

Digital Inclusion in Solihull

This note summarises available evidence around digital inclusion at a national and local level focusing on measures that influence the extent to which a population can access and fully utilise digital services. Consideration is given to a range of factors that are likely to impact on digital use, including:

- The digital skills of the population;
- Socio-demographic factors such as age, income, ill health and disability and qualifications that may adversely impact on digital skills acquisition, access and use;
- The frequency and nature of internet use; and
- Local area coverage of high speed and reliable broadband and mobile digital services.

Digital inclusion is an important component of Solihull MBC's wider inclusive growth agenda and Council Plan. The risks of digital exclusion at a borough level and among specific population groups and local neighbourhoods will inform Solihull's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) evidence base.

Key Points

- Nationally, 89% of adults use the internet at least weekly and 77% use mobile services. The proportion for both falls substantially among people aged 65+;
- Nationally, a majority of people use the internet for leisure activities and private sector services such as banking or shopping;
- The proportion using the internet for public sector services appears to be lower, with, for instance, just 15% making online GP appointments and 31% making Local Government transactions;
- Solihull has an excellent digital infrastructure with 97% of premises able to access Superfast broadband and good 4G mobile coverage from all four mobile network operators throughout the borough;
- However, there are parts of Solihull that are less well served by communications services, with 9% of rural areas unable to access a decent fixed broadband service;
- Survey evidence shows that 79% of the Solihull population have the nationally recognised five basic digital skills (top quintile for Local Authorities in England);
- Vulnerable population groups such as those subject to physical and mental ill-health and those in unsuitable or unstable housing as well as those with a low income, the elderly and those with lower qualification levels are the most likely to face digital exclusion;
- Solihull's relatively large population aged 65 and over, particularly those living alone, appears to be the borough's main digital exclusion risk factor;
- The representation of other vulnerable groups is lower in Solihull than across the rest of the country. However, higher levels of economic disadvantage as well poorer outcomes relating to health and housing mean that North Solihull is at greater risk of digital exclusion;
- The Internet User classification shows that the profile in North Solihull is very different to the rest of the borough, with those described as "Uncommitted and Casual Users" predominating.

National Context

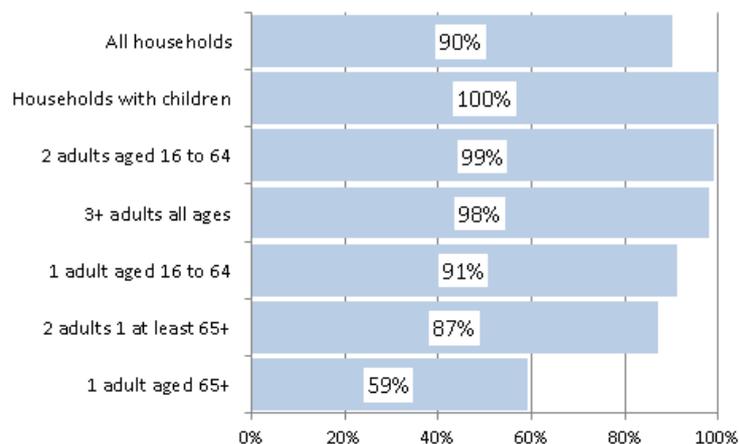
Digital inclusion is the ability for people to be able to use computers and the internet, to have access to do so, and to have digital services which meet their needs. Research for the UK Digital Strategy suggests that there are a number of important barriers, and more than one may affect individuals at any one timeⁱ. They are:

- Access - not everyone has the ability to connect to the internet and go online;
- Skills - not everyone has the ability to use the internet and online services;
- Confidence - some people fear online crime, lack trust or don't know where to start online;
- Motivation - not everyone sees why using the internet could be relevant and helpful.

There are still significant levels of digital exclusion, with 11.5 million people in the UK lacking the basic digital skills they need to use the internet effectively and 4.8 million people never going online at all. It disproportionately affects vulnerable people, low-income groups, the elderly and the more marginalised communities in our society. This creates a strong correlation between digital exclusion and social exclusion. For instance, 51% of the digitally excluded population are over 65, 45% earn less than £11.5k a year and, 56% have a disability or long term conditionⁱⁱ.

A large majority of people and households in the country have access to the internet and are regular users, with access and use increasing rapidly over the last 10 years. According to the ONS 89% of adults used the internet at least weekly in 2018, up from 51% in 2006ⁱⁱⁱ. Households with one adult aged 65 years and over had the lowest proportion of internet access, although this group has recorded the largest growth in internet access since 2012^{iv}.

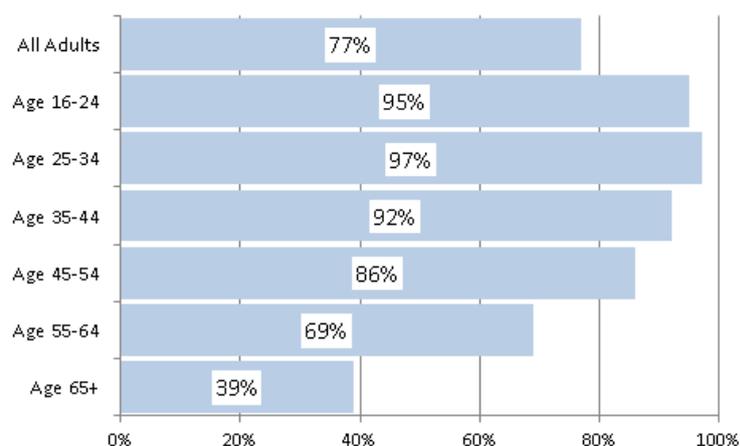
Internet Use by GB Households in Last 3 Months



Source: ONS Internet Access—Households & Individuals 2018

Mobile access and use is expanding rapidly with 77% of adults using the internet “on the go”, although this falls to 39% among those aged 65+.

