

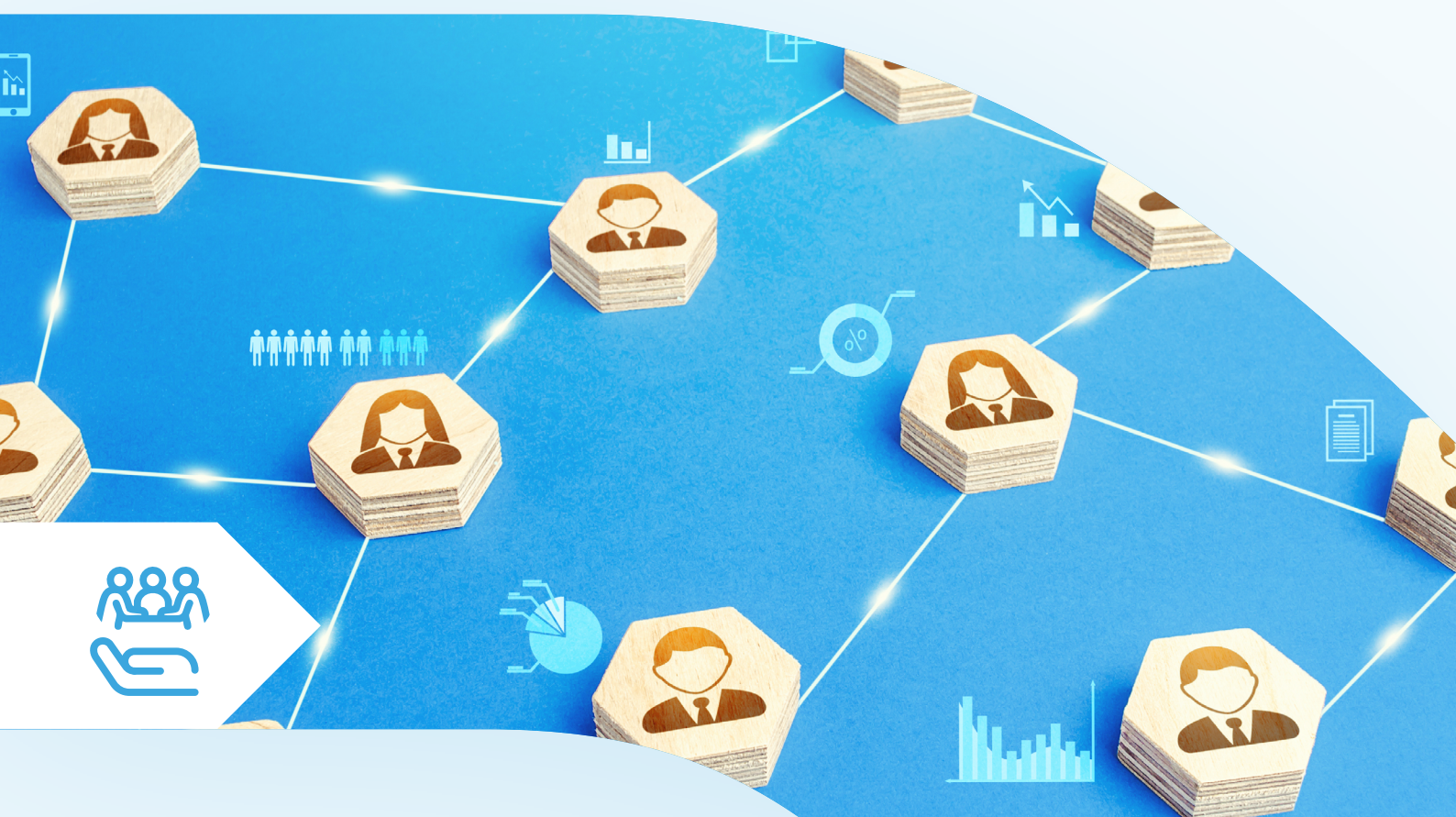
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Public sector impact studies

Local government: Joining-up local authority data to prevent hardship





The problem

Local authorities possess a uniquely broad range of data on their residents, spanning social care, housing, debt, and benefits, but this information is typically fragmented across different legacy IT systems. This makes it much more difficult to determine what support residents need. Frontline officers often lack a complete picture of the resident's circumstances, leading to duplicated effort and interventions that only come in after a crisis has hit.

