WBC Executive Member for Digital &
Environmental Services &
ADC Executive Member for Resources
21 January 2021

Decision to be taken on or after
29 January 2021

Key Decision: Yes

Ward(s) Affected: All

External Funding Award for development of OpenCommunity

Report by the Director for Digital Sustainability & Resources

Executive Summary

Purpose

- This report provides an overview of the OpenCommunity project, an initiative to establish a national data standard for local community services.

- The project is funded by the MHCLG Local Digital Fund and is now at the "Beta" stage with £250,000 of confirmed funding.

- Adur & Worthing Councils are the lead in a partnership that includes Essex County Council, Leeds City Council, MHCLG, the Local Government Association, and CAST, an organisation which supports the community and voluntary sector to improve their digital capability.

- This report recommends that Adur & Worthing Councils undertake the administration of the grant fund on behalf of the partnership and to enter into contract with a digital design agency, procured through the government framework, Digital Marketplace, to deliver OpenCommunity Beta Jan-March 2021.

Recommendations

The Executive Members are recommended to:

- Note the receipt of £250,000 external funding from the MHCLG Local Digital Fund for the delivery of the OpenCommunity Beta.

- Approve the creation of a budget for the new scheme.

- To approve a direct contract award under the G-Cloud Framework digital marketplace with Snook and Porism Ltd to deliver OpenCommunity Beta, using the government Digital Marketplace framework.

- Delegate authority to the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources to thereafter manage the contract, in close collaboration with the partnership project team.

- Delegate to the Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources the authority to let future contracts associated with this project.

- Request that the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources report the outcomes of OpenCommunity Beta to Joint Strategic Committee when available.

1. Overview

1.1. Adur & Worthing Councils are the lead local authority partner in an exciting project to establish a national data standard for community based services, a project called OpenCommunity.

1.2. The "discovery" phase of the project, funded by MHCLG, found that there were significant inefficiencies in the way local community service information is held and managed in local areas. There is a high level of duplication of effort, with multiple databases containing similar information. There is no interoperability between systems which drives the need to duplicate, and importantly, national providers such as NHS and DWP simply cannot "connect" to information resources about local community services for patients and clients. In a world where social prescribing is ever more valued as a delivery model, the public service systems requires better data infrastructure to power it.

1.3. The data standard will enforce the same data structure wherever information is held about local community services. Rather like everyone using the same 3-pin electrical sockets, it means multiple systems can easily "plug in" to the data to power services.

1.4. Following the discovery phase, the Alpha project, led by Porism, a specialist data agency during 2020, identified and developed the appropriate national standard, called OpenReferralUK. This stage of the project was very successful in establishing full agreement across several projects operating in the space that this was the right standard to support. Achieving alignment in this way nationally has been an excellent milestone achieved.

1.5. The OpenCommunity Beta project will focus on increasing the already good levels of adoption of the standard and building an online presence, community and tools, to drive adoption further and deeper.

2. Issues for consideration

The OpenCommunity Beta project will deliver the following:

2.1. An OpenCommunity website designed to drive adoption to include

- 2.1.1. Brand identify
- 2.1.2. Adoption tools
- 2.1.3. Case studies
- 2.1.4. Ability to network, chat and share with other projects
- 2.1.5. Technical guides

2.2. Options on governance models for the future, exploring who will own and manage the standard and technical community in a sufficiently reliable and robust way to be trusted by multiple agencies including NHS, DWP, MoJ

2.3. Support for local exemplars including project work in Adur & Worthing aligned to "community mapping" work being undertaken in the Communities directorate.

2.4. Support and alignment to the CAST led project which will work with three charities to implement the data standard in their systems.

2.5. Engagement work with software suppliers to push for adoption of the standard in the most popular service directory software products.

2.6. Submit OpenReferral UK to the Data Standards Authority for approval (https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/data-standards-authority)

3. Engagement and Communication

3.1. During the discovery phase of the OpenCommunity project, 49 in depth interviews were undertaken including with 10 community referrers (social prescribers), 10 data custodians, 9community service providers, 4 software providers, 3 service users. This included fieldwork within Adur & Worthing.

3.2. A stakeholder workshop was also undertaken with senior officers from NHSX, NHS Digital, DWP, Government Digital Service to understand national requirements.

4. Financial Implications

4.1. The project is fully funded by the MHCLG Local Digital Fund, at £250,000.

4.2. Under the Council's financial regulations, following the successful application for funding, officers are required to submit reports to the relevant Executive Member for bids that are over £100,000 and up to £250,000. Bids over £250,000 are approved by the Joint Strategic Committee. This report fulfils the requirements of our financial regulations.

4.3. The supplier contract will be established in a way to allow for contract extension should the MHCLG Local Digital Fund offer additional funding to develop the project further.

4.4. The Local Digital Collaboration Unit is a section of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government and based on the application for grant funding made by Buckinghamshire Council with Adur and Worthing Councils, the grant funding has been made without terms, and is purely a grant from the Local Digital Fund to enable delivery of the Open Community Project.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

5.2 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation

5.3 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

5.4 s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the local authority to enter into a contract for the provision of making available assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority

5.5 Under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 where a Public Authority is to enter into a contract for the supply of goods & services, and the value of those goods and services exceeds a financial limit of £189,333, any procurement exercise to contract for those goods and services must be conducted in accordance with the Regulations. Using the proposed framework will be compliant with the regulations. Any contract extension and/or modification will need to be compliant with Regulation 72 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council's own Contract Standing Orders.

5.6 When accepting and spending grant funding, it is important to ensure that the grant money is spent in a manner that does not infringe the terms and conditions upon which the grant funding was made.

Background Papers

- MHLCG Local Digital Fund project page
  https://localdigital.gov.uk/funded-project/open-community-beta/

- OpenCommunity Discovery Report
  (https://opencommunity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Report-OpenCommunity-Data-standards.pdf)

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1.   Economic

- Matter considered an no issues identified

2.   Social

2.1   Social Value

- The OpenCommunity project will make access to local community services easier for all partners. Residents will be presented with more reliable and comprehensive local community service options, and small charities and groups will have a reduced admin burden as the data will be managed locally in an efficient way without duplication.

2.2   Equality Issues

- The data standard will be designed with equalities issues in mind, with and Equalities Impact Assessment undertaken.

2.3   Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Matter considered an no issues identified

2.4   Human Rights Issues

- Matter considered an no issues identified

3.   Environmental

- Matter considered an no issues identified

4.   Governance

- Matter considered an no issues identified