

Sector News and Consultations listed in July 2026

Local NHS unveils ambitious Mental Health Strategic Plan with £20 million investment to increase support in every school

NHS Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board (ICB) has unveiled its new Mental Health Strategic Plan 2026-2031, marking a significant commitment to investing in and transforming mental health services across Norfolk and Suffolk.

The plan sets out a comprehensive programme to improve emotional wellbeing, strengthen mental health outcomes, and increase access to high-quality support for people of all ages.

At the heart of the plan is a £20 million investment to expand Mental Health Support Teams into every school and college across Norfolk and Suffolk by 2030, ensuring children and young people can access help earlier, closer to home and in the settings they know and trust. [Read more here.](#)



Build the power of your club as a space for action and change in your local community

We're now accepting Expressions of Interest for social clubs across England that want to have a more influential role in community action and local change, particularly addressing poverty, disadvantage, and discrimination.

We aim to have a geographically diverse group, so we are particularly interested in applications from clubs in neighbourhoods facing multiple deprivation, former coalfield communities, coastal towns, rural and post-industrial communities, and metropolitan/urban areas.

If selected, your club will receive:

- A paid community organiser to work with your club for 3.5 days a week
- £15,000 annual budget to support the role and associated activities
- A package of specialist business support from expert advisors each year
- Expenses covered to attend regional and national events

We're looking for up to **nine** clubs across England to join our first cohort, starting later this year. To put your club forward and apply for the programme, visit the website to find out more.

Applications close 31 July 2026.

<https://www.21stcenturysocialclubs.com/programmes/national/clubs>

Keys to the future: How we build a new era of community ownership

Community ownership is a proven, scalable driver of local economic renewal and resilient, connected communities. While political support has never been higher, demand for investment far outstrips supply, with the recent Community Right to Buy Fund touching just the tip of the iceberg.

This landmark research from Locality and [Power to Change](#) sets out a detailed roadmap for a new era of community ownership. With the right strategy, investment and support, community ownership can do far more than save at-risk buildings and spaces: it can create inclusive jobs, tackle isolation and strengthen cohesion. Supported by [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#).

'[Keys to the future: How we build a new era of community ownership](#)' lays the foundations for local renewal on a national scale.



Unpaid Carers Action Plan

The Department for Health and Social Care have launched the Unpaid Carers Action Plan to help millions of people across England. Unpaid carers form a core part of our communities. They provide vital support to family, friends and neighbours. This can be both rewarding and challenging. We must do more to recognise this contribution and ensure unpaid carers receive the right support at the right time. This is why the government is acting now, and this plan sets out how. They hope the plan will mean unpaid carers are better recognised, referred to support and helped to reach their full potential.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unpaid-carers-action-plan-recognise-refer-reach/unpaid-carers-action-plan-recognise-refer-reach>



Putting the Neighbourhood Back into Neighbourhood Health

Think tank New Local have hosted a short paper from Cormac Russell and Lisa McNally on Putting the Neighbourhood back into Neighbourhood Health, which they hope will spark much-needed debate on a potential future for neighbourhood health approaches.

Read it at <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/putting-the-neighbourhood-back-into-neighbourhood-health/>

Skills plans to train local people for local jobs



The Government has released new plans that will make sure local training equips people with skills needed by local employers.

A total of [39 Local Skills Improvement Plans \(LSIPs\)](#) have been unveiled across England, covering the next three years. They provide detailed insight and analysis into what priority economic sectors and jobs are for each given area.

The plans also explain how designated Employer Representative Bodies and Strategic Authorities, which developed the plans with support from Skills England, will work with education providers and other partners, including Job Centres, to ensure training meets local businesses' needs and help tackle key issues including youth unemployment.

