

**Round 6 Fund application - Discovery project :  
Entry # 8064****2. Project contact details****2.1 Lead authority name**

London Borough of Newham

**2.2 Details of the person leading this application**

Anna Trevena

**Role**

Programme Manager

**Email address**[anna.trevena@newham.gov.uk](mailto:anna.trevena@newham.gov.uk)**Phone number****2.3 Details of a senior stakeholder from lead authority****Role****Email address****2.4 Details of a Section 151 Officer from lead authority****Role****Email address****2.5 List your project partners and provide a single point of contact for each organisation.**

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| Project partner organisation | Name of single point of contact | Role of single point of contact | Email address of single point of contact | Phone number of single point of contact |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Redbridge Council            |                                 |                                 |  |   |
| Royal Borough of Kingston    |                                 |                                 |  |   |
| Rushmoor Borough Council     |                                 |                                 |  |   |
| Croydon Council              |                                 |                                 |  |   |

### 3. Your project proposal

#### 3.1 Project title

Improving housing advice services to prevent homelessness

#### 3.2 Project description

Housing advice can reduce homelessness but there are challenges to providing accessible advice, managing casework and identifying people at risk of homelessness. A Discovery project is proposed with the aim of preventing homelessness and improving user experience, this project will explore:

- Contributors to homelessness
- User needs for tailored advice and support
- How to identify ways to share data to identify early prevention opportunities
- Inform solutions needed to manage e2e casework

#### 3.3 How much funding are you applying for?

100000

### 4. Project assessment

#### 4.1 Describe the problem that your discovery project seeks to investigate.

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Users of housing advice services include:

- Residents
- Local Authority staff
- Voluntary sector organisations

[Research](#) shows that housing advice can reduce homelessness but lack of advice can result in hardship and negative housing outcomes. [Shelter reports](#) specific barriers for women. Nationally [only 54% of private renters](#) are aware LAs can help with renting problems with 41% saying they would like online tools. Council staff do not always know which service to refer residents to.

Councils must treat requests from residents at risk of homelessness formally to meet statutory duties. However, there may be [multiple factors](#) that lead to homelessness which may be best served by specialists yet pathways into services do not support an early intervention and a multi-agency approach. Partner councils have also expressed the lack of suitable systems to provide advice and manage casework; online requests are not integrated with back-office systems; data is not joined up so opportunities to identify cumulative risk factors are missed. Online advice contains legal jargon and requires the user to prove eligibility and self-assess.

This is an increasing problem with 74,320 households in England becoming homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless between January and March 2022 (a rise of 11%, 5% rise on the same period last year) including 25,610 families with children. Newham had a 16% increase in approaches and an 8% increase in acceptances between 21/22 to 22/23.

### 4.2 Describe the outcomes and outputs you aim to achieve by the end of the project.

The discovery phase will:

- Create a high-level map of homelessness contributors and advice provision. Potential reuse as a baseline for mapping services and what is delivered by councils or by other organisations.
- Identify users and barriers, needs, motivations and constraints (including those delivering the service) (output user research) with a particular focus on understanding disproportionality in the system/service. These needs are unlikely to vary nationally although there may be local variations in demographics, and therefore could be reused to inform other councils.
- Produce low fidelity maps of services and identify common digital/non-digital service patterns across partner boroughs; if this can be achieved between partner councils, then maps could be reused London-wide or even nationally (output).
- Research the IT systems and digital services in use and whether they meet user needs to identify best-fit solutions or validate the assumed gap in the market.
- Identify data needed for risk factors relating to homelessness; this can be reused by councils exploring the use of data.
- Identify how to measure success - data needed and performance metrics to measure success for the Alpha phase.
- Identify what reusable outputs and solutions could be delivered at Alpha e.g. Dynamic forms and/or chatbot capability, integrated data hubs, case management solution, standardised content, reusable service patterns.
- Deliver a business case and prioritised list of ideas to test at Alpha.

### 4.3 Tell us how your project will make local government services safer, more resilient and/or cheaper to run in the context of the problem area.

