Policy in Practice

LIFT platform case study

Challenge

Kent County Council wanted to tackle poverty across the county by identifying and engaging with vulnerable residents they were aware of, and those they weren't. With datasets stored on separate systems, identifying those in need of support was difficult

Solution

Kent county and district councils collaboratively shared their data to get powerful insights for their poverty prevention activity

A newly created Living Standards Index allows users to track Council Tax support spend across all districts and assess local demand. They can drill down to household level to accurately target support

Impact

Better use of data leads to effective preventative poverty campaigns:

- **£1,232,898 of extra income** to Kent residents so far

- 50 current active campaigns with **25 completed in 2021-22**

- Outcomes show how **county and district councils can work collaboratively** with data to **benefit residents and reduce future costs to the council**

LGC Awards 2022 FINALIST

Kent County Council

Kent county and district councils collaborate with data to tackle poverty

Kent County Council was shortlisted in the Digital Impact category at the LGC Awards 2022. Their work collaborating with district councils using administrative data to tackle poverty was applauded by the judges, who said:

> **"Great to see joint leadership from a county and district councils on tackling poverty. A fantastic use of the Policy in Practice insights platform"**

Here's how Kent County and district councils worked together to put over £1 million and counting into the hands of financially vulnerable residents.

The challenge

Kent County Council, together with 12 district councils, supports 1.6 million residents.

A number of Kent residents were already financially vulnerable before Covid-19 and the onset of the pandemic pushed more into hardship. At the same time council budgets had come under more pressure due to extra costs and increased demand in areas such as housing.

This meant there were two core groups of residents that Kent Council was eager to identify, engage and support:

1. Vulnerable residents **already known** to the councils
2. Residents **not known** to the councils who had been affected by the restrictions on the economy or social isolation, such as the newly unemployed

Between the county and the 12 districts, all administrative data existed on separate systems, with revenues and benefits, council tax and rent arrears data stored separately. This meant that proactively identifying those who needed support across the county was a monumental task.

The solution

In a first for local government Kent County Council and district councils collaborated by sharing data insights to answer these challenges. This approach is helping councils to proactively identify people eligible for support sooner.

The collaborative approach and the remarkable results implemented by Kent are **replicable across other county and district councils**

The campaigns help to **target support across free school meals take-up, housing, and welfare benefits**

Knowing that the financial situation for residents was particularly unstable at that time, Kent county and district councils boldly chose to collaboratively share their data to get powerful cross-county insights to drive their poverty prevention activity. In practice, this involved the district councils sharing their administrative data with Policy in Practice, for use in a new Living Standards Index (LSI) built specifically for Kent.

The LSI-Kent platform allows those with upper-tier oversight to see changes at a district level and target support accordingly. Users can track Council Tax support spend across all districts, compare caseloads and see benchmarks to assess local demand. They can drill right down to household level to accurately target support.

Importantly, the project has transparency built-in so that councils can very easily benchmark with each other to identify and share best practices in a safe, collaborative way.

The impact

Better use of data leads to more effective preventative poverty campaigns. The information revealed by the council's data is now driving 50 poverty prevention campaigns at different stages of delivery, with 25 campaigns completed in 2021-22.

The results for residents, councils and local government are impressive:

- The campaigns have delivered **£1,232,898 of extra income** to Kent residents so far
- The work has shown how county and district councils can work collaboratively with data to benefit residents, and reduce future costs to the council
- The collaborative approach and the remarkable results are easily replicable across other county and district councils

The data-driven campaigns are helping to target a wide range of support to vulnerable residents across free school meal take-up, employment support, public health interventions, housing initiatives and welfare benefits.

The benefits are felt internally too. Learning between county and district is key, with bi-monthly strategic meetings in place to share best practice. Objectives are also reviewed monthly in order to align with local needs.

"The Low-Income Family Tracker was a no-brainer because we knew that what we could do with it would be far more longer term and sustainable than just something that was an immediate reaction to the pandemic."

Zena Cooke, Director of Corporate Finance, Kent County Council