

Round 6 Fund application - Discovery project : Entry # 8059

2. Project contact details

2.1 Lead authority name

London Borough of Lambeth

2.2 Details of the person leading this application

Catherine Neal

Role

Head of Operations & Innovation

Email address

cneal@lambeth.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.

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
Bracknell Forest Council				
Bath & North East Somerset Council				

**Round 6 Fund application - Discovery project :
Entry # 8059****3. Your project proposal****3.1 Project title**

Exploring an improved system for Local Authority Building Control services

3.2 Project description

Like all council services, BC must do more with less. Unlike many council functions, statutory demands on the service are in tension with fee-generating activity which compete with private-sector approved inspectors. This project is about streamlining the way BC services are delivered to tradespeople, householders and developers. We'll decide if the focus is back-office or external; uncover needs for interoperability with other systems, and opportunities to capture data related to construction.

3.3 How much funding are you applying for?

100000.00

4. Project assessment**4.1 Describe the problem that your discovery project seeks to investigate.**

Software isn't designed around BC functions, and often piggybacks onto tools used by Planning departments, so:

- Fee income is lost when busy officers mistakenly don't fill-out a field.
- Inefficient workarounds persist in maintaining statutory registers.
- Income reporting is hampered by mazes of database fields.
- Workloads are unclear, with cases dormant for years.
- Time limits are missed for recovery of public funds spent to enforce - or even rectify - dangerous work.

There's widespread sentiment that back-office systems are unfit for purpose. Data about buildings exists, but is not kept in a standardised way. Often it's locked up in documents and paper notes. Data collected by BC is highly regarded because of the public safety remit of these bodies.

Now, BC functions are changing:

- KPIs are to be introduced for all BC bodies, which are likely to include detailed record-keeping and reporting of site visits.
- New obligations for building owners to maintain 'golden thread records' about each building - likely to increase demand for data that's held and collected by BC (some of which may be commercially sensitive).

This context provides a 'line in the sand' opportunity to move to a data-led approach, with smarter systems that help organise workloads and flag pressing timeframes. Others, eg Waltham Forest, have seen the need for more granularity in BC data, to unlock real-time tracking of housing delivery.

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

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We aim to produce an options report. This will weigh up the best way forward – whether it's developing front-end improvements for customer experience; a back-office system; or a 3rd option to comprehensively cover both customer and officer needs. To do this, we'll document:

- All sources for submitting / receiving applications, queries, referrals that generate BC workstreams.
- Process maps for key business areas: through workshops and systems reviews, we'll define existing workflows and see whether a better single process can be co-produced.
- User stories and barriers. Through interviews with officers and service users, we'll analyse their experience with current systems, pain points and how they would improve them - helping inform best practice with which to assess a new system.
- Interviewing stakeholder/users about how to best meet the challenges from emerging regulatory burdens in the sector. This analysis is timely and critical given ongoing industry reform.
- Explore existing / emerging solutions on the market, across built environment sector and compare it against best practices we identify.
- Explore how a new system may interplay with projects in PlanTech space, and e.g. the Building Safety Regulator (HSE) Portal.

We'll document our work as we go, on a project website that can be retained as a resource. Ongoing sharing during the project would prompt other organisations to positively engage and spread broader awareness of the project within the sector.

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.

Improving efficiency of core business areas and reducing opportunities for income to be missed are central concerns for the project. These would reduce service delivery costs and would also raise customer satisfaction.

Reducing time spent on administration to meet regulatory burdens will free up officer's time to spend on safety-critical work. That includes taking action to deal with dangerous structures and maintain high standards in construction.

We could help deliver a more effective process for enforcement activity (required to recover public money), reducing demand on councils' general funds.

In terms of resilience, BC has an aging workforce, with officers in high demand. Government has prioritised increasing housing delivery and meeting new requirements. A leaner and user-centred process will help to realise these ambitions. A truly 21st century approach to delivering services will help make roles within local authority BC more attractive / marketable to new entrants.

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

In addition to a main point of contact, primary stakeholders in each Council will be:

- BC service leads- our key assets for delivering this project by communicating buy-in, securing staff time etc;
- Customers at all scales from householders, SME builders through to developers.
- Officers with practical knowledge/experience delivering services on the ground.
- Officers in allied services eg Planning, Regulatory roles who engage with BC.

