

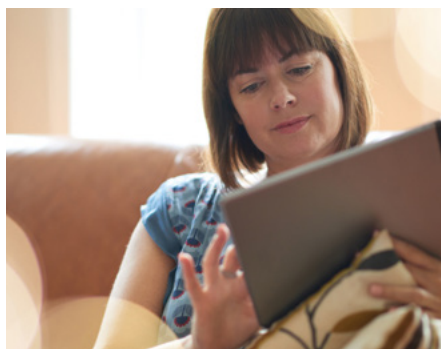


Digital Brent

Hyperoptic is a fibre broadband provider, working to increase customer access to high speed internet connection. Brent Council recognises the importance of quality digital infrastructure to support residents and help local businesses thrive.

LB Brent and Hyperoptic both want to tackle the Digital Divide – meaning helping residents who can't access the power of the internet. Many people don't see the internet as something 'for them', are fearful of using technology or lack the funds to pay for an internet connection. People who lack digital skills can't always access the services they need, which means they may miss out on the many benefits of digital literacy such as feeling less alone, finding work, saving money and improving health.

As part of their fibre broadband roll-out for Brent Council, Hyperoptic included a digital inclusion support package with charity Citizens Online. Their approach to tackling digital exclusion is to work with organisations to embed digital inclusion, making provision sustainable. They do this by focussing on three key elements required within an area to have the greatest impact: evidence, partnership, and digital champions.



This aligned with Brent's Digital Strategy, which had recently been refreshed. Hyperoptic invested in a project with Citizens Online to work with LB Brent to tackle digital exclusion. The project also coincided with the onset of the pandemic, which further stressed the importance of supporting residents during this difficult time. More than ever, residents needed to be accessing essential services, supporting children's education, working remotely and for online shopping. Brent were also keen to support local SMEs in Covid recovery.

Many small businesses in the borough had relied on footfall and face-to-face transactions. Citizens Online took part in work being carried out by Town Centre Managers and made recommendations to support businesses in finding new online sales opportunities.



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Citizens Online's understanding of Brent's ambition to combatting digital exclusion meant the series of recommendations made directly shaped the borough's Digital Inclusion Action Plan. Citizens Online worked with the council, including the health and housing partners and the voluntary and community sector, in developing priorities and securing commitment to develop and implement the Action Plan.

The project has also supported Brent to establish Digital Champions. Several pilots are underway with groups of council staff and volunteers from a local organisation to develop the digital skills of older people. With access provided to the Digital Champions Network, Champions will themselves be able to gain new skills and confidence in supporting others to get online.

Work is being carried out on a further refresh of Brent's Digital Strategy and Digital Inclusion will be at its heart, informed by the collaboration with Citizens Online.