

# MHCLG local digital collaboration discovery

Approach, findings and recommendations

17th July 2019  
dxw digital and MHCLG Local  
Digital Collaboration Unit



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

# Contents

## [Introduction](#)

The scope and purpose of the discovery

## [What we did](#)

The research activities we did during the discovery

## **What we learned**

What we learned during our research:

- [What is collaboration?](#)
- [The culture of collaboration](#)
- [Anchors and drivers of collaboration](#)
- [User/Stakeholder needs](#)

## [Opportunities and solutions](#)

The opportunities we have identified and the solution ideas we have created

## [Recommendations](#)

Our recommendations and priorities for alpha



# Introduction

Context, scope and purpose



# Our team



**Alex Yedigaroff**  
Transformation  
manager



**Marianne Brierley**  
Senior user researcher



**Linda Butterfield**  
User researcher



**Becky Miller**  
Service designer



**Samantha Obioha**  
User researcher



**Daria Kwiatkowska**  
Service designer



**Stacey Phillips**  
Delivery lead

We carried out a discovery on improving digital collaboration between local authorities.

The project started with a short inception phase, which was followed by 3 two-week discovery sprints.

The discovery phase ran from 5th June - 16th July.



## Hypothesis

By improving local authorities' **awareness** of projects and their **ability** to collaborate, it will result in cost and time savings, and better public services



## Research questions

1. How can MHCLG support local authorities to ensure good outcomes for public services?
2. What are the barriers to collaboration in local authorities?
3. What are the ingredients of successful collaboration in local authorities? When and how does it take place?



## We did not exclusively focus on Pipeline in our research.

In order to test our hypothesis, our research questions focussed on a number of different areas. This was important to ensure we explored a range of opportunity and solution ideas in the discovery, and not just Pipeline.

As Pipeline is a product being used by some local authorities to collaborate, we included it within our scope. In our research with users and stakeholders, we sought to understand local authorities' experiences of using Pipeline, if applicable.

## We also considered the wider landscape that exists in this problem space.

This project is one of many initiatives looking at and supporting collaboration between local authorities. We spent time during the discovery understanding the role of different teams, organisations and stakeholders in the wider landscape, and the work they're doing.

This included central government teams in MHCLG and GDS, as well as LocalGov Digital, Socitm, LGA and the newly established LOTI.

# Local Digital

Laying t

[Local Digital](#) > Local Digital Fund

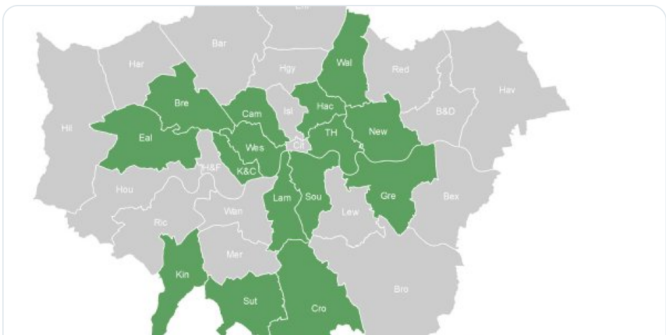
## Local Digital Fund

The Local Digital Fund was announced in July 2018, by the UK Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak



**Theo Blackwell** @LDN\_CDO · Jun 13

"London, LOTI has landed..." - read launch update on new @londoncouncils digital collaboration body London Office of Technology & Innovation



### LOTI has landed... - Smart London - Medium

London local government came together at Bloomberg HQ to toast the launch of the new London Office of Technology & Innovation, a new...

[medium.com](#)

2 22 62

## Pipeline

**ALPHA** This is a prototype, your feedback will help us improve this service.

Tags All projects

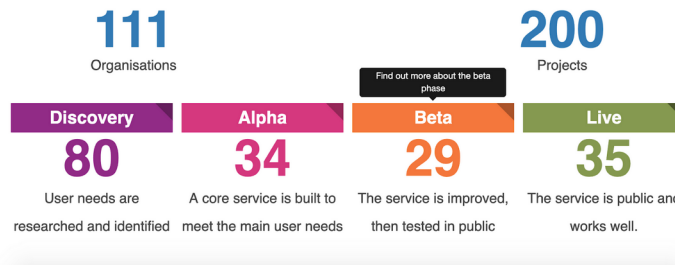
Login Register

**Projects** Welcome to Pipeline from LocalGov Digital

Enter text to search

## Welcome to Pipeline

Pipeline is a service from [LocalGov Digital](#) to aid innovation and collaboration in local government digital.



Upgrade

## Building a new London Office for Technology & Innovation

Smart London  
May 24 · 9 min read

Chief Digital Officer for London Theo Blackwell and interim LOTI Director Omid Shiraji describe the set-up of the new London Office of Technology & Innovation (or 'LOTI') as we prepare for launch on 10 June

In June London Councils, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and 15 London boroughs will launch the new London Office of Technology & Innovation.

As we prepare to launch, here's how LOTI came about, how it will work and what its focus will be.

What is LOTI?

# A strategic outcome for MHCLG is to help transform services and support local government efficiencies.

MHCLG wants to support local authorities to ensure good outcomes for public services. By improving their ability to collaborate it will:

- Deliver savings so funds can be used more effectively
- Encourage re-use and sharing knowledge about similar projects or problems
- Grow 'digital' capability and user-centred design skills in local government
- Improve diversity and competition in the public sector IT market

## Context

In 2018, MHCLG launched the [Local Digital Declaration](#). Co-written by 45 public sector organisations, signing the declaration includes a commitment to working openly and sharing. By June 2019, 165 councils had signed up.

Councils who have signed can access free GDS Academy training and are able to apply for funding to work on collaborative projects. The response to the first round of funding surpassed expectations, with 389 expressions of interests and 81 full applications submitted. An independent panel selected 16 projects (11 discoveries, 5 alphas) to go ahead.

The 16 funded projects have recently come to an end and their outputs have been [published online](#). Research to understand experiences of working collaboratively through the fund is currently on-going and some councils that participated were part of this discovery project.

# Context

MHCLG also ran a series of workshops and conducted 8 interviews to learn about collaboration to date. The findings confirmed that there is a strong appetite to collaborate but that councils face multiple barriers that limit their ability to do so.

Platforms that enable collaboration such as Pipeline have also had limited take up.

Further research was required to explore the barriers and potential solutions that might make collaboration feasible and sustainable for local authorities.

# What we did

Research activities



We identified different teams, organisations and stakeholders who operate in this problem space to help us prioritise who to speak with during discovery

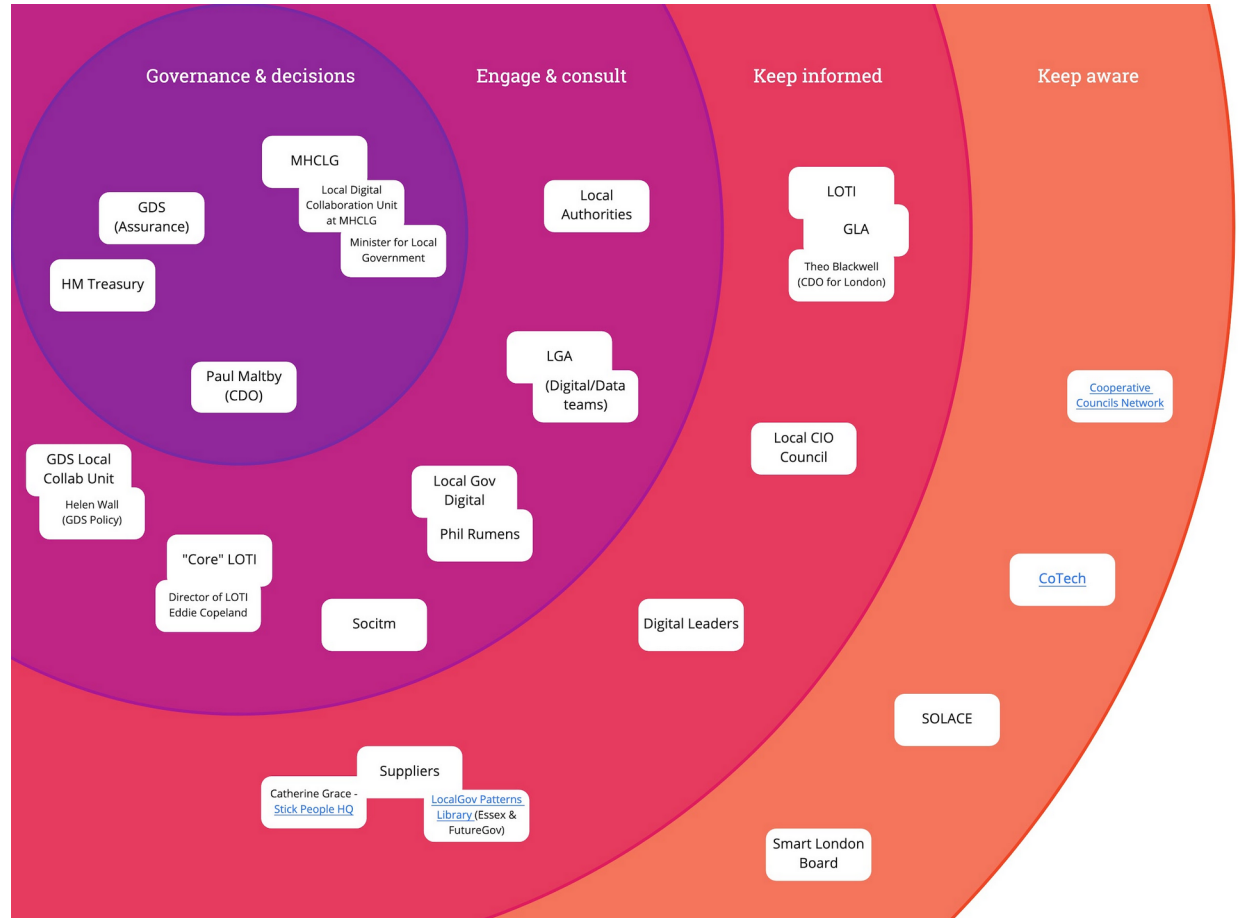




# Stakeholder mapping

We produced a map to determine how we'll engage different teams and organisations with involvement or interest in the project.

Mapping the stakeholders allowed us to concentrate our research efforts on those that are active in the collaboration space and who would give us a breadth of insight into what is happening, what has worked, what hasn't and why.



## Existing research analysis

- **Research review** - we reviewed existing research, carried out as a series of mapping exercises with users, to identify the gaps and build on findings
- **Analysis of Pipeline** - we carried out desk research on Pipeline, to understand how it was developed and learned about the research that's been done to date
- **Review of other related work** - we reviewed other work carried out by Bloomberg Associates on digital leadership in local government
- **Desk research** - we carried out desk research into the different tools, services and organisations that exist in the wider problem space

# A note about collaborators

Local authorities are experienced collaborators. Services are increasingly delivered in partnership with other organisations in the public, private and third sectors.

Some local authorities, as organisations, have higher digital maturity and are actively sharing, reusing and collaborating on digital work. However, this does not necessarily mean that this mindset or culture has filtered throughout the entire authority.

Equally, for less digitally mature councils who do not collaborate on digital work as often, the opposite is true. There will be pockets of people or individuals that operate with a more collaborative and open mindset.

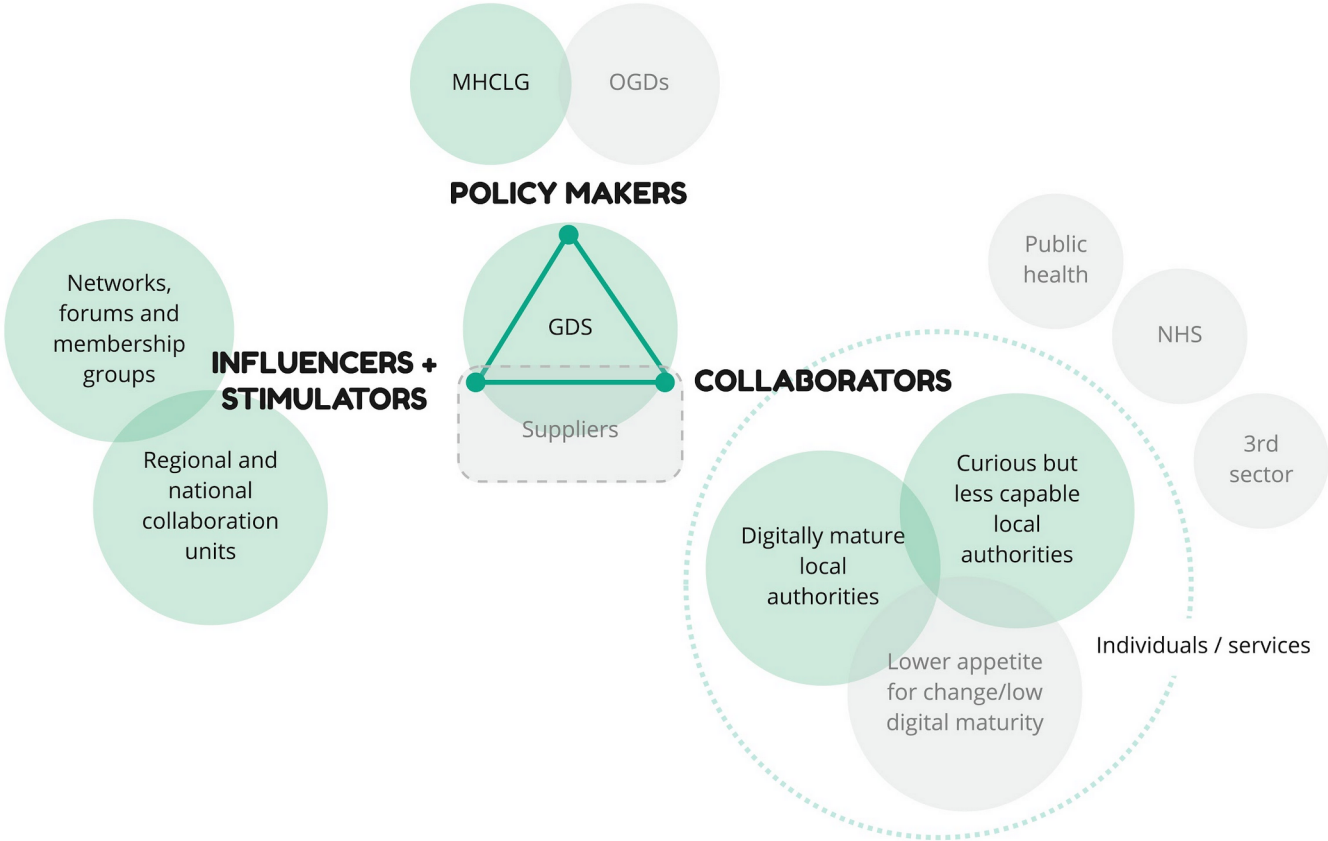
The more engaged collaborators are easier to access and involve. More efforts need to be made to include those who are less engaged, less aware, less able or less willing to collaborate.

# User landscape

This diagram describes the landscape of users and stakeholders connected to MHCLG Local Collaboration Unit activities.

Green indicates where we have involved groups in our discovery.

Grey indicates potential areas to explore further.



We included 9 different local authorities in our discovery research.

Our analysis includes findings from a further 8 councils interviewed by the MHCLG team.



Participants came from a range of seniority, roles and skill sets, but they were all responsible for delivering services



# Recruitment strategy

We made efforts to ensure local authorities could take part from across England.

We aimed for a balance of political colours and council types to provide a broader view on collaboration.



Criteria	Metropolitan	Unitary	County	Borough/city/district (inc. London Boroughs)
<b>Total complete (Total sprint 1-2)</b>	<b>3</b> (0)	<b>4</b> (1)	<b>3</b> (1)	<b>7</b> (7)
<b>Signed to LDD?</b>	Yes			No
<b>Total complete (Total sprint 1-2)</b>	<b>13</b> (7)			<b>4</b> (2)
<b>Political make up</b>	LAB	CON	LIB DEM / GRN	NOC
<b>Total complete (Total sprint 1-2)</b>	<b>6</b> (4)	<b>8</b> (3)	<b>2</b> (2)	<b>1</b> (-)
<b>Location</b>	North England		South England	
<b>Total complete (Total sprint 1-2)</b>	<b>5</b> (2)*			<b>12</b> (7)
<b>Job role</b>	Mix of roles and responsibilities			

\*cancellations of 3 northern authorities have affected our distribution of interviews.

We ran 8 interviews with government and non-government organisations involved in local digital collaboration including LocalGov Digital, LGA, Socitm, LOTI and GDS





# We spoke to organisations that are already active in promoting and stimulating local digital collaboration

## **LocalGov Digital**

An organisation for digital practitioners working in and around local government. Includes the LocalGov Digital Slack and Pipeline

## **Local Government Association (LGA)**

The membership body for councils, working to support, promote and improve local government

## **London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI)**

A recently established collaborative vehicle to strengthen the London boroughs' ability to innovate, build common capability and to scale-up digital innovation across London's public services

# We spoke to organisations that are already active in promoting and stimulating local digital collaboration

## **Society for IT Managers (SOCITM)**

The professional network for digital leaders in the transformation of local, regional and national public services

## **Government Digital Service (GDS)**

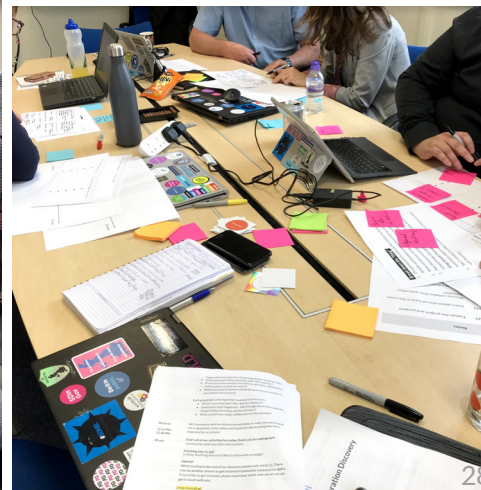
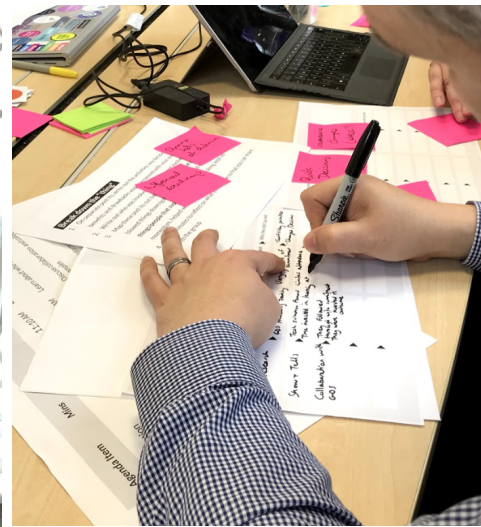
Leads digital transformation in central government, builds and runs common platforms

## **Co-fund and Collaborate 2 Innovate (CC2i)**

Crowdfunding platform for digital transformation projects in local government, housing and health

Most research sessions were one-to-one interviews run in person or remotely, but 2 sessions were run as workshops for 4-6 participants





## Our research sessions focussed on 3 main areas:

### What is collaboration within a local authority?

We asked participants to share their experience of collaboration. We collected examples of different types of collaboration, and the tools or platforms that support them.

### What examples (good or bad) can we find of collaboration?

Participants were asked to think about collaborative projects that had taken place in their organisation. Alternatively, if they didn't have any examples, we focussed on *why* they thought collaboration wasn't happening.

### What are the drivers and anchors to good collaboration?

Once we had learned about collaborative projects, we tried to understand what had led to both good and bad examples.

We looked at what characteristics and environments encouraged collaboration, and which would hold it back.

What we learned:

# What is collaboration?



Our desk research identified 4  
categories of collaboration



1

## Networking

Knowing where to meet others who might be facing similar challenges is the first step to building closer informal relationships between local authorities, and anecdotally, this acts as a catalyst to collaboration.

2

## Knowledge sharing

Alignment on issues and sharing approaches, research, tools, practices and problems.



## Resource sharing

Sharing resources like code, skills, budget, access to platforms or other tangible solutions.

3

## Delivery

Working together jointly in partnerships to solve problems and deliver new services, meeting the needs of each of the local authorities.

4





There are multiple organisations and parts of government with an interest in local digital collaboration



# Local authorities are already collaborating to some degree

## Political will and leadership

Collaborating on projects requires both political will and strong leadership.

Political priorities change, which can make and break partnerships.

The political priorities in central government are also subject to turbulence, creating risk for centrally administered initiatives. There is a view that 'we have been here before'.

## Individuals and networks

Relationships between individuals at authorities are crucial. Collaboration is very often a product of existing networks and relationships.

Strong relationships build alignment over goals and outcomes.

Succession planning is critical for ensuring the sustainable success of a project.

## Local authorities collaborate

Local authorities already collaborate extensively for service delivery.

Shared service arrangements are already delivering partnership approaches to digital and IT, with varying success.

Platforms exist for sharing knowledge, however the landscape is potentially confusing and there is little coordination.

# There is no “right way” to collaborate

## There is a digital / service divide

Collaborating on a ‘digital’ project is often seen as a job for the digital team. There is an evident divide between digital teams and service teams.

Those involved in spearheading initiatives in digital collaboration find it difficult to reach those outside the digital bubble.

## Government is messy

Local authorities deal with different parts of central government and are often on the receiving end of changes to policy.

A single service area in an authority may be dealing with DWP, HMRC, MHCLG, GDS, CCS, etc, with little coordination or cohesion in approach.

## Pipeline is a ‘use once and forget’ tool

The intent behind Pipeline is generally supported. However it is not an integral part of business processes, is used erratically and represents a point in time, rather than articulating the vision or roadmap for authorities to come together over.

There is little appetite for another ‘product’ in a crowded space.

User interviews told us the benefits of collaboration are well understood, but harder to quantify



# What users think about collaboration

## Networking

Building a network and **developing relationships is often the precursor to sharing and collaborating.** Strong relationships also improve the likely success of a collaborative project.

## Knowledge sharing

Sharing knowledge, case studies and stories **help people make better decisions and avoids the cost of repeating activities** such as research.

## Resource sharing

Local authorities **benefit from direct cost savings when reusing shared resources**, for example avoided build costs, reduced salary or labour costs, reduced maintenance costs.

## Delivery

The benefits of collaborating on project delivery are assumed as 'no brainers' but there is limited evidence to demonstrate improved outcomes, and in some cases project failure may be more likely. **The value and benefit of collaborating in project delivery needs more exploration**, for example through the funded projects.

# What are the assumed benefits of collaboration?

## Do more with less

It should be possible to pool resources and budget to be able to do more with the knowledge you have.

Not only do teams see results faster, outcomes can be used several times, and be improved upon each time so that all can benefit (such as adapting code).

## Improve experiences

Councils felt that services delivered in collaboration would be “better” but concrete evidence of this is hard to find.

Working with others enables local authorities to develop a consistent approach to make it easier next time. This *should* have a knock on effect that residents have a consistent experience across councils.

Best practice should be replicated where possible and lessons learned should not be repeated.

## Grow and motivate

The opportunity to improve services with others tends to be an empowering experience if successful. If all parties are aligned in their goals, this can be highly motivating and offer the opportunity to learn new skills and ways of working.

In addition, when procuring services or requesting changes from suppliers, it's possible to have a louder voice to ensure cooperation and change.

“ We publish everything on github.  
It's hard to know how many people  
benefit.

You can fix the problem, not  
just fix the problem in your  
borough.”





# What already exists in the collaboration landscape?

## There are many tools, communities and projects

There are many things already in existence that cater to collaborative efforts in local government.

Rather than adding too much noise to this space, we want to ensure we dovetail neatly with the existing landscape.

## The networking and knowledge sharing area is crowded

Most collaborative spaces are geared towards conversation rather than action.

There is an opportunity to explore the user needs on the delivery side of collaboration.

## Awareness of tools is limited

The intent behind Pipeline is generally supported. However it is not an integral part of business processes, is used erratically and represents a point in time, rather than articulating the vision or roadmap for authorities to come together over.

There is little appetite for another 'product' in a crowded space.

# Learning from others

There is a strong desire to learn from others, to replicate the good things and avoid repeating lessons learned.

## Remotely

Most learning activities were done as desk research using a variety of online community tools. This kind of learning was easier to manage around other responsibilities.

## In person

There is a desire to go to other authorities to be able to learn from them. To do this, people need to be sure that their time and effort will be worthwhile.

Some would join regular meetups based on a common role or project type.

## Where do people look?

- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Local Government Slack
- Pipeline
- Newsletters, case studies, articles, forums
- Local Government Authority (LGA)
- Benchmarking groups, meet ups
- Internal chat groups (slack, microsoft teams etc.)
- [Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Gartner](#) think tank



Benchmarking seems to have stopped now... Before we used to have benchmarking with other local authorities to know who was a good and poor performer.



# Sharing with others

We observed less evidence of local authorities sharing resources with each other. This may be because this type of collaboration requires much more organisation and management.

## Knowledge/skills

Other than sharing through blog posts, tweets and online communities, some councils have adopted agile methodologies such as weeknotes and show and tells to share their progress.

## Outcomes/budget

We heard a few examples of sharing a budget to deliver projects, or reusing code from another authority. It is not always easy for local authorities to access resources from others, as it can depend on who you know, and being in the right place at the right time.

## Why do people share?

What and how people share will vary depending on how open they are as an organisation.

- To create efficiencies: quicker delivery in projects, exposure to tools, increased compliance and shared processes.
- To create better outcomes: cost savings, culture change and seeing the impact of success.
- To empower and motivate: through personal relationships, increasing buy-in power and likelihood of more funding.

# Being in the right place at the right time

A county council used the new wordpress website code from a neighbouring county council. They were connected through a personal network, one council had just finished their new website when the other had started considering the work. They had a reduced digital team, which triggered the discussion with their neighbour.

*“We were retracting our digital team, and we asked if they had any resource they could share. They said they couldn't share resource, but they could share work.”*

The council sharing the code was happy for it to be reused, and requested that any changes the other council made to it be shared back with them. Our participant was sure this council would be happy for others to use the code as well, but did not think they had shared it anywhere in the wider local government community.

