



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
9 February 2021
Agenda Item 10

Key Decision No

Ward(s) Affected:All

Building the Organisational Data Capability & Capacity

Report by the Director for Communities

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- To introduce plans to build the councils' data capability and capacity
- To outline the resource requirements to support this ambition

2. Recommendations

- To adopt the approach outlined in this report
- To proceed with appointment of Data Lead in order to further develop the data capability subject to confirmation of the budget at February Council.

3. Context

- 3.1 Better use of data - in all its forms - is an important next step on the Platforms journey. It will help design more effective services and it will help the councils and our diverse communities better understand the impacts of change and, as a result, build better for the future. This work also takes forward the excellent digital foundation that is in place as a result of the good services platform and will support the ambitions around civic data as outlined in the And Then document.
- 3.2 The Councils are at the start of a data journey and this report describes both the progress to date and the ambition for the future. The approach suggested in this report is based around the following assumptions which have been tested internally with lead members and relevant officers:

An interest in data is fueled by a desire to be making sure our decisions are data informed - not simply to drive more accurate measurement of our work

- The definition of data includes both quantitative and qualitative data
- There is a desire to build our data capability in terms of skills, attitudes, applications and tools
- The capability should to be spread across the whole organization and not concentrated in one area
- That wherever possible the councils should be taking an open data approach and making data available and accessible to our communities and to the local economy as outlined in the 'And Then' document and its ambitions around civic data

3.3 The proposed approach to building our data capability covers three areas:

- Identifying the most useful and important problems to work on
- Developing the right skills
- Delivering the right tools

This report introduces the first phase of this work and outlines how it will develop.

4. Find the right problems

4.1 Data science can be used in many different ways and as we build the councils' capability it's important to start by focusing on some of the most important challenges, in order to explore the data and our skills we need around them, rather than pursuing data for data's sake.

4.2 Three problem (or enquiry) areas have been identified and part of discussions with partners will be to help narrow down this focus and decide where best to focus first. Those chosen will most likely depend, in the short term, not on the importance of the question but more on the accessibility and readiness of the data to be worked on as we develop skills and infrastructure.

4.3 None of these areas are new so each of these enquiries will start with some desk research in order to find out where the best practice is and understand how to learn from it.

4.4 Critical to the decision of where to focus is the need to use data to move quickly to meaningful action and not simply be better at admiring the problem.

4.5 Financial vulnerability

4.5.1 It is very clear that the impact to the economy of the Covid pandemic is already evident and will be present for some time with significant impacts on the financial resilience of many residents.

4.5.2 Different groups and communities are being affected in markedly different ways by the pandemic, with those already the most vulnerable and experiencing the

greatest levels of inequality being the most detrimentally affected. Early intervention and support can make a major impact with respect to helping individuals and households avoid financial difficulty and the risk of homelessness however it can be difficult to identify and target support at the people who most need it when they most need it.

4.5.3 There has been some success with proactive support calls made from the contact centre and this provides a useful foundation to build on. In May 2020 the team started calling customers who had not paid the April council tax installment, with the intention of offering help and support, e.g. through altering their repayment schedule to offer some 'breathing room', signpost to council tax support or to the community support helpline if appropriate. Customers really valued the contact and felt it showed the council cared.

4.5.4 In total 12,057 accounts were assessed. 667 customers had their accounts reprofiled and 819 were sent details of the council tax support scheme. The total value of payments taken and pledged was £240,849.

4.5.5 A late payment of a council tax is a late stage indicator of financial difficulties and so to be able intervene early enough to have meaningful impact there is a need to look at how the councils might predict people becoming vulnerable and potentially needing access to support. This requires sophisticated data modelling and predictive analysis.

4.5.6 Industry experts Policy in Practice were commissioned to do a one off piece of work looking at patterns of vulnerability with respect to the end of the furlough scheme and associated policies. This work has been described in the February 2021 JSC paper: Covid Benefit Measures impacts on Vulnerable Residents“.

4.5.7 The report has given us access to information that will help us both prevent vulnerability and assist those residents already in crisis. It is also highlighted that different communities are at different levels of risk from the impacts of the pandemic. For example, it has shone a light on those who are out of work due to disability or illness as these make up the largest group of residents currently in payment arrears (37% in Adur and 47 % in Worthing). Work is now underway to better understand the reasons for these disparities and from this, and develop more tailored and effective services.

4.5.8 As well as providing valuable learning this project has provided a data model that can be used to do scenario planning over the winter period and beyond.

4.5.9 Once this work has been evaluated there is the option for a second phase in the form of a Policy in Practice dashboard which would provide dynamic access to analysis and benchmarking data on this topic.

4.5.10 This approach has been used with success in other Councils, for example in the Cabinet Office sponsored work that LB of Barking and Dagenham have done with Newcastle City Council in order to 'Reimagine Debt' and put a proactive approach in place¹.

4.5.11 The Councils' strong digital foundation and multidisciplinary approach means we will be able to progress this work quickly in order to support residents this winter and beyond.

4.6 Housing supply and demand

4.6.1 If we wish to reduce disadvantage and increase opportunity we need to improve access to affordable, good quality housing. To address this issue there is a need to create a supply and demand model that will support short, medium and long term planning of affordable housing and homelessness provision for Adur and Worthing. This is not a trivial thing and as a result the housing team have started by looking at how to define and measure the short term supply/demand for accommodation this winter for the homeless and potentially homeless population.

4.6.2 Understanding the housing needs of those presenting homeless has been useful in planning for immediate emergency accommodation needs and also understanding the permanent accommodation requirement. A review of homelessness presentations and those rough sleeping showed that in Adur 58% of those presenting were a one bed need with most these being single households. In Worthing, 70% of those presenting had a one bed need with most of these also being single households. Greater effort has therefore gone towards ensuring we have sufficient temporary accommodation for those with a one bed need. For the first time, a HMO for single people has been secured through our Opening Doors scheme and additional emergency accommodation has included HMOs with support provided to test tenancy management skills and provide a stepping stone into longer term settled accommodation.

4.6.3 A review of the singles households indicated that in Adur, 60% (15 individuals) had medium support needs and 48% (12 individuals) had full support needs. In Worthing, 61% (58 individuals) had medium support needs and 58% (55 individuals) had full support needs. Our plans this winter therefore included in-reach support and collaboration with other voluntary groups to provide additional support into temporary accommodation to assist these individuals sustain their temporary accommodation especially during the Coronavirus pandemic.

4.6.4 This work will help the Councils' better understand the support needs of the residents who need access to affordable housing and as such will help inform our Public Health Strategy as it develops approaches to address the wider determinants of health. Understanding the future demand for support provides the data needed in order to plan for these more proactive and preventative interventions.

¹ <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/reimagine-debt/>

4.6.5 Moving forward this data could be the basis of more predictive modelling that could be used to support the forthcoming housing development strategy. The data will help build a picture of the housing needed in order to support the needs of our diverse residents who we are working with via our various housing pathways.

4.6.6 An internal team has been formed to look at the data already in the system and to build an initial model to support this work. This is supporting the work being done this winter to better understand and predict emergency and temporary accommodation needs. This work is limited by the skill set of the team and so while progress is being made it will need the support of more specialist data analysis skills to develop it further.

4.7 Community Mapping

4.7.1 As outlined in the 'And Then' document, the Covid volunteering app has made visible a population of active citizens and people who need support who were not accessible before. Building on this the ambition is to have a better and closer understanding of the community activity and networks which sit across our places.

4.7.2 The intention is to explore this new landscape not just in quantitative terms but also in terms of the social insights that this new visibility can provide. This data question may be as much about data collection as data analysis but will be an important foundation of work in neighbourhoods to address inequality or with respect to growing the councils' participation capability, as well as underpinning thinking with respect to the forthcoming Housing Development Strategy and the community conversations needed to support that work. Ward members hold vital insight in this area and this research will be carried out working closely with members to capture their insights as well as with the various teams within the councils that have community connections.

4.7.3 As part of this ambition we will start to make better use of existing mapping tools, such as OCSI's Local Insight tool. The Councils will also commission a partner to carry out community mapping research in order to:

- a. Create a hyperlocal (ie ward and sub-ward level) map of Adur and Worthing that shows where our different communities are clustered
- b. Document the formal and informal community groups and infrastructure in order to add to our knowledge of community activity
- c. Document community assets located in the hyperlocal areas identified. This to cover, council, civic and social (for example social businesses) in the area

4.7.4 The resulting data and analysis will support a number of areas of work where the ambition is to work more effectively and closely with our communities. This includes the upcoming activity strategy, our public health strategy, the housing development strategy as well as ongoing work with the food partnerships. It will also

help to develop community participation in some of our SustainableAW work at New Salts Farm as well as with green spaces projects such as Brooklands.

4.7.5 Furthermore, this data will be used to support the work of the social prescribers and Find It Out Plus service. The outputs will be used to better connect to and utilise the informal networks and assets found by the the research in order to reduce pressure on council and NHS services.

4.7.6 This data set will be developed in partnership with the communities involved in order to progress the civic data ambitions outlined in the And Then document. This will support work, for example, such as the Food Partnership by giving better insight into community networks which have been developed as part of the Covid community response.

5. Approach to skills and capacity building

5.1 Data science is a developing area with specialist skills and capabilities. Work commissioned by NESTA in 2017² described the landscape of local government data use at that time developed a data maturity framework for local government which is a useful starting point for the development of skills and capabilities at the Councils.

5.2 In the framework seven themes are identified with respect to data maturity; leadership, skills, culture, data, tools, uses and analysis. The scale of the maturity for each of these goes from 'Unaware' to 'Mastering'. A basic self assessment of the Councils against this framework indicates that we are only mid way through a process of gaining mastery of data and that more connected and accelerated action is needed in order to improve this.

5.3 Overall, while there is enthusiasm the organisation lacks some of the skills and the capacity to do more effective data-led work. In the future there may be a need to build data skills set into more specialist areas but currently there are three initial gaps:

5.4. Data Lead and Convener

5.4.1 There is a need for someone who can bring together a community of practice around data, support less skilled practitioners and also coordinate work with partners who can help grow the data capability. This person will be a data scientist or similar but, more importantly, have the skills and an interest in building community around the data work. This person will bring with them significant experience in this arena and the ability to build a capability that can work alongside multiple organisational functions at a senior level.

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<https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/the-data-evolution-new-tools-to-help-organisations-get-more-from-their-data/>

5.4.2 This person will be tasked with carrying out a more systematic assessment of the Council's data maturity and putting a data action plan in place. Importantly this person will also be responsible for working with our communities to unlock the potential for civic data as outlined in the And then document.

5.4.3 To build our capacity, and achieve excellence in data analysis, it is vital that Adur & Worthing Councils introduce advanced skills into the organisation, which are currently lacking. Key staff identified across the organisation have good potential but require strong professional leadership to develop their skills and be offered the right training and guidance. To this end it is strongly recommended that a senior data post is created, and this forms part of the budget proposals for 2021/22 for consideration elsewhere.

5.5. Data Analysts

There are already staff who are working on data as part of their roles but there is a need for these to have a baseline of skills and capabilities which may mean some training and upskilling for current staff. This may be around training them in new toolsets or familiarize them with some of the principles of data science or architecture. Part of the role of the new data lead post will be to lead a skills assessment and develop a training plan.

5.6. Partners

5.6.1 Rather than build a disproportionately large team the proposed approach is to find partners who can accelerate progress and provide specialist insight. In this initial phase of work following organisations have been approached:

- Datakind: DataKind are a charity which provides support to non-profit organisations (including government) in the form of data hacks (where they gather experts to help answer specific questions) as well as capacity building support
- Policy in Practice: Are experts in social policy data and using it to identify vulnerable local residents
- OSCI are a Brighton based social data organisation with expertise around population analysis
- Brighton data collective: An informal local group of data experts with whom the councils could suggest setting up something similar based in Worthing (where there is evidence that there to be a critical mass of data experts to support something like this)

5.6.2 There are also many Local Government colleagues to learn from such as the Barking and Dagenham data team. Part of the role of the data lead will be to embed Adur and Worthing Councils in the wider government community in order to share learning and best practice.

5.7. Convening Our Community

From initial conversations it is clear that there are staff who are interested in how the councils develop the data practice and see the opportunity to develop their skills. The first step has been to convene this group in order to test and iterate this thinking and gauge their interest and capacity in bringing this work forward. This has provided an internal community for over 20 people who are already doing some element of data work. As we build the data capability the intention will be working to upskill this community and create a flexible resource pool that can be used across the councils.

6. Tools and foundations

- 6.1 In parallel with this work the customer service and digital teams are looking at potential data analysis tools for the organisation. The timeline for this work will be brought in line with this work in capacity building and make sure that there is tech/skills alignment before committing to a new toolset in this space.
- 6.2 Sitting behind the tools, however, is an understanding of the quality and accessibility of the organisations' data as well as foundations like data dictionaries and taxonomies which create a data infrastructure. The role of the data lead will be to understand and develop these non-technical foundations to the data capability. These are the 'boring but important' elements that will underpin the work of the capability and need expert skills to deliver them.
- 6.3 Like other councils, Adur & Worthing has a variety of data systems, some being easier to interrogate and link to than others. Rather than "linking it all together" as a starting point, the work will be guided by solving the problems we identify in the best way possible, establishing repeatable methods, therefore building the right data infrastructure over time.
- 6.4 The low code platform is an example of a modern system that will allow the development and testing of real-time data dashboards as well as publication of real-time data to the public, to create a dynamic view of the work of the councils. This provides the opportunity to learn about open data publishing and build data reporting and open data as core principles in our service design and digital development approaches.
- 6.5 Adur & Worthing is leading on a national project called OpenCommunity, which is working to establish data standards for local community service data, and this project and its learning will also help us seek out and apply other data standards, such as the HACT UK Housing Data Standard and OpenActive, creating more "readable" and interoperable councils.

7. Next steps

- 7.1 The initial work we have done with Policy in Practice as well as the housing demand modelling we have started has been a valuable starting point but critical to making progress is the appointment of the data lead who will be able to progress the capacity building work as well as developing the partner relationships that we need.

8. Issues for consideration

- 8.1 The development of the data capability is directly linked to the digital foundation, including the investment in Citizen Wifi, that has been laid at Adur and Worthing and offers an opportunity to further exploit and get value from the infrastructure and skills that have been created.
- 8.2 Consideration was given to whether a data capability was a service that could be bought in via partners, however the conclusion was that the best balance was a small internal team with a network of partners and suppliers to support for more specialist work.
- 8.3 As this is a fast moving area the Councils will regularly review if this blended approach is the most suitable and represents best value for the Councils.

9. Health and safety

- 9.1 There are no health and safety issues for arising from this report.

10. Engagement and Communication

- 10.1 Following this report the team will be engaging with external networks in order to learn from other practitioners but there are no immediate engagement and communication issues.
- 10.2 There will be an ongoing need to ensure that data analysis and modelling is reported in an accessible and plain english way in order to maximise value from what can be a very technical discipline.

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1 Contained within the Executive reports on the Revenue Budget 2021/22 is a proposal to invest in the creation of a new Data Lead post. If approved at Council in February this will provide the budget for the appointment of the new data lead. This is estimated at Grade 9 which would normally be in the range of £43,966 - £47,075. However to recruit a suitably experienced data

lead will require a salary of c. £70,000 which will be equivalent to a cost of £95,000 including all oncosts.

11.2 A training programme will be developed for data analysts which will be funded from within the corporate training budget.

11.3 The Insight Team, working with Digital are reviewing business analytics tools which enable data visualisation and dashboarding, enabling insights to be easily accessed, shared and understood in real time. The team are currently exploring a product called PowerBI which will significantly reduce the amount of time staff have to spend trawling through data and manually manipulating it into a presentable format, which not being live is very quickly out of date. The current licence costs are in the order of £70 per user per year. If this product was rolled out to our data community, the annual cost would be in the order of £2,130 for 30 users which would be funded from the digital budgets.

12. Legal Implications

12.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (the GDPR) regulate data sharing processing and storing.

12.2 In accordance with the legislation and also the Council's policy, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be required for this project. This is a process which helps to identify and mitigate any data protection risks of a project and ensures that the key principles of data protection are 'baked in' at an early stage. Also, the DPIA will identify any further documentation that will be required to be put in place prior to the work commencing, including any data processing or data sharing agreements with the Council's partners and privacy notices. This will be in addition to any consultancy legal agreements that are put in place.

12.3 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything to facilitate or which is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of their functions.

12.4 s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the local authority to enter into a contract for the provision of making available of assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority.

13. Equality Issues

- 13.1 The council is subject to the general equality duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and these legal duties have informed and shaped the development of this proposal. In developing our data capabilities the councils will be able to gather greater and more accurate information about the residents of Adur and Worthing, including those who are most vulnerable and have legally protected characteristics. With this increased insight we will be able to monitor, review and improve our services so they are better able to both respond to changing needs and address areas of historic disadvantage and inequality.

Background Papers

Budget Estimates 2021/22 and Setting of the 2021/22 Council Tax - Report to the Adur Executive dated 2nd February 2021 and to the Worthing Executive dated 1st February 2021.