Digital Connectivity Readiness Index

October 2023 Results

Executive Summary

84
UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
READINESS INDEX

87
UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

83
UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
ADOPTION INDEX

SCOTLAND
79
79   INFRASTRUCTURE
79   ADOPTION

NORTHERN IRELAND
80
86   INFRASTRUCTURE
76   ADOPTION

ENGLAND
86
89   INFRASTRUCTURE
84   ADOPTION

WALES
77
78   INFRASTRUCTURE
77   ADOPTION
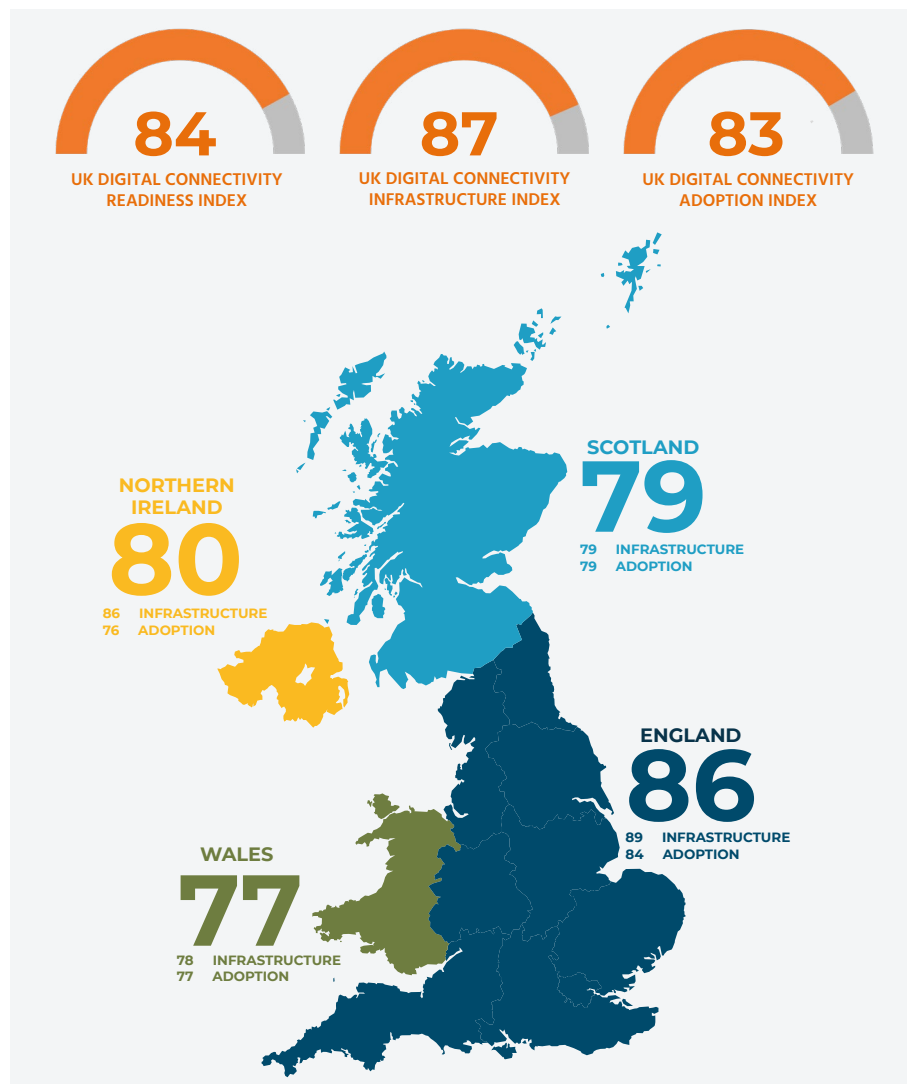
Digital connectivity is increasingly important in enabling economic growth, aiding the journey towards Net Zero and improving social wellbeing. However, both good quality digital infrastructure as well as widespread digital adoption are required to maximise these benefits.

This report gives an overview of the key findings for the UK and each of the constituent nations. The Digital Connectivity Readiness Index (DCRI) scores are based upon a range of country-wide **connectivity infrastructure** and **digital adoption** indicators.

The results of the DCRI for October 2023 show that the UK is in a strong position to harness the full potential of digital.

Overall, the UK and its constituent nations performed best on indicators linked to the proliferation of 4G mobile connectivity and having at least a basic level of fixed connectivity. On adoption, there was a mixed picture: whilst all nations performed well on general household use of the internet, challenges remain around Security and Wellbeing Online across the board. In addition, several areas are yet to harness the full potential of the Digital Economy and use it as a force for driving economy-wide Innovation.

Undertaking this initial Digital Connectivity Readiness assessment is the first stage in a 5-step plan that public bodies can take to understand the strengths and challenges within their region to enable them to create a digital strategy. It brings together all the pieces of the connectivity jigsaw puzzle and delivers a robust evidence-based mechanism to inform and track progress towards achieving local digital priorities.

The next FarrPoint Digital Connectivity Readiness Index scores will be released in early 2024.

Introduction

Digital connectivity is increasingly important in enabling economic, social and environmental change in the modern day. This has driven investment in improving the available infrastructure across the UK, most recently with the UK Government's £5 billion Project Gigabit programme.

