

A Regional Approach to IT Reuse for Good:

Opportunities in the West Midlands



A report for the West Midlands Combined Authority
by Good Things Foundation and Better Places

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Good Things
Foundation



West Midlands
Combined Authority

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Foreword

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is using its convening powers to embed digital inclusion more strategically across the region, as set out in the [West Midlands Digital Roadmap](#), with a clear ambition to close the digital divide.

This research was commissioned to further develop our digital inclusion portfolio, building on our strong track record of evidence-led policy and delivery, exemplified by the [Digital Skills Blueprint](#), which informed the creation of the £2 million Digital Divide Programme in the region. We also aim to share the findings with stakeholders at local, regional, and national levels to reinforce the region's position as a thought leader in this field – driven in particular by insights from Local Authority and Community Sector partners. This includes informing the implementation of the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

The WMCA is grateful to all those who contributed to this research, generously offering their insights, expertise, and lived experience.

Mike Lewis

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West Midlands Combined Authority



Executive Summary

This report takes a regional lens to look at opportunities, enablers, and barriers for device reuse and donation. Insights and opportunities for action emerged through desk research and a series of online workshops with cross-sector stakeholders in and beyond the region. For the West Midlands Combined Authority, this represents a significant deep dive into an area with implications for the long-term prospects of many residents. It is also strategically aligned with WMCA frameworks and strategies, such as Inclusive Growth Framework, #WM2041, Local Growth Plan and the West Midlands Futures Green Paper which are shaping the future direction of regional policy.

A National Agenda for Action

- The Government's [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#) commits to tackling 'device poverty' by promoting reuse and refurbishment of devices to give to digitally excluded individuals and households.
- A new government charter for responsible device donation will encourage businesses and public sector organisations to reuse their IT assets for good.
- Devolution to regions and localities is a key plank in the Government's approach.

Realising Regional Opportunities in the West Midlands

- The [West Midlands Digital Roadmap 2024-2027](#) has a commitment to enabling residents to access an affordable device and connection, and feel confident to access the internet and basic services, as part of a holistic approach.
- The West Midlands has an evolving ecosystem for device donation and reuse involving local authorities, businesses, integrated care boards, voluntary and community sector organisations, alongside national initiatives.
- A snapshot estimate indicates the size of the opportunity in the West Midlands. Based on 22 large employers, together employing around **240,000** people, around **131,275** devices could become available over a **four-year** period, enabling around **37,842** devices to be rehomed to tackle digital inclusion.
- Stakeholders confirmed the need for devices (also connectivity and skills support). However, activity, assets, capacity and capability to implement device donation and reuse schemes was felt to be uneven across the region.
- Some local authorities have more developed approaches, such as #CovConnects (Coventry) and Wolves Tech Aid (Wolverhampton).
- The importance of local VCSE infrastructure and capacity was emphasised, but the strength of relationships with local authorities varied.
- Stakeholders felt a regional ecosystem could centralise business engagement and bulk donations, but local relationships and autonomy would be crucial to delivery. Schemes like the National Device Bank were felt to play a valued role.

Opportunities for the West Midlands Combined Authority to explore include:

- **Set a vision**, with strategic outcomes to guide regional activity such as:
 - **WMCA** leads by example, embedding device donation and reuse into digital inclusion and sustainability goals.
 - **Local authorities** are empowered to innovate, build business partnerships, and respond to community needs.
 - **VCSEs** are supported to play their vital role in device reuse – acting as trusted intermediaries to reach those most in need.
- **Champion national initiatives**, like the **charter for device donation**, in the region.
- **Publish a regional annual snapshot**, combining case studies, data and trends.
- **Ensure digital inclusion funding streams** support the purchase of refurbished devices.
- **Use commissioning levers** to integrate reuse and donation in public contracts.
- **Connect device donors** with IT Asset Disposal providers who meet key standards.
- **Resource holistic digital inclusion**, so devices are given alongside offers of data connectivity, and support with digital skills and confidence.
- **Create a West Midlands device reuse network**, fostering collaboration.
- **Share good practice** through regional learning forums or showcases; funded peer placements between initiatives; and/or a searchable directory of initiatives.
- **Help to establish local repair and reuse training schemes** through partnerships with colleges, social enterprises or repair cafes.
- **Co-create practical guidance for VCSEs** on assessing donated or refurbished devices, with community organisations, local authority and other experts.

“We had access to 30 devices ... we actually had an overwhelming response of over 100 people who wanted the devices”

(VCSE lead)

“The combined authority is probably in the best place to have those relationships with strategic businesses at a regional level”

(Local authority lead)

“There’s a lot of stuff going on locally, so the WMCA role in that respect might be around sort of getting practice shared ”

(Local authority lead)

“Organisations are very happy to receive devices... but they haven’t got the skills to understand what their expectations are as a provider of a device”

(VCSE lead)



1 Introduction

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has played a key role in digital inclusion across the region, delivering innovative programmes in partnership with local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, national charities, and funders. Recent work funded through the [2023 Deeper Devolution Deal](#) has helped to situate digital inclusion as an enabler of economic participation, education, health and wellbeing. The [West Midlands Digital Roadmap 2024-2027](#) includes a commitment to enabling residents to have access to an affordable device and connection, and feel confident to access the internet and basic services, as part of a holistic approach covering access to devices, connectivity and skills.

In February 2025, the UK Government published its [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#). This includes a commitment to tackling 'device poverty' by promoting the reuse and refurbishment of devices to give to digitally excluded individuals and households. Alongside a pilot to refurbish and donate ex-government devices, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is working with Good Things Foundation, VodafoneUK, Deloitte, and others to develop a charter for responsible device donation. It will encourage businesses and public sector organisations to reuse their organisational IT assets for good, promoting circularity and helping to close the UK's digital divide. This sends a clear signal: device reuse and donation is a positive, practical solution which delivers environmental, social, and organisational benefits. It is a solution which is already in place across the

country – from hyperlocal partnerships between local businesses, schools and charities; to device refurbishment and distribution schemes run by local authorities, to national schemes like the National Device Bank run by Good Things Foundation with Reconome.