[The Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

[The Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

[The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

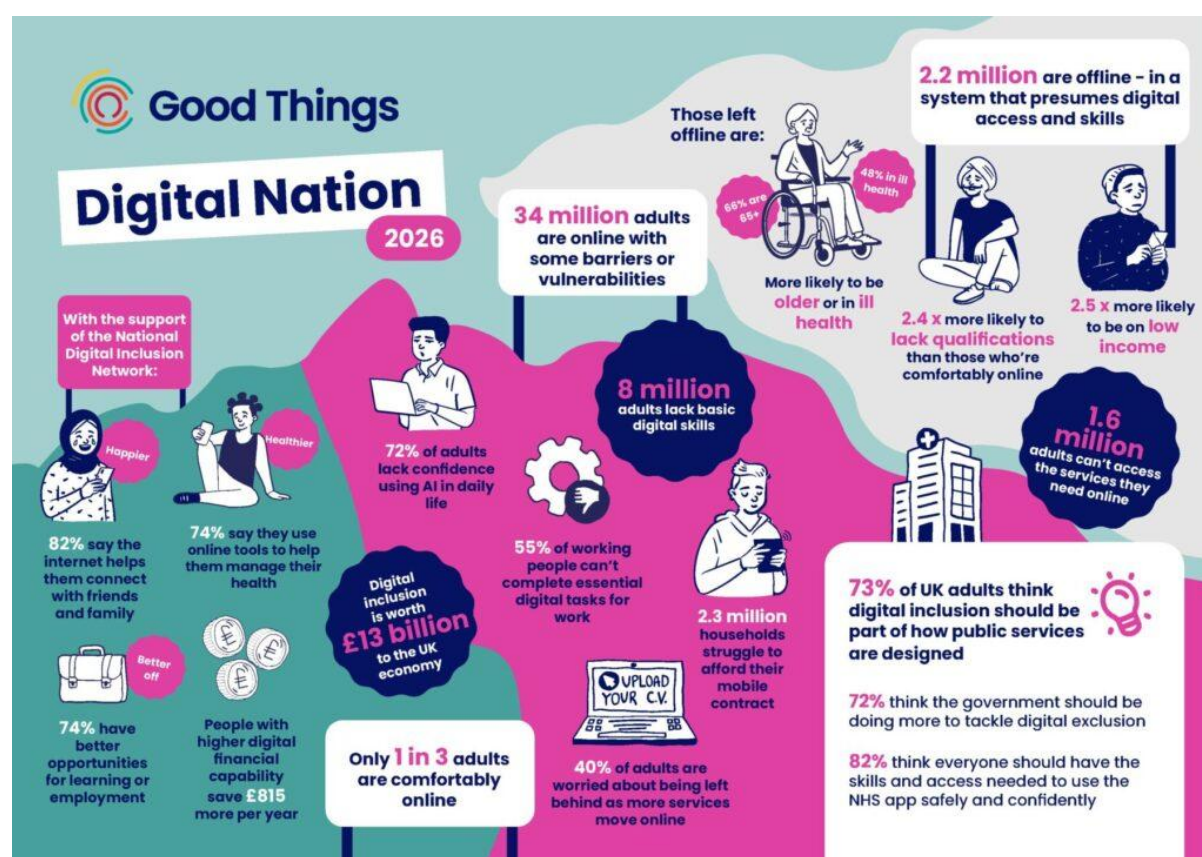


Digital Nation 2026

The latest update of our Digital Nation infographic was launched in July 2026. It brings together recent data on digital exclusion and the impact of digital inclusion support from a range of sources, including Lloyds' UK Consumer Digital Index and Essential Digital Skills reports (2025), Ofcom's Communications Affordability Tracker (April 2026), and Good Things Foundation's internal monitoring and evaluation impact reporting.

For the first time, this year's infographic also features data gathered using Good Things Foundation's [Indicators of Digital Inclusion \(IDIs\)](#). Developed collaboratively with cross-sector experts, the IDIs act as a unified measurement tool designed to show the depth and breadth of digital inclusion and the barriers that impact whether someone can participate fully in a digital society. Several key statistics in this edition are drawn from our analysis of the Money and Pension Service using these indicators in their 2026 MoneyView survey.

Please use and share this free resource, crediting Good Things Foundation and linking to their webpage so others can also access the full list of sources.



<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/digital-nation.html>

Future of Rural England Report



Rural communities are the backbone of the UK – integral to our cultural identity, our economy, and our future prosperity. Rural England is skilled, innovative, ambitious and resilient – with more than half a million small and medium-sized businesses driving agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy, and contributing £259 billion to England's economy.