However, the roll out of Gigabit connectivity is only one aspect of digital infrastructure. Furthermore, infrastructure alone, without adoption, does not produce any benefits for households, communities or businesses.

What is the DCRI?

The Digital Connectivity Readiness Index (DCRI) is a tool for both policy makers and businesses to benchmark their key challenges and opportunities and make informed evidence-based decisions when developing digital strategies and projects.
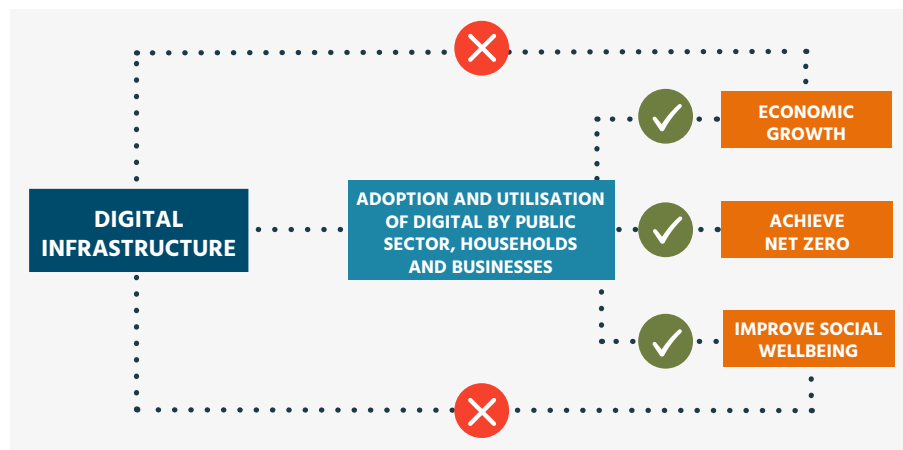
The DCRI is designed to enable decision makers to identify where a region performs well and where challenges remain. This will ensure that they are able to make evidence-based decisions to prioritise investment.

The scores contained within the DCRI are based on key indicators gathered from a series of data sources, including Ofcom and the Office for National Statistics. As detailed within the report on the infrastructure side four key indicators have been produced based on metrics around Gigabit, Superfast, 4G and 5G connectivity, then on the adoption side eight key indicators have been produced looking at Online Households, Digital Skills, Security Online, Online Wellbeing, Access to Public Services, Affordability, the Digital Economy and Innovation.

A robust approach to weighting has been used to ensure that the indicators take into account the commercial, regulatory and policy prioritisation considerations. This included a larger weight being put on the adoption of digital technologies given the importance that his has in delivering real outcomes for households and businesses alike. This delivers a result that is not only accurate but also helps deliver real value when it comes to designing digital connectivity infrastructure, adoption and inclusion projects.

FarrPoint is working with various UK public bodies (including Local and Combined Authorities) to define their local readiness scores, which can then be used to track progress over time and compare progress against regional and national averages.