This report looks at the opportunities, enablers, and barriers through a regional lens. It explores the feasibility and potential of a regional approach to device donation and reuse in the West Midlands, drawing on insights from a collaborative project between the WMCA, local authority partners, Good Things Foundation, and Better Places. It includes insights from regional and national stakeholders experienced in device recycling initiatives.

While this report focuses on opportunities in the gift of the WMCA and its partners across the region, it also surfaces issues that require national attention. As such, we hope that insights from the West Midlands can inform both national and regional thinking around challenges and opportunities for device donations within and across regions, and the roles that private, public and third sector organisations have within this.

Case study: #CovConnects

#CovConnects is Coventry's city-wide programme for digital inclusion, designed to ensure that all residents can access the devices, connectivity and skills they need to thrive. The programme is backed by a growing network of over 150 voluntary and community sector partners and brings together public, private, and third-sector organisations to tackle barriers to digital access.

From the outset, Coventry City Council recognised the potential to achieve both social and environmental impact by building a circular approach to technology reuse. With the appointment of a dedicated Digital Services and Inclusion Lead, the council undertook a comprehensive scoping exercise to identify what assets already existed and where there were gaps. One early insight was the untapped potential in reusing corporate and council-owned devices.

Building on community insights and pilot initiatives, the Council launched the #CovConnects Device Bank, using government funding and end-of-life council equipment. A new customer relationship management (CRM) system was developed to automate and streamline requests and referrals, ensuring the process was both efficient and fair.

At the heart of the Device Bank is a commitment to supporting voluntary and community organisations in a way that works for them. Organisations can approach #CovConnects with a request and receive bespoke support – not just a device, but help with connectivity, digital skills and wider wellbeing where needed.

With the Device Bank established and demand rising, the next phase focused on long-term sustainability. The #CovConnects team recognised that scaling impact meant thinking beyond isolated donations, instead joining up digital inclusion with the city's sustainability and circular economy goals.

Alongside this, existing relationships with the NHS provided a critical opportunity to go further. In partnership with Hubbub and Virgin Media O2's Time After Time programme, the team began testing a new model for refurbishing and redistributing NHS IT equipment, assessing its social and environmental value.

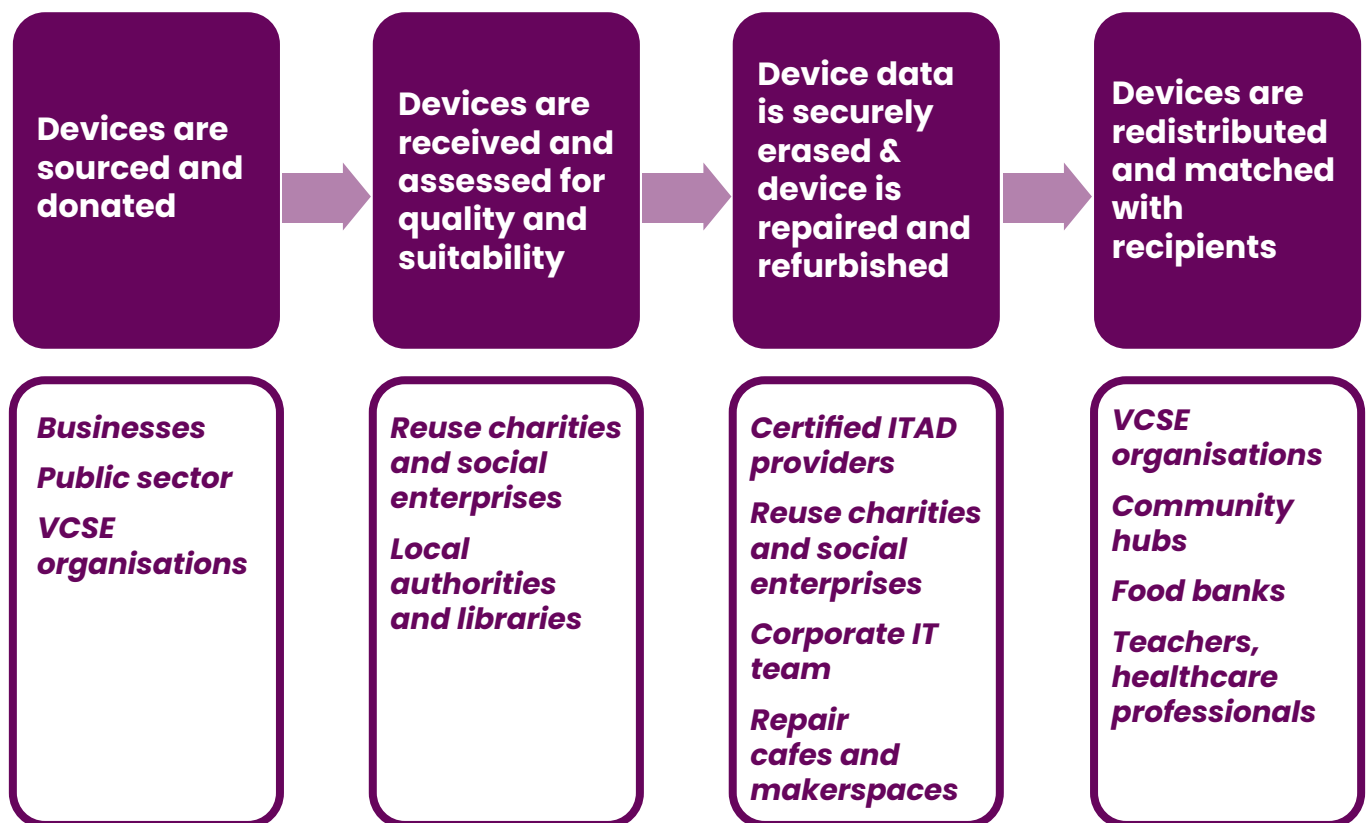
In parallel, #CovConnects is deepening its approach by embedding reuse into frontline services, from care homes and youth organisations to dementia hubs and homelessness services. These partnerships ensure that donated devices reach the people who need them most, in a way that respects their context and supports long-term inclusion.

