



A PLAYBOOK FOR UK COUNCILS

AI Forward: the council playbook for 2026.

How councils move from AI pilots to a programme that works across the whole organisation. Three areas to change, two ways of working, and one shared way to measure value, mapped to your senior leadership team.

For Chief Executives, CIOs, S151 Officers, Monitoring Officers and service directors

October 2026

Start with the main guide, then go to your section.

Read the main guide first: three short sections on why now, the framework and who leads it, and what it's worth. Then each leader goes to their own area for the first things to do and the metrics to track.

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Councils have the biggest AI opportunity in the public sector.

Council services are built on exactly the kind of work that AI changes: high-volume, repeated processes for large populations. Applications, assessments, referrals, reviews and correspondence. The potential is structural, not speculative.

Cut the cost of services

Every council service involves information processing: reading, summarising, routing, drafting, reviewing. AI does this faster, more accurately, and at a fraction of the cost.

5,232

hours a year,
forecast in one
council's business
case

Source: Agilisys
research

£228k

forecast gross
savings in Year 1,
same business case

Source: Agilisys
research

Get through backlogs

Statutory deadlines are being missed. EHCP backlogs, FOI deadlines, planning applications. AI clears the queue so officers focus on the cases that need human judgement.

75%

average EHCP
drafting time saved;
40+ councils signed
up

Source: Agilisys 2026

**~2
months**

from zero to a
working FOI triage
agent at Wigan
Council

Source: Wigan Council ·
GMCA 2026

Manage rising demand

About 57,000 vacancies. A £6.2bn funding gap over two years (LGA). Demand rising faster than budgets. AI is one of the few routes to closing the capacity gap without recruiting more.

93%

accuracy for one
council's AI web-chat
assistant

Source: LGA case study:
South Cambs

**10 to 15
min**

saved per call with
AI call
summarisation

Source: Agilisys
research

The savings from AI are more than efficiency gains. They are capacity that can be redirected to frontline services, schools, facilities and prevention. Every hour AI saves is an hour returned to residents.

There is so much to go after, but momentum is hard.

Almost every council is exploring AI. Almost none have turned that exploration into a programme that compounds across the organisation. The blockers are organisational more than technical.

95%

exploring, only

7%

leading

Nearly every council is doing something with AI. Almost none have the structure, leadership or coordination to make it stick across the organisation.

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

80%+

of AI projects fail by some estimates, twice the rate of other IT projects

The main causes are organisational: leaders unclear on the problem they want solved, teams chasing the technology, and too little investment in getting tools into live use.

Source: RAND 2024

41%

have a specific AI policy

38%

have a senior owner for AI

14%

have an AI ethics board

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

68%

say they are not ready on data: availability, quality and storage

Source: LGA AI survey 2024

WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK GIVES YOU

A way to organise the effort, and move faster

The framework

What to change across technology, people and services, plus two ways of working that help you go faster and safer. Each area has a named leader on your senior team.

How you'll know

Key metrics for every area, with national figures to compare against.

Your first moves

The top 3 to 5 things each leader can start with, scored on the Value Lens.

The framework and who leads it.

There are three things to change: technology, people and services. Two ways of working, the Innovation Engine and Guardrails for Growth, help you go faster and safer. Every area has one accountable leader. Find your role and follow the link to your area. In many councils one director holds several of these roles, so read every row that applies to you.

LEADER	AREA	WHAT YOU NEED TO DO	TYPICAL VALUE
Technology Foundations Led by: CIO			
CIO / Chief Digital Officer leads directly, with Head of IT, Head of Data and Enterprise Architect	Platform & Model Choices	Decide and document the council's AI stack, cloud and model choices, and get licensed tools actually used Start with	  
	Data Architecture	Get data into a platform AI can reach, with a clear position on hosting, processing location and how models use council data Start with	  
	Standards & Policies	Set technical standards for AI builds and purchases: security, testing, architecture and procurement controls Start with	 
	Integration	Replace manual copying between systems with APIs and joined-up data products Start with	  
People Empowerment Led by: Chief Executive			
Director of Transformation	Everyday AI	Put approved AI tools in every member of staff's hands, with clear boundaries and the first things to try in their role Start with	  
Director of HR / OD	Skills by Role	Build skills by role and AI type through doing and co-building, not classroom training Start with	 
	Workforce Evolution	Redesign roles, career paths and HR's own processes for AI, working with the unions Start with	  
Chief Executive	Leadership & Sponsorship	Make AI a council-wide agenda: use it visibly, own it at SLT, fund it, and back champions in every department Start with	 
Service Transformation Each service lead owns their area			

LEADER	AREA	WHAT YOU NEED TO DO	TYPICAL VALUE
Head of Customer Services	Customer Contact & Demand	Resolve contact first time, shift to self-service, and absorb AI-generated inbound Start with	   
Monitoring Officer	Legal & Governance	Meet FOI, SAR and complaint deadlines at scale, and automate redaction and committee admin Start with	   
Director of Adult Social Services	Adult Social Care	Give social workers time back (case notes, triage), then move to predicting and preventing need Start with	   
Director of Education & Inclusion reports to the DCS	Education & SEND	Hit the 20-week EHCP deadline and get ahead of SEND and school transport demand Start with	   
Director of Children's Services	Children's Social Care	Consistent, faster front-door decisions and more time for direct practice Start with	   
Director / Head of Housing	Housing	Meet Awaab's Law timescales and triage repairs, then predict failures and homelessness Start with	   
Chief Planning Officer	Planning & Growth	Automate validation and triage, handle AI-generated objections, and shift officers to judgement Start with	   
S151 Officer	Finance & Revenues	Automate finance and collection, detect fraud, and forecast rather than just report Start with	   

Innovation Engine Owner: Director of Transformation

Director of Transformation leads with the Engine team, however it's staffed	Run the Engine	Offer five ways to use the Engine, from a Prototyping Day to leading the council's Priority Challenges, with the value named up front and tested at the gate Start with	  
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Guardrails for Growth Owners: Monitoring Officer, SIRO, S151 Officer

Monitoring Officer SIRO as Also	Control	Set decision rights scaled to risk, so low-risk work goes ahead and the big calls are made once, properly Start with	  
SIRO often held by the Monitoring Officer, S151 or a Corporate Director	Visibility	Know and publish what AI the council uses, who owns it, its risk tier and the value it is delivering Start with	  
S151 Officer	Business Case & Benefits	Run one proportionate business case route and a benefits register scored on the Value Lens, with continue, change or stop gates Start with	 

The Value Lens at a glance.

The framework says what to change. The Value Lens says why it's worth it. It gives the whole council one shared language for value, and it runs through every section of this playbook: the icons show which values are in play, and the first moves in each section are scored on it.

**Cash savings**
Money that leaves the budget

**Capacity released**
Staff time put back into frontline work

**Faster service**
Residents get an answer sooner

**Demand managed**
Contact dealt with first time, or avoided

**Risk reduced**
Less harm, error or exposure

**Statutory compliance**
Legal duties and deadlines met

**Foundation established**
Something later work can reuse

FOUR PRINCIPLES

1
Name the value before you start.

2
No foundation without a first use, where you can.

3
Measure what you named, from a baseline.

4
Continue, change or stop on value at each gate.

ONE VALUE STATEMENT FOR EVERY PROJECT

"We will [do X] for [who] to deliver [values], measured by [metric], by [date], and it also establishes [foundation]."

Projects are scored 0 to 3 on each value: expected at the start, realised at each gate.

The Value Lens section has the full key, scoring and a worked example.



IN DETAIL

The Value Lens in detail.

The full value key, the four principles, the value statement, how scoring works, where the lens appears across the playbook, and a worked example.

WHY A VALUE LENS

Every AI project has to answer "what's it worth?".

The S151 officer asks it at the business case. Members ask it at scrutiny. Staff ask it when they're told to change how they work. Most councils can't yet give a straight answer: across the sector, benefits are rarely baselined or tracked after go-live.

