Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

PropTech Innovation Fund Round 1

Summary Report

February 2023

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1.0   Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings and outcomes from Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund which can inform emerging policy guidance and wider industry adoption.

Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund was launched in August 2021 to support the widespread adoption of DCE tools and services within the planning process. The goals of the Fund were to:

● Accelerate the adoption of Digital Citizen Engagement (DCE) and digital planning tools, supporting public sector bodies to make the most of innovative new solutions to achieve planning reform objectives.
● Explore easy and effective routes to market for LPAs, including the potential need for centralised intervention (e.g., helping with the procurement of tools) .
● Better understand the barriers to be overcome to allow Councils to adopt these tools at scale (e.g., capability, funding and senior executive buy-in).
● DLUHC to work with local authorities to scope requirements for digital engagement guidance to establish best practice for the first time.

Round 1 led to some incredible achievements on the part of all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), both quantitatively in terms of increased engagement levels and reach, and qualitatively in terms of the new community data and response diversity achieved. A select few examples of pilot outcomes have been provided in Table 1 below, with further detail on all LPA outcomes at Section 3.0.

Table 1: Examples of Round 1 achievements by selected LPAs

LPA	Outcome	Evidence (Quote/Statistic)
Cotswolds	Increased quantity of respondents	29% increase in number of subscribers (an additional 646 individuals)
	Reduced planning officer time	40% reduction in officer time required to manually input consultation information at this stage.
Watford	Increased range and diversity of respondents	-75% said receiving alerts would make them more likely to get involved with the Council's planning service -83% of people surveyed said that QR codes would enhance the engagement process for them -80% said it would allow them to access and understand planning information online quicker and easier
	Increased range and diversity of respondents	-37% of people surveyed said they would not be likely to engage with major applications without this platform -100% of people surveyed said that receiving planning alerts by email makes it easier for them to find out about planning applications

Chesterfield	Increased range and diversity of respondents	2016: 1% of sites submitted were from the general public (majority from owners and agents) compared to - 2022: 64% of sites submitted were from the general public
Hounslow	Increased range and diversity of respondents	90% of people who used the Local Plan tool as part of this consultation were classified as individuals
Southampton	DCE legacy	Have now upgraded to a Corporate Enterprise licence of Bang the Table for a 12-month trial period (to be used across all aspects of the Council's work, from employee engagement to city-wide surveys)

Beyond the various achievements for LPAs and progress for suppliers in the market, Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund has also provided invaluable learnings to us at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Overall, our key takeaways from the programme which will be carried forward in our work on potential future rounds and beyond are:

- New and existing digital platforms (such as engagement and development management) need more incentives to create interoperability of data and information.
- It is not a given that younger audiences will engage online (unless the engagement offer, channels and methods are carefully thought through).
- Multi-disciplinary LPA teams are needed to deliver effective engagement projects at speed and scale (e.g. planners and non planners).
- There is a tension for LPAs between meeting regulations to ensure compliance and pass examination in public (in the case of local plan making), versus the needs and wants of the public to contribute to plan making in a hybrid and non-technical way.
- DLUHC's leadership and financial support de-risks initial DCE work and means there are fewer reputational and organisational risks for LPAs.
- LPAs that blended face to face engagement with digital engagement reported some of the most positive outcomes.
- There have been great successes for Councils building software in house themselves (sometimes with bought in expertise).
- Sharing the legacy and potential longevity of DCE tools is key as showing tangible outcomes can help build the case for future investment and create a community of practice.
- LPAs all view impact differently, and have different views on what 'social value add' really means in the context of these tools.

Informed by the findings of Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund and detailed conversations with LPAs, we believe that there are key learnings and actions to be taken with regards to the community engagement policy, guidance and standards that currently exist or are in the process of being developed:

- There is demand from LPAs for further guidance on how to implement DCE tools at a local authority (and neighbourhood) level. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) DCE team will produce practical tools that can be of use to LPAs in this space, packaged up into a **DCE toolkit.** This toolkit will look to include tangible case studies to help LPA gain senior buy-in for DCE, and can be kept live and iterative as a resource for all LPAs looking to test or adopt digital engagement tools. Details on what we believe this toolkit could and should include, and how it might best be formatted, are set out in Section 6.2 of this report.
- To complement the above practical toolkit, DLUHC will publish the **Community Engagement Guidance** that is already in the pipeline. From speaking with LPAs, there is a clear role for this guidance alongside the toolkit as a way of formalising advice and making clear central government's recommended approaches on issues such as how to engage with communities during the planning process and ensure that engagement happens at the right time in the process with the right people so that communities have a proper say over development in their area. More detailed suggestions on what content this guidance could included are provided in Section 6.2 and 6.3
- Planning policy could address the tension between what LPAs are required to do according to policy versus emerging digital methods of engagement being tested and advocated. Updates being made by DLUHC to planning regulations / policy should look to implement requirements for consultation processes to include digital methods and/or platforms, **using policy to prioritise and facilitate a hybrid form of engagement.** We know that hybrid methods can open up planning discussions to the 'seldom heard' whilst including participants that are unable or prefer not to use digital platforms.
- **Collaboration with Planning Inspectorate (PINS)/Planning Advisory Service (PAS)** is vital to ensure all planning stakeholders have clarity on how inspectors would like to view consultation submissions at examination. This will increase LPA confidence in adopting new hybrid engagement methods by providing assurance that all consultation responses and evidence bases are in an acceptable format when it comes to formal examination. The DCE team has commenced this collaboration as part of the Continuous Funding Round[1].
- New and existing Property Technology (PropTech) suppliers need more support and incentives to create datasets that are fully interoperable and can be used cross-purpose, rather than being coded into, or limited to, one platform. There is opportunity for DLUHC to **foster a 'build to share' and 'learning in the open attitude'** that ultimately ensures LPAs are able to access and use their consultation data efficiently and effectively in a variety of contexts that suit them.

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[1] https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/digital-planning/digital-planning-continuous-funding/

2.0   Round 1 Programme Summary

2.1 Round 1 overview

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings and outcomes from Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund which can inform emerging policy guidance and wider industry adoption.

Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund was launched in August 2021 to support the widespread adoption of DCE tools and services within the planning process. The goals of the Fund were to:

- Accelerate the adoption of DCE and digital planning tools, supporting public sector bodies to make the most of innovative new solutions to achieve planning reform objectives.
- Explore easy and effective routes to market for LPAs, including the potential need for centralised intervention (e.g., helping with the procurement of tools) .
- Better understand the barriers to be overcome to allow Councils to adopt these tools at scale (e.g., capability, funding and senior executive buy-in).
- DLUHC to work with local authorities to scope requirements for digital engagement guidance to establish best practice for the first time.

