

LGA Support to the Sector on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and LGA Coordination

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

An update on the programme of work on Artificial Intelligence and local government as led by the Cyber, Digital and Technology and Research and Information teams.

LGA Plan Theme: Data and digital

Recommendation(s)

That the Executive Advisory Board notes the activity being undertaken to support the secure and inclusive use of AI by Local Government and to influence central government AI policy.

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Background

1. Since early 2023, interest in Artificial Intelligence (AI) has boomed, due to the widespread availability of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT.
2. These generative AI developments have coincided with a broader political and policy conversation about the risks and opportunities in the deployment of AI. This includes the UK Government's White Paper '[A Pro-Innovation Approach to AI Regulation](#)' (the CDT team led a local government response to that, available [here](#)), and the UK [Parliament Inquiry into the Use of Large Language Models \(LLMs\)](#), to which the CDT team also led [a local government response](#).
3. There is widespread interest in the use of AI by local authorities. There is enthusiasm about AI's opportunities in addressing capacity challenges, and concerns that local government cannot be left behind in an 'AI powered future'. However, there is also consideration of the risks associated with AI and the need to manage them.
4. The results of the recent LGA survey on AI show:
 - 4.1. **AI deployment and exploration:** The survey indicated that there is a positive outlook on AI adoption within the sector, with 85% of respondents indicating they're either using AI or exploring its potential. Only 15% had not begun exploring AI capabilities. This strong interest suggests a sector receptive to innovation and eager to leverage AI.
 - 4.2. **Benefits and opportunities:** Staff productivity, service efficiency, and cost savings were the most commonly cited areas where respondents were already experiencing benefits from AI use, and where they see the biggest future potential¹. However, several councils acknowledged it is still too early to quantify the realised benefits.
 - 4.3. **Readiness:** Over half (53%) of respondents felt their council was very or fairly ready to adopt or continue to adopt AI in terms of technology (infrastructure, software, and cloud). This was followed by institutional culture (leadership and receptivity to change) at 45%, and policies and procedures (governance frameworks and risk management) at 37%. Workforce skills and expertise were identified as the biggest area of unpreparedness (72% not

¹ For more information on published cost savings, please see Swindon's [AWS case study on translation services](#) and the [development of their easy-read product](#), and regarding staff productivity - [Microsoft's case study using Barnsley of Microsoft 365 copilot](#).

very or at all ready), followed by data availability, quality, and storage (68%). The three biggest barriers to AI deployment cited were lack of funding, lack of staff skills, and lack of staff capacity.

5. The CDT team is developing an AI case study hub to showcase transferable and scalable uses of AI by Local Government. Examples include the following:

5.1. **Buckinghamshire - Microsoft365 Copilot:** Buckinghamshire has been a pioneer of adopting Microsoft copilot and a sector leader in facilitating learning between councils also at an early stage of piloting the tool. The council has been using the tool to:

- a. Transcribe and summarise calls saving call centre agents an average of 2 minutes per call equating to a 33% reduction.
- b. Support Executive Assistants who, using copilot, have reported a 20% reduction in task completion time (60-90 minutes saved daily) for activities such as creating reports and meeting minutes.
- c. Support HR, who use Copilot for sentiment analysis and job description/interview question writing, helps compare interview transcripts, and prepare job specs. This has reduced advert creation time from hours to minutes.
- d. Support Childrens Social Care: where copilot is being piloted to condense information from multiple documents into standardised education, health and care plans.