WHAT THE LENS DOES

- Gives the whole council **one shared language for value**: seven types, each with its own icon and shape
- Speaks the **S151 officer's language**: each type maps to HM Treasury's cash-releasing and non-cash-releasing benefit categories
- Makes **foundation work visible**: you can see when a project mostly builds foundations and decide knowingly whether that's the right call
- Runs through the **whole programme**: setup, the framework, top 5s, the Innovation Engine, business cases, the AI register, guides and events

HOW IT FITS WITH THE REST

- **It scores projects.** The framework shows how far the council has come; the lens shows what each project delivers.
- **Scores where decisions are made.** Scores (0 to 3) appear where a decision about a project is made. Everywhere else, icons show which values are in play.
- **It frames the business case.** The lens names and tracks the value; Business Case & Benefits (Guardrails for Growth) does the sums.

THE VALUE KEY

Seven types of value.

Each type has a colour and a shape, so the key still works in greyscale print and for colour-blind readers. The Treasury mapping tells the S151 officer which benefits release cash and which don't.



Cash savings

Circle

Cash-releasing

Money that leaves the budget: lower spend on agency staff, contracts, placements, print or postage.

Measured by: £ removed from a budget line, agreed with finance.



Capacity released

Rounded square

Non-cash-releasing

Staff time freed up and put back into frontline work, backlogs or new demand. It only becomes cash if posts or spend actually go.

Measured by: hours per case or task, and where the freed time went.



Faster service

Diamond

Non-cash-releasing · quantifiable

Residents and businesses get an answer, decision or service sooner.

Measured by: end-to-end time, such as request to decision or first contact to resolution.



Demand managed

Down triangle

Cash or non-cash

Contact, requests or cases that are dealt with at first touch, avoided, or stopped from escalating. That includes AI-written inbound.

Measured by: contacts deflected, repeat contact avoided, escalations prevented. Counts as cash only if the avoided demand takes out cost.



Risk reduced

Shield

Non-cash-releasing · qualitative or quantifiable

Harm, error or exposure that becomes less likely: safeguarding flags missed, data breaches, fraud, poor decisions.

Measured by: incidents, error rates, audit findings, risk register scores.



Statutory compliance

Hexagon

Non-cash-releasing · avoids sanction

The council meets a legal duty or deadline it is missing or at risk of missing: CQC, SEND 20 weeks, Awaab's Law, FOI 20 working days.

Measured by: % within the statutory timescale, inspection findings, ombudsman and ICO decisions.



Foundation established · Dashed square **Enabling · no direct benefit on its own**

A data platform, policy, skill or tool that later work can reuse. It is scored like any other value, so it shows up in every expected-value table. That lets a council see when a project is scoring *only* on foundations and decide whether that's acceptable. Sometimes it is.

Measured by: whether the foundation is in place, and how many later uses reuse it.

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FOUR PRINCIPLES

How councils use the lens.

1

Name the value before you start

Every project, prototype or piece of foundation work names the value types it is for, using the value statement. No statement, no start.

2

No foundation without a first use

Where you can, scope foundations through the first use that needs them. Not "build a data lake", but "bring SEND data into one view so caseworkers can see plans at risk of breach, as the first use of the data platform". Where a project is foundation-only, the scores make that visible, and the council chooses.

3

Measure what you named

The values you name set the measures. Take a baseline before go-live. If you can't measure a value yet, say so, and revisit it at the gate.

4

Continue, change or stop on value

At each gate, compare the value realised with the value expected, then decide. Stopping something that isn't delivering is a good outcome, not a failure.

One sentence before anything starts.

It is the same template at Innovation Engine intake, in the business case and on the AI register, so a project is described the same way from idea to benefits review.

We will **do X** for **who** to deliver **values**, measured by **metric**, by **date**, and it also establishes **foundation**.

Do X · for who

The use, written in the service's own words, for a named team or resident group.

Values · metric · date

The main value types from the key, each with the measure and date it will be judged on.

Establishes

The foundation it leaves behind for reuse. Leave this out if there isn't one.

SCORES

0 to 3, expected versus realised, for projects only.

Scores are judgement calls, so the scale is short and easy to defend honestly with members and auditors. The **expected** score is set when the value statement is written. The **realised** score is set at each gate against the named measure.

EXPECTED (SET AT THE START)

0

None. Not a reason to do this.

1

Some. A side benefit, tracked lightly.

2

Strong. A main reason to do it, with a baseline and a measure.

3

Primary. *The* reason. The go/no-go measure at the gate.

REALISED (SET AT EACH GATE)

0

Not seen yet, or not measurable.

1

Partly. Some movement, well short of the target.

2

Mostly. Close to the target, or met in part of the service.

3

Met. The target has been met or beaten on the named measure.

A gap between expected and realised is a prompt for a continue, change or stop conversation.

WORKED EXAMPLE · EDUCATION & SEND ILLUSTRATIVE

From "build a SEND data lake" to a first use with value.

This is an illustrative council, not real data. It shows the lens applied from idea to gate. Only the national figure is sourced.

WITHOUT THE LENS

"Build a data lake for education and SEND data."

- No named user, so no one owns adoption
- The S151 officer asks "what for?", and there's no measure
- Twelve months of build before anyone benefits

WITH THE LENS: VALUE STATEMENT

We will bring EHCP casework, partner advice and attendance data into one queryable view that flags plans at risk of breaching 20 weeks for the SEND casework team and Head of SEND to deliver  statutory compliance and  capacity released, measured by % of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks, by [date], and it also establishes  the council's first governed education data platform and a reusable data sharing agreement with schools.

EXPECTED VERSUS REALISED AT THE 6-MONTH GATE

VALUE	EXPECTED	MEASURE (BASELINE BEFORE GO-LIVE)	REALISED
 Statutory compliance		% of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks. National: 46.4% in 2024  . Council baseline: [x]%	
 Capacity released		Caseworker hours per plan spent chasing and collating partner advice	
 Faster service		Median weeks from request to final plan	
 Risk reduced		Tribunal appeals registered on timeliness grounds	

VALUE	EXPECTED	MEASURE (BASELINE BEFORE GO-LIVE)	REALISED
£ Cash savings		Indirect: better high-needs placement forecasting. It becomes cash only if placement decisions change.	
 Foundation established		Governed education data platform live, with a schools data sharing agreement signed. Later uses built on it: tracked	
 Demand managed		Not a reason for this use. It would come from a later early identification use on the same platform.	n/a

Continue

Value is on track. Scale to all casework teams.

Change

Compliance is moving (3 expected to 2 realised), but capacity lags (2 to 1): caseworkers still chase advice by hand. Add automated partner chasing, then re-gate in 3 months. [Decision](#)

Stop

No movement on the primary measure. Close it, keep the data sharing agreement, and record what was learned.

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UP NEXT

Technology, people and services in detail.

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IN DETAIL

Technology, people and services in detail.

One section per area, each led by one person. Go to your area, start with your top 3 to 5, and track progress with the key metrics.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology Foundations.

Get your technology estate AI-ready

Owner: CIO



Every AI project a council runs sits on choices about technology: which productivity suite, which cloud, which AI models, where data is held and processed, and how systems share it.

In most councils those choices are made by default, or project by project, and nobody has written them down. Microsoft is the default for most councils, and that is a reasonable place to start.

What matters is that the council decides and documents its position, knows when it would go beyond it, and can show IG, members and auditors why.

Foundations are built through first uses, alongside AI work: a data platform earns its place by answering a real service question, and an integration by removing real re-keying.

83%

of councils using or exploring AI are using generative AI, but only 36% report realised productivity benefits

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

68%

of councils say they are not ready on data (availability, quality and storage) for AI

Source: LGA AI survey 2024

2

clouds behind government's own AI tools for councils: MHCLG's Extract is built on Google's Gemini, and i.AI's Minute runs on AWS. Even government mixes clouds

Source: Google 2025 · NDX catalogue

WHAT THIS COVERS

Platform & Model Choices →

Decide and document your stack, cloud and models: Microsoft is the default for most councils, so know when and how to go beyond it

Data Architecture →

Where your data lives, where AI processes it, and whether AI can reach it safely

Standards & Policies →

The technical standards every AI build and purchase has to meet

Integration →

How do your systems talk to each other?