The focus of Round 1 was to identify barriers to adoption of DCE tools, concentrating on engagement around the plan-making process and development management. Each of the funded LPAs procured and tested a digital engagement tool or service to address one of the following four themes:

- Theme 1: Plan-making process: Regulation 18 - Local authorities leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
- Theme 2: Plan-making process: Regulation 19 - Local authorities leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage.
- Theme 3: Development management: Planning publicity - Local authorities sought to make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience.
- Theme 4: Development management: Managing & analysing responses - Local authorities leveraged innovative approaches to more efficiently manage and analyse a higher volume of responses (received from both digital and non-digital channels) to inform decision-making (there were no applications under this theme).

2.2 User research plan

User research (UR) is key to supporting progress on DLUHC pilots and learning about opportunities and challenges for participating authorities. The UR process for Round 1 was underpinned by a number of core principles. These principles guided our approach to the research and also the way research insights were, and continue to be, shared. These core principles are outlined below:

- Share emerging learnings and insights continuously. This includes (1) sharing learnings from Round 1 across the 28 projects we had in Round 2 at monthly show and tells and/or in written format such as blogs or newsletters and (2) sharing emerging insights with DLUHC policy teams through monthly UR playbacks.
- Diverse coverage. UR will offer insights across a broad range of project characteristics including local authority location and size and DCE maturity level.
- Empathy and a human-centred approach in all of our interactions with LPAs, including any UR.

UR was undertaken in four rounds across Round 1. Each had a separate goal attached, which spanned from exploring the pains and gains experienced through procuring new digital technologies from PropTech suppliers, to understanding what extra support LPAs require in order to successfully deploy these new digital tools in their respective engagement processes.

Once the interviews were completed and the data consolidated for each UR round, the DCE UR team were able to playback the findings and learnings to the wider Digital Planning team within DLUHC. The findings of the UR have been included at Appendices 5 and 6.

2.3 Project partners

An Expression of Interest (EOI) process was undertaken in July 2021 inviting LPAs to participate in the fund. 13 LPAs were selected after a competitive review from DLUHC's Digital Planning team.

Council	Consultation Topic
Bolsover District Council	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
Chesterfield Borough Council	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
Cotswold District Council	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
Dacorum Borough Council	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
Greater Cambridge	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
Southampton City Council	Regulation 18 - Local authorities addressing Theme 1 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making.
LB Hounslow	Regulation 19 - Local authorities addressing Theme 2 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage.
LB Wandsworth	Regulation 19 - Local authorities addressing Theme 2 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage
Stockport Council	Regulation 19 - Local authorities addressing Theme 2 leveraged digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage
Dorset Council	Planning publicity - Local authorities addressing Theme 3 sought to make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience
LB Barking and Dagenham	Planning publicity - Local authorities addressing Theme 3 sought to make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience
North Lincolnshire	Planning publicity - Local authorities addressing Theme 3 sought to make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience
Watford Borough Council	Planning publicity - Local authorities addressing Theme 3 sought to make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience

Table 2: LPA projects funded through Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund

A number of PropTech companies were also procured and engaged as part of the programme, to support LPAs in undertaking their digital citizen engagement. Suppliers and PropTech companies involved include:
- Commonplace
- Bang the Table
- Urban Intelligence
- Future Fox
- Vu.City
- Granicus
- ESRI
- Arcus Global

In addition, some LPAs worked with already procured platforms such as IDOX and Leaflet to improve internal systems/processes. This also highlighted the need for interoperability of existing platform providers with new PropTech suppliers, and the cultural change required for that innovation to take place with and for LPAs.

2.4 Delivery method

Throughout the programme, DLUHC took the role of delivery manager to support LPAs throughout this process, working in conjunction with the UR/planning implementation team. DLUHC also leveraged the expertise of procurement consultants Advice Cloud, to support LPAs with troubleshooting using procurement frameworks and processes for the first time.

For the majority of the programme, LPAs worked independently of each other and DLUHC also conducted meetings with suppliers including hosting a recurring show and tell showcase and thematic workshops. Whilst this approach was effective for the initial round of funding, this has been further developed for Round 2 given the evolving scale and nature of the programme.

All parties were brought together regularly at virtual events and meetings organised by DLUHC, such as the supplier kick-off meetings, monthly show and tell sessions and thematic meetings focused on particular support topics such as the use of social media in digital communication. Over the course of Round 1, over 58 meetings and events were held including but not limited to 21 LPA and supplier kick off meetings, 10 show and tell events, 9 UR sessions and a digital outreach workshop.

The DCE team have reflected upon the above approach to delivery and arrived at the following internal recommendations for approaches to pilot delivery, relevant to both future rounds of the Fund and other engagement opportunities:
- DLUHC should continue to take a lead on running strategic workshops or meetings on areas where there are quick wins and learnings to support delivery e.g. procurement, brief writing or digital outreach strategies. This also helps position DLUHC as a champion and thought leader in this space, and the digital outreach strategy workshop was praised as particularly valuable to LPAs.
- DLUHC should encourage LPAs to be champions and leaders in terms of having an active role in sharing learnings and leading on developing a motivated and transparent community of practice. For example, we know LPAs wanted to be more involved in the initial Fund communications and announcements, which we will enable as part of future rounds. The strategy for developing a community of practice in this space is currently being developed by the Digital Citizen Engagement team.
- LPAs valued the UR session as a space to reflect and be open and honest about their pilot experiences. This format has received a lot of praise and should be continued for the dual benefit of LPAs and DLUHC in gathering key programme

insights. These sessions should however be programmed at regular times in future to avoid LPA diary management issues faced during Round 1.

- It is essential to agree a specific project plan ahead of time, with a clear schedule of show and tells and UR meetings upfront.
- Kick off meetings should be maintained as an essential meeting ground at the beginning of pilots, establishing positive rapport between LPAs and their suppliers/project teams. They also give an opportunity to make clear how DLUHC intend to be involved and support.
- The reporting template and monitoring and evaluation outputs should be pre-agreed before any round or pilot commences, to mitigate need for unnecessary re-work.
- More transparent team and LPA communications or information sharing is needed, enabled by an appropriate communication channel (the current PlanTech Slack group with LPAs is sufficient but not optimal in terms of the level of conversation taking place, so other options should be considered).
- Support from Advice Cloud on procurement was appreciated by LPAs, as they were able to make time for limitless 1-1 discussions with LPAs.
- It is anticipated that moving from Round 1 to potential future rounds of the Fund, the role of DLUHC should shift from direct delivery manager to strategic advisor and observer with more hands-on support for LPAs who need it rather than for all. We also intend to bring specific policy colleagues on the journey with us in a more tailored fashion to ensure learnings are disseminated more efficiently into policy teams.

