

**FUTUREGOV**

# Central Bedfordshire / Camden

Improving data exchange between councils and VCS  
Concept Workshop

Monday, October 5th 2020

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Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

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Central  
Bedfordshire



Camden

# Design brief

In a second wave of Covid-19, how can we **overcome the data sharing challenges** between councils and the voluntary community sector (VCS) that stop organisations being able to **find and provide residents the right support when they need it?**

## We should consider:

- Culture
- Process
- Governance
- Tools
- Lessons from recent months

# The concepts

***Needed*** - Formed as a response to common recurring research themes across both organisations

***Pragmatic*** - reflective of resources and conditions. Workable first versions could be implemented in the next month to test and learn from

***Enhancements*** - New takes on things that exist in some form

***Outline*** - Not fully formed so as to be shaped and informed by local ideas and needs

***Different*** - They will not all appeal or apply equally to you and your role

# The concepts

## **Services and capacity overview**

An online tool providing up-to-date and easily accessible information on who is doing what locally. Giving shared visibility of who can benefit, how the service works, and where it operates.

## **Community Insights Projects**

Create shared insights and data about important community issues by pooling capacity, skills, and assets from across the council, VCS, and partners. Coordinated effort on prioritised issues.

## **Simplified standardised spreadsheets**

Creating common data standards to support sharing, matching and deduplicating resident information from across databases on Excel. Implement a set of simple online tools to help clean, tag and standardise data.

# Residents and resident needs we anticipate supporting in wave 2

“Lack of proximity to residents because of lockdown is hurting VCS' ability to support residents and build trust.  
-VCS

## Types of residents

- Shielding
- Newly vulnerable from wave 1
- People with disabilities and long-term health conditions
- Youth who might be at risk of gang affiliation because disconnected from school
- BAME, especially BAME women with ESL
- Carers

## Specific resident needs

- Employability support
- Debt support
- Mental health / anxiety / well-being
- Social isolation especially of those shielding / older people
- Digital divide
- Bereavement support
- Domestic violence

# Information we heard you say you need

“ Two types of data is being collected simultaneously: non-demographic data about the resident to help them (e.g. name, DOB etc..) and demographic data to build a report over time and measure impact.

- VCS

## Types of residents



### Resident information:

- Name
- Address
- DOB
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Income`
- How they want to be communicated with (e.g. another language/braille, phone, text, email)
- Questions around food—aka allergies/cultural preference
- Self-reported vulnerability (e.g. around well-being or isolation)

### Volunteer information:

- Skills
- Availability
- Experience
- DBS check
- Languages spoken

### Service information

- Up to date information from partners/VCS groups on services/capacity
- Understanding what types of support are needed / which not so we can adapt our offer of services
- List of all the streets in a ward / locality / hub

## Hard to access but important information:



### Hard to access but important information:

- Details of people who need help but might not know how to access us
- “Invisible residents and hidden issues” - understanding who to target.
- If resident is already in touch with other VCS/ the council
- Mapping the digital divide

# Concept 1: Services & capacity overview

**Concept description:** an online tool providing up-to-date and easily accessible information on who is doing what locally. Giving shared visibility of who can benefit, how the service works, and where it operates.

## Needs it meets

- To increase the visibility and awareness of available support options
- Who has capacity for you to signpost a resident
- Awareness of changes to local support on offer
- Understanding of how local services fit together, enabling you to spot gaps and partnership opportunities
- Potential for residents to find and access services in an appropriate way

“ ‘Live’ updates from VCS/LA/NHS and other organisations involved in the COVID-19 response about their volunteer needs. We need this information on an ongoing basis as these needs change. - VCS

“ There’s various things that already exist but they need to become more accessible, accurate and real time to be valuable. - Council

“ Having easily accessible information on who is doing what in the local area and where the gaps are to understand where we can fit into that is vital - VCS

# Concept 1: Services & capacity overview

## How it could work

*For VCS volunteers and professionals:*

- what services do I offer? What are our specialisms?
- am I currently accepting new service users?
- am I looking for additional volunteers?
- what resident eligibility criteria do I have?
- who have my services been supporting recently? (Demographics)
- what can I offer in terms of expertise or resources for others to understand how they might work with me or what niche I'm filling?
- what data, trends or overview of needs could I share with others?