MATURITY LEVELS, INFRASTRUCTURE READINESS

Foundational

Structured

Advanced

Leading

Platform & Model Choices

Typical value   

Decide and document your stack, cloud and models: Microsoft is the default for most councils, so know when and how to go beyond it

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Check which AI and data licences you hold and what's switched on, then reclaim or reassign the idle ones	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Finds money and tools you already have before you buy more
2. Roll Microsoft 365 Copilot out to one willing team, with usage and time saved tracked from day one	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Proves value on your own work before buying at scale
3. Write a one-page AI stack decision record: productivity suite, cloud platform(s), and which AI models are approved for which classes of data	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Gives IG, procurement, members and suppliers one answer to point to
4. List the AI tools and models staff and suppliers already use, including AI features switched on inside existing systems	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	You can't set a position without knowing what's already in use

KEY METRICS

 83%	of councils using or exploring AI are using generative AI, but only 36% report realised staff productivity benefits LGA AI survey 2025
 12 to 26 min	a day saved per user in central government Microsoft 365 Copilot trials (26 min self-reported across government; about an hour a week at HMRC). DBT did not find evidence that time savings improved productivity GDS 2025 HMRC 2026 DBT 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	% of AI and data licences actively used versus purchased across the council estate
 2	clouds behind government’s own AI tools for councils: MHCLG’s Extract is built on Google’s Gemini, and i.AI’s Minute runs on AWS Google 2025 NDX catalogue

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Data Architecture

Typical value   

Where your data lives, where AI processes it, and whether AI can reach it safely

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven’t already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Decide and document the council’s data position for AI: UK hosting and processing location, in-tenancy versus external API by data class, and whether suppliers’ models may train on or retain council data	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	IG signs it off once, so projects stop reopening the same questions
2. Agree one DPIA approach for AI with your Data Protection Officer: a template and screening questions every AI project reuses, drawing on the MHCLG standard assessment templates	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	UK GDPR requires DPIAs for high-risk processing; one approach stops every project starting from scratch

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
3. Check the AI terms of the suppliers you already use for processing location, retention and training use, starting with your productivity suite and largest line-of-business systems	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	AI features are arriving through updates to systems you already own
4. Via a first use: map the data behind your first AI use case: which systems hold it, who owns it, and how good it is	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Starts the data map where it pays back first

KEY METRICS

 68%	of councils say they are not ready on data (availability, quality and storage) for AI LGA AI survey 2024
 UK	in-country processing is now offered by several major AI providers for some services; verify per product and model, as dates change
 10	local government case studies in ODI research found inconsistent identifiers, scarce metadata and limited API access, so data readiness depends on the use case ODI & Nortal 2025
 4+	disconnected property systems at one council, where “the holy grail” is a single property view Agilisys research

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Standards & Policies

Typical value  

The technical standards every AI build and purchase has to meet

The AI usage policy for staff now lives in [Control](#), and the record of every AI tool in use (the agent directory) in [Visibility](#). This section covers the technical standards those rely on.

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Put a quick AI check into buying now: no AI purchase or switch-on without a security review and DPIA, using the LGA AI Procurement Guide	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Stops new risk arriving while fuller standards are written
2. List the AI tools each department has bought or plans to buy, and stop duplicates before the next renewal	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Duplicate tools are a quick cash saving and a hidden risk
3. Ask the suppliers of your core systems which AI features are on or coming, and decide before staff get them	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	AI arrives through supplier updates that nobody has checked
4. Test the next AI tool due to go live: accuracy on a sample of your own data, how it fails, and who checks the output	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	One real test shows what a proportionate standard needs
5. Add standard AI clauses to the next contract renewal: data use, processing location, audit and exit	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Renewal is when you have the most leverage

KEY METRICS

 68%	of councils using or exploring AI pay external suppliers for AI tools, or are procuring them LGA AI survey 2025
 16%	of councils use none of the listed measures to manage AI risk LGA AI survey 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	% of AI purchases in the last year that had a security review and DPIA before contract
 YOUR BASELINE	Duplicate AI tools bought for the same job across departments

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Integration

Typical value   

How do your systems talk to each other?

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Count the staff hours spent re-keying between systems in one high-volume service, and rank the transfers by cost	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Puts a number on the problem, so the first fix is the right one
2. Remove one re-keying task in one team with an approved automation, such as Power Automate, while the API route is explored	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Gives staff time back this quarter, without waiting for suppliers
3. List API access, costs and restrictions for systems with contracts renewing in the next 12 months	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Gives you time to negotiate access before you sign again
4. Check which property systems already hold UPRN, and fill the gaps for one service, such as repairs	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	The common identifier makes every later join cheaper

KEY METRICS

 7+	data sources for housing at one council, with 4+ disconnected property systems Agilisys research
 10	local government case studies in ODI research reported limited API access and inconsistent identifiers across their systems ODI & Nortal 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	Staff hours a week spent re-keying data between systems
 YOUR BASELINE	% of core line-of-business systems with documented, usable APIs

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PEOPLE

People Empowerment.

AI in every person's working day: learned by doing, backed from the top

Owner: Chief Exec



AI changes a council one working day at a time. The biggest gains come when ordinary staff have approved tools, know what's allowed, and use AI in their own work every day, not when a few specialists run projects on everyone else's behalf.

Many staff are already experimenting, often with tools the council hasn't approved.

This area brings that use into the open and makes it safe: leaders who use AI themselves and back it visibly, approved tools and clear boundaries for everyone, skills that grow by role through doing and co-building, and roles that change with the unions at the table.

People capability grows inside everyday use and delivery.

36%

of English councils using or exploring AI report realised staff productivity benefits so far

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

71%

of UK employees have used AI tools at work that their employer hasn't approved (survey of 2,003 staff, incl. 500+ public sector)

Source: Microsoft UK 2025

12 to 26 min

a day saved per user in UK government Microsoft 365 Copilot trials, mostly self-reported; one department (DBT) did not find evidence that time savings improved productivity

Source: GDS 2025 · DBT 2025

WHAT THIS COVERS

Everyday AI →

Approved tools, access for everyone, and licence to experiment inside locked-down risks

Skills by Role →

A progression by role and AI type: Ask, Capture, Assist, Automate, Build

Workforce Evolution →

New roles, career paths, and the recruitment edge

Leadership & Sponsorship →

Leaders who use AI themselves, sponsor it visibly and give champions a mandate

MATURITY LEVELS, ORGANISATIONAL ADOPTION

Foundational

Structured

Advanced

Leading

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Everyday AI

Typical value   

Approved tools, access for everyone, and licence to experiment inside locked-down risks

Policy wording and approval rules sit in [Control](#); tool and platform choices in [Platform & Model Choices](#). Improvements staff spot go to the [Innovation Engine](#).

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Get approved AI tools into staff hands: know which licences you hold and who has them, grant access, give each main role group its first things to try, and publish the approved tools list	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Licences already paid for start earning, and staff get a safe alternative to shadow AI
2. Run show-how on real work with one willing team using Microsoft 365 Copilot or your approved assistant, with usage and time saved tracked from day one	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Proves value on real work before rolling out wider

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
3. Ask staff which unapproved AI tools they use and why, with no blame, then offer an approved route for the three most common needs	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Shows which real needs shadow AI is meeting
4. Pilot AI access for one frontline or shift team without a laptop, through mobile or shared devices	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Stops a digital divide opening up inside your workforce

KEY METRICS

 71%	of UK employees have used AI tools at work that their employer hasn't approved; 51% do so every week (survey of 2,003 employees, incl. 500+ public sector) Microsoft UK 2025
 26 min	a day saved per user, self-reported, in the cross-government Microsoft 365 Copilot experiment (about 20,000 licences, late 2024) GDS 2025
 12 to 19 min	a day in departmental evaluations (HMRC about an hour a week; DWP 19 min a day). DBT did not find evidence that time savings improved productivity, so treat all figures as conservative ranges HMRC 2026 DWP 2026 DBT 2025
 2 to 4 hrs	a week saved per user with Microsoft Copilot at Somerset Council LGA case study: Somerset

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[Next: Skills by Role →](#)

Skills by Role

Typical value  

A progression by role and AI type: Ask, Capture, Assist, Automate, Build

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Run one co-design session on a real pain point with frontline staff, including at least one known sceptic	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Builds skills by doing, and turns sceptics into champions
2. Agree the ladder for two or three main role groups, with first things to try at Ask and Capture for each	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Shows each person their next step, not the whole field
3. Brief the managers in one directorate to coach their teams up the first two rungs, using a short slot in team meetings	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Managers make learning happen in the flow of work
4. Run a short staff pulse survey on AI use by role group, to set a baseline for the ladder	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	You can't plan skills without knowing where people start

THE AI SKILLS LADDER

Five types of AI use: **Ask** a general assistant to learn, explore and draft · **Capture** meetings as notes, minutes and actions · **Assist** with AI inside documents, spreadsheets, email and meetings · **Automate** personal routines such as email, calendar and simple flows · **Build** agents and apps in co-design projects. Most staff start at Ask and Capture. Not every role needs to reach Build.

