

Harnessing data for regional impact: empowering local leaders to drive change

Wednesday 21 May 2025

Housekeeping

- Audio check
- Please ask questions throughout
- Short survey
- Aim to finish by 11.45
- Slides and recording will automatically follow
- Connect with us on X [@policy_practice](#) and LinkedIn

We empower people

Policy

£23 billion of support is unclaimed each year

[Read our analysis](#)

Practice

Smart products help our clients efficiently close this unclaimed support gap

[View our Better Off platform](#)



- **Strategic context:** Jonathan Flowers, Senior Advisor, Policy in Practice
- **Impact results on LIFT being used across 2 counties:** Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service, Publica
- **Managing reorganisation and making data work across systems:** Nigel Blair, Head of Strategy at NEC Software Solutions
- **Using Policy in Practice tools to minimise the side effects of local government reorganisation:** Sam Fathers, Head of Commercial Development, (South and Wales), Policy in Practice
- **Discussion and Q&A**

Today's speakers



Karine Tollari
Growth Marketing
Manager,
Policy in Practice



Jonathan Flowers
Senior Advisor,
Policy in Practice



Mandy Fathers
Business Manager,
Environmental, Welfare &
Revenue Service
Publica



Nigel Blair
Head of Strategy,
NEC Software
Solutions



Sam Fathers
Head of Commercial
Development
(South and Wales)
Policy in Practice

Jonathan Flowers

Senior Advisor
Policy in Practice



Personal Context

Data science education background

Ex Deputy CE of County Council

Consulted to a number of unitaries pre and post bid and implementation

Currently independent chair of audit committee of a district council going through LGR (St Albans)

The Change

Devolution - to a manageable extent for the centre

- Strategic authorities - spanning a number of local councils
- Best powers depend on elected mayors (“single throat to choke”).

Unitarisation across the board

- Two-tier areas are expressing views on new arrangements
- Mixed messages from government about acceptable sizes
- Uncertainty and risk
- But: opportunity for scale economies and simplification (and boosting the town/parish tier).

The Challenge

It's an immensely political process, alongside a very complicated administrative and governance challenge

Making new unitaries is hard

- Complex mergers of services (eg revs and bens) alongside divisions of other services (eg children's social care)
- Significant people uncertainty for those involved
- Contract novation and change
- Capacity has been depleted by years of cuts
- Need to protect a "local" feel eg by turbocharging town/parish councils.

A new strategic authority also brings challenges

- New administrative and governance infrastructure
- A new set of choices to be made.

The Opportunity

Data will be fundamental to the new Strategic Authorities having an impact quickly

- Understanding the population's "fitness" to drive economic growth
- Prioritising interventions, building business cases
- Will those sub-regions with better data be served better? Will they set the agenda?

In making new unitaries

- Can we make choices which prioritise good consistent data
 - Eg standardising revs and bens data, social care data ...

When the new elected mayor asks you questions (starting from May 2026 for some), what will you wish you'd started doing in May 2025?!

Mandy Fathers

Business Manager -
Environmental, Welfare &
Revenue Service
Publica



PUBLICA



Forest of Dean
— DISTRICT COUNCIL —



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOW INCOME FAMILY
TRACKER

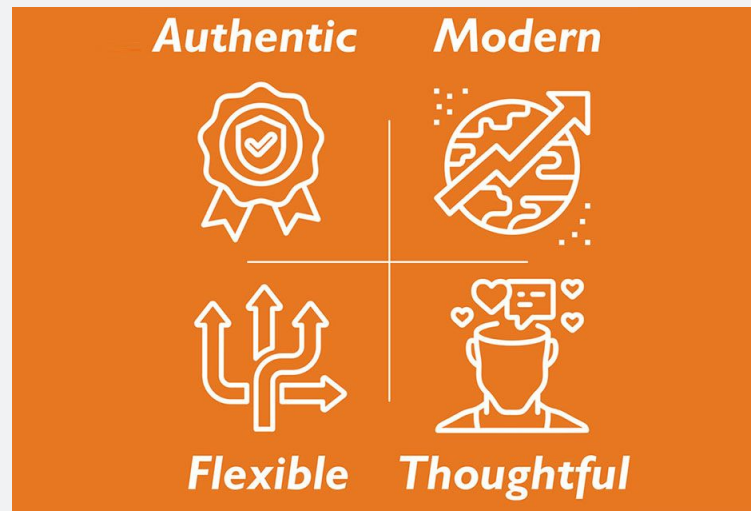
(LIFT)



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WHO ARE WE?

