



Insights from Local Government Leaders on Scaling AI Beyond Experimentation

Beyond the Pilot: Leveraging AI for Better Citizen Outcomes

As local government seeks to increase citizen services and achieve better outcomes, how do those of us at the intersection of technology, process, people and change make it a reality?

Author:

Vikas Krishan,

Chief Digital Business Officer (UK/EMEA), Altimetrik

Introduction: The AI Imperative for Better Citizen Outcomes

Local governments are entering a defining moment in their digital transformation journey. Rising citizen expectations, increasing service demand, constrained budgets and complex legacy environments are reshaping how public services must be designed and delivered. Artificial Intelligence has the potential to fundamentally transform this landscape not simply by improving operational efficiency, but by enabling faster, more connected and more citizen-centric services. Yet while AI adoption is accelerating, many organisations remain confined to isolated pilots that demonstrate promise without delivering enterprise-wide impact. Realising AI's full value requires more than technology. It demands modern data foundations, trusted governance, interoperable platforms and an organisation prepared to embed AI into everyday decision-making and service delivery.

This report brings together insights from local government leaders to examine what it takes to move beyond experimentation and scale AI responsibly creating measurable improvements in citizen outcomes while building the foundations for the next generation of public services.

A Vision for AI-Enabled Citizen Services

Imagine a social worker asking an AI assistant to instantly retrieve a resident's history, identify key risks and generate a draft care plan. The plan is automatically prioritised, routed for approval and securely shared with everyone involved in delivering care enabling faster decisions, greater collaboration and more personalised support.



Image created by Google Gemini

That future is already beginning to emerge.

Today, AI is helping councils streamline documentation, improve access to information and automate routine administrative work, giving frontline teams more time to focus on supporting citizens.

As Rehana Ramesh,

Director – ICT, Digital and Customer Services at Hackney Council, explains:

“Our digital strategy is not focused on technology; it’s focused on people, it’s focused on our residents, it’s focused on our businesses.”

Ultimately, success is not measured by how much AI is deployed, but by the outcomes it delivers: better citizen experiences, faster access to services, more informed frontline decisions and improved support for vulnerable communities.

However, today’s reality remains fragmented. Moving home can require interactions with ten organisations, while managing a long-term condition may involve more than forty services across nine organisations. This complexity creates unnecessary friction for both citizens and council staff.

Agentic AI presents an opportunity to simplify these experiences by connecting information, automating workflows and supporting better decision-making. But technology alone cannot deliver transformation. Many councils continue to face challenges around legacy systems, fragmented data, governance and organisational readiness. Unlocking AI’s full potential requires trusted data, interoperable platforms and an operating model where people and AI work together to improve citizen outcomes.

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Perspective:

Building the Foundations for AI at Scale

AI transformation does not begin with models, copilots or agents. It begins with the digital foundations that enable AI to operate securely, responsibly and at scale.

At Altimetrik, we believe organisations move beyond experimentation when they treat AI not as a standalone technology initiative, but as an enterprise capability. Scaling AI requires modernising legacy systems through composable architectures, connecting fragmented data across the organisation and embedding governance from the outset. Trusted data, transparent decision-making and responsible AI practices are not barriers to innovation they are the foundations that enable it.

For local government, success should not be measured by the number of AI pilots or tools deployed. It should be measured by the value created for citizens: faster access to services, empowered frontline teams, improved operational resilience and better public outcomes.

The councils that lead the next phase of digital transformation will not necessarily be those adopting the most AI. They will be those building the strongest digital core combining modern platforms, trusted data and responsible governance to transform legacy systems into connected, citizen-centric public services.



Beyond the Pilot

For many councils, the challenge is no longer proving that AI works it is proving that it can work consistently, securely and at scale.

Across local government, pilots are demonstrating tangible gains in productivity, knowledge discovery and service delivery. Yet relatively few initiatives progress beyond departmental experimentation into enterprise-wide capabilities. The barrier is rarely the technology itself. More often, it is fragmented data, legacy systems, unclear governance and organisational readiness that prevent AI from becoming part of everyday operations.

