



Age UK London receives funding from:



Consultation Response

TITLE: Smart London Plan Listening Exercise

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About Age UK London

Age UK London raises the voice and addresses the needs of older Londoners. We promote and represent the views of older Londoners; we campaign on real issues that make a difference to older people; we work with older people's organisations across London to enhance services; we offer a range of products and services tailor-made for the over 50s (via Age UK London Trading). We are part of the national Age UK network and work in partnership with the national charity Age UK and with London borough Age UKs.

We also work with over 500 local older people's groups in all London boroughs, many of them volunteer led. We are currently funded by City Bridge Trust to build the resilience of these local age sector organisations and help them and older people to make their voice heard, as part of "The Way Ahead" initiative which the GLA is also party to. We work to digitally upskill older people's groups to help them work better and save money.

1. Introduction

We are pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the proposals for the Smart London Plan.

We welcomed the Mayor's Manifesto commitment to "Implement a digital inclusion strategy, led by the new Chief Digital Officer, to ensure that everyone in London, including older Londoners, have the skills, and online access they need to access public services, job opportunities and information". We also welcome the inclusion of digital inclusion for older people in the Mayor's recently published Social Integration Strategy – albeit only in principle and through limited pilot projects.

The Smart London Plan should be an effective vehicle to push forward digital inclusion for people of all ages. It should include support to digital literacy and skills work to help older Londoners access services digitally, update digital skills and participate more in London's digital life. Social life and activities are increasingly accessed online and digitally excluded people are also more at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

2. Key points and recommendations

We will focus on section 2.4, Digital Skills & Capabilities. We very much welcome the initial emphasis that "London needs to equip our citizens with the digital skills, understanding and capabilities they need at all levels". However the Smart London Plan must include older citizens, who need to be able to take an active part in an increasingly digital society.

With the increasing shift to providing information and services online, digital exclusion becomes an increasingly important equality issue and a large proportion of older

Londoners are digitally excluded: see Age UK London's report [Wealth of the Web](#) showing both the benefits of digital technology to older people, and the extent of digital exclusion. Among the report's key recommendations were:

- Regional and local government should **provide funding for adult learning** so that older Londoners can have affordable computer-training
- Funders should **support research** designed to further understand motivational and behavioural elements of (older people's) decisions to use online technologies
- Private companies should incorporate older people as **co-designers and testers** of products to ensure user-friendly operation

While the proportion of older people who are online may be gradually increasing, Age UK still found in 2016 that three-fifths of people aged 75+ do not regularly use the Internet. In Age UK London's annual survey of older Londoners' priorities for change, access to digital technology regularly appears as one of the areas of life which older respondents are most unhappy with (as does information about local services, which is increasingly concentrated online to save scarce public funds).

The need to access public services, in particular health and social care, tends to increase with age. Londoners' lifespans are increasing, which is a great success story. However given the "digital by default" agenda, there is the risk that in the oldest age groups, many of the people with the most support needs may remain digitally excluded and may be the least able to access services independently.

For a younger cohort of people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, improving digital skills may be important in maintaining or regaining employment.

Age UK London and borough Age UKs have considerable experience in supporting older people to increase their digital skills and digital literacy, for example via:

- A range of activities like computer classes and "Silver Surfers" groups provided locally by borough Age UKs
- Age UK London activities working with corporates to provide eg. "Techy Tea Parties" where older people are supported to make better use of their digital devices, or technology-based workshops on subjects like avoiding scams online
- Our successful intergenerational digital inclusion project "MiCommunity", which was funded by Team London and the Reuben Foundation, was delivered in 20 boroughs and 39 local schools, involving 1324 young volunteers and 250 corporate volunteers and benefiting 1450 older people in just under a year – further information [here](#).

We would urge that the Smart London Plan include support to digital literacy and skills work to help older Londoners and their local organisations access services digitally, update digital skills and participate more in London's digital life. Such support could scale up the successes of previous work which has usually only been funded on a small scale and short term basis. Age UK London has previously, at the GLA's request, given the GLA a costed proposal for such a programme.

We also support the separate recommendations sent in by Positive Ageing in London, related to:

- Helping older Londoners to develop and improve their digital skills
- Training & research
- Co-designing digital services
- Connectivity & security
- Transport services