- COLLABORATION
- CAMPAIGNS
- FUTURE ASPIRATIONS



Pension Credit Campaign - West Oxfordshire

| Nov 2024 | | Mar 2025 | | Change from Nov 24 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Number of hhs claimed GC (and SC) | 11 | Number of hhs claimed GC (and SC) | 45 | 34 |
| Number of hhs claimed SC only | 4 | Number of hhs claimed SC only | 14 | 10 |
| Total people in claiming hhs | 16 | Total people in claiming hhs | 65 | 49 |
| Pension Credit annual amount | £35,368 | Pension Credit annual amount | £168,184 | £171,287 |
| Backdated Pension Credit | £7,781 | Backdated Pension Credit | £46,250 | £38,470 |
| Total amount of PC | £43,149 | Total amount of PC | £214,435 | £171,287 |
| Winter Fuel Payments | £3,200 | Winter Fuel Payments | £13,000 | £9,800 |
| Support awarded in first years | £46,349 | Support awarded in first years | £227,425 | £181,087 |
| Lifetime economic impact | £445,699 | Lifetime economic impact | £1,852,019 | £1,496,320 |

234 Letters Sent

69 New accepted claims

Take Up Rate of at least 28%

Lifetime impact £1.8m

Pension Credit Campaign - Cotswold

| Dec 2024 | | Feb 2025 | | Change from Nov 24 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Number of hhs claimed GC (and SC) | 17 | Number of hhs claimed GC (and SC) | 49 | 32 |
| Number of hhs claimed SC only | 4 | Number of hhs claimed SC only | 18 | 14 |
| Total people in claiming hhs | 22 | Total people in claiming hhs | 70 | 48 |
| Pension Credit annual amount | £68,545 | Pension Credit annual amount | £178,179 | £109,634 |
| Backdated Pension Credit | £15,079 | Backdated Pension Credit | £52,768 | £37,688 |
| Total amount of PC | £83,625 | Total amount of PC | £230,948 | £147,322 |
| Winter Fuel Payments | £4,400 | Winter Fuel Payments | £14,000 | £9,600 |
| Support awarded in first years | £88,025 | Support awarded in first years | £244,948 | £156,922 |
| Lifetime economic impact | £421,269 | Lifetime economic impact | £1,320,780 | £899,511 |