Working with the University of Warwick, the team is also developing an evaluation framework to assess both the carbon and environmental impact of the model and its social outcomes. As the programme evolves, this evidence base will help make the case for sustained investment and wider adoption.

2 Our approach

The journey of a donated device, from initial donation to reaching its intended recipient, involves multiple stages and stakeholders. This includes businesses and public services that donate devices, organisations working to repair and refurbish them, and charities and frontline professionals matching them with their intended beneficiaries. Each has a distinct, important role to play so that devices are not only reused, but are also usable, secure and accompanied by the support people need to get online with confidence.

Figure 1: Overview of the device donation and reuse journey



2.1 Activities

To explore the opportunities, barriers and enablers for device donation and reuse across the West Midlands, we conducted the following activities:

- **Desk-based research**, drawing on published reports and learning from device reuse and donation projects, like Good Things Foundation's National Device Bank.
- **Mapping** of infrastructure, resources and partner capacity across the region.
- **Interviews and workshops** with key stakeholders at national, regional, local, and hyperlocal levels, involved at all stages of the device donation and reuse journey, from sourcing to refurbishment to distribution to support for those receiving devices.
- **Developing a methodology** to estimate the scale of the opportunity in the region.
- **Outlining a roadmap** for further consideration by WMCA and key partners.

Case study: Wolves Tech Aid

Wolves Tech Aid is a not-for-profit initiative launched in 2021 by LearnPlay Foundation and the Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP to address digital exclusion and promote sustainability within the community. The programme focuses on collecting, refurbishing and redistributing donated technology to individuals and communities in need across Wolverhampton.

Donated devices are thoroughly cleaned of personal data and refurbished before being distributed to recipients. The initiative has established drop-off points at various locations, including the Civic Centre and local libraries, making it convenient for residents and businesses to contribute.

LearnPlay Foundation handed over the initiative to Wolverhampton Council in 2024, and up to that point had received £22,178 in donations, used to repair, upcycle and distribute devices to children in Wolverhampton. This effort has been instrumental in supporting students who lack access to digital devices, enabling them to participate in online classes and complete homework assignments.

The programme also collaborates with the Digital Wolves network, comprising trusted partners who assist in identifying and supporting individuals without access to technology. For instance, Ark Training, a member of this network, has used Wolves Tech Aid to support over 50 people, including those experiencing isolation or financial hardship, by providing them with devices to access online resources and communicate effectively.

Wolves Tech Aid's commitment to environmental sustainability is evident in its efforts to reduce electronic waste. By refurbishing and repurposing donated devices, the initiative minimizes the ecological footprint associated with discarded electronics. Even devices that are not in pristine condition are valuable, as their parts can be used to refurbish other equipment.

The programme continues to evolve, with ambitions to expand its reach and services. By tailoring its offerings to meet the changing needs of the community, Wolves Tech Aid aims to ensure that more individuals gain the tools they need to learn, work, and connect – fostering a more inclusive and sustainable digital environment in Wolverhampton.

3 Understanding the West Midlands device reuse ecosystem

The West Midlands has an evolving device reuse ecosystem, involving a wide variety of partners from across sectors. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that the scale of the opportunity to tackle digital inclusion through device donation and reuse means there is space (and need) for many organisations and actors. However, activity, assets, capacity and capability across the region is uneven.

Table 1: Partners involved in the West Midlands device reuse ecosystem

Category	Examples
Businesses	Large employers, SMEs
Government	National government, WMCA and constituent local authorities
Anchor institutions	NHS bodies, universities, schools and colleges, libraries, housing associations
Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations	Mutual aid organisations, community groups, charities, CICs, food banks
IT Asset Disposal (ITAD) providers	Certified refurbishers and providers
Recycling and reuse organisations	Tech and/or circular economy charities and social enterprises, repair cafes and makerspaces

Previously, the region has benefited from the **Getting West Midlands Connected** programme, supported by West Midlands 5G (WM5G). This involved distributing devices and connectivity solutions through local authorities and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) partners, targeting residents facing digital exclusion. Funding for this has ended. Some local authorities now rely on networks and voluntary sector partnerships to deliver digital device programmes; others have more developed approaches. For example, Coventry City Council's #CovConnects programme focuses on holistic support and strategic integration with the climate agenda, NHS innovation and anchor institutions. City of Wolverhampton Council's approach is built on business and community donations, refurbished by the social enterprise REPC Ltd. Until recently, the Birmingham Device Bank programme had been a key part of Birmingham City Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy, refurbishing retired council devices for distribution to community groups and individuals.