All will be invited and encouraged to attend show-and-tells. We will also run regular project stakeholder sessions, scheduled user testing along with ad hoc topic specific discovery meetings. We will also use social media and set up a project page to engage with.

We will engage with the LABC National and LDSA to share our progress and update them on the work we're doing – inviting feedback and comment. Engagement with these bodies could help spread awareness of the project and eventual outputs.

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

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We've approached a number of local authorities to ensure we have their buy-in, engagement, ideas and input into the project. We've added the project to the wider LDF 'Ideas for R6' spreadsheet. Of authorities we've contacted, the majority replied echoing a recognised need to improve software and committed as a fully-fledged partner or to input on an ad hoc basis.

Lambeth's Head of BC is widely respected within the profession; an LDSA Executive Board member and LABC Board Member. We'll build on these relationships with the wider industry to secure buy-in on a wider scale. Those bodies will be instrumental in helping to roll-out anything we develop, as well as promote tools to their authorities.

We would also need to gain a fuller understanding of the needs of:

- Building Safety Regulator, who'll set the KPIs likely to rolled-out nationally. To understand the scope and reporting requirements.
- Bodies that BC must consult on certain applications.

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)
Project Officer (BC Specialist)	1 FTE	50000	Local Digital funding
User Researcher	1 FTE (hours TBC)	35,000	Local Digital funding
Project oversight/admin/support	2 days per week	10000	Local Digital funding, supplemented by LB Lambeth as required
Agile training workshop	1x 3 days	2500	Local Digital funding
Business Analyst	3 days month	5000	LB Lambeth
Systems Analyst	3 days month	5000	LB Lambeth
Contingency		2500	Local Digital funding

4.7 Tell us about your delivery plan.

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Our proposed project runtime is 9 to 12 months.

Prior to work, procurement will take place for a user researcher on the project using Digital MarketPlace. Expected lead-in time would be upto 6 weeks. We hope to engage a trainer and run a three day Agile training session with attendees from each partner authority to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which Agile methodology works. A similar workshop was held for an Alpha project in 2019 at a cost of around £2,500.

Whilst this would be agreed on the project, we think milestones will look something like this:

- Agile Training workshop: attendees from partner authorities
- Procure/engage User Researcher
- Kick-off workshop: Delegates from each of the partner councils to attend. Agree a vision for the project and check expectations are aligned and set out how we commit to working together.
- User Stories: development
- Develop metrics and key analytics (incl potential cost savings)– we suggest these will come out of fortnightly partner strategy workshops.
- Draw up indicative Road Map for the project
- Setting up key communication documents (e.g. project site, possibly social media accounts, Slack, Trello, Kanban etc)
- Project wide meeting to agree a first sprint goal. Given resources available and the broad remit, sprints would likely have a duration of 1 month.
- Scheduling show and tells to report back on the progress at similar intervals.
- Agree themes and topics: At this stage, we propose that that the work would potentially cover broadly 6 themes, leading to epics, to produce the outputs identified in our response to Q4.2. These are:
 - Shared understanding of how we do business now
 - Understand how we can do better, and where we must
 - What does best practice look like?
 - Who do we need to take with us?
 - What do our customers think and need?
 - How to move forward
- Close-down and reporting back – including recommendations, benefits case, UR findings

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.

As lead partner, Lambeth will bring a wealth of experience having successfully delivered digital projects in an agile, iterative way - our work on the Open Digital Planning project demonstrates this. We will role model agile practices (including retrospectives and Show & Tells) and effective collaboration by holding regular workshops and engaging widely for topical stakeholder sessions. An Agile workshop would be open to officers for each partner.

We'll engage key contacts at each partner to develop a committed project team. Early stage commitment can be difficult so we would accommodate high or more occasional levels of involvement. We'll work in the open and keep all partners updated in a proactive, engaging style.

A hybrid model will ensure in person workshops are rotated across partners, so they're fully engaged at least every couple of months. This will ensure everyone has a firm grasp of the structure and way of working.

A user researcher will be an integral part of the team. We'll develop skills across the project team through observing/shadowing UR work. 1st-hand observations of what users struggle with will give a deeper understanding to pinpoint where future work could best focus.

