

Universal Credit

How Policy in Practice's LIFT dashboard can help you support vulnerable households

Challenge 1: Visibility of households on Universal Credit

We know that councils are losing visibility over vulnerable households when they move onto Universal Credit.

Our analysis captures around half of all families on Universal Credit and in addition carries out analysis to identify those households that are the most vulnerable.

Here we can click into the 40% of households in this council who are on Universal Credit and filter to identify those most likely to be struggling, at risk or in crisis.

Identifying households those that are most vulnerable and their barriers to work helps us to target the right kind of support to them, promoting independence and reducing future demand.

Challenge 2: Increasing take-up of council tax support and visibility over UC households

We know that households eligible for Council Tax support on Universal Credit are not always making claims.

The LIFT dashboard is able to identify those households that have left Housing Benefit recently and are not currently claiming Council Tax support. This is likely to include a number of those that have recently left Housing Benefit to move onto Universal Credit.

This helps the local authority to carry out a take up campaign, helping them to reduce council tax arrears and bad debt, while also protecting residents and helping them to get support quickly even when they have moved onto Universal Credit.

Challenge 3: Identifying issues with Universal Credit claims

We know that Universal Credit has a number of issues.

One of these is that the payment of the housing element is not always being paid on time. In some cases only the standard element of Universal Credit is being paid until the claimant can verify their housing costs.

The LIFT dashboard shows you cases on Universal Credit where full housing costs have not been paid, and those cases where housing benefit has not been paid at all.

- You can see all of those households on Universal Credit
- You can filter to see all those where the housing element is not being paid in full
- You can filter to see all those where the housing cost element is not being paid at all, where they appear to be eligible for support with their rent.

This helps your case worker identify and support those residents to complete their Universal Credit claim correctly, receive the income and support they're eligible for and help them to sustain their tenancies – all at the same time while reducing long term costs and reliance on discretionary housing payments for the Council.

Discretionary Housing Payments

How Policy in Practice's LIFT dashboard can help you spend your DHP money well

Challenge 1: Keep track of your Discretionary Housing Payment spend

We've seen a number of Local Authorities invest a huge amount of time, energy and effort keeping track of how discretionary housing payments are currently being spent. We've carried out this analysis and helped a number of Local Authorities to see where that money's going.

- We can very easily show spend according to the reform that people have been impacted by - which housing benefit reform is getting the most attention?
- We can show spend by different types of tenure, those in council housing, those in the social rented sector, those in the private rented sector.
- We can show spend by disability benefit, to ensure that money's going to fundamentally where those priorities for DHP should be.
- And we can show spend according to those that in work vs out of work and a whole range of other criteria that we might be interested in.

The benefit of this is that it allows you to demonstrate that you're spending discretionary housing payments in line with your local priorities to both internal and external stakeholders and gives you access to that information quickly and easily.

Challenge 2: Target DHP spend to those household who need most help

How do you make sure financial and non-financial support is getting to those households that need your help the most?

We know that of those that apply for a discretionary housing payment, 9 in 10 applications are successful. But we also know from analysis carried out for a number of local authorities, that only 1 in 5 households that need a discretionary housing payment actually make an application.

The DWP recommends that local authorities carry out a needs assessment for their local area. We've helped local authorities do just that by using their housing benefit data and our analytical engine to identify, for example, households eligible for discretionary housing payments, and those that are most in need.

We then compare income against expected costs. This allows you to identify households that are coping (income more than expenditure), struggling, (income and expenditure are about equal), at risk (significant cash shortfall), or in crisis (severe shortfall). The latter are households you will be highly concerned about if they're unknown to you.

You can compare this to other indicators, such as council tax support or rent arrears, and then target DHP support to those most in need.

We can also show the degree of barriers to work faced by households. Those facing high barriers to work may need a long term discretionary housing payment, while those with low barriers may benefit from a DHP to help engage them in employment support and take up employment-related activity.

This shows where your council can target activity to raise awareness of discretionary housing payments and increase referrals. You can make your DHP funds go further by helping residents to retain their tenancies and reduce future demand for DHPs by helping people towards greater independence.

Challenge 3: Track the effectiveness of your Discretionary Housing Payments spend

Finite Discretionary Housing Payment budgets, coupled with a growing demand for support, mean that local authorities need to be confident that their interventions are working.

We can show you the journey of households that have been awarded the discretionary housing payment. You'll be able to see whether or not they were able to sustain a tenancy, and if they were able to move into work.

For some authorities, we have even been able to compare these households to a control group. We do this by identifying a similar group of households that weren't awarded.

This shows how effective interventions funded by a DHP have been.

Homelessness Prevention

How Policy in Practice's LIFT dashboard can help you tackle homelessness

Challenge 1: Identify who may be at risk of homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act was passed in April 2017 and is expected to come into force in early 2018. The act places a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.

Using Housing Benefit and Council Tax support data, together with our predictive analysis approach, we are helping a number of councils to identify predictors of homelessness in their areas.

Households will be segmented based on their current circumstances and their future risk of homelessness. The proposed segmentation categories are 'coping', 'struggling', 'at risk' of homelessness or 'in crisis'.

An objective and consistent view of current circumstances will be based on indicators including their current level of income, their tenancy type, their surplus or shortfall against their modelled expenditure, whether they are in arrears, or receiving support from the council and possibly other consistent measures such as absolute or relative poverty.

Their outlook will be based upon indicators that show their distance from the labour market (e.g. time since last employment, childcare or disability-related barriers to work, current employment situation) and the impact of planned changes in policy on their incomes.

Councils have the information needed to help prevent future homelessness.

Challenge 2: Engage with households who may be at risk of homelessness

Some vulnerable households may not already be known to you. We can help you identify and then engage with individuals through targeted and personalised communications. You can focus support where it's needed and improve the quality of what you offer via self-service and advisor led channels.

The ultimate aim is to help residents toward greater independence through consistently effective frontline support, to help reduce the risk of homelessness.

Challenge 3. Track what happens to households over time

Councils must better understand the vulnerabilities of low income households. We can help you track the changing circumstances of households over time, giving a systematic and scalable approach to tracking the impact on households. This can be tracked through the smart analysis of administrative data and enhanced using vulnerability markers. You can track changes in tenure and other events.

A better understanding of the vulnerabilities and challenges each household faces can be used to estimate and record the likely cost of inaction based on metrics such as the cost of temporary accommodation, homelessness or supporting people through other barriers they may have.

The effectiveness of segmentation and the impact of advisor support can be tracked to estimate savings.

The journey from secure housing to being at risk of homelessness, and ultimately becoming homeless or moving into temporary accommodation, can be better understood by analysis of historical datasets.

You can estimate and record the likely cost of homelessness to accurately forecast future budget needed to prevent homelessness.

Find out more

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