Triaging Digital Inclusion Case Study:

Barnet pilot

Key findings of Barnet pilot

1. Outline of delivery model

Frontline staff in four services or 'gateways' across the borough (both council-run and VCS-run services) aimed to ask every resident they spoke to whether they might need any digital support. If the response was "yes", they used the digital inclusion questionnaire to identify specific needs, assign the resident a digital inclusion segment and signpost them to relevant local support.

The four gateways were:

- BOOST – Barnet's employment and benefits advice service

- Customer Services (face to face at the council's reception)

- Barnet Libraries

- Colindale Community Trust (CCT) – a community partner within Barnet

In practice, fewer practitioners than planned were trained to do the triage and conduct the questionnaire (they included apprentices and front desk administrators) and not every resident was invited to do the questionnaire due to capacity constraints and other factors.

loti

2. Key insights from project data

Who was supported?

Table 6. Breakdown of Barnet residents triaged (by gateway)

Triage gateway	Residents triaged	Residents with a digital need	Residents signposted
BOOST	43	27	19
Customer Services	10	7	5
Barnet Libraries	5	2	2
Colindale Community Trust (CCT)	4	4	3
Unclear	6	4	2
Total	**68**	**44**	**31**

Figure 18. Age profile of Barnet residents triaged

Barnet: Age range of all residents triaged*

- 18 - 30 years
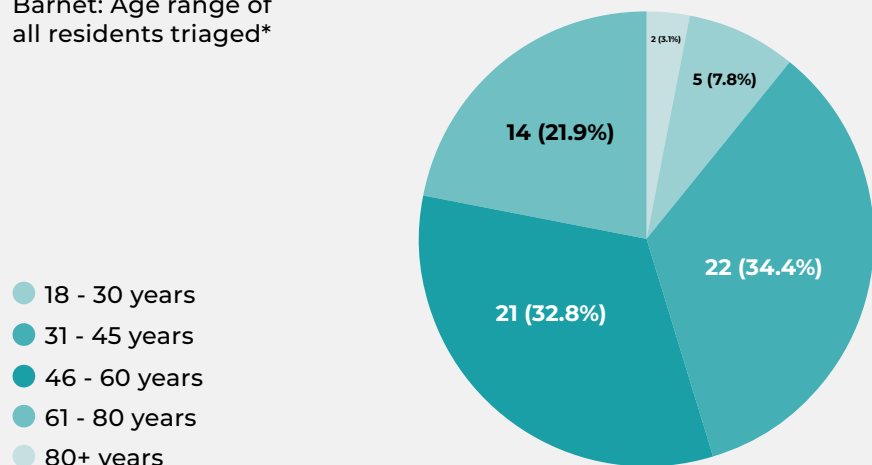- 31 - 45 years
- 46 - 60 years
- 61 - 80 years
- 80+ years

Figure 19. Age profile of Barnet residents with a digital need

Barnet: Age range of residents with digital inclusion need

- 18 - 30 years
- 31 - 45 years
- 46 - 60 years
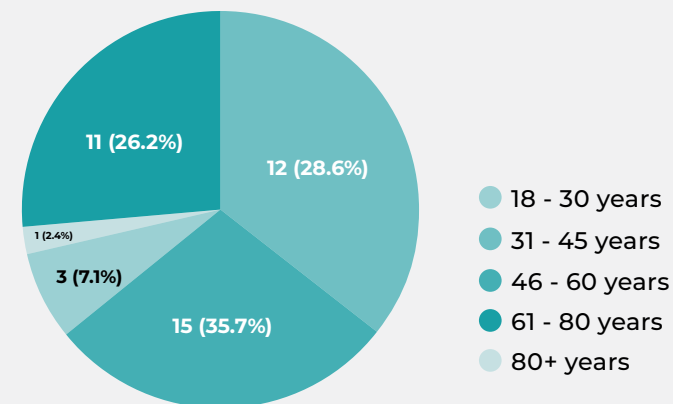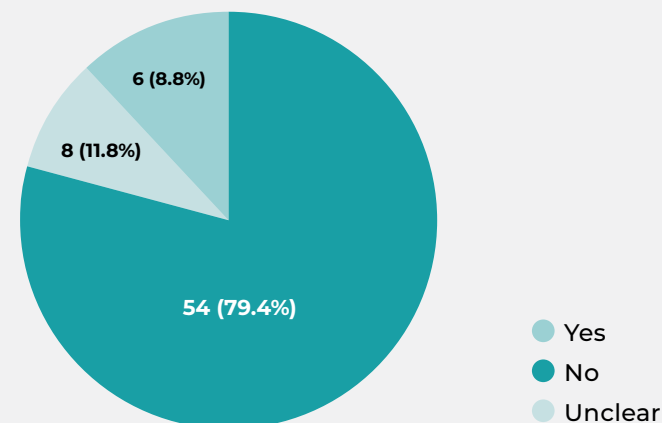- 61 - 80 years
- 80+ years

