

Councils awarded £800,000 to build on digital advances made during pandemic

Press release

Communities across the country are set to benefit from better local services as councils receive a share of £800,000 for innovative digital projects.



- Up to £120,000 given to 11 innovative council-led projects to better serve residents
- The Local Digital Fund will use innovation to solve common problems facing councils as they respond to the coronavirus pandemic
- This month marks the 2-year anniversary since the start of the Local Digital Declaration

Councils have responded to the coronavirus pandemic by rapidly introducing innovative new ways of serving their communities. This new funding will help ensure they continue to modernise and improve the way they deliver public services.

Examples include £67,500 for Newcastle City Council to develop a tool which predicts whether parts of a city are overcrowded which will help understand whether social distancing can be followed.

Projects will also build on recent rule changes allowing councils to focus on letting people have their say on major planning applications online. Another project will expand on community and council networks to speed up local support for vulnerable people.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke MP said:

Councils have made huge efforts to support their residents at this testing time – by housing rough sleepers quickly, supporting vulnerable people and ensuring services such as bin collections continue.

They have had to adapt their services from in-person to online, using technology to do so and I am determined we capitalise on this and use everything we have learned to improve efficiency and make services better for residents and communities.

That's why we're giving them £800,000 to build on the rapid digital innovation of recent months so that local communities continue to feel the benefits of more efficient public services.

The announcement comes 2 years since the start of the [Local Digital Declaration](#), a pledge signed by over 220 councils and public sector bodies committing to driving efficiency and improvements in services through digital technology.

An important part of the pledge is to share their success with other councils, and to work collaboratively with them, so people living across the whole country can benefit.

Eleven projects have been awarded funding:

- Camden Council will receive £80,000 to make it easier for local people and businesses to have their say online on things like major planning projects and town centre changes. This will build on changes to rules on 14 May to allow councils to publicise planning applications mainly on social media and other electronic means if they couldn't do site notices, neighbour notifications or newspaper publicity. They will work with Middlesbrough Council.
- South Gloucestershire Council and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames will jointly receive £80,000 to build on increased online access to public meetings which has been improved quickly due to social distancing measures stopping people attending in person. This will also cover citizens' assemblies and statutory consultations. They will work with West Berkshire Council, Oxford City Council, Staffordshire County Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Waltham Forest Council, and Milton Keynes Council.
- Leeds City Council will receive £79,500 to develop a guide for all councils to ensure that people who may struggle with digital technology, especially those who are vulnerable or socially isolated, get the help they need. This will make it easier for them to use services and help with loneliness and local support. They will work with Croydon Council and Eastbourne Council.
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority will receive £80,000 to develop a predictive modelling system to understand and prepare for the possible knock-on effects of the coronavirus pandemic on vulnerable children.
- Newcastle City Council will receive £67,500 to develop a tool for people to use to know which parts of a city may be overcrowded and therefore where it would be difficult to adhere to social distancing measures. Their work to understand data could be used to help councils predict overcrowding.
- Central Bedfordshire Council will receive £80,000 to build on successful data sharing between councils and voluntary community services that has

helped to give vulnerable people support during the pandemic. Both groups would have better information about who needs support in their area and would be able to share information quickly and securely to help more people. They will work with the Greater London Authority, and Camden Council.

- A group of councils will receive £120,000 to build on successful work to help vulnerable residents during the pandemic. They will use the information that's been most useful to improve and speed up how councils identify vulnerable people so they can predict and give the right support. This merger of proposals will be worked on by Huntingdonshire District Council, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, North Yorkshire County Council, Bolton Council, Sedgemoor District Council, and Somerset's councils.
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council will receive £76,000 to build on what they've learned about changes to how staff have worked during the coronavirus pandemic. Social distancing measures have meant dramatic changes to how we work, with large numbers mostly working at home for the first time and others changing when they work to keep the workplace safe. This will help to design future working patterns that maximise productivity, efficiency and wellbeing for council staff delivering public services. They will work with North East Lincolnshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council and Hull City Council.
- Manchester City Council will receive £80,000 to learn from how council teams – across housing, social care, healthcare and more – have worked together to support residents including some of society's most vulnerable people.
- Bolton Council will receive £23,000 to help ensure people who aren't used to accessing council services online, and would normally prefer face-to-face contact by visiting council offices, are not stopped from accessing services. They will look at remote and self-service ways such as considering the introduction of sealed pods for face-to-face conversations.
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council will receive £34,000 to help them add extra functionality to a smartphone application they have developed that will help to prevent overcrowding on its beaches by telling people how busy sections are so they can do their bit to help ensure social distancing.
- For more information, visit the Local Digital Collaboration Unit's website: <https://localdigital.gov.uk/c19-challenge/>

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