

Press release: Government uses innovative tech companies to tackle rural isolation and loneliness

- Five small tech-companies awarded contracts to tackle loneliness in Monmouthshire
- Minister says this will “improve people’s lives and enable them to feel a part of their local community”
- Sixty-five percent of the applications were from Welsh and UK-wide small businesses

Five tech companies have been awarded contracts to use cutting-edge technology to tackle the problem of rural isolation and loneliness.

These businesses will create new technology platforms to match the supply and demand for transport in rural areas, as well as minimise the risk of digital exclusion among older people and those in more isolated, rural areas with limited connectivity.

Speaking at the [Digital Leaders Innovation Conference](#) in London, Cabinet Office Minister, Oliver Dowden, said:

I am delighted that our funding for innovative tech companies is helping to tackle loneliness and rural isolation – to improve people’s lives and enable them to feel a part of their local community.

The GovTech fund encourages firms to find innovative ways to address the big social problems we all face, including loneliness, plastic pollution and national security. Through emerging technologies, this fund will help to elevate British companies onto a global market while transforming the delivery of public services for people across the UK.

Councillor Sara Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Justice and Community Development at Monmouthshire County Council, said:

In Monmouthshire, we are blessed with beautiful, rural surroundings and thriving towns. Yet the diversity of our landscape has its challenges, where journey times on public transport to local services can exceed two hours. That is why we are determined to address this issue to ensure people feel connected and part of the community.

We are delighted to be working with innovative businesses who have

developed a range of digital solutions for transport and rural isolation. Given the importance of the small business sector to the fabric of our country, it was great to see that sixty-five percent of the applications were from Welsh and UK-wide micro businesses with less than 10 employees.

In November 2017, the £20m Govtech Catalyst Programme was launched to help fund innovative tech firms, to solve public-sector challenges through innovation and emerging technologies.

As part of a wider commitment to use technology to improve lives and transform the delivery of public services, the government will publish an innovation strategy in spring 2019.

The five small tech-firms to win contracts are:

- Box Clever Digital Limited
- Enable International Ltd
- GPC Systems Ltd
- The Behavioural Insights Team
- Zipabout

These 5 companies are funded up to £50,000 each over 12 weeks, in phase 1, to prove the feasibility of their ideas. They are given contracts to conduct research and development.

In phase 2, up to two companies are then funded to develop their ideas and will be awarded up to £500,000 over 12 months.

The successful companies will retain all intellectual property and equity for what they develop.