Scaling AI therefore requires a shift in mindset from delivering isolated use cases to building the digital foundations that enable AI to be embedded across services.

“Many organisations do not have the expertise, knowledge or insight to be able to properly interrogate these technologies or products. [...] Therefore, they are signing up to stuff that ostensibly works and then finding out, once they’ve invested lots of money into it, that actually it doesn’t do what they wanted it to”

– Dr. Youssef Oskrochi

Health & Digital Transformation, London Borough of Sutton

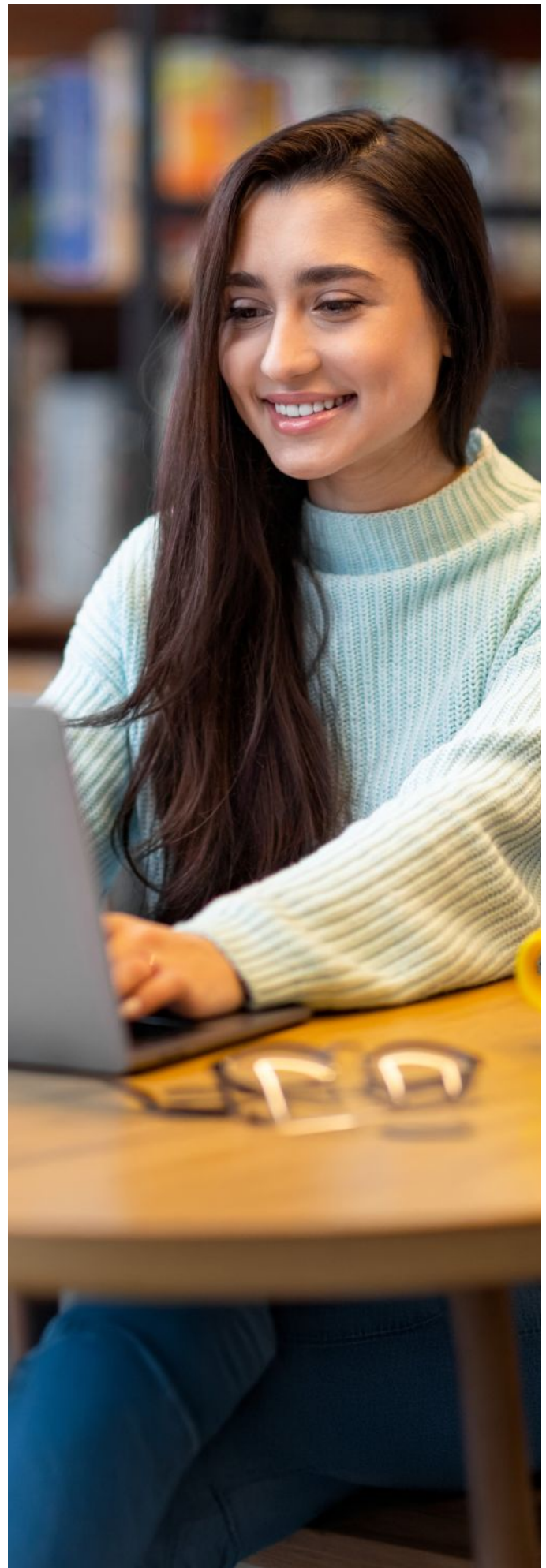
One solution is to make incremental changes. For example, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham started by focusing on a single view of council properties. By assigning each property a unique reference number, all relevant data can be accessed, including complaints, repair issues and inspections. Now they are applying learnings from property directly to customers.

Another challenge is the intersection of people and process within the organisation.

“Customers [are] a little bit more challenging because [...] we have many different systems that hold a level of customer data depending on how they’re interacting with the council, whether that’s through social care, through housing, or just through customer services. I think we will get there within the next 12 months. For me, that is the real key and winner: to deliver better experiences for people.”

