

Policy Brief: Community Internet Access – Enhancing Dignity through Digital Inclusion

Overview

Access to the internet is essential for social connection, education, civic engagement, and economic opportunity. However, many people, especially those in lower-income communities, face barriers to affordable, safe, and balanced internet use. This proposal introduces a state-owned Community Internet service that offers free, safe, and ethically curated internet access as an additional option.

Enhancing Dignity through Community Internet Access

This proposal promotes dignity by ensuring **equal, affordable access** to safe and reliable internet for all, especially those currently excluded due to cost or risk of harmful content. By providing a free, ethically curated online environment that protects children and vulnerable users, it safeguards wellbeing and fosters healthier digital habits. Supporting local businesses and sustainable products strengthens community pride and economic participation, further affirming personal and collective dignity. Importantly, the proposal **respects user choice** by offering an additional option without restricting broader internet freedom. Through transparency, oversight, and inclusive access, this initiative empowers individuals to fully engage in modern society with confidence, safety, and respect—core elements of human dignity.

Key Features

Digital Inclusion with Respect for Choice

- Community Internet provides **free access during key hours** (8 AM–7 PM and 9 PM–6 AM) for social interaction, education, and local economic engagement.
- It **does not restrict users' overall internet access**; instead, it offers a dignified, safe alternative to private providers.
- Users retain the freedom to use private, unrestricted internet services if they wish.

Safety and Wellbeing

- The service filters harmful content such as pornography and gambling to protect children and vulnerable users, fostering a safer digital environment.

- Ethical ad-blocking and curated content reduce exposure to exploitative clickbait and doom-scrolling, supporting healthier online habits and mental wellbeing.

Community and Economic Empowerment

- Local businesses receive free or low-cost advertising, encouraging economic dignity and community resilience.
- An ethical, sustainable online marketplace promotes environmentally friendly and locally produced goods.

Transparency and Oversight

- Independent oversight ensures content filtering and any monitoring respects privacy rights and human rights principles.
 - Transparency builds public trust and ensures accountability.
-

How This Enhances Dignity

- **Promotes Equal Access:** By removing cost barriers, the Community Internet empowers all citizens to engage fully in society.
 - **Protects Vulnerable Users:** Prioritizing safety respects the dignity of children and vulnerable adults.
 - **Encourages Healthy Digital Use:** Reducing harmful content and manipulative ads supports mental health and balanced lifestyles.
 - **Supports Local Economies:** Empowering local businesses strengthens community ties and economic participation.
 - **Respects Choice and Privacy:** Offering an additional option without restricting broader internet freedom honors personal autonomy.
-

Financing the Community Internet

- Sustainable funding is proposed through a **small tax on sales via major online platforms** such as Amazon and Temu.
- This tax would be handled similarly to VAT increases, leveraging existing infrastructure for efficient collection.
- Revenues would fund infrastructure, maintenance, and community advertising programs, ensuring no direct cost to users.

Implementation Pilot

- The scheme would launch initially as a pilot in Greater Manchester, refining operational details and measuring impact on access, wellbeing, and local economic activity.
- Lessons from the pilot would inform scalable rollout nationwide.

Conclusion

The Community Internet initiative restores dignity by ensuring safe, affordable digital access that respects choice, protects the vulnerable, supports local economies, and fosters healthier online habits. It transforms internet access from a privilege into a right, strengthening digital citizenship and social inclusion for all.

1. Ofcom. *Online Nation 2022* [Internet]. London: Ofcom; 2022 [cited 2025 May 20]. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/241293/online-nation-2022-report.pdf
2. Building Digital UK. *Annual Report and Accounts 2023 to 2024* [Internet]. London: GOV.UK; 2024 [cited 2025 May 20]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-digital-uk-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024>
3. McLaughlin B, Gotlieb MR, Mills DJ. Caught in a dangerous world: Problematic news consumption and its relationship to mental and physical ill-being. *Health communication*. 2023 Oct 15;38(12):2687-97.