

Case Study

West Sussex County Council: Data practitioners network and conference

In order to encourage closer shared working and increasing involvement from external experts as local government seeks to make better use of its data, the LGA offered modest grant opportunities in 2016/17 to support councils to buy in additional expert support to assist them in progressing local data projects.

West Sussex County Council had already recognised the benefits that might be possible through more joined up methods of working with other authorities and bodies around data in their local area. The authority was aware that many local organisations were already working towards similar goals and were keen to avoid silo working and duplication of effort by establishing a data working group for the county, district and borough councils and other public sector bodies in the area. The police were also included in this initiative. The group met every two months and was running well with organisations sharing ideas, expertise and best practice.

Seeing the success and impact that the group was having locally, the council was keen to expand upon this and to develop a *virtual national experts forum* to share and make better use of information and data on a wider scale. Once established, the council then ran a Summit event to promote the network and to enable the sharing of innovative ideas, approaches and successes.

Outputs and outcomes

The council used funding from the LGA Local Data Experts Programme (LDEP) in order to establish the online virtual Data and Insight Authority Forum – DIAF – (aimed at local government and public sector organisations). The forum enabled members to use data, evidence and insight more effectively in their strategic planning, decision making and performance management – potentially resulting in a positive impact on the lives of residents through better public service delivery. The funding was also used to run the first Summit event to promote this new network.

The Summit was held in December 2017 in London and comprised discussion, conversations, presentations, challenges and networking opportunities. It provided the chance for those using the virtual network to meet in person and to cement their online connections. In the future the organisers hope for this to become an annual event, held in different locations throughout the country, to allow participation by as many organisations as possible.

Issues and challenges

Establishing the forum has been resource intensive and council staff have been involved in a range of website and communications activities to make progress.

Running the summit has also taken time and organisation skills in securing a venue, catering and speakers. Making this an annual event will require input from other authorities as West Sussex would not be able to resource or host its delivery year on year.

Impacts

As a result of the forum and the Summit, data and insight experts are now regularly interacting with each other by a range of communications channels. They have made strong connections in different local authorities and other organisations and mechanisms are now in place for these individuals to speak directly via the forum, in person at the summit and also via a WhatsApp group which has been established to share information with others or to ask for help. Individuals can now call on the high level of expertise that exists amongst forum members. Previously some authorities felt the need to call in external consultants for support but are now able to easily share and access knowledge and expertise from like-minded individuals across organisations by using the forum.

Longer term savings are likely to be seen from avoiding a duplication of effort throughout the wider local government sector. Additionally individuals who have already completed projects that have worked well, can share their learning with others who will then not have to start similar work from scratch.

West Sussex County Council has also benefitted by using the forum to promote its work and to link to examples of good insight activity. The Council is now far more aware of the help that is on hand from other authorities and it has approached and learnt from others who have undertaken similar projects.

For more information about the Data and Insight Authority Forum visit:

<https://www.datainsightauthorityforum.co.uk/>

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