Summary: the full AI Skills Ladder is a toolkit asset

ROLE TYPE	ASK	CAPTURE	ASSIST	AUTOMATE	BUILD
Frontline practitioner	Explain a policy or procedure in plain English	Record a visit (with consent) and draft the case note	Tidy and summarise a case record	Commissions: spots a repetitive task and brings it to the Innovation Engine	Co-design a tool in a prototyping session
Case or admin officer	Draft a reply to a complex enquiry	Minutes and actions from panels and case meetings	Summarise a long email thread or document	Sort and file routine emails	to

ROLE TYPE	ASK	CAPTURE	ASSIST	AUTOMATE	BUILD
Team manager	Prepare for a difficult conversation	Team meeting actions and follow-ups	Draft reports; summarise team performance data	A weekly status digest	Sponsor and test a team use case
Specialist or analyst	Explore a data or policy question	to	Analyse spreadsheet data; draft formulas	Data refresh and exception alerts	Build and test agents with the Innovation Engine
Senior leader	Test options for a strategy paper	SLT and board actions	Brief from long reports	Commissions: backs automation of high-volume work and owns the benefit	Set the value and remove blockers (sponsor, not build)
Elected member	Understand a report or policy before a meeting	to	Summarise casework correspondence	Scrutinises how automated decisions that affect residents are reviewed (see Visibility)	Scrutinises AI use and value through committee

Tools, access and the rules staff work within sit in [Everyday AI](#). Build-level co-design runs through the [Innovation Engine](#).

KEY METRICS

 36%	of English councils using or exploring AI report realised staff productivity benefits LGA AI survey 2025
 20+	frontline staff scoped, designed and tested one council's social care assessment tool Agilisys research
 ~200	social workers at one council using the conversation-to-assessment tool, with no standalone AI training budget Agilisys research
 YOUR BASELINE	% of staff at each rung of the ladder, by role group

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[Next: Workforce Evolution →](#)

Workforce Evolution

Typical value   

New roles, career paths, and the recruitment edge

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Assess how AI changes the roles in your first use case's service, baseline their time before go-live, and agree with the team how released time will be used	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Staff help redesign their work when they know what it means for them
2. Brief trade union representatives on current and planned AI use, and invite them to shape how AI changes are consulted on	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Unions engaged early help shape safeguards and make change stick
3. Map your three hardest-to-fill roles against the parts of the work AI could absorb	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Targets AI where recruitment alone won't close the gap
4. Try AI on HR policy queries: an assistant that answers staff questions from your published HR policies, with HR checking a sample of answers	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	HR leads by example on its own high-volume work

KEY METRICS

 ~57,000	vacancies across local government (about 9% of posts)	LGA workforce data 2025
 £6.2bn	council funding gap forecast across 2025/26 and 2026/27	LGA budget submission 2024
 ~6,000	assessments a year across ~200 social workers at one council, each previously needing 2 to 3 hours of manual write-up	Agilisys research
 95/100	CQC score for one council's adult social care, with digital and AI innovation featured in the report	Agilisys research

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Leadership & Sponsorship

Typical value  

Leaders who use AI themselves, sponsor it visibly and give champions a mandate

The AI Working Group’s review and approval role now sits in [Control](#). This section covers sponsorship and champions; Control covers the decisions.

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven’t already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

FIRST MOVE	EXPECTED VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Name one accountable senior owner for AI at SLT, backed by a cross-directorate oversight group that meets monthly (see Control for what the group decides)	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Without a named owner, pilots run on goodwill and stall
2. Run a 30-day “use it yourself” challenge for SLT: each member uses an approved AI tool on a real briefing or report, then shares what happened	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Leaders who use AI give everyone else permission to try
3. Nominate champions in two or three willing directorates, with protected time agreed with their managers in writing	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Champions carry adoption locally and bring ideas back up
4. Agree a first AI budget line with the S151 Officer, tied to one or two first use cases with value statements	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	A small, owned budget turns scattered pilots into a programme

KEY METRICS

 38%	of councils have a Senior Responsible Owner for AI	LGA AI survey 2025
 8 to 10	AI use-case proposals put forward by one council to its combined authority, the only council to come forward with ideas	Agilisys research
 YOUR BASELINE	% of SLT members using an approved AI tool in their own work each week	

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SERVICES

Service Transformation.

Deploy AI where it matters most, starting with the demand every council faces

Owner: Each service lead, see [who leads what](#)



This is where AI delivers outcomes residents and staff can see. The order is deliberate: it starts with the demand every council faces.

Customer contact, complaints, FOIs and SARs land on districts, counties and unitaries alike, and residents’ own AI tools are making that demand longer and larger.

Then come the statutory people services, adults, SEND and children’s, followed by housing, planning and finance. Each service progresses on its own: a council can be Advanced in FOI and Foundational in Housing, and that’s expected.

Every service starts with a Top 5: the uses with the best and fastest return, each scored for expected value on the Value Lens.

+40%

FOI complaints to the ICO in 2025/26 (10,713, up from 7,639), as AI makes requests cheaper to write
Source: ICO 2026

75%

average EHCP drafting time saved with an AI drafting agent that 40+ councils have signed up to
Source: Agilisys 2026

5,232

hours a year forecast to be saved by nine automations across adult social care and resident services at one council
Source: Agilisys research

WHAT THIS COVERS

Customer Contact & Demand →

Contact centre, self-service, complaints, and the rise of AI-generated inbound

Legal & Governance →

FOI, SARs, complaints, legal services and committee administration

Adult Social Care →

Assessments, safeguarding, care management, reablement

Education & SEND →

EHCPs, SEND casework, school transport, admissions, attendance

Children’s Social Care →

Front door and MASH, child protection, looked-after children, early help

Housing →

Repairs, damp and mould, allocations, homelessness, tenancy management

Planning & Growth →

Development management, objections, building control, economic development

Finance & Revenues →

Finance, council tax and benefits, procurement, counter-fraud

MATURITY LEVELS, DEPLOYMENT JOURNEY

- Foundational
- Structured
- Advanced
- Leading

Customer Contact & Demand

Typical value    

Contact centre, self-service, complaints, and the rise of AI-generated inbound

AI-generated inbound also lands as FOIs, SARs and legal letters (see [Legal & Governance](#)) and as planning objections (see [Planning & Growth](#)). Build the triage, then summarise, then draft to review pattern once and reuse it.

Complaint themes feed service improvement across services. Repairs and damp and mould complaints link directly to [Housing](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. Call summarisation and after-call notes written for the agent to check, co-designed with the staff who do the work	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency
2. Self-service assistant for routine enquiries, with hand-off to a person	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency (accessibility duties under the Equality Act 2010 still apply)
3. Complaints triage and categorisation including summaries of long AI-written complaints, with drafts for review	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Stage 1 in 10 working days, Stage 2 in 20
4. Email, letter, webchat and messaging triage that routes each contact to the right team first time, with drafted replies for officer review so written responses are consistent	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency
5. Demand intelligence from call, correspondence and complaint themes, reported to service directors	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency

KEY METRICS

 83%	of complaints the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigated in detail were upheld in 2024-25 LGSCO 2025
 27%	of incoming calls are routine queries South Cambridgeshire DC's AI assistant could handle, with 86 to 90% resident approval LGA case study: South Cambs
 10 to 15 min	saved per call on note-writing with AI call summarisation Agilisys research
 19 to 27 pages	for an AI-assisted complaint that would once have been one side of A4; Hertfordshire CC has received complaints of up to 99 pages BBC 2026 LDRS 2026

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[Next: Legal & Governance →](#)

Legal & Governance

Typical value    

FOI, SARs, complaints, legal services and committee administration

The front door sees the same AI-generated inbound first: see [Customer Contact & Demand](#). For who approves AI use on requests and redaction, see [Control](#)