- Natalia Monvoisin

Strategic Head, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham



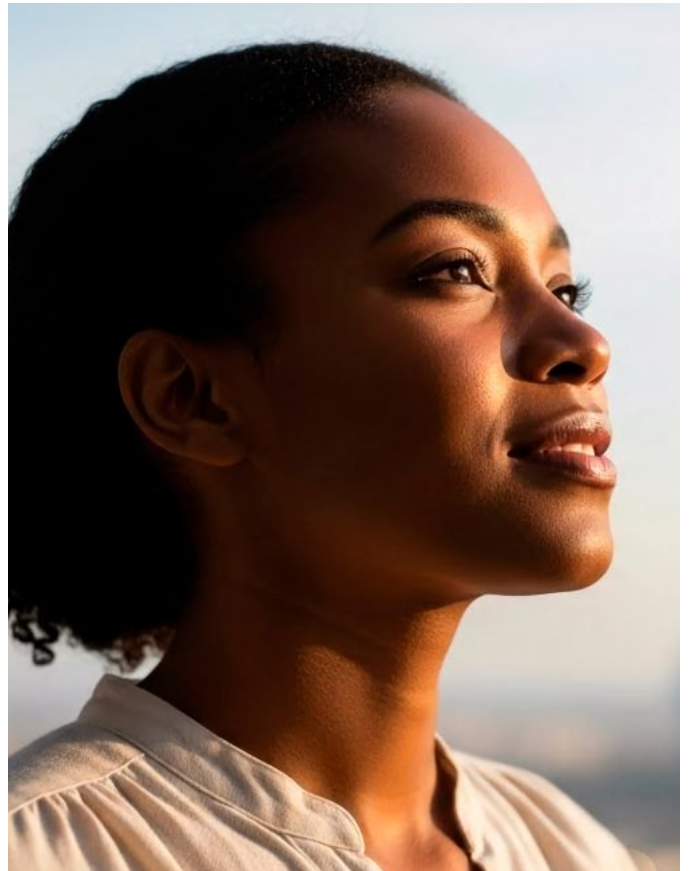
Culture Undermines Change More Than Strategy

When organisational change collides with micro-cultures and leadership behaviour, it often fails.¹ Even when transformational technology such as AI can boost productivity and improve outcomes for citizens, it is important to remember that “organisations are complex social systems held together by relationships, shared histories, unwritten rules and deeply embedded patterns of interaction.”²

“Change from a legacy system to a new way of working is always gradual. You can have a whole set of performance statistics showing that, since you made the switch, things have objectively improved - but people still won't necessarily like the new system. Even after getting rid of every PDF in the organisation, someone might still resist because the drop-down menu isn't quite like the old one, and they knew exactly where everything used to be and had a keyboard shortcut for it..”

- Nathan Pierce,

Chief Digital and Innovation Officer, Essex Council



The Drive to Increase Citizen Services

What, then, are the strongest drivers of progress in implementing AI for public services?

“[...] internal factors such as leadership ambition, governance discipline, clarity of digital strategy and data capability emerge as the strongest drivers of progress.”³

To drive the benefit of AI, you need to understand the processes that you have today, and what those processes are dependent on.

For example, both private and public sector organisations operate with legacy systems. Those systems create obstacles to AI adoption. Data is often fragmented across platforms. Finally, technical debt blocks scale.

The Legacy

28% of central government systems met end-of-life criteria in 2024. Outdated systems hinder data quality and clean data is essential for successful AI implementation.⁴

However, rip-and-replace solutions are not cost effective. Not to mention the likely outcome is unsatisfactory at best and chaos at worst.

The more practical and cost-effective solution is to modernise platforms at the rate of change your organisation can absorb.

“This is such breadth of opportunity. There are so many things that have not been done that have been technically challenging before. We’re sort of spoiled for choice, but that’s the thing that does keep you going. Even if I can just stick a couple of these use cases. The flip side of the challenge is choosing them and focusing on them. I think we’ve got a real opportunity to lead from the front once we get there.”

- Steve Waterman

Head of Data, Westminster Council

Bite-sized Engineering

Using a composable and modular design, systems are broken into independently deployable services.⁵ This allows organisations to integrate new solutions into legacy infrastructure.