Figure 20. Proportion of Barnet residents who previously received digital support (yes) and who did not receive support (no)

Barnet: Had residents received digital support previously?

- Yes
- No
- Unclear

What were the residents' digital needs?

Figure 21. Breakdown of Barnet resident needs by digital inclusion segment

Barnet: Which digital inclusion segments did residents fall into?

- No segment - A. I feel confident in using the internet and devices, and don't need any help
- No segment - G. None of the above
- No segment - field left blank
- B. I have little or no interest in the internet or getting online
- C. I have some interest but find it too complicated and tend to rely on other people to use the internet for me
- D. My main issue with the internet is my lack of confidence using it
- E. I lack confidence in using the internet and I can't afford a device and/or mobile data or broadband
- F. I can use the internet but am unable to afford a device or mobile data or broadband
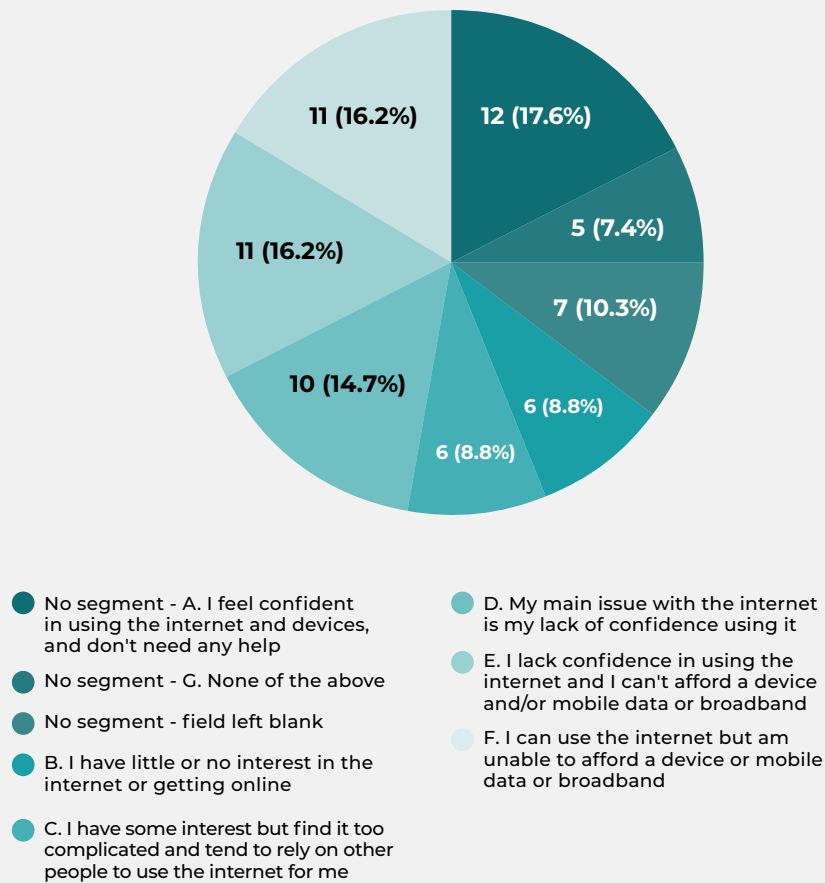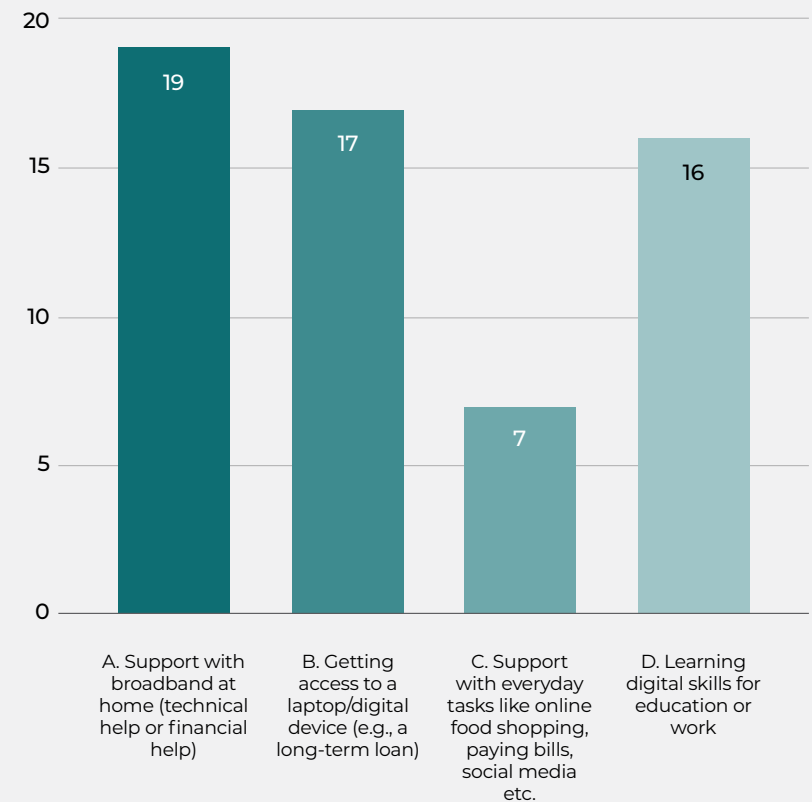
Figure 22. Breakdown of Barnet resident needs based on what they wanted to gain from digital support