The ICO published guidance on AI-generated FOI requests in May 2026: they are still valid requests, and the usual cost limit (s12) and vexatious (s14) provisions apply

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. FOI and EIR triage and draft responses with officer review of every response	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	FOI: respond within 20 working days (FOIA 2000 s10); EIR: 20 working days
2. SAR redaction of personal data across case files, checked by an officer	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	SAR: respond within one month, extendable by two (UK GDPR Art 12(3))
3. Minutes and decision summaries drafted from recordings for the clerk to verify	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Access-to-information rules for minutes and decision records (Local Government Act 1972; 2012 Executive Arrangements Regulations)
4. Proactive publication of the information people ask for most	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Publication scheme duty (FOIA 2000 s19)

KEY METRICS

 +40%	FOI complaints to the ICO in 2025/26: 10,713, up from 7,639 ICO 2026
 ~2,000	FOI requests to Lincolnshire County Council in 2025/26, up 18% on the year Lincolnshire Online 2026
 ~2x	year-on-year growth in Subject Access Requests (71 in the first two months of 2026), each needing 40+ hours of manual redaction Agilisys research

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[Next: Adult Social Care →](#)

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Adult Social Care

Typical value    

Assessments, safeguarding, care management, reablement

Transitions: young people moving into adult services share a boundary with [Children's Social Care](#) and [Education & SEND](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. Conversation-to-assessment and AI case notes with consent, checked and signed off by the social worker	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Care Act 2014 assessment duty (s9); CQC local authority assessment
2. Intelligent automation of repeatable back-office tasks across care and resident services	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency
3. Front-door virtual assistant for information and advice, built with practitioners and residents	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Information and advice duty (Care Act 2014 s4)
4. Referral triage and prioritisation so urgent cases reach a worker first	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Safeguarding enquiries (Care Act 2014 s42)
5. Case file auditing to check recording quality and gather CQC evidence	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	CQC assessment of local authorities (Health and Care Act 2022)

KEY METRICS

£	£23.5bn	net council spending on adult social care in England in 2023/24, the biggest area after education	MHCLG outturn 2023-24
🕒	2 to 3 hrs	of typing per assessment before conversation-to-assessment, across ~6,000 assessments a year and ~200 social workers	Agilisys research
🕒	5,232 hrs	a year forecast to be saved by nine intelligent automations across adult social care and resident services (business case)	Agilisys research
£	£228k	gross cash savings forecast in Year 1 from the same automation business case, breaking even at 16 months	Agilisys research

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[Next: Education & SEND →](#)

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Education & SEND

Typical value    

EHCPs, SEND casework, school transport, admissions, attendance

Shared boundary: children known to social care and preparing-for-adulthood transitions connect to [Children's Social Care](#) and [Adult Social Care](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. AI-assisted EHCP drafting from multi-agency advice, checked by the caseworker	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	20-week EHCP timescale (SEND Regulations 2014)
2. Transport eligibility checks against the council's policy	£ ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Home-to-school travel duties (Education Act 1996 s508B)

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
3. Annual review preparation summarising reports and drafting amendments	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	EHCP review at least every 12 months (Children and Families Act 2014 s44)
4. Tribunal bundle compilation and analysis of appeal grounds	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	SEND Tribunal response deadlines
5. Plain-English plan summaries for parents and young people	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency

KEY METRICS

 46.4%	of new EHCPs issued within the statutory 20 weeks in 2024 (excluding exceptions), down from 50.3% in 2023 DfE EHCP stats 2025
 ~£2bn	forecast council spend on SEND home-to-school transport in 2025/26, around £8,900 per child a year LGA/Isos 2025
 75%	average EHCP drafting time saved with an AI drafting agent that 40+ councils have signed up to Agilisys 2026
 YOUR BASELINE	Time saved per EHCP annual review and per transport eligibility decision

Children's Social Care

Typical value    

Front door and MASH, child protection, looked-after children, early help

Human review: in children's social care AI drafts, summarises and flags, it never decides. Oversight, impact assessment and human review rules are set out in [Control](#)

SARs: council-wide SAR handling and redaction are covered in [Legal & Governance](#); this section covers children's files

Transitions and SEND: care leavers moving to adult services link to [Adult Social Care](#); EHCPs and SEND casework sit in [Education & SEND](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens. A qualified practitioner reviews every output.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. AI-assisted recording of visits and statutory meetings (child protection conferences, strategy discussions, LAC reviews), drafted for the social worker to check	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Working Together 2023: initial child protection conference within 15 working days of the strategy discussion; timely case recording
2. SAR redaction for children's files , AI proposes redactions, a trained officer approves every one	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	UK GDPR Art 12: respond within one month (extendable by two for complex requests)
3. Family network mapping , eco-maps and genograms drawn from case records to show who is around the child	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency and practice quality
4. Chronology builder across case notes, email and partner records, checked by the allocated worker	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Working Together 2023: assessment within 45 working days of referral
5. Front door and MASH contact summaries , contacts summarised and history surfaced to support (not make) the threshold decision	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Working Together 2023: decision on a referral within one working day

KEY METRICS

£	£15.5bn	planned council spend on children’s social care in 2025-26; looked-after children account for almost three-quarters of the real-terms increase MHCLG budget 2025-26
▼	633,000	referrals to children’s social care in England, year ending March 2025 DfE Children in need 2025
stb	71 SARs	in the first two months of 2026, doubling year on year, 40+ hours of manual redaction each Agilisys research
🕒	19,200 hrs	a year spent in group supervision across children’s services, no tools to capture themes across sessions Agilisys research

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Housing

Typical value stb ✓ ▼ ⚡

Repairs, damp and mould, allocations, homelessness, tenancy management

Resident contact: repairs and complaints calls through the contact centre and digital channels are covered in [Customer Contact & Demand](#)

Data foundations: joining repairs, asset and tenancy systems shares a boundary with [Integration & Interoperability](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. Damp, mould and disrepair call capture, AI summarises calls into a structured record with the fields Awaab’s Law needs, checked by the call handler	stb ● ● ● 🕒 ● ● ● ✓ ● ● ●	Awaab's Law: investigate within 10 working days, emergency hazards within 24 hours
2. Repairs triage by hazard, urgency and trade from reports and photos, with a person confirming emergency and significant hazards	⚡ ● ● ● stb ● ● ● 🕒 ● ● ●	Awaab's Law for hazards; otherwise none: efficiency

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
3. Voice agent to book and confirm access appointments for gas safety checks, surveys and repairs, handing to a person when a tenant needs help	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998: annual safety check
4. Housing complaint categorisation and draft responses reviewed by the complaint handler	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (statutory from April 2024)
5. Visit and homelessness assessment notes, conversations transcribed and drafted into case notes for officer review	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: 56-day prevention and relief duties

KEY METRICS

 24 hrs / 10 days	Awaab's Law: emergency hazards made safe within 24 hours; significant damp and mould investigated within 10 working days, for social landlords from October 2025, with more hazards phased in from 2026 MHCLG Awaab's Law guidance
 3x+	rise in Housing Ombudsman determinations, from 2,138 in 2019-20 to 7,082 in 2024-25 Housing Ombudsman 2025
 1,000+	homes where the council cannot get access for gas safety checks, surveys or repairs, out of 21,500 council homes Agilisys research
 10 to 15 min	of note-writing saved per damp and mould call with AI call summarisation, already live Agilisys research

Planning & Growth

Typical value    

Development management, objections, building control, economic development

Free national tools: MHCLG’s Local AI and Digital Planning programmes are making document extraction and consultation analysis a commodity. Many councils will adopt these free tools rather than buy or build, that is a sensible choice. Check what is available before starting any use below

AI-generated inbound: the council-wide response to AI-written complaints, FOIs and objections is covered in [Customer Contact & Demand](#)