More fundamentally, this data fragmentation prevents the organisation from identifying patterns of vulnerability and need across its population. As a result, councils are often locked into a cycle of costly crisis management, unable to deploy resources proactively to prevent problems like homelessness or acute debt before they escalate.

This public sector impact study is based on a talk at Productivity Pitches, a series of events hosted by the Institute for Government and The Productivity Institute, which aims to share and support ways to improve public sector performance levels. The talk is available to watch on the [Institute for Government's website](#).



The innovation

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham commissioned the development of a data platform, known as One View, to overcome this structural problem. It integrates previously siloed data sets from adult and children's social care, housing, the school census, and revenues and benefits to create a single, comprehensive view of a resident and their household. This integrated data asset is then used in three distinct ways to drive productivity:

Frontline case summaries: When a resident makes contact, a frontline officer can instantly see a summary of the council's interactions with them across key services. This provides immediate context, such as existing rent arrears, social care involvement, or benefits status. In addition, the system contains a number of support tools, including a benefits calculator and an income- expenditure form, which the officer can use to quickly assess a resident's financial situation. This can be used to provide more effective, joined-up support without wasting time navigating multiple IT systems.

Data-driven dashboards: The platform provides managers with dashboards to monitor the outcomes of support for residents and key service. This allows service leads to see what is working, identify emerging needs across the borough, and make constant improvements to the support being offered, a level of agile management not possible with older systems.

Proactive outreach: The model's most significant innovation is its synthesis of the data to identify residents at risk of future crisis. By spotting early warning signs, such as a resident beginning to miss council tax or rent payments, a team can contact the resident to offer free debt and money advice. This helps them to stabilise their finances and avoid more severe consequences.





The impact

The model has delivered tangible, measurable benefits for both residents and the council:

- *Direct financial gains for residents:* The proactive support model has helped residents claim over £1 million in additional income and benefits.
- *Improved council finances:* Of this total, approximately £300,000 was returned to the council in the form of cleared rent and council tax arrears, demonstrating a clear win-win outcome.
- *Enhanced prevention:* A pilot of the proactive outreach model found that a supportive phone call was more effective at securing payment from residents in arrears than the formal, and more costly, court process.
- *Increased efficiency:* The single-view system has saved hundreds of hours of staff time that was previously spent manually cross-referencing different council databases.

“The project demonstrates that a local authority’s greatest untapped asset is often the data it already holds.”



Takeaways

The project demonstrates that a local authority’s greatest untapped asset is often the data it already holds. The project’s success stems from its strategic decision to refine this crude data into a high-value resource that can power preventative services. By creating a single, reliable source of contextual information, the council has enabled a fundamental shift from a reactive to a proactive operational model. This is most clearly illustrated in the outreach pilots, which replaced a costly and often adversarial legal process with a supportive intervention that delivered better outcomes for all parties.

However, the case study also highlights that technology alone is not a solution because its value is unlocked by people. A critical factor in the project’s success was the deep collaboration between the central data team and frontline service managers. The system was not imposed from the top down and was co-designed to solve the real-world problems that staff faced daily. This is evidenced by the decision to build a new, user-friendly case management system after finding that existing software created too much of an administrative burden.

Finally, the project also offers a crucial lesson in overcoming the cultural barriers that often inhibit data sharing in the public sector. The presenters noted that the biggest obstacle was not technical, but the culture and fear surrounding data governance. This manifested both internally and externally, including navigating significant practical hurdles when attempting to share data with central government bodies like DWP and HMRC.

They surmounted this by presenting the project as a solution to a problem that many staff were keenly aware of, namely the need to help the borough’s most vulnerable residents more effectively. By demonstrating tangible benefits and involving staff in the process, they built the trust required to transform a technical possibility into an operational reality.



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