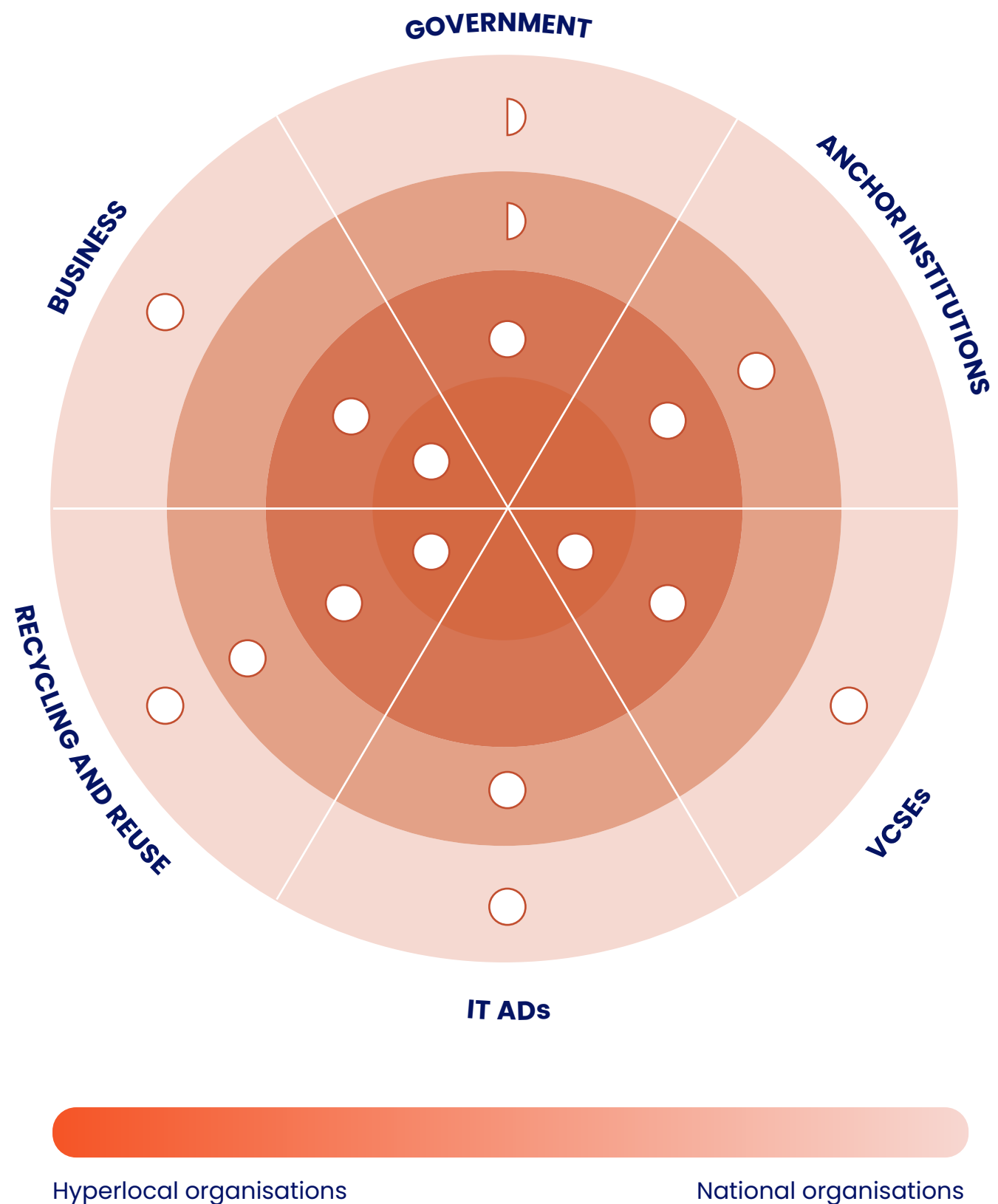
3.1 Assets to support device donation and reuse across the West Midlands

Across the West Midlands, we identified a mix of organisations already involved in different aspects of device donation and reuse (visualised in Figure 2).

- Local authorities are pivotal to device donation and reuse in the West Midlands, playing a significant role in understanding and responding to community needs. This underscores the need for any activity led by WCMA to complement and support (rather than replace) work already undertaken at local authority level.
- At hyperlocal and local level, many VCSE organisations and others who work with digitally excluded people are active in receiving and distributing devices – such as One Walsall and Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre who ensure that devices reach those who need them, working with initiatives like Wolves Tech Aid.
- Anchor institutions (larger employers with a strong local presence and assets) are well represented across the region, including NHS bodies, universities, colleges and housing associations. There is significant potential for more anchor institutions to follow the example of organisations like the Black Country Integrated Care Board through its Black Country Connected scheme.
- There are several IT Asset Disposal (ITAD) companies and refurbishers operating in the region, such as Wowdot CIC, and REPC Ltd.
- Businesses appear more likely to be active in local device donation and reuse, rather than playing a role at a regional level. There is potential for many more businesses to become device donors and/or offer pro-bono services to support device donation.
- National businesses and schemes also support activity in the West Midlands – such as Material Focus’s #RecycleYourElectricals campaign, Good Things Foundation’s National Device Bank, Hubbub, and companies like VMO2, Vodafone UK, and Deloitte.



Figure 2: Device donation and reuse assets across the West Midlands region



Case study: Digi-Dudley

Digi-Dudley is a community-led initiative delivered by Just Straight Talk (JST), a local community organisation. It provides free, inclusive, and accessible digital support for older people (65+) in Dudley.

The programme emerged as a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted stark digital inequalities, especially for older people at risk of social isolation. Essential services, such as ordering prescriptions, accessing healthcare appointments, applying for benefits, and staying in touch with loved ones, had shifted online. Without support, many were at risk of being excluded, compounding feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Following early investment for tangible equipment from the National Lottery Community Fund early in the pandemic, the project gained momentum and secured funding for a full-time Digital Lead to tackle loneliness, isolation, and poverty from Public Health Dudley, 2021–2024, and more recently, Citizens Advice Dudley, 2024–2026.

Digi-Dudley has successfully engaged approximately 560 older people across 17 community and sheltered accommodation sites throughout the Dudley borough. Alongside support with digital skills, Digi-Dudley has provided hundreds of pieces of equipment, such as tablets, laptops, and Chromebooks, through partnerships with the ICB Black Country Connected programme and others.

“We put in a couple of applications during the pandemic. From an initial pilot, it went far and wide; there was such a need, and the Digi-Dudley project was born. We had some initial funds from the National Lottery purely for kit. We delivered it to people’s driveways during the pandemic. We’d boot it up, so at least it had Zoom or similar to start with. Then we’d go in and have a meeting with them remotely from there, talking to them on the phone about how to accept the Zoom link. We now run 17 groups and offer home sessions for those housebound, led by Jim, the Digi Lead. We’ve just had an extension for a further year, it’s fantastic... The Digi-Dudley project shows the potential to tackle the digital divide and reduce isolation.”

(Staff member, Just Straight Talk)

Originally a loan scheme, the team recognised that returning devices often created technical and logistical issues, especially with browser blockers and setup costs. As a result, many devices are now gifted to participants, ensuring long-term access. An ongoing relationship with upcycling and recycling organisations has supported a cost-effective flow of new and refurbished kit into the community, helping those affected by poverty and/or high costs of living to maintain digital connectivity.

4 Barriers and enablers to device reuse and donation for digital inclusion

The journey of a donated device from donation through to reaching its recipient highlights the importance of working together across business, public services and VCSE organisations. At each stage, there are barriers and enablers that influence success.

