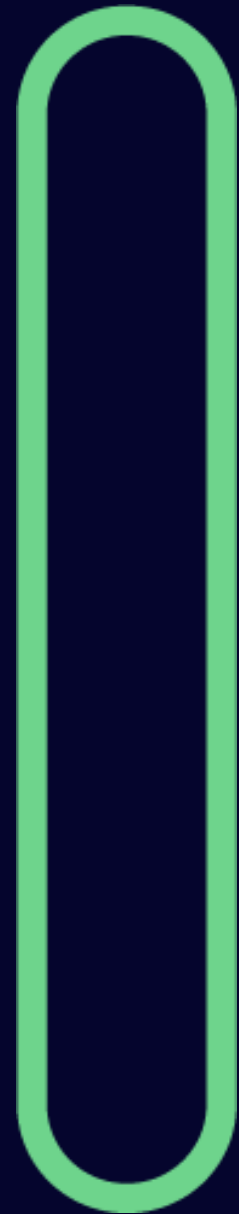


Social Value, Connectivity & Digital Inclusion in Social Housing



Wifinity in partnership with Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) Connected Homes, Inclusive Places programme.

Executive summary



Across the UK, millions of families are still on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Research from The Good Things Foundation (March 2024) found that around 3.7 million families with children do not meet the government's Minimum Digital Living Standard. Digital exclusion is a barrier for many social housing households, which lack the internet access, devices, or skills needed to participate in a digital society fully.

Overall, around 15% of UK adults lack essential digital skills for daily tasks, from using online services to managing information safely and confidently. In social housing, this skills gap can be compounded by affordability, access and confidence.

The same research paper found that 15% of school-aged or young people aged 8–25 do not have home broadband, 14% lack access to a larger-screen device like a laptop or desktop for learning, and 4% have neither a learning device nor home internet access.

Digital exclusion is more than not having a connection. It includes the skills to use technology, apps and online platforms well. Social housing residents in this cohort find it harder to access jobs, education, health services and support. Everyday life is more difficult.

The UK's social housing sector is allocating more focus, capability and resources to address this gap and improve resident outcomes, whilst balancing budget, compliance and regulatory demands.

The goal is to generate social value through practical actions and outcomes across their housing portfolios.

In January 2026, Wifinity, along with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Connected Homes, Inclusive Places (CHIPs) programme, brought together senior social housing providers in the North West to discuss how social value objectives can be achieved through digital inclusion.

A recurring theme was the gap between connectivity infrastructure and experience. As one attendee put it:

“There’s a big difference between internet connectivity and people being connected.”

Read more to support your social housing connectivity strategy.

socialhousing@wifinity.co.uk | 020 3372 6284



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Connectivity solutions for social housing

Connectivity delivers social value most effectively when it is designed and managed as a long-term service, with performance, accountability and resident experience built in from the outset.



Wifinity works with social housing organisations to make connectivity the foundation of social value delivery.

We design and manage internet services to support resident outcomes and operational needs, including:

- Reliable, building-wide connectivity that enables access to online resources, education and public services
- Resident connectivity that supports access without recurring connectivity barriers
- Connecting housing technology and monitoring systems, including IoT enabled compliance tools, damp and mould sensors and smart building functions that depend on stable, secure networks
- Supporting staff and operational systems through secure, managed networks that underpin service teams, digital casework and housing operations
- Consistent performance and by building social value measures directly into service agreements

Defining social value outcomes for social housing

It's now usual for social housing providers to report on social value and their support for digital inclusion across their portfolios.

These objectives are shaped by regulation, procurement frameworks and local authority partnerships, which also now place social value as a high priority. And, of course, the same financial and operational constraints exist.

In line with the Social Value Act, social value is now embedded in corporate plans, tenders and supplier contracts. For social housing providers, this translates into a set of measurable outcomes across resident, community and service performance.



A hand is shown interacting with a smart home control panel mounted on a wall. The panel features a large screen at the top and several touch-sensitive buttons below it. The background is a solid blue color.

Social value in housing means...

- Access to services
- Education and employment support
- Wellbeing and community connection
- Safer, healthier homes
- Measurable resident outcomes

"Source: UK Government Procurement Policy Note 06/20 (updated 2023)"

Digital exclusion is a barrier for many social housing households, with many public services, benefit applications, health appointments, learning platforms and employment tools now primarily online.