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The aim is to tackle homelessness through improved upstream prevention, increase the proportion of homelessness being prevented, and develop user-centred, efficient and cloud-based solutions for providing housing advice and managing cases to reduce costs. The project will inform:

- Homelessness contributors
- Requirements for an online triage function for issues that could result in homelessness
- An 'open-to-all' solution that residents, voluntary agencies, LAs etc can use to triage/refer users to the appropriate service to provide support and advice
- The creation of patterns and different approaches and tools that enable a user to request advice for multiple factors e.g. employment, financial and skills advice (a holistic user-centred approach to prevention)
- [Potential for standardised content](#) that is accessible to all service users that can be reused and tailored by local authorities (cheaper to run)
- Solution requirements for integrated customer-facing and back-office systems

### 4.4 Tell us about your project stakeholders and how you plan to engage them.

Each partner council has a Housing programme covering homelessness services. Programme stakeholders and other stakeholders will be engaged through workshops, online/phone/f2f surveys, customer journey mapping, f2f and online show and tells, blogs. Project leads will facilitate access to partner organisations and service users.

- Residents that have accessed services across all channels, housing applicants, residents in temporary accommodation
- People who have barriers to accessing services
- Housing Needs, social care and other advice services
- Related services such as community-based services, employment and financial advisors, outreach workers
- Voluntary sector organisations such as Shelter, Kingston Churches, Magpie, food banks
- Council contacts e.g. via Local Gov Digital Slack group
- Children's Services and the need to consider services delivered from Family Hubs, youth zones and other neighbourhood-based services.
- Groups supporting ex-military personnel (a notable cohort in Rushmoor)

### 4.5 Tell us about any local government sector engagement you've carried out or intend to carry out.

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Some of the organisations that partner councils have engaged with, and will continue to do so for the Discovery, are shown below:

- Generation Rent
- Home Start Richmond
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Kingston Churches (homeless support)
- Kingston Community Furniture
- Kingston Voluntary Action
- London renters Union
- Magpie
- Mind
- No Second Night Out (St Mungos)
- North East London Foundation Trust (mental health)
- Project Malachi (Salvation Army)
- RAMFEL (NRPF)
- Refugee Action Kingston
- Rise – Kingston Quaker Centre
- Service users
- Shelter
- Single Homeless Project
- StreetLink
- TA hostels
- Welcome Centre (homeless outreach)
- [Welcome Newham](#)
- Westminster Drug Project

Potential reuse of standards and alignment to other research includes:

- Utilise triage/form standards for the Repairs Online form
- Potential reuse of the Redbridge tenancy case management alpha
- Use of the GDS pattern for Smart Answers

Potential alignment with the [Homelessness and rough sleeping research](#)

### 4.6 How will the project budget be used?

| Item (e.g backfill staff time, buy in user researcher, software, hardware and others) | Time/quantity  | Total cost/value £ | Where will the funding come from? (e.g Local Digital funding or a particular project partner) |
|---|--|--------------------|---|
| Supplier/Partner Agency including delivery manager role                               | Estimated cost of a discovery team of 2.5 FTE for 8 weeks (40 days) at £1000 per day | 1000000            | DLUHC Discovery Fund  |
| Anna Trevena, Newham Council Programme Manager (lead contact)                         | 1 day per week   | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |
| Under recruitment, Newham Council Business Analyst                                    | 1 day per week   | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |
| Andrew Tonkin, Newham Council, HPAS service lead                                      | 0.8 days per week  | 3000               | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |
| Candida Thompson, Newham Council AD Housing Needs                                     | 0.5 days per week  | 3000               | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |

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| Item (e.g backfill staff time, buy in user researcher, software, hardware and others)  | Time/quantity     | Total cost/value £ | Where will the funding come from? (e.g Local Digital funding or a particular project partner) |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Faisal Gajja, Newham Council BSMI Head Of Inclusive Economy and Housing (systems lead) | 0.2 days per week | 1000               | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |
| Mike Green, Newham Council Procurement Lead  | 2 days            | 600                | Value of time commitment - Newham Council   |
| Sarah Piercy, Redbridge Council user researcher  | 1 day per week    | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Redbridge Council  |
| Tom Harrison, Redbridge Council Programme Director                                     | 1 day per week    | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Redbridge Council  |
| Maggie Nelson, Homelessness Prevention team, Royal Borough of Kingston                 | 1 day per week    | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Royal Borough of Kingston  |
| David Farrell, Housing Digital Team, Royal Borough of Kingston                         | 1 day per week    | 4000               | Value of time commitment - Royal Borough of Kingston  |
| Tom Bates, Head of Digital Delivery, Royal Borough of Kingston                         | 0.2 days per week | 800                | Value of time commitment - Royal Borough of Kingston  |
| Suzannah Hellicar, Head of Housing Options   | 1 day in total    | 400                | Value of time commitment - Rushmoor Borough Council   |
| Victoria Hunt, Senior Product Manager, Digital Platform team, Croydon Council          | 0.5 days per week | 3400               | Value of time commitment - Croydon Council  |
| Kevin Rowe, Digital Platform Lead, Digital Platform team, Croydon Council              | 0.5 days per week | 3400               | Value of time commitment - Croydon Council  |
| Naomi Charles, User researcher, Croydon Digital Service                                | 1 day per week    | 3400               | Value of time commitment - Croydon Council  |
| Collaboration tools e.g. Teams, Trello, Miro, Slack - to be provided by Newham         | 0                 | 0                  | Utilising existing Newham collaboration tools   |

### 4.7 Tell us about your delivery plan.

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1. The partner councils will draft a specification for procurement of a supplier (drafted prior to bid announcements)
2. Finalise specification and gain approval from stakeholders (1 week)
3. The lead council will request quotes and a proposal through Digital Outcomes and Specialists framework (2 weeks)
4. The partner councils will carry out evaluation of proposals and select a shortlist (2 days)
5. Supplier to submit final proposals (1 week)
6. Project team to score and make a decision on successful supplier (1 week)
7. Lead council to complete internal procurement governance to appoint supplier (4 weeks)
8. Mobilisation period for supplier (1 week)
9. The project team will identify stakeholders, both in councils, in the VCS and from service users (2-4 weeks, running concurrently from #1)
10. The supplier will carry out the required research and analysis and hold weekly sessions with stakeholders (potentially daily stand ups with the core team and regular show and tells) (8 weeks)
11. The supplier and core team will compile their findings and recommendations into a report (2-3 weeks)
12. Final show and tell / present findings (1 week)
13. The outputs of the project will be published and promoted including a business case (1 week)
14. Discussion with stakeholders and DLUHC on how to progress recommendations and steps to Alpha
15. Project close

The delivery plan for the actual Discovery will be subject to review with the chosen supplier.

### 4.8 Describe how your project team will have the skills and time available to deliver the project in an iterative, agile and user-centred way.

The project will follow GDS guidelines for Discovery. Each council has some of the required skills but none have the full capability or capacity to deliver the overall project. Therefore, a partner will be commissioned to deliver the Discovery, overseen by the group of councils. The procurement exercise will ensure the chosen supplier works in an open and collaborative way and will lead on delivery management to facilitate collaboration. The leads from each council will be responsible for time commitment offered at bid stage. Individuals from each Council are also already trained in agile delivery, user research, service design and development.

The supplier will provide the roles required to deliver e.g. user research, delivery management, technical, service design, performance etc. Resources that partner councils will bring to the project are shown in 4.6.

Redbridge Council resource brings specific experience on previous digital fund projects as both council-lead and from the supplier perspective (tenancy management, online repairs and BOPS). Redbridge also brings experience of Housing Needs user research capability and outputs from previous research.

The lead from Newham Council brings service design and GDS user research capability. Capacity from the business analyst on the Newham programme is included in the resource commitment.

RBK and Croydon Council bring knowledge of development and Housing business systems to the project.

### 4.9 Define the governance structure of your project.

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All partners have existing Housing programmes in place; respective programme boards will be utilised for decision making as required, e.g. it was used to sign off this bid, for milestone reporting and risk and issue escalation. Each partner will sign off the procurement specification and have members on the evaluation panel. During delivery, all partners will attend kick-off meetings, sprint planning, retrospectives and show and tells and sign-off the discovery report.

Each council has a named lead that is responsible for coordination. They will provide milestone updates to their stakeholders using existing programme/project boards and escalate any issues e.g. resource constraints. As lead council, the bid is a deliverable within Newham's Homelessness Response programme so any issues such as procurement delays will be escalated there.