3.0   Outcomes

Across the range of the Round 1 projects, a considerable amount of insight and emerging evidence has been captured, which not only demonstrates how adopting DCE tools generates an increase in the quantity of public participation, but how this funding intervention has been used as a catalyst for wider digital transformation. We have grouped examples and testimonials from all LPAs thematically as follows:

3.1 Increase in public participation

At the start of the programme, we wanted to test whether having more user friendly interfaces would reach a wider community audience and increase engagement conversion rates. Many local authority pilots proved that using digital citizen engagement tools led to an increase in public participation compared to historical benchmarks (1% according to the RTPI[2]). For project specific examples please refer to attached LPA reports included at Appendix 8. Specific examples include:

- During Cotswolds consultation, the Council recorded 6,532 people visiting the consultation platform (approx. 7% of the district's population) and generated responses from more than 755 people. This reflects an 119% increase in

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[2] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/blog/2017/may/planning-and-public-engagement-the-truth-and-the-challenge/

participation compared to respondents engaged in the 2015 local plan. The team also saw a 29% increase in the number of subscribers (an additional 646 individuals). They believe Commonplace's sharing and news post functionality was a key reason for the increase in subscriptions.

- As part of Chesterfield's pilot, the Council were able to notify 1347 people directly about the consultation through letter, email and social media posts. One of the social media posts had a reach of 11,576. In 2016 only 1% of submissions were received from members of the public, but in this Round 1 pilot 64% of sites were submitted by members of the public.

- Watford found that 37% of people surveyed said they would not be likely to engage with major applications without this platform; which goes some way to demonstrating the added value this platform has created. 83% of people surveyed also said that QR codes would enhance the engagement process for them, whilst 80% said it would allow them to access and understand planning information online quicker and easier.

Quotes such as the following from Stockport demonstrate not only the reach achieved through these pilots, but the value of that reach in educating communities on place shaping activities and opportunities to get involved: 'the feedback indicated that the majority of people were not aware of their work to develop a Local Plan and through this work they now know that they can get involved through Story maps and other formal consultation methods'.

3.2 Resource and time saving

In most cases, Round 1 LPAs acknowledged that the procurement and building of new digital tools and software was costly and time consuming. However, a common finding (particularly among planning publicity pilots) was that once the software was in place, the time and resource savings on activities such as processing hard copy consultation responses were significant.

- Chesterfield were able to save a significant amount of time on data entry and in acknowledging call for sites responses. 85% of submissions for the Council's previous call for sites were received by email and 15% by post. Of the emailed submissions 27% were received in PDF format which meant that information could not always be easily transferred into the Council's submission database. In comparison, in 2022 84% of submissions were received through the consultation portal with the remainder sent via email or post. With circa 140 sites submitted in total, the Council were able to save roughly 280 hours of officer time (2 hours per site).

- Cotswold were able to remove a time consuming task from their public consultation process by embedding AI filters for comments containing inappropriate language. This has helped support an important process that was previously all done manually. The larger than expected take up of the platform resulted in an approximate 40%

reduction in officer time needed to manually input letters and email into the consultation platform. The Council commented that the 'automatic entry of comments through PropTech has saved significant officer time – sometimes consultations have taken us a year to process 10,000 analogue comments manually'.

- North Lincolnshire found that investing resources initially in doing significant aspects of tech development in house alongside working with suppliers, saved resourcing in the long term by building internal capacity to tackle issues more confidently/proactively as they arise. For example, they extended existing licensing, undertook web app development for the QR code and did Google Analytics and Microsoft Clarity investigations which helped increase their capacity in those areas.

3.3 Digital transformation and legacy

These pilots were not just concerned with the initial trial and adoption of technology and citizen engagement platforms. Many of the LPAs also had goals to embed the platforms within their Council's way of working and wider policy strategies for the long term. We have been delighted to see that many of the LPAs have experienced some degree of success in kickstarting long term process transformation. There are learnings to be taken in terms of how scalability and interoperability in the wider market can support LPAs in securing buy-in (both financial and ideological) to take these technologies forward in the long term. Through embedding platforms within their Council's way of working and wider policy strategies Council's have created a positive legacy:

- Cotswold were surprised that their community subscription list grew by around 700 people. The digital tools have enabled the Council to grow their database of people who they can inform about all future consultations, and they intend to keep using the platform into the future. In their own words, 'this project has introduced the opportunity for the Council to use the software corporately to increase their digital engagement. Having this software also provides us with the opportunity to compare demographic data across different areas to help us ensure we are reaching a representative proportion of the population'
- Watford noted they are 'delighted to have achieved several [...] products' in the form of digital planning tools they can continue to use and promote into the future. The products they have achieved include their planning alerts system, QR codes for their planning publicity and planning information map tools.
- Southampton has now upgraded to a Corporate Enterprise licence of Bang the Table for a 12-month trial period (to be used across all aspects of the Council's work, from employee engagement to city-wide surveys). This will enable the Council to fully assess the benefits of a range of digital tools within the platform, and will enable consultations to be delivered in one place, starting the process of joining up feedback from residents. Their Strategic Planning team will deliver its statutory Regulation 18 consultation via the same platform.
- Wandsworth noted a significant increase in the amount of time people spent on the local plan webpage after the digital identity was added, which they were pleased to

report has sparked internal conversations about how the Council can make more lasting changes such as more user friendly web page layouts (the designs for which are now in progress). A key legacy achievement for this Council is therefore demonstrating the value of design in tangible terms, and gaining buy-in to take DCE learnings beyond the Planning department.

- Be First (Barking and Dagenham) have been able to see the potential for digital tools to benefit within and beyond planning. They were pleased to report that 'PropTech will now become a regular part of our validation process' of planning applications in the borough, and they are now 'looking at how to scale this across our entire corporate team'.
- In addition, Greater Cambridge reported that the pilot results are going to be key in their selling of the platform to other teams in the Council, whilst Chesterfield said it has 'led to a new relationship' being built with their ICT team that will continue into the future.

In the context of the above successes, the pilots have demonstrated the need to balance digital engagement tools with in person and traditional methods of community consultation. This hybrid approach to engagement is often where Councils and communities have reaped the most reward from the process. Stockport for example has specifically ensured their digital tools will sit alongside existing approaches and give 'many strings to our bow' to engage with all corners of their community. They noted that there is real value in delivering PropTech "in person", adding that it has 'been important to bring the technology to them and not rely on the platform itself to engage underrepresented communities'.

3.4 Skill and capacity building

One of the key successes of the pilot has been that many LPAs have now committed to using and developing existing skills and capabilities within their project teams. Due to a combination of high costs and desire for autonomy, the LPAs have reflected post-pilot about what the future of DCE looks like for them. Many are seeking a future for DCE where the Council only needs to bring in third party or contractor skills for specific parts of the journey as opposed to relying solely on external advice and support. The benefits of this approach to in-house skill building are numerous: increased autonomy, cost saving, longevity of DCE strategy and skill/talent building within the organisation.

- Be First noted that they have 'really valued the contact with other authorities and the collaborative approach between suppliers'. For them, digital literacy has grown to the extent that they can hold suppliers and tools to account to deliver DCE work, in a way that they would not have been able to previously. In their own words, it has armed them 'with the expertise to push back when suppliers haven't been able to help'.
- Watford found that the PropTech Innovation Fund gave them 'ammunition' to sell the importance of digital skills internally (both within planning and beyond), recognising that effective DCE requires an initial time and resource investment on tasks such as

integration of new tools with back office systems, and continued attention on developing internal capabilities. For example, the Council noted that after using Commonplace they worked with ESRI to create a platform that builds on the functionalities of this in a 'self-serve' way and can be owned by the Council in perpetuity.

What Round 1 has achieved for internal ambition and personal confidence in local authorities is epitomised by the following quote from an officer at Watford: "I didn't know what an API was [...] now I understand, my knowledge has improved as part of this, my confidence in digital and presentations [...] and my future ambition".

3.5 Access to higher quality data and community insights

Round 1 has demonstrated that DCE tools can better demonstrate the nature and value of development and place shaping for communities. In turn, many LPAs have been able to use this increased awareness within the community as an opportunity to educate people on the trade offs of development, making it clear what people can and cannot influence in order to increase the quality and relevancy of consultation comments.

As well as leading to better quality data and insights for Councils, officers have in many cases been able to use their own skills or analytics tools built into PropTech platforms to tweak engagement while it's live. For example, seeing low response rates from young people encouraged Bolsover to add targeted messages for that group part way through the pilot. The real time optimisation these digital tools allow and promote are a core benefit of adding DCE into the mix for local consultation processes.

- Watford found that 100% of people surveyed said that receiving planning alerts by email makes it easier for them to find out about planning applications, and 75% said receiving alerts would make them more likely to get involved with the Council's planning service. In addition, 93% of people surveyed said that they like having the option to view planning information on a map and 84% said they're likely to use the new maps.
- Hounslow learnt that residents who commented on the on the digital local plan tool exclusively used it to comment on their sub-area or neighbourhood (ie. they did not use the platform to comment on the Borough Wide Design Codes). In a similar vein, Stockport noticed that users of their digital tool wanted to find out about what was going on in their locality more than the whole borough.
- In addition, Hounslow found that 90% of people who used the local plan tool were classified as individuals (ie. they were not developers, companies, statutory or other bodies or community groups). Only 9% of those who submitted comments via email were individuals. Statutory bodies & other bodies made up the largest category of those who submitted responses via email (34% and 6% respectively). This will help them target the right information to the right people in future.
- In Chesterfield's 2016 call for sites process, 80% of the submissions related to

residential sites whereas the Round 1 pilot received a much broader range of submissions. In terms of the geographical spread of respondents, Chesterfield's data showed a wider spread from the Round 1 pilot than previously in 2016.

- For Greater Cambridge, their pilot focused on using algorithms and machine learning to analyse community data, and found useful takeaways even in the way the community used certain words. For example, they found that the word 'housing' tends to be used for more general conversations whereas 'homes' tends to be used for more personal conversations.

3.6 Scaling to wider industry

To date, the PropTech Innovation Fund has allowed us to work towards longer term legacy and scalability in the sector in the following ways (which will continue to be explored in Round 2 and potential future rounds of the PropTech Innovation Fund:

- Given the level of industry interest in DCE tools, since the launch of Round 1 the DCE team and LPAs have been proactively approached and invited to speak at a range of events and showcases on behalf of the RTPI, Homes England, UK Community Engagement Conference, New London Architecture.
- The DCE team have also offered strategic advice and guidance to major stakeholders including a range of internal policy teams, the GLA, TfL, Homes England, Cabinet Office, Key Cities, the Environment Agency and Historic England. These requests have varied from knowledge sharing to strategic advice on how to inform their own strategies on undertaking community engagement.
- So far, we have seen tangible examples of how the Fund has driven interest in, and adoption of, digital engagement strategies or approaches. For example:
  - The GLA have just agreed with Commonplace to adopt the interface platform/UX they developed with Watford (Round 1) across all major development management sites in London
  - 'Voice to Text' translation developed with Commonplace and Dacorum is now being scaled into other LPAs
  - Document uploading / Management system for statutory consultees developed with Urban Intelligence and Chesterfield is now being scaled across other LPAs
  - Digital branding and communications developed at Wandsworth is now being adopted across entire planning team and corporate website
  - API Integration of Arcus Global BOPS and Social Media platforms developed for North Lincolnshire is now available for all LPAs

4.0   Local Planning Authority learnings

The following summarises the key lessons learnt that LPAs have expressed to us as part of Round 1, and will be used to inform emerging guidance and best practice. These findings

are ordered chronologically in terms of the DCE adoption process, and incorporate both qualitative and quantitative learnings:

Pre-procurement:

- The pilots highlighted the importance of having a detailed brief with all requirements and Key Performance Indicators included. They discovered there is value in collaborative workshops pre-commencement to scope requirements, and in drawing on known networks to ask people what suppliers they'd recommend.
- LPAs noted it was beneficial to be open and transparent with suppliers, especially with requirements to comply with current plan making regulations.
- All LPAs recognised the importance of budgeting up front for all PropTech tools, including 3D models, targeted social media and in person events.
- A number of LPAs highlighted the importance of working with internal communications and engagement teams in this phase to ensure alignment with any existing outreach strategies or norms, and to leverage existing relationships with user groups and wider communities.
- A key learning has been that before any consultation period begins, LPAs should scope and agree what outcomes they hope to achieve and how to track them. This in turn makes reporting much easier. This may require early work with suppliers to make sure that they can supply all of the metrics needed for analysis.
- Multi-disciplinary teams are needed to deliver effective engagement projects at speed and scale (e.g. planners and non planners).

Procurement:

- All LPAs acknowledged the value in early and pre-market engagement with PropTech suppliers and the tech community - this has helped refine the tech specifications and optimise budgets. The immersive experience of procurement through this pilot helped many to understand challenges in the process and build an understanding of how to overcome these challenges in future.
- Making use of internal teams where available is important to speed up the procurement process. Strong in-house procurement teams have really helped in many cases, but not all LPAs benefit from this. Early alignment with ICT aspirations and engaging internal ICT colleagues was also highlighted as beneficial to avoid issues later on in the project.
- DLUHC providing support around procurement via Advice Cloud was appreciated, even by those authorities who did not need to take up this support. However, LPAs also recognised the need to continue building understanding of internal processes beyond the pilot for future procurement exercises. LPAs noted G-Cloud is a quick and easy method of procurement, but having clear criteria before starting the process is key.
- LPAs commented on the importance of engaging with a number of suppliers as part of the procurement process, including offering up opportunities to smaller companies and

startups. LPAs highlighted the importance of investing time in sourcing and selecting the right supplier, and that this can be an important factor to the success of the project.