Mobile Internet Access



Source: ONS Internet Access – Households & Individuals 2018

The Digital Inclusion Dashboard shows a number of survey measures relating to national progress towards a digitally inclusive society, with a particular focus on the extent to which people access services online^v.

ONS Digital Inclusion Dashboard			
Activity	Outcome	Date	Source
Job Seeking online	52%	2015	Ofcom
Completing an online qualification	7%	2015	Ofcom
Children (0-15) going online	87%	2015	Ofcom
Comparing products online	85%	2013	OXIS
Paying bills online	57%	2013	OXIS
On-line banking	61%	2013	OXIS
Doing creative things on-line (e.g blogs, videos etc)	64%	2015	Ofcom
Making online GP Appointments	15%	2016	ONS
Seeking online health information	69%	2013	OXIS
Online social networking	73%	2015	Ofcom
Finding leisure information	71%	2015	Ofcom
Looking for central Government services	46%	2013	OXIS
Central Government transactions	45%	2013	OXIS
Looking for information about Local Govt Services	44%	2013	OXIS
Local Government transactions	31%	2013	OXIS
Contacting local councillor/MP online	7%	2015	Ofcom
Finding out about local news/events	57%	2015	Ofcom

Source: Ofcom, Oxford Internet Institute (OXIS), ONS

The Likelihood of Digital Exclusion in Solihull

The Tech Partnership in conjunction with the Local Government Association provide a useful summary of digital exclusion risk factors and the likelihood that local area population's will be unable to access or fully utilise digital services^{vi}.

A Digital Exclusion Heatmap provides an overall score for each Local Authority in the country by measuring the digital infrastructure of each area, the digital skills of the population and a range of

social indicators around age, education, income and health. This overall score is an indicator of each Local Authorities vulnerability to digital exclusion.

This tool shows that the likelihood of digital exclusion in Solihull is medium, with the borough scoring 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. Relative digital strengths in Solihull include the digital infrastructure (access to broadband and mobile networks) and the basic digital skills of the population. Solihull’s main vulnerability to digital exclusion is an above average older population, although this is largely offset by other positive socio-demographic indicators such as a relatively low proportion of the population with low skills or low incomes.

Socio-Demographic Risk Factors

As the Digital Exclusion Heatmap summarises, at a borough level, the socio-demographic risk factors associated with digital exclusion are relatively limited in Solihull. However, some local communities in the borough, particularly in North Solihull, are disproportionately impacted by benefit dependency, the risk of poverty, low skills and unemployment. Vulnerable population groups such as those with ill-health or disability are also more common in some parts of the borough.

Age Profile

Older people aged 65 and over represent a relatively large proportion of the Solihull population (20% compared to 18% for the UK)^{vii}.

	Solihull Count	% Population		
		Solihull	UK	West Midlands
Aged 0- 15	41,500	19.4%	18.9%	19.6%
Aged 16-64	127,600	59.7%	62.9%	62.1%
Aged 65+	44,800	20.9%	18.2%	18.4%
All People	213,900			

Source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates 2017

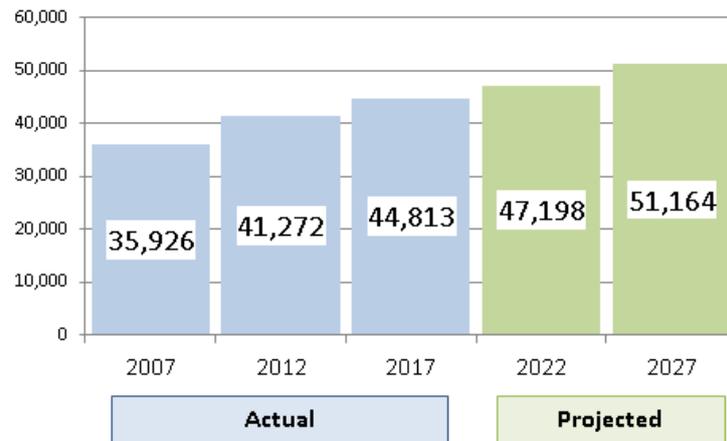
The Solihull older people population has increased rapidly over recent years, with the number of Solihull residents aged 65 and over increasing by over 3,500 individuals (9%) since 2012. This includes an increase of over 960 people aged 85 and over (+17%).

	Growth in Older Population 2012-2017			
	Solihull Count	% Growth		
		Solihull	UK	West Midlands
Aged 65-74	2,111	10%	13%	10%
Aged 75-84	468	3%	6%	7%
Aged 85+	962	17%	11%	11%

Source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates

Population projections show that older people will continue to be the fastest growing section of the Solihull population. In total the Solihull 65+ population is projected to increase by over 6,200 people (14%) in the 10 years 2017 to 2027, including an increase of 34% in those aged 74-85 and 21% in those aged 85+^{viii}.