UK Results

UK Results

84

UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
READINESS INDEX

87

UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

83

UK DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
ADOPTION INDEX
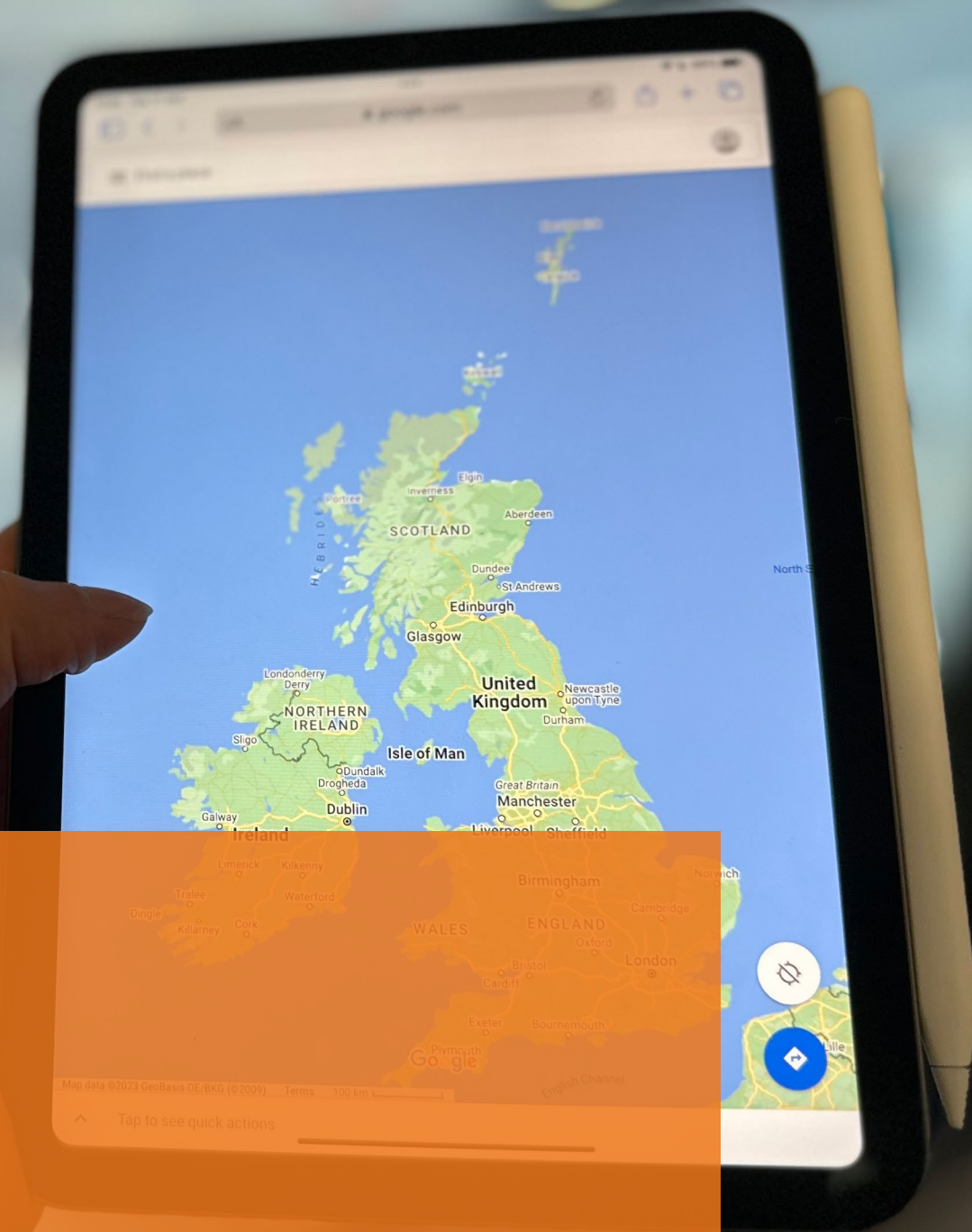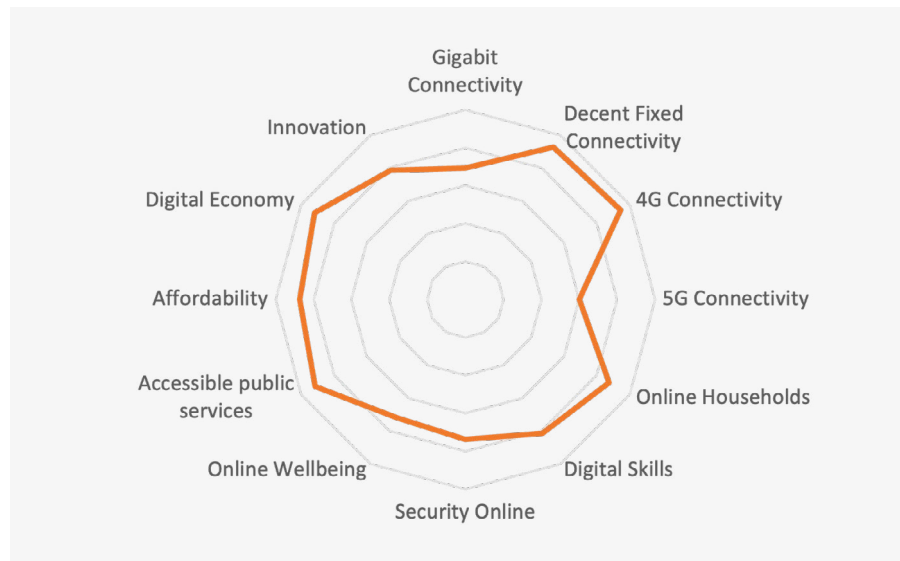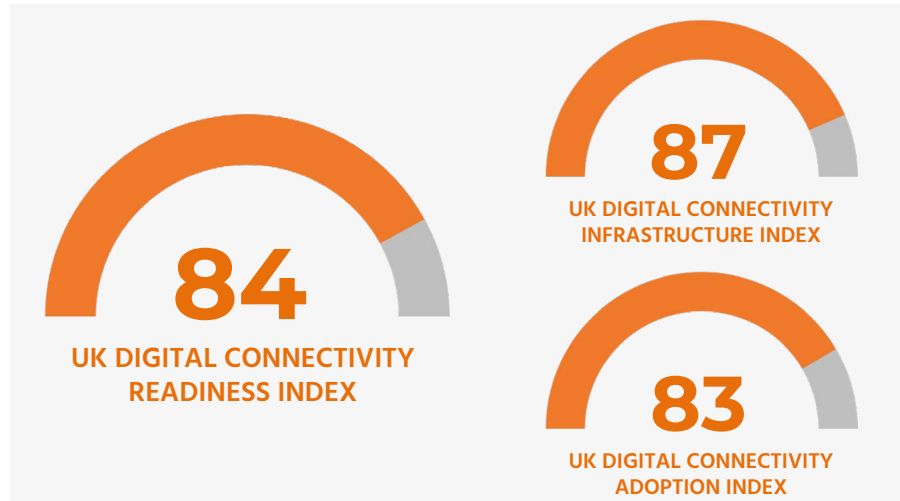
Overall, the UK performs relatively better on the Infrastructure Index (87) compared to Adoption Index (83). This is reflective of the prioritisation of investment in improving digital network infrastructure by the UK Government. This backs up findings from the **FarrPoint Digital Connectivity Survey 2023**, through which Local Authorities identified a continued focus on gigabit coverage, closely followed by the desire to get everyone connected to at least superfast levels so as not to leave anyone unable to access digital connectivity.

