London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Policy and Oversight Board
Minutes

Monday 29 April 2024

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Lisa Homan (Chair), Jacolyn Daly, Natalia Perez, Helen Rowbottom, Nikos Souslous, Nicole Trehy, Rory Vaughan and Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler

Other Councillors
Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)
Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety)
Councillor Florian Chevoppe-Verdier (Lead Member for European Co-operation and Digital Innovation)

Officers
Nicola Ellis (Strategic Director, Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services)
Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics)
Bathsheba Mall (Programme Lead)
Jo McCormick (Assistant Director, Procurement and Commercial)
Tina Akpogheneta (Chief Digital Officer)
Anthony King (Enterprise Architect)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

Guests
Jeremy Tolmie (Microsoft)
Stelios Zarras (Microsoft)
Darius Toomer (Agilisys)
Eugene O'Driscoll (Agilisys)
Professor Aldo Faisal (Professor of AI & Neuroscience at Imperial)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

   There were no apologies for absence.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

   There were no declarations of interest.

3.   MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler noted that some of the actions from the previous meeting were still pending and asked officers to follow-up.

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

4.   GENERATIVE AI: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND RISKS

The Chair outlined the theme of the discussion and noted that the item was intended to support the early exploration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its uses.

The Chair welcomed the following guests to the meeting:
- Jeremy Tolmie (Microsoft)
- Stelios Zarras (Microsoft)
- Darius Toomer (Agilisys)
- Eugene O'Driscoll (Agilisys)
- Professor Aldo Faisal (Professor of AI & Neuroscience at Imperial)

Tina Akpogheneta (Chief Digital Officer) addressed the meeting and noted that the Council had been working on the issue of generative AI since last summer. Digital Services had set up a working group to look at the implications and how to safely leverage the technology. The Council wanted to explore carefully and had taken a measured approach. For 'tech week' (10-14 June 2024) speakers from Microsoft and Gartner had been invited to discuss potential use cases. Digital Services had recently unlocked starter licences to Microsoft Copilot (a generative AI chatbot) for staff and was gathering feedback from technology champions across departments. Microsoft had also established a forum for local authorities to help them learn together and share knowledge and best practices.

Jeremy Tolmie and Stelios Zarras from Microsoft gave a presentation covering the following:
- An overview of the history of machine learning, deep learning, and generative AI.
- The key uses of generative AI – content generation, summarisation, code generation, and semantic search.
- Applying generative AI to business problems to increase productivity, automate processes, improve the customer experience, and build creative content.
- Responsible AI principles – privacy and security, inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, fairness, and reliability.

Darius Toomer and Eugene O'Driscoll from Agilisys addressed the meeting and covered the following points:
- Agilysis had been working with the Council to identify use cases such as personal productivity and handling complex processes and applications.

- The importance of a learning and development culture that requires new teaching and learning.
- A culture of innovation and continuous improvement, which Agilisys provides to local councils.
- The need for strong data governance and infrastructure as an enabler for AI services.
- AI being used to search and make use of unstructured data – which offered the public sector an array of new opportunities, for example using predictive analytics in social care services.

Professor Aldo Faisal (Professor of AI & Neuroscience at Imperial) said AI technologies represented a revolution that would transform white collar work. In local government he saw a number of opportunities given the large datasets available and various types of decisions that lent themselves to AI. Regarding risks and opportunities he noted the risk of manipulation, but also the benefits of better, more granular decision-making and messaging.

Councillor Rowbottom noted she was supportive of the agenda but had the following questions:
- What was the timeline for implementation of the Council's AI working group?
- Regarding use cases, what was the approach to complex cases in Adult Social Care and Children's Services where the majority of spend goes?
- What were the Council's thoughts on improving the interoperability of data through genuine co-commissioning with the NHS other local services?

Tina Akpogheneta said the Digital Services working group had been trialling Microsoft Copilot and other generative AI technologies and were in the process of familiarising staff with these tools, through a package of support. Opportunities were being explored in the Housing department, in contact centres, and in the Resident Experience and Access Programme (REAP). Requests for these tools used the standard H&F business case process.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom said she was interested in the use of these tools in complex cases but warned that any use of these tools for resident facing work had to be carefully evaluated and monitored.

Councillor Rowbottom asked how areas of priority were fed through to the programme. Tina Akpogheneta said the process was to put forward a business case then come to the working group for approval or amendments.

