



Action Plan

Final version

Birmingham City Council

April 2022

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1 General information

Birmingham (UK), Gävle (Sweden), Tartu (Estonia) and Nyíregyháza (Hungary) have been working together since 2019 under the leadership of Genoa (Italy) in the framework of the Interreg Europe project BETTER. BETTER offers an innovative approach to a key priority for the EU by encouraging public authorities to develop Regional Innovation Strategies in which e-government solutions can stimulate regional innovation chains (as well as improve their services). The key components of the project are the development and application of:

- Physical and virtual infrastructures to support innovation
- New innovative products and services
- Processes to support new business models and cross-sector (private-public-community) cooperation
- People and skills strategies to enable change to take place

This Action Plan describes the lessons learnt during the Exchange of Experiences process and how these have been utilised to improve the policy instrument tackled by Birmingham City Council (BCC).

Birmingham City Council's aims in BETTER are to:

Achieve a 10% increase in regional innovation activity stimulated by eGovernment initiatives by 2022 by:

1. Increasing the quality of public administration services
2. The use of intelligent tools for modernising public administration
3. Developing ICT systems which ensure that citizens have easy access to local government information, services and decision-making processes

By participating in the BETTER project BCC is aiming to foster a policy environment which will provide:

- Better support for **SMEs** by connecting them with innovation processes and digital solutions
- Better **health** for the city and region through improved use of big data to tackle city health challenges
- Better **data management** capability through developing platform tools
- Better **air quality/transport** in the city and region through improved infrastructure and enabling technologies.

Birmingham's policy instrument for its Action in BETTER falls within the Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) under the auspices of the Combined Authority for the city region (West Midlands Combined Authority WMCA).

The RIS is operationalised by regional partners within the West Midlands Innovation Programme which sits within the strategic remit of the Combined Authority. Post Brexit, this set of arrangements represents the policy framework which replaced the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) in the UK. European Regional Development Funds and the European Social Fund are no longer applicable to the region.



PROJECT DATA

Project name	<i>BETTER Stimulating regional innovation through better e-government services</i>
Partner organisation	<i>P2</i>
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant)	<i>N/A</i>
Country	<i>United Kingdom</i>
NUTS2 region	<i>West Midlands County</i>
Contact person	<i>Heather Law</i>
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2 Policy context

Policy type	<input type="checkbox"/> Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input type="checkbox"/> European Territorial Cooperation programme
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other regional development policy instrument
Policy name	West Midlands Innovation Programme WMIP

The Policy context for Birmingham City Council and the journey taken to agree the policy change

Birmingham City Council's (BCC) primary aim in BETTER is to support a 10% increase in regional innovation activity stimulated by eGovernment initiatives by 31/07/2023. This to be achieved by an increase in the quality of the public administration services, the use of intelligent tools for modernising public administration and improving ICT systems to ensure that citizens have easy access to local government information, services and decision-making processes.

There are growing demands on Birmingham Council in how best to address complex needs for citizens within a framework of cost savings. A policy pathway was agreed to develop new services utilising digital technology with the private sector, particularly SMEs. However, there are barriers to engagement in that SMEs are less able to access new technology and to invest in new solutions made more difficult by public procurement processes.

To explore this, the Innovation Alliance West Midlands (IAWM) an alliance of organisations active in support of science and technology innovation across the West Midlands, commissioned the Aliciyo Report 2020 "Supporting the advancement of innovative procurement in the West Midlands" which recommended pilot actions to test new ways of working.

BCC informed by the Aliciyo Report findings wishes to foster a policy environment and to develop a Regional Action Plan (RAP) in BETTER which will provide:

- Better support for **SMEs** by connecting them with innovation and digital solutions
- Better **health** for the city and region through improved use of big data to tackle city health challenges
- Better **data management** capability through platform tools
- Better **air quality/transport** in the city and region through improved infrastructure and enabling technologies.

BETTER provided BCC with an excellent opportunity to see how best to improve innovation by learning from good practices to be found in partner cities and sharing experiences in Thematic Events and Study Visits.



Exchange of experience, learning with partners and impact on the Action Plan

The experience shared by Tartu (Smart Tartu) based on citizen challenges around common problems was extremely insightful. The Deputy Director for the Innovation Alliance West Midlands, the regional lead for promoting innovation and the technology sector, attended the thematic events in Gavle and Tartu and heard how the Estonian government works with SMEs to develop and procure smart city solutions and the supporting experiences of the Gavle Innovation Service. Both examples feature Design Thinking approaches.

E Estonia was subsequently invited to present to regional stakeholders and companies at the Smart City Alliance regional event in 2021. The link between innovation and unlocking barriers to procurement to tackle city challenges was evident from these exchanges.