Utilising data mesh and data lakes, domain teams have decentralised ownership over data products, while adhering to centralised enterprise governance.⁶

Data Bridges the Gap

Everything comes back to data, its integrity and how it is treated.

- Is the data structured or unstructured?
- What is the source of your data?
- Is the data fit for purpose?
- Is it sensitive or nonsensitive?
- How does it get treated?

We have all heard the idiom “garbage in, garbage out” or GIGO.

GIGO is often traced back to the 1950s, when a room-filling IBM 705 mainframe could perform 1,250 basic multiplications per second. Your laptop, by comparison, is 1.5 to 2 million times faster.⁷

Regardless of compute power, GIGO still applies. More so, due to the exponential increase in data thanks to the internet, digital transformation and artificial intelligence.

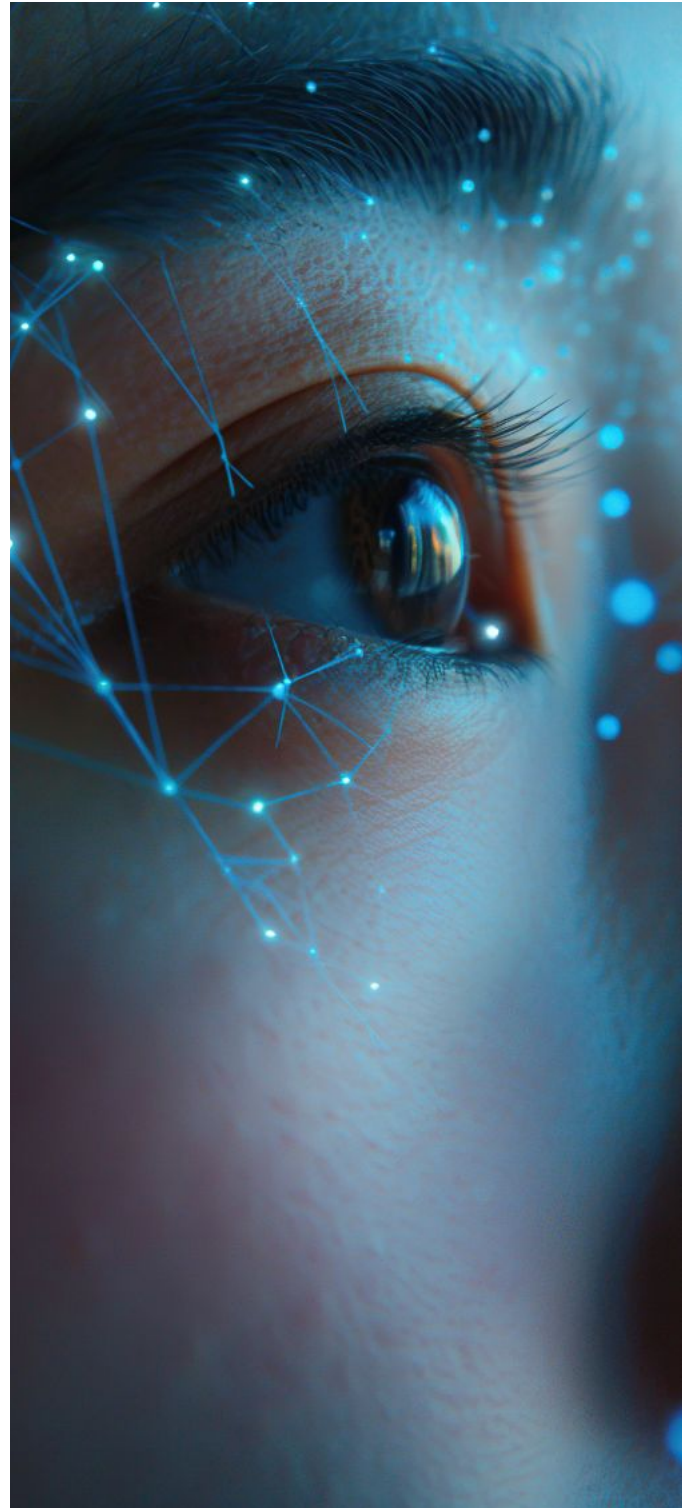




Image created by Google Gemini, Data sources: Statista, University of Waterloo CECM, TheBestVPN.com⁸

However, the sheer volume of data does little good if it is unusable.