Within connectivity infrastructure, the UK performs well on ensuring everyone has access to a fixed connection and 4G mobile services. Progress is also being made in the roll out of Gigabit services and increasing 5G coverage.
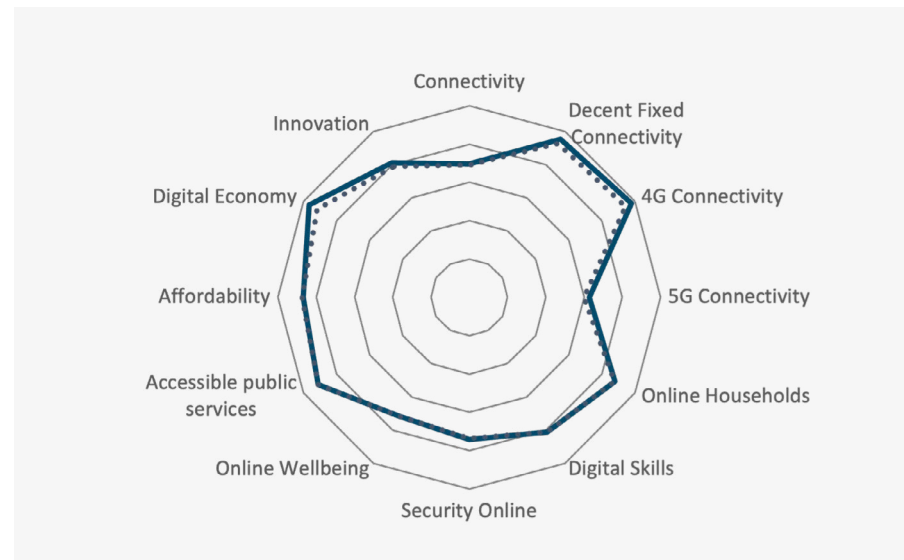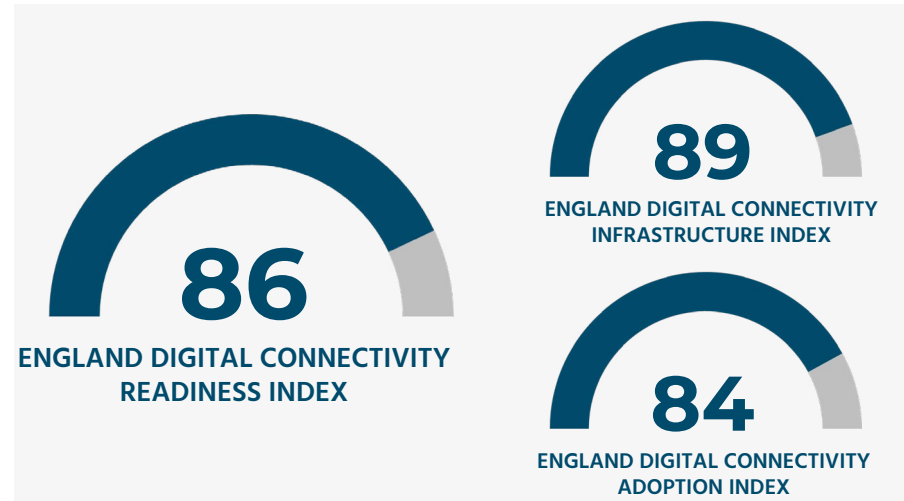
On the adoption of digital services, the UK performs best with indicators of the strength of the digital economy, taking into account both the size of the digital sector and also the investment made across the economy in use of digital technology. With all constituent nations largely taking a digital first approach to service delivery, access to Public Services also performs well nationally.

However, there remain challenges and progress is needed in areas relating to Wellbeing and Security Online, as well as Digital Skills and wider Innovation.

England Results

England Results

86
ENGLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
READINESS INDEX

89
ENGLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

84
ENGLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
ADOPTION INDEX

With a connectivity infrastructure score of 89 and digital adoption score of 84, England is the best performing of the four nations within the UK.

