Digital Inclusion Support Policy

PRN-43: Digital Inclusion Support Policy
Company Name: AI Auto-Tech Ltd
Trading/Business Name: CAREHOPES
Company Registration Number: 15556946
SIC Code: 88100 – Social Work Activities Without Accommodation for the Elderly and Disabled
Email: admin@carehopes.com
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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that individuals receiving services from the organisation have equitable opportunities to access digital technologies, online services, information, communication platforms, and digital resources.

The organisation recognises that digital inclusion is essential for promoting independence, social participation, wellbeing, access to services, education, employment opportunities, healthcare support, and community engagement.

This policy establishes a framework for identifying and reducing digital exclusion while supporting service users, companions, staff, and stakeholders to access and use digital technologies safely, confidently, and effectively.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All service users.
- Family members and informal carers where support is appropriate.
- Companions and support workers.
- Employees, volunteers, and agency personnel.
- Managers and supervisors.
- Contractors providing digital services on behalf of the organisation.

The policy applies to all digital interactions, support activities, training initiatives, communication platforms, and technology-enabled services provided or facilitated by the organisation.

Policy Statement

The organisation is committed to promoting digital inclusion and reducing barriers that may prevent individuals from accessing digital services and opportunities.

The organisation will:

- Promote equal access to digital resources.
- Support individuals experiencing digital exclusion.
- Encourage safe and responsible use of technology.
- Provide appropriate digital assistance where required.
- Consider accessibility needs when implementing digital systems.
- Support individuals to develop digital confidence and skills.
- Promote digital independence wherever possible.

No individual shall be disadvantaged due to limited digital skills, lack of access to technology, disability, age-related barriers, language barriers, financial constraints, or other factors contributing to digital exclusion.

Responsibilities

Board of Directors / Trustees

The Board is responsible for:

- Supporting organisational commitments to digital inclusion.
- Ensuring appropriate governance oversight.
- Reviewing strategic digital accessibility objectives.
- Promoting equitable access to services.

Senior Management

Senior Management shall:

- Implement this policy across the organisation.
- Promote digital inclusion initiatives.
- Allocate appropriate resources.
- Monitor digital accessibility and inclusion performance.
- Ensure digital systems support accessibility requirements.

Line Managers

Line Managers are responsible for:

- Identifying individuals who may require digital support.
- Facilitating appropriate assistance and resources.
- Ensuring staff understand digital inclusion principles.
- Escalating barriers affecting access to services.

Employees, Companions and Volunteers

Employees and volunteers must:

- Promote digital inclusion during service delivery.
- Support individuals appropriately within their competence.
- Report identified barriers to access.
- Encourage safe use of digital technology.
- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and data protection requirements.

Service Users

Service users are encouraged to:

- Participate in digital support opportunities where appropriate.
- Request assistance if experiencing difficulties.
- Use digital services safely and responsibly.
- Report accessibility concerns.

Procedures / Standards

1. Identifying Digital Exclusion

The organisation shall seek to identify individuals who may experience digital exclusion due to:

- Lack of internet access.
- Limited access to suitable devices.
- Financial hardship.
- Low digital confidence.

- Limited digital literacy.
- Physical disabilities.
- Sensory impairments.
- Cognitive difficulties.
- Language barriers.
- Mental health challenges.
- Social isolation.

Assessment shall be proportionate to individual needs and service requirements.

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2. Digital Support Planning

Where appropriate, support plans may include:

- Identification of digital needs.
- Access requirements.
- Training opportunities.
- Device support arrangements.
- Communication preferences.
- Accessibility adaptations.
- Ongoing review arrangements.

Support plans should promote independence wherever possible.

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3. Access to Technology

The organisation will seek to:

- Promote access to digital communication tools.
- Signpost available community resources.
- Support access to relevant online services.
- Encourage the use of accessible technologies.
- Identify alternative methods of communication where necessary.

The organisation recognises that not all individuals may be able or willing to engage digitally and will provide reasonable alternatives where appropriate.

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4. Digital Skills Support

Digital support may include assistance with:

- Video calling platforms.
- Online appointments.
- Accessing healthcare systems.
- Online forms and applications.
- Email communication.
- Internet safety awareness.
- Accessing community resources.
- Educational and wellbeing platforms.

Support shall be delivered in a manner that promotes dignity, respect, and independence.

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5. Accessibility and Assistive Technology

Digital services should be designed or selected with accessibility in mind.

Reasonable consideration should be given to:

- Screen readers.
- Voice recognition software.
- Closed captions.
- Alternative text functions.
- Magnification tools.
- Accessible document formats.
- Language translation technologies.

Accessibility requirements should be considered during procurement and implementation of digital systems.

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6. Digital Safety and Online Protection

Individuals receiving support should be encouraged to:

- Protect passwords and personal information.
- Recognise online scams and fraud.
- Use secure websites and applications.
- Report suspicious online activity.
- Seek assistance where uncertain.

Staff supporting digital activities must comply with organisational cybersecurity, information governance, and data protection requirements.

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7. Alternative Access Arrangements

Where digital engagement is not appropriate or feasible, alternative methods shall be considered, including:

- Telephone communication.
- Face-to-face support.
- Printed information.
- Assisted appointments.
- Advocacy support where appropriate.

The organisation recognises that digital inclusion should enhance, not replace, individual choice.

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8. Staff Training and Awareness

The organisation shall provide appropriate training covering:

- Digital inclusion principles.
- Accessibility awareness.
- Digital confidence support techniques.
- Cybersecurity awareness.
- Online safeguarding.
- Digital communication skills.

Training requirements shall reflect the nature of staff roles.

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9. Confidentiality and Information Governance

All digital support activities must comply with:

- Data Protection requirements.
- Information Security policies.
- Confidentiality obligations.
- Recordkeeping procedures.

Staff must not access personal accounts, passwords, or sensitive information without appropriate authority and safeguards.

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10. Partnership Working

The organisation may collaborate with:

- Community groups.
- Charitable organisations.
- Educational providers.
- Local authorities.
- Healthcare providers.
- Technology support programmes.

Partnerships may help improve digital access and reduce exclusion.

Case Study

Scenario

An older service user would like to attend virtual healthcare appointments but lacks confidence using a tablet device and struggles to access video calls independently.

Risk

Without support, the individual may miss healthcare appointments, become more socially isolated, and experience reduced access to services.

Required Action

The companion should:

1. Assess the individual's digital support needs.
2. Provide appropriate guidance and encouragement.
3. Demonstrate how to access video appointments safely.
4. Promote digital confidence without creating dependency.
5. Record support provided in line with organisational procedures.

Outcome

The service user successfully attends virtual appointments, improves digital confidence, and gains greater independence when accessing healthcare services.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

The organisation shall monitor compliance through:

- Service user feedback.
- Digital accessibility reviews.
- Complaints and compliments analysis.
- Training completion records.
- Digital inclusion project evaluations.
- Internal audits.
- Governance reporting.

Improvement actions shall be implemented where barriers or gaps are identified.

Review Arrangements

This policy shall be reviewed:

- Every two years; or
- Earlier following legislative, technological, regulatory, or organisational changes.

The review shall consider:

- Digital accessibility developments.
- Service user feedback.

- Technological advancements.
- Inclusion objectives.
- Audit findings.
- Emerging risks and opportunities.

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- PRN-001 Safeguarding Adults Policy
- PRN-002 Safeguarding Children Policy
- PRN-009 Information Governance Policy
- PRN-010 Data Protection and UK GDPR Policy
- PRN-011 Information Security Policy
- PRN-024 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- PRN-037 Accessible Information and Communication Policy
- PRN-039 Cyber Security and Acceptable Use Policy
- PRN-041 Social Media Policy
- PRN-042 Assistive Technology and Digital Care Policy