*For clients and carers:*

- if I engaged with this service, what do the people I'd speak with look like?
- where would I go, what does it look like?
- will they have the language skills to communicate with me?
- can I physically access the space?
- exactly what Covid precautions are in place, and what does this look like?

## Where are we starting from?

- Voluntary Action Camden service directory
- Care Choice with Bedfordshire, Central Bedfordshire, Luton
- Time to Spare for overview of volunteers
- Public facing coronavirus service listings in [Camden](#) and C.Beds

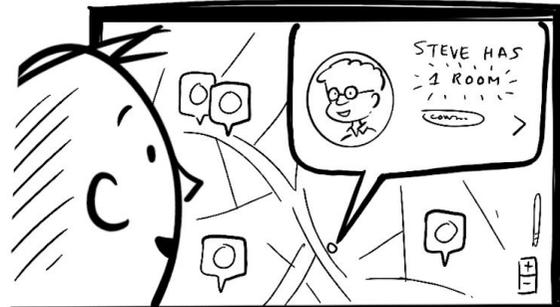
## Considerations:

- What features should be prioritised and why? What do you currently lack or find hard?
- What would make this trustworthy and useable?
- What have you learned from past attempts to find/create this type of information?

# Concept 1: Services & Capacity Overview



John works in a charity that helps people improve their digital skills. He needs to find a physical space where they can store some of their equipment and organise socially-distanced courses as soon as possible.



Through this tool, he can see who is offering space to share with other organisations in his ward. He emails Steve, who has a spare room in his community space where he could store his equipment and run small socially-distanced sessions. On a call later that day, the two hit it off and start talking through future collaboration ideas.



The system notices an email exchange occurred. Steve gets an email notification asking him if he needs to update his profile. That reminds him he needs to update the space he still has available to others. From this notification, he easily connects to his page and makes the update.



Haniya is going through a difficult time, having lost her cleaning job as a consequence of COVID-19. She is not confident in her English, but would like to access employment help to find a new job and childcare. She could also benefit from mental health support to help her cope with anxiety. Through a local board she finds Sarah, who can speak French and helps women in similar situations.



On her computer, Sarah looks up services for Haniya using the tool. She can see what each of them offers and their current referral capacity. She then messages Haniya the most suitable ones through Whatsapp, which Haniya can check on her phone while she is looking after her children.



Upon checking the results sent by Sarah, Haniya can see where the recommended services are, how long it would take her to get there or if she can call (best during COVID-19). She can also see which languages they speak and photos of the advisors who would help her, as well as their capacity and eligibility criteria. She requests a callback in just a few clicks and is contacted by the services.

## Concept 2: Community insights projects

**Concept description:** Create shared insights and data about important community issues by pooling capacity, skills, and assets from across the council, VCS, and partners. Coordinated effort on prioritised issues.

### User needs:

- Develop valuable understanding around shared challenges to aid better coordinated and targeted responses
- Provide VCS community with access to data expertise to unlock value in data
- Connect the data the council can access to clear needs and uses
- Quickly compile data in response to emerging issues to enable better planning
- Improve communication and skills sharing between partners to raise data quality and value

“ *I'm really fearful for at-risk groups of residents out there about which we have almost no information. Right now, we're simply guessing and reacting using our own instincts and numbers...together we must surely have different pieces of the puzzle to help us be smarter?*  
- VCS

“ *We have real pressing issues like understanding the digital divide, spotting the invisible residents who don't show up on the books (no GP, etc)...I'd love to frame the questions together not just get sent some data to interpret.*  
- VCS