The potential for further growth is huge. Yet, for too long, rural communities have been held back from seizing the opportunities ahead by a unique set of challenges: from transport and digital connectivity barriers, to hidden health inequalities and a lack of affordable housing. And, for too long, government's approach to 'rural proofing' has been to look backwards to review how well policies delivered against rural communities' needs, rather than taking those needs into account when designing policy.

This report seeks to change that: taking a proactive approach and placing rural communities at the centre of decision-making. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-rural-england-report/future-of-rural-england-report>

Gift aid income for charities rises 10% to £1.88bn



Gift aid income for charities in the UK has risen by 10% year-on-year to £1.88bn, according to new government statistics.

HMRC's [UK charity tax relief statistics](#) show that gift aid was paid to 67,650 charities in the tax year ending April 2026. This is about the same number as the previous year but a decrease on 2019's 73,220.

The total £1.88bn received in 2025-26 is up from the £1.71bn paid to charities in 2024-25 and a 57% increase on the amount received a decade before that.

The statistics show that just under half the value of gift aid payments went to charities that received less than £1m each. See more at: <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/gift-aid-income-for-charities-rises-10-to-1-88bn.html>

Access to face-to-face banking remains a vital issue for many rural communities



Following a recent House of Lords debate, the Rural Services Network have published an article which looks at the Government's review of banking services, concerns over branch closures, and why rural proofing must be central to future decisions. [Read the Rural Services Network article](#).



Charitable purposes soft opt-in and fundraising marketing

A guide to help you meet the Code of Fundraising Practice when you are carrying out fundraising marketing has been published by the Fundraising Regulator. You can read it here – <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/about-fundraising/resources/charitable-purposes-soft-opt-and-fundraising-marketing>

Newcastle University: Survey of Volunteer Managers

Newcastle University has published new research into volunteer managers' experiences of supporting older people as they approach the end of their volunteering. [Read the report here](#)

Digital Poverty Alliance report reveals barriers to digital government services



Digital government services are now part of how people apply for support, manage identity documents, access benefits and complete essential public-service tasks. A new report from the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA) shows that, for a significant number of people, access can still depend on whether they can find someone to help them through the process.

The research, funded by Cognizant, examines people's experiences of using online public services, including Universal Credit and Pension Credit, ID and driving licences, eVisas and school admissions. Accessibility of Government Services draws on a nationally representative survey of more than 2,000 people, a Tech4Families cohort survey, and two in-person focus groups held with people experiencing digital poverty in Sunderland and Medway.

The findings show how easily digital access can break down. Nearly one in five respondents said they are unable to access or use digital government services without support. Fifty-eight per cent have experienced login issues, while 26% report running into problems frequently when using digital government services. Read more on <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/news-updates/dpa-report-reveals-barriers-to-digital-government-services/>



Vacant Property Toolkit

A Vacant Property Toolkit has been developed by Artspace Lifespace with funding from Power to Change as a free how-to guide for creatives and communities looking to take on empty properties. <https://artspace.uk/vacant-property-toolkit/>

UKGrantmaking 2026

UKGrantmaking is the definitive annual publication on grant funding in the UK.

It points out that though grantmaking increased overall in 2024-25, this isn't a straightforward story. The funders identified represent a highly diverse sector, varying in size, structure, context, and strategy. They have seen large increases, significant drops, and many grantmakers maintaining their levels of giving. This variation reflects the breadth of the sector and aligns with what their research has shown in previous years.

While total grantmaking continues to increase and outpace inflation, it comes amid ongoing economic pressures on communities and civil society organisations. The Charity Commission for England & Wales reported that expenditure grew by 5.4%. Charities are facing increased costs, rising demand for services, and pressures on other income streams. While grantmaking has grown, demand for funding continues to increase, creating challenges in meeting funding needs. Read more – <https://www.ukgrantmaking.org/>



Right Support, Right Time: Insights from across the sector

Human-led and relational support crucial for small charities

New research from Cranfield Trust, delivered with pro bono support from nfpResearch, highlights the pressures facing small charities and the types of specialist and targeted support that will have the biggest impact for charities and the sector in the years ahead.

Drawing on the perspectives of funders, charity leaders, volunteers and staff, the findings released in the new report, *Right support, right time: Insights from the sector*, present a picture of a sector working under sustained strain, but clear on the value of practical, relational support that strengthens leadership and organisational resilience.