Data foundations: access to planning system data and the mirror pattern share a boundary with [Integration & Interoperability](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven’t already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. Planning document extraction , conservation areas, Article 4 directions and TPOs turned into structured data, using the free MHCLG Extract tool	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	None: efficiency (supports national planning data standards)
2. Validation checks before registration , missing documents, wrong forms and boundary issues flagged before an officer picks it up	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Determination periods: 8 weeks (minor), 13 weeks (major)
3. Representations triage , duplicate and AI-generated objections clustered, material planning issues extracted for the officer	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Duty to have regard to material considerations (TCPA 1990 s70)
4. Officer report drafting with constraints and Local Plan and NPPF policies cited, edited and signed off by the officer	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Determination periods: 8 weeks (minor), 13 weeks (major)
5. Consultation response analysis for local plans, responses tagged to policies and summarised by theme (MHCLG pilots)	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Local plan preparation duties; none: efficiency

KEY METRICS

 19%	of major applications decided within the statutory 13 weeks (91% including agreed extensions of time), Jan to Mar 2026 MHCLG planning stats 2026
 2 hrs to ~2 min	per planning document converted to structured data with MHCLG Extract, free to every English LPA since June 2026 MHCLG Digital: Extract
 18.5 hrs to ~16 min	to analyse local plan consultation responses in the first trial of PlanAI, an MHCLG-supported pilot; a first draft, not a finished product MHCLG Digital: PlanAI

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Finance & Revenues

Typical value    

Finance, council tax and benefits, procurement, counter-fraud

Resident contact: council tax and benefits enquiries through the contact centre and digital channels are covered in [Customer Contact & Demand](#)

Business cases: how to build an AI business case and benefits register the S151 Officer can sign is covered in [Business Case & Benefits](#)

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these. Scores are expected value (0 to 3) on the Value Lens. These uses are newer, so start small and baseline first.

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
1. Single person discount review , AI helps prioritise accounts for review alongside the National Fraud Initiative data matches; officers decide every change	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Council tax discounts (Local Government Finance Act 1992 s11)
2. Invoice capture, coding and payment matching , invoices read and coded without keying, exceptions to a person	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	None: efficiency

USE CASE	EXPECTED VALUE	STATUTORY DRIVER
3. Council tax and business rates account changes, moves, discount applications and correspondence read and prepared for a revenues officer	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	None: efficiency
4. Budget monitoring variance commentary drafted from the ledger for budget holders and finance business partners to check	 ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●  ● ● ● ●	Budget monitoring duty (Local Government Act 2003 s28)

KEY METRICS

£ 95.9%	average in-year council tax collection rate in England, 2024-25, broadly unchanged on the previous year MHCLG council tax stats 2025
£ £6.6bn	council tax arrears outstanding at 31 March 2025, up £659m in a year MHCLG council tax stats 2025
✓ 47%	of 2023/24 local audit opinions were disclaimed after the February 2025 backstop PSAA 2025
£ YOUR BASELINE	Finance or revenues time and cash savings from a live council AI deployment (no Agilisys prototype in this area yet)

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UP NEXT

Going faster and safer.

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IN DETAIL

Going faster and safer.

How the council goes faster (the Innovation Engine) and safer (Guardrails for Growth). Each section starts with the top 3 to 5 things to put in place first.

GO FASTER

Innovation Engine.

A dedicated function that gets AI work from idea to value, fast

Owner: Director of Transformation (Chief Executive as sponsor)



Technology, people and services are what your council changes. The Innovation Engine is how it changes them faster.

AI work is already happening everywhere: teams trying approved tools, services talking to suppliers, projects someone started because they could see the opportunity. The problem is rarely a lack of ideas. It's pace.

Requests pile up with nowhere to go, pilots never reach live service, and a good tool gets rebuilt from scratch in the next department.

The Engine is a team any part of the council can pull on, in five ways: a Prototyping Day, a Prototype Sprint, a Project Boost for an existing project, leading the council's Priority Challenges, or helping a team Reuse a Pattern.

Whichever way it's used, the value is named up front, tested at the gate, and what works is reused. It doesn't approve anything. Guardrails for Growth does that, and the Engine's own work goes through the same gates as everyone else's.

95% vs 7%

of councils are using or exploring AI, but only 7% see themselves as leaders

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

88%

of AI proofs of concept don't reach production (enterprise research, not councils)

Source: IDC/Lenovo 2025

4, then 18, then 2

prototyping days, working prototypes and tools in live production at one council

Source: Agilisys research

HOW THE ENGINE IS STAFFED: A DESIGN CHOICE

There's no single right model. Councils run an innovation function in three ways, and any of them can work well:

Council team

Your own in-house lab of transformation, digital and data specialists. This is the most common alternative, as with Birmingham's The Foundry or Barking & Dagenham's Insight Hub.

Key technology suppliers

Specialist capacity called off when you need it, for a sprint, a stalled project or a skill you don't hold.

Partnership

A standing arrangement with a key technology partner, usually blended with council staff and designed to build your own capability over time.

What matters is capacity, speed and reach, not who provides them. Many councils blend all three, and the mix changes as skills grow. Whoever staffs it, the Engine offers the same five ways in and works to the same gates. See [How to set it up](#).

Five ways to use the Engine

The Innovation Engine turns AI ideas into working services, fast. Any part of the council can call on it in five ways, from a single day to leading a council priority.

1 Prototyping Day

One day

Service staff and the Engine team map a real problem in the morning and build working prototypes in the afternoon.

USE IT WHEN

A service feels a pain point but has no clear answer yet, or wants to test several ideas before committing money

YOU GET

Several working prototypes, a reworked workflow, a rough cost and value estimate for each, and a view on which to back

TYPICAL VALUE



At one council, four prototyping days across four service areas produced 18 working prototypes, and 2 are now in production

Agilisys research

2 Prototype Sprint

Days to weeks

A small team drops in, wrestles with one problem and builds a prototype that is tested with the people who will use it.

USE IT WHEN

The problem is known and worth solving but too hard for a day: messy data, several systems, or a statutory process that needs care

YOU GET

A tested prototype and an evidence pack: what it does, staff feedback, known limits, a cost range including running costs, and a first realised-value estimate

TYPICAL VALUE



Birmingham's The Foundry works in six-week delivery cycles

LGA case study: Birmingham

3 Project Boost

Days to weeks, embedded

An existing team is wrestling with an AI project. The Engine adds expert help to unblock or accelerate it, and the team keeps ownership.

USE IT WHEN	A project has stalled (data access, integration, a supplier issue, a pilot that never went live) or needs to move faster than the team's own skills allow
YOU GET	The blocker removed, or a clear decision to stop; a path to live; and the skills left with the team. Each boost starts with a written problem statement and an agreed exit point
TYPICAL VALUE	  

Aimed at "pilot purgatory": across enterprises, 88% of AI proofs of concept never reach production

IDC/Lenovo 2025

4 Priority Challenges

Months, run as gated sprints

The council has agreed a set of priority challenges it wants AI to help solve. The Engine leads the work to deliver them.

USE IT WHEN	SLT has named its priority challenges and wants a dedicated team on them
YOU GET	A tool in live service against a council priority, benefits tracked in the register, and patterns other services can reuse. The Engine leads the delivery; the service owns the live tool after handover
TYPICAL VALUE	  

Illustrative "Every EHCP issued within 20 weeks", or "Halve repeat contact across the council"

5 Reuse a Pattern

Days

A team takes something already built, here or in another council, and adapts it with light support. The cheapest way to use the Engine, once the library exists.

USE IT WHEN	The problem matches a pattern already in the library: triage, searching a body of documents, summarisation, voice, or a single view of a case
YOU GET	A proven tool configured for your service and checked against the pattern's test set, faster and cheaper than a first build
TYPICAL VALUE	  

Bradford, Norfolk and West Northamptonshire run one shared adult social care AI front door

WHAT EVERY PIECE OF WORK SHARES

Whichever way a team uses the Engine, four things stay the same. They keep the pace honest and link the work to the Value Lens and Guardrails.

Name the value

A [value statement](#) and expected scores before work starts. See [How to ask](#).

Evidence to the gate

Continue, change or stop, decided in Guardrails: the gate in [Business Case & Benefits](#), the route set by the risk tier and fast lane in [Control](#). Low-risk work doesn't wait for a meeting. A cheap stop is a good outcome: record why.

Hand over cleanly

One path to live, whoever builds it. Handover names a service owner, a run book, a support contact and a budget line for running costs.

Add to the library

Each pattern gets an owner, its data sources, a live example and a test set. Record blame-free lessons from stops, and rerun live agents against their test sets when models change.