5.2 **Hertfordshire- AI road maintenance robot:** Hertfordshire has been collaborating with a technology company and the University of Liverpool to develop an innovative AI powered solution for road maintenance. Key points include:

- a. The robot uses AI to pinpoint and assess cracks, potholes and other road imperfections. It then automatically fills cracks to prevent water from seeping in and forming potholes.
- b. Despite being an early pilot, the technology holds immense potential for cost and time savings in road maintenance. Given that more than 75% of cracks become potholes within three years and the UK faces a staggering £16 billion road repair backlog, this could be impactful for the whole sector.
- c. The pilot has garnered significant media attention, [including the BBC, which is crucial for ensuring local government is recognised as a vital part of the public sector innovation ecosystem.](#)

5.3 **Kingston - Magic Notes:** Kingston Council has been using an AI powered solution, Magic Notes, to streamline the process of writing case notes and assessments for social workers, freeing up valuable time to focus on direct client care. Despite a small pilot, the results are promising with social workers

reporting a time reduction of up to 60%, and the transcripts have a 98% accuracy rating.

LGA programme of work

6. Actions taken so far include:

6.1. Support for councils to deploy AI safely and responsibly

- a. **Explainer videos.** We are developing 'AI Unpacked' videos (building on the [Cyber Unpacked](#) series), explaining complex terms and concepts related to AI using animated examples. Videos are due in July 2024.
- b. **Sector skills.** We have negotiated access for councils to a range of e-learning modules to support predictive analytics and AI via the ONS Data Science Campus, and administers these. These e-learning modules have currently been taken up by over 400 council analysts.
- c. **Data Maturity Model.** Building on the development of a refreshed local government data maturity model and self-assessment tool in 2023/24, in 2024/25 we will continue to support councils through the use of the model and an associated programme of support.
- d. **Responsible procurement.** We are a member of a working group convened by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Information Commissioners Office (ICO) to support councils on how to be compliant with data protection law and the public sector equality duty in the procurement of AI.

6.2. Influencing policy and ensuring local government is part of the national conversation

- a. **Smith Square Debate.** We organised a Smith Square Debate, chaired by the Chairman focusing on '[Risks, Rewards and Readiness](#)' of councils to deploy AI.
- b. **National engagement.** We have been meeting with Government and key regulators about local government concerns and experiences, including No.10 strategy teams, Department for Science Innovation and Technology, CDEI – now the Responsible Technology Unit.
- c. **Research institute partnerships.** We have been building partnerships with key research institutions, including supporting the Alan Turing Institute's proposal to develop a *Centre on Digital Innovation for Good Government*.
- d. **Policy responses:** We developed three responses in 2023 to the Pro Innovation Approach to AI, a Parliamentary Inquiry into Large Language Models, and a submission to the [Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into the use of AI across Government](#).

6.3. Sector leadership and peer learning.

- a. **AI Network.** We set up an AI network for council staff to learn and share notable practice and build knowledge on how to deploy AI in local government safely and responsibly. The network now has over 330 members and meets every six weeks.
- b. **Sector leadership.** We play a leading role in convening partner organisations across local government. Partners include: Socitm, Solace, the London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI) and iNetwork.

7. Future work. Pending resourcing, the 2024/25 work programme will include:

7.1. Support for councils to deploy AI safely and responsibly:

- a. Hosting a conference to facilitate market engagement between councils and quality assured suppliers and showcasing different council approaches to govern responsible use,
- b. Support to strengthen governance on digital transformation and AI – particularly in procurement.
- c. Developing an AI hub on the LGA CDT website, including a use case bank.
- d. Undertaking portfolio holder focus groups with members across the country to understand their concerns and perspectives on AI.
- e. Supporting councils as they adopt the Data Maturity Tool and the provision of a programme of associated improvement support.

7.2. Influencing Government and the national conversation. Our three key policy asks are for:

- a. A Local Government Centre for Digital Technology.
- b. A fully resourced Local Government Digital Technology Career Structure.
- c. More de-risked funding and support for councils to enable scalable innovation and centralised procurement of Digital Technology.

Implications for Wales

8. There are no additional implications for Wales in this report.

Financial Implications

9. There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Cyber, Digital and Technology programme is funded by DLUHC through a separately funded grant with their 2024/25 Grant Determination Letter having been agreed earlier this year.

Equalities implications

10. Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are factored for all sector support programmes and will continue to be considered during the development and delivery of this programme of work.