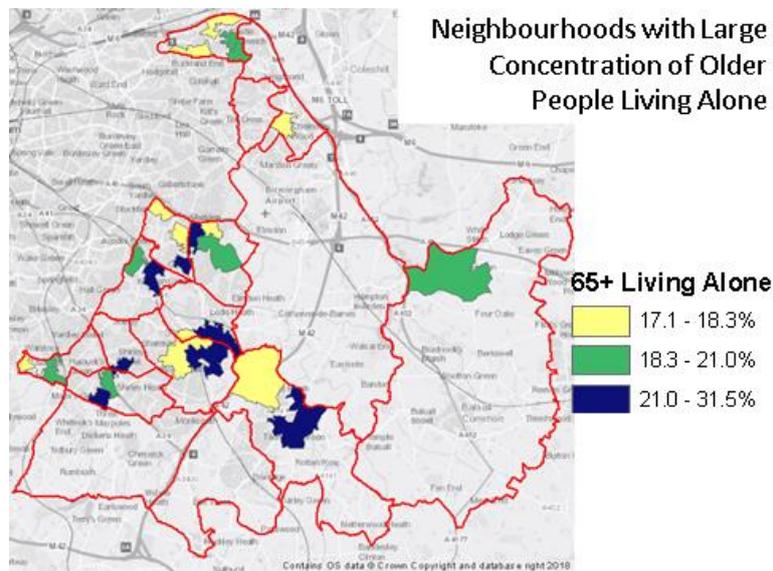
65+ Population Growth in Solihull



Source: ONS Population Estimates and Projections

As the national data shows, older people living alone have the lowest levels of both internet use and mobile access. At the time of the 2011 Census 12,000 Solihull people aged 65+ lived on their own, equating to 14% of all households in the borough compared to the England average of 12%^{ix}.

Large concentrations of older people living alone can be found in neighbourhoods across the borough, most prominently in St Alphege, Knowle, Olton, Elmdon, Lyndon and parts of Shirley^x.



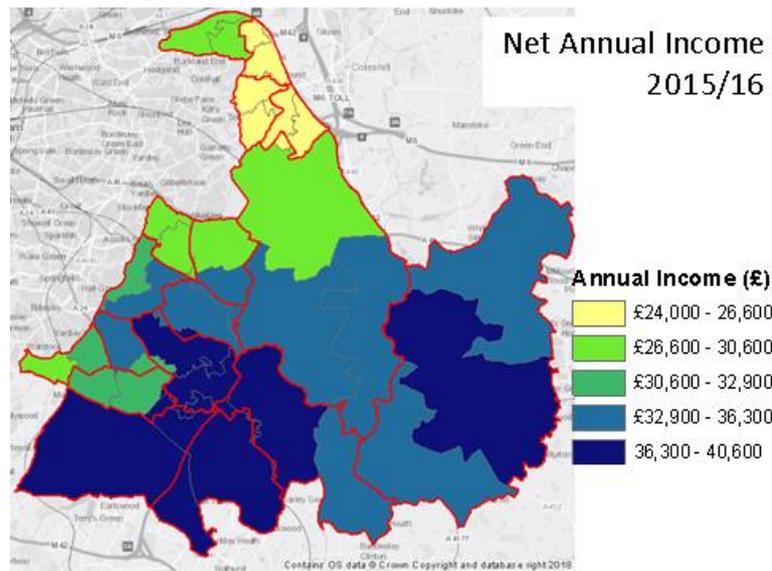
Income Profile

Solihull is a broadly affluent borough, with at a borough level above average levels of annual income and earnings. For instance, household disposable income is 13% above the UK average^{xi} and Solihull residents in employment earn on average 7%^{xii} more than nationally.

ONS data shows that average annual incomes vary across the borough and are on average nearly £7,500 per year lower in North Solihull than the average across the rest of the borough. The differential in average incomes is even wider when housing costs are taken into account, with those in North Solihull being 31% lower than the average across the rest of the borough^{xiii}.

Average Household Incomes 2016		
	Net annual income	Net annual income after housing costs
North Solihull	£27,110	£20,918
Rest of Borough	£34,602	£30,102
Difference Between North Solihull and Rest of Borough		
Per Household (£)	-£7,492	-£9,185
Per Household (%)	-22%	-31%

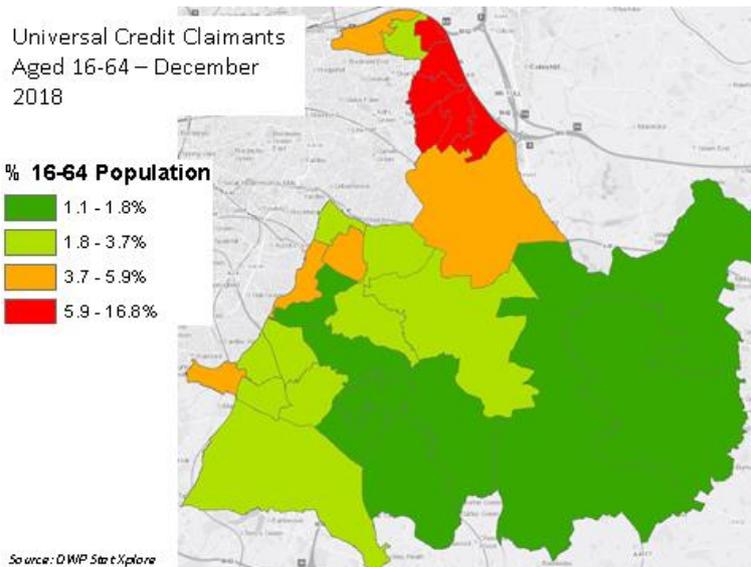
Source: ONS Small area Income Estimates 2016



The local neighbourhood variations in annual incomes reflect higher levels of benefit dependency in North Solihull. For instance 63% of Universal Credit claimants in Solihull live in the North Solihull locality, where the rate is 11.6% compared to an average of 2.7% across the rest of the borough^{xiv}.