# Concept 2: Community insights projects

## How it could work:

- project would be co-produced based on what all parties prioritise (e.g. *Understanding the digital divide by mapping the characteristics of people most impacted*)
- rather than requests being passed between organisations, ideas are informally shaped together at an early stage to explore what is possible, desirable and valuable
- bring together key support roles such as legal and policy expertise, to help foresee and unblock issues as they arise
- find other data projects and rapidly re-apply the existing tools, legal frameworks and lessons to create local versions
- framing as 'projects' provides clear time pressures and clarity over outcomes and return on time investment
- through these projects, upskill VCS and the council in identifying how to collect and use high quality data and how to design these data projects/products
- look at things that it's sensible to know, not just what regulations or policy mandate
- explore ethics, standards and fair usage together

## Where are we starting from?

- New frontline partner forums setup during Covid in each region
- Knowledge of emerging issues and trends
- Local data initiatives such as Digital Charter in Camden
- Example forums and data initiatives across the UK

## Considerations:

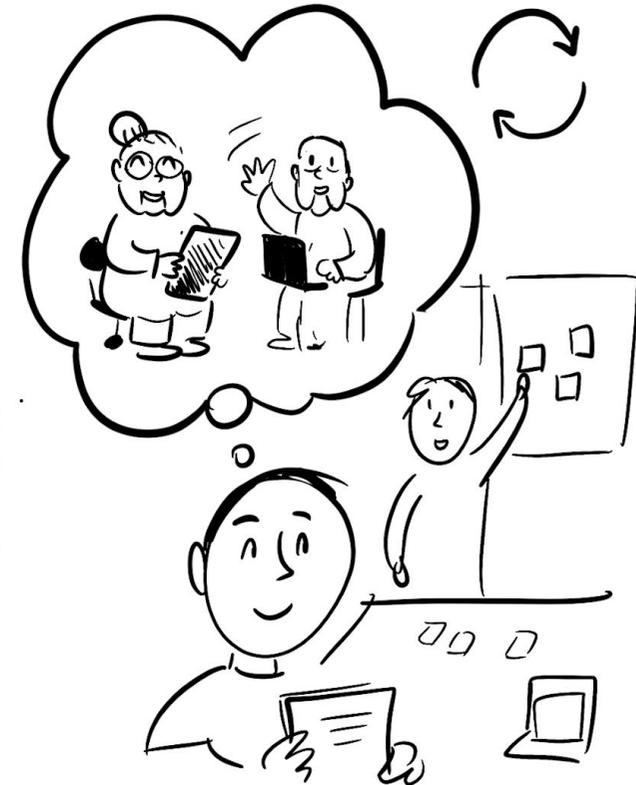
- What project ideas come to mind?
- What assets could you bring to this forum?
- What might this concept look like?
- What would it need to make this work?

# Concept 2: Community Insights Projects



Liam and Chris work for a charity that support older adults. It's been increasingly difficult to connect with these residents during COVID who generally relied on in person activities. Liam and Chris could really benefit from some support in mapping and understanding the digital divide. They are not sure what to do to reach out to those residents who need support, but who might not have access to a computer or have an internet connection.

They contact the Community Insights Project team to submit their proposal. Liam and Chris are not the first to approach them about this gap in information. The team therefore reaches out to the broader VCS group with this new proposed project to understand who is willing to work together on mapping this with their team leading and coordinating this piece of work.



From this mapping exercise, Liam and Chris' organisation is now in a better place to understand how to reach older adults who don't have access to technology. After this project, with this new data in hand, Chris and Liam and some of the other VCS' who worked on this project decide to come together to develop solutions for how they might address this.

# Concept 3: Simplified and standardised spreadsheets

## Concept description:

Embracing the most common data format, this is about creating common data standards to support sharing, matching and deduplicating resident information from across databases on Excel. Implement a set of simple online tools to help clean, tag and standardise data.

