

Towards Connected Places: Insights into Actions

Background paper

**Socitm / St George's House Consultation
Monday 18th March – Tuesday 19th March 2024**



Introduction

This second Socitm-St George's House consultation forms part of the [Society for innovation, technology and modernisation \(Socitm\)](#) work on championing [place-based leadership and connected places](#). It builds on the findings of Socitm's previous consultation [Resilient people, communities and places](#) held in November 2021.

The 2024 consultation, which involved 40 key policy influencers, drawn from the public, private, third and academic sectors covered two days of shared insights, discussions and reflections provided an opportunity to stimulate debate on empowering and enabling place-based leadership and transformation, set in an era characterised by increasing devolution of power and growing adoption of artificial intelligence.

Through a series of multiple working groups, consultation participants looked at the interplay of place-based leadership and transformation with particular focus on the Connected Places and Artificial Intelligence agendas. The range of insights generated included identification of "what works" and what needs to change.

This background paper accompanies the consultation overview report and outlines the key insights and highlights from these deliberations. The findings of which will help to inform the development of the [Socitm Institute's](#) work with a range of partners on [place-based leadership, connected and sustainable places](#) and [artificial intelligence](#), as well as its [wider policy research](#).

Part I: Connected Places: Devolution, Digital, Data, and Sustainability

The focus of this part of the consultation looked at place-based leadership and transformation in an era of turbulent times, devolution, climate change and technological change. Following a series of insight briefings (summarised below), the working groups' discussions identified key challenges, opportunities and what needs to change around the themes of devolution, digital, data and sustainability.

Insight: Socitm Institute - Imaging Connected Places and Digital Trends

The Socitm Institute team outlined how reimagining public services lies at the heart of connected and sustainable places [insert infographic link when available]. Moving beyond narrow 'smart city' thinking, connected places are founded on digital models that embrace whole systems, with the aim of creating and sustaining environmental, social and economic conditions in which people and communities can thrive in any setting, urban or rural, large or small. They then went to set this thinking within the broader context of the findings of Socitm's [Public Sector Digital and Technology Trends 2024](#) report which covered the issues of community resilience, IT for the public good, reimagining services, leadership, skills and capacity.

Insight: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Secure Connected Places [

A [connected place](#) is “a community that integrates information and communication technologies and Internet of Things (IoT) devices to collect and analyse data to deliver new services to the built environment, and enhance the quality of living for citizens¹” This can involve using sensors, networks and applications to improve:

- transportation and mobility - monitoring traffic or planning journeys
- the environment - monitoring and preventing flooding and improving air quality
- waste management - smart bins that communicate when they need emptying
- housing – monitoring and preventing mould in social housing and temperature/hydration for care home residents.

Two-thirds of the public have heard of the term ‘smart cities’ but this does not cover the full range of places that can be connected in this way, including transport hubs and places of education. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is preparing an online explanatory video designed to help local authorities explain connected places and the opportunities they present to the public. In March 2024, the department also published the beta version of its [Secure connected places playbook](#), which includes advice on how to implement [National Cyber Security Centre \(NCSC\) connected places cyber security principles](#).

Insight: Social Progress Imperative /Impera Analytics: Measuring social progress

The idea that countries and areas should track social as well as economic growth via a common [Social Progress Index \(SPI\)](#) has gained ground in recent years. Overall, the UK’s SPI score fell slightly between 2011 and 2023 as a result of low scores for rights and values, inclusivity, water and sanitation, housing and health offset by positive scores for advanced education, information and communications and environmental quality. [[See article](#)]

The [Social Progress Imperative](#), a US-based not-for-profit organisation and their UK partners [Impera Analytics](#) work across nations, regions and places to track social progress and have been working to establish the SPIs for areas of Barking & Dagenham, Leeds, Luton and Lichfield. The company believes that geographically targeted interventions can provide high levels of social value and is now working with Hampshire County Council on using AI to predict future population trends. [Impera site]

Linked to this is Impera’s work on [Citizen-Led Impact](#) initiatives that seek to redefine community engagement by shifting from top-down approaches to empowering individuals as active architects of policy making. This practice is built around approaches developed as part of the [Good Life Euston project](#) (working with Camden Council and University College London) that involved over 500 local participants, of which three-fifths said they would not normally have taken part in formal engagement sessions. The results have been used to inform Camden’s policies on regeneration projects and are helping to establish a long-term and sustainable relationship between policymakers and community members, providing real-life and consistent feedback on the views and needs of the local community.

¹ As defined by National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI).

Working Groups Outputs

WG 1. Place-based Devolution – Big and Small - How does devolution provide us with an opportunity to improve digital place-based working and delivery?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Devolution allows for flexibility in delivery of digital working because a small-scale focus can help to facilitate a bespoke approach to improving digital place-based skills and delivery.
- Success stories tend to be based at even smaller scales, such as specific places or areas rather than as entire devolved areas.
- Data sharing has been seen to break down barriers.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Devolution isn't going to be the whole answer to delivering place-based outcomes; it is only one part of the conversation.
- Tackle the quality of the data being shared, the need to focus on what data is really needed to achieve the right outcomes and open-up data silos, such as the limitations on housing associations and local authorities sharing data.
- Devolution can help to understand local needs for improving digital skills and delivery then escalate these to a national level to enable creation of a baseline.
- Collaboration among devolved administrations and regions is complicated by factors including differing resident experiences, politics, demographics and population density – what is right for a city is not right for a rural area.
- Knowledge and therefore skills will continue to become outdated as digital technologies develop, so organisations should recruit and train not just the 'skills of today' but also the skills of the future.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Social progress rather than GDP should be the measurable policy goal. This will help understand the barriers to participating in the economy and considering how libraries, transport and housing affect digital place-based skills and delivery.
- Fostering and developing skills for the future, while understanding that skills and outcomes are specific to different localities.
- Remembering that devolution is one, but not the only, lens to look through.
- Understanding where the input of humans on AI and workload is relevant.
- Understanding what is best placed to be delivered at a national or local level, including on data security of locally run healthcare services, understanding local needs before escalating to a national standard. starting from the local to develop a baseline.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Regional bodies such as London Office for Technology Innovation (LOTI) and iNetwork should work together to strengthen guidance on how data sharing can be used to answer the right questions and achieve the desired outcomes.
- Pooling of research on place-based collaboration and innovation to establish a baseline sharing of what works and what needs to change with regards to digital and data devolution.
- Socitm and partners should help ensure leaders have the knowledge of and capabilities to lead digital projects.

WG 2. Power of Digital - How can digital capabilities enable us to deliver services and improved outcomes for the public good?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Collaboration using forums, community groups and central government.
- Maintaining the approach adopted during the pandemic to use networking hubs, leading to a more structured approach being formed.
- Acceleration of digital adopting a stronger customer focus.
- Innovative ways of working that increase productivity.
- Senior executives and political leaders becoming leadership advocates.
- Utilising the components of digital technology more effectively through skills and technology.
- Developing understanding of digital inclusion so it is public sector and industry wide.
- Understanding the value of data and how data sharing can support better outcomes for all.
- Raising awareness and the ability to take calculated and educational risks.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Close gaps in skill sets and look at opportunities to reskill.
- Streamline processes then simplify, standardise and share these across the sector.
- Realise the need for cultural changes and more in-depth discussions with political leaders.
- Recognise the technological challenges of legacy systems and interoperability.
- Transformational change – moving away from the silo mentality approach – needs and wants and the unheard voices.
- Improve the perception of local government's brand.
- Tackle antiquated recruitment and budget issues.
- Recognise the need for data standards.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Introduce a data standard across local government for all to follow and embed.
- Stop reinventing the wheel through one voice for local government and more collaborative engagement, including on commercial support.
- Consider how government is perceived, what it does versus what it is; and make decisions more transparent
- Recognise the unintended consequences of current restricted budgets.
- Establish mentoring schemes and programmes while investing in people through upskilling.
- Measure social impact.
- Develop business cases for sharing, collaboration and collaborative procurement.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Standardise language by making it clear, simple and inclusive.
- Use a more interoperable standards way of working.
- Develop partnership working and more collaboration.
- Share what good looks like to avoid reinventing the wheel.
- Work on what vehicle should be used for data standards through funding and research.
- Speak with one voice for one place.
- Tap into the goodwill that is available.

WG 3. Power of Data - How can we harness data to improve outcomes for residents, communities and businesses?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Data sharing: the pandemic showed the value of data sharing to the most vulnerable and those who were shielding.
- Data analytics: the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has joined up data sets on economic, social and environment measures to develop a resident's matrix.
- AI: can be used in work on Freedom of Information requests and for social worker case records.
- Digital Twins' pilots helping to test physical infrastructure models that can meet people's and communities' needs and expectations.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Introduce a 'can do' mindset based on working together to redefine how places can meet these challenges and opportunities through adopting robust data insights, championing citizen empowerment and using emerging technology responsibly.
- Support responsible use of generative AI to edit drafts of documents, apply context and provide critical awareness of the wider availability of data in a locality.
- On investments, consider whether to adapt rather than adopt, understanding what the possibilities are to leverage prior investments, such as with the Total Place approaches.
- Support the shift in national public administration thinking from 18th century attitudes to a 21st Century digital public service ethos.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Demonstrate working examples, such as showing that generative AI work on Freedom of Information requests is faster and more accurate.
- Showcase places where people's health and wellbeing are being improved.
- Address accountability, governance, quality of data, transparency consistency, keeping a human in the loop and risks.
- Recognise that AI is not a panacea.
- Upskill and create political leadership, particularly in data and ethics.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Understand of context and risk management.
- Change appetites for risk.
- Contribute what is possible with technologies and what works.
- Implement low-risk AI applications and provide training.
- Democratise data by making connections, showcase insights and being transparent.

WG 4. Sustainability and Net Zero - How can we improve sustainability through data and insight?

Initial steps that have worked well

- University of Exeter Local Climate Adaptation Tool for decision support (<https://www.lcat.uk/>).
- Oxfordshire County Council's impact/cost tool for residents.
- Citizen-led impact work.
- Dr Cara Courage, is a world leading expert in Creative Placemaking <https://www.caracourage.net/> she works closely with Dr Rhiannon Jones from the University of Derby on Civic communities of practice and influence through creative placemaking.
- University of Derby, has a Zero Carbon Academic Theme <https://www.derby.ac.uk/research/themes/zero-carbon/>
- University of Derby is a Civic University and Dr Rhiannon Jones, Associate Professor Civic Practice leads CivicLAB, public forum supporting place-based approach to knowledge generation (<https://www.derby.ac.uk/civic/civic-lab/>)
- London Borough of Barnet net zero impact tool.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Improve consistency of data collection including measures, benchmarks and impact.
- Community led, cross service and agency action.
- Better education.
- Story of Change reworked as Theory of Change.
- More agreement between the higher education and civic sector with policies focused on relevant issues.
- Engagement, which is with, not on behalf of, others.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Adopt peer review by a range of stakeholders.
- Encourage organisations to take risks. Get across messages of 'Stop thinking – start doing! No time left.'
- Share knowledge across sectors.
- Encourage cooperation between government and business.
- Shift the landscape we use and where we use it.
- Develop a series of published case studies of best practice.
- Set up a single source of truth or advice, but this may take too long.
- Use non-professional lived experience, such as neighbourhood experts as part of Socitm.
- Provide solutions that meet user needs and have impact to make change desirable.
- Introduce longer-term thinking, funding and impact measures.
- Work beyond silos.
- Get government really working to stop climate change.
- Centralise case studies and training.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Engage and promote University of Exeter Local Climate Adaptation Tool
- CivicLAB is a public space led by the University of Derby for research and practice through shared learning. <https://www.derby.ac.uk/civic/civic-lab/> It works at a regional and National level with stakeholders, funders, and local communities.
- London Borough of Barnet Citizen's Assembly playbook and lessons learnt provides shared best practices.
- 3Ci to address citizen-led initiatives, including cultural and design communities.
- Participate in the Net Zero What Works Centre and Doughnut Economics Action Lab

Part 2: Connected Places: Impact of AI and Emerging Technologies

Following an evening overview briefing on the findings of the [St George's House consultation on the threats and opportunities of AI²](#) held in October 2023 the consultation's second day focused on how AI can help places and communities to thrive while guarding against its risks. Following a series of insight briefings (summarised below), the working groups' discussions identified key challenges, opportunities and what needs to change around the Impact of AI and Emerging Technologies.

