

Councils invited to apply for digital funding to boost services

Councils looking to improve public services through innovative uses of digital technology can apply for funding from today (19 August 2019), Local Government Minister Luke Hall MP has announced.

Grants of up to £350,000 will be invested in projects from the government's Local Digital Fund.

Projects bidding for the Fund of up to £7.5 million must be shared by councils working together to explore how digital technology can improve public services for residents in innovative ways.

Ideas could range from making people's lives easier with more efficient, online ways to pay for services or get help, to embracing tech to support vulnerable people or making bin collections, social housing repairs and taxi licensing services more efficient.

Minister for Local Government, Luke Hall MP, said:

Digital technology is transforming our lives. From smart tech at home to apps on our phones, it's helping us to stay connected and making things easier.

Councils are on the front line of exploring how we can harness technology to improve services while saving taxpayers' money.

Today we're opening up the next round of applications for the Local Digital Fund. I would encourage all councils with innovative ideas that focus on residents' needs to apply.

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

Projects included 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 included giving frontline social workers better access to information to make crucial decisions and improving software used by council planning departments.

For the projects, lead councils across the country partner with at least 2 other councils to share knowledge and ideas. This collaborative approach is a key pillar of the government's Local Digital Declaration, launched last year,

to coordinate public bodies seeking digital solutions.

The Fund is also being invested in digital skills and digital leadership training for council staff.

See more information on the Local Digital Fund, projects previously funded and how to apply: <https://localdigital.gov.uk/fund/applying-to-the-local-digital-fund/>

Only councils in England are eligible to lead on applications; councils in other parts of the UK are still eligible to partner on applications.

Applications to the Local Digital Fund close on 16 September 2019.

Projects that previously received funding were 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. The 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. The 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. The 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.
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[Extra UK aid support to help stop the spread of Ebola to vulnerable countries](#)

Since the epidemic began last August, the UK has been a major donor to the Ebola response and has now allocated a further £8 million for countries neighbouring the DRC, such as Uganda, South Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda, as the likelihood of Ebola spreading to these countries is high.

Trusted partners will use this money for prevention work to help contain the outbreak and stop its spread. The funding will deliver more temperature checks at border crossings, support Ebola treatment units, provide clean water and sanitation, and enable engagement with local communities to raise awareness of the dangers of Ebola.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

“This UK aid to countries that neighbour the DRC will make a real difference in helping to prevent further spread of this deadly outbreak.

“Livelihoods depend on people being able to cross borders safely so it is essential we continue to put in place the tools to contain Ebola. If we

don't, the outbreak will spread and many thousands more could suffer – ultimately Ebola is a potential threat to us all.”

There have been more than 2,850 cases in the DRC and almost 2,000 people have died from the disease. Three cases of Ebola were found in Uganda in June. The treatment centre where the cases were taken in the first instance was funded by UK aid and swift action prevented the spread of infection.

During a visit to Uganda this week, Mr Sharma will see first-hand how existing UK support has helped to:

- build two treatment units
- train health workers in 22 districts
- fund 16 ambulances to help people in areas most at risk
- provide protective clothing for health workers and thermometers at borders to screen people
- vaccinate health workers.

Notes to editors

1. UK support has already helped a range of response activities, including the vaccination of more than 190,000 people.
2. To date, the UK has given £45 million to the response in the DRC and £15 million to help neighbouring countries prepare for and prevent the spread of Ebola.
3. DFID recently announced up to £50 million additional support for the response and the UK is actively calling on others to step up their efforts. This latest support of £8 million is a new allocation of the £50 million.
4. The DRC outbreak is second in scale only to the West Africa outbreak of 2013 to 2016, with 2,852 cases and 1,905 deaths (as of 6 August).
5. Public Health England assesses the risk to the UK to be very low / negligible.

[Prime Minister orders urgent action to improve vaccination uptake](#)

Urgent action to boost the number of children and young people receiving life-saving vaccinations will be set out by the Prime Minister today.

Boris Johnson will visit a hospital in the South West and lay out a number of measures designed to improve vaccination rates, including for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).

While confidence in the UK's world-leading vaccination programme remains high – with uptake exceeding 90% for most childhood immunisations – there has been

a small but steady decline in coverage in recent years.

It means that the UK has lost its 'measles-free' status with the World Health Organisation (WHO) – three years after the virus was eliminated in the country. The WHO have stated that in the first six months of 2019 reported measles cases globally are almost three times as many as the same time last year. Measles is now endemic in countries including France, Germany and Italy.

The PM has now called for health leaders to renew their efforts to meet 95% for both doses of MMR. Currently just 87% of children are getting their second dose of the jab, which has likely contributed to the spread of measles.

Action to achieve this includes:

- NHS England writing to GPs urging them to promote 'catch up' vaccination programmes for MMR for 10-11 year olds, as well as all those 5-25 year olds who have not had two doses of the jab;
- Strengthening the role of local immunisation coordinators – healthcare professionals that promote vaccines particularly with hard-to-reach families. This includes supporting areas with low uptake and tailoring specific local interventions to under-vaccinated communities;
- Addressing parents' concerns about vaccines by updating the advice on NHS.uk specifically to address misleading information about the dangers of vaccines, by giving people NHS-approved, evidence-based and trusted advice on vaccines including through a new website;
- Calling a summit of social media companies to discuss how they can play their part in promoting accurate information about vaccination; and
- The Department for Health and Social Care – working with Public Health England and NHS England – delivering a comprehensive strategy to address the issue in the Autumn.