Universal Credit Claimants by Solihull Locality – December 2018					
Locality	Not in employment	In employment	Total	% Total	Rate (% 16-64 Population)
North	2,533	1,665	4,180	63%	11.6%
West	1,156	999	2,158	33%	3.0%
East	175	104	275	4%	1.4%
Total	3,864	2,768	6,613		5.2%

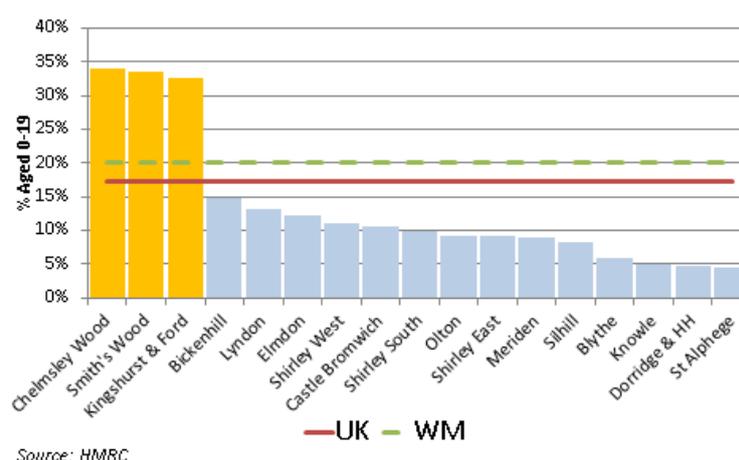
Source: DWP Stat Xplore



Lower incomes and a higher level of benefit dependency mean that the risks of poverty are much higher in North Solihull. This is summarised by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) data on the number of children in low income families, defined as those in receipt of out-of-work benefits or those in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent of UK median income^{xv}.

15% of all children in Solihull live in a low income household, proportionally fewer than both the UK (17.3%) and West Midlands (20.2%) averages. 54% of Solihull children living in poverty live in the three North Solihull regeneration wards where the child poverty rate is 33% compared to 9% in the rest of the borough.

Solihull Children in Low Income Families 2016



Qualifications and Skills Profile

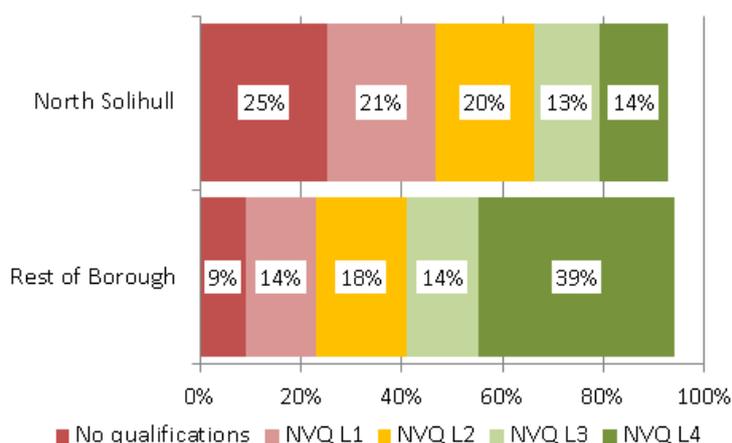
The skills profile of Solihull working age residents is broadly in-line with the UK average but much more favourable than that of the West Midlands region^{xvi}. Just 15.8% of Solihull 16-64 year olds have low skills (either no formal qualifications or a maximum of NVQ level 1), far fewer than the national average (18.4%) or that for the region (21.3%).

Highest Level of Qualification - December 2018				
	Solihull Count	% 16-64 year olds		
		Solihull	UK	West Midlands
NVQ4+	50,700	40.2%	39.2%	33.1%
NVQ3	26,000	20.6%	17.0%	17.6%
NVQ2	21,300	16.9%	15.8%	17.3%
NVQ1	11,300	8.9%	10.4%	11.0%
No qualifications	8,700	6.9%	8.0%	10.3%
Trade Apprenticeships	1,700	1.3%	3.0%	2.4%
Other qualifications	6,600	5.2%	6.7%	8.3%

Source: Annual Population Survey

At the time of the 2011 Census 25% of adults aged 16-64 living in North Solihull had no formal qualification and a further 21% were qualified to a maximum of NVQ Level 1. North Solihull adults are far less likely to have a higher level qualification than those living elsewhere in the borough (14% NVQ L4+, compared to 39%)^{xvii}.