We've allowed a longer timeframe for the project to ensure we are realistic about input we can regularly expect from all partners. As lead, we'll provide a business analyst and technical expertise of our Systems Lead to access and analyse data from existing systems.

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4.9 Define the governance structure of your project.

Collaboration is important to us and we will encourage our partners to engage in our regular workshops. As mentioned, we will rotate venue as well as hold sessions remotely – so that we both engage in person and encourage buy-in by building strong relationships as well as use creative and visual tools such as Miro for virtual working. This would hopefully dissolve any issues around geographically dispersed partners.

We hope that each partner will assign a point of contact (POC) so that we can form an overall steering group. These POCs would be involved in decision making by consensus; developing and prioritising a roadmap and backlog of work. Each partner would be encouraged to develop ways of collecting/reporting metrics for their authority. We would also run surveys nationally to get a better understanding of the issues (and hopefully gather metrics) across the country.

A slack channel will be set up for partners creating a space for sharing knowledge, project updates, and where issues can be debated. We will develop a project forum – either sharepoint, google drive, or project page of some sort – for us to work together as partners.

4.10 Outline the risks to project success.

1. **Resistance to change / fear for job security.** We'll need to work carefully on communication in Discovery, making it clear to participants / teams that this work is about improving efficiency, making lives easier and not a blunt tool to reduce workforces. Engagement in workshops (e.g. pain points review) would help get conversations started / break down barriers from more sceptical staff.
2. **Uncertainty exists around potential new regulatory burdens.** To mitigate this we will draw on resources available, such as contacts across industry bodies who are closest to and consulted on emerging regulation. Auditing and legal compliance may also be required to uncover regulations around the way existing processes are carried out / documented. Most key issues will be known by the partners involved; we'll mitigate legal risks by engagement with partners' legal teams.
3. **Project fails and we are unable to come with any viable ideas or useful outputs**
Engaging with partners and widely across the country to gather useful information and pick up ideas should avoid this outcome. In addition to our council partners, the Managing Director for Hertfordshire BC (who are owned by and represent 8 councils across Herts), Simon Heywood, has given a commitment to support this project, recognising the need for change. This buy-in puts a wealth of experience, potential ideas and resources at our disposal. Additionally – ensuring the project is fully supported by analysts and systems officers within Lambeth – as well as the Lambeth Digital team providing ad hoc support – should secure tangible results. Remote engagement with partners and other organizations will maintain project momentum.

4.11 Describe how project monitoring and evaluation will happen.

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The problem area is not well studied with existing metrics. There are parallels with the processing of Planning applications – which is better understood. We will also take a similar approach to that of the Open Digital Planning project, where methods include:

- National public surveys
- Engaging with Local Gov Workspaces to send out call outs – will help us gather some statistics.
- Collect data about current expenditure and costs of back office software
- Draw up an as-is service overview, identifying hand-offs between different users
- Officer timesheet exercises to capture time spent on certain tasks/groups of tasks
- We will review BC service general enquiry inboxes and obtain data from customer contact centres (where they exist) to get a sense of failure demand.
- Complaints data could be used to understand particular problems, and the number of complaints may be a useful metric for measuring improvement in customer service.

We will collect and analyse data using shared templates that are co-produced. This approach can will help keep project activity on track, promote consistency. Together, this will give force to our sharing learnings and insights.

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

Improving the way in which the system works for both officer and applicants will also help prevent delays – which have considerable financial impacts to delivering construction projects at all scales.

Officer time could be spent on fee earning services such as marketing building control to draw in more fee earning local projects. Market share is generally around 40-50% - and increases would see savings against councils' general funds.

Developing a more intuitive and effective system would have benefits in terms of officer and customer satisfaction levels – which whilst not financial, this would be a measurable metric. Other Non-cashable benefits include:

- Helping to make the profession more attractive / remove frustrations
- Contribution to speeding up housebuilding
- Robust financial position for the safety-critical work remit

These would increase Building Control's social value for the community. Encourage good building practices allows for better quality homes to meet the climate emergency declared by many Local Authorities. This would align with Lambeth's Borough Plan and Manifesto as well as likely other local authorities with similar ambitions.

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

Please tick the box to agree.

- I agree