*“I'm not sure they're sharing it more widely. If someone were to come and ask to use their code the answer would be: Yes, sure, why not?!”*

# Collaborative tools

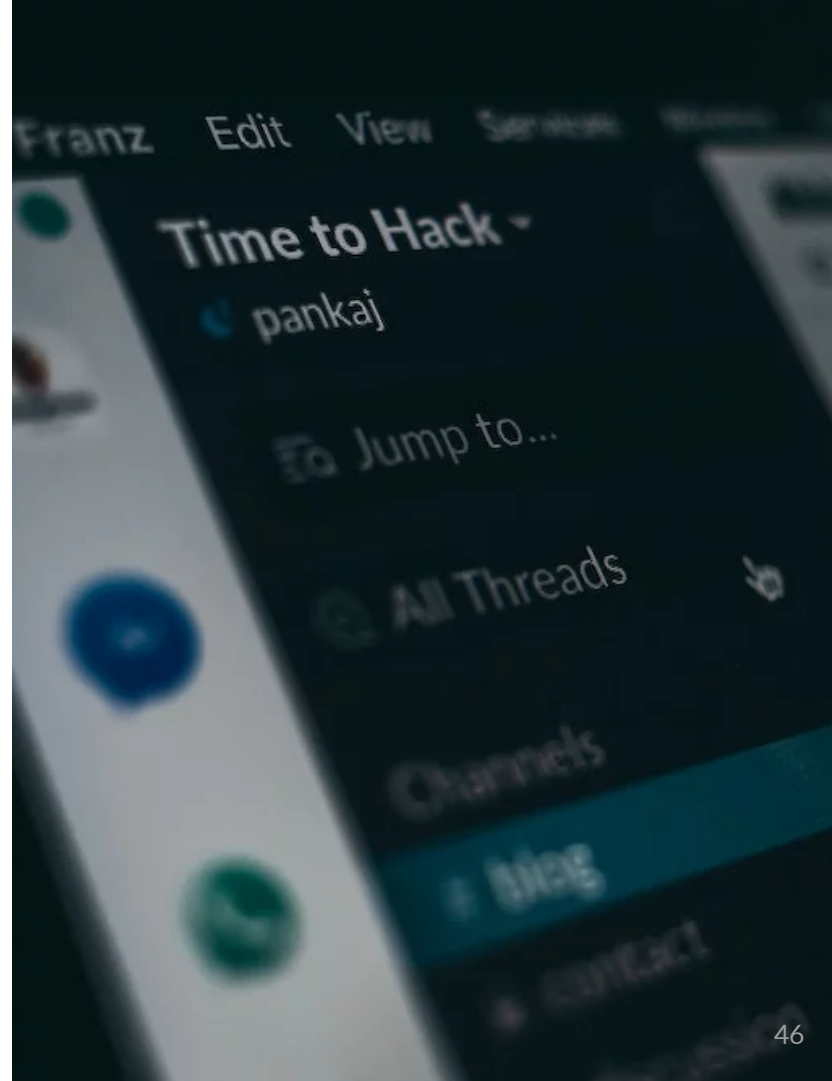
Slack was most commonly referenced, however not all local authorities use this. Some will use it for single projects, internally only or to find information externally e.g. Local Gov. Digital.

## What do local authorities use?

Slack, Lucid chart, Microsoft teams/ OneDrive, Whatsapp, Yammer, Sharepoint, Trello, Google Docs, KHub, Hangouts, Skype...

## Barriers to using tools

1. No budget for professional versions meaning some useful features are not available
2. Aversion to using online platforms due to fear of how information will be used and stored
3. Not all local authorities use or have access to the same tools
4. Lack of awareness that some tools exist to support collaboration



“ We do look to see what others are doing. With the waste project, I searched the system on Slack to see who was further on in the process to get some information. They offered to share their discovery and explained their issues, it was all useful.



“ Getting on and using tools such as Slack is fine but there are concerns about what you can share. There was worry from above about where the information was stored and used for. Only the digital team keep using it, no-one else.





# Pipeline is seen as a generally good thing, but there is room for improvement

Pipeline was viewed positively as a place to share projects you were working on. However, to encourage collaboration it needs to:

- Help local authorities find common problems they want to solve
- Help users become more engaged and proactive around topics they are interested in (so it isn't forgotten)
- Encourage users to keep content up to date, and to publish outcomes (including code)
- Help users find other people working on the same thing or in the same way



People post what they do...  
and that's it. Every now and  
then there's a flurry of  
activity.



“ There's an acceptance that the starting point for collaboration is having a place where you can find out what others are doing but most people have reservations around how it operates... I suspect it's to do with curation.



What we learned:

# The culture of collaboration



Research from MHCLG already showed themes emerging after 8 interviews (with a slightly different focus)



# The need to cut costs and become more efficient is a key driver of collaboration

Making savings is the most common trigger for digital change in local authorities and those we spoke to recognise that there is great potential to make savings through avoiding “reinventing the wheel.” Economies of scale can enable local authorities to “do it once and share.” Whilst the potential might be clear, there are multiple barriers to overcome including aligning systems, getting buy-in and finding time to work with others.

# Culture is changing in local authorities and can act as an enabler (or disabler) of collaboration

## Working in the open (and failing in the open)

Local authorities are moving towards working in the open but there is recognition that this is a shift in culture that will take a long time.

Those that work in the open are more likely to be able to work collaboratively. They are also more likely to have access to tools that facilitate collaboration, such as Slack, Trello, Teams.

## Empowered teams (or not, in some cases)

Collaborative working has been successful when teams have had buy-in from the top and autonomy to try things out and make decisions.

Conversely, some local authorities have multiple layers of governance that can impact on their ability to work with others.

## Balancing projects with the “day job”

Time and capacity is a challenge for local authorities. There is a lack of multidisciplinary teams for local authorities where one person might be covering multiple roles such as user research and service design.

For some local authorities, visiting others and going to conferences has reduced in recent years due to funding cuts.

# Procurement practices may hinder opportunities to collaborate

Complex procurement practices mean that local authorities spend a long time creating specifications for tender. Expectations from non-digital teams can lead to a “gold plated approach” in which everything should be automated. In doing so, lengthy contracts and large specifications are defined, slowing down work and limiting opportunities to work with SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and other local authorities.



# Sometimes collaboration comes down to a “coalition of the willing”

Where councils have worked together well, this has been through pre-existing relationships with people who have a particular interest in solving a problem. They have common attitudes of working openly and sharing. Collaboration has not been formalised which enables people to come together easily but can limit the extent to which the work is recognised and prioritised.

There is a lack of planning for succession in collaborative projects that can mean that the work ends when people move into new jobs.

What we learned:

# Anchors and drivers for collaboration



We investigated the main anchors  
and drivers to collaborative activities



# Anchors

## Culture

Siloed teams and a risk averse attitude can slow down collaboration. It can also mean opportunities to improve are missed.

## Politics

Senior Leadership can be more resistant to adopt agile ways of working. Changes to politicians and leaders can alter project priorities.

## Technology

Out of date/unsupported or disconnected technology can make it difficult to collaborate with people outside of the office walls. Using different technology to a partner makes sharing more complex and cumbersome.

# Drivers

## Culture

Agile working and an open sharing culture introduces habits that support collaboration such as show and tells, or blogging.

## Politics

Buy in from senior leadership empowers project teams to make decisions that benefit their services. Red tape tends to be removed. Political alignment between partners can drive partnerships.

## Technology

Access to collaborative tools such as Slack, Whatsapp, Trello, Pipeline etc. allows users to learn from others. It also enables collaborators to connect remotely to teams.

# Anchors

## Standards/governance

Some policies and standards can be interpreted and used as blockers to new technology or approaches.

## Shared vision

Collaboration can fall apart when there are differences in goals collaborators want to achieve, the pace or how they want to work.

## Relationships

It is hard to know how to connect to people outside of your personal networks.

# Drivers

## Standards/governance

Clear guidance and best practice definition gives users the confidence to work in different ways and can convince management to change.

## Shared vision

Common goals, user groups, systems and services cement collaborators and help them work towards one outcome for all.

## Relationships

Pre-existing relationships is where collaboration commonly starts. Relationships continue when people move to new roles allowing potential for further collaboration.

# Anchors

## Geography

Travel costs and time makes collaborating across long distances challenging. Online collaborative tools do not replace the need for meeting in person.

## Capability

Users lack skills in how to collaborate, from managing relationships to aligning goals. This can lead to a fear of change and can hold back collaborative ways of working.

## Scope

Misalignment on scope, choosing technologies over outcomes or competing requirements can make collaboration difficult to achieve.

# Drivers

## Geography

Proximity plays a large part in choosing who to collaborate with. Personal networks are most likely to be with people close by and users can afford to travel to meet them.

## Capability

Skills in multidisciplinary working allows teams across organisations to form more easily. Users who have budget to attend events gain more exposure to networks and collaborative opportunities.

## Scope

Solving problems and developing solutions incrementally, and meeting the common needs rather than focussing on those unique to a council will help partnerships succeed.

Research sessions showed that whilst most are enthusiastic about collaboration, there are a lot of blockers to overcome



“ Resource sharing & delivery are the most useful but also have the most hurdles. Delivery is important, but so is resource & knowledge sharing. Not easy to manage however - but can be done.