HOW TO ASK

One published route in, open to frontline staff, managers, champions, suppliers and councillors. Requests are logged as a problem, not a product ("here's the problem", not "can we buy this tool?"), checked against the AI register and pattern library, and sent to the right option. Procurement refers AI purchases before a supplier is chosen: a sense-check that shapes the purchase, not an approval.

IF...	TRY
The council's approved tools already do this	Self-serve guidance, through the low-risk fast lane (see Everyday AI)
The problem matches something already built	Reuse a Pattern
You feel the pain but don't know the answer yet	Prototyping Day

IF...	TRY
You know what to build, but it's hard	Prototype Sprint
Your project is stuck, or moving too slowly	Project Boost
It's one of the council's agreed priority challenges	Priority Challenges

EXAMPLE: ONE WEEK'S REQUESTS ILLUSTRATIVE

An illustrative council. Each request arrives as a value statement, with expected scores (0 to 3) for its main value types.

REQUEST, AS A VALUE STATEMENT	EXPECTED VALUE	WHERE IT GOES
Draft visit records from case notes for adult social care practitioners, measured by hours per assessment	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Reuse a Pattern this month. High value, a summarisation pattern already exists, and it's medium tier
Triage AI-generated planning objections for development management officers, measured by officer time per application	 ● ● ●  ● ● ●  ● ● ●	Prototype Sprint next , starting from the triage pattern, with a data check first
"Can we buy a transcription tool?" for one team's meetings	 ● ● ●	Redirect to self-serve. The council's approved tools already do this, so it goes through the low-risk fast lane
"Build a council-wide data lake"	 ● ● ●	Rescope via a first use. It scores on foundation only, so attach it to the first service use that needs it, then re-submit

See the [Value Lens worked example](#) for one project from value statement to gate, and [Business Case & Benefits](#) for the benefits register that holds the realised scores.

How to set it up

Start with a named lead, a clear mandate and a sandbox, and grow as demand builds.

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these.

FIRST MOVE	VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Name an Engine lead and write the mandate , backed by the Chief Executive, to prototype with any service and step into stalled projects		Without it, the Engine needs permission service by service
2. Stand up a sandbox away from live systems, with a data rule agreed with the DPO and the fast lane agreed with Control		Prototypes stall waiting for IT and approvals without one
3. Run a first Prototyping Day on a real demand pain point , such as repeat contact in one service, co-designed with the staff who do the work. Write the value statement first: "We will cut repeat calls about missed bin collections for the contact centre, measured by repeat contacts per week, by March."		Shows value in days on a problem services already feel, and builds the case for the Engine
4. Open one route in with a request log that requesters can check, and a value statement on every entry (see How to ask)		You can see what's waiting and prioritise on value, not on who asks loudest

Team

A named lead, usually reporting to the Director of Transformation. Add product ownership, data and build skills, and change or user research support. Keep a named contact in information governance and finance. You can grow the core team or call off extra capacity.

Mandate

Written and backed by the Chief Executive. It lets the Engine prototype with any service, step into stalled projects, and see AI purchases before a supplier is chosen. It also makes clear that decisions stay with Guardrails.

Sandbox

A separate environment away from live systems, a data rule agreed with the DPO (synthetic or pseudonymised data, and when real data is allowed), and approved tools to build with. Without it, prototypes stall waiting for IT.

Staffing model

Council team, key technology suppliers, or a partnership. It's a design choice, and many councils blend all three. See [the staffing panel](#) in the Engine overview.

Councils and governments already run teams like this. Birmingham's The Foundry works in six-week delivery cycles, Barking & Dagenham has its Insight Hub, and Camden is exploring 75 AI use cases under a data charter co-created with residents' panels. Nesta's study of government innovation teams ("i-teams") found the same ingredients each time: a mandate, a team, a sprint method and a route in.

HOW TO KNOW IT'S WORKING

Track a few measures from day one and report them to SLT: **requests in** (and which of the five ways they use), **prototypes built**, **the share that reach live service**, and **how often patterns are reused**. Over time, more requests should be met by reusing a pattern, and the time from idea to live service should fall. The value of each project is scored at the gate and tracked in [Business Case & Benefits](#).

VOICES

"We've been absolutely flooded with requests, and we can't possibly deal with all of them."

Senior digital officer, English council

"...moved us from a lengthy period of experimentation... towards really pushing a programme of delivery, where we can embed some solutions and move at a more rapid pace."

Senior digital officer, English council

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Guardrails for Growth.

[Control p. 53](#)

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GO SAFER

Guardrails for Growth.

Create the environment for speed without chaos

Owner: Monitoring Officer, SIRO & S151 Officer



If the Innovation Engine is how your council goes faster, Guardrails for Growth is how it goes safer, without slowing down. The fastest route to the benefits of AI isn't the one with the fewest controls. It's the one with the right controls.

Too tight, and every idea waits months for a meeting. Too loose, and the council spends money on things that don't deliver, loses track of what AI it runs, or ends up in the headlines when an AI decision goes wrong. Guardrails has three parts.

Control scales decisions to risk, so low-risk work goes ahead through a fast lane and the big calls are made once, properly. Visibility gives one live view of every AI tool, who owns it, its risk and the value it delivers.

Business Case & Benefits makes sure money follows value, using the Value Lens. It's a set of controls to put in place, starting small and adding more as AI use grows. It applies to all AI work, whoever builds it.

41%

of councils have a specific AI policy to manage AI risk, and 16% use none of the listed measures

Source: LGA AI survey 2025

5 Feb 2026

new UK GDPR safeguards for significant automated decisions came into force under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025: genuine human intervention and a right to contest

Source: SI 2026/82

4 of 32

London boroughs have published an algorithmic transparency (ATRS) record, which is still voluntary for councils

Source: mySociety 2026

WHAT THIS COVERS

Control →

Policy, the oversight group, risk tiers and the fast lane, ethics, impact assessment, human review and legal duties

Visibility →

One live view of every AI tool and project: the AI register, ATRS publication, shadow AI, member scrutiny and audit readiness

Business Case & Benefits →

Business cases, the benefits register and stage gates: where the Value Lens is governed

DECISIONS SCALED TO RISK: ILLUSTRATIVE (EACH COUNCIL SETS ITS OWN TIERS IN CONTROL)			
TIER	TYPICAL EXAMPLE	ROUTE	HOW IT SPEEDS YOU UP
Low	Staff using approved tools for everyday productivity; low-impact internal automation	Fast lane. Follow the AI usage policy in Control and log it on the AI register in Visibility . No meeting	Most AI work never waits
Medium	A team agent handling internal casework; supplier AI in a non-critical system	Light check against standard templates: impact screen, data, and a value statement in Business Case & Benefits . Decided within a set number of days	Quick, predictable decisions
High	AI that makes or informs significant decisions about residents; significant spend	Full review. AI impact assessment, DPIA, human review design and Arts 22A to 22D safeguards in Control , plus a business case scored on the Value Lens in Business Case & Benefits . Then an S151 / SLT decision	The big calls are made once, properly, and don't unravel later
The same tiers apply to AI built by the council, bought from a supplier, or switched on inside an existing system. Every item, whatever its tier, goes on the AI register in Visibility .			

Control

Typical value   

Policy, the oversight group, risk tiers and the fast lane, ethics, impact assessment, human review and legal duties

The risk tiers are set out in the [Guardrails overview](#). Technical standards for AI builds and purchases stay in [Standards & Policies](#), and staff guidance on using approved tools well sits in [Everyday AI](#).

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these.