Insight: Socitm Institute: AI@Socitm

The Socitm Institute team outlined its thinking on the impact of AI and emerging technologies on connected places. Taking Worcestershire County Council as a case study, it highlighted a range of opportunities and risk/concerns facing local authorities over the adoption and use of AI, including: enhancing customer relationship management systems, accelerating and augmenting staff knowledge, supporting counter-fraud measures, reskilling and enhancing workforce productivity, and allowing decisions to be made collaboratively. This could be particularly useful in social work, for example in bringing together everything known about an individual.

As Socitm's recent [AI and Leadership roundtable report](#) highlighted, a balanced perspective [[see infographic](#)] recognising both the value and risks, helps to obtain best value from AI. This can include setting up a policy framework for AI adoption and use. Safe and resilient adoption of AI means working with "all six sides of the Rubik's cube" involved in local public services: senior leaders, staff, citizens, local businesses, suppliers and stakeholders.

To support this work, on the 18 March [Socitm launched a new AI@Socitm resources portal](#). AI@Socitm is updated every month with various resources including case studies of practical AI implementation across public sector/local gov/councils, policy guidance and templates for adaptation and use within your organisation and wider community.

Insight: PUBLIC.io: Procurement of AI by the public sector

The UK public sector spent around £800 million on AI from 2019 to 2023, driven by increasing interest from central government, according to research by consultancy PUBLIC based on contract award notices. Official notices covering 79 AI-related contracts from local authorities from 2021 to 2024 suggest they are using AI more narrowly than in central government, with established use cases featuring back-office processes, chatbots and customer service the most common. About 50

² See Annex

of these contracts were focused exclusively on AI adoption, with the rest making use of AI in larger projects. However, 2023 saw some more ambitious AI-linked projects:

- Luton Borough Council: a digital family hub for carers using AI for personalisation.
- Coventry City Council: a support app for parents again involving personalisation.
- London Borough of Merton: automation of accounts payable and e-invoicing.
- Suffolk County Council: a smoking cessation coaching app.
- Gwynedd Council: a project for local business support.

From October 2024, [the UK's new Competitive Flexible Procedure](#) will allow public authorities to ask suppliers to propose solutions to problems, rather than starting a contract process by stating what products and services they require. Suppliers will be chosen based on what they present in a pitch day or their performance in a test. The latter could involve a local authority providing synthetic data on a range of people and running a competition of AI models to see which does the best job of identifying at-risk families, subject to it passing ethical and risk standards.

Insight: Connected Places Catapult: Digital Twins and AI

The Connected Places Catapult (CPC) is the UK's innovation accelerator for cities, transport and places. It provides impartial 'innovation as a service' for public bodies, local authorities, businesses and infrastructure providers to catalyse step-change improvements in the way people live, work and travel.

The work of the CPC on Digital Twins and their application as virtual models of physical systems or environments, that can be used to support testing, monitoring and maintenance is providing wider insights as how they could also be used to provide AI systems with a deep, accurate understanding of parts of the real world. Some of the key issues for consideration include:

- Privacy vs. innovation in urban spaces
- Cybersecurity vs. usability in public access
- Technological access and equity
- AI ethics and bias in smart city solutions
- Economic growth vs. environmental sustainability.

The CPC considers that addressing these issues effectively in the era of AI will involve application of the [Centre for Digital Built Britain's Gemini Principles](#) to ensure that Digital Twins have clear purposes, are deemed trustworthy and function effectively.

Insight: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Introducing Local Digital's stewardship approach

[The Local Digital team](#) within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities curates' local government digital work, supports collaboration and encourages central government to work better with local digital teams. It focuses primarily on cyber resilience and digital transformation in local government.