Darius Toomer said there were use cases for social care, though they required more governance – e.g. safeguarding meeting minutes. He said there was a lot of business administration work that could be automated, including lower risk social care documentation. He added that one of the main opportunities was a new era of generative AI chatbots that could be used to triage resident queries to the relevant teams.

Stelios Zarras said people should think of AI as a technology layer with a wide range of uses. He felt just looking at return on investment was too limited a view – asking

how could a value be put on saving lives or helping children. He encouraged councils to be ambitious and noted some were already moving at pace.

Professor Aldo Faisal noted that if citizens were interacting with these systems, they needed to understand how their data was being used. There had been problems reported in other countries around prejudice based on the underlying data so organisations should be mindful. They may want to know what data had been used to train the models, how systems were used by people who speak English differently, and what values the models were being aligned to.

The Chair asked how quickly businesses cases were being evaluated by the working group and what framework was being used to assess against. Tina Akpogheneta said they looked at the expected return on investment and the financials of the service, as well as wider considerations.

Councillor Nikos Souslous asked how AI fit with the Council's commitment to digital accessibility. He also asked if there was a national AI framework to help (or hinder) Councils in this work. Tina Akpogheneta said there was legislation proposed around automated decision making, but the Council was trying to think through potential risks, ahead of any future legislation. The Council was looking at developing a set of standards.

Councillor Florian Chevoppe-Verdier (Lead Member for European Co-operation and Digital Innovation) added that the Council co-produced digital services with residents to ensure digital exclusion was minimised.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler asked how big the AI working group was. Tina Akpogheneta said it was comprised of eight standing members who met every fortnight.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked if the working group had the necessary expertise to innovate and take action in response to requests from across Council departments.

Tina Akpogheneta said officers had proactively set up the working group in response to this emerging technology. Officers started researching and testing products on the market. They put together a database of use cases and how to assess them. The team had guidance on how to deploy and scale up these technologies in services.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked Agilysys about their work with other councils. Darius Toomer said they worked with a range of councils. For example, in the Manchester region some council development partners were trialling generative AI in areas like social care, freedom of information requests, and complaints.

The Chair asked how many councils they worked with in total. Darius Toomer said they worked with 60 councils total, with 15 engaged generative AI councils, and four development partners.

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked about the volume of data needed for accurate and meaningful predictions. He also raised the question of biased outcomes if the underlying data contained biases.

Darius Toomer said for predictive analytics there wasn't a specific volume of data required, but to see if projects were viable they carried out a discovery project using anonymised data to see if there were the necessary markers that could be used for predictions.

Stelios Zarras noted that the use of AI in relation to social care was not restricted to predictions. He gave the example of a field worker who could use AI to make them more efficient by typing up their notes automatically or taking dictation. He added that when considering the data required for these systems to work well, it was less about volume and more about quality.

Councillor Vaughan asked if officers had used generative AI to write council reports or minutes. Tina Akpogheneta said no, not yet.

Councillor Vaughan asked about the timelines for using this technology across the Council. Tina Akpogheneta said officers were rolling out Microsoft Copilot for Edge and conversations about other programmes were starting.

Councillor Nicole Trehy asked about the implications for staff and companies. She also raised concerns about the dangers of people trusting these systems over other humans. Stelios Zarras acknowledged the concerns about the impact on jobs but stressed that Microsoft saw the technology as a force multiplier for human workers, not a replacement. Professor Aldo Faisal felt the answer to Councillor Trehy's second point was education. People needed to understand if these systems were producing accurate information, if they could be trusted correct, and when to challenge their outputs.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked about how to move forward ethically and safely. She asked if other organisations were looking at this and if there was any learning to take that the Council could put in place. Professor Aldo Faisal offered his advice and support to the Council in this area.

The Chair then invited reflections from Councillor Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform. Councillor Rowan Ree addressed the meeting and thanked the guests and committee members for attending. He said this technology was developing rapidly and all areas of society were rushing to harness the benefits of AI. He wanted to ensure H&F was embracing opportunities if they led to better, more efficient services for residents. He felt there were huge opportunities with AI and other technologies and noted the investments the Council had already made to improve efficiency including robotic process automation and business intelligence. He also highlighted the co-production work on digital accessibility.