During March 2026, Cranfield Trust undertook research to better understand how the needs of charities and not-for-profit organisations are evolving. From the 368 stakeholder responses, a consistent message emerged: charity leaders are balancing rising demand with increasingly challenging fundraising conditions and need support that is both specialist, accessible and human-centred to navigate this environment confidently.

<https://www.cranfieldtrust.org/articles/human-led-and-relational-support-crucial-for-small-charities>



Volunteering: what our strategy means for NCVO's work

Volunteering has been central to NCVO's work for many years, and we know how vital a good volunteering landscape is to charities achieving their mission. [Read what NCVO's new strategy means for NCVO's work.](#)



Devolve more power to civil society, NLCF boss urges government

The chief executive of the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) has called on the government to give more power to local communities and civil society ahead of the next prime minister beginning their term in office. Read more at: <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/devolve-more-power-to-civil-society-nlcf-boss-urges-government.html>

Britain's Leading Edge Launches 2026 Manifesto



A new manifesto setting out the case for greater investment in rural and coastal regions was launched by [Britain's Leading Edge](#) at last week's Local Government Association (LGA) Conference.

According to the Rural Services Network, the [Britain's Leading Edge Manifesto 2026](#) argues that predominantly rural areas have a vital role to play in delivering the UK's future prosperity. It highlights how these regions can help power the UK through clean energy, feed the nation by strengthening food security, support national defence through key infrastructure and industries, and act as the lungs of the UK by protecting landscapes, storing carbon and supporting nature recovery.

Alongside showcasing these strengths, the manifesto calls for fairer investment, improved infrastructure, better connectivity and greater recognition of the unique opportunities and challenges facing rural and coastal communities. It also sets out a series of commitments aimed at unlocking growth, improving resilience and ensuring rural areas can make an even greater contribution to the national economy. [Read the full Britain's Leading Edge Manifesto here.](#)



A Rural Touring Story

The Rural Services Network reports that the last time the infrastructure of rural touring was researched

was before the pandemic and a lot has changed since then. The [University of Warwick's Vishalakshi Roy](#) and [Melanie Stavrou](#) share the preliminary findings of their new research.

Rural touring responds to the unequal distribution of cultural provision between rural and urban areas by providing access to high-quality professional arts in rural places. It also helps address wider challenges including limited mobility, ageing populations, rural deprivation and isolation.

Its unique collaborative model, comprising regional touring schemes, local rural arts promoters and rural resident volunteers, brings professional arts performances to non-traditional spaces such as village halls, churches, pubs and village greens.

Recommendations from the last research study into rural touring in 2019 highlighted the need to investigate the wider impact of the sector on rural residents, communities and rural life.

Guidance for Green Social Prescribing Practitioners

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) has published new Green social prescribing practitioner guidance, created in partnership with Thrive and the cross-government green social prescribing programme.

The guidance is aimed at groups and organisations who provide nature-based interventions that support people's mental health – for example, community gardening programmes, local walking schemes, conservation volunteering, outdoor arts and culture, wild swimming and green gyms, among others. [Read the guidance](#).

Charity Digital Skills Report 2026

The Charity Digital Skills Report 2026 is out now. This report is the annual barometer of digital and AI trends, funding, and support needs across the sector, including those of marginalised groups. Key statistics from the results include:

- Digital progress – 81% of charities have moved forward this year.
- AI use – 79% of charities are now using AI.
- Strategy – 28% of charities have a digital strategy in place.

- AI skills – 56% say a lack of skills is their biggest AI barrier.
- Trust – 35% don't trust AI tools, more than double last year.
- Grantmaking – 55% of funders don't know if applicants use AI.
- Applications – 58% of funders say AI is changing the bids they get.
- Funding squeeze – 63% say squeezed finances are their biggest barrier.
- Boards – 33% of charities say their board has poor AI skills.
- Funding – 44% say training staff is their top funding need.

[Read or download the full report.](#)

July 2026

Help shape the future priorities for the Norfolk & Waveney and Suffolk VCFSE Assemblies



Norfolk and Suffolk
Integrated Care Board

NHS Norfolk and Suffolk ICB are running two surveys to gather insight from the VCFSE sector to help shape the future structure and priorities for the VCFSE Assemblies.