On infrastructure the strong performance is driven by high levels of superfast fixed connectivity and almost ubiquitous 4G coverage. In addition to this, the higher population density and urban nature of many areas means that it also performs relatively well on the Gigabit and 5G roll out indicators.
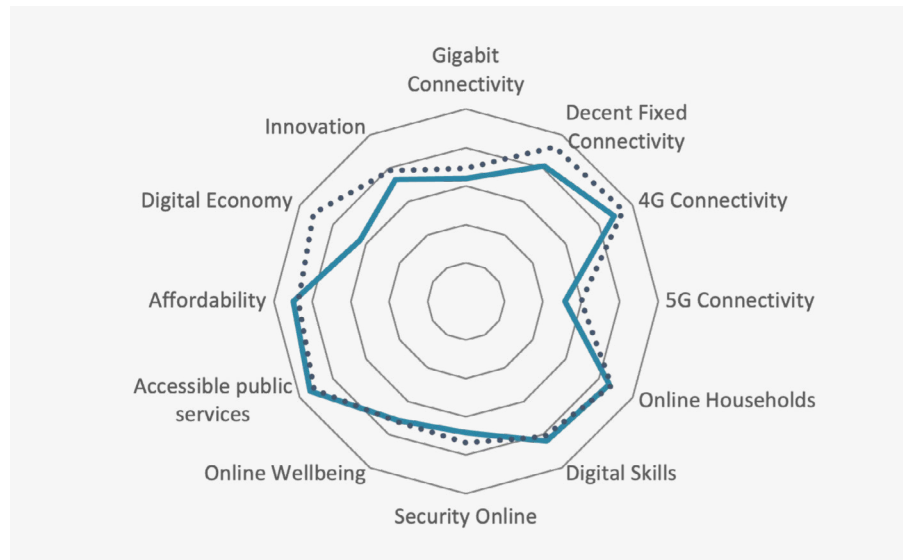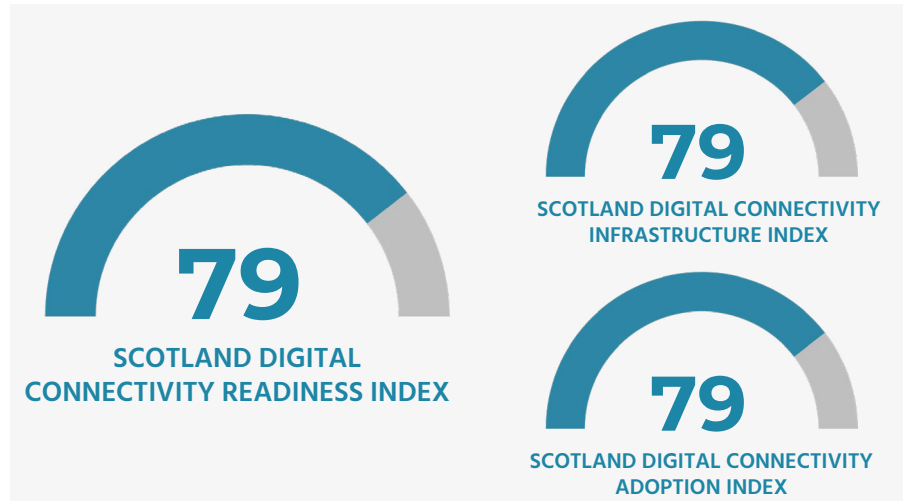
On adoption, England's strongest performance is in Digital Economy, contributing £1.76 billion in 2021 and accounting for 8% of the total economy. A significant proportion of this digital activity is located in and around London. England as a whole also performs well on its shift to digital delivery of Public Services, although more can be done in ensuring that not only services are switched to being online but to ensure adoption by the public.

The DCRI results for October 2023 suggest that England's weakest performing indicators are around Security and Wellbeing Online. These are often cited as the opposing case to the increase in digital and the shift online. Two other notable indicators are around Digital Skills and Innovation, both of which are key to harnessing the economic and social benefits of digital connectivity.

Scotland Results

Scotland Results

79

SCOTLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY READINESS INDEX

79

SCOTLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

79

SCOTLAND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY ADOPTION INDEX

With an overall DCRI score of 79, Scotland performs below the UK average for both infrastructure (79) and adoption (79). There are several key drivers for this.

Scotland's land area is classified as 98% rural with some of the least populated regions in all of Europe. This means that connectivity infrastructure is often below the UK average. Nevertheless, significant strides continue to be made on both the fixed and mobile networks, spurred by Scottish Government infrastructure projects such as the Reaching 100% (R100) and the Scottish 4G Infill (S4GI) programme.
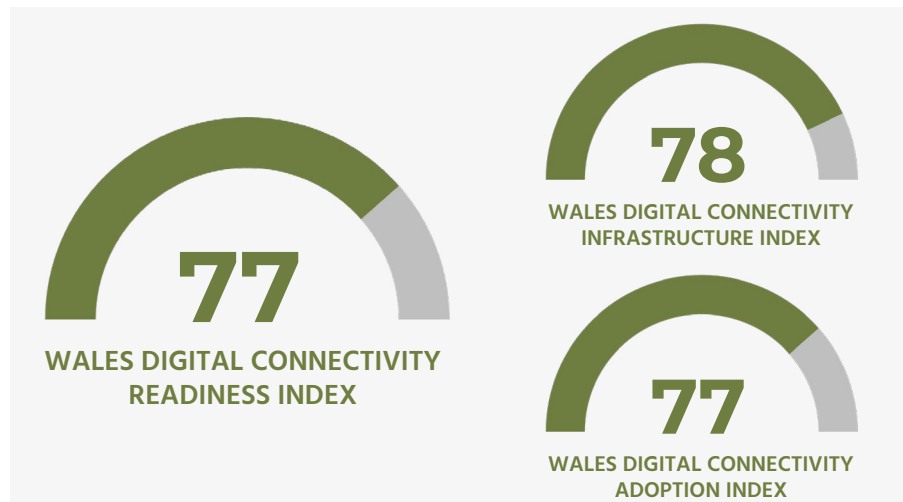
On adoption, Scotland performs relatively well on Accessible Public Services – driven by its DigitalFirst objective. Scotland also performs the best in the UK on digital adoption Affordability metrics, where factors around low pay and other household costs are taken into account.

However, as with the other regions, key challenges are around Wellbeing and Security Online. Scotland also performs less well on indicators around the Digital Economy and Innovation with the digital sector accounting for less than 5% of total Gross Value Output (GVA).