- Due to variations in knowledge levels or timing pressures, some LPAs are choosing to vary existing contracts rather than create new ones, or looking to pool resources with other LPAs. There is clearly a desire to share digital tools with other authorities through open source, but LPAs want to know whether commercial concerns of PropTech companies will overrule this.

Onboarding and working with PropTech suppliers:

- Contracts for planning software agreed prior to LPA participation in the pilots proved to be an obstacle to some projects and sometimes prevented a full new specification bespoke to the pilot being implemented. Other unexpectedly time consuming activities were managing procuring new contracts while still honouring existing ones and time needed to develop a mobile phone friendly version of engagement software.
- Many LPAs cited having a differing corporate approach that did not suit the needs of planning teams or the agile needs of the project and its suppliers. For example, limits on the number of emails that can be sent via existing software or being tied to a corporate digital consultation platform that has not been renewed for several years (so there are now newer alternatives on the market).
- Time restrictions were cited as one of the main challenges due to the fast paced nature of the projects coupled with the accelerated learning curve to understand and maximise a platform's functionality. Many LPAs found it useful to follow project management principles and log errors to eliminate future occurrences. One LPA remarked that the tight deadline also limited the ability to work with other Council departments and use existing networks as effectively as they would have liked to. Case studies could offer checklists of likely IT considerations and timelines.
- Where issues with the platforms or technology arose, suppliers were able to fix most of the problems within a day and in most cases Councils could liaise with users until a suitable resolution was found. One LPA noted it would be beneficial if officer time taken to liaise with suppliers on technical matters could be replaced through self-serve.

Designing and delivering digital consultation and effective engagement:

- All LPAs highlighted the importance of a comprehensive comms strategy as a key factor to success. This strategy needs to be adaptable and optimised in real time. One Council experimented with adding a 'tile' specifically for children and young people. Bolsover noted that the pilot 'dispelled our assumption that social media will automatically reach younger people – in fact more older people are using platforms like Facebook and Twitter.'
- What these communications channels allow is more visual engagement, which LPAs have noted is key for their communities in enhancing planning publicity. Engagement

with images, maps and QR codes appear to make it quicker and easier for communities to access and understand planning information.

- There is real value in a hybrid approach to consultation, balancing digital with "in-person" engagement. Digital platforms do not remove the need for other traditional forms of engagement and traditional methods need to focus on awareness raising, being visible in communities and building trust.
- Many LPAs reported growth in subscription numbers, creating a spin-off benefit of communities being better informed about other future consultations and Council strategies. Proactive collaboration with town and parish Councils (where they exist) was also recommended as the best way to create added benefits and deliver wider reach.

Analysis and reporting:

- Analytics built into PropTech platforms have been helpful for tweaking engagement approaches in real time (e.g. low responses from young people encouraged one LPA to add targeted messages for that group). LPAs offered advice to one another that officers should allow contingency time for gathering final statistics from suppliers and clarifying any unexpected results.
- LPAs noted that the vast majority of people who submitted responses via new digital platforms were individuals vs. groups or planning agents. Knowing the core users of the platform and what their preferences are allows LPAs to target the information to the right people, and also to consider how to optimise their engagement methods to suit. An example of this is Bolsover's statutory consultees getting in touch asking how they should engage with emojis. Consideration needs to be given to how these new digital approaches fit with the professional planning industry.
- UR has been highlighted as a valuable listening and trust building exercise, particularly during periods of political uncertainty. It can help build positive relationships, ensuring Councils show they are listening and using the feedback to inform policy design. Wandsworth recommends doing this as early as possible, as 'it becomes harder to reach underrepresented groups the further down the regulatory path you are'.
- These pilots permitted a greater understanding of engagement analytics data for LPAs. This allowed many Councils to break the responses received down by demographics or channel to understand where underrepresented groups lie, and evaluate the performance of different engagement sources. LPAs have also started to pursue better collaboration with other LPAs on sharing digital systems learnings.

Implementation of community feedback:

- The use of social media, or social listening tools, has allowed LPAs to capture what was termed as conversations 'in the wild'; to find out what communities are expressing about the place they live in a more authentic way (without forcing the use of new channels). Indeed, one LPA noted that the pilot has enabled them to improve the user experience of planning by allowing users to 'engage when they want to' – rather than

'remembering to call us between 9-5'. This has in many cases increased the diversity of respondents, as groups such as younger, working, or time-poor residents have found it convenient and easy to get involved.

● When analysing and implementing their community feedback, many LPAs have found that the data gathered benefits other internal teams as well. For example, outside of planning applications, community feedback has helped other internal departments such as marketing and regeneration to learn about grassroots sentiment in certain areas.

● Finally, LPAs have highlighted the importance of managing both internal and external expectations when it comes to taking on board community feedback. In one LPA for example, the countryside came out as something the community valued most, but officers were concerned that it 'might be a bit of a shock when we want to build houses around them'.

5.0   Key barriers to adoption

Sections 3.0 and 4.0 summarise the positive outcomes and valuable learnings that our LPAs achieved during the course of Round 1. Now that Round 1 is complete, the challenge and goal is to scale these practices and outcomes beyond these Round 1 LPAs to achieve a much wider scale of adoption. In order to achieve this scale, we needed to identify and unpick the barriers that still exist to adoption of DCE tools among LPA teams. The key barriers that we have identified through UR as well as ongoing liaison with LPA project leads are summarised below:

● Senior buy-in - LPAs stressed the importance of securing senior buy-in at an early stage to ensure the success of this kind of innovation. This is not always easy for LPA officers to do without the right evidence, case studies and resources. One LPA was 'surprised that we've had to sell this to planners – they're a well-organised team and they need to see a clear incentive to adopt new tech'.

● LPA digital / procurement skills - LPAs within the pilot have often found themselves in need of certain digital or procurement skills training in order to get the most out of digital tools. For example, a 'blue sky thinking approach' (with no specific brief) is often used by LPAs when procuring suppliers which can leave LPAs vulnerable in terms of what product they end up with.

● Digital skills in the community - a theme that was constant across the user engagement sessions was residents' differing levels of IT skills and their enthusiasm or reluctance for using digital tools. The pilots have served as a reminder for LPAs when developing their communications and consultation plans that they must choose a mixture of engagement tools so as not to exclude certain members of the public.

● Planning complexity - many LPA project teams have found that despite implementing a system that is easy to use, some residents found the planning language used to be overly complex. Whilst this is a problem that would also likely be present with more traditional consultation approaches, it is evident that further work needs to be

undertaken on how planning teams can use software to better communicate planning concepts and definitions so that all users feel fully able to contribute.

- Social media sentiment - some LPAs faced internal resistance or concern from Councillors regarding the use of social media for the publicity of planning applications, as there is a perception that these platforms can engender more negative comments. For example, the Commonplace platform allowed comments to be made on a planning application live online, without the Council having the opportunity to check them first (which is the current process). This raised a GDPR risk and concern over unacceptable comments being viewable in the public domain which the Council would have to report.

- Interoperability - planning data arose as an area requiring more thought among many LPAs. Mention was made of data being locked in proprietary systems, and LPAs being asked to pay to release it. LPAs highlighted that API compatibility between suppliers would be beneficial as it would help with the interoperability issues and transfer of data between platforms. In addition, Wandsworth noted 'we're happy with what we've achieved, but the limitations of our website has prevented us from fulfilling everything in the brief (e.g. embedded audio)'.

- Supplier support - LPAs experienced varying levels of support from suppliers; some may only provide the technology whilst others had a more hands on offering. In some cases, suppliers were able to bring in partners to help with specific topics such as social media engagement. One LPA hosted daily stand-ups with their supplier to maintain ongoing comms and open workflows during the design and delivery process.

- Accessibility - some LPAs have concerns that the automatic translations or tools being used may not provide an accurate representation of the information, and mistranslation would reflect badly on the Council or the consultants.

6.0   Programme reflections

Having identified the key achievements and learnings from Round 1, this section analyses what steps DLUHC need to take to scale the adoption DCE, create legacy and continually build upon the achievements of the PropTech Innovation Fund. The structure of this section is based on who we believe should, and can, drive this change forward.

6.1   Considerations for engagement guidance, policy & standards

Informed by the findings of Round 1 of the PropTech Innovation Fund and detailed conversations with LPAs, we believe that there are key learnings and actions to be taken with regards to the community engagement policy, guidance and standards that currently exist or are in the process of being developed. These are as follows:

- There is demand from LPAs for further guidance on how to implement DCE tools at a local authority (and neighbourhood) level. The DCE team will look to meet this demand by pushing forward with the production of engaging, practical tools that can be of use to LPAs in this space, packaged up into a **DCE toolkit.** This toolkit will be an iterative

resource for all LPAs looking to test or adopt digital engagement tools. Examples of what we believe this toolkit should include are below (this is not an exhaustive list):

- ○ Structured guidance on how to write a clear and concise design brief, how to interview a supplier and hold them to account for the agreed deliverables.
- ○ Further guidance on how to use social media to engage young people. The majority of Councils were surprised at how young people were not always responsive to social media or new digital tools, or sometimes see themselves as a transient population member (and therefore don't see the value in getting involved in place shaping).
- ○ A checklist that LPAs can use to ensure that all conditions are in place for digital transformation (whether that be procurement, funding, resource, internal buy-in or other pre-requisites).
- ○ Case studies to support LPAs on how to advocate the use of digital engagement solutions internally. LPAs are aware of the need to digitise but often struggle to evidence the tangible benefits to management teams (e.g. cost reductions, improved engagement).

- To complement the above practical toolkit, DLUHC should publish **Community Engagement guidance** that is already in the pipeline. From speaking with LPAs, there is a clear role for this guidance alongside the toolkit as a way of formalising advice and making clear central government's recommended approaches.
- Planning policy must address the tension between what LPAs we are required to do according to policy versus emerging digital methods of engagement being tested and advocated. Updates being made by DLUHC to planning regulations / policy should look to implement requirements for consultation processes to include digital methods and/or platforms, **using policy to prioritise and facilitate a hybrid form of engagement.** We know that hybrid methods can open up planning discussions to the 'seldom heard' whilst respecting participants that prefer to opt out of digital platforms due to specific circumstances (such as disabilities or difficulty accessing internet).
- **Collaboration with PINS/Planning Advisory Service (PAS)** is vital to ensure all planning stakeholders have clarity on how inspectors would like to view consultation submissions at examination. This will increase LPA confidence in adopting new hybrid engagement methods by providing assurance that all consultation responses and evidence bases are in an acceptable format when it comes to formal examination. The DCE team are commencing this collaboration as part of the Continuous Funding Model.
- New and existing PropTech suppliers need more support and incentives to create datasets that are fully interoperable and can be used cross-purpose, rather than being coded into, or limited to, one platform. There is a clear opportunity for DLUHC to use the Continuous Funding model to **foster a 'build to share' and 'learning in the open attitude'** that ultimately ensures LPAs are able to access and use their consultation data efficiently and effectively in a variety of contexts that suit them.

6.2   Considerations for the PropTech market

- Suppliers should consider how to better help LPAs measure success qualitatively – we focus on numbers, statistical significance and representation of different groups, but how could these platforms also help measure social value add?
- LPAs noted that the development of a schematic diagram of the overall user journey through the online consultation system at an earlier stage would have helped to prioritise tasks for the suppliers.
- Some LPA officers felt it would have been productive if suppliers had taken a proactive role in wireframing and designing the way in which the tool could look and work (i.e. suppliers seeking feedback on what LPAs would like to see and offering them input.)
- There is potential that suppliers could address the gap acknowledged by LPAs on accessibility standards and delivery of translation add-ons as part of digital tools.
- In many cases, Councils have limited demographic data, and this data may often be limited or not fully up to date. This may be something suppliers can support, in terms of establishing a clear baseline within each community.
- The market has a strong role to play in the continued building and leading of a community of practice for DCE tools.

6.3   Considerations for LPAs

- Acknowledging and understanding the limits of digital tools is key. There is still a need to build trust, be visible, feedback and act on consultation outcomes when possible, and explain what is not possible and why.
- There are strong benefits in proactively sharing learnings with other local authorities who are interested in adopting similar tools.
- Turn participation into a positive. In Planning, often the high levels of response are associated with an objection. Internal training and education, perhaps using case studies from pilots, can educate on how digital tools can help people shape development rather than just object to it.
- As digital planning establishes a prominent role within the planning industry, local planning departments will also need staff skilled in GIS software as well as understanding software development and/or digital planning tools.
- Continued user research can help identify specific skills gaps and pressure points.

6.4   Considerations for planning consultants/advisors/statutory consultees

- Feedback from the pilots has sometimes highlighted lesser engagement of professional planning firms and statutory organisations with new digital engagement tools compared to via traditional methods. The reasons for this are understandable, but closer collaboration is required between planning professionals in both the public and private spheres to troubleshoot areas of friction and understand how small, surmountable barriers like 'too many online log-in details' can hinder statutory consultees from engaging.