Highest Level of Qualification Adults Aged 16-64

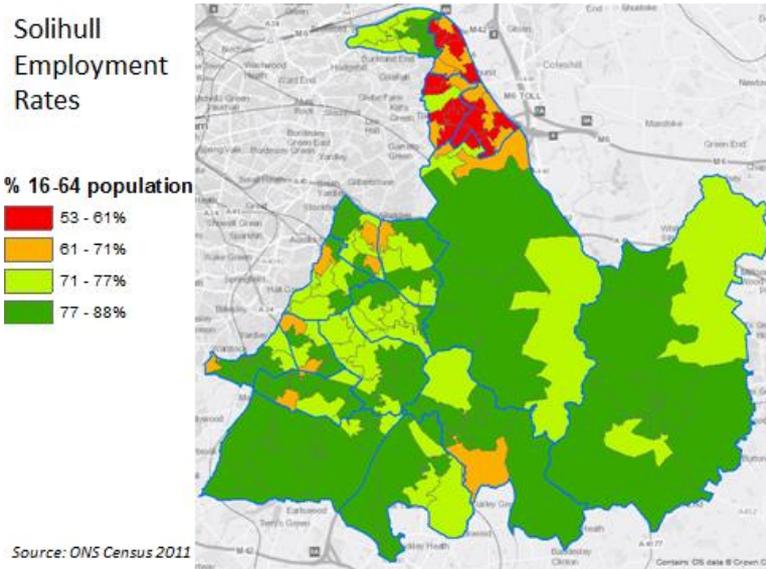


Source: ONS Census 2011

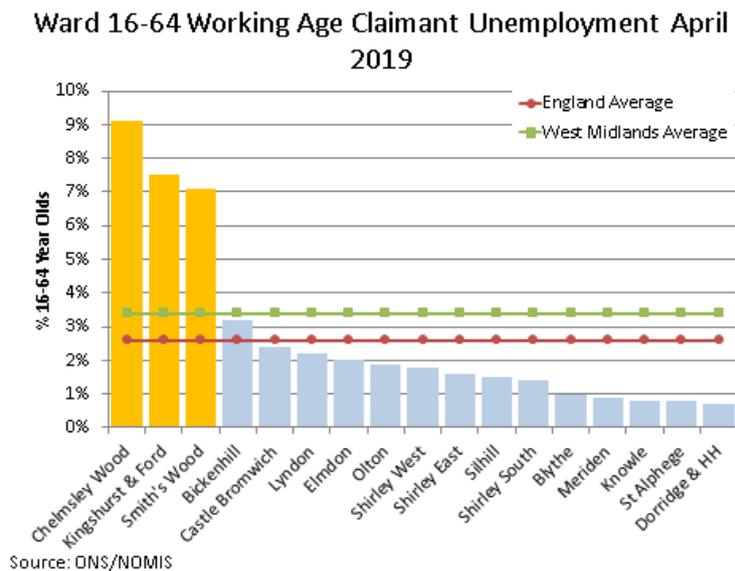
Employment Profile

As at December 2018 76.5% of working age adults in Solihull were in employment, a higher rate than the UK (75%) and West Midlands averages (73%)^{xviii}.

However, at a local neighbourhood level a number of LSOAs in North Solihull had employment rates in 2011 of less than 60%^{xix}.



This concentration of less favourable employment outcomes in North Solihull is also evident from more recent data. For instance, in April 2019 the average claimant unemployment rate for the three North Solihull regeneration wards was nearly five times the average across the rest of the borough (7.9% compared to 1.6%)^{xx}.



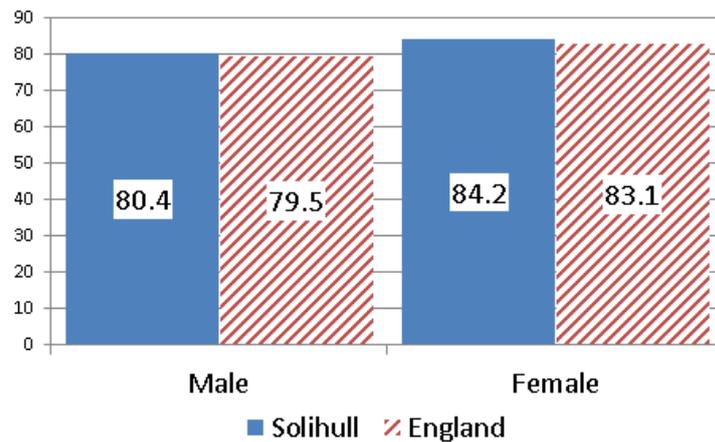
Vulnerable Groups Profile

Alongside older age groups and those economically disadvantaged, other vulnerable groups such as those suffering from illness or disability or subject to housing need are more likely than the general population to face digital exclusion.

The health of Solihull residents is generally good and is getting better, with people living longer, healthier lives. However, good health is not consistent across the borough. Premature deaths, work limiting illness and disability and acute morbidity are issues that still disproportionately affect some parts of the Solihull population.

Life expectancy at birth is a useful summary measure of the overall health of a population. In Solihull it is around a year longer than the England average for both males and females. In 2014/16 Solihull had the highest Life Expectancy in the West Midlands among females and the 2nd highest among males^{xxi}.