Gavle and Tartu showed the clear benefit of following a challenge led approach with local citizens which was further explored by Birmingham in Thematic Event (TE) #3 on Design Thinking. Tartu and Gavle presented details of this approach to Birmingham stakeholders (including the regional Black Country Consortium) as Birmingham's approach was being designed and subsequently when the prototype ideas were being further developed for a project submission to the West Midlands Innovation Programme.

BCC learnt a great deal in the Thematic Event sessions and Study Visits from the SME led examples of Velvet in Tartu and from Future Position X in Gavle around "Design Thinking". The experience of e-Estonia, which is fundamentally a systems approach, was insightful, as was the experience of Liguria Digitale for Genoa in providing a digital platform for citizen interaction and SME engagement. Furthermore, the *Digital Renewal* programme adopted in 2016 was showcased by Gavle at the Study Visit on 27th October 2021. The Gavle approach is based on the "Innovationsguiden" (service design) methodology which champions an holistic approach to public sector challenges which focuses on the end-user helping to develop the solution.

The Register of Good Practices in the project informed the Thematic Events and Study Visits. Of particular significance was Genoa Smart City and Urban Dashboard, the E-Services inhouse team and Innovation Hub in Gavle, The Sandbox Programme in Tartu University and the online provision of local services in the Interactive Municipal Budget in Nyiregyhaza. Thematic Event (TE) 3 then brought together a focus on "design thinking" from the Good Practices and Study Visits which catalysed the activity for Birmingham in Action 1.

The key idea from these inputs to meet Birmingham's objectives was focussed on **procurement** and how to enable and to support Birmingham City Council officers to learn from Good Practices and how to engage with citizens and SMEs to develop innovative solutions to city problems. The concept of adopting a procurement approach with identification of **city challenges** from BCC Service departments to then engage SMEs to jointly address through **design thinking** methods was seen as the way forward. The next step was to resource a project to test this policy approach.



A procurement approach to support innovation in the development of public services

The outline ideas for the Action were subsequently presented by Birmingham stakeholders to the BETTER partners in March 2021 for feedback. This was in the form of an online Import Workshop with a peer review methodology for the Import Workshop approach developed and led by Birmingham City Council. This consisted of two linked sessions where partner cities commented on the ideas and activities proposed by Birmingham which then became the Digital Innovation in Public Services (DIPS) proposal and subsequently, project as detailed in Action 1. The DIPS project is essentially a prototype approach to test out thinking to evaluate and then mainstream in BCC and in the region. The comprehensive reach and strategic scope of the DIPS approach made it Birmingham's key Action to represent in the RAP.



3 Detailed action

ACTION 1

Background

The Action is aimed at Council Officers to support innovation in service delivery by adopting Design Thinking approaches based on ‘city challenges’ and to improve innovation by 10%. The initial plan for BCC was to measure the increase of 10% in innovation through 5 policy instruments with sub objectives, to develop 3 innovative instruments (Digital platforms and AI) to increase societal impact in terms of quality and quantity and to co-develop community level integrated approaches.

As the BETTER project progressed, it was decided to focus results in these areas through the DIPS approach.

The Action for Birmingham was inspired by Study Visits in the interregional learning process notably from **Smart Tartu** where a system for cooperation was demonstrated with city challenges at its heart engaging with citizens for problem definition and SMEs to develop prototype ideas to test in the city to solve such problems. (Tartu bus timetable app, blue tooth ticketless systems on transport, planning engagement, smart city data). The example of **Gavle’s Digital Renewal Programme** was significant, working with end users, establishing a service design “mindset” and adopting this approach across all city staff through a training programme.

Birmingham as part of **TE 3 ran a Design Thinking workshop** across the project to seek ideas and subsequently developed a prototype proposal to test an approach.

The WMIA secured the participation of **Tartu in an on-line workshop** to discuss its approach with regional stakeholders in 2021.

Import Workshops were held in March 2021 to receive feedback on the initial policy proposal and again in February 2022 where the early stages of the DIPS project were discussed with partners.



Action

From this exchange of experience a **Digital Innovation in Public Services (DIPS) project** of activity was developed and funded within the investment strand of the WMIP. This proposal is aimed at SMEs and service departments in the Local Authority to consider and address citizen challenges.

The key partners in the delivery of the project are Birmingham City University (BCU) for design thinking methods and Bruntwood Ltd for business support for SMEs to commercialise innovation.

The DIPS project consists of six stages: 1) Challenge definition by BCC Service Departments 2) Invitation of solutions (SMEs) 3) Exploration 4) Business Accelerator run by Innovation Birmingham/Bruntwood to develop the ideas 5) A prototype phase and lastly 6) Pre-commercialisation.

