LONDON BOROUGH USES ITS DATA TO TACKLE HOUSEHOLD POVERTY EARLY

Croydon Council has adopted an early intervention and prevention approach to helping families affected by the Government's welfare reforms. Called Gateway, the award winning programme uses tools, including a LIFT Dashboard developed in partnership with Policy in Practice, to help it identify households at risk and target tailored support to people before they reached crisis point. The approach sees the council using its own data to proactively tackle poverty and prevent homelessness.

HOMELESS ACTIVITY WAS STEADY AT 3,500 CASES A YEAR

Croydon faces significant housing challenges with rapidly rising house prices and rents, high levels of homelessness and growing pressures on social housing. Homeless activity, including prevention, has been steady at around 3,500 cases per year. The north of the borough contains wards that are amongst 10% of the most deprived in England.
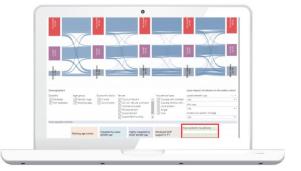
With finite resources yet growing demand for support, Croydon needed to understand the impacts of the policy changes on households, both now and in the future. Understanding the drivers of poverty, particularly in the most deprived areas, was key to creating longer-term solutions for people hit by welfare reform, a change of fortune or in need of support.

VISUALISING EXISTING DATA TO UNDERSTAND HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE

Croydon Council asked Policy in Practice to work with them to develop detailed insights from their existing household data to help proactively tackle the impact of welfare reforms. Initially Croydon used a one time Policy Impact Analysis to understand how the benefit cap affected families. As welfare reforms continued and the Homelessness Reduction Act came into law, Croydon's ambitions to do more with their data evolved so they began to use the LIFT Dashboard.

The bespoke, online dashboard that we built in partnership lets the team easily create and share insights from their data in a click and explore poverty trends over time. The redacted data sets include housing benefit and council tax data sets, Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax arrears data, as well as a DWP benefit cap scan.

Croydon can more easily identify people in danger of crisis before it hits, target support and track the resulting changes in living standards using their LIFT Dashboard. Crucially, having such easy access to insights on their low income families allows better strategic and operational activity planning.

Working with Policy in Practice, we have developed the LIFT Dashboard to help us build on our early intervention and prevention approaches enabling proactive targeting that makes a real difference for our residents going through hard times.

Julia Pitt, Interim Director of Gateway and Welfare , Croydon Council

CROYDON'S WORK MEANS 2,003 FAMILIES AVOID HOMELESSNESS

Croydon's award winning Gateway programme has helped over 2,000 families avoid homelessness through support with budgeting, benefits and employability advice. The council has shifted the balance of homeless activity to prevention, resulting in over 2,000 cases last year avoiding homelessness.

The Gateway approach has achieved costs avoidance savings of over £4 million in one year. Over 17,000 residents received budgeting advice, over 4,700 Universal Credit claimants got support with personal budgeting and / or digital skills so they can access online services, over 3,000 received DHPs, nearly 500 residents attended budgeting, employment, debt and housing workshops and 217 were helped into work.

The LIFT Dashboard has provided data that has contributed to :

- **Identifying hidden pockets of poverty.** Customers losing less than £30 per week due to the benefit cap but who also had overpayment of housing benefit, council tax or rent arrears were found. By looking at the full picture Croydon prioritised engagement with these customers to help them avoid further debt.

- **Improving on the ground operations.** Landlord Income Officers were directed to knock on the doors of people who were losing more than £100 per week.

- **Adding to available data from DWP scans.** Policy in Practice identified over 100 more people affected by the benefit cap. Within 4 weeks the team closed a third of cases by using their data smarter:
    - 40 customers weren't claiming working tax credit but were eligible
    - 15 people moved into work, 45 more were supported into better paid employment

- **Increasing childminding capacity whilst increasing financial independence.** The data showed that the biggest barrier to work was childcare, specifically for women with more than 2 children under 5. Croydon commissioned an online childminding course to train parents to be childminders. Now they don't have to go out to work and they have increased capacity for childcare services.

- **Informing Members.** Members were interested in the insights from the ward level data showing where to spend their budgets and how to help residents.

- **Pushing the Gateway approach out into the community.** The Gateway Community Connect project, established in one of the most economically disadvantaged areas of Croydon , pulls together services from the council, third sector, voluntary sector and health to target early intervention and prevention.. It features 'The Food Stop', London's first combined welfare and membership food stop, where people can get around £20 of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy and other foods each week for £3.50.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Policy in Practice works to reduce poverty by making the welfare system easier to navigate. Our analytics services help councils find relationships in data to understand the drivers of poverty. We help councils design council tax support schemes that support the most vulnerable households, now and in the future. Our award winning Benefit and Budgeting Calculator is used by over 10,000 people daily. We've promoted a data-led approach to improve the design and delivery of social policy interventions since 2013.

Contact Policy in Practice for a demo of the LIFT Dashboard on
0330 088 9242, hello@policyinpractice.co.uk or visit www.policyinpractice.co.uk

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