What were Barnet residents hoping to gain from digital support?

What support did residents receive?

Figure 23. Breakdown of digital support Barnet residents were signposted to
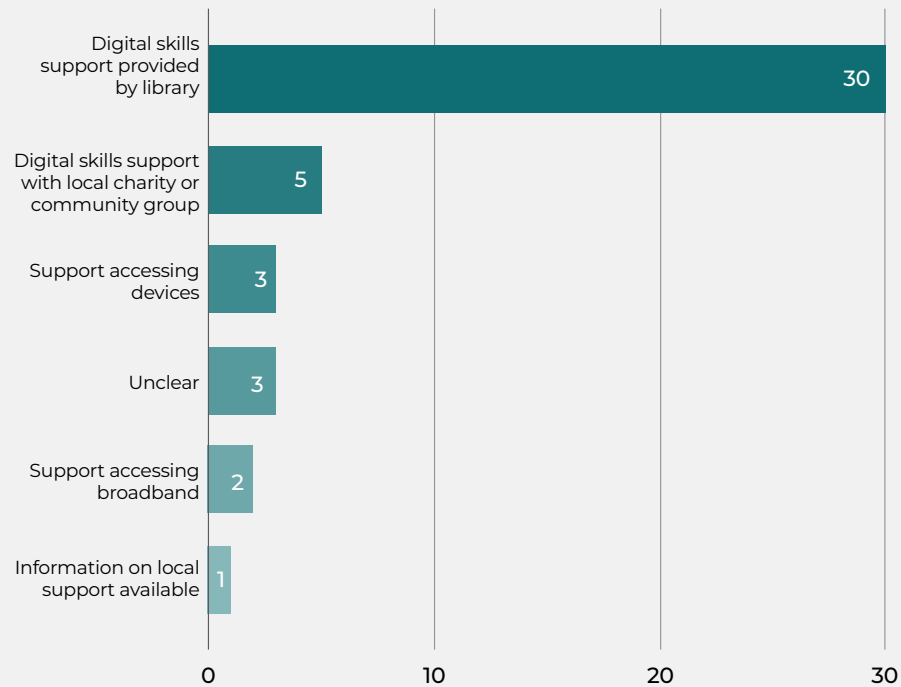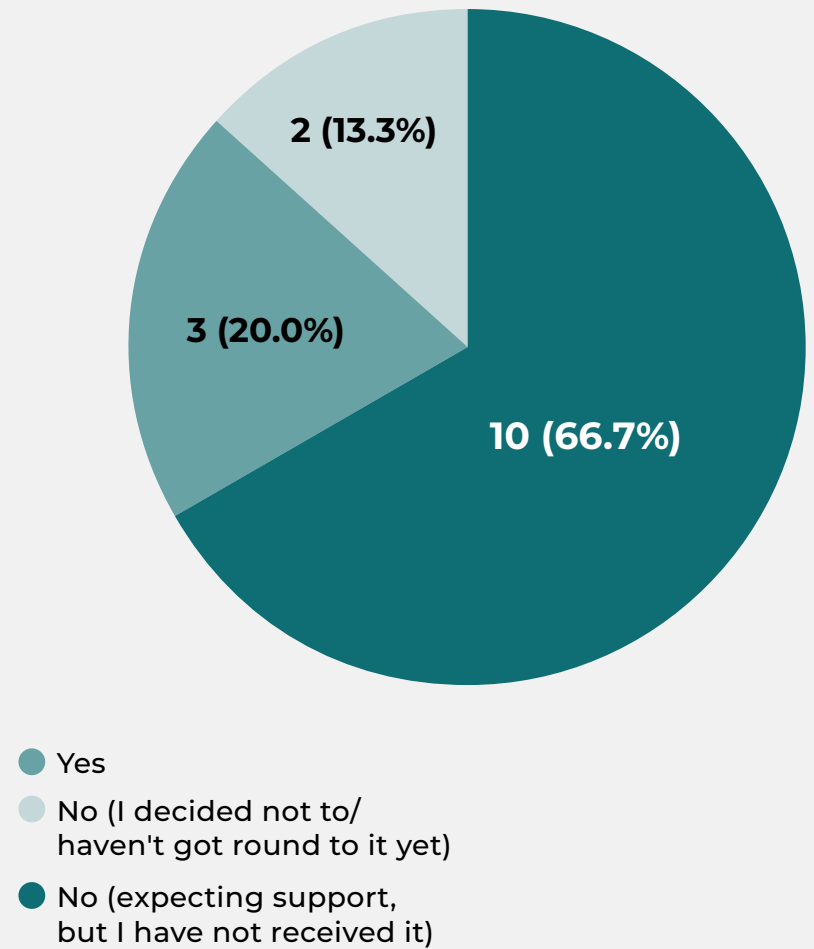
What were Barnet residents signposted to?

Category	Value
Digital skills support provided by library	30
Digital skills support with local charity or community group	5
Support accessing devices	3
Unclear	3
Support accessing broadband	2
Information on local support available	1

Figure 24. Proportion of signposted Barnet residents who received digital support (yes) or did not (no)

- 2 (13.3%)
- 3 (20.0%)
- 10 (66.7%)

- Yes
- No (I decided not to/ haven't got round to it yet)
- No (expecting support, but I have not received it)

3. What worked well

Good coordination across four internal and external 'gateways'

Led by a digital inclusion coordinator, the Barnet pilot was well coordinated across various council and third sector partner gateways. Ahead of the launch, all the gateway leads were briefed and brought together for a pre-launch meeting. During the pilot, regular updates were given, and regular check-in sessions were held to share progress, discuss delivery challenges and share learning. These were well planned and organised but, unfortunately, they suffered from a lack of engagement from some of the gateways.

Use of apprentices to triage residents

About halfway through the Barnet pilot – and partly as a result of low numbers of residents triaged – BOOST decided to brief their apprentices and task them with triaging residents who were waiting to be seen by another member of staff. This was a good example of adapting to delivery challenges and flexibly using available resources, which resulted in an increase in the number of residents triaged.

BOOST gateway triaged a good number of residents

The BOOST gateway was relatively effective at reaching and triaging residents – it triaged 43 residents, which is nearly two thirds of all residents triaged in Barnet. In terms of total numbers of residents triaged, BOOST had the third most effective triage pathway out of the nine being tested across the four boroughs.

4. Key challenges

Lack of staff capacity to deliver the triage process

Frontline staff delivering the triage were required to do so in addition to their already busy roles, which meant that many were unable to fit it in or conduct the survey with every resident.

"It was intended that our receptionist would carry out the triage process but, in reality they didn't have the time because there are always people waiting to be seen."

Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

"There was an overload in capacity. Staff felt it was an add-on to what they had to do."

Team leader, BOOST

"We try to speak to everyone. If we're really busy, they've not been able to ask everybody. There's one member of staff."

Manager, Customer Services (face to face team)

High proportion of residents did not want to answer the questionnaire

Practitioners across the Barnet gateways reported that most residents did not want to engage with the process – they simply wanted help with the issues they came in for.

"The biggest barrier is people don't want to complete the forms. People just want their query resolved and then want to leave. Others just don't want digital help – either because they don't need it or don't want it. They're not rude about it, they just don't want to get involved."

Manager, Customer Services (face to face team)

"A lot of people didn't want to take part in the survey for whatever reason."

Digital Inclusion Lead, BOOST

Current mix of support is not right for everyone

Several practitioners across the gateways commented that the current range of digital support available is not suitable for everyone, which limits signposting options.

"A couple of people were looking for employment and training courses but didn't have equipment so we helped them directly rather than refer."

Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

"[Barnet College] courses start on particular dates so there's a bit of waiting. I don't want to have people to wait for six weeks to get on a course so we should have more options to provide more rapid support and training such as drop-ins. That's the reality of structured training programmes but we need other options."

BOOST

[Some residents are] happy to wait a few days and we'll make an appointment. Others don't want help to learn how to do it themselves, they just help with a specific thing they need to do like applying for a blue badge... They want help with transacting with the council online... most want someone to help them there and then – or a few days later."

Manager, Customer Services (face to face team)

Poor previous experience of council services limited referrals

A specific concern from Barnet's community partner, Colindale Community Trust (CCT) – that signposted services might not follow up with residents – led to very few referrals from CCT.

> "There's some scepticism [in our team] about whether the support will be provided. It's more about being confident about referring people and they'll get the support. If we do a referral online, we need to get a response back from the referral place saying they've received it and there will be a response."
>
> Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

> "When people need [support] they need it, so we couldn't take the risk of waiting and nothing potentially happens. We'd have to know something will get done if we refer them – I want an email back just to acknowledge. Just something simple like that."
>
> Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

Low engagement from two of the gateways

There was very low engagement from Barnet Libraries in the pilot. They did not attend any of the project check-in meetings, did not respond to requests for interviews and only triaged and referred five residents.

> "We have low engagement from the library service. I have been trying to speak with a library contact for the last eight weeks and they didn't respond to the interview request. Across 6-7 libraries, they offer digital support but they don't share their data with us."
>
> Digital Inclusion Lead, BOOST

> "They only have staff during limited hours – and you've got to be a library member [to get support]. The majority of visitors to libraries occur during unstaffed hours. Librarians rotate around libraries and they're really busy and over-stretched while they're there and they work on lots of different other community initiatives."
>
> Digital Inclusion Lead, BOOST

Colindale Community Trust (CCT) was more engaged from a management perspective – its CEO attended regular check-ins and took part in an interview. However, CCT only triaged and signposted four Barnet residents as its staff were reluctant to take residents through the questionnaire because of a lack of trust in signposted services following up with them.

> "Our concern as a team – and my team was quite vocal – is what if the support we refer them to don't get back to them? Then that does more harm than good and it reflects badly on us."
>
> Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

Operational challenges and teething problems

These Included:

• Delays to the start of the pilot (e.g. delay to a data sharing agreement) meant that, for some gateways, there were other priorities

> "We were ready to start the project but it was delayed by a month, if not more. Other stuff kind of took its place because between that period, the cost of living crisis happened."
>
> Chief Executive, Colindale Community Trust (CCT)

> "The start coincided with other stuff happening and it seemed more discretionary than other stuff like benefits and cost of living needs."
>
> Team Leader, BOOST

• Technical issues at the start meant the pilot got off to a slow start

> "Some technical stuff in this particular building (library) devices are linked into public library wi-fi."
>
> Team Leader, BOOST

- The main council reception was not the ideal place to do the questionnaire

"There's lots of visitors coming in for meetings so it's not a big enough space. There was also building work going on in the cafeteria making a lot of noise and disruption. It's not very private there either so people might not be happy answering questions that may be embarrassing or sensitive."

Manager, Customer Services (face to face team)