- All planning stakeholders should have clarity on how inspectors would like to view consultation submissions at examination, to allow development of a back-end analytics display that shows the consultation responses in an acceptable format.
- Further engagement guidance is required on how far language can be simplified or represented through iconography such as emojis without risking falling down at examination. There is still a tension for LPAs between meeting regulations so as to pass examination in public versus the needs for members of the public to contribute to plan making in a way that suits them, without having to read through detailed evidence and technical papers.

7.0   Next steps

We have condensed the learnings into a selection of Round 1 case studies, promoted as part of a formal blog post on DLUHC's Digital Planning website.

Moving forward, the DLUHC DCE team are focused on:
- Wrapping up the learnings and outcomes of Round 2 of the Fund in collaboration with the relevant LPAs
- Developing further guidance on how to implement DCE tools at a local authority (and neighbourhood) level. This includes both an online LPA toolkit (to be kept as a live working resource) and DLUHC's Community Engagement guidance.
- Working with planning policy teams and external stakeholders such as PINS and Statutory Consultees through our Continuous Funding round, to ensure insights from the Fund are fed into emerging policy changes and that data standards and requirements are developed to factor in multiple stakeholders and user needs.
- Collaboration with PropTech suppliers to explore interoperability of platforms and data, fostering a 'build to share' attitude and win-win situation for LPAs and suppliers (to be explored and tested as part of the ongoing Continuous Funding pilots).

8.0 Appendix

1. Summary of LPAs and platforms (see below)
2. Launch Press Release
3. Expression of Interest Guidance (see below)
4. Announcement of LPAs

PropTech Innovation Fund - Round 1

Appendix 1 - Summary of LPA projects

Council	Consultation Topic	Trying to Prove / Develop
Bolsover District Council	Plan Making Reg 18	To simplify and speed up plan making through the creation of an interactive web-based GIS interface that produces policies and site allocations based on data rather than documents. To provide access to this interface and the same datasets used by officers to allow citizens to do more than simply comment on the plans. Using digital tools to allow citizens to create and submit alternative proposals by deleting and/or adding sites to the map.
Chesterfield Borough Council	Plan Making Reg 18	This pilot used a digital web-platform to engage a broader range of Chesterfield's community in an expanded call for sites as part of Local Plan Review. To understand how the use of a web platform can be used to support a more efficient and automated Land Availability Assessment and call for sites process that benefits from a wider range of contributions at an early stage of Local Plan Review. Integration of existing digital information to provide a user-centric platform for engagement on sites.
Cotswold District Council	Plan Making Reg 18	This pilot prioritised early and effective engagement to ensure that a range of voices from within local communities are heard right from the beginning of the local plan process; Ensuring that documents and information are accessible in a range of different mediums and through various formats to ensure ease of access; Making consultation documents and supporting information visually engaging, accessible, simple to understand and easier to 'apply' at the local neighbourhood level.
Dacorum Borough Council	Plan Making Reg 18	This pilot progressed thinking on the recent local plan consultation. Delivering a more transparent and inclusive process (increasing 'touch points', two-way communication with residents, enabling trust to be built-up and reducing periods of uncertainty.) Present engaging/informative information and use new technologies (machine readable, spatial data, 3D modelling of area).
Greater Cambridge	Plan Making Reg 18	Set out to investigate the value of social media insights to inform our consultation topics and local plan focus areas. As part of the intensive consultation program for Regulation 18 engagement, the Council wanted to understand what conversations were happening in and around planning-related topics that weren't necessarily being picked up by the formal consultation process. Topics that are relevant to planning and are incredibly useful but won't be brought up in a formal process for various reasons. Project scope was limited to twitter as the aim was to capture comments that were already made available for public viewing.
Southampton City Council	Plan Making Reg 18	The pilot focused on improving participation levels with: children and young people and people from black and minority ethnic groups focused on feedback on proposed Local Plan options Improve understanding of how to target engagement to specific groups (methods, channels and content)
LB Hounslow	Plan Making Reg 19	Extending an existing platform to create an online, 3D map-based Plan Maker which displays Neighbourhoods/ Places with areas to be transformed, enhanced and conserved from Character and Design study; infrastructure plans and place policies/strategies. Allowing this data to be selected and viewed by place or topic to ensure the public can access the information that is important to them and target 'hard to reach' groups and allow residents to understand the balanced

		approaches taken and justifications for decisions taken.
LB Wandsworth	Plan Making Reg 19	The pilot focused on whether small digital initiatives can improve engagement rates and demographic spread of respondents to the Local Plan, and if so, which are most effective at doing so. Exploring more effective options on how they can use their existing digital consultation tools for the Local Plan consultation. Sharing learning with other London boroughs who may not have a strong digital precedent for Local Plan consultations.
Stockport Council	Plan Making Reg 19	Developing and testing an enhanced mapping tool that brings their Local Plan to life. The Council developed a consultation portal within the map itself, allowing people to more easily explore and comment on specific aspects of the plan. The solution responds to feedback from residents that inaccessible information has been a barrier to engagement, from young people that interactive formats are more understandable, and from their Borough Plan process that visually engaging information increases engagement.
Dorset Council	Planning publicity	The Council piloted an approach to easily tracking planning applications that gives users choice of how they receive updates, and whether they follow individual applications or a variety of applications by area (as defined by them) or by type. Aimed to find out how much a targeted intervention can help shift the experience of reviewing and commenting on planning applications from an interaction currently based primarily around chasing failure demand or making an objection, to something more positive.
LB Barking and Dagenham	Planning publicity	Development of an app that provides easier access to planning data; digitalise PDFs of householder application plans to create an AR visualisation of the submitted proposal. Increasing public participation and engagement, in volume, quality and diversity; Utilising tech to visually represent development without requiring specific skills, notably reading plans, thereby improving accessibility to understanding proposals
North Lincolnshire	Planning publicity	Creating new planning data feeds, enabling integration to social media and other planning websites, using a data standard that can be supplier agnostic. Including the ability to push/pull the initial application data and provide updates at key stages through the process. Allowing for external websites such as those run by parish and town Councils, or local media outlets to pull details of planning applications and pushing to social media - all with the aim of increasing engagement. To better understand where people access planning information and measure the success of multiple digital methods. Measuring the first point of entry for interest in an application with a plan to test new methods and understand their relative success.
Watford Borough Council	Planning publicity	3 month digital marketing campaign (social media, posters, Council wide literature) along with planning publicity (neighbour letters, site notices, website etc.) which uses a QR code directing to the registration platform. Registration allows for real time notifications to be sent, allowing those interested to be kept fully up to date on any amendments to plans, representations submitted, notification of committee meetings, decisions.

