

# **Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

## **Pensioner poverty - digital exclusion**

### **Written Submission by BT Group, 14 March 2025**

On behalf of BT Group, I am writing to highlight our approach on digital exclusion, which we hope will be of interest to the Committee to inform its inquiry into Pensioner poverty.

BT Group is the UK's leading telecommunications and network provider with a significant presence in Scotland, including our state-of-the-art offices in Glasgow and Dundee. We are committed to playing our part in helping Scotland realise its potential, including our significant investment to deliver full fibre and 5G networks right across your communities, to serve all our customers. As an example of our commitment to Scotland, we are proud to be supporting connectivity for public sector organisations via the Scotland Wide Area Network (SWAN) and, via Openreach, we are delivering the R100 contract with Scottish Government, connecting 114,000 homes to superfast broadband.

Rooted in our purpose to connect for good, BT Group is proud to take a leadership position on the digital skills divide across the UK, including Scotland. In our view, only a more inclusive digital landscape will enable us to drive productivity, innovation and growth across the economy. This is why we welcome the committee's inquiry, and we set out our contribution to tackling digital exclusion below.

### **Tackling digital exclusion at BT Group**

In our view, the best indicator of digital exclusion/inclusion is whether or not someone has a broadband connection at home. Ofcom's latest data<sup>1</sup> shows that at least 7% of all Scottish households (5% for the UK) currently do not. We know that digital exclusion disproportionately affects older people; around 69% of people aged 65 and over do not have the skills to regularly use the internet<sup>2</sup>. We want to help change this, not just to give older people the digital skills and confidence they need but also to encourage them to stay active online. After all, our research has

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcom, 2024. Technology Tracker 2024 – Table 61. Available online: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/data/statistics/2024/technology-tracker/technology-tracker-2024-data-tables.pdf?v=374153>

<sup>2</sup> Age UK, 2023. Age UK launches offline and overlooked digital campaign. Available online: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2023/age-uk-analysis-reveals-that-almost-6-million-people-5800000-aged-65-are-either-unable-to-use-the-internet-safely-and-successfully-or-arent-online-at-all/>

shown that two thirds (65%) of older people think that you're never too old to learn new skills, with almost half (49%) open to learning tech skills specifically<sup>3</sup>.

We believe that someone who has never used a digital device before and is on the journey to becoming digitally confident will most benefit from high quality, tailored, one on one, consistent support. When this is provided it can be transformative. It is also essential to driving change: people do not want services they cannot use.

This is why in 2023 we partnered with AbilityNet to deliver a UK-wide programme aiming to improve the digital skills of older and digitally excluded people. Through the programme, skilled AbilityNet trainers - often supported by BT and EE tech volunteers - deliver regular community or one-to-one sessions, enabling participants to gain essential digital skills for their goals at home, work and in education. They cover topics we know to be of interest such as using banking apps, booking GP appointments online, and avoiding scams.

We are pleased with the results so far. In the first year of the programme, we helped nearly 300 people across Glasgow, Edinburgh and other areas across the Central Belt – feedback from participants showed that:

- **96%** of the attendees rate the sessions as excellent or good
- **81%** say they feel more knowledgeable about tech
- **72%** feel more independent
- **64%** feel less isolated
- **82%** can use what they have learnt at home
- **63%** can manage day to day life online

We are continuing with this programme. In its second year, we have a fresh focus to help disabled adults, as well as anyone over 65. We have expanded our reach in Scotland, funding a second Digital Skills Trainer to cover North East Scotland, as well as furthering our coverage across Central Scotland. You can find out more information about the training sessions online here: <https://abilitynet.org.uk/free-tech-support-and-info/digital-skills-training-people-over-65>

As part of our commitment to support our customers through the industry-wide transition from traditional analogue landlines to digital ones, we have extended our partnership with AbilityNet and another charity partner, Neighbourhood Watch Scotland, to help us run a series of 'roadshow' events throughout 2025. Our charity partners are helping our customers learn about what our new home phone system, Digital Voice, is, why the change is necessary, and how it will impact them, resolving any questions or concerns they have. You can find out more about these events

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<sup>3</sup> Research carried out by OnePoll in October 2022 of 1500 people over 60 years of age in the UK

online at: [bt.com/broadband/digital-voice/events](https://bt.com/broadband/digital-voice/events)

I trust that this is a useful overview of our approach to digital inclusion. If you'd like to find out more about our policy work in this area, then you might be interested to read our report "*Digital Inclusion: New insights and finding a suitable way forward*"<sup>4</sup>.

Nick Speed

Head of Nations and Regions, Policy and Public Affairs

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<sup>4</sup> BT Group, 2023. Digital inclusion: new insights and finding a sustainable way forward. Available online: <https://newsroom.bt.com/digital-inclusion-new-insights-and-finding-a-sustainable-way-forward/>