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### CONTACT US DIRECTLY

Do you have an experience of digital exclusion you would be willing to share with us, or an example of how you've been helped to get online? We would love to hear from you.

#### Email:

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#### Or write to:

**The National Pensioners  
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(photographs from Violet Rook)

### The Digital Switchover "FasterBroadband" A Digital Voice Tool for NPC members.

The NPC have been contacted by the above organisation offering free support to older, disabled who are finding difficulties with the switch from analogue to digital phones. The Digital Voice Switchover Support tool is designed for people who are worried about the change or unsure what to do. Particularly older people, disabled users, carers, and anyone who relies on their landline for emergency contact, telecare alarms, or other connected equipment. It asks a short series of questions and produces practical next steps, including: a ready-to-copy message for their phone or broadband provider, call or web chat notes so key concerns aren't missed, a separate message for a telecare or alarm supplier where relevant, provider contact details where available

The tool is free, contains no advertising or sponsored content, and has been **developed as a not-for-profit resource** to help people explain their circumstances clearly before their line moves to Digital Voice.

The platform provides a telephone number, which is 01172 800118. You may be able to leave a message and your own phone number for a response. Alongside the Digital Voice tool, FasterBroadband also provides a few other free resources that may be useful.

The technical jargon support page lets people type in broadband or phone related terms they do not recognise and get a plain English explanation. The data breach search is also an opportunity to promote online safety in workshops.

They also provide the UK's most comprehensive broadband social tariff support tool. This is another not-for-profit resource designed to help people receiving qualifying benefits check whether they could move to a lower cost broadband package.

There are also other practical tools on the site, including the data usage calculator, which can help people avoid paying for more broadband than they actually need. **See if they can**

**help** <https://www.fasterbroadband.co.uk/tools/digital-voice-switchover>



## **EDITORIAL**

The concerns regarding digital inclusion keep coming. Everything is online and digital. There are many good things and opportunities for the individual online, but these demand, time, and money. In this newsletter we try to bring information and advice about events nationwide.

It is great to have letters from two of NPC members commenting on the Digital Switchover. Information from Stephen a member of the Working Party gives lots of information about AI and how it is affecting digital communication. He also indicates how it is the Smartphone which is now the device of choice in regard to digital use for many aspects of life. Examples where the use of a Smartphone is essential are in health, banking and travel. It is the QR code which is often used to communicate. Some people who cannot get online or who do not choose to do so, older people and others, are being locked out of many services.

News and views need to be continually update because technology development is happening so fast. The cost of everything is also raising so fast.

The letter from the General Secretary Jan Shortt to the Pension Minister is a reminder of that fact. Torsen Bell indicated that an online service exists for the public to "Check their State Pensions". Allowing people to find out when they could receive their pensions and how much that would be. The use of digital technology in regard to checking about Pensions also illustrates how everyone is being encouraged to go online.

Please keep your letters coming and voice your needs in regard to the digital age.

**Violet Rook**

## **How will Digital Identity impact digital exclusion?**

**The Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA) and Industry Forum recently held an in-person policy roundtable focussing on digital identity through the lens of digital exclusion.**

The event at St. Catherine's Conference Centre, Westminster, brought together stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors and others.

Its purpose was: to examine how Digital ID may be implemented in such a way that digital exclusion is prevented.

Insights and practical experiences were shared, but the meeting was held under The Chatham House Rule so attendees names and organisations cannot be given.

The invite from Elizabeth Anderson, DPA chief executive, said: "With the government's consultation underway, Digital ID is in the public eye as a government led product. However, digital identity has a wider meaning – directly linked to how people experience proving who they say they are for a range of online services. This ranges through concerns on access, skills, trust and confidence, as well as practical difficulties, opportunities and choice.

"For this session we will in part look at the government proposals – particularly concerns with international comparisons We will also consider wider issues related to digital identity."

"These will include the connection between digital poverty and identity poverty; the skills and behaviours that are now assumed in online identity checks by financial and other service providers; and what safeguards and offline alternatives are essential. We will also touch on the link between digital identity and age, particularly with reference to services including social media and smartphone profiles, and the links between safety and trust."

The meeting discussed the challenges and potential solutions for digital exclusion, and many concerns were expressed about the implementation of a digital ID system.