233 Letters Sent

70 new accepted claims

Take Up Rate of at least 30%

Lifetime impact £1.3m

Nigel Blair

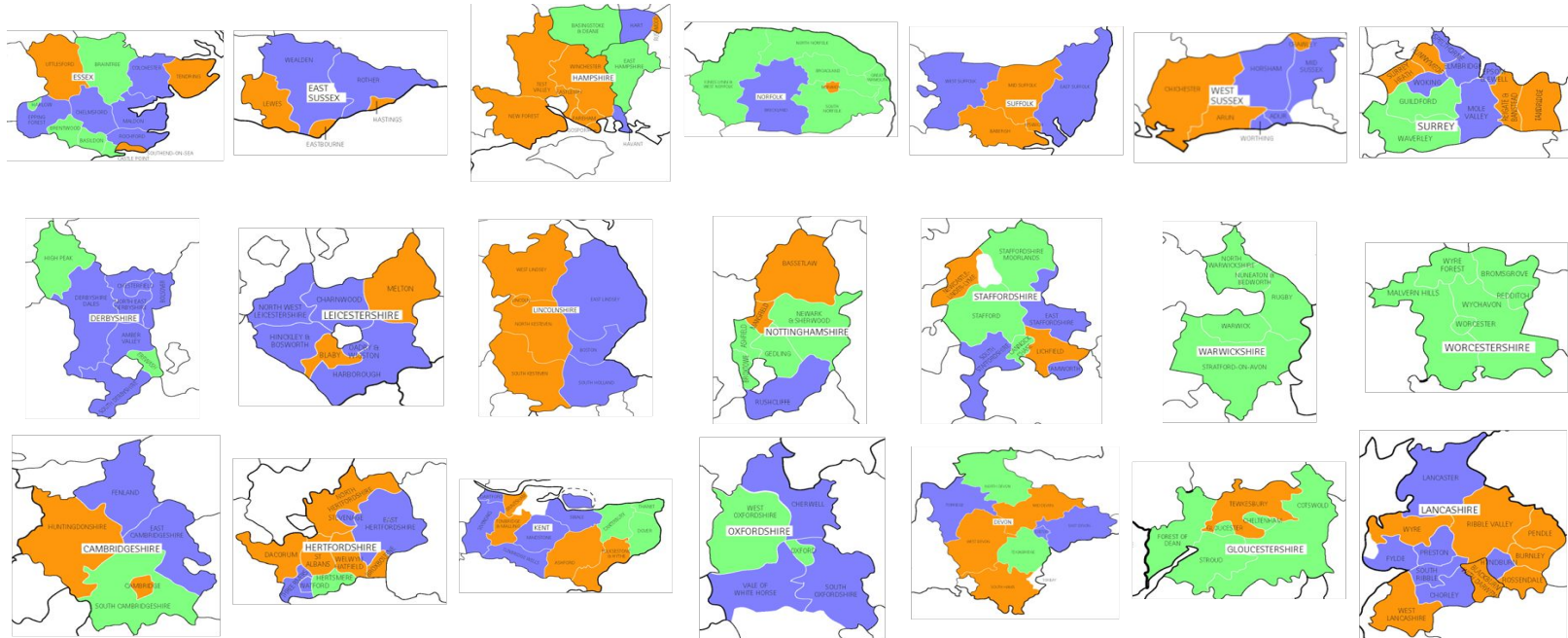
Head of Strategy,
NEC Software Solutions



The end of two-tier local government in England

- One of the fundamental aims of the White Paper was the removal of two-tier local government in England
- The existing two-tier counties / districts would be replaced by new unitary authorities
- The government has indicated that the new unitaries should cover **populations of 500k or more**
- This would affect **21 counties** and their **164 constituent districts**
- It might also impact **15 associated current unitary authorities**
- This could see **200 (21+164+15) councils reduced to less than 50**
- Government announces postponement of elections in 7 counties and 2 unitaries.
First wave of reorganisation
- Submissions were due in March, Full proposals in November 2025
- We have already seen some unexpected alliances and cross county border proposals
- There are already **132 existing English unitary authorities**, only 12 of these have populations of over 500k. 35 have populations of under 200k.
- It is likely that some of these will need to merge / reorganise in the future meaning this reorganisation is just the beginning.