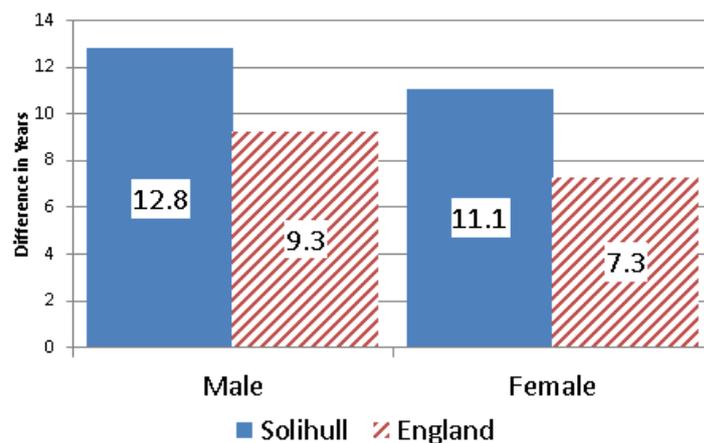
Life Expectancy at Birth 2014/16



Source: Public Health England

Inequality in Life Expectancy in Solihull is the one of the highest in the country and has increased over the last few years for both males and females. On average males in the most deprived 10% of the Solihull population can expect to live for 12.8 years less than those in the least deprived, compared to an inequality gap of 9.3 years across England as a whole. Females in the most deprived 10% of the Solihull population have a life expectancy of 11.1 years less than those in the least deprived, compared to the inequality gap of 7.3 years across England^{xxii}.

Gap of Inequality in Life Expectancy Between Most and Least Deprived 10% of Population 2014/16



Source: Public Health England

At the time of the 2011 Census 16,854 Solihull residents said that their day-to-day activities were limited a lot by long-term ill-health or disability. This equates to 8.2% of the population, in-line with the England average (8.3%). The rate is much higher in the North Solihull locality (10.5%) than the average across the rest of the borough (7.2%)^{xxiii}.

	Day-to-Day Activities Limited a Lot	% Day-to-Day Activities Limited a Lot
North Solihull	6,101	10.5%
West Solihull	8,386	7.6%
East Solihull	2,367	6.2%
Solihull Average	16,854	8.2%
England	4,405,394	8.3%
<i>Source: ONS Census</i>		

In addition to overall health and disability those with mental health issues are also potentially vulnerable to digital exclusion.

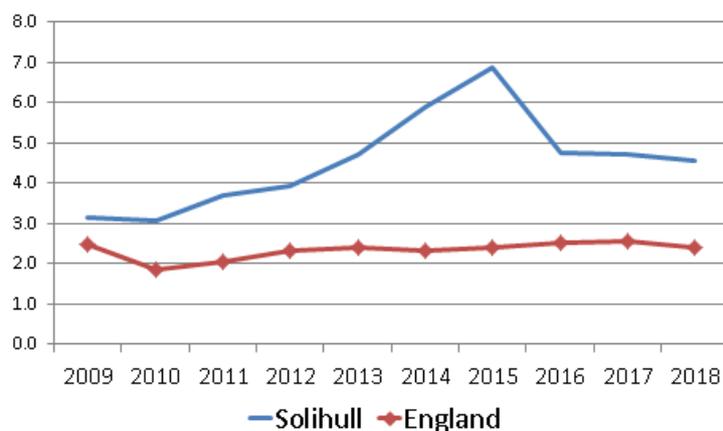
Evidence suggests that there is a link between mental ill-health and those living in more deprived circumstances, with Solihull mirroring the national pattern. In the 2016/17 GP Patient Survey, 12% of adults aged 18 and over registered with a Solihull practice indicated that they suffered from depression and anxiety, less than the England average of 14%^{xxiv}. At a national level, 17% of people living in the most deprived communities reported that they were suffering from anxiety or depression compared to 11% of people from the least deprived areas. This link between depression and deprivation is evident from individual GP data in Solihull, with 13% of adults in practices and in the North Solihull locality suffering from depression compared to less than 7% of registered patients at practices elsewhere in the borough.

In November 2018 2,590 working age Solihull residents claimed Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) due to mental health issues, equating to 2% of the working age population compared to the England average of 2.5%. Over half of all people claiming ESA due to mental health issues live in the North Solihull locality (51%) where the rate is 3.7% compared to an average of just 1.4% elsewhere in the borough^{xxv}.

	Claiming ESA due to Mental Health	% Claiming ESA due to Mental Health
North Solihull	1,340	3.7%
West Solihull	1,060	1.5%
East Solihull	220	1.0%
Solihull Average	2,590	2.0%
England	888,750	2.5%
<i>Source: DWP November 2018</i>		

Individuals presenting as homelessness or those subject to housing need (unsuitable or unstable accommodation) face significant barriers to digital inclusion. The number of statutory homelessness acceptances in Solihull is well above the England average, but falling. In 2017/18 405 Solihull households were classified as being homeless, equating to 4.54 per 1,000 households compared to the England average of 2.41. This ranks Solihull 26th in the country out of 322 Local authorities and the 2nd highest in the West Midlands after Birmingham^{xxvi}. The Solihull homelessness rate increased sharply between 2009/10 and 2014/15, but has trended downwards since. The number of homeless households fell by 32% (-194 households) between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

Statutory Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Unsuitable or unstable housing is best summarised by the number of households on the housing register classified as being in housing need. As with other measures of vulnerability, there is a strong link to overall deprivation with 62% of all Solihull households on the Housing Register living in the North Solihull locality. In this area 13% of households are deemed to be in housing need, compared to an average of just 3% across the rest of the borough^{xxvii}.