Local Digital initially focused on [the Local Digital Declaration](#) that was signed by 361 public sector organisations and on the creation of common building blocks, such as [the Digital Planning national data platform](#) and LocalGov Drupal, [an open source council website publishing system now run by](#)

[a co-operative](#). However, common services are not always sustainable and may not work for everyone given that councils and their geographies vary significantly.

In February 2024, the Local Digital team said that [it will take a broader and more strategic role as steward of the sector](#), with the aim of becoming more effective and helpful. It is now planning to refine the Local Digital Declaration, initially by updating published material and developing it as an interactive service that allows benchmarking, then through resources including toolkits to support councils in digital transformation.

The team will also build on 2023's Future Councils pilot project to explore [what gets in the way of significant digital transformation](#) across organisations. The project has been evaluated by Socitm and consultancies Daintta and PUBLIC. This found a set of common challenges for councils including difficulties prioritising, effectively using data and changing organisational culture, as well as dealing with silos, lack of skills and overly complex governance. Local Digital has identified three systemic barriers: no way to de-risk innovation, no standards for change and market failure.

The department is encouraging the development and adoption of better data standards. In March 2024, it announced a three year plan to develop [the Open Referral UK standard for sharing information on services](#), with initial funding of £600,000. It is also exploring a data standard for housing, an area directly within the department's remit that it thinks may feature market failure, given that dominant suppliers have little incentive to allow interoperability that could help new suppliers. If it can introduce a common data standard for housing, this would support it making a case for similar work that would require collaboration with other departments, such as in education or children's care.

Local Digital's support for the cyber resilience of local public services continues, having funded 192 councils. Now, 90% of councils have offline data backup that allows quicker recovery from a ransomware attack. Launch of [the Cyber Assessment Framework for Local Government](#) will take place later in 2024 with plans to share experience across the sector under the slogan 'Defend as one'.

Working Groups Outputs

WG 1. Local AI Challenges and Opportunities - What lessons can we take from places that have utilised AI so far?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Using AI to inform decisions rather than make decisions.
- Using AI to assist such as in social work to gather and review data for case management.
- Buddying up and collaborating with other local authority colleagues to put forward AI joint projects and business cases such as for Microsoft Copilot.
- Case studies including Brent Council have incorporated the use of AI and automation in their digital strategy (<https://legacy.brent.gov.uk/media/16420030/digital-strategy-2022-2026-2.pdf>) and Worcestershire County Council considering AI implementation (https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/it_strategy_2021_23.pdf)
- Triple value impact model – advising local authorities to use different services after having their data reviewed.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Better understanding of data standards, legislation, rules and regulations.
- Change local government's fear of sharing best practise and lessons learnt with each other.
- Use data collaboratively by linking up and matching data to inform decisions to support citizens, such as home movement tracking sensors for vulnerable or elderly residents.
- A lack of digital skills among leadership and their staff needs to change. How do you recruit and retain staff with the right skills – use of the Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) framework, more attractive salaries?
- Use accessible language when explaining AI and give practical examples, such as framing it as an administrative assistant speeding up processes currently carried out manually.
- Tailor the promotion of AI and its capabilities to different audiences, such as AI use cases, benefits or risks from specific industries rather than broad or generalized discussions.
- Improve AI awareness among leaders. At present leaders may defer to other colleagues with greater expertise on AI, but this is not sustainable long term; decisions, direction and strategy, as well as justifying the costs of adoption, should come from the top.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Guidance needed on the new Procurement Act – gaps in collaboration and concerns around whether products are delivering intended outcomes.
- Establish a collective agreement of what best practice looks like, drawing on private sector, academic and central government understanding of what a good utilisation of AI looks like.
- Strengthening collaboration by improving the sharing of case studies, pilots and business cases and creating a forum or safe space free from businesses trying to sell to local government to discuss for example what businesses to avoid and to trust.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Districts and smaller local authorities lack the budget to spend on AI and companies like Microsoft are not willing to take a risk because of low financial returns. Instead, small councils should offer them space and staff to develop, test and pilot AI projects and tools.
- Socitm, Solace and LGA should run workshops and develop key actions with each other.
- Regional Bodies (e.g. LoTI and iNetwork) could identify skills gaps and keep a library of job descriptions to facilitate upskilling.
- Solace could run a programme with chief executives to get on the same page around AI, raise its profile and understand how AI can be used and implemented in local government.
- Socitm could work with PUBLIC on guidance on the data procurement legislation changes.

WG 2. Leadership, governance and AI - What does the rapidly changing AI environment mean for place-based leadership?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Identifying what skills are required and putting in place a governance framework.
- A strong senior leadership approach.
- Networks of collaboration with public and private sector intelligence coming together.
- Common threads to help focus, demonstrate understanding and build shared awareness.
- Maximising resources by repurposing skills sets and allowing upskilling opportunities.
- Efficiency gains and infrastructure sharing between local public services.
- Sharing of business cases and wider insights, including what works helps to increase productivity, collaboration, tools and what doesn't work so well to learn from this.
- Policy and guidance – simplifying and not over complicating.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Not being afraid to share what has not worked, develop risk taking and risk management.
- A more structured approach to analytical and supervised outputs.
- More open sharing, collaboration, early intervention and early adoption.
- Get information governance right and more importantly get the basics right.
- Seek wider public buy-in.
- Measure impact with data on financials, people-driven and duty of care measures.
- Setting up AI boards that link service directors and heads of information governance in the delivery of workshops.
- Consider perceptions, both positive and negative.
- Regarding connected places, show why activity in one area can benefit others.
- Involve combined authorities in dialogue.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Increase opportunities for collaboration.
- Provide education for decision makers and influencers.
- Share things, actually use them rather than just say it: Do it, Say it, Use it!
- Develop tool interaction.
- Build skills, including meaning and understanding behind requests, to prompt creativity.
- Consider human versus machine interface.
- Lean more on suppliers so that we can collaborate with them both on social value, but also on wider knowledge sharing and funding opportunities.
- Understand our needs and wants, and build knowledge of the financial climate.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Collectively, through more sharing.
- PUBLIC (the consultancy) can help explain the new procurement rules.
- The Innovation Procurement Empowerment Centre hosted by the Connected Places Catapult can help on funding and information.
- Universities can broker relationships and carry out impact gathering for local authorities, join the dots and support people, as well as host working groups such as on bid writing.
- Partnership programmes can help senior leaders manage processes.
- [The Safe and Responsible AI Information Hub \(Saihub.info\)](https://www.saihub.info) helps showcase what is available.
- Continued collaboration – connecting and supporting the use of tools.
- Education that the public sector needs at SME level.
- The Local Government Association can help politicians.
- Data maturity – devolved nations assessments, a learning journey.

WG 3. Responsible and Secure AI / Emerging Technologies - How can we use AI and emerging technologies to support public good, defend democracy and societal well-being?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Joined up data sets.
- Generative AI delivering efficiencies and improving productivity such as social worker case records, Freedom of Information request processing and complaints.
- Socitm and partners briefings and collaboration on responsible use

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- The way we share data.
- More upskilling of IT departments.
- Help users to have a better understanding of the use of their data.
- Get the balance right between social aspects and digital services, such as with self-service tills at the supermarket.
- Better interface – empower officers with AI tools to enable them to respond more effectively.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Start with the basics: sort your data, improve data quality and introduce automation.
- Raise awareness of AI including considerations, limitations and secure use.
- More security layers for your sensitive data.
- Let's not lose human interaction.
- Make it safe – apply rules and ethics.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Apply the Gemini Principles <https://digitaltwinhub.co.uk/download/the-gemini-principles/> for Digital Twins.
- Update Socitm's Ethical Digital Placemaking model to address the responsible use of AI.
- Promote the AI@Socitm platform as source of advice of the ethical and responsible use of AI.
- Socitm look to partner with [RAIUK - Responsible AI UK](#) international ecosystem for responsible AI research and innovation.
- Participate in the forthcoming AI and Elections St George's House Consultation.
- Translate the Bletchley Park declaration findings into tangible guidance and support for local public sector partners.

WG 4. Nurturing AI Skills and competences - What are the skills and competences needed to develop and deliver digital transformation in the era of AI?