Ahead of the hospital visit Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

After a period of progress where we were once able to declare Britain measles free, we've now seen hundreds of cases of measles in the UK this year. One case of this horrible disease is too many, and I am determined to step up our efforts to tackle its spread.

This is a global challenge and there's a number of reasons why people don't get themselves or their children the vaccines they need, but we need decisive action across our health service and society to make sure communities are properly immunised.

From reassuring parents about the safety of vaccines, to making sure people are attending follow-up appointments, we can and must do more to halt the spread of infectious, treatable diseases in

modern-day Britain.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

It's easy to forget how devastating measles can be precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing it in the first place.

With this strategy, the whole health system will come together to renew focus on vaccinations – especially for our children – and this time we will eliminate measles for good.

The Prime Minister's visit to the South West is part of a series of visits to hospitals he is taking. He will meet doctors and nurses, hearing directly from them about what support they think the NHS needs so it can continue to be the best healthcare service in the world.

Measles elimination status means that the virus is no longer circulating permanently in a country. The UK achieved measles-free status in 2016 after three years of limited spread due to high vaccination rates, but measles has since been spreading slowly in the UK for over 12 months.

In the first quarter of 2019, there were 231 confirmed cases of measles in the UK. Many of these were acquired abroad with some onward spread in under-vaccinated communities.

The Department for Health's strategy to be published in the Autumn is also expected to:

- Ask the NHS to use technology to identify who may have missed a vaccination and make booking appointments easier, such as improved call/recall systems for those accessing immunisations, and more consistent use of these systems across UK healthcare to remind people of their vaccine appointments.
- As part of the GP contract review, examine wider questions of improving GP capacity to allow additional immunisation appointments – while also asking NHS England to consider other settings outside of a GP for vaccinations.
- Develop a major campaign with NHS England and Improvement, Public Health England and GP practices to support the importance of key vaccinations in protecting against potentially dangerous diseases.
- Work with DFE to explore more ways in which students can be informed about their health and wellbeing including the value of vaccinations – plus enabling them to critically assess misinformation spread online about certain vaccines.

This comes as part of a wider government drive on Prevention, following the publication of the Prevention Green Paper last month.

Head of Immunisation at Public Health England Dr Mary Ramsay said:

Losing our 'measles-free' status is a stark reminder of how important it is that every eligible person gets vaccinated. Elimination can only be sustained by maintaining and improving coverage of the MMR vaccine.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known to man – only one person travelling back to an area with lower vaccination rates can lead to an outbreak. Anyone who has not received two doses of MMR vaccine is always at risk.

Making it as easy as possible for parents to access vaccines so that they can offer their children the best possible start in life is a priority for us, DHSC and for NHS England. Through our Value of Vaccines campaign we'll be using all opportunities to remind people to get two doses of MMR vaccine – whether that's new parents, school children or younger adults. This will be crucial to the UK achieving elimination status again in future.

Brexit Secretary signs order to scrap 1972 Brussels Act – ending all EU law in the UK

The 1972 Act is the vehicle that sees regulations flow into UK law directly from the EU's lawmaking bodies in Brussels.

The announcement of the Act's repeal marks a historic step in returning lawmaking powers from Brussels to the UK. We are taking back control of our laws, as the public voted for in 2016.

The repeal of the European Communities Act 1972 will take effect when Britain formally leaves the EU on October 31.

Speaking after signing the legislation that will crystallise in law the upcoming repeal of the ECA, the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU Steve Barclay said:

This is a clear signal to the people of this country that there is

no turning back – we are leaving the EU as promised on October 31, whatever the circumstances – delivering on the instructions given to us in 2016.

The votes of 17.4 million people deciding to leave the EU is the greatest democratic mandate ever given to any UK Government. Politicians cannot choose which public votes they wish to respect. Parliament has already voted to leave on 31 October. The signing of this legislation ensures that the EU Withdrawal Act will repeal the European Communities Act 1972 on exit day.

The ECA saw countless EU regulations flowing directly into UK law for decades, and any government serious about leaving on October 31 should show their commitment to repealing it.

That is what we are doing by setting in motion that repeal. This is a landmark moment in taking back control of our laws from Brussels.

[Dr Andrew Murrison's statement on the attacks in Idlib](#)

Minister for the Middle East & Minister of State for International Development Dr Andrew Murrison said:

I was appalled to learn that two health workers and one humanitarian worker were killed in Idlib this week as they responded to regime attacks on civilians.

This is the latest in a series of regime attacks on health and humanitarian workers, and civilian buildings including hospitals.

We must see an end to this wilful disregard for civilian life – we call on the Assad regime and their Russian backers to adhere to their commitments under international humanitarian law.

The UK Government commends the bravery of the men and women putting their lives at risk to deliver vital humanitarian and health support across Syria. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who lost their lives in this tragedy.