Local Government Reorganisation – The new unitaries



200 authorities abolished, 40 - 50 new unitaries created

Affected Counties

RED COUNTIES = First Wave

1. **CAMBRIDGESHIRE** 5 districts, population 699,573
2. **DERBYSHIRE** 8 districts, population 811,449
 - PLUS, **Derby** unitary 266,460
3. **DEVON** 8 districts, population 833,408
 - PLUS, **Plymouth** unitary 268,736
 - PLUS, **Torbay** unitary 139,485
4. **EAST SUSSEX** 5 districts, population 555,484
5. **ESSEX** 12 districts, population 1,536,118
 - PLUS, **Thurrock** unitary 178,201
 - PLUS, **Southend** unitary 182,271
6. **GLOUCESTERSHIRE** 6 districts, population 659,276
7. **HAMPSHIRE** 11 districts, population 1,428,559
 - PLUS, **Southampton** unitary 256,110
 - PLUS, **Portsmouth** unitary 210,297
 - PLUS, **Isle of Wight** unitary 140,906
8. **HERTFORDSHIRE** 10 districts, population 1,215,387
9. **KENT** 12 districts, population 1,610,251
 - PLUS, **Medway** unitary, population 286,800
10. **LANCASHIRE** 12 districts, population 1,270,162
 - PLUS, **Blackpool** unitary, population 142,708
 - PLUS, **Blackburn** unitary, population 157,503
11. **LEICESTERSHIRE** 7 districts, population 734,015
12. **LINCOLNSHIRE** 7 districts, population 782,808
 - PLUS, **North Lincolnshire** unitary, population 170,087
 - PLUS, **North-East Lincolnshire** unitary, population 158,335
13. **NORFOLK** 7 districts, population 931,943
14. **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE** 7 districts, population 844,494
 - PLUS, **Nottingham** unitary, population 329,276
15. **OXFORDSHIRE** 5 districts, population 750,230
16. **STAFFORDSHIRE** 8 districts, population 898,521
 - PLUS, **Stoke** unitary, population 263,157
17. **SUFFOLK** 5 districts, population 776,442
18. **SURREY** 11 districts, population 1,228,671
19. **WARWICKSHIRE** 5 districts, population 617,823
20. **WEST SUSSEX** 7 districts, population 900,862
21. **WORCESTERSHIRE** 6 districts, population 614,185

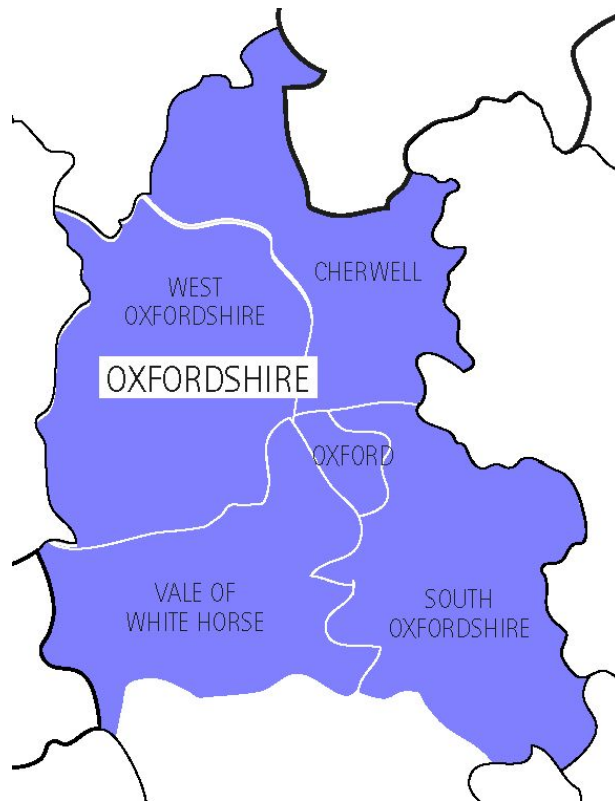
What happens next?

