

Project Summary

From Citizen to Co-innovator, from City Council to Facilitator

Integrating Urban Systems to Provide Better Outcomes for People

THE CHALLENGE

As the largest city outside London, with one of the most diverse and youthful populations anywhere in the UK, the City of Birmingham and the Greater Birmingham area have the potential to set a new agenda for 21st century urban living. Like most great cities, Birmingham is experiencing unprecedented change brought about in part by global economic forces combined with reductions in national and local public expenditure. While generating some innovative outcomes, this challenge has exacerbated environmental and societal problems (education, radicalisation, health, pollution, energy) rooted in long-term, persistent deprivation that has been a feature of the city for a number of decades, even continuing during past periods of economic growth.

THE URBAN LIVING BIRMINGHAM PROJECT

The **Urban Living Birmingham** project was awarded in May 2016 following a successful bid to the Urban Living Partnership call for pilot projects (see below). It runs for 18 months from 1 June.

On 20 November 2015 a meeting of 39 representatives from across Greater Birmingham's public, private and third sectors was held to discuss the Urban Living Partnership Pilot Call. Taking a city focus within the context of the region, this group noted that the appetite for innovation in the development and delivery of urban services was high in Birmingham, but the degree of success and ability to integrate these innovations into mainstream strategies and policies varied greatly. Therein lies the paradox and it became evident that there is a missed opportunity for Birmingham, and British cities more generally, to co-innovate by effectively drawing upon end-users.

There is a critical need in Birmingham for innovation in developing integrated and city-wide solutions that cut across existing policy silos and have the potential to transform the city into a prosperous, healthy and vibrant living place. **The Urban Living Birmingham consortium is identifying improvements to urban services by combining top-down urban governance with bottom-up lay and expert knowledge to provide an environment that emphasises and encourages innovations that generate a step change in urban service provision.** It is doing this by bringing together, developing and applying end-user and open innovation processes (from business disciplines) and participatory and cooperative design principles (from urban design disciplines) to selected urban services and systems to co-create a resilient Birmingham that provides 'better outcomes for people' (BOP). Most transformational service innovations occur when service providers go beyond listening to consumers to co-innovating with consumers. This user-centric approach to innovation reflects a process of end-user innovation in which users can modify existing products and services, but also service providers can learn from this process. This is particularly challenging in urban environments, where infrastructure can be inflexible, costly and have extended lifetimes. **Urban Living Birmingham** brings together universities, Birmingham City Council, regional governance, civic organisations, communities, individuals, urban professionals and innovative businesses to maximise the potential of existing urban and community assets and ecosystems.

Urban Living Birmingham contributes towards the transformation of Birmingham into a city that is a regional asset and a global beacon for urban service innovation; a city with an exceptionally rich quality of urban living, increased social cohesion, reduced deprivation, increased connectivity and productivity, and a healthy urban population.

THE URBAN LIVING BIRMINGHAM PROJECT TEAM

The **Urban Living Birmingham** Consortium brings together the expertise of four universities; national and international academic institutions; and very many local, regional and national organisations. The core academic team, led by the University of Birmingham with Birmingham City University, Aston University and the University of Warwick, have world-leading track records in cities, engineering, services and social sciences; a portfolio of pioneering inter-disciplinary research; and a deep understanding of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

THE URBAN LIVING PARTNERSHIP CALL

In 2015, the seven Research Councils and Innovate UK came together to advance the challenges faced by urban areas in the UK and help realise visions for future urban living. They subsequently announced a Pilot Phase Call for bids of up to £400,000. Successful bidding consortia had to bring together cross-disciplinary research expertise, city leaders, civic organisations/community groups, public, third sector, private sector businesses and other urban innovators. Bids had to focus upon a specific UK city/urban area, whilst at the same time develop a holistic understanding of the complex and interdependent challenges that can be translated elsewhere.

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