# Collaboration doesn't only happen between local authorities, but with other groups, bodies and organisations too

Collaboration does not always mean collaborating externally with other local authorities. It can mean collaborating internally, with other organisations (such as health, community organisations, charities and the voluntary sector) or private enterprise (such as telecoms providers)

We identified similar themes appearing across external and internal collaboration. Those who did not have a external sharing culture were more likely to share things internally, however still faced the same challenges and blockers to successful collaboration, such as having siloed-teams, funding challenges, and a waterfall culture.

# A better way to get a bus pass

One example of working with the voluntary sector came from the changes to how people collect their bus passes. This was a complex arrangement, with a transport company contracted to issue the passes, the council being responsible for the data of residents, and a charity who had specific objectives to meet around improving quality of life for older people. The problem was around finding a suitable place to issue the passes, as the transport provider did not have this facility.

*“The voluntary sector really wanted to do it and that made a real difference as it was a low value contract.”*

The council and charity were able to pool resources to deliver an improved service. The outcome was to change where bus passes were collected, which enabled charity staff to identify those who needed more support. This aspect was something the council would not have been able to offer. The new approach offered the chance to reduce social isolation and improve health and wellbeing for residents.

*“A lady could come in and be recognised that she looked a bit peaky... we hadn’t the time to ask those questions (in the service centre).”*

“ We haven't worked on delivering projects in collaboration with other authorities

We're not very good at sharing what we've done. ”



# Other than networking and sharing knowledge/resources, local authorities need more support in *how* to collaborate

They need guidance on where to go, how to begin, the best tools, regulations to follow, information on how data can be handled in these tools to reassure their managers/directors, as well as support in how to manage working relationships, ownership, maintenance , how to get outcomes to align and so on.

This also includes support with succession planning to avoid specialist knowledge being held by one individual (who could leave the authority and take that knowledge with them).



How do you have those conversations to start with? Who are the right people to talk to? Maybe probing those might help us get to the table.





If I left, it would be very challenging for them because I am very IT literate, a lot of the other product owners aren't and don't want to know about it either.



“ Who owns the system? Who owns the service? Where does the data sit? Who holds the licences for Slack? All those conversations are really hard to have for shared services...it's the practicalities that cause the problems.



# Collaboration requires a time commitment. It's hard to prioritise this around the “day job”

There seems to be a lot of willingness to collaborate but finding the time and protecting the time to do this properly is difficult around day to day tasks.

Local authorities described lack of time as a barrier to successful collaboration. Some compared their work to firefighting where it is nearly impossible to contribute or collaborate on another project, when they haven't finished putting out their own fire, which is their first priority. Longevity and complexity of a project also determines how likely local authorities are to take time out to collaborate.

Team shapes often change, and as a result people have to drop in and out of projects in order to fit around their own day job responsibilities/priorities. Local authorities described this having an impact on the speed of delivery and a challenge they face when collaborating.





Everyone is busy, doing their own thing, multiple things at the same time.





Something needs to be really easy to get in and out of it, otherwise you're not going to look for it because the day job will swallow it up.



# Collaborators will use their personal networks and the networks of their colleagues to connect to other local authorities/partners

Personal networks hold a lot of value in local authorities. People will hold on to connections as they move jobs to different authorities. They will also use the networks of colleagues to find people to work with.

Personal networks make it easier to initiate conversations about collaboration and to arrange visits to learn from each other.



We work with lots of councils, the driver is where we have pre-existing links with them.



# Justifying travel to visit other authorities or to attend events is becoming more difficult, even for those with budgets for such activities

Particularly for those in more rural settings, or not within easy reach of London. Councillors find it difficult to get sign off for travel and accommodation to attend events or visit other councils. It is also difficult to find time for these activities outside of their 'day job'.

This has built some frustration amongst these councils, particularly when a lot of events are held in London. **#NotJustLondon**



There's certainly no budget for attending conferences whatsoever so it's not something we would get involved with, it's very inwardly focused.



## ...which can mean that proximity to other local authorities plays a large part in choosing who to work with

The path of least resistance leads to councils that are closer to each other. It's easier to find common ground and to justify a few hours to meet to discuss ideas. This also allows for staff to work in each others' offices when required.

“ Communication, geography and arranging meetings was difficult. We do need to weigh up which events are most valuable. It's more and more difficult to justify travel, especially to London. Central gov is London centric.





# A key ingredient for successful collaboration is for all teams to be aligned with the outcomes they want to achieve

Alignment could be around a common goal they want to achieve, a common service or type of user. Using similar tools and technology also made it easier for authorities to communicate.

This could be another reason why councils look to their nearest neighbours first, as there is an assumption they will have more in common.



The best way to collaborate is to find an issue you want to deal with, then find your partners.



# ...but different structures, tools, backgrounds and priorities can make it harder to keep that alignment

Local authorities have varied experience of using different collaboration tools/platforms. Senior leadership can be reluctant to introduce new ways of working in case policies change.

In addition, there is anxiety around how information shared on these platforms is recorded, used, and how people will behave.

Different ways of working can slow down the process and generate frustration amongst collaborators. Different council 'colours' can result in projects being de-prioritised or dropped for other responsibilities (even between the same coloured councils).

“ Mostly it gets sorted. Ultimately we agree on a tool that everyone's happy with, or it gets clunky. There have been many instances where it's got clunky.



## ...and the type of councils collaborating can make a difference (e.g. county council working with a district council)

The size of the council and the types of services they deliver to residents can cause friction during collaboration. We heard examples of smaller councils feeling their requirements were ignored by larger councils “leading” the project. The end result meant these smaller councils had to retrofit the end solution, costing more money and time to do so.

# Councils will collaborate with suppliers to solve problems

However there are some challenges and expectations that councils have about working with suppliers:

- Detailed requirements for going out to tender take a long time to collate, and often leaves councils with a limited number of suppliers to choose from
- There is pressure from the top to make savings, but little compromise on how solutions are procured
- Councils expect suppliers to be well skilled in networking and collaborating efficiently whilst building capability. However, collaboration doesn't tend to be built into contractual arrangements

“ Procurement processes are so complicated, so difficult, it makes me cry. It’s a challenge to understand where the market is and what’s changing when establishing a business case.



# Suppliers provide networking and learning for local authorities

Users of the same supplier will join annual gatherings to learn about the developments of a product and to provide their input. It's also possible to learn about what others are doing through a supplier's customer base.

The downside of this approach is that it limits awareness of other solutions, benchmarking activities or exploration of new technology and trends. Some local authorities have the mindset that they produce a set of requirements, and the supplier works to deliver it.



“ Collaboration in my area comes through the vendors... from us feeding back changes. They both have regular academies and forums where they discuss requirements and we feed into that.



# The importance of networking and collaborating is being recognised by the changes to job titles and job descriptions

A few local authorities had noted that their job titles and job descriptions were changing to reflect the importance of networking. This was usually seen in more senior roles.

We heard from stakeholders that they felt collaboration needed to be driven from the “top, down.” This was echoed by examples of successful collaboration when councillors were empowered by their Chief Executives or Directors.

“ When I came to my Business Partner role, part of my job is to look outwardly more, it's about how you engage and looking outwards, the collaboration and the benefits that it can bring and that's where the declaration piece came up.





You either are in that mindset of talking and hunting and sharing or you're not.



# ...but this does not always filter through to affect the working culture and environment

On the surface, the importance of working in the open and collaborating is being recognised. However in practice, there is still evidence of working in silos, concerns about sharing information and data, using new tools and governance.

Many councils still operate with a risk averse mentality that limits their pace of change. Whilst there may be opportunities to collaborate, finding budget to join these projects is difficult as they strive to meet their short term aims e.g. finding £10k to join a collaborative project for an app to help with adults and social care, but the budget holder being unable to sign this off despite the prospect of making more savings in the next year and beyond.

## Working in silos resulted in poor service

A borough council's Adult Social Care and Housing teams worked independently, and were not communicating together to drive efficiency. It was explained that gangs often target the homes of vulnerable people who are unable to fend for themselves and use the property as a base for drugs dealing or other criminal activities. The vulnerable adult becomes compromised, and anti-social behaviour reported to Housing resulted in the vulnerable adult becoming evicted and therefore losing their tenancy.

As Adult Social Care and Housing weren't talking to each other, neither of them knew how one situation could affect the other. Housing had no idea that the person they were evicting was a vulnerable adult, and Adult social care was not aware that the person that they were supporting was being evicted due to anti-social behaviour.