Oxfordshire options

Population = 750,000

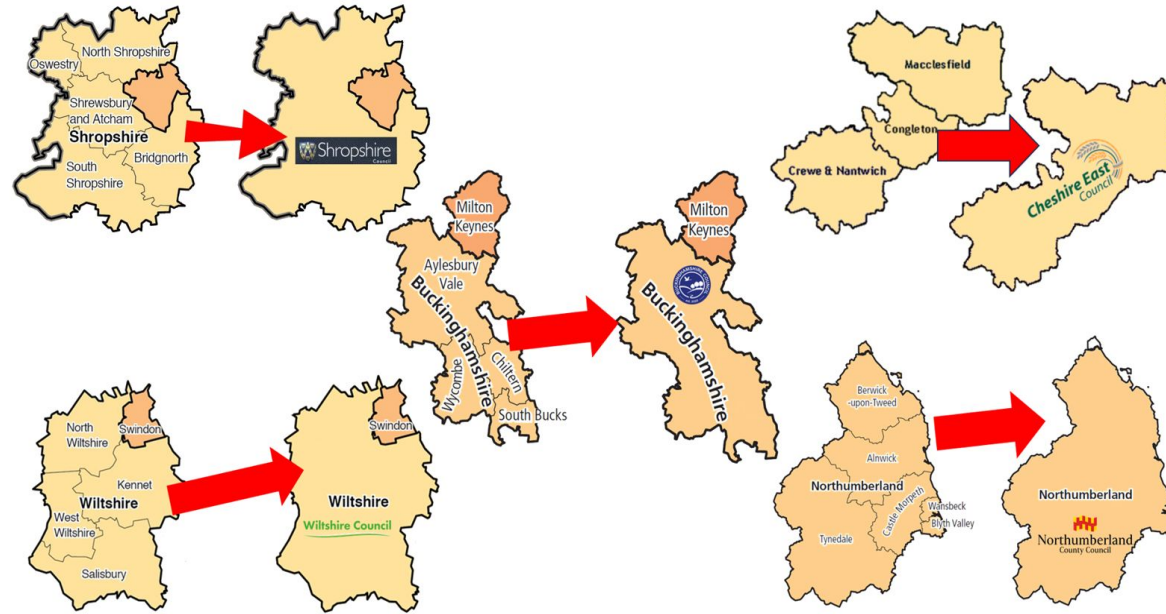
Currently; 1 County Council, 5 District Councils (No Unitaries)

- **One very large unitary (750k)**
e.g. Buckinghamshire, North Yorkshire
- **Two unitaries**
e.g. Northamptonshire, Cumbria, Cheshire
- **Cross county boundary unitaries**
e.g. Ridgeway Council (Vale, South PLUS West Berkshire)
- **Boundary Change**
e.g. Change current structures. A Great Oxford?
Unlikely.
- **No Change**
e.g. Berkshire. Turn all the districts into unitaries.
Won't happen!



Unitary conversions

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

| When did you last change your R&B system? | |
|---|-----|
| Less than 5 yrs ago | 4% |
| 5 - 10 years ago | 9% |
| 10 - 20 years ago | 19% |
| More than 20 years ago | 34% |
| Don't know / can't remember | 34% |

R&B System considerations

- **You are now a VERY LARGE Unitary Authority**
 - You were several smaller distinct authorities
 - You need to become and think like ONE BIG authority
- **Review the market**
 - Engage with potential suppliers / new unitaries
 - Find out what's available
- **Are you making the best from your current systems?**
 - Review your processes, system usage
 - Invest in the best training possible, get the best people to train existing & new people
- **Are you future-proofed for...?**
 - The future of R&B?
 - The technological future?
- **Find the best way of doing things (for an organisation your size)**
 - Automation
 - Online channels
 - Analytics

Implementation considerations

- **Hardware**

- You're a much bigger authority; more users, citizens, data
- Size & speed of servers and capability of system / database to deal with daily work / overnight processing / peak periods (e.g. annual billing)

- **Standard data migration issues**

- Data cleansing (dealing with known issues / errors on legacy data)
- Data mapping (marrying legacy data / codes / protocols with equivalents on new system)

- **The joys of merging databases (from all constituent authorities)**

- All the above....compounded!
- The number of databases needed (15 databases @ Bucks for 4 LAs)
- Standardising structures, conventions & processes
- Dealing with Duplicates

Standardising structures, conventions & processes

- **Administration Areas**

- Parishes (730 in North Yorks)
- BIDS
- Magistrate Courts

- **Local Schemes / Practices**

- Discounts
- CTR Schemes

- **Billing / Recovery**

- DD Dates (Originator references)
- Instalment dates

Dealing with Duplicates

- Addresses
- Reference Numbers (External & Internal)
- CT account
- NDR accounts
- Debtors accounts
- Property References
- Originator References
- Benefit Claims
- Landlords References
- Online account

Poll

What's your biggest concern about how reorganisation will affect local service delivery?