Initial steps that have worked well

- Asking how we should make the case for AI.
- Requiring problems to be defined.
- Having the ability to learn from mistakes.
- Having the skills to educate users of the benefits of AI.
- Applying user centred design.

Changes needed to achieve better outcomes

- Learn how to scale up.
- Make long-term investments.
- Build skills in detecting digital fraud.
- Develop international co-operation in AI.
- Provide skills for training civil servants in AI.
- Develop skills in public relations management.
- Take care not to let AI overtake the focus on data.
- Apply critical thinking skills.
- Give away power to the front line.
- Promote culture change, the art of the possible.
- Run pilots that sell success.
- Encourage participatory engagement.
- Clarify problems.

Practical steps needed to enable change

- Find the right champions.
- Apply change management and art of the possible.
- Focus on the problems with services on the front line by engaging customers and front-line deliverers.
- Develop basic skills in user-centred design, journey mapping, process mapping and user requirements.
- Establish hubs for excellence and innovation.
- Educate children, inspire them and teach the basics, support inquisitive creative skills for under-5s and influence the education agenda.
- Build a model council from core principles.

Collaboratively help to support the change process

- Share wider learning from the nations and regions [such as WLGAs research]
- Develop joint capacity building schemes drawing on wider competencies' frameworks.
- Share stories from the around the world – look at key lessons coming out of Bletchley Park participants like UK, US, EU and China
- Share methods of engagement.
- Provide resources playbooks.
- AI@Socitm work to investigate the scope for wider collaboration with emerging AI related initiatives such as the AILabs proposal.

Annex - St George's House consultation on the threats and opportunities of AI

Socitm was involved in a [St George's House consultation on the threats and opportunities of AI](#) held in October 2023. This examined misinformation, social disruption, dangerous activities and law making and regulatory functions, while deliberately leaving out existential risks and bias. The key themes of the discussion included:

- **We don't know what we don't know**, including problems around unintended outcomes, whether AI could be used to manage the harms it may cause and to what extent AI models are trained on data already produced by AI.
- **Definitions and barriers to discussion**, with a lack of agreement on terms including 'artificial intelligence' itself.
- **Act now, not later** was the consensus opinion but doing so means facing issues of resourcing.
- **What is human?** Human misuse of AI as a greater risk than out-of-control AI and the technology could be used to increase the scale of dangerous human urges, although there was also discussion of the importance of preserving human dignity.

The consultation's working groups proposed the following:

- **Misinformation** (incorrect information rather than intentionally false disinformation) from AI could be tackled through open-source tools for research, innovation, standards and access to data, such as [Microsoft's ElectionGuard software development kit](#), as well as a public Trustmark for AI algorithms.
- **Social disruption** issues include the centrality of human dignity and the risks of losing interactions between humans. It could be addressed through universally agreed definitions of human and AI, better education, explainable and transparent AI models and clear means to opt out of data harvesting.
- **Dangerous activities** include identifying these from a wide range of possibilities including open-source bioweapons, prompting suicides, inducing market crashes and rigging elections, with the last needing rapid action. They could be tackled through international co-operation on prohibiting the most dangerous activities as well as monitoring, deterrence, accountability, sanctions and open reporting of accidents to an international organisation
- **Law making and regulatory functions** showed the need for an online wiki or database with [the Safe and Responsible AI Information Hub \(Saihub.info\)](#) which covers the EU, UK and US as a first step in this direction. Other useful actions would include compulsory ethics studies and trusted assurance schemes for AI, transparency about investments, regulatory sandboxes and a commitment from political parties not to use deepfakes, AI-generated fraudulent material.

The session considered whether AI's potential was being oversold as a result of its successes in generating text and images. In both cases, enormous amounts of training data are available online, which may not be true for other areas. However, while AI is in a hype cycle and is finding limitations, it is still a general-purpose technology that can generate great dangers and opportunities.

Participants also discussed how AI is concentrated within a very small number of companies. Demystifying AI and discussing its benefits as well as harms could help, while public sector organisations can aim to manage changes caused by AI rather than leaving these to suppliers.

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