PropTech Innovation Fund: Expression of Interest

Summary

The Planning for the Future White Paper set out a vision to increase the use of digital engagement within the planning process, to make the planning system more accountable and democratic through offering alternative routes to engage alongside traditional forms of engagement.

The PropTech Innovation Fund will support the widespread adoption of digital citizen engagement tools and services. Funded projects will enable us to better understand the barriers to be overcome to allow councils to adopt these tools at scale.

Scope

The PropTech Innovation Fund will begin with engagement around the plan-making process and development management, two key areas of consultation where digital can help broaden the range of voices and views being heard. We recognise there is an emerging market offering digital citizen engagement tools and services; our approach is to foster and steer these existing market offerings and accelerate adoption.

We will select up to 12 local planning authorities in this funding round. Each of the funded LPAs will procure and test a digital engagement tool or service to address one of the themes specified below. LPAs will be expected to use G-Cloud or Spark DPS for their procurement in order to access a range of suppliers, with support available for Commercial teams to help with the procurement process.

LPAs will be able to apply to run a digital engagement pilot for one of the four following themes:

Theme 1: Plan-making Process: Regulation 18

Early-stage engagement with communities enables citizens to contribute feedback on what a Local Plan should contain, but the current system only engages a small minority of voices. Digital tools and services can enhance consultations in a number of ways, from presenting information in a more visually engaging manner to reaching a larger and more diverse range of citizens.

Local authorities addressing Theme 1 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 18 consultations.

Theme 2: Plan-making Process: Regulation 19

Engagement on a draft Local Plan enables citizens to comment and feedback on proposals, but consultation is dominated by the few willing and able to navigate the process. Digital solutions can support LPAs to better visualise the plans being proposed and broaden the demographics represented including feedback from traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

Local authorities addressing Theme 2 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 19 consultations.

Theme 3: Development Management: Planning Publicity

Publicity is an important part of ensuring a democratic planning process, but residents should not have to rely on planning notices attached to lamp posts, printed in newspapers or posted in libraries. Digital approaches can make planning information easier to find and understand and make it appear in the places where discussions are happening, for example in digital neighbourhood groups and social networks.

Local authorities addressing Theme 3 will make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience. We are interested in planning applications of all types; this could be tested across householder applications, for example, or could focus on a major or minor development.

Theme 4: Development Management: Managing & Analysing Responses

All the comments local planning authorities receive from the community need to be analysed, key themes need to be identified and non-material comments need to be separated out. This can create additional challenges for local authorities receiving a high volume of responses, especially when replies come through a mix of letters, emails, and wider digital platforms. However, technology can improve their ability to analyse feedback at scale and more efficiently identify key themes and issues.

Local authorities addressing Theme 4 will leverage innovative approaches to more efficiently manage and analyse a higher volume of responses (received from both digital and non-digital channels) to inform decision-making. This will include going through a development management consultation using both digital and non-digital engagement channels.

Geographical scope: We will aim to test local authorities spread across a range of locations and representative of different contexts in England, including Urban, Rural,

Two-tier, Unitary and Joint Plan areas.

Basic Information

Duration:

The expression of interest will be open for 4 weeks from 3 August 2021 to 31 August 2021.

Deadline:

The deadline for submission of expressions of interest is 31 August 2021.

Question and Answer Session:

We will be hosting a Q&A session for Local authorities on 18 August 2021. Please register for this session by 16 August 2021.

Contact details:

Please contact us with any queries at DigitalPlanningTeam@communities.gov.uk

How to respond:

Please use this application form when you submit your expression of interest and return it to DigitalPlanningTeam@communities.gov.uk by 31 August 2021.

Invitation for Expressions of Interest

The programme intends to fund 10-12 projects that address one of the following four themes:

· **Theme 1: Plan-making Process: Regulation 18 (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 1 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 18 consultations.

· **Theme 2: Plan-making Process: Regulation 19 (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 2 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 19 consultations.

· **Theme 3: Development Management: Planning Publicity (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 3 will make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader

audience. We are interested in planning applications of all types; this could be tested across householder applications, for example, or could focus on a major or minor development.

·   **Theme 4: Development Management: Managing & Analysing Responses (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 4 will leverage innovative approaches to more efficiently manage and analyse a higher volume of responses (received from both digital and non-digital channels) to inform decision-making. This will include going through a development management consultation using both digital and non-digital engagement channels.

We will be seeking a mix of proposals from across different locations and contexts. We expect to select LPAs spread across England with different spatial contexts, demographics, and digital and consultation resources.

You may respond by submitting the application form including details listed below.

Application requirements

Please complete the application form details, keeping to the maximum word limit. **This covers:**

A. **Objectives, Outcomes and Learnings** - a summary of the digital engagement pilot you'd like to run, objectives and outcomes you want to achieve, and what learnings you anticipate being useful to other LPAs.

B. **Project Plan** - how you plan to deliver the pilot which should cover key events or milestones, how you'll measure whether objectives have been met, proposed team roles and stakeholder engagement.

C. **Working with Suppliers** - what kind of supplier(s) you expect to procure, what outputs you will ask them to deliver, and what pre-market engagement you've had so far.

D. **Budget** - a breakdown of how the funding from DLUHC will be spent (e.g. software license cost, marketing outreach budget, backfilling roles if needed, etc).

E. **Spatial Context** - the type of context, or area type that applies to the local authority.

There are two additional questions which will not be scored, but which will help inform support offered:

F. **Supporting procurement** - what support you would find helpful to aid the procurement process.

G. **Digital engagement background & hurdles** - what previous digital engagement

you have run, if any, and what hurdles you would expect if you were pursuing this project outside the PropTech Innovation Fund.

Assessment criteria and weighting

We expect to assess the EoI against the criteria listed above (A-E), with a weighting of:

- · A. Objectives, Outcomes and Learnings (30%)

- · B. Project Plan (30%)

- · C. Working with Suppliers (20%)

- · D. Budget (10%)

- · E. Spatial Context (10%)

PropTech Innovation Fund programme outputs and timescale

LPAs will be expected to:

- · Hold an introductory meeting with DLUHC officials, establishing what baseline data we can compare the pilot outcomes to.

- · Hold a kickoff meeting with external suppliers that will form a part of the project team, in which DLUHC officials will be in attendance.

- · Hold monthly show and tells to provide progress updates, surface any challenges and showcase work that has taken place. A monthly UR check-in will run on an alternating schedule so that every 2 weeks is either a show & tell or a UR check-in to feed in learnings or surface any issues. There will be opportunities to engage further if you have more you want to discuss or share.

- · Create a short written report (max 3 pages) at the end of the project summarising the outcomes, learnings, hurdles and what could be improved in the future (e.g. policy, guidance, or engagement approaches). A list of topics and metrics will be provided to guide the report. It is up to the local planning authority if they would like to have this written by the supplier with input from the project team.