1. Losing sight of who needs help most
2. Delays in coordinating across teams and agencies
3. Difficulty designing targeted, high-impact interventions
4. Data silos and reduced insights into local needs
5. Other (Add it in the questions panel on the right)

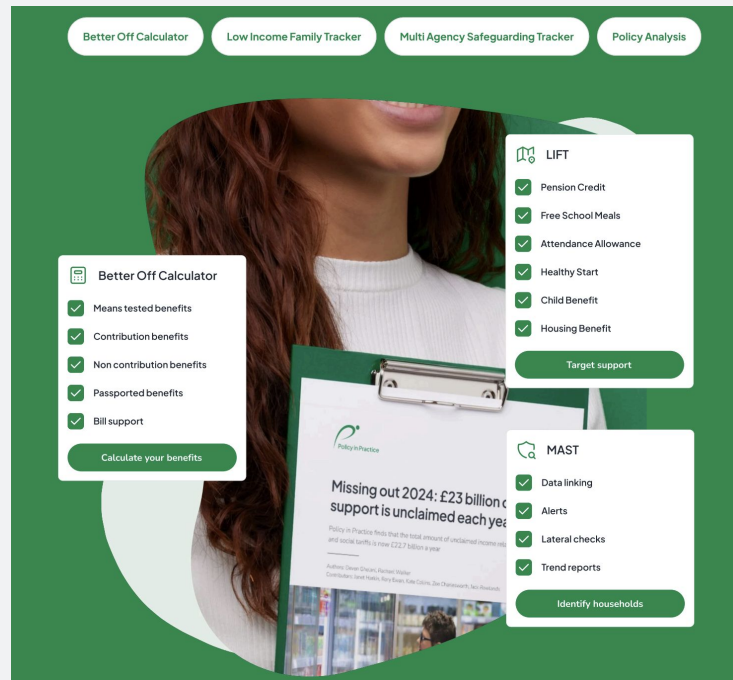
Sam Fathers

Head of Business Development
Public Sector (South and Wales)
Policy in Practice



Better Off Platform: better together

- Policy in Practice's Better Off Platform combines all our tools together (LIFT, Calculator, CTR modelling, MAST)
- Identify, engage, track and award all through one platform
- One integrated platform across departments and campaigns - making things easier for officers and residents



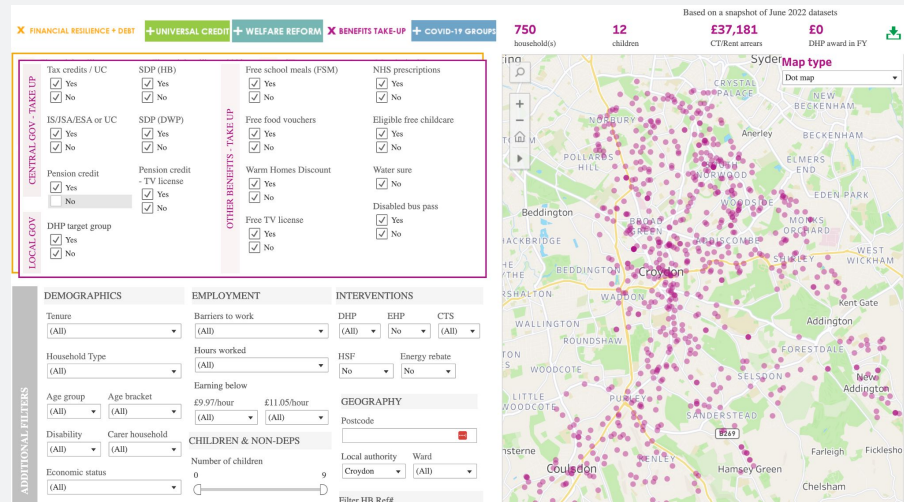
LIFT: The Low Income Family Tracker

- LIFT platform s being used by more than 1 in 3 local authorities including districts and boroughs, unitaries and county councils
- Proactively identifying vulnerability
- Easily identify households eligible for but missing out on benefits, at risk of crisis or in need of additional support
- Fully compliant with the DWP MOU and HMRC data sharing requirements



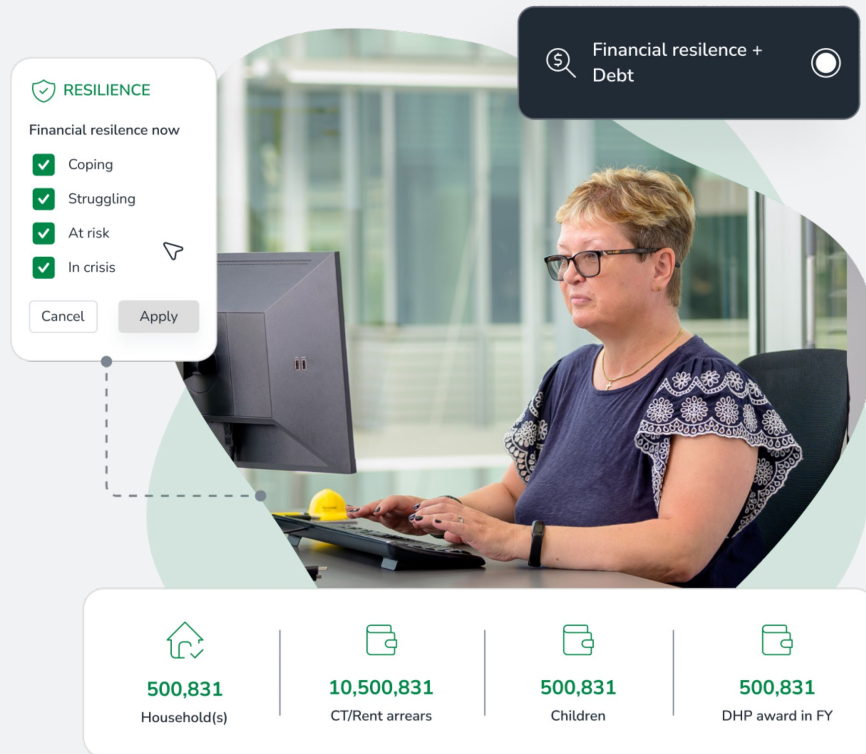
LIFT: Keeping services local through LGR

- LIFT keeps services local by showing the areas with the highest need for resource, and those not served by council services
- Easily build a localities approach based on data, demand and insights
- Combine data from multiple systems and providers seamlessly and without disruption



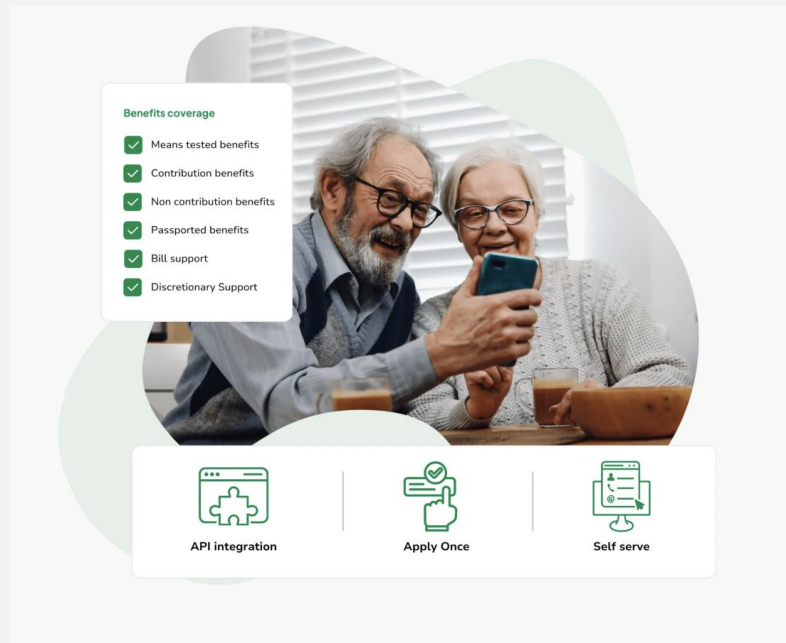
LIFT: Data insights for Combined Authorities & Counties (and Countries)

