

Bracknell Forest's journey from tackling homelessness to benefit take up and arrears recovery using data

LIFT case study

At a glance

For every £1 invested, £36 for residents was secured and £26 arrears recovered

Over £820,000 secured for over 240 households

Over £550,000 arrears reduced

240 households helped

7 data led campaigns

1 LIFT platform

Worsening deprivation prompted Bracknell Forest Council to improve its financial hardship strategy

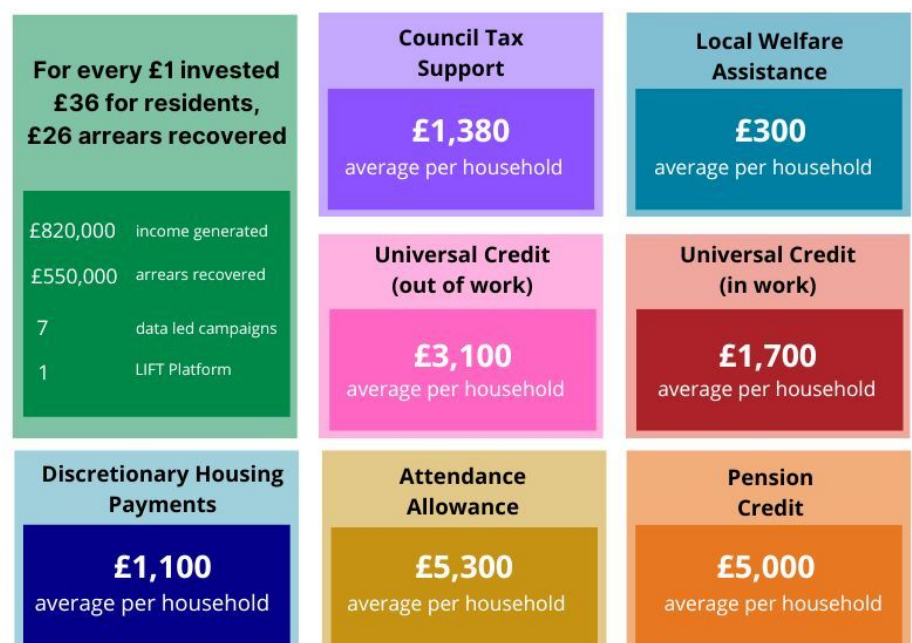
More families struggled to pay their rent after COVID-19 and, as a result, Bracknell Forest Council saw an increase of 750% in the number of families who approached as homeless, up from 120 to 909 in four years.

The council initially bought Policy in Practice's LIFT platform in 2021 to tackle rising homelessness.

Using LIFT, the council harnessed the power of its administrative data to identify residents for support. Notable campaigns include the timely allocation of over £4,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments and over £8,000 in emergency support to 31 households.

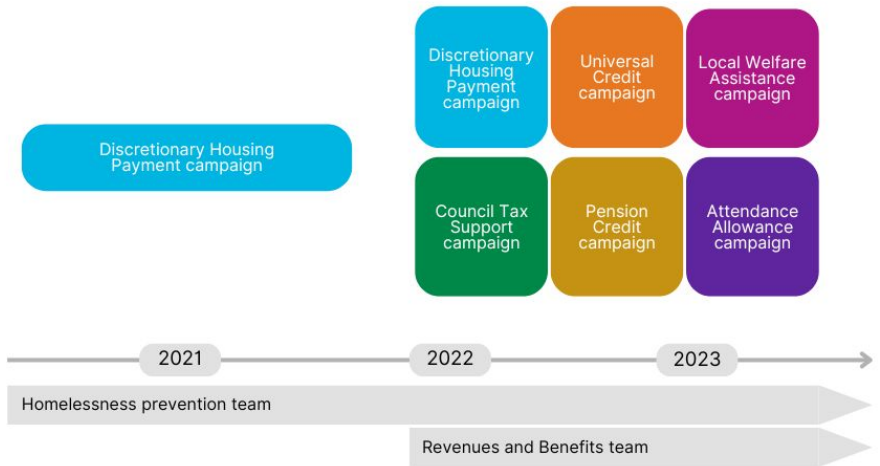
But household financial health took another hit from the cost of living crisis and, by March 2022, two in ten families found paying bills a burden and were regularly in arrears.

A proactive shift by a council officer extended LIFT's data driven approach from the homelessness team to other departments, with great results. The LIFT approach had proven its ability to identify residents at risk and allocate scarce resources. With more demand for council services, LIFT offered a way to give preventative support at scale across the borough.



LIFT helped Bracknell Forest to secure over £820,000 for 240 households, and recover over £550,000 in arrears by October 2023

Bracknell Forest expanded LIFT use across teams to support residents through the cost of living crisis, and recover debts



“Thank you so much. Words will never express how grateful I am for all your support. You have given me the tools to see things differently and the strength to keep going.”

Bracknell Forest resident

One council officer expands the LIFT approach to the Revenues and Benefits team

Solution: Data led platform to tackle deprivation adopted more widely throughout the council

The power of LIFT goes beyond homelessness prevention. Combined datasets, together with LIFT’s built in expert policy engine, painted a clearer picture of residents’ benefit entitlements and debts. This allowed for work around income maximisation, debt collection and cost avoidance.

Step 1: A business case for a Financial Inclusion plan and associated team was made

LIFT poverty insights were an essential part of the Council's Financial Inclusion plan to Cabinet. Data provided objective evidence to underline why Cabinet Members should invest in further preventative support. It also revealed the need for a new team to administer this support.

The council commissioned a Financial Inclusion team of 6.5 employees into the Revenues and Benefits team.

Step 2: Identifying over 500 of the most vulnerable households at risk of financial crisis for targeted support

Identifying populations in need can be challenging. Often relatively affluent parts of the borough can conceal pockets of deprivation. LIFT’s drill down feature identified 550 households that were at risk of financial crisis.

Step 3: Launching seven data led benefits take up campaigns

Armed with this information the team launched seven benefits take up campaigns:

1. Discretionary Housing Payments allocation
2. Local Welfare Assistance allocation
3. Council Tax Support take up campaign
4. Universal Credit campaign for those in work
5. Universal Credit campaign for those out of work
6. Pension Credit take up campaign
7. Attendance Allowance take up campaign

Impact: Every £1 invested in LIFT saw £36 of income gained for residents and £26 of arrears recovered for the council

The seven campaigns yielded over £820,000 for over 250 households. The council recovered £550,500 in arrears by October 2023.

Building resident income, reducing council arrears

March 2024

Campaign	Number of households	Income to residents	Arrears recovered for council
Discretionary Housing Payment	27	£8,100	£5,250
Local Welfare allocation	30	£8,100	£5,250
Council Tax Support	26	£41,300	£17,500
Universal Credit for those in work	26	£44,000	£11,500
Universal Credit for those out of work	25	£77,400	£10,300
Pension Credit	54	£270,900	£3,700
Attendance Allowance	71	£377,000	£500,300
Campaign results	259	£826,800	£553,800

Bracknell Forest's campaigns helped over 250 residents with £820,000 in income

Highlights from four campaigns

1. Universal Credit campaign for households in work: £1,700 gained per household, on average

Over 20 households received £44,000 in Universal Credit. Many families struggle to pay for the essentials despite being in work. This additional income will protect them from rising living costs and falling into arrears.

“Our most successful campaign has been to support pension age households to apply for Attendance Allowance and Pension Credit, passporting them to other support delivering real results for residents and enabling us to minimise and prevent future need arising”

Sharon Warner
Head of Welfare
Revenues and Benefits
Bracknell Forest Council

“My Mum and I appreciated your kind and caring manner when you came to her home and thank you for supporting us while completing forms and advising us on the best next steps.

Bracknell Forest resident

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Bracknell Forest, talking
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2. Universal Credit campaign for households out of work: £3,100 gained per household, on average

Over 20 families received £77,400 in Universal Credit. Families out of work are at the biting edge of the cost of living crisis. This additional income can encourage the households to find work.

Together both UC campaigns produced nearly £121,500 for residents, and recovered nearly £22,000 in arrears to the council.

3. Attendance Allowance: over £5,300 gained per household, on average

Over 70 households received £377,000 Attendance Allowance. This support can be life changing. By putting more money into the pockets of pensioners, the council recovered over £400,000 in Council Tax arrears and over £19,300 in Housing Benefit overpayments by October 2023.

4. Discretionary Housing Payments: over £1,100 gained per household, on average

Four households received Discretionary Housing Payment worth just over £4,400. Since the campaign began, none of these households have moved into temporary accommodation.

Keeping one family from temporary accommodation can save councils an average £16,000. Bracknell Forest has therefore saved £64,000 in temporary accommodation costs.

“The Financial inclusion team has used LIFT to identify households for support at different points and to target the interventions accordingly.

“Using LIFT we were able to apportion an element of the Household Support Fund to those experiencing or at risk of experiencing fuel poverty.

“We have used the software to simplify a number of complex data sets. This allowed us to target those who owe council tax but also have a disability so to ensure that we support with applications for relevant discounts.”

Sharon Warner
Head of Welfare
Revenues and Benefits Bracknell Forest Council