FIRST MOVE	VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Publish a short AI usage policy that staff know about , with an approved tools list, clear no-go uses and an approved alternative, so shadow AI has somewhere to go. Tell every team, not just the intranet	 	AI is already in use, and banning it without an alternative drives it underground
2. Name one oversight group with written terms of reference and decision rights , a decision record, and members from information governance, digital, audit and frontline services. It reports to the senior owner in Leadership & Sponsorship	 	Gives managers a clear yes, no or "yes, if" instead of silence
3. Set risk tiers with written criteria and publish a fast lane for low-risk work, with sample checks instead of full review	 	Most AI work goes ahead in days, and scrutiny goes where residents are affected

CONTROLS TO PUT IN PLACE

IN PLACE EARLY

-   List the tools that make or support significant decisions about residents, and put the Arts 22A to 22D safeguards in place: information, a chance to make representations, genuine human intervention and a right to contest

THEN ADD, AS AI USE GROWS

-   Combine the DPIA, equality impact assessment and ethics check into one AI impact assessment that starts at scoping and is scaled to the risk tier
-   Write override rules for staff, and log overrides, contested decisions and AI errors centrally so you can spot rubber-stamping and repeat faults
-   Write AI decision rights into the scheme of delegation, bring supplier and embedded AI into scope, and agree one legal position on AI-generated FOI requests and complaints
-   Recalibrate tiers from past decisions to move proven categories into the fast lane, and get ready for the ICO's statutory code on AI and automated decisions

KEY METRICS

 41%	of councils use a specific AI policy to manage AI risk, and 16% use none of the listed measures (about a third of councils responded) LGA AI survey 2025
 38% / 14%	of councils have a senior responsible owner for AI, and only 14% have a specific AI ethics board LGA AI survey 2025
 71%	of UK employees have used consumer AI tools at work that their employer hasn't approved, and 51% do so every week. It is an all-sector survey of 2,003 employees, not councils only Microsoft UK 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	Working days from AI proposal to decision by risk tier, and the share of AI work going through the fast lane

Visibility

Typical value   

One live view of every AI tool and project: the AI register, ATRS publication, shadow AI, member scrutiny and audit readiness

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these.

FIRST MOVE	VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Set up one AI register covering every AI tool, agent and project, including supplier-embedded AI and agents staff build themselves, each with an owner, purpose, data used and risk tier. Via a first use: register your first priority service's tools, with value statements, to prove the fields	 	You can't govern, report or audit what you can't list
2. Run a first shadow AI check using licence, network and expenses data plus a no-blame staff survey, then register or retire what you find	 	You can't govern shadow use you haven't found, and councils that look often find more AI use than they expected
3. Put AI on the strategic risk register with a named owner, covering both the risks of using AI and the risk of falling behind		Puts AI in front of SLT and audit through a route they already use

CONTROLS TO PUT IN PLACE

THEN ADD, AS AI USE GROWS

-   Roll up expected and realised scores from [Business Case & Benefits](#) by value type, and report the portfolio view with its risks to SLT every quarter
-   Publish ATRS records for tools that significantly affect residents, and a plain-English public AI register
-   Give a member committee a scheduled AI report covering the register, risks, incidents, and projects stopped as well as scaled
-   Make the register audit-ready, with each item's tier, impact assessment and gate decisions attached, and ask internal audit to review it. Keep it updated automatically as tools are deployed

EXAMPLE: THE CONTROL TOWER VIEW ILLUSTRATIVE

An illustrative council with 24 AI items on its register, not real data. Each item counts under every value type it scores 2 or more on, so the columns add up to more than 24.

24 items 15 low tier 7 medium 2 high 3 found by shadow AI check 2 ATRS records published

VALUE TYPE	A MAIN VALUE (EXPECTED 2+)	REALISED 2+ AT LAST GATE	WHAT SLT ASKS NEXT
 Capacity released	14	9	Where did the released hours go?
 Faster service	8	5	Which of these can scale to other services?
 Demand managed	5	2	Why are three behind? (See the gate example in Business Case & Benefits)
 Statutory compliance	4	3	Are the high-tier items covered by Arts 22A to 22D safeguards?
 Cash savings	4	1	Is the MTFs assuming savings the register can't yet show?
 Risk reduced	3	2	Is this reflected in the risk register scores?
 Foundation established	3	3	How many later uses are built on them?

KEY METRICS

 4 of 32	London boroughs have published ATRS records, part of what researchers call a “patchwork” of transparency approaches mySociety 2026
 153	records published on GOV.UK under the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard. It is mandatory for central government but voluntary for councils, and Sutton and Camden are among those that have opted in GOV.UK ATRS records
 13%	of councils provide councillor training on AI, which limits how well members can scrutinise it LGA AI survey 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	Share of AI tools in use that are on the register, and the number found by shadow AI checks that weren't

Business Case & Benefits

Typical value  

Business cases, the benefits register and stage gates: where the Value Lens is governed

TOP 3 TO 5 TO START WITH

If you haven't already, start with these.

FIRST MOVE	VALUE	WHY START HERE
1. Publish one business case route for all AI work, with a light-touch format for proofs of concept under your direct award threshold	 	Small, fast wins stop waiting months, and total AI spend becomes visible
2. Require a value statement and expected scores on every case, separating cash-releasing from non-cash-releasing benefits as the Green Book and Better Business Cases guidance do (see the value statement)	 	Cases can be compared, in the S151 Officer's own language
3. Give every pilot written success criteria, an end date and a named person who can stop it	 	Stops pilots drifting and frees money for what works
4. Take a baseline before go-live, name a benefit owner in the service, and include running costs beyond year one with a named budget holder	 	Without a baseline, time savings can't be proved later

CONTROLS TO PUT IN PLACE

THEN ADD, AS AI USE GROWS

-   Keep one benefits register for every live AI project, scored expected versus realised and reported to SLT and cabinet each quarter
-   Run proportionate continue / change / stop gates, where low-risk projects are gated without waiting for a board, and money from stopped projects is released between budget cycles
-   Judge AI cases over a realistic horizon with an optimism bias adjustment, not a short payback test, and count later uses of each foundation
-   Calibrate new forecasts from your own realised scores, and agree with finance when released hours count as cash

EXAMPLE: THE BENEFITS REGISTER AT A QUARTERLY REVIEW

ILLUSTRATIVE

An illustrative council, not real data. Expected scores come from each business case, and realised scores are set at the gate against the named measure. For one project traced from idea to gate, see the [Value Lens worked example](#).

PROJECT	VALUE	TREASURY	EXPECTED	REALISED	GATE
Case note drafting, adult social care (live 9 months)	Capacity released	Non-cash-releasing	● ● ●	● ● ●	Continue. Scale to all teams, and record where the released hours go (the assessment backlog)
	Faster service	Non-cash-releasing	● ● ●	● ● ●	
Self-service agent, customer contact (live 6 months)	Demand managed	Cash or non-cash	● ● ●	● ● ●	Change. See the gate below
	Cash savings	Cash-releasing	● ● ●	● ● ●	
Invoice matching, finance (pilot, 4 months)	Cash savings	Cash-releasing	● ● ●	● ● ●	Stop. Match rates are too low on the council's own data. Close it and record the lessons
	Capacity released	Non-cash-releasing	● ● ●	● ● ●	

Continue

Demand is on track. Extend the agent to more services.

Change

Demand managed is well short (3 expected, 1 realised): residents drop out at identity checks and call anyway, so no cash is released yet. Fix the hand-off, then re-gate in 3 months.

Decision

Stop

No movement on the primary measure after the fix. Switch it off and move the budget to the next project in the register.

KEY METRICS

 36%	of English councils using or exploring AI report realised staff productivity benefits so far LGA AI survey 2025
 12 to 26 min	a day saved per user in UK public sector Microsoft 365 Copilot trials. DBT did not find evidence that time savings improved productivity, so count released hours conservatively GDS 2025 DBT 2025
 17% to 42%	of companies abandoned most of their AI initiatives, 2024 to 2025. This is a case for deciding to stop early and deliberately, not late S&P Global 2025
 YOUR BASELINE	Share of council AI projects stopped at a gate, and time from idea to first realised benefit. No UK council publishes AI stop rates, and the quarterly continue / stop / re-scope gates Agilisys has proposed to councils haven't run yet

[↑ Guardrails for Growth](#) [Contents](#)

[Next step →](#)

NEXT STEP

Talk to us about AI Forward.

Book an AI Forward maturity assessment: where your council stands in each area, each leader's top 3 to 5 first moves, and the value they are expected to deliver.

[Contact us →](#)

SOURCES

Where the figures come from.

Every figure in this playbook carries a short source tag. The full references are below, grouped by publisher. Links were checked in October 2026. Figures tagged Agilisys research come from Agilisys’s work with UK councils and have not been published separately.

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NEXT STEP

Book an AI Forward maturity assessment.

Find out where your council stands in each area. Each leader on your senior team leaves with their level, their top 3 to 5 first moves, and the value each one is expected to deliver.

CONTACT US

agilisys.co.uk/contact

info@agilisys.co.uk

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