

Press release: Innovative digital projects to improve public services win funding

Councils have been awarded almost £1.3 million to find solutions for how digital technology such as chatbots, artificial intelligence and one-stop shop websites can improve services for the public.

Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP today (7 December 2018) announced winning applicants receiving money from the first round of a £7.5 million fund aimed at harnessing digital technology to improve their work.

Some 16 projects across the country were awarded grants of up to £100,000, with 57 councils working in teams to shape new digital services and explore the potential of modern technology.

Projects include exploring how virtual assistants like Amazon's Alexa can improve the lives of people in need of care, improving online tools for reporting social home repairs, and using data analytics and artificial intelligence to produce education plans for children with special needs.

Other areas of research include giving frontline social workers better access to information to make crucial decisions and improving software used by council planning departments.

Minister for Local Government, Rishi Sunak MP, said:

Embracing digital technology can revolutionise public services. Within local government, I firmly believe it has the potential to improve a range of services in a host of different ways.

Ultimately, our aim is to make services better for users but it is likely to reduce costs for councils too. This could be by improving the experience of someone in care, streamlining the admin that comes with the stress of moving home, or offering a simpler way to license taxis.

And these are just some of the successful ideas which I am delighted to announce government funding for today. I'm excited to see these projects come to fruition.

Lead councils across the country are partnered with other councils to share knowledge and ideas. This collaborative approach is a key pillar of the government's [Local Digital Declaration](#), launched in July, to better coordinate public bodies seeking digital solutions.

The government's new Local Digital Collaboration Unit will also work with

LocalGov Digital, an organisation made up of people who work on digital solutions in local government, to create a place to see details of all the digital transformation happening in the sector.

This announcement is a further demonstration of the commitment by the government to help create communities that are fit for the future, including through the Brexit Deal.

More information on the Fund is available at www.localdigital.gov.uk

Projects receiving funding are to:

- Investigate how the use of virtual assistants or chatbots, such as Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri, could improve the provision of care for people in need. Birmingham City Council and 2 partners were awarded £69,300 for the project.
- Look at how the government's free online payment service for government and public sector organisations – Gov.uk Pay – can be used better across councils. North East Lincolnshire Council and 4 partners were awarded £52,103 for this project.
- Discover a better way for people in socially rented homes to report housing repairs online. London Borough of Southwark and 3 partners were awarded £80,000.
- Research how analytics and artificial intelligence can help the writing of education, care and health plans – currently a complex and time-intensive process – for children with special educational needs. Ealing Council and 2 partners were awarded £99,000.
- Unlock a transformation of town planning by working to understand problems with software and by encouraging more small and medium enterprises to support innovation. London Borough of Southwark and 3 partners were awarded £78,000.
- Improve decision making in council's children's services departments by improving inefficient and costly processes. Greater Manchester Combined Authority and 3 partners were awarded £80,000.
- Understand the best way to enable people moving into an area to have to only contact the council once to set up all services – such as council tax, bin collections, and benefits. Sunderland City Council and 4 partners were awarded £77,000.
- Help frontline children's services workers access the information they need to assess what support to offer and judge safeguarding risk by building a prototype to view the information easily. Stockport Local Authority and 3 partners were awarded £100,000.
- Provide better and more up-to-date information for planning departments by improving data collection. Greater London Authority and 4 partners were awarded £100,000.
- Look at how registration data for births, deaths and marriages can be securely and ethically shared to improve services and reduce costs. Worcestershire County Council and 14 partners were awarded £57,500.
- Fix complexity in taxi licensing applications, saving time, reducing costs and improving public safety. Gateshead Council and 2 partners were awarded £75,865.
- Ask whether chatbots and artificial intelligence can improve the design

of public services, and look at the possibility of creating a place for councils to share solutions for using such technology. Oxford City Council and 12 partners were awarded £80,000.

- Discover how local directories in councils, health bodies, police forces and the voluntary sector can be better coordinated. Adur and Worthing Council and 2 partners were awarded £78,400.
- Develop a prototype system for managing Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests that makes it quicker and easier for enquirers as well as staff. London Borough of Hackney and 3 partners were awarded £80,246.
- Simplify the process of doing data protection impact assessments, which are a requirement in some work, by using digital and sharing the method across the country. Greater Manchester Combined Authority and 10 partners were awarded £74,900.
- Create a way of gathering information on problems and successes of waste collection services to solve local problems, educate, enforce, and improve customer satisfaction and efficiency. North East Lincolnshire Council and 1 partner were awarded £69,178.