*"If Adult Social Care and Housing were communicating and collaborating with each other on these cases then the matter could of been handled differently, one that does not lead to eviction for someone that is vulnerable."*

What we learned:

# User/stakeholder needs



We mapped local authorities (users) into a matrix based on what they wanted to achieve and how engaged they were as an organisation or individual







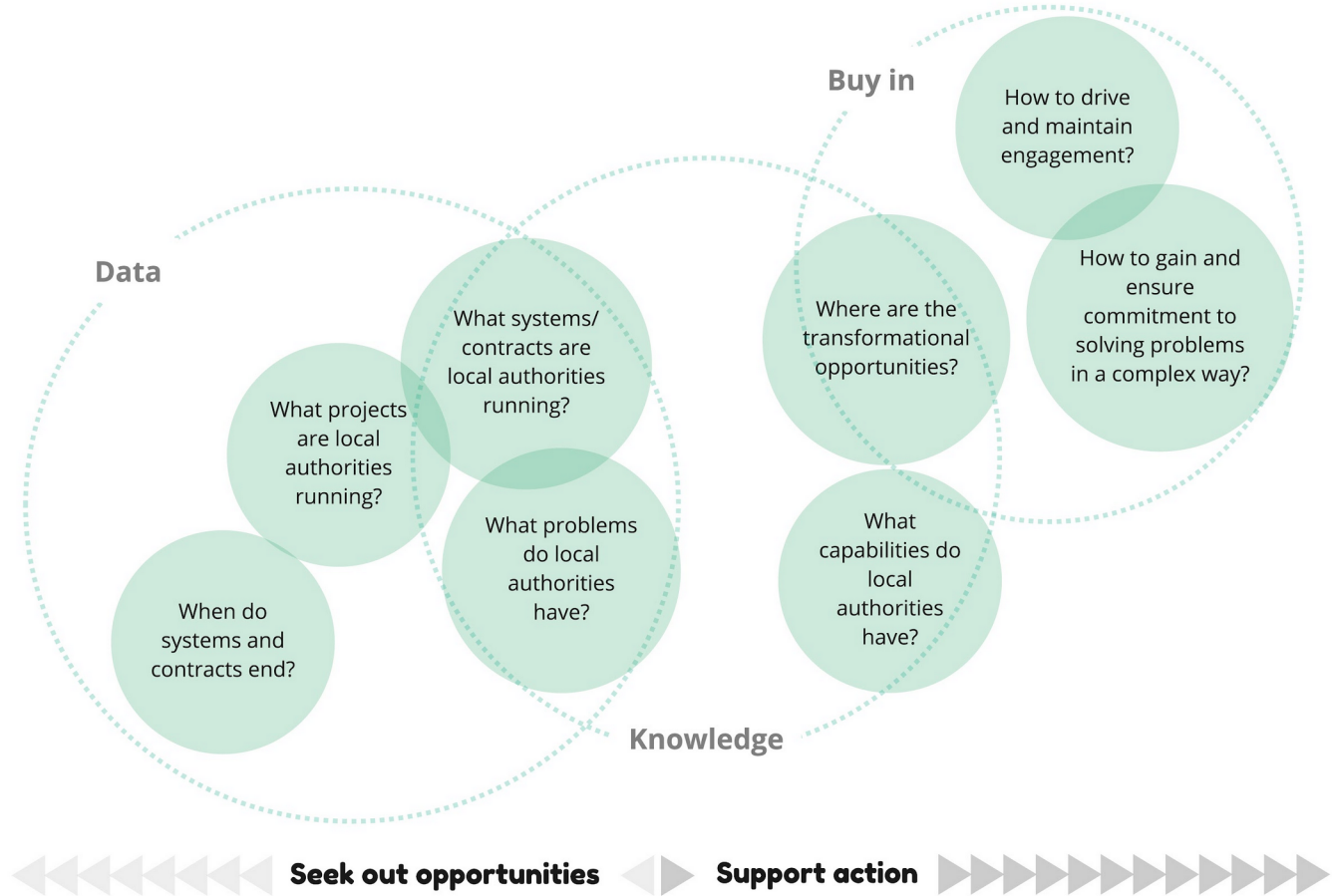
The needs of influencers and stimulators will change depending on their aims to find opportunities, or provide practical support.



# Influencers + Stimulators

This diagram describes what kind of support organisations could benefit from.

Support is grouped into data, knowledge and buy in as 3 main areas that MHCLG could operate.



The range of digital collaboration opportunities in councils demand different levels of commitment and risk



# Digital collaboration opportunities in local authorities

1

## Networking

Developing relationships

2

## Knowledge sharing

Reviewing research

Adopting patterns

Adopting standards

Learning from best practice

Learning from bad practice



## Resource sharing

Adopting a shared platform or application

Reusing code

Reusing research

Sharing skills

3

4

## Delivery

Defining standards

Conducting research

Project to build

Project to buy (joint procurement)

We identified some areas where users would benefit from support...



1

# Push the message of collaboration

Whilst most believe collaboration is a good idea, it is difficult to identify concrete examples of where it has had a positive impact on public services.

Help local authorities find examples to share in their organisation, with their colleagues, managers and directors. This should help get everyone on board.

Make it easier for people to find relevant examples or similar problems to the ones they are interested in so that they can become more proactive.

Help local authorities speak with a bigger, cohesive voice to tech suppliers so that they can show the market what they need as a community.



## Help establish effective relationships

Some people don't know where to look to find others to work with outside of their personal networks. MHCLG could help people partner up over common services, problems, systems, ways or working or other aspects that support successful collaboration.

One blocker to overcome is how local authorities can communicate and work together. As many will use different systems in different ways, they could benefit from guidance on the most effective tools to use for collaboration e.g. Slack, Trello, Miro, Appear.in etc.

There is also opportunity to support councils who struggle to get access to these tools. This can be due to old internet explorer versions, IT.. policy limitations (locked down browsing) or other aspects unique to a council.





## Provide guidance and training

Those who had experienced GDS agile training felt it had helped teams align ways of working and acted as a leveller for each partner. Be aware there is a risk that training can be viewed as irrelevant if it does not respect the realities of working in local authorities e.g. not possible to have a team of 9 per project, have dedicated user researchers/service designers etc.

Some of the less digitally mature local authorities believe in collaborating with others, but feel they don't know where to begin to make this happen. We heard reports of senior management feeling unsure about different tools or practices required for successful collaboration. These roles may also benefit from learning more about user centred practices and agile working.



## Facilitate sharing of resources

*“Everyone’s got a lot of good will but there’s no structure for extracting resources or time.”*

Support local authorities in sharing different resources be it budgets, skills, time or knowledge. Help people to share their problems and needs so that it is easier for others to get involved.

Seek out those who are doing good things and find ways to make it easy for them to share this with others. Seek out those who are not exploring their networks and show them the value they are missing.

Highlight networks, platforms and tools already being used widely in the public sector.



# Remove blockers to collaboration

As projects progress things tend to become more complicated. With so many pressures pulling people in all directions, sometimes collaborative projects are not the priority.

Consider providing support in removing blockers such as a lack of budget for user research, a lack of available developers, lack of senior buy in, difficulty travelling to meet and work together or even by providing independent advice and feedback.



...and some expectations of MHCLG  
from stakeholders.



1

# Identify collaboration opportunities

Local authorities find it difficult to find opportunities to collaborate on project delivery. Existing networks and tools are effective for sharing stories, but they aren't always effective for bringing together partnerships.

There is an opportunity for regional and central government to spot opportunities for collaboration, where there is sufficient data and information available to provide a 'birds eye view' of initiatives or legacy technologies. The London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI) is adopting this approach.



## 2

## 'Fertilise' collaboration opportunities

Where opportunities to collaborate are identified, local authorities can lack the resources and capabilities to capitalise on that opportunity.

Funding (e.g. the Local Digital fund), capability building (e.g. GDS academy), and practical guidance on how to collaborate and share risk are examples of how opportunities can be fertilised to maximise the chance of delivering a successful outcome that benefits multiple local authorities.



## 3

## Relationship brokering and alignment

Relationships between key players in different local authorities are an important factor in ensuring successful and enduring collaboration. Projects can suffer when the needs or expectations of different parties aren't aligned at the start and throughout. Shared goals and outcomes contribute to success.

Providing common space for authorities to come together, and acting as a non-executive type advisor, critical friend or referee, are areas for potential exploration.



## Problem definition/articulation

Projects are often named after the technology being deployed, or a council specific business process. Coming together to deliver a project or solve a problem can be made easier when problems or outcomes are expressed in a common way, or before specific technologies have been elected. A good example of this is the naming and articulation of projects as part of the Local Digital Fund.

Guidance, templates, blogs and workshops are ideas for potential exploration.





## 5 Building capability

There is a wide range of digital maturity and capability levels across local authorities. Centrally administered initiatives to stimulate collaboration (such as the Local Digital fund) risk a perverse outcome where the gap between the digitally mature authorities and those with lower capability actually increases.

Collaboration between partners can also be strained, and projects slowed down by a 'weaker' partner. How to improve capability across all local authorities, and to target efforts in high value areas, is an area for potential exploration.



# Coordination

With multiple membership bodies, advisory bodies, networks, digital platforms and government department who directly impact policy and collaboration initiatives, the landscape is confusing.

There are some potential coordination roles for central government to explore.

The first is the coordination and facilitation of activities in the sharing knowledge and sharing resources spaces. Secondly, MHCLG could better coordinate the activities of government departments who impact council transformation and curate or present a more coherent set of guidance and assistance.