Previous research by Good Things Foundation with Deloitte (2023), [Circular electronics for social good](#), identifies some of the key issues, with a particular focus on how businesses use their end-of-life devices. The report highlights that many businesses are unaware of the positive impact that reusing their IT equipment can have on society and the environment. Good Things Foundation research with the University of Liverpool, [Public sector pioneers: Reusing IT equipment to fix the digital divide](#) (2023) focuses on the experiences of public sector providers in championing and implementing pathways that work for them, and how this contributes to digital inclusion and sustainability goals.

We distilled insights from this and other research (e.g. [Making the connection](#) by Green Alliance, [Device upcycling research](#) by London Office for Technology and Innovation). We then tested the collated insights with stakeholders across the West Midlands. What follows is a summary of barriers and enablers, grounded in the West Midlands context.

4.1 Sourcing and donating devices

“There’s a lot of waste alongside reusable devices. There’s a multitude of device categories that are going to come up for a corporation. It isn’t about just cherry-picking the devices that are going to be suitable for digital inclusion, it’s intercepting the kit at the point of refresh.”

(Device refurbisher)

Some stakeholders felt that the potential to scale device donation and reuse at regional level is undermined by fragmented approaches across local authorities. Others noted the importance of having distinct approaches for different local contexts.

Reflecting wider research, progress is often led by motivated champions within organisations who push for change. Consistent partnerships with corporate and public sector bodies, including local authorities and NHS trusts, are seen as critical to enabling reliable device flows. Emerging collaboration between sectors and organisations, particularly at local and hyperlocal level, is helping to surface and share best practice. However, this is not yet happening systematically, suggesting that in future, there may be opportunities to incentivise device donation through procurement and lease agreements, as well as to engage more strategically with businesses’ social value and community investment commitments.

4.2 Assessing device quality and suitability

“Globally, there are 450 million devices that won’t be Windows 11 compatible. Let’s just make sure those devices get repurposed and put in the hands of people who can use them. Let’s not rely solely on Windows.”
(Device refurbisher)

A major challenge, in the West Midlands and elsewhere, is ensuring that donated devices are fit for purpose. Often, devices are either too old, damaged, or not suitable for the needs of recipients. Planned obsolescence, locked-down systems and limited access to spare parts mean some devices simply cannot be repaired. Compounding this is confusion over the upcoming Windows 10 support deadline in 2025, which some stakeholders fear will lead to the unnecessary disposal of otherwise usable devices.

Stakeholders highlighted that clear communication and targeted awareness campaigns could help mitigate these issues. Educating device donors, especially large employers, on what types of devices are most needed, and how even those running Windows 10 can be repurposed using alternative operating systems like ChromeOS Flex or Ubuntu, would enable more effective redistribution.

4.3 Erasing and refurbishing devices

“There’s a confidence gap. We have digital confidence that others don’t have... it’s not an easy fix.”
(Health professional)

“We couldn’t be sure that a factory reset was enough... so a lot of devices just sat in storage.”
(VCSE organisation)

“If we didn’t have the technical knowledge of the people we know, we’d be at a loss. Some of the stuff that we are donated... it’s quite worse for wear.”
(Device refurbisher)

Stakeholders highlighted lack of confidence when it comes to erasing and refurbishing donated devices. In the absence of a nationally recognised framework, research shows that many organisations are cautious about data security, choosing to dispose of rather than reuse devices. There can be scepticism around the motives of ITAD providers, particularly if higher-value devices are perceived to be diverted for resale rather than community use. Refurbishment can be costly and logistically complex.

Effective partnerships with ITADs and accredited refurbishers are starting to address the trust gap in the West Midlands; providers that offer certification and quality assurance help to increase confidence. Some community organisations are going further, offering hands-on repair workshops so people can learn how to repair or refurbish devices.

4.4 Redistributing devices and matching them with recipients

“It’s a mismatch and devices aren’t going to the right people... we’re working blind. We’ve given devices out, but we don’t really know how effective that’s been other than we know these many people are using those devices or what difference is it making.”
(Local authority digital inclusion lead)

Stakeholders emphasised that while redistribution efforts are growing in the region, they are not always equitable or

well-matched to local needs. Questions persist about who should manage and maintain devices once they have been distributed, and many redistribution schemes still operate on short-term funding models. A shortage of local technical capacity complicates efforts to deploy devices efficiently and at scale.

Crucially, stakeholders felt that providing hardware alone is not enough to tackle digital exclusion. People often face barriers such as lack of connectivity or digital confidence. Organisations differed as to whether data connectivity or devices was the more pressing need for the communities they support.

Local authority and other stakeholders highlighted that community and grassroots organisations are vital connectors; they ensure that devices reach marginalised groups and supporting the logistics and wraparound services needed for successful use.

4.5 Perspectives from VCSE organisations

“[VCSE] organisations now have to take on a completely different skill set... Suddenly it’s a whole new arena – different people, different skills, different training, different systems and processes – and most importantly, you need different policies. It’s not just as simple as saying, ‘We’ve got someone who’s excluded, they need a device, we’ll support them with a device.’ It’s not as simple as that.”
(VCSE organisation)

VCSE organisations play a vital role in device distribution, digital inclusion support and community outreach, particularly among groups most likely to be digitally excluded. VCSE organisations often have trusted

relationships with people facing multiple barriers to digital access, such as refugees, carers and people experiencing poverty. However, their contribution is sometimes overlooked, and often taken for granted. They may face specific barriers that limit their ability to participate in device redistribution initiatives, in particular: connectivity barriers, funding and capacity barriers, mismatch between supply and demand, and capacity and skills barriers.

4.51 Connectivity barriers

“I think we’re probably best... giving [people] the data. If they’ve got access actual data I think they’ll benefit a lot more than by loaning [a mobile device].”
(VCSE organisation)

“We’ve got the National Data Bank, we’ve got the SIMs, but the next hurdle I’m coming up against is people don’t have devices to put the SIMs in.”
(VCSE organisation)

VCSE organisations highlighted the importance of affordable and reliable connectivity. Some organisations access free SIM cards through the National Databank and West Midlands 5G. They told us that this was useful for those who already have a mobile-enabled device, and the confidence to use it.