The surveys are slightly different to reflect the delivery models in the two areas so please select your area.

We're keen to hear from existing Assembly members as well as those who may not have attended a meeting but are interested in helping shape the future model so please feel free to circulate as widely as possible across the sector.

NORFOLK & WAVENEY VCFSE ASSEMBLY SURVEY: [Norfolk VCFSE Assembly Future Priorities | Lets Talk Health and Care](#)

SUFFOLK VCFSE ASSEMBLY SURVEY: <https://www.letstalkhealthandcare.co.uk/the-voluntary-sector-assembly/surveys/suffolk-future-priorities>

The surveys will close on the 28th July.

Do you work with children in Suffolk?

When you spot a child who's struggling, working out where to send them is harder than it should be. The right support usually exists, but it's scattered across services, websites, and people's memories.

We're building a single, easy-to-use visual guide to the children and young people's mental health and wellbeing support across Suffolk- it will include the everyday support that sits before specialist NHS services. It's for the people who spot these struggles first, whatever your role.

The survey asks how you handle this now: where you look, how you decide, where you get stuck, and what would help. You know where the system helps and where it fails, so your answers shape what goes in.

It takes about 20 minutes- a real ask, but your input is what makes this resource useful, and it can't be built without people like you. The deadline for completion is the 1st of August 2026.

Take the survey: [Suffolk CYP Mental Health Service Experience Survey – Fill in form](#)

Or scan the QR code below:



Charities urged to help reform VAT rules on social media advertising

Charities are being invited to help build the case for reform of VAT rules on social media advertising.

Charity Tax Group (CTG) has [launched a sector-wide survey](https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-urged-to-help-reform-vat-rules-on-social-media-advertising.html) on the topic after the issue was raised twice in parliament and Treasury ministers called for further evidence. [See more at: https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-urged-to-help-reform-vat-rules-on-social-media-advertising.html](https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-urged-to-help-reform-vat-rules-on-social-media-advertising.html)

Dear Volunteer,

My name is Vicky Whay, and I am a Clinical Psychology Doctoral Trainee in the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex. I am conducting a research study exploring the relationship between volunteering and mental health, with a particular focus on how social connectedness, self-efficacy, and sense of purpose may play a role.

I am inviting individuals who are currently volunteering to consider taking part. **Please find the link to the survey**

here: https://essex.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3wpAPKRiVysbLTg

We are looking for other people to take part, whether or not they are volunteering. You are welcome to share this invitation with them.

What would taking part involve?

If you choose to participate, you would be asked to:

- Complete an online questionnaire at baseline (approximately 20 minutes)
- Complete a brief check-in survey at 2 months to confirm your volunteering role and hours (approximately 5-10 minutes)
- Complete a follow-up questionnaire at 4 months (approximately 20 minutes)

The questionnaires will ask about mood, wellbeing, and your volunteering role. All surveys will be completed online in your own time.

Who can take part?

You may be eligible if you:

- Are aged 18 or over
- Are currently volunteering in a formal volunteering role
- Are willing to continue volunteering over the next four months
- Are able to complete online questionnaires in English

Who is not eligible?

You would not be able to take part if you:

- Currently have, or have previously been diagnosed with, a severe mental health condition such as bipolar disorder or psychosis

As a thank you for your time, participants will be entered into a **prize draw for 2 x £50 gift vouchers** at the start and at the end of the study. Entry into the prize draw is optional and participation is entirely voluntary.

Taking part is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. All data will be kept confidential, and no identifying information will be shared with volunteering organisations. Choosing not to take part will not affect your role or relationship with your organisation in any way. This study is being conducted independently of your volunteering organisation. This study has received ethical approval from the University of Essex (Reference: ETH2425-1339).

If you would like to take part or would like more information, please follow the link above to read the full participant information sheet and provide consent.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation.

Kind regards,
Vicky Whay
Clinical Psychology Doctoral Trainee
School of Health and Social Care
University of Essex

Supervised by Dr Rick O’Gorman, School of Psychology, and Dr Tugce Dolen, School of Health and Social Care.