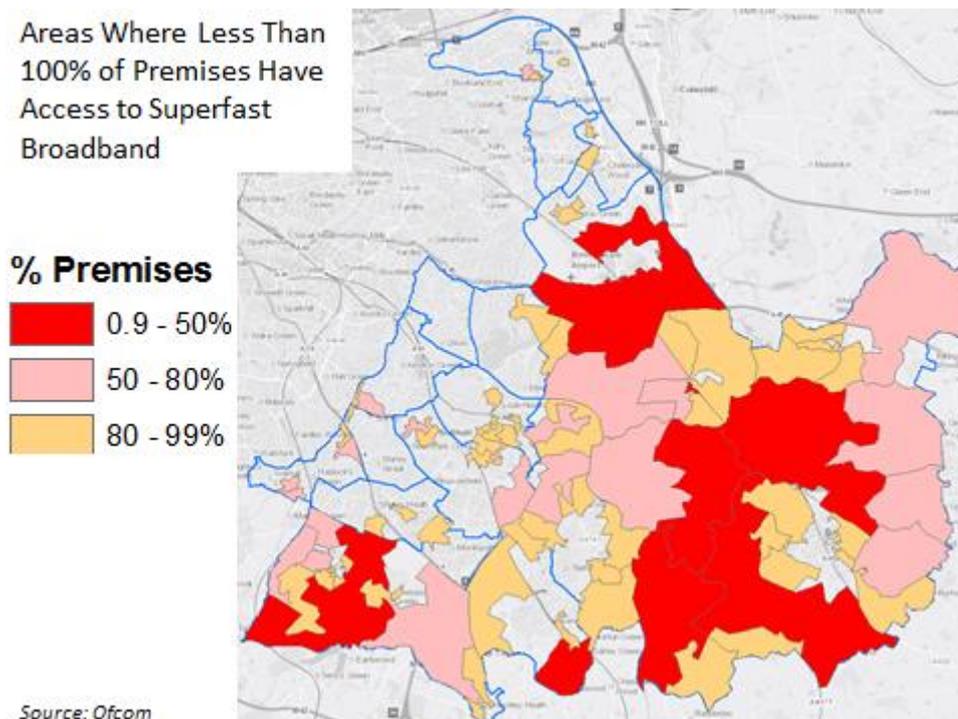
Digital Infrastructure in Solihull

Ofcom data shows that the digital infrastructure in Solihull is excellent both in terms of broadband and mobile coverage^{xxviii}:

- In 2018 Superfast broadband coverage in Solihull increased to 97% of homes and businesses, compared to the UK average of 94%. This refers to the availability of fixed broadband services with a download speed of at least 30 Mbit/s;
- 3.8% of homes and businesses now have access to full-fibre connections compared to 6% across the UK. These connections can deliver much higher download speeds, of up to 1 Gbit/s;
- Just 1% of Solihull premises cannot access a decent fixed broadband service that delivers a download speed of at least 10 Mbit/s and upload speed of at least 1 Mbit/s compared to the UK average of 2%;
- All of Solihull has access to good 4G mobile coverage from all four mobile network operators compared to 66% of the UK as a whole.

However, there are parts of Solihull that are less well served by communications services:

- 9% of rural areas in Solihull cannot access a decent fixed broadband service that delivers a download speed of at least 10 Mbit/s and upload speed of at least 1 Mbit/s;
- Across most of Solihull all premises can access Superfast broadband, although as the map below shows this falls to less than 80% in many parts of south and east Solihull.



Digital Skills in Solihull

The Department for Education has produced an essential digital skills framework, which outlines five basic digital skills^{xxix}:

- Managing information – find manage and store digital information and content;
- Communicating – communicate, interact, collaborate, share and connect with others;
- Transacting – purchase and sell goods and services, organise finances, register for and use Government services;
- Problem solving - increase independence and confidence by solving problems using digital tools and finding solutions;
- Creating - engage with communities and create basic digital content.

Survey evidence shows that 79% of the Solihull population have these five basic digital skills, in the top quintile for Local Authorities in England, but that only 44% of the population have used all five basic skills in the last three months (3rd quintile)^{xxx}.

Classifying Solihull Internet Users

By combining survey, lifestyle, census and performance statistics, the University of Liverpool has profiled internet users across England^{xxxi}. Each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) neighbourhood in England has been assigned to one of 11 groups depending on the dominant population group in the area. The table below shows the 11 internet user classification groups and the four super-groups to which they belong. Pen portraits of each of these groups is available in the Internet Classification [User Guide](#).