Councillor Ree noted that the Council had a huge amount of data across different services and said he was keen to ensure that it was used in the most effective way to design services to address people's lives as they are. He welcomed Professor Aldo Faisal offer for further discussion and support.

The Chair summarised the discussion and noted the following points:

- This was the beginning of a discussion about how the Council could harness AI technologies for the benefit of the organisation and residents.
- There were a wide range of opportunities – from simpler data processing to more complex areas like predictive modelling.
- The Council needed a structure in place to assess bids and opportunities for AI in its services.
- She was interested in looking at examples from other organisations for learning that could be applied in H&F.
- The Council needed to be mindful of the issue of bias and the quality of the underlying data powering the models.
- Any AI technologies used by the Council had to work for residents. Some education and communication may be needed to allay fears about how data was being used.

The Chair thanked Councillors, officers and guests for their contributions.

RESOLVED

1. The Policy and Oversight Board noted and commented on the report.

2. The Board requested more information on the AI working group and asked officers to think about a more formal structure going forward.

3. The Board asked officers to look at examples of use cases in other local authorities and organisations that could be applied locally.

ACTIONS: Tina Akpogheneta

5.   COST OF LIVING UPDATE

Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics) and Bathsheba Mall (Programme Lead) introduced the report which provided an update on the Council's Cost of Living response programme and work underway to develop a strategy for 2024/25, given the government's late decision to extend the Household Support Fund.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked what the most impactful intervention had been. Matthew Sales said it was hard to pick one scheme but highlighted the Crisis Prevention Fund, a cash first approach and one of the first times the Council had done that. He noted that officers were tracking a range of different indicators and had responded to that data – for example increasing housing support in response to rent rises. He also highlighted the Winter Support Fund, £340,000 of grants to third sector organisations that helped over 4,200 households.

Councillor Rowbottom noted there were now three Family Hubs in the borough but they couldn't keep pace with the number of referrals. She asked how the Council was monitoring that and how they could be supported to meet the demand. Matthew

Sales said they needed to make connections with the hubs to see how to work better on referrals as a council and with partners.

The Chair noted that one of the positive aspects of this had been the Cost of Living Alliance and the relationships built with third sector partners.

Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) addressed the meeting and discussed the new winter booklet targeted at schools, GPs, and libraries with information about income maximisation, housing, debt, and more. She noted the Council was investing a lot into the advice service and the third sector. She also echoed the Chair's comments about stronger partnerships and the importance of the Alliance steering group who had worked together on delivering the signposting tool.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked who was coordinating the signposting tool and referrals. Bathsheba Mall said she was leading the work on the signposting tool internally, supported by a project team from different service areas.

Councillor Perez asked about the likelihood of the Household Support Fund being extended further and the impact of its withdrawal. Matthew Sales said it had been extended until 30 September but there was no clarity beyond that. It was an important source of funding which the Council added to from its own funds. Without it there would be significant pressure on the Council to either end the support or find money from elsewhere to continue it. He said it was difficult to plan without permanent funding in place.

Councillor Vaughan asked for more information on building economic resilience and supporting the local economy. Matthew Sales said he would come back on those questions.

ACTION: Matthew Sales

Councillor Daly thanked officers for their work in this area. She asked if officers had found a way of capturing what had been achieved so the lessons could be applied in other areas. Matthew Sales said the team was keen to evaluate what had been done and how to develop it further. They were doing an analysis and evaluation of past data and performance and they would be looking at where to apply that more widely in the Council.

Councillor Harvey said she was keen to take the learning and build it into the Financial Inclusion Strategy. She added that there was a lot of work still to be done, but they could build on real successes – like the work done with the H&F Foodbank to save 40% of the cost by going straight to delivery.

The Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions. She said there was a lot of learning to build into how the Council operates.

RESOLVED

1. The Policy and Oversight Board noted the report and provided comments and feedback on H&F's response to the Cost of Living crisis.

6.   WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler proposed an item on the level of traffic and parking fines in the borough. Members suggested that should be considered as a potential item for the work programme of the relevant Policy and Accountability Committee, rather than the Board.

RESOLVED

1. The Board noted the draft work programme for 2024.

7.   DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates of future meetings were noted:
- 1 July 2024
- 9 September 2024
- 25 November 2024
- 5 February 2025
- 6 May 2025

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.22 pm

Chair   ....

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