The Local Government Association acknowledges that “councils are often described as ‘data rich and insight poor’ organisations holding data on every resident in the UK in the delivery of vital public services but often data is stuck behind legacy systems that aren’t interoperable with other council systems and/or not easy to access.”⁹

“We have the same challenge as everybody else, across all industries, not just local government, of having lots of unlinked islands of unclean data that can’t be readily linked together.”

– **Martin Chalmers**

Director of Digital, Data and Technology, Slough Borough Council

Most importantly, it is imperative that you bring the right guardrails and security to the data layer to ensure that data is only available to the right people at the right time.

Taking it one step further, the data itself is dependent on the platforms that provide the data:

“Given the breadth of services that councils provide to every citizen in the UK, councils hold a wealth of data on each resident. However, it is challenging for councils to ensure that systems and data are interoperable due to barriers by legacy suppliers and/or the high costs of APIs which significantly hinder digital transformation.”¹⁰

The platforms must be able to provide the right quality of data in a meaningful, efficient, and cost-effective way. In other words, the cost should improve citizen services, rather than increase just because it is in the budget.

The Biggest Challenge Is Governance

The biggest challenge in using data to improve citizen services is governance. When you develop AI within a local government organisation, guardrails and security must be built in.

The governance built into the data layer allows you to then drive that governance and security into the AI layer.

“How do we balance planning for the future, thinking about all these emerging risks in a really complex geopolitical environment with a lot of turbulence, but also acknowledge the fact that we have a lot of pressing issues that we need to [deal with] here and now?”

- Olivia Plunkett

Corporate Strategy Officer at City of London Corporation

“We Built It Next Door”

Throughout both the private and public sector, leaders expect AI to cut costs. Yet often there is no strategic direction for implementing AI.

Not only does this potentially lead to data governance issues, but it also sometimes leads to duplicating AI effort. You may find that you’ve spent money and time building a particular AI agent to do a job, only to find that someone next door has done the same thing.

“We don’t see AI in local government as being a means of cost-cutting, we actually see it as a means of improving the velocity of citizen outcomes.”

- Vikas Krishan

Head of UK & EMEA and Chief Digital Business Officer, Altimetrik

You want one agent to do that job for the whole firm. If there is central governance within the organisation, it suddenly makes it a lot easier.



In the Shadows

Another obstacle is shadow AI.

Concerns have been raised regarding an “unclear ownership of tools, agents, and workflows. [There is a] limited visibility on what is being built, what data is being used, and what actions systems are taking. Tools being developed without central oversight [create the] potential for violations and conflicting outputs from AI systems.”

Further, there are examples of money from ring-fenced budgets being spent without properly interrogating the process first. That inevitably leads to buying products and services that do not align with the desired outcome.

Many councils are operating in conditions of “short-term, inconsistent, siloed and highly prescriptive funding and policy making.”¹¹

Conclusion:

From AI Potential to Citizen Value



The opportunity for local government is no longer to experiment with AI it is to embed it responsibly into the fabric of public service delivery. While technology will continue to evolve, sustainable transformation depends on far more than AI models or isolated use cases. It requires modernising legacy systems, establishing trusted data and governance frameworks, and building the organisational capabilities that allow AI to scale securely and effectively.

Ultimately, the success of AI should not be measured by the number of pilots launched, but by the value it creates for citizens. Faster access to services, more informed frontline decisions, improved operational resilience and better public outcomes are the metrics that matter. The councils that lead the next phase of digital transformation will be those that view AI not as a technology initiative, but as a strategic capability one built on strong digital foundations, responsible governance and an unwavering focus on delivering better citizen outcomes.



NOTES

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