4.52 Funding and capacity issues

“We had one young member of staff here... just trying to repair [devices] where we could and it was difficult.”
(VCSE organisation)

“We supported a local organisation... to develop a device recycling centre. Within about three months of us walking away, the whole project fell apart.”
(VCSE organisation)

VCSE organisations told us that many organisations do not have the resources or infrastructure to collect, refurbish and redistribute devices on their own. Developing such schemes requires specialist skills and systems that are outside their experience. VCSE organisations in some parts of the region, such as the Black Country, have benefited from integrated care board-funded schemes distributing reused devices. This is not universally available, and often tied to short-term funding cycles. Often, available funds focus on project delivery, not infrastructure or sustaining capacity.

4.53 Mismatch between supply and demand

“We had access to 30 devices which I thought was fantastic, but we actually had an overwhelming response of over 100 people who wanted the devices...”

(VCSE organisation)

“Everyone thought they were going to get an iPhone or an iPad. And when we turned up with a 50 quid [device] from Argos, people were like, ‘No, I don’t want that.’”

(VCSE organisation)

“Loaning a device doesn’t work... We’ve had many a story where they were afraid to even open the device... there was a cost issue if there was damage to it as well.”

(VCSE organisation)

VCSE organisations raised the mismatch between device supply and user demand. Some reported high demand for a small number of devices; others found that devices were difficult to distribute. Devices perceived as outdated or low quality were less likely to be accepted. Device loan schemes introduced confusion and hesitancy, especially among groups with limited digital confidence or language support needs.

4.54 Capacity and skills gaps

“Organisations are very happy to receive devices... but the big issue becomes understanding what their responsibilities are... they haven’t got the skills to understand what their expectations are as a provider of a device.”

(VCSE organisation)

“We ended up being a dumping ground... receiving monitors, power leads, mice – it wasn’t what people wanted. We had a pile of tack that really demotivated the project.”

(VCSE organisation)

Several VCSE organisations raised concerns about their own organisational readiness to participate in device donation and reuse schemes. While many are eager to support people who are digitally excluded, they often lack the policies, skills or capacity to manage the technical, logistical, and legal aspects of device handling. This includes challenges with set up, data wiping, technical support and maintenance.

Some groups also described becoming overwhelmed with unsuitable donations from well-intentioned local businesses, such as broken peripherals or outdated hardware, which created additional burdens and reduced morale.

Case study: The West Midlands Multibank

The West Midlands Multibank, operated by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC), launched in March 2025. It is part of a network of Multibanks, redistributing surplus goods and donated items from businesses via a network of community-based partners across the region. The Multibank aims to distribute over 750,000 surplus goods to 75,000 families in need in its first next 12 months.

Already, the Multibank, established in partnership with former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Amazon, has begun working with a number of organisations across the voluntary and public sectors, and is building partnerships with local businesses. Items such as clothing, crockery, cleaning products, toiletries, towels and toys are distributed free of charge through a trusted network of frontline professionals, including social workers, teachers and healthcare providers.

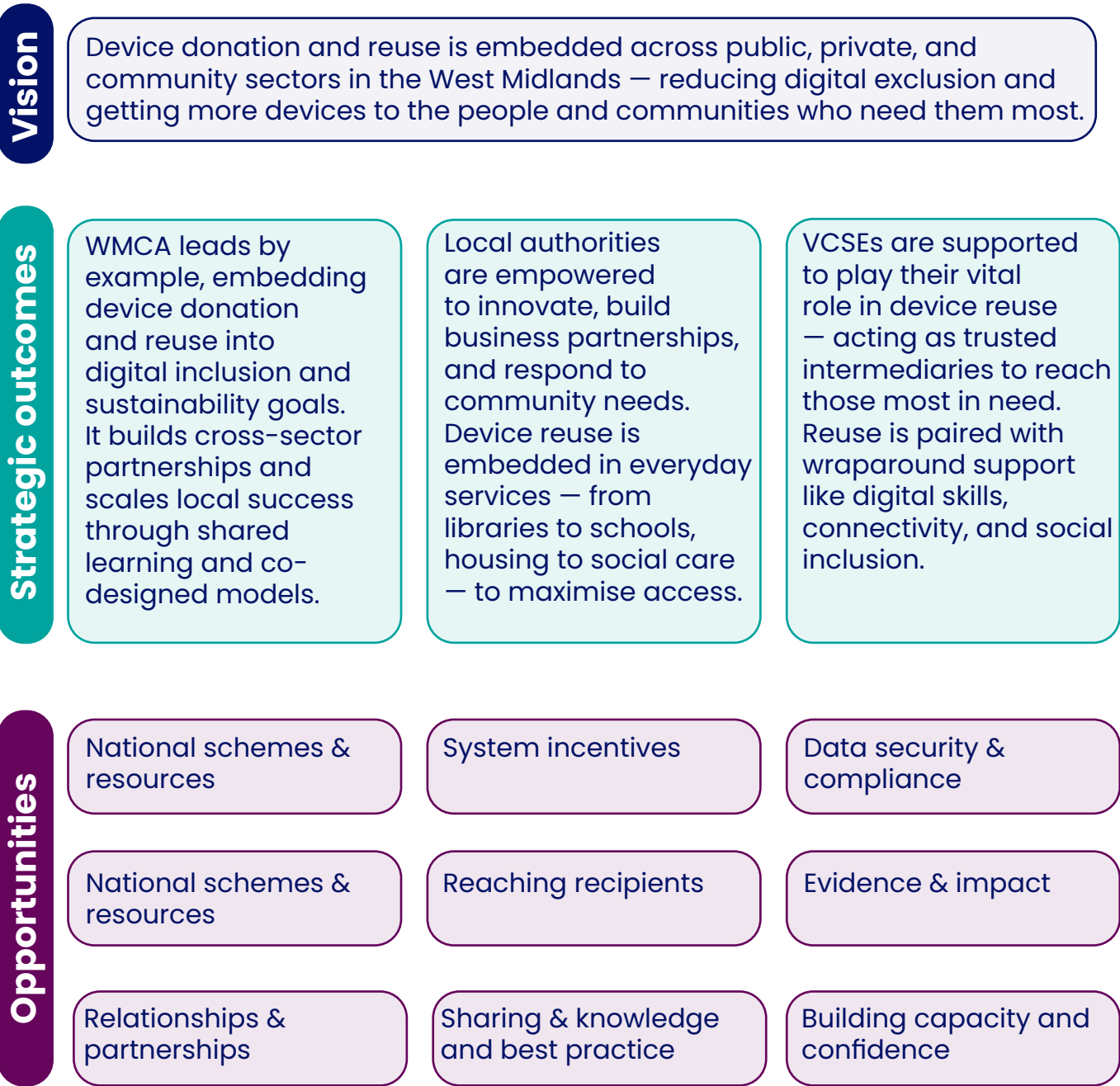
This initiative builds upon BVSC's existing infrastructure and collaborations, such as the coordination of the Household Support Fund and BrumEnergy, to ensure efficiency, avoid duplication, and foster local collaboration. Additionally, Amazon Web Services (AWS) supports the initiative by offering digital skills training for individuals accessing the Multibank, further enhancing digital inclusion in the region.

