



DIGITAL BIRMINGHAM
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BIRMINGHAM WINS GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR OPEN CITY PROJECT

Birmingham City Council is celebrating winning funding from a Government initiative designed to bring local Government decision making closer to people.

Birmingham's 'Open City' is one of ten local government projects to win a slice of the £620,000 fund from the Department for Communities and Local Government aimed at supporting pilot schemes to provide better information for local citizens.

The 'Open City' project was developed by Digital Birmingham and will create new digital resources to enable citizens to better contribute to local decision-making.

Focusing on developing an online community that will allow people to influence the planning and delivery of services, the Open City plan is an interactive approach to generating discussion and debate between web users. Tools like Google Maps, blogs and social media could all be used to enable residents to directly connect with the council and other decision makers online.

As well as seeing an improvement in access to services, residents will benefit from more opportunities to influence local decision making as councils benefiting from the new funding will have to be more transparent and accountable.

"This is a great chance to demonstrate to citizens and government that Birmingham is ahead of the game in developing innovative new digital services for the public sector," said Birmingham City Council deputy leader Paul Tilsley, who chairs the Digital Birmingham partnership.

The driving force behind the project, Digital Birmingham's economic development manager, David Harte, said:

"We'll be working closely with the city's vibrant development community and a strong network of community organisations that recognise the need to use new technologies to influence local decision-making. Thanks to government funding, we can help create the right conditions for new engagement tools to be produced."

The project is one of ten 'timely information for citizens' pilots across England announced by

communities secretary Hazel Blears, who said:

"Excellent public services depend on providing not only resources but ensuring that people can easily use those services. New technology provides an opportunity for councils to have a real dialogue with people in their area.

"These pilots will help local residents make better use of the services available to them, as well as holding their councils to account for the quality of those services.

"It is vital that public services are at the forefront of using new technology to allow people to easily share information about their public services and have a real say in how they are run."

The Open City project will commence in late April and report back to government in August.

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Notes to editors:

Digital Birmingham is a Birmingham City Council initiative and a strategic partnership of private, voluntary and public organisations throughout the city. It aims to establish Birmingham as a leading European digital city by 2010 and ensure that the benefits of digital technologies are available to all in the city. For more information visit www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk.