

## How a Data Led Strategy Uncovered Hidden Pockets of Poverty and Delivered Big Impacts

### Client profile

Winchester is a designated heritage city attracting nearly 6 million visitors a year. Whilst unemployment is low, house prices are high and there are key areas of deprivation in the district.

### Overview

#### Challenge

Winchester City Council wanted to proactively prevent people falling into poverty.

#### Solution

They used data analysis from Policy in Practice to understand the problem and create a support programme to circa 100 people affected.

#### Impact

Achieving an impressive 68% engagement, the *Make Money Work* scheme helped 10 households move into work, 3 families moved house and 38 families become exempt within 2 months. 23 households are still working with the programme.

### The challenge

Winchester is an area with a large voluntary sector and a huge amount of goodwill amongst the people who live there, an outlook mirrored by Winchester City Council. With welfare reform well underway and a lower Benefit Cap on the horizon, the council was determined to prevent vulnerable residents from falling into poverty. However, channelling that goodwill was not always easy. The council wanted to proactively identify vulnerable people before they presented as homeless or in need of help, and were looking for a solution.

Though various different projects were funded to provide help, not everyone knew where to get that help from. More significantly, the cultural change required by Universal Credit, whereby tenants must pay their rent themselves rather than their landlord being paid directly, is huge. Winchester City Council knew it must create long term, sustainable changes.

### The solution

Armed with a clear vision and a small budget the council commissioned a Policy Impact Analysis from Policy in Practice to understand how all welfare reforms were affecting low income households in Winchester.

The detailed information in the report painted a picture of hidden pockets of poverty and also told the council who was at risk of poverty in the near future.

Neither the internal software system used for processing housing benefit claims or the information provided by DWP had been able to give the granularity of detail the council needed to create actions plans that would tackle existing and future poverty.

Policy in Practice's analysis showed the impact of each reform in isolation, as well as all reforms combined, at household level. This detailed analysis and the corresponding recommendations were the catalyst for action. Whilst the council had undergone significant internal change due to the appointment of a new Leader and Chief Executive, the facts and insights provided by Policy in Practice underpinned the new data led strategy and meant that changes were minimal. Everyone was on board with the actions required.

The clarity and sheer scale of the task ahead could have been overwhelming, but the council took a pragmatic approach and started small. Using the editable dataset of low income households provided by Policy in Practice, the team was able quickly pinpoint households at risk and target support activity directly to them.

The support activity, called 'Make Money Work', was aimed at people who would be affected by the new cap and who would see an immediate loss in the amount of housing benefit they received to help pay their rent.

Launched in October 2016, the scheme gives advice on debt, money management and access into work for people affected by the lower benefit cap and is provided by housing colleagues and partners at Citizen's Advice and Job Centre Plus, as well as the Council's Benefits and Welfare team. Additional Discretionary Housing Payment funds were made available, if needed.

## Metrics

**68% engagement**  
with targeted households

**100 households**  
originally hit by new lower  
benefit cap

**38 households**  
now no longer affected by  
the benefit cap

**£100,000 savings**  
of DHP money

**48% households**  
were lone parents

**44% families**  
had 3 or more children

*"I feel the project is fantastic with great support. I love the way everyone has got together and supported my family. I have started part time work with the support of the project."*

**A Make Money Work  
programme customer**

*"Working with Policy in Practice has been a game changer for us. I have proven that the recommendations you gave in our Policy Impact Analysis have achieved results. You were absolutely on the money."*

**Denise Sadler, Deputy Head  
of Revenue and Benefits,  
Winchester City Council**

## The impact

To date, 68% of capped households have contacted the Make Money Work scheme and been offered support, whilst the remaining households continue to be proactively approached. The communications activity undertaken to achieve this impressive engagement rate included a press release, face to face drop in sessions and direct mail letters.

The analysis highlighted households with potentially low barriers to work. Armed with this information, the team was able to discuss the benefits of moving into work, and therefore be exempt from the cap, with these individual households, which has been achieved.

Advice on benefit eligibility and support available has proven to be the most popular support, with 55% of people seeking this.

Policy in Practice's analysis revealed that a number of people in the cohort had debt management issues. Money management advice was sought by 20% of people and debt advice by 14% of people, whilst 11% of people have sought employment advice.

The partnership working with other colleagues has been valuable. The JCP and WCC Benefits section ran joint surgeries at the Job Centre Plus and, together, the teams have helped 15 people.

Within 2 months of launching the Make Money Work scheme the council has helped 10 households move into work, 3 families move house and 5 families become exempt from the cap. Others received general advice and 23 households continue to work with the programme.

The extra Discretionary Housing Payments made available have not been needed, delivering £100,000 in cashable savings to the council. In addition, 17 households who did receive DHP support needed much less money than anticipated, leaving additional funds available to support others.

## What's next?

With its own housing stock and 60% of tenants who are currently paid Housing Benefit the roll out of Universal Credit roll is a significant concern for Winchester City Council which estimates circa £14.5million of rental income is potentially at risk. The need to create long term, sustainable change is real.

Denise Sadler said, "My DWP Partnership Area Manager is keen to do more; he wants to look at lone parents on income support and start to discuss support available with them but, without your data, I can't do that."

## About Policy in Practice

Policy in Practice believes the welfare system can work more effectively. It can help people towards greater independence if we make it simple for people and organisations to understand.

We talk to government on a national level to influence policy, so that frontline feedback is heard. We show local organisations how individual households are affected by all policy changes, now and in the future, so they can accurately target support.

We simplify the welfare system by showing people how policy affects them personally, using our software, so they can make decisions that are right for them.