Wales Results

Wales Results

77
WALES DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
READINESS INDEX

78
WALES DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

77
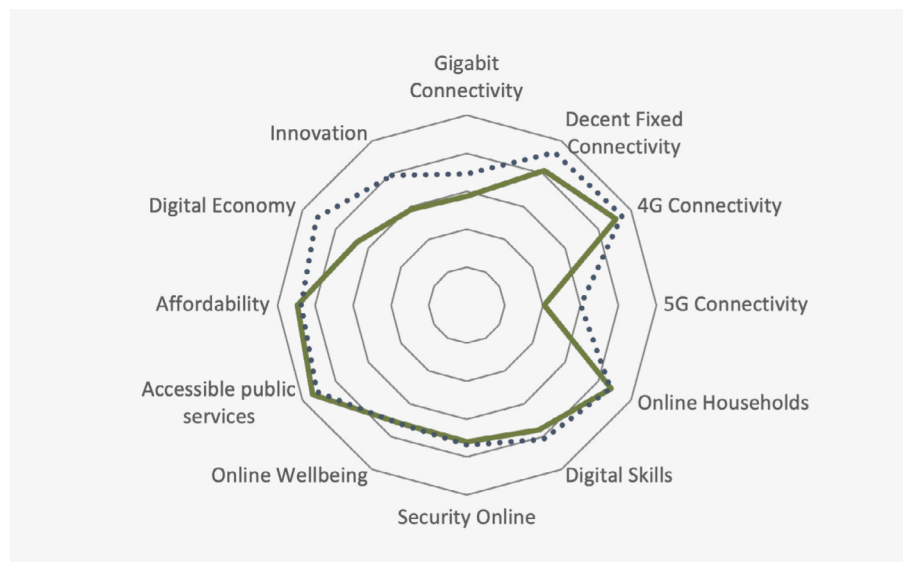WALES DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
ADOPTION INDEX

The DCRI in Wales is the lowest of the four nations – 77, with the scores for Infrastructure (78) and Adoption (77) both below the UK scores.

Whilst progress has been made over recent years in the coverage of decent fixed and 4G coverage in Wales, through schemes such as the Superfast Cymru programme, coverage still remains below the UK average. Furthermore, the roll out of both 5G and Gigabit services in Wales is slower than elsewhere.

On adoption of digital connectivity, as with Scotland, Wales performs relatively well on the access and use of online Public Services. Wales also performs well on digital adoption Affordbility metrics, which takes into account factors including relative household costs and proportion of people cancelling digital services.
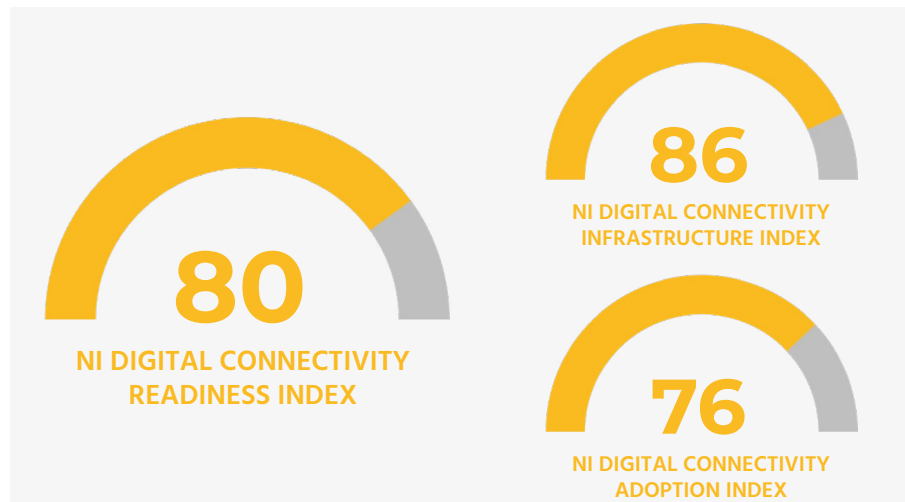
However, on other indicators, in particularly around the Digital Economy and Innovation, Wales performs poorly. The digital sector in Wales only accounts for c.4% of total GVA in 2021, down from c.5% in 2016. Its per capita spend on research and development is also below the UK averages. In addition, the challenges faced by the rest of the UK in online Security and Wellbeing are also prevalent in Wales.

Northern Ireland Results

Northern Ireland Results

80

NI DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
READINESS INDEX

86

NI DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX

76

NI DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY
ADOPTION INDEX

The Northern Ireland DCRI results paint an interesting picture. The infrastructure and adoption index scores differ in all nations, but in Northern Ireland this difference is most stark. For Infrastructure the index score is 86, compared to only 76 for Adoption.

On Infrastructure, Northern Ireland performs particularly well on Gigabit (driven by the significant investment made through Project Stratum) and 4G infrastructure, outperforming the UK on both these indicators. However, the coverage of 5G is significantly below the UK measure.