Super Group	Group
E-Unengaged	Too Old to Engage
	E-Marginals: Not a Necessity
	E-Marginals: Opt Out
E-Professionals and Students	Next Generation Users
	Totally Connected
	Students Online
Typical Trends	Uncommitted and Casual Users
	Young and Mobile
E-Rural and Fringe	E-Fringe
	Constrained by Infrastructure
	Low Density but High Connectivity
<i>Source: University of Liverpool</i>	

As the map shows nine out of the 11 groups are dominant in at least one of Solihull's 134 LSOAs. The two groups not present are both part of the E-Professionals and Students super group ("Totally connected" and "Students on-line). The two most prominent groups in Solihull are those classified as E-Fringe and those Constrained by Infrastructure which are both part of the wider E-Rural and Fringe super groups. The three Solihull localities North, East and West Solihull have the following characteristics:

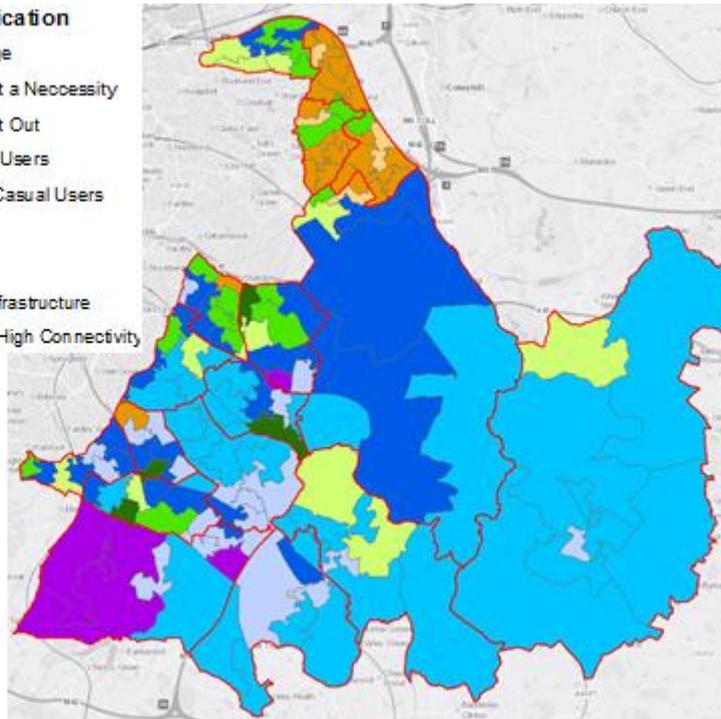
North Solihull (Castle Bromwich, Smith's Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Chelmsley Wood wards) – the three Regeneration wards are dominated by Uncommitted & Casual users part of the Typical Trends super-group, while E-Marginals are most common in Castle Bromwich.

East Solihull (Meriden, Bickenhill, Knowle, Dorridge & Hockley Heath wards) – dominated by E-Rural and Fringe groups with most of the area classified as E-Fringe or Constrained by Infrastructure.

West Solihull (Blythe, St Alphege, Shirley South, Shirley East, Shirley West, Silhill, Olton, Lyndon, Elmdon) – the most diverse area of Solihull, with E-Rural and Fringe groups common in central areas, E-Marginals prominent in Elmdon and Lyndon and some pockets of Next Generation Users particularly in Blythe.

Internet User Classification

- 1a Too Old to Engage
- 1b E-Marginals - Not a Necessity
- 1c E-Marginals - Opt Out
- 2a Next Generation Users
- 3a Uncommitted & Casual Users
- 3b Young & Mobile
- 4a E-Fringe
- 4b Constrained by Infrastructure
- 4c Low Density but High Connectivity



ⁱ Cabinet Office: [Government digital Inclusion Strategy](#)

ⁱⁱ NHS Digital: [What digital inclusion is](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ ONS: [Internet access - households and individuals 2018](#)

^{iv} ONS: [Internet access - households and individuals 2018](#)

^v ONS: [Digital Inclusion Dashboard](#)

^{vi} The Tech Partnership: [Get Digital Heatmap 2017](#)

^{vii} Office for National Statistics (ONS): [Annual population estimates](#)

^{viii} ONS: [Subnational population projections for England](#)

^{ix} ONS Census 2011: [Key statistics table KS105EW](#)

^x ONS Census 2011: [Key statistics table KS105EW](#)

^{xi} ONS: [Gross Disposable Household Income](#)

^{xii} ONS/Nomis: [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

^{xiii} ONS: [Small area income estimates 2016](#)

^{xiv} DWP: [Stat-Xplore](#)

^{xv} HMRC: [Personal tax credits - Children in low income families 2016](#)

^{xvi} ONS/Nomis: [Annual Population Survey](#)

^{xvii} ONS Census 2011: [Local Characteristics - Highest level of qualification by age](#)

^{xviii} ONS/Nomis: [Annual Population Survey](#)

^{xix} ONS Census 2011: [Local Characteristics - Economic Activity by sex by age](#)

^{xx} ONS/Nomis: [Claimant Count April 2019](#)

^{xxi} Public Health England: [Public health outcomes framework 0.1ii Life Expectancy at birth](#)

^{xxii} Public Health England: [Public health outcomes framework 0.2iv Inequality in healthy Life Expectancy at birth](#)

^{xxiii} ONS Census 2011: [Key Statistics - health and provision of unpaid care](#)

^{xxiv} Public Health England: [Mental Health and Wellbeing JSNA](#)

^{xxv} DWP: [Benefit claimants - Employment & Support Allowance](#)

^{xxvi} Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: [Live tables on homelessness](#)

^{xxvii} SMBC Housing Register

^{xxviii} Ofcom: [Connected Nations 2018](#)

^{xxix} Department for Education: [Essential digital skills framework](#)

^{xxx} The Tech Partnership: [Get Digital Heatmap 2017](#)

^{xxxi} Greater London Authority: [The 2014 Internet User Classification \(LSOA Data\)](#)