# Opportunities and solutions



We ran a workshop with MHCLG staff and the project team: We identified solutions that met the user needs (opportunities) identified in the discovery



# Workshop aims

The opportunity and solution mapping workshop was an iterative design process that helped us:

- Ensure there was a common understanding of the outcomes that came out of user research
- Decide which areas needed further investigation and to shape recommendations for improvements for those areas
- Collaboratively explore potential solutions linked to desired outcomes that are grounded by research findings
- Consider and determine priorities for alpha



Based on user insights we created themes based on the solutions identified for alpha and improvements needed



### Collaboration manual + tool kit

<b>Project tool kit/ blueprint</b>	<b>Project kick off guide/ blueprint</b>	What matters and what doesn't for delivery (the onion)
<small>toolkit - setting up a collaborative project, examples of best practice, documentation, templates on ongoing guide, workshop outline on how you'd start collaborations, list of action tasks like trials board</small>	<b>Collaboration manual (working in the open and best practice)</b>	Make version of the 7 lenses for collaboration
<b>Reuse of projects propagated through Pipeline</b>	<b>Guidance about how to reuse work</b>	Highlight red flags for collaboration
<small>Could MHCLG make it easy to extract and copy work across (e.g. highlighting parts that are unique vs. shareable)</small>	<b>Prioritisation looking outwardly before starting</b>	

### Matchmaker, matchmaker

<b>Gov Tinder: Match making</b>	Look at viability of contract data as opportunity spotter	MHCLG broker local relationships for regional communities - helping set up regional networks
<b>MHCLG role in encouraging face-to-face networking</b>	<small>Pushing out opportunities for collaboration, coordination role in brokering projects that need collaboration and sharing out work that's ready for reuse (like a Sales person)</small>	<b>MHCLG brokering role finding LAs facing similar challenges in geographically disparate areas</b>
Reflecting on your network to identify what collaboration opportunities exist	<b>Skills exchange</b>	<small>"Local Digital User Panel" - a pool of willing local gov user research and testing participants going less engaged LAs, a more gradual way into the number of collaboration and at the same time a valuable community of implementers for funded projects</small>

### More carrot

<b>MHCLG loans service</b>	<small>Rewarding collaboration through an award or competition to promote successful collaborations and reduce the competitiveness between local authorities that blocks collaboration</small>	<b>Collaboration week - award, attract case studies, speed dating and networking, promoting toolkit</b>
<small>Evolve the funding model - use match funding to encourage more commitment from LAs</small>	<b>Project fail: Fund more risky projects to demonstrate failure</b>	

### Storytelling

<small>Demonstrate that collaboration can achieve this end (if we can find examples of this)</small>	<b>Council X files: Anonymise case studies</b>	<b>Research success criteria in more detail</b>
<b>Collecting examples of successful collaboration at any scale</b>	<small>telling the stories of collaboration - successes and failures</small>	<b>Define benefits and present to councils</b>
<b>Compare baseline costs to shared service costs</b>		

### Collaboration Bootcamp

<b>Fund Digital maturity assessment</b>	<small>Changing the culture from the top - training and guidance to those responsible for initiating collaboration</small>
<b>Train the leaders and practitioners</b>	<b>Train the trainer (digital champions)</b>

### Collaboration audit

<b>Pipeline user testing</b>	<small>Relationship between Pipeline views and projects created</small>
<small>Conduct an audit and create an open database of local authority tech/software</small>	<small>Add a 'rating' feature to LA to rate their tech/software platforms</small>

### Fuel the mindset

<small>Ongoing support role in central gov for MHCLG to visit councils and help people get work off the ground, and having check ins with them</small>	<b>Business cases to mandate inclusion of external work happening in this area</b>
<small>Tying collaboration to corporate objectives, job descriptions and values and strategy of the organisation</small>	

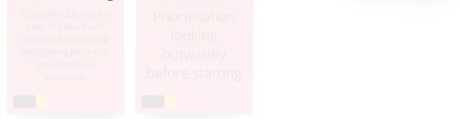


20

### Collaboration manual + tool kit

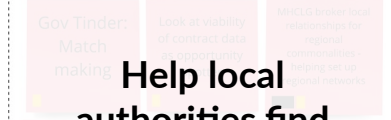


**Help local authorities learn how to collaborate.**  
 Guidance, support and tool kits that provide practical and relevant help for their services.

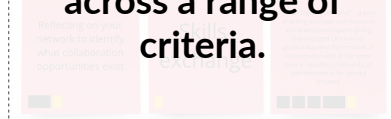


18

### Matchmaker, matchmaker

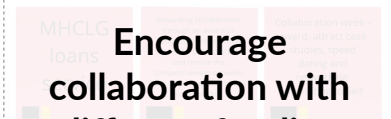


**Help local authorities find others to work with who are aligned across a range of criteria.**



12

### More carrot



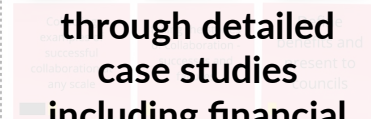
**Encourage collaboration with different funding approaches, awards and celebrations.**

10

### Storytelling



**Show the value of collaboration through detailed case studies including financial impact and where it can go wrong.**



8

### Collaboration Bootcamp

**Help councils assess their digital maturity to identify areas to improve and provide training.**

6

### Collaboration audit

**Audit and rating of different tools/platforms.**

6

### Fuel the mindset

**Support and pressure to include collaboration in job roles and KPIs**

We prioritised high value activities that we wanted to complete and then mapped out the activities firstly based on their impact and secondly on the effort needed to complete them during alpha



Ideas higher up are considered easier to implement.

Contract data

Skills platform

re-orientate & iterate pipeline

Make a collaboration tool kit

Feasibility

Create standard for reuse

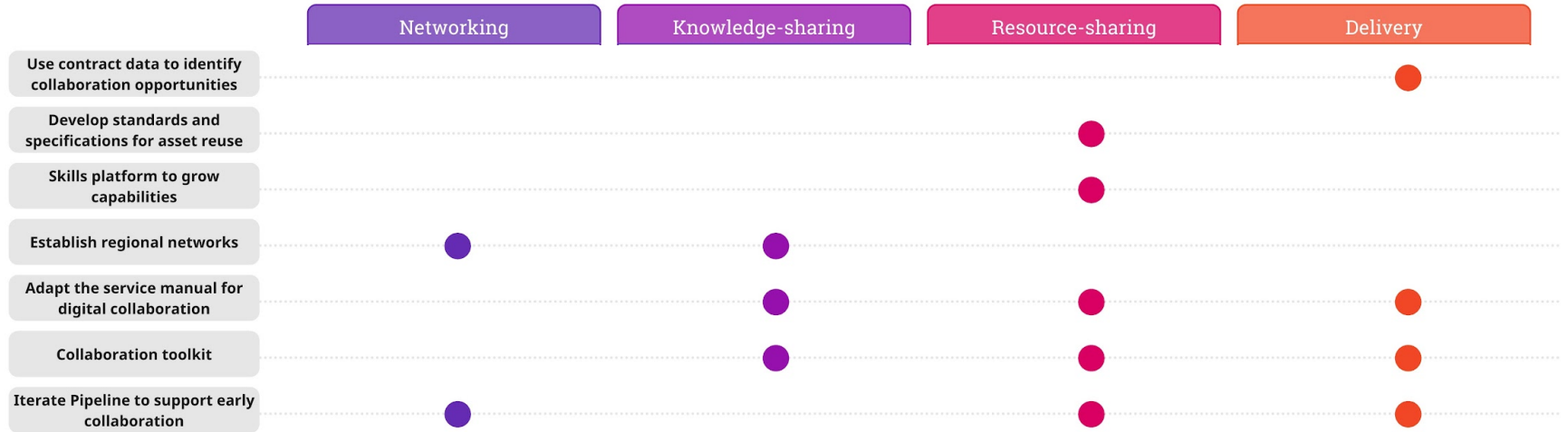
Adapt service manual for local gov collaboration