Key points included the high cost and complexity of obtaining IDs such as passports, which excludes many especially older people and those on low incomes, and the essential need for offline alternatives and public access points .

The findings will be incorporated into research to be shared by the DPA.

**Jenny Sims**

## Accelerating Digital Traffic

An interesting, not to say challenging set of demands are arising for us all. Just when we could see the end of the Web skills demand road, a whole new set of tests are presenting themselves.

A combination of organisations committing to AI and to smartphone apps, is generating a need for both skill acquisition and massive self-reliance for service users of all kinds.

If your bank, doctor, local authority or other agency adopts AI supported customer service, it is typically to save money by cutting staff. So, they can't allocate time and effort to taking general questions by email or telephone, hence many web sites no longer offer email addresses or telephone numbers.

What they do offer is a Chat service, where an AI assistant will try to answer your questions and offer you relevant services. A lot of the time, this works really well, fast and effective. But, it depends on the user knowing how to ask AI the right questions. If you fall at any of those hurdles though, life gets tough. There is usually a human operative the AI can call if it gets stuck but that can be hard to initiate. There are some support services for people who need to learn to use smartphones, but they are neither very common, nor evenly spread.

In other parts of their operations, some government services are now using systems from the US software company, Palantir, whose Gotham platform is used by the US military to support weapons systems and to run military operations. The NHS uses the Foundry platform rather than Gotham, but the separation of these functions is not transparent. This is true too in respect of Palantir's AIP platform, an AI Large Language Model and AI assistant.

Palantir was originally a tech startup company funded by the CIA. It is now a major military asset. An analysis published in The Week say, "Palantir Technologies Inc., a Miami-based company that specialises in data integration and analysis, is seldom out of the news. This is partly because it works in controversial sectors and its software is used in conflicts around the world.

Clients also include the CIA and [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) (Ice); it was involved in Elon Musk's short-lived [Department of Government Efficiency](#).

It has also expanded into healthcare: in Britain, [its contracts include a £330 million deal with NHS England](#), as well as a £240.6 million deal with the Ministry of Defence."

**Stephen Rennie**

## Unlimited Access??

**Is the NHS granting staff from companies including Palantir 'unlimited access' to identifiable patient data while working on its federated data platform (FDP), the Financial Times (FT) asked?** A briefing document, written by a senior NHS data official in April 2026, indicates that granting enhanced permissions could mean there is a "risk of loss of public confidence" when it comes to "safeguarding patient data and ensuring appropriate use and access to it".

A Palantir spokesperson said "To the NHS, and all our customers, we are designated by law as a 'data processor', with our customers "data controllers, that means that Palantir software can only be used to process data precisely in line with the instruction of the customer. Using the data for anything else would not only be illegal but technically impossible due to granular access controls overseen by the NHS."

An NHS England spokesperson said "The NHS has strict policies in place for managing access to patient data and carries out regular audits to ensure compliance, Anyone external requiring access must have government security clearance and be approved by a member of NHS England staff at director level or above."

It was indicated that broad access was originally intended only for NHSE employees with security clearance. The Financial Times reported that in the briefing note external workers had requested the same permissions "as it is too inconvenient to apply for all of the necessary individual CDAs", (data permissions)

## ***The Forgotten Patients Study***

***The Forgotten Patients*** is a study from the online platform **Digital Health**. It shows how ‘digital first’ ideas can be opposite to the needs of those who rely most on care, and what must change to ensure services are designed for inclusion from the outset.

The government’s 10 year health plan sets out a move towards a ‘digital by default’ service, with the NHS App as the system’s ‘front door’ and an ‘online hospital’ planned to help reduce elective wait lists.

Some individuals say this will expand access and free up capacity for those who need it most, but is this being realised in practice or does it risk becoming a barrier for the most vulnerable members of society? Especially those who cannot get online.

In this project, editor of Digital Health, and reporter Jordan Sollof investigate the human impact of the NHS’s digital revolution.

An example begins at a kitchen table in the Midlands with Rosemary, a widow in her 70s who feels locked out of an increasingly digital system. The reports explore the growing risk of creating a two-tier system if issues such as affordability, digital skills, accessibility and service design are not addressed.