While not yet offering device donation and reuse, BVSC recognises the impact of the digital divide on both communities and the voluntary organisations that support them, and will be exploring how the Multibank can help tackle this issue in the future. With the backing of key stakeholders and the potential for regional expansion, the West Midlands Multibank represents a potentially scalable model for addressing digital exclusion and exemplifies how cross-sector collaboration can lead to meaningful impact.

5 Vision and roadmap

A key theme through the research is that strength lies in the West Midlands region’s diversity of approaches, partnerships and potential to shape solutions together. In outlining a potential vision and roadmap for the WMCA and its partners to consider, we have therefore focused on suggesting an outcomes-led vision for device donation and reuse across the West Midlands – and identifying a number of opportunities which could be explored and prioritised in the months and years ahead.

Figure 3: Vision, strategic outcomes and opportunities for device donation and reuse across the West Midlands



5.1 Balancing needs and priorities across the ecosystem

Stakeholders identified several potential models for device donation, refurbishment and distribution across the West Midlands. This included: coordination of existing initiatives and funding; developing a centralised regional device bank; a regional platform to distribute devices based on need (where need is identified through a transparent, fair process); and regionally coordinated infrastructure supported by local delivery.

“The combined authority is probably in the best place to have those relationships with strategic businesses at a regional level and then put them into the funnel... we’ve got some really strong networks too.”

(Local authority digital inclusion lead)

“There’s a lot of stuff going on locally, so the WMCA role in that respect might be around sort of getting practice shared from areas that are doing things really well to areas that are less developed.”

(Local authority digital inclusion lead)

There is a clear appetite for multiple, layered solutions at national, regional, local and hyperlocal level. Stakeholders said that the National Device Bank plays a valued role in supporting larger scale donations and distribution through hyperlocal and local partners. Stakeholders also said that a regional ecosystem could centralise business engagement and bulk donations, but local relationships and autonomy are crucial to effective delivery.

“As a local authority, we’re being approached by loads of organisations saying ‘we’ve got devices’, but what they want is assurance their devices are wiped and there is no liability for them. We can’t give that level of assurance because we haven’t got the capacity. Perhaps where the combined authority can come in to help some of those standards to make sure there is the right technology in place and act as the conduit for them to be able to do that.”

(Local authority digital inclusion lead)

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of local VCSE infrastructure and capacity for device reuse and digital inclusion, but recognised that this is uneven across the region, and there is also variation in the strength of relationships between VCSE organisations and local authorities. Therefore, while some localities may benefit from a more centralised regional approach, others – with existing strong local models – may not.

“We can retain the local networks, we can have that local intelligence, but that doesn’t mean that we have to do everything as local authorities. We’re actually duplicating resources... we’ve got to stop being parochial about this. If we are a combined authority and our resources are coming from the combined authority, we should be equally distributive in terms of where it goes.”

(Local authority digital inclusion lead)



5.2 Sizing the opportunity for device donation and reuse

We wanted to understand the potential for device donation, refurbishment, and reuse in the West Midlands. As there is no established methodology for doing this, we used data from the National Device Bank, and we used regional data on the main employers and anchor institutions in the West Midlands, to estimate how many devices could be available for reuse and donation. We looked at factors such as the typical number of devices released by different types of organisations, and how many of these devices are likely to be suitable for refurbishment.

This gives us a snapshot analysis, which comes with heavy caveats, such as variations in device replacement cycles and in donation behaviours and organisational cultures. We have erred towards a conservative estimate, so the size of the opportunity in the West Midlands could be much higher.

By examining 22 major employers – including local authorities, NHS bodies, universities, utilities companies, banks and businesses – who collectively employ around 240,000 people across the region, we estimate that approximately 131,275 devices could become available over a four-year period. Of these, around 37,842 could be refurbished and redistributed to digitally excluded people who need them. While noting caveats, this offers a valuable indication of what could be possible, and provides a foundation for further exploration.

5.3 Opportunities for further exploration

In outlining a roadmap, we identified a series of linked opportunities for stakeholders across the West Midlands to explore. Many overlap, so progress in one area may also unlock or accelerate progress in others.

	Regional	Local	Hyperlocal
Leveraging national resources and amplifying impact	X	(X)	
Aligning system incentives and building confidence	X	X	
Nurturing relationships and reaching recipients	(X)	X	X
Sharing knowledge and best practice	X	X	X
Building capacity and confidence	X	X	X

5.31 Leveraging national resources and amplifying impact

We identified a number of opportunities for WMCA and partners across the West Midlands to connect more intentionally with national initiatives. For example, campaigns such as Material Focus's [Recycle Your Electricals](#) provide a UK-wide reuse and recycling point directory, and national schemes such as the [National Device Bank](#).

A charter for responsible device donation, one of the first steps in the [Digital Inclusion Action Plan](#), will encourage reuse of organisational IT assets to increase the number of devices donated, promote circularity, and reduce e-waste. It will be supported by a playbook (forthcoming) with practical information and case studies from public and private sector organisations which support device reuse and donation.