Regional networks

Impact

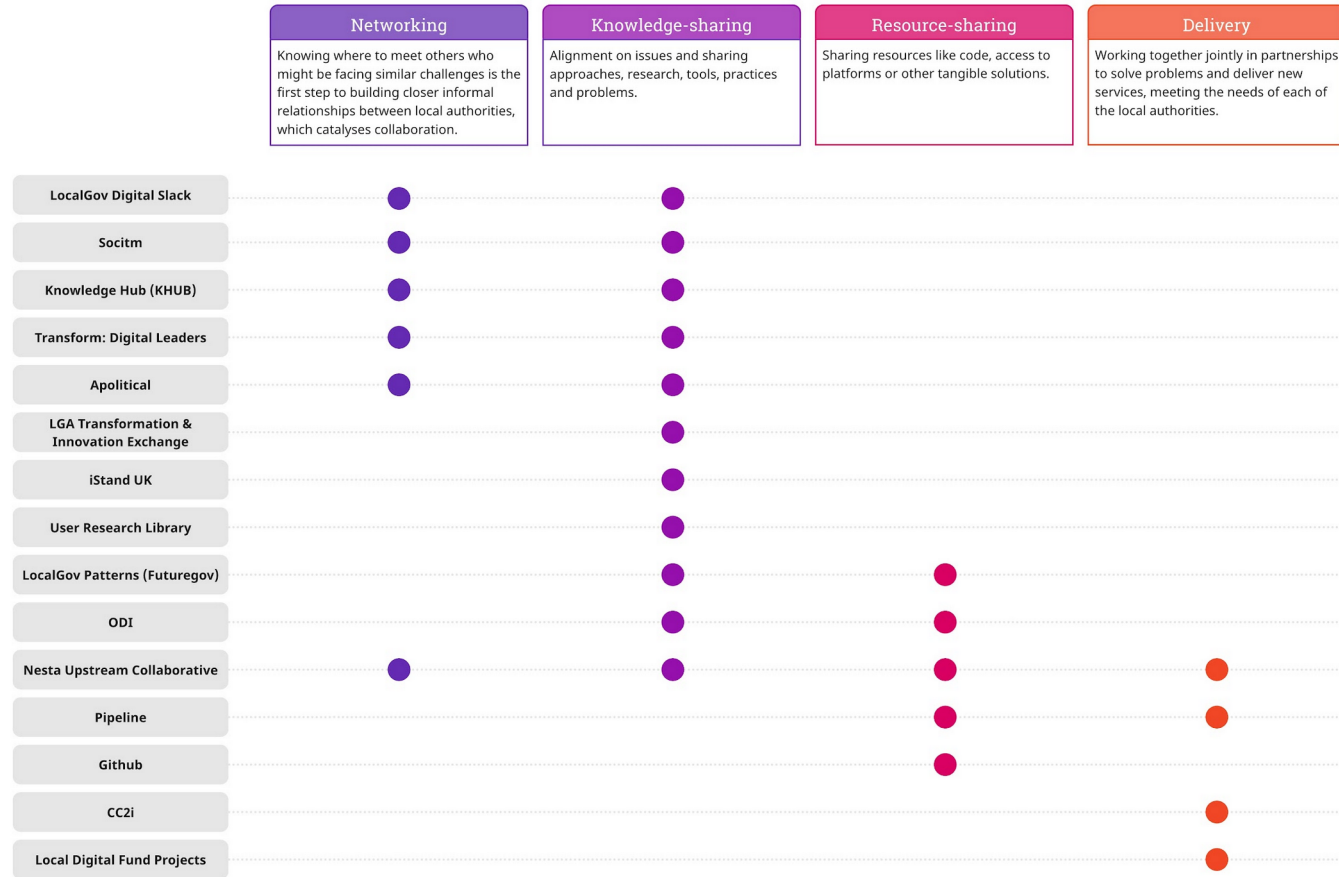
Ideas further right are considered more impactful for the user.

# We mapped opportunities against the four types of collaboration

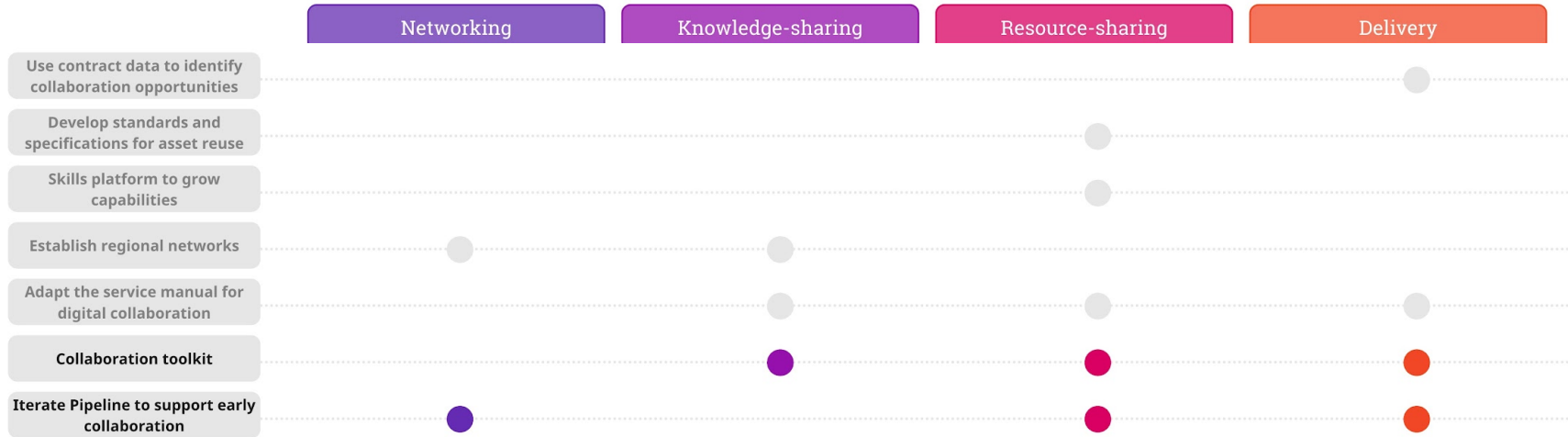


# Re-balancing the landscape

As a comparison, the existing landscape is very focused on Networking and Knowledge-sharing, and the gap we recommend MHCLG develop would lean in the other direction.



# The proposed direction is to focus on the side of collaboration that is currently under-supported



# Recommendations and next steps



# Alpha recommendations

Based on research from this discovery, there are two areas where there is a high level of confidence that they will have impact on local digital collaboration, and are considered to be feasible to prototype and test in alpha.

The recommendations for alpha address two broad areas of need: **how** to collaborate, and **who** to collaborate with. These alphas will aim to address the following problem statements

- How might we develop a set of tools and guidance to help organisations re-use assets and to structure, align on, and deliver collaborative projects?
- How might we re-orientate and iterate Pipeline in order to stimulate collaboration by organisations on shared problems?



# Develop a collaboration toolkit

To meet the need of local authorities who want help in **how** to collaborate, we recommend an alpha on the development of a 'collaboration toolkit'.

The alpha should explore and test the types of tools, guidance and coordination that local authorities would benefit from when seeking to collaborate, when reusing assets built elsewhere (and vice versa) and when collaborating on projects. The tools would give users clarity on how collaborative projects can be set up for success and how to avoid common blockers to collaboration.

The funded projects programme is an ideal test-bed for tools and guidance that can add value to collaboration.





That's probably why councils have always struggled to harmonise: because everyone is starting from a different position with the set-ups they have.



# Insights supporting a collaboration toolkit

In our research, participants often cited common blockers as to why their collaborative projects didn't work out:

- Project aims or priorities were not aligned
- Incompatible processes and ways of working
- Project structure not agreed in advance
- Different culture and internal language
- No succession planning in place

This indicates that there is an opportunity for MHCLG to provide practical support and guidance on setting up and running collaborative projects, leading with examples of “best practice”.



## Re-orientate and iterate Pipeline

To meet the need of local authorities who want help in **finding the right organisations and people** to collaborate with, we recommend an alpha on the re-orientation and iteration of the Pipeline product.

While use of the existing Pipeline tools is inconsistent, it provides an established platform from which to explore and test different approaches:

- Will clearer articulation and publishing of problems and future work (rather than current or completed projects) stimulate collaboration?
- Will re-orientating Pipeline into a proactive tool enable people to find collaborative opportunities, e.g. through subscribing to topics or tags, with notifications of latest activity?



In what ways can data from Pipeline be used to proactively identify transformation opportunities?



It wasn't obvious that it could be a list of collaborative opportunities. People forgot about it [Pipeline]. It doesn't have the ability to keep you engaged on there.



## Insights supporting re-orientating and iterating Pipeline

Research showed that Pipeline was not being widely used and local authorities needed help in **finding the right organisations and people** to collaborate with. Below are insights that were identified:

- It's difficult to find what you're looking for in Pipeline
- Poor quality and out of date data
- Pipeline is seen more as a place to share what you're working on, than a place for collaboration
- Pipeline doesn't align with business processes in local authorities
- Users feel that Pipeline should be more about common problems, not a list of projects
- Poor adoption by local authorities
- It's hard to be engaged and proactive with the content on Pipeline



NEXT STEPS PRE-ALPHA

We're planning to run collaborative workshops in Leeds and London to develop ideas with people who will be impacted by them.



# Thanks!

[dxw.com](https://dxw.com)

@dxw





# Appendix



# Limitations of our research

All research has its limitations. Here are areas that we think need more exploration or should be considered in future phases of this work:

- User recruitment was done mostly through a survey posted on Twitter and through personal networks, which meant that most of the people we spoke to were more 'engaged' and from digital/IT teams
- We struggled to speak to many local authorities who haven't signed the Local Digital Declaration
- We had several drop-outs from participants based in the North, which means our sample isn't as geographically balanced as we'd like

## Out of scope

During the discovery we identified a number of areas of investigation which fell out of scope for our research. We recommend that these are discussed and decisions made about how to take them forward:

- Collaboration between local authorities and voluntary organisations
- Challenges around procurement in local government collaboration
- Internal collaboration (collaboration between different services or departments within an authority)



## Miro boards [\(click to access\)](#)

Inception activities

Inception workshop

MHCLG interviews

Digital Transformation  
survey analysis

Stakeholder  
mapping

Raw data (users)

Data analysis (users)

Stakeholder  
discovery

Local Gov  
ecosystem

Opportunity  
solution tree