A wider range of communities, including ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, disabled people, LGBTQ+ communities and those living in rural areas are mentioned in the report.

For NHS leaders, policymakers and technology providers, this report is a reminder that digital transformation will only succeed if it works for everyone. It is worth a read. [www.digitalhealth.net](http://www.digitalhealth.net)

**Violet Rook**

## **Digital Care and Carers**

**“Digital care technologies risk deepening inequalities and increasing pressure on unpaid carers if not implemented carefully”, writes Dr Ekaterina Hertog, associate professor in AI and Society, at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford**

Nearly nine million people provided unpaid care in the UK between 2023 and 2025 –one in six of all UK adults. The support they give to family, partners, friends and neighbours because of illness, disability or age is also a vital support to the health and care services.

Many of the projects funded recently from a [Accelerating Reform Fund \(ARF\)](#) were to develop new technologies to help identify unpaid carers (many of whom go under the radar and so receive no support) and to create online communities to provide digital support and resources.

Evidence from global research studies shows that people who could benefit most from digital care technologies are often the least able to access them.

The ARF evaluation found that younger, more able carers are quickest to engage with new digital tools, while older, more isolated and disadvantaged carers lag behind.

Consider this in the light of UK statistics, which show that older people and those from disadvantaged areas make up the biggest proportion of unpaid carers.

The ARF findings, showed a clear need for better regulation that specifically addresses both data governance and privacy issues around care technologies. This would indicate the need for privacy in regard to the needs of carers and their relatives. Especially in connection with commercial products and services.

In some places like the US, the regulations which govern this area are weak. In Europe, they are incomplete, with specific provisions protecting children’s, but not vulnerable adults’ data.

The professor also indicated “This is not an area that should be purely left to market forces, given how essential care is to society” Many charities are supporting this view.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Smart Places & Smart Communities

Across three live morning sessions 2026 will bring together public sector leaders from local government, combined authorities and the wider public sector to explore how Place data, AI, digital infrastructure and connected technologies are being used in practice.

**Wednesday 24 June to Friday 26 June**

Time: 11:00 - 12:30 each morning via Teams

### From the Kings Fund

[Join at a free online session](#) on Monday 8 June to explore how data analytics experts, NHS leaders and patient advocates are using the platform's capabilities to innovate and improve care. Don't miss out. Sign up for free today. (note this is sponsored by Palantir)

### What the Local Government Association are doing in regard to the Digital Switchover (click the links)

Are providing social media assets and printable leaflets to use to raise awareness of the landline digital switchover on our [partner toolkit page](#). They are conducting both a [landline switchover readiness survey](#) and a [2G/3G switch off impact survey](#) with councils.

We've helped produce [guidance and templates](#) with the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI).

### A National Commission on AI

In April aspects of the National Commission on the Regulation of AI in Healthcare, were made public. The Public needing to know when AI is being used, how it is influencing decisions, and who is accountable. The new commission will help shape how AI tools, such as ambient voice technology (AVT), are regulated across the health system,

### Which-Switchover support

BT says its customer support team concerning the Digital Switchover is available on [0330 1234 150](tel:03301234150) to discuss options. It will also give customers notice when the switchover is planned in their local area. If you have concerns, now is the time to contact your phone provider to get that support in place. BT plans to migrate vulnerable customers regionally.

**From Spring 2025:** East of England, Northern Ireland, Wales, Yorkshire & Humber

**From Summer 2025:** East Midlands, London, Northeast England, Scotland

**From Autumn 2025:** Northwest England, Southwest England, Southeast England, West Midlands

**All plans. it is said will be completed by January, 2027.**

### Key stats on digital exclusion from Age UK.

2.1 million people aged 65 and over do not use the internet.

4.9 million people aged 65 and over don't have the basic skills needed to use the internet successfully.

4.3 million people aged 65 and over in the UK don't use a smartphone. 1.6 million people of the same age group don't use any sort of mobile phone.

**Call Age UK's Advice Line on 0800 678 1602** to find out local training opportunities.

Online Centres Network provides access to the internet and help using it, and some centres also offer training courses. [Find a centre near you.](#)

Ask at your local library about computer training opportunities.