If residents cannot connect reliably or affordably, there's a gap between social value ambitions and day-to-day resident experience.

It's also difficult to evidence and sustain social value commitments when more services move online.

There's also a growing expectation that housing services will be data-led, digitally accessible and responsive, including through connected devices and IoT-enabled monitoring systems. This increases reliance on robust building infrastructure, including reliable connectivity.

Rather than overbuild a separate network, social housing decision-makers will find cost-benefits, simplified management and improved ROI by using the same network.

Manage social value successfully

Social value commitments are often defined at the procurement stage before local needs or building constraints are fully understood.

This is risky and likely too early in the planning cycle. Speakers flagged that this means that social value may be defined in a silo or not supported by a management framework to steer outcomes throughout the project.

Once services are live, responsibility for social value delivery can become unclear, sitting across asset, customer and community teams without a single owner. This creates a disconnect between what is promised and what can be realistically delivered.

“A lot of the pledges that were agreed at procurement stage weren’t really delivered.”

Rosie Briercliffe, Chief of Staff at Wifinity added,

“It’s easy during procurement to say what you’re going to do. It’s much harder on the other side when you’re delivering it to actually measure it.”

What this means in practice?

Move beyond broad commitments and define measurable indicators of impact. For example:

- Support school-aged residents to access online learning from home
- Enable residents to use digital public and health services independently
- Support residents to gain digital skills linked to employment pathways
- Reduce missed appointments or failed service interactions due to a lack of access

FRAMEWORK: From commitment to measurable delivery

- 1 Social value commitment
- 2 Define outcome
(for example, access to online learning)
- 3 Design & build enabling infrastructure
(reliable building-wide connectivity)
- 4 Measure the impact
(engagement, skills gained, service access)

It was agreed that social value outcomes can not be achieved through policy statements.

They depend on connectivity infrastructure, service design and resident support services working together consistently across the housing environment. Delivery improves when goals, infrastructure and service models are aligned from the start.

Effective social value delivery requires:

- Define community priorities earlier in procurement
- Set clear outcome measures and reporting expectations
- Link social value activity to local community needs
- Align connectivity planning with wider digital and housing strategies
- Support secure public or community internet access where needed

Create social value through connectivity

As a roundtable attendee said:

“Connectivity is part of everyday life; it should be seen as essential as gas and electric.”

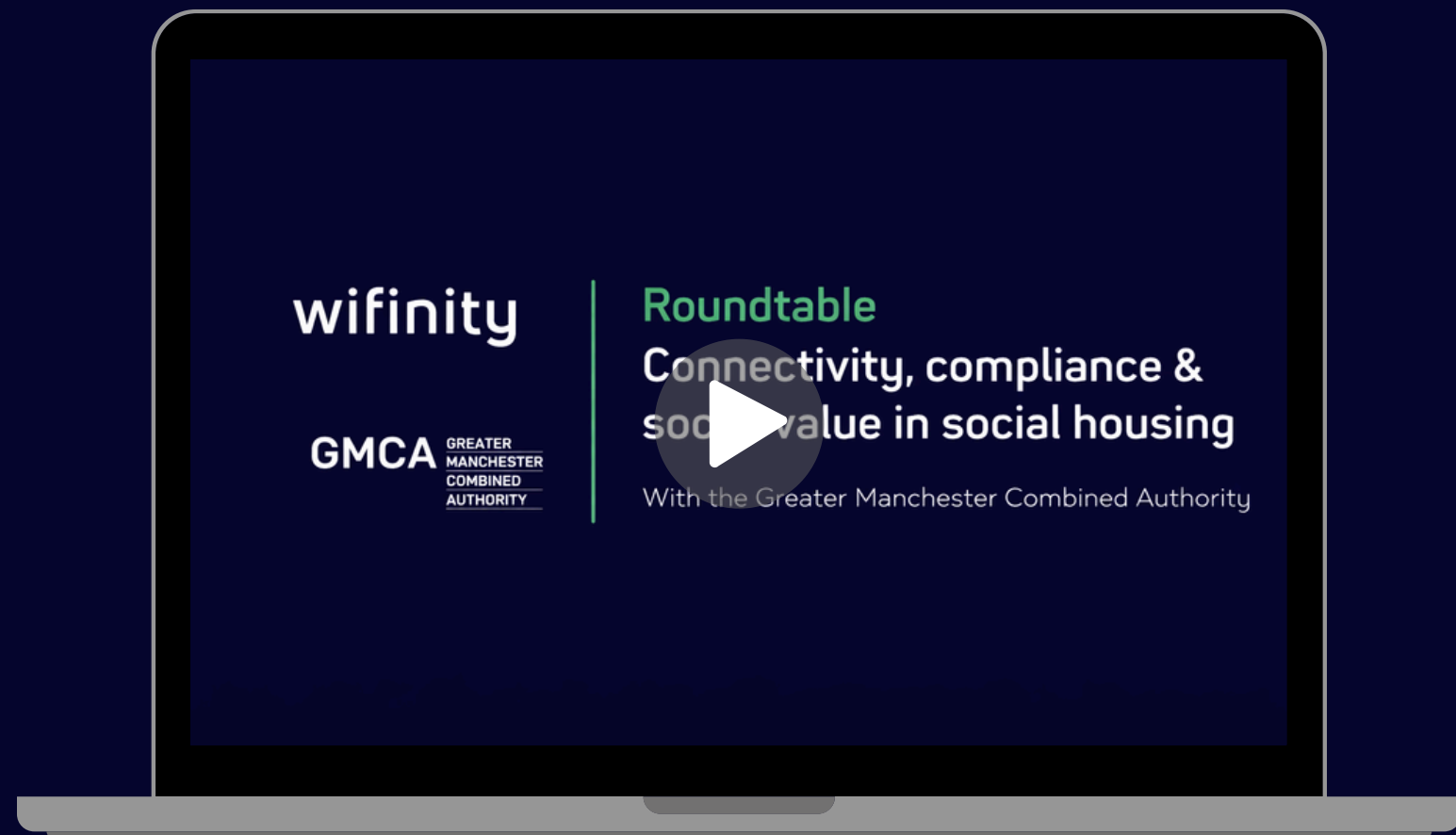
Achieving strong social value depends on early planning, clear ownership and connectivity that supports services every day.