Healthy Child Services consultation



There is an important public consultation on the proposed changes to Suffolk’s Healthy Child Services and to ask for your support to take part in the consultation yourself and also in encouraging participation from the children, young people and families you work with.

The consultation will run from **8th July to 18th September 2026** and seeks views on proposals relating to:

- **Health Visiting (0–5)**
- **Young Parents Pathway**
- **Family Nurse Partnership**
- **School Nursing**

The Healthy Child Service continues to play a vital role in supporting children, young people and families. However, increasing demand and reduced funding mean that services need to be redesigned to ensure resources are focused where they can have the greatest impact.

What is being proposed?

Health Visiting (0–5)

The proposals aim to create a more efficient model while strengthening Health Visitor capacity in line with national guidance.

Under the proposals:

- All five mandated health and development reviews would continue.
- The number of Health Visitors would increase, providing stronger clinical leadership, oversight and continuity of care.
- Families would, wherever possible, see a named Health Visitor for antenatal, new birth and 6–8 week reviews.

- Community Staff Nurse roles would be ended, with services delivered through a revised Health Visitor and Healthy Child Practitioner workforce model.
- Children and families would benefit from clearer accountability and enhanced support throughout the first 1,001 days of a child's life.

Young Parents Pathway and Family Nurse Partnership

Support for young parents would no longer be delivered through a standalone Family Nurse Partnership and Young Parents Pathway model. Instead, support would be integrated into Health Visiting and Early Help services, helping ensure families receive support through a single, coordinated pathway.

School Nursing

The School Nursing service would move from an open-access model to a more targeted approach, focusing support on children and young people with the greatest need while continuing to work closely with schools and other partners.

Supporting Children and Families

These proposed changes sit alongside wider improvements across children's services in Suffolk, including:

- Strengthened Early Help services
- Enhanced SEND support
- Increased mental health support in schools

The aim is to ensure children, young people and families continue to receive the right support at the right time, while making the best use of available resources.

How You Can Help

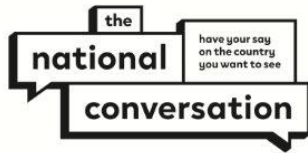
As a trusted partner, your views are important and we would be grateful if you could:

- Take part in the consultation yourself
- Share information about the consultation with your staff, networks and service
- Encourage children, young people, parents and carers to have their say

Feedback from our partners and communities will play an important role in shaping future service delivery across Suffolk.

Find out more and take part:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/healthy-child-services-consultations>



The National Conversation provides an opportunity to share your views on what it's really like living in your area right now. It's a major UK-wide project by researchers at Oxford University, and it only takes a few minutes. You can have your say by going to <https://www.national-conversation.ox.ac.uk>



National Lottery Good Causes: Fund what matters to you

Since the first draw in November 1994, the National Lottery has generated over £53 billion for good causes, supporting communities and transforming lives across every postcode in the UK. While the impact of this funding has been life-changing, the way it is distributed is “showing its age”. The current funding model is rooted in a different era, too often reliant on centralisation, with decisions about where this money goes being made in distant rooms, far from the communities who know their needs best.

That is why the Government is launching a call for evidence on National Lottery Good Causes: Fund what matters to you, seeking a wide range of views from both organisations and individuals. This isn't just a review; it's about fundamentally re-evaluating how good cause funding is distributed and ensuring that the voice of the whole country is heard.

The call for evidence will run for 12 weeks, closing at midday on 23rd September 2026, with [the survey](#) taking approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. [Find out more and share your views.](#)



Government seeks expressions of interest to join new Impact Economy Advisory Council

The Government is seeking expressions of interest for members of a new external advisory group on the impact economy, named the Impact Economy Advisory Council, which will meet quarterly in the Cabinet Office from Autumn.

In a notice published by the Cabinet Office, the impact economy ecosystem is described as “a substantial and growing contributor to the UK economy that is already delivering significant social and environmental benefits against the government’s top domestic priorities. It is imperative that this government works more strategically and effectively with the impact economy, so that every pound of public funding works harder to greater private and public impact capital and resources in support of national renewal.”

Representatives are sought with experience from across the full breadth of the impact economy. This could range from grassroots organisations to financial institutions, across the voluntary and charity sector, trusts and foundations, or purpose driven businesses of any size.

[Find out more and how to apply](#)