

How Housing Organisations Are Supporting Homeschooling

(February 2021)



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

The imposition of lockdowns and closure of schools during the coronavirus pandemic has required many parents and carers to homeschool their children. This has meant children and teenagers across the country have found themselves studying at home, attending online classes, completing work while being supervised by parents - who in many cases are also working from home.

This situation has created many issues which disproportionately affect children from lower-income families. In many cases, the pandemic has magnified existing disadvantages and their impacts on families, such as digital exclusion, insecure employment, and mental health and wellbeing.

Housing organisations have been playing their part in providing solutions to issues highlighted, so that tenants and their families, housing organisation staff, and local residents can be better equipped to face the everyday trials of this extraordinary time.

Access to IT

While 96% of households in Great Britain had Internet access in February 2020 according to data from the [Office of National Statistics](#), this statistic does not clearly convey the whole picture. Within this figure are a wide variety of experiences, from individuals whose sole Internet access is via limited data on a smartphone, to families using multiple devices on unlimited superfast broadband. From these two extremes, it is easy to see how having access to a suitable device and data package can shape an individual's online experience. A further complication is added when considering that many children studying at home also have one or more parents working from home, increasing the strain on the broadband connection or data package.

The difficulty of sustaining children's education during lockdown due to varying levels of online access has been noted by teachers. The Sutton Trust's January 2021 briefing note [Remote Learning: The Digital Divide](#) reveals stark differences between state and private sector schools in terms of access to a suitable device

for studying, with 54% of teachers at private schools and just 5% of state school teachers reporting that all their pupils have a suitable device.

Government and charitable efforts to distribute devices to pupils lacking access and unable to afford to buy a device have had some success, however there remain many pupils whose learning is being curtailed due to having to share a device with one or more siblings, or due to limited access to data. Housing organisations are among the many third sector organisations who have distributed devices free of charge to enable children to study more effectively from home.

Following an IT upgrade, [Tai Tarian](#) donated 300 iPads to local primary schools in Neath Port Talbot. These will be loaned to pupils lacking access to appropriate technology so that they can continue to study while they are required to remain at home.

Guidance for:

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Availability of affordable data is crucial, too. Limited access to data prevents children from joining in with activities such as live online classes and watching videos. Furthermore, in a household with multiple family members working and/or studying from home, the value of good, reliable bandwidth becomes evident.

[Hyperoptic](#) are a fibre broadband provider company, founded in England in 2013. In January 2021 they announced a scheme to enable local authority and housing association tenants in the areas they operate to access free broadband to enable homeschooling. Tenants currently without a reliable broadband connection can obtain a promotion code from their landlord, which entitles them to a free router and installation of 50Mbps broadband, provided free until 31 August 2021.

Before the pandemic, many housing organisations were working to tackle the issue of digital exclusion. This took many forms, the most popular being introductory classes and access to wifi to enable tenants to access online services in their own time, and build up their knowledge and confidence in doing so. For some providers, these were offered as part of a scheme to provide wider services to socially excluded tenants. [Govan Housing Association](#) operated a community hub and digital hub, providing hot food and Internet access. After these spaces were closed down due to the pandemic, Govan began distributing hot food to the community via a food truck. The truck was fitted with wifi, enabling residents to access connectivity at a time when free wifi points in the community – such as libraries and fast food restaurants – were also closed.

[Clyde Valley Housing Association](#), working with [Connecting Scotland](#), have 120 iPads to distribute free to tenants with little or no Internet access. The iPads come with 12 months free mobile wi-fi access and access to a Digital Champion to help in setting up the iPad and learn how to get better connected. The initiative focuses on families with children to enable them to complete schoolwork while at home.

Supporting students

While teenagers and older students may be used to working alone using their own initiative, this is normally alongside classroom or group learning and working. The social aspect of attending school is central to the typical educational experience of this age group, enabling them to experience working and studying alongside different people as well as forming friendships which extend out of school and beyond. The needs of this age group are often overlooked as they do not require continuous adult supervision while homeschooling, but nevertheless they will have support needs which cannot easily be met during lockdown.

The [London Borough of Tower Hamlets](#) provides a range of useful information for children and young people, and their parents and carers, on coping with homeschooling. This includes a wide range of useful educational links, aimed at children of all ages, and information on how to stay safe online. Additionally, children and young people age 11-25 who live or study in [Tower Hamlets](#), or are registered to a GP in the borough, can access [Kooth](#), an online mental health community facility, for free.

Supporting tenants to homeschool children

Even with the right equipment, supporting children to continue their education from home can involve a steep learning curve for parents and carers. Schools use dedicated platforms for homeschooling, enabling children to participate in online lessons, video calls, and to submit homework, which parents are often unfamiliar with on an in-depth level.

As part of their 'Do It Digitally' programme to help tenants gain confidence in accessing online services, [Newydd Housing Association](#) set up a Google Classroom to provide support for tenants who found themselves homeschooling their children during the pandemic. This helps to familiarise tenants with

Google's services and give them confidence to support their children in accessing online services. One-to-one support is provided to help tenants with specific issues and queries.

Meeting specific needs of individual children and ensuring they remain confident and interested in their studies can be a difficult goal to meet when schools are fully open. During closures, it is important that parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) continue to receive ongoing support from schools. [Scope](#) have drawn up a range of information for parents and carers of children with SEN. This includes resources and activities for learning at home, and helpful hints on developing and maintaining a daily routine. It also details the support parents and carers can expect from schools in continuing their child's SEN support, and how to take action if this support is not forthcoming. Information is also given on how parents and carers can look after their own mental health during homeschooling, how to balance work and homeschooling, and online resources to get support from other parents.

Supporting staff to balance responsibilities at work and home

With many housing staff working from home, a large number have found themselves balancing the demands of their job with supervising children who are homeschooling or unable to access their usual external childcare. Parents are also concerned for their children's wellbeing, amid their feelings of uncertainty over the lockdown and being separated from friends.

Following consultation with staff on how they were coping with the lockdown, **Newydd Housing Association** announced they will enable staff who are parents of school-age children to take up to two hours per day homeschooling time without a reduction in salary. When the schools first closed at the start of the pandemic, Newydd took a flexible approach to enable staff to balance responsibilities; however, the new working practices will consolidate existing approaches and recognise the importance of staff being able to support their children in this way.