When connectivity is planned during building design, refurbishment or service planning, it is easier to link infrastructure design to measurable resident and operational outcomes.

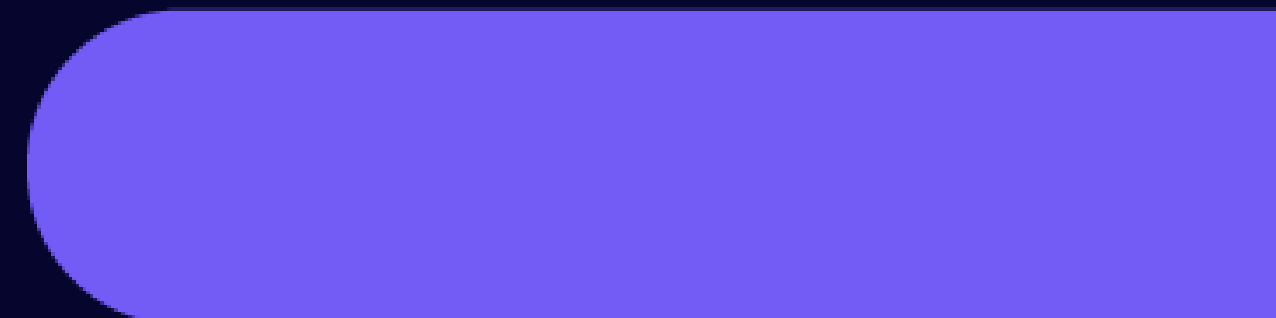
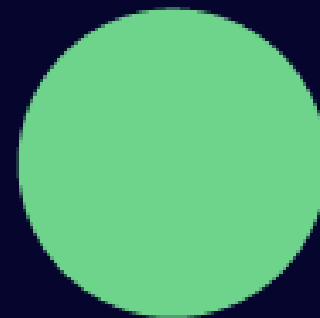
Sector Perspective: Social housing providers can support social value delivery by:

- Planning connectivity during development, refurbishment and service design
- Defining a social value owner responsible for resident and operational needs
- Setting specific, measurable social value outcomes linked to resident access
- Embedding performance measures and social value reporting within managed connectivity service agreements

This approach supports whole-life value and reduces the risk of reactive deployment, funding gaps or fragmented delivery.



Watch insights from our recent roundtable on connectivity, compliance and social value.



Contact Scott Fawcett, Social Housing Connectivity Lead, Wifinity

socialhousing@wifinity.co.uk | 020 3372 6284

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