As a regional convenor, WMCA could play a key role in ensuring that organisations within the West Midlands are able to benefit from these initiatives, and consider signing up to the new charter. WMCA can also amplify evidence on the positive impacts of device reuse.

WMCA could explore opportunities such as:

- Championing national initiatives, such as the government charter, and using its relationships with public, private and VCSE partners to drive regional engagement.
- Developing a consistent approach to outcome reporting from supported partners, which can be used more widely across the region to strengthen the evidence base.
- Publishing an annual report or snapshot for the region, combining case studies, data and key trends on device donation and reuse.
-

5.32 Aligning system incentives and building confidence in data security

Device reuse is more likely to thrive when it is embedded into broader circular economy, commissioning and procurement frameworks. WMCA can play a strategic role in aligning these systems to encourage donation and reuse as standard practice, and supporting them organisations do so safely and securely. To achieve this, it may be beneficial for WMCA to explore how it can foster a shared understanding of what 'good' looks like in the region, addressing concerns about data security and legal compliance while building awareness of minimum standards for quality, security and usability.

WMCA could explore opportunities such as:

- Digital inclusion funding streams that support the procurement of refurbished devices, not just new ones; consider support to replicate or sustain proven models.
- Integrating reuse and donation requirements in public contracts, and embedding circularity for social good standards into IT disposal and grant frameworks.
- Promoting certified refurbishers and connecting device donors with trusted ITAD providers who meet recognised data-wiping and refurbishment standards.

5.33 Nurturing relationships and reaching recipients

Device donation and reuse initiatives thrive when there is strong collaboration between businesses, public services, ITADs and trusted VCSE organisations. The West Midlands has many of these organisations already active at local levels, but the wider ecosystem can often feel fragmented. WMCA has an opportunity to convene and connect

these efforts at a regional level, helping to clarify roles, share best practice, and build a more joined-up approach. For example, local authorities and Jobcentres are already well-placed to connect with businesses and coordinate local distribution, and VCSE organisations are widely recognised as being best placed to identify and engage the people and communities most at risk of digital exclusion.

WMCA could explore opportunities such as:

- Mapping and convening key actors through the creation of a West Midlands device reuse network, fostering collaboration and shared ownership.
- Resourcing holistic approaches – so devices are given alongside offers of data connectivity and support with digital skills and confidence to use devices.
- Supporting the co-delivery of devices alongside wraparound digital support, ensuring that recipients not only receive equipment but also the skills and confidence to use it.
- Encouraging ways to link device distribution with social prescribing pathways, where digital inclusion supports outcomes around health, wellbeing and independence.

5.34 Sharing knowledge and best practice

Across the West Midlands, local authorities, community enterprises, and others are developing approaches to device donation and reuse, tailored to local needs and assets. There is interest in how to seed, scale, and replicate these in other areas of the region.

While priorities may vary by place, there is a clear opportunity to share learning and good practice across the region,

helping partners avoid duplication, build on what works, and adapt successful approaches to their own context. WMCA could play a valuable role in facilitating this knowledge exchange and enabling practical collaboration.

WMCA could explore opportunities such as:

- Facilitating regional learning forums or themed showcases to share challenges, insights and innovation.
- Funding short-term secondments or peer placements between initiatives to support hands-on learning and skills transfer.
- Developing a searchable regional directory of device reuse initiatives to improve visibility and enable collaboration.

5.35 Building capacity and confidence

There are already a variety of local models across the West Midlands supporting device distribution, from donation and gifting schemes to repair cafés, leasing models and reuse projects. These models are often rooted in community relationships and designed to meet specific local needs. Rather than investing in a centralised regional device bank, which would require significant resource, there is an opportunity for WMCA to support a diverse ecosystem of local distribution models, adapting to what works best in different contexts. WMCA could also help build local capacity and confidence, especially among VCSEs, by supporting practical activities that strengthen reuse and distribution in communities.

WMCA could explore opportunities such as:

- Supporting the replication of proven models, such as Digi Dudley, in areas where similar infrastructure does not yet exist.
- Offering capacity-building grants and training to support VCSEs with secure and effective device distribution.
- Helping to establish local repair and reuse training schemes, for example through partnerships with colleges, social enterprises or repair cafes.
- Co-creating practical guidance for VCSEs on assessing donated or refurbished devices, with community organisations, local authority, and other experts.

6 Conclusion

This research highlights the significant potential of device donation and reuse across the West Midlands, contributing to both digital inclusion and sustainability goals. It is encouraging to see a wide variety of organisations and actors involved in this space, across a range of geographies. In developing a regional approach to device donation and reuse, the challenge for WMCA and local authority partners is to find a way of building on existing assets, capacity and capability, while addressing gaps and supporting continuous improvement where it is needed.

To achieve this, it will be important to pay attention to all parts of the ecosystem, nurturing relationships with large employers who are key to unlocking a pipeline of reusable devices, while also supporting and nurturing hyperlocal, community-based organisations that play a vital role in ensuring that devices reach, and are used by, their intended beneficiaries.

By adopting a holistic approach and working in partnership towards a shared vision, the West Midlands is well positioned to turn the promise of device donation and reuse into meaningful progress to tackle the digital divide.



7 Useful links and resources

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2025) [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#)

Environment Agency (2025) [Waste electrical and electronic equipment \(WEEE\): evidence and national protocols guidance](#)

Good Things Foundation (2023) [Circular electronics for social good](#)

Good Things Foundation (2023) [Public sector pioneers reusing IT equipment to fix the digital divide](#)

Good Things Foundation (2025) [National Device Bank](#)

Green Alliance (2025) [Making the connection Ending digital exclusion with reused devices](#)

London Office for Technology and Innovation (2021) [Device Upcycling Research](#)

Material Focus (2025) [Recycle your electricals](#)

West Midlands Combined Authority (2024), [West Midlands Digital Roadmap 2024-2027](#)

West Midlands Combined Authority (2023), [West Midlands Digital Skills Blueprint](#)

Forthcoming:

Information about and links to the new government charter for responsible device donation, and the accompany playbook, will be accessible from Good Things Foundation's website: www.goodthingsfoundation.org)



Good Things
Foundation



West Midlands
Combined Authority

BETTER
PLACES