Stage reviews/checkpoints will be set in the procurement specification. The specification will also set out the expected level of engagement with all councils. A memorandum of understanding will commit councils to make people available to the supplier to assist in research. During project delivery show and tells will be held with stakeholders. Council leads will meet weekly with the supplier to ensure the project is on track, address concerns and escalate risks or issues. The team have been collaborating on the bid via Teams, Slack and Google and virtual workspaces will continue to be used for collaboration.

### 4.10 Outline the risks to project success.

#### Risks:

1. Lack of engagement with those who cannot or do not access the service as it does not meet their needs. Mitigation includes facilitating access through partner organisations, interpreters etc. and utilising existing research carried out by Newham (Generation Rent), Redbridge (internal research) and Kingston (TPX Impact). Specification to include use of financial incentives for participants. Partnering with Rushmoor for a specific focus on [ex-military personnel](#) in the borough as they may be underrepresented in London.
2. Data to identify risk of homelessness may be quite broad and held across different systems; this will need to be addressed during Discovery and is likely to need input by a range of services.
3. Increasing pressure on services due to homelessness demand may reduce time service can commit to the project. Project leads have agreed support from service to engage and the wide range of staff involved in delivering the service means a single service lead is not needed.

#### Constraints

1. The legal jargon currently used in content is related to the statutory duty of councils so there may be issues around making content more user friendly
2. Data sharing may be challenging; however, policies can be put in place to ensure appropriate sensitivity around GDPR.
3. Councils may be tied to particular systems and contracts; lessons from previous projects will be reviewed to inform any prototypes at Alpha.

### 4.11 Describe how project monitoring and evaluation will happen.



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The Discovery includes the need to identify data for monitoring the success of the proposal but there is existing data that can be used to measure the proposed outcomes. It is not known how many people are unable to access services so this will need to be baselined although there is some [research](#) on awareness of council services. Evaluation measures will include data around:

- Increase in self-service and decrease in phone contact including failure demand (e.g abandoned calls)
- Satisfaction with advice services
- Increase in the proportion of outcomes e.g. homelessness prevented, employment gained, debts reduced
- Decrease in proportion of cases resulting in acceptance of duty (by demographic)
- Reduction in cost of solutions for advice services
- Increase in user needs met for existing solutions
- Reduction in the loss of assured shorthold tenancy
- Reduction in families being made homeless
- Decrease in domestic abuse incidents

Baseline surveys would need to be carried out as part of the Discovery to understand more about user experience and barriers which can then be used to measure performance at any subsequent phases.

It would be expected that any improvements would result in an increase in self-service channels being used, an increase in preventions, a reduction in the proportion of homelessness cases being prevented (due to the expectation that the risk of homelessness is expected to continue to rise due to the cost of living crisis and population increase.

### 4.12 Describe the benefits and savings your project is likely to deliver.

There are two main areas of potential savings:

1. Direct reduction in the cost of rehousing a household by preventing homelessness
2. Reduction in the cost of creating content and procuring and maintaining systems by delivering a shared solution and reusable content

Lack of supply means councils are increasingly reliant on temporary accommodation. [Data from Zoopla](#) shows that fewer than one in eight private properties listed last year were affordable within housing benefit levels. The cost to the Council for temporary accommodation varies, in Kingston it is between £5k and 13k per annum. Newham's partnership with Local Space means the majority of cost relates to hotels costing £41,650 per household p/a. By the time a household engages formally, it is often too late to prevent homelessness. If this discovery identifies problems we could tackle upstream of formal engagement in the service, each household we can help would likely save each council between £5k to £41k per annum, per household. Prevention of just 10 homeless cases in Newham could save £410k per annum based on households being rehoused in hotels.

[A report by JRF](#) states that a national housing advice platform could be created for £26k per year per LA. The cost of systems has not yet been identified but there are savings relating to reusable content and solutions.

Non-financial benefits include improved resident and staff experience and importantly not having a home as a stable and secure base can make it harder for people to find a job, stay healthy and maintain relationships so finding new ways to prevent homelessness is critical.

## 5. Agreement with DLUHC

### 5.1 Please confirm that you commit to delivering the project outputs listed below. Please tick the box to agree.

- I agree

### 5.2 Agreements with DLUHC

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Please tick the box to agree.

- I agree