## User needs:

- Share information with partner organisations who do not have access to advanced data and IT skills and software
- Where it is shared, piece together information about residents in one place
- Increase dialogue between organisations about what information is available and what is shared
- Know enough about any data that is shared to be able to make sense of it
- Timely feedback from partners about residents that have been referred to them
- Match up repeat lists quickly (i.e. updated Shielding list, list of residents in care home etc)

“ We had to reject a VCS groups data because it was such a mess and we didn't have the time to tidy it up but it's not their fault, there's limited time and skills. If we could help remove that hurdle it opens up lots more possibilities”  
- Council

“ All our data eventually is in spreadsheets, so the last thing I need is another place to copy things or look for things. I don't have the time to be figuring out someone else's rules.  
- VCS

# Concept 3: Simplified and standardised spreadsheets

## How it could work:

### *Common data standard and tools to support sharing*

- Create a list of specific information that commonly features in the datasets (e.g. names, addresses, volunteer status etc)
- Decide across the partnerships what to call them and how they should be formatted
- Anyone can easily start applying these standards to any existing excel data by using online tools that support with cleaning and tagging data
- Open source online tools already exist which could be repurposed

### *Matching and deduplication*

- This would be an Excel tool. You paste lists of resident data from various systems that could be copied into tabs.
- It would find duplicates and potential duplicates based on a number of factors
- Where there are definite matches, resident information can be paired up. Where there are non-definite matches, this could be double checked by a human
- Significantly reduce the time needed to manually match different lists of residents, helping to increase the frequency of sharing

### Where are we starting from?

- Excel tools created in each council to match residents from across different lists
- Open source “helper” tools on the web
- Lessons from the last 6 months of key information to gather

### Considerations:

- What lessons did you learn about your own data quality in wave 1?
- What info is most important to standardise?
- How often do you submit or share data set at the moment? How much time does it take?

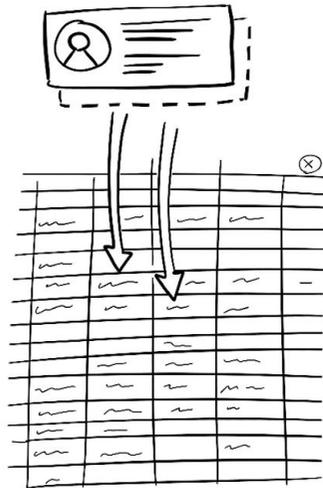
# Concept 3: Simplified and standardised spreadsheets

## Bringing lists together



Asma, from the council's data team, is trying to bring together information from the shielding list from the NHS, with their Adult Social Care list, along with information shared by the social prescribing team.

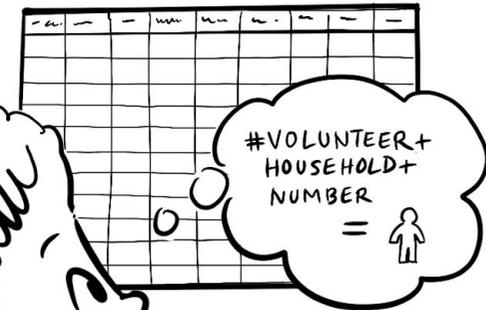
Asma applies tags to the column headers by inserting a row. She uses the Data Checker to see if there are any errors.



She copies and pastes each list into the Excel deduplication tool. She gets back a short list of things that might be duplicates that the tool was not sure about for her to review.

She works with the relevant colleagues to check if they are indeed duplicates or two separate people. She is quite pleased with how much time she's saved in wave 2 consolidating this data, because she only had the one list to review and not all of the data.

## Sharing datasets



In the Excel, Asma recognises that #Person+Volunteer+AllNames means that this column contains the name of a person who is contributing their time free of charge (aka as a volunteer). But, Asma sees another column heading with #Volunteer+Household+Number. She isn't sure if that's the number of people in the volunteer's household or the number of people in the resident's household which this volunteer was asked to support. She looks this up in the data dictionary and sees it's the first scenario. So, when we see '1', we know that the volunteer lives by herself.