

# councillor

## Using data to improve services



**Councils collect swathes of useful information about local residents, their areas and the services they provide as part of their day-to-day work. But are they making the most of that data to improve services, develop policy or make savings?**

With decreasing budget and resources, councils will need to find innovative ways to reduce costs while maintaining service quality and meeting their statutory obligations. Data plays an important role in making informed decisions. When used effectively, data can lead to new insights that can lead to unexpected benefits.

So the LGA, in partnership with The Open Data Institute, has developed a series of free online e-learning modules to help encourage and support local government's better use of data. Designed for councillors as well as officers, the six modules describe the stages necessary to prepare, manage and make best use of the data collected on a daily basis by local authorities undertaking their business operations.

The first three modules consider the benefits of, and strategies for, being more transparent and open with data, taking on board the stages leading to publishing

in accordance with national information standards.

But probably of more interest to councillors are the last three modules, which encourage better use of data already collected. They make the case for data and draw upon a wide variety of examples and case studies where councils are already introducing innovative and efficiency saving practices through increased data use and re-use.

Module 4, 'Making your data work for you', looks at why local government is turning to data to solve problems and improve processes, some of the tools used to do it, and how success is being measured.

Among other things, it considers the difficulties of pulling data together when it is held on different IT systems and the technology available to overcome this. Some councils are beginning to use specialist software, which can work with multiple

legacy systems to integrate their data in one place. This avoids duplication of effort and of data, increasing the efficiency of processes.

Automated data integration also reduces the amount of time consumed by manually processing data from one system so that it can be used in conjunction with another, in order to check eligibility, detect fraud, provide business insights or diagnose service failure.

For example, the Camden Residents Index (CRI) collates data from 16 systems and, as a result, enables the council to reduce administration, provide a more streamlined service and detect fraud.

'Making an impact with data', the fifth module, highlights where and how exemplary work is being done, inspiring other councils to make working with data a core part of their practice.

For example, to help inform changes to long-term social work in Newcastle, data analysts worked alongside social workers to look for hypotheses to test and analyse those strategies which offer insight into how best to support families, and looked at patterns of outcomes. This enables data analysts to test what works best, and develop a 'data dashboard' for social workers to manage their caseloads.

Finally, module 6, 'Making the case for data', gives advice on clear, effective communication of the benefits from better use of data to help you deliver a pitch to secure buy-in, support, and financial help to move your ideas forward.

The LGA and the Open Data Institute have already run a series of online 'webinars' to support the first three e-learning modules, and similar sessions are being held on the last three modules in the coming months. You can register to take part in these webinars via the LGA website at [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



**For quick access to the modules**, please visit <http://lga.learndata.info/> or go to <http://about.esd.org.uk/news/elearning-modules-help-local-government-make-better-use-data> for more information