

## **BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND ERADICATING THE POVERTY PREMIUM**

### **Communities 1<sup>st</sup> - What We Stand For Policy Statement (2)**

#### **Introduction**

Communities 1<sup>st</sup>, alongside our member Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, recognise that the vitality of our communities are marred by the stark realities of poverty and digital exclusion. These are not separate battles but interconnected fronts in the WAR against social inequality. We advocate not just for short-term solutions but for systemic changes that empower and include all. Our vision is a society where every individual, irrespective of their socio-economic background, has equal access to opportunities, resources, and a digital world.

#### **Digital Inclusion: A Right, Not a Privilege**

In an era where digital connectivity is as vital as electricity and water, being digitally literate and connected is a necessity for all. We assert that access to digital resources is a fundamental right that should be afforded to everyone, regardless of economic status. Our aim is to ensure that every child, every adult, and every elder has the means to connect, learn, and engage with the digital world. This commitment transcends mere access; it is about nurturing confidence and competence in technology use, ensuring that digital skills become as fundamental as literacy and numeracy in our modern world.

In our communities, residents with lower incomes are subjected to a stark reality: they pay more for basic needs due to their financial constraints. Faced with inflated prices for utilities and steeper rates for credit, this poverty premium drives a persistent cycle of inequality. We are determined to break this cycle, to fight for fair pricing, and to advocate for a market that does not penalise poverty.

#### **Our Pledge**

Our commitment is to foster a community where digital fluency and financial fairness are norms, not exceptions. As Communities 1<sup>st</sup> and our member organisations, we pledge to:

- Work collaboratively to address the intertwined issues of poverty and digital exclusion.
- Share knowledge and resources to develop and implement effective strategies for different segments.
- Continuously engage with our community to understand and meet their evolving needs.

#### **Our Ask of Decision-Makers and Influencers**

We call upon our politicians, senior leaders, and officers within governments, local councils, the NHS, and other public sector bodies to commit to our cause. We ask that they:

1. Recognise and prioritise the eradication of the digital divide and poverty premium in their policy agendas.
2. Engage with us, the VCFSE sector, in meaningful dialogue to understand the realities of these issues on the ground.
3. Commit to evidence-based policies that address these challenges, ensuring that every policy decision is weighed for its impact on poverty and digital exclusion.
4. Support and fund community initiatives that are working towards these goals, acknowledging that local actions are pivotal in driving national change.