Turning to Adoption, Northern Ireland performs weakest on indicators around Digital Economy and Innovation. This is partly driven by economic challenges specific to Northern Ireland but can also be seen as a real opportunity for growth should focus be given to these areas. As with the other areas of the UK, Security and Wellbeing online are also key areas that decision makers should consider for improvement.
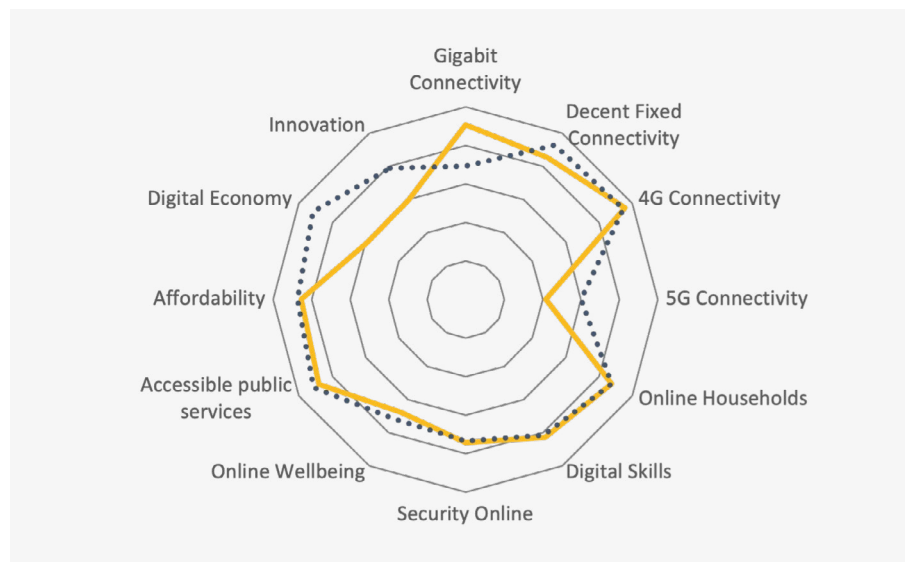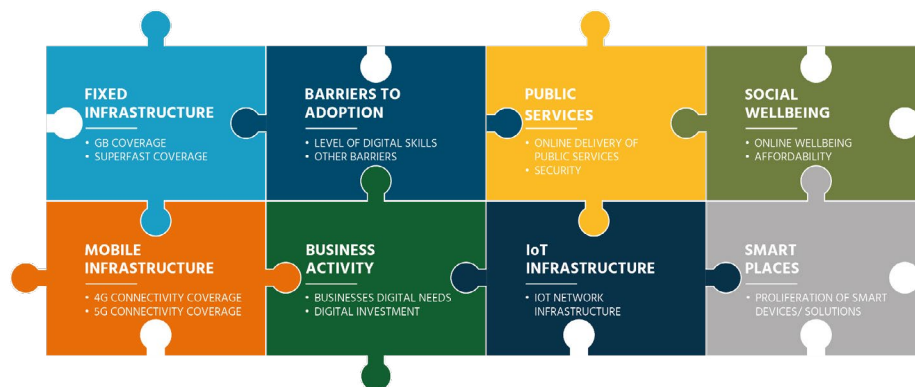
Next Steps

Next Steps

Digital connectivity is increasingly important in enabling economic, social and environmental change, and therefore the UK has put a lot of focus on the roll out of infrastructure through programmes such as Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network.
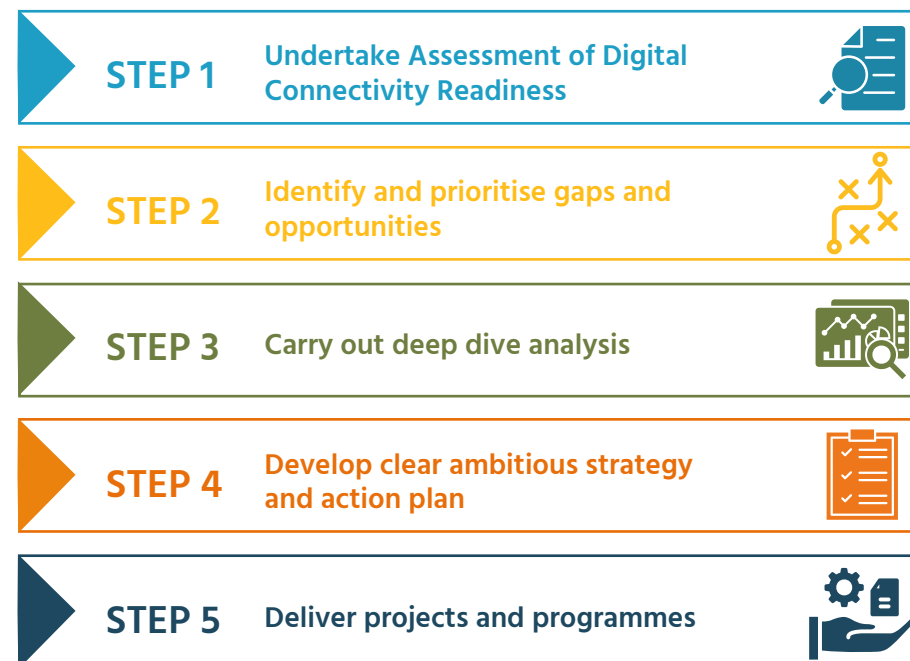
However, infrastructure on its own does not deliver the benefits to wider households and businesses.

This is highlighted in FarrPoint's Digital Connectivity Jigsaw Puzzle, where all the pieces are required to maximise economic growth, aid the journey towards Net Zero, and improve social wellbeing.

