approach. The Digital Inclusion team at MCC have a mission to support all Manchester people to access the benefits of being online. They believe everyone should have the kit, skills and confidence to benefit from the digital world. The Let's Get Digital programme supports people to access free data, get cheap laptops, and improve their digital skills, with a focus on #DoingDigitalTogether.

## Partnering for Impact

Recognising critical need, XMA stepped forward. As part of a social value contract, XMA generously donated



refurbished  
laptops

to Manchester City Council's (MCC) Libraries Digital Inclusion Team. This initiative aimed to breathe new life into these devices to support Manchester's communities.

The MCC's Digital Inclusion team then took on the vital role of distributing these laptops to a wide array of community organisations.

*"We are so grateful to XMA for giving us these laptops to distribute in the community. We know they will make a massive difference to the people who will be using them as now more and more services are only available online. Having a decent device is one of the three key elements of being digitally included, we only wish we could have many many more!"*

**Chris Northen, Digital Inclusion Coordinator,  
Manchester City Council**

The team then took on the vital role of distributing these laptops to a wide array of community organisations. The goal was twofold: to help alleviate the immediate challenges these organisations faced in delivering their services and to enable them to scale their impact across Greater Manchester.





# Tangible Change and a Path Forward



The impact of this technology is already being felt across the city, turning ambitious initiatives into reality and expanding existing support networks. Each device offers organisations the chance to magnify their work, allowing more people to tap into the advantages of the digital world. Organisations are using the laptops to host digital skills sessions, provide direct device access to residents, and streamline their own operations.

**Here's a glimpse of the difference being made in the community:**

## Empowering Vulnerable Groups:

**MASH (Manchester Action on Street Health)** is helping female sex workers access online services and build digital literacy. *"Having the laptop offer is a positive incentive for our women as it has ignited interest in wanting to take up studies and keep themselves occupied in positive ways."*

**The Newleaf Foundation** is empowering minoritised women with digital tools through a new computing project.

**Revive Community Development** is enabling refugees and asylum seekers to access online opportunities. *"The Laptop is helping me learn how to check my email, God bless you - I'll check my Universal Credit and my British Gas bill. The screen is bigger than a computer, and I can see very well with it than the phone. Thank you"*

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**Walking With The Wounded** is assisting veterans with virtual therapy, job searches, and benefits support. For instance, one veteran, Arron, is now developing his business ideas using his donated laptop.

**Manchester Care Leavers** are gaining access to the wide array of opportunities a digital device offers.

**Manchester Carers Centre** is launching a pilot program for digitally excluded young carers. *"I struggle with technology so having access to the bigger screen of a laptop in the sessions has been amazing and has made this leisure time for me as a Carer so much more valuable"*



## Enhancing Education and Skills:

Young people at **STRIDE UK Foundation** are benefiting from improved online access for their qualifications.

**The Dimobi Children Disability Trust** is supporting young people in honing their resume building, interview, and job search skills online.

**The Booth Centre** is assisting more individuals struggling with homelessness to acquire digital skills.

**Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian School** is benefiting from enhanced facilities and engaging learning experiences. *"The laptops have been a godsend. They have allowed the teachers to prepare and deliver more engaging activities for our pupils by adding a fun element to education, making the process of learning both interactive and more interesting. This in turn has increased the teachers' motivation and confidence as well as interest in technology: many of them are already using chalk and board less and less."*

**Harpurhey Neighbourhood Project** staff and service users now have access to additional training and educational opportunities. *"The laptops have been such a wonderful help towards furthering our digital accessibility for local residents"* Dale Johnson, Chair.





Supporting Community Services:

Customers of **The Grange's Community Pantry** are being supported to access food poverty support.

**Friends of the Strawberry Duck** are progressing plans for a satellite digital drop-in at ASDA Eastlands.

**St. Chad's Church playgroup** is providing computer and printing access to families at risk of digital exclusion.

Volunteers at **FC United of Manchester** are building their digital skills to streamline project administration and online engagement.

**Mindful Mums** peer support group can now explore more online resources.

**The Community Bike Library at No. 93** is using devices to discover new cycling routes.

**Communities 4 All** are providing laptop loans to enable more people to access the internet.

**Rainbow Surprise** is offering digital skills support in their new hub.

**The Over 50's group at the Guidance Hub** is receiving support to help people search and apply for jobs, benefits, and book appointments online. The Hub shared, *"We're truly grateful to have received these laptops, as they've already made a noticeable difference... even in this early stage, the devices are proving invaluable"*.



# Partnerships with Purpose

This collaboration, as highlighted by XMA's sustainable technology partner Ikonik Technology who worked with XMA to source and supply the devices, is "Social Value in Action". Donations from businesses like XMA and Ikonik Technology are vitally important, enabling charities and communities to broaden their reach and impact.

While the donation of 333 laptops marks progress in bridging Manchester's digital divide, it's also a clear indicator that the journey doesn't end here. The digital divide remains a very real challenge. This initiative, though impactful, represents a crucial step rather than a complete solution. More concerted efforts and continued collaboration are essential to ensure everyone in Manchester has the opportunity to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

**Darren Howe, ESG Director at XMA, aptly summarised the forward-looking perspective:**



*"It's been fantastic to be involved in such a forward-thinking programme. Manchester is leading the way when it comes to digital inclusion, and we look forward to being involved in further proactive initiatives like this".*

You can find out more about MCC's Digital Inclusion Action Plan here:

[Find Out More](#)



If you want to discuss partnering with XMA for social value, get in touch.

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