- LIFT aggregated dashboards in use across tiers of Local Government & in devolved Wales
- Ability to make informed decisions on funding and priorities from a single data source
- Makes grant applications simpler
- See data ahead of time in new councils for planning



Campaign manager: combining tools & removing effort

- Campaign Manager works through LIFT and can also allow for wider integration with the Better Off Calculator and Apply Once
- Identify households in LIFT that are eligible for different benefits or support
- Integrate with Better Off Calculator and Apply Once to target DHPs as well as Social Tariffs
- Pre-populate the Better Off Calculator with data from LIFT to save resident's time
- Campaigns enacted faster, more effectively and with less officer resource



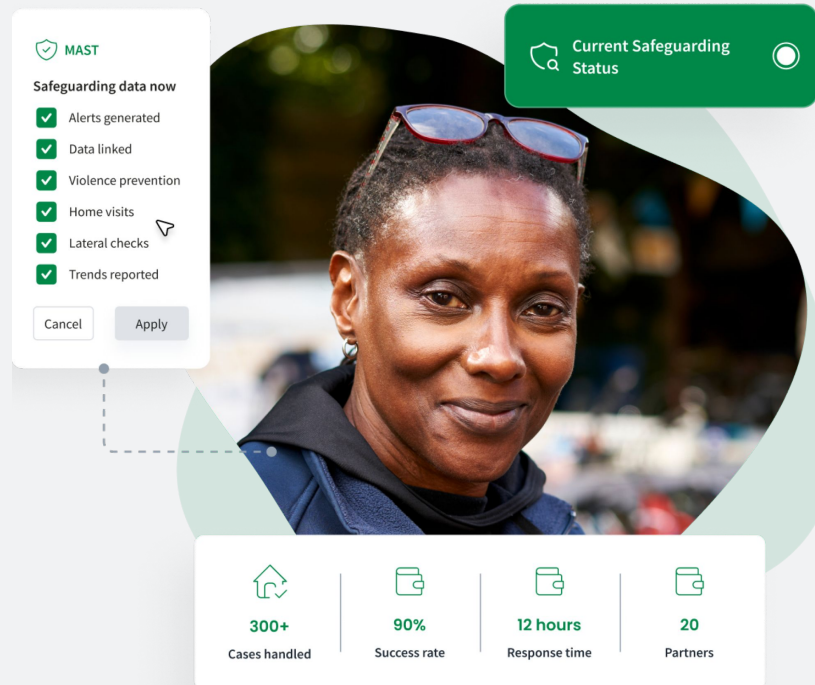
CTR: Merging schemes and measuring impact

- Our recent CTR report and fireside chat is available now through our website.
- Our team of experts have experience in comparing and combining schemes as part of previous council restructures
- Measure the cost and impact of different models across new council boundaries effortlessly
- Work across all (and multiple) data providers



MAST: Multi Agency Safeguarding Tracker

- Finally we have our Multi Agency Safeguarding Tracker - which combines safeguarding data from multiple sources
- Used to automatically alert safeguarding partners across sectors and geographies
- Identify vulnerable households earlier, and keep track of cases with automated alerts



To explore more book a
call via this QR code



Discussion and Q&A



Next steps

Take our very short survey when the webinar ends to:

- Give us feedback and ask further questions of our speakers
- Book a chat with the team

The Better Off platform is available through GCloud 14. Contact us for more information.

Register for our next webinar, Tue 3 June with Collaboration Network, “Data sharing in action: How organisations can connect silos to better support customers”

Thank you to our speakers

Jonathan Flowers, Policy in Practice

Nigel Joseph Blair, NEC

Mandy Fathers, Publica Group

Sam Fathers, Policy in Practice

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