FIXED INFRASTRUCTURE
• GB COVERAGE
• SUPERFAST COVERAGE

BARRIERS TO ADOPTION
• LEVEL OF DIGITAL SKILLS
• OTHER BARRIERS

PUBLIC SERVICES
• ONLINE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICES
• SECURITY

SOCIAL WELLBEING
• ONLINE WELLBEING
• AFFORDABILITY

MOBILE INFRASTRUCTURE
• 4G CONNECTIVITY COVERAGE
• 5G CONNECTIVITY COVERAGE

BUSINESS ACTIVITY
• BUSINESSES DIGITAL NEEDS
• DIGITAL INVESTMENT

IoT INFRASTRUCTURE
• IOT NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

SMART PLACES
• PROLIFERATION OF SMART DEVICES/ SOLUTIONS

FarrPoint's Digital Connectivity Jigsaw Puzzle

Undertaking the Digital Connectivity Readiness Assessment and defining the DCRI score is the first stage in a 5-step plan that public bodies can take to understand the strengths and challenges within their region and to enable them to create a digital strategy and implementation plan.

STEP 1   **Undertake Assessment of Digital Connectivity Readiness**

STEP 2   **Identify and prioritise gaps and opportunities**

STEP 3   **Carry out deep dive analysis**

STEP 4   **Develop clear ambitious strategy and action plan**

STEP 5   **Deliver projects and programmes**

5-step approach to solving the Digital Connectivity Jigsaw

GET IN TOUCH ABOUT YOUR DCRI SCORE

About FarrPoint

FarrPoint is a connectivity and smart technology consultancy with operations in the UK and Canada.

At FarrPoint, we understand the importance of connectivity, as it drives business and society, bringing communities and commerce together. That's why we use our insight and experience to connect people and companies, anywhere in the world.

Our services

Our team of consultants advise public and private sector organisations on the strategy, procurement and implementation of digital technology and connectivity infrastructure.

Areas of Expertise

We specialise in a wide range of areas, including 5G, Digital Connectivity, Enterprise IT, Net-Zero, Networking, Technology-Enabled Care, Smart Places, GiS and more.
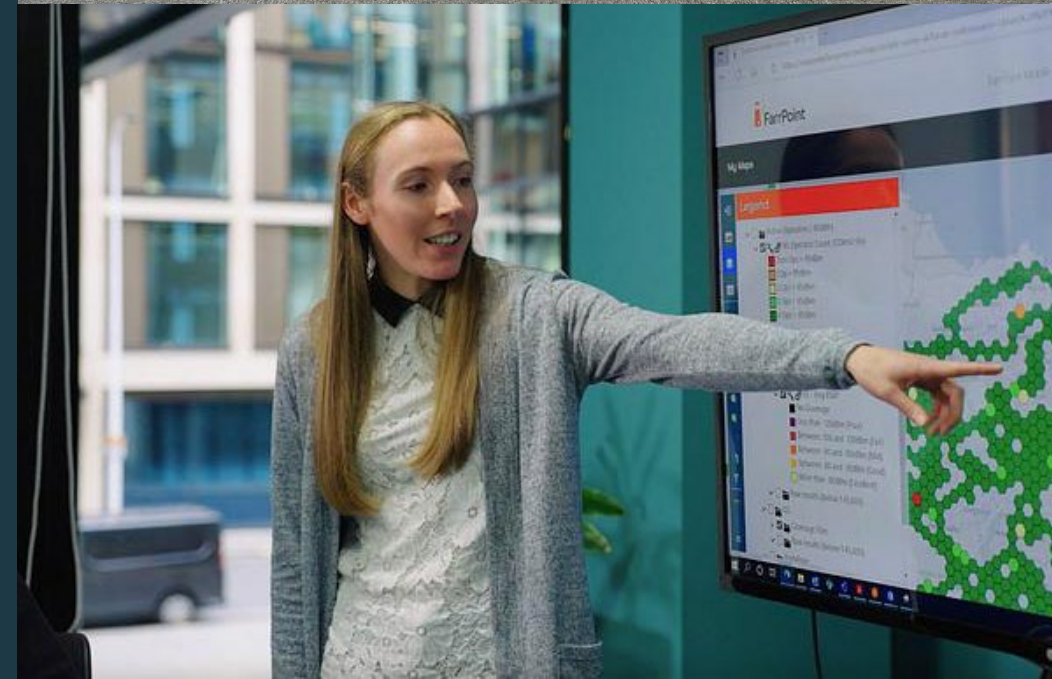
The approach that makes us go further:

PRAGMATISM   **EMPATHY**   **DUTY OF CARE**

FarrPoint

Get in touch

farrpoint.com

contact@farrpoint.com

EDINBURGH

Exchange Place 2
5 Semple Street
Edinburgh
EH3 8BL

+44 (0)131 202 6018

LONDON

1st Floor
99 Bishopgate
London
EC2M 3XD

+44 (0)203 693 7310

MANCHESTER

3 Hardman Square
Spinningfields
Manchester
M3 3EB

+44 (0)161 669 5821

HALIFAX, CANADA

1300-1969
Upper Water Street, Halifax
Nova Scotia, Canada
NS B3J 3R

+19025001414