There are four City Council Departments to date with identified challenges – Adult Social Care, the Public Health Food Team, Planning and Development and Transport (Transport for West Midlands).

The project completed its “challenge definition” stage by late 2021 and the progress on emerging themes and SME engagement will be reported in the Import Workshop in February 2022 for partner feedback.

The challenges now under development by BCC Service Departments to test out are:

Food Hub approaches, focusing on sustainable food in local communities, connecting local producers to city residents and an urban farm

Town Planning processes – an online consultation service for citizens

Transport to develop self-organizing community hubs and

Adult Social Care to pilot new approaches to user-based needs.

The key objective is to focus Council Officers on procurement through design thinking on city challenges.

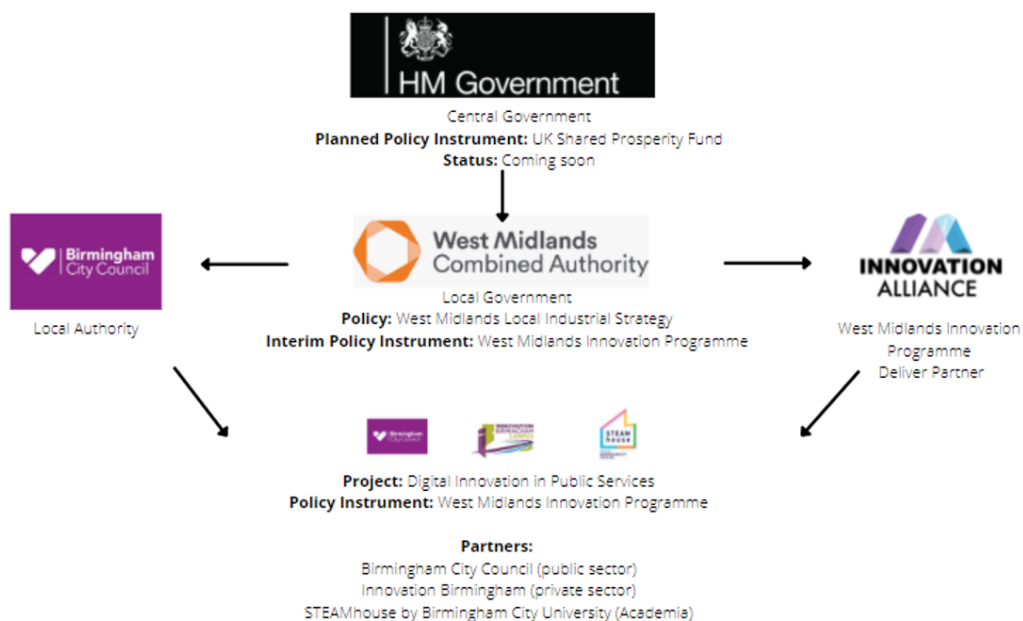
Once tested and evaluated the aim is to mainstream the approach within BCC and to then develop a model for other Local Authorities in the region to work with SMEs.

The outcome is to establish a structured challenge-based system, to enable intrapreneurship in the public sector and to develop a new mechanism for public sector procurement.



	<p>Measuring Impact</p> <p>The policy change and adoption of the DIPS approach to public procurement will be measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of SMEs engaged in innovative procurement with BCC • Number of BCC service departments and officers engaged from September 2022 following evaluation of the pilot stage (September 2021 to September 2022) • Number of SMEs “business to business” from the BETTER partnership engaged in innovative procurement internationally <p>Gavle wishes to develop links with Birmingham SMEs and this aspect will be further explored within the partnership.</p>
Players involved	<p>The Action at the Development Phase involves the Innovation Alliance for the West Midlands (IAWM), Birmingham City Council’s European and International Affairs team with input from Digital Birmingham and the Procurement Directorate of BCC.</p> <p>In terms of the Implementation Phase, Innovation Birmingham Ltd. and Birmingham City University (BCU) are delivering the programme of Design Thinking activity with four of the Birmingham City Council Service Directorates. SMEs within the programme will then be further supported in business planning, technical aspects and marketing to take the prototype ideas to test in the market. The UK’s Connected Places Catapult will offer technical and best practice support.</p>
Timeframe	September 2021 to September 2022
Costs (if relevant)	£80,000
Funding sources (if relevant)	West Midlands Innovation Programme





The West Midlands Combined Authority as the manager of the policy instrument 'The West Midlands Innovation Programme' confirm that through DIPS, the policy instrument has been influenced and additional funding has been identified to test out the approach.

Name: James Elliott

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Organisation: West Midlands Combined Authority

Date: 12.04.22

Signed:

