

In **Our** View *Focus*



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FEATURING COVERAGE OF



Share National, 19 October

THEME

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use of emerging
technologies and data**

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VICE-PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

We owe it to our communities to use data ethically



This event is about how we understand and promote ethical use of all the technologies and data that we use. Ethics is defined as the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour. It's really important given the unique position we have in local government around data and systems in our community, particularly for vulnerable members of our society. We have an honoured position, so we need to make sure we use data in the right ways for the right purposes. Our residents have to trust us to use that data and to protect it.

There is also a real opportunity to change, maximise and do things differently with data. It's really important that we use data in new, innovative ways to reduce inequalities and think about genuinely place-based ways of public service delivery. An ethical approach to using data is absolutely at the centre of that.

Lots of work has already happened or is taking place on this policy theme. We are championing the use of ethics around technology and data, and we are promoting all sorts of work on ethics to ensure it is embedded in the architecture of what local government does. We can't do this by ourselves, so there is an alliance with other organisations including the Cyber Technical Advisory Group, which is doing a huge amount of work around cybersecurity.

A crisis is not a time to throw ethics out the window. It is a time to do things fast and do things right. Local government is very good in a crisis – just think about the challenge of the Covid pandemic and the opportunity that data gave us

to target resources. Chief executives suddenly got the fact that if they had more accurate live data, it had much more value to them. We have responded to other crises since then, concerning Ukrainian refugees and the cost of living.

You wouldn't set up local government like it is, with so many systems and data all over the place. It is only when you start to join up that data that you get insights, intelligence and wisdom. But the trust our residents and communities have in us is so important. We have to do what we say we are going to do with their data and keep it safe as well. We have got to do things in the open and be transparent.

Mark Lumley
Socitm vice-president

This is an edited version of Mark's welcome to Socitm's Share National event held in London on 19 October

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Brent data ethics board 'not there to scare'

Brent has set up a data ethics board to advise and share best practice, the borough's head of digital transformation Rehana Ramesh told Socitm's Share National event in London on 19 October. "The ethics board is not there to scare you, it is not a decision-making authority," she said.

Ramesh said that she established it after discussing healthcare ethics boards with an NHS trust delegate at a Socitm event in 2019. The board includes an academic, a lawyer, an NHS representative, a head of data from the Greater London Authority and a local resident. It started small with a single project, and the borough took advice from the Open Data Institute (ODI) and the London Office of Technology and Innovation in developing it.



The borough has also set up training, extending to residents and councillors on what it does with data; a written framework on data ethics drawing on the ODI's data ethics canvas; and a technical design authority. Ramesh said its data ethics work aims to support data and business intelligence teams in this area: "It's a bit more than having a moral compass, it's about putting on a different hat and thinking about the wider consequences." When introducing text message and email authentication for citizens to access services, it found that most residents saw it as a way to keep their data safer



"It's a bit more than having a moral compass, it's about putting on a different hat"

*Rehana Ramesh,
London Borough of Brent*

Such work can help convince departments that tend to be protective of what they see as their own data, such as adult social care and children's services: "The minute you say you want to automate an online form? 'Children will die'," she said. The council uses internal data-sharing agreements between departments to ease such tensions.

Ramesh said that she advises those undertaking data projects to consider the positive and negative consequences, to encourage the former and mitigate the latter, as well as likely differences between what they intend to happen and actual impacts. "Trust me, this also works in relationships and marriages," she said. "I always think I'm doing the right thing by challenging my husband."

Barnet could add sustainability score to procurements

Barnet could judge suppliers on sustainability as part of its procurement process, the London borough's assistant director of sustainability and insight Yogita Popat told the event.

"Social value is 20%," she said, referring to the procurement weighting for social, environmental and economic factors agreed in 2021. "I'm going to be pushing for sustainability to be 10% as well."

She added the council's supply chain is probably responsible for about 96% of its greenhouse gas emissions, although it does yet have the data to know this.

Popat said that Barnet's sustainability plans accelerated after Labour took control of the borough from the Conservatives in May's local elections and brought forward the area's net zero carbon emissions target date from 2050 to 2042, with the council itself aiming for 2030.

Popat said the borough wants to be "one of the most sustainable boroughs in London" rather than the most sustainable, recognising others are setting similar aims.

See more

LOTI on Brent's data ethics board: bit.ly/3SAuGWS

ODI data ethics canvas: bit.ly/3FbjV5I



Delegates taking part in the Share National workshop session

EVENT NEWS

Lack of access frustrates social value data sharing

Local public services face a range of problems in accessing and combining data to build social value, including uncooperative suppliers, poor staff access and a lack of single identifiers for people. This was the view from participants during a workshop at Socitm's data-focused Share National event.

The group, chaired by Sue Daley, technology and innovation director at TechUK, heard some suppliers block or make it very difficult for organisations to export data: "Some companies think it's their data, not the residents' data," said one participant. Another said that it can be tricky to extract data from cloud-based services, particularly older 'legacy cloud' ones.

Social value could provide a way to change this, with a supplier representative saying that assessments of this in the procurement process increasingly represent "the difference between winning and losing" with some local authorities making this worth 30% of the scoring.

Within organisations, individuals and departments can be protective of data they have gathered and unwilling

to share it, participants said. This can include data teams, with other staff feeling that specialists are hoarding data in a virtual dungeon. This can be tackled by giving everyone access to data analysis tools such as Microsoft's Power BI, which may help persuade them it is worth opening internal access to new sets of data.

“

"Some companies think it's their data, not the residents' data"

Workshop participant

The discussion also covered the lack of a single identifier for individuals, which makes it harder to join up personal data. One option is to use Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs), designed as permanent identifiers for all buildings and addressable locations in Great Britain. They are openly available for use by local authorities, with the Local Government Association and Socitm having published

guidance. UPRNs are only a proxy for individuals, although the London Borough of Tower Hamlets used them to monitor Covid-19 vaccination.

One participant added the public sector could learn lessons from the financial sector's open banking standard, which gives customers the ability to pass data held on them by one organisation to another, making permission-based sharing much easier.

Two other groups discussed ethical digital leadership and cyber resilience. From the first, former Socitm president Sam Smith said that ethical leadership includes monitoring the quality of data: "If you're making any decisions based on data and the data quality is rubbish, so is the quality of the decision," she said. The second reported that ethical cyber resilience should consider reducing the data currently held securely in favour of open publication, as having less data to protect reduces cybersecurity risks.

See more

LGA guide for councils on using UPRNs: bit.ly/3MXIT3P

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Panel: public sector can lead by example on data

Public sector organisations can support ethical data practices by following them, even if the government loosens data protection law, members of a panel session said.

“What the public sector can do is lead by example,” said Mahlet Zimeta, head of public policy at the Open Data Institute. “By setting high expectations about ethical use of data, about what inclusive data practices look like, how data can be used for social good, that then sets communities’ expectations.”

If public bodies set high standards citizens will not accept low ones from the private sector, she added. “That shapes the ecosystem, that sets the norms and teaches people what is possible,” Zimeta said, adding that civil society can be an ally in doing this.

The Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, which would replace the current law based on the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation, was introduced to the House of Commons in July. If eventually passed in its current form, it will introduce risk-based approaches in some areas and remove the requirement for a specific data protection officer.

However, Paul Withers, data protection manager for Walsall Council, said the bill would still require a senior officer to take responsibility for data. More generally, he said organisations should be guided by ethics rather than narrow legal compliance: “I never call it GDPR. I call it getting data protection right,” he said of the current legislation.

“By setting high expectations about ethical use of data... that sets communities’ expectations”

*Mahlet Zimeta,
Open Data Institute*

He added that if officials had a gut feeling they were doing something wrong they should look for alternatives and if they want to do more with data they should show they are taking responsibility for this. It also made sense for projects to cover possible actions from data collection, such as how data collected on air quality could lead to changing roadworks.

Zimeta said that there are opportunities for local authorities to do more with data in an ethical fashion, such as adapting the concept of data portability. Third sector organisations could access and use individuals’ data if they ask for support and give permission. They could also replace the expensive concept of smart cities with ‘open cities’ which seeks to make better use of existing data.



Top Talent tackles document management

Better document management has the potential to save organisations money and reduce environmental impacts, according to the cohort of participants in Socitm’s Top Talent course who presented findings at the event.

Use of management software and a central print room can boost efficiency, while providing good print services for those working remotely, the cohort’s yellow team reported. Printing can take place when electricity costs less, such as overnight, and

analysis passed to managers can minimise unnecessary printing. Organisations can use artificial intelligence and natural language processing to deal better with scanned physical post, by categorising it and in some cases feeding contents into line of business systems, the blue team added.

Automated scanning could greatly reduce the costs of digitising paper archives, with the green team estimating that Norfolk County Council could cut £95,000 from the cost of scanning its archive of traffic regulation orders and parish records by using such a system.

See more

Pinsent Masons assessment of new data protection bill: bit.ly/3zdXPQW

ODI on data-enabled cities: bit.ly/3TOBp0m



Nations and regions news

To pass on local authority IT news, please email inourview@socitm.net

Scotland

The Highland Council has published a new ICT strategy after bringing services in-house following 20 years of outsourcing, which includes building a local ICT team and increasing resilience and security.

bit.ly/3SUYOgC

Wales

Swansea Council has set up a cost of living section on its website, including information on accessing financial support and food, searching for work, energy saving tips and advice on dealing with debt.

bit.ly/3g5u7a7

Northern Ireland

Belfast City Council is planning a Citizen Office of Digital Innovation which will try to increase public engagement with its digital work, according to a prior information contract notice.

bit.ly/3rT5yzO

Republic of Ireland

Kildare County Council has published nearly 18,000 pages of records online from local poor law unions in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including how workhouses were run and thousands of names.

bit.ly/3ex5WAL

North-east England

Sunderland City Council and partners have chosen 10 early-stage technology companies to join an Internet of Things and 5G accelerator programme which includes £10,000 grant funding.

bit.ly/3ezFHcZ

Yorkshire and the Humber

Leeds City Council is planning a year-long programme to explore robotic process automation, having identified a number of ways it can use such technology.

bit.ly/3SdMgQx

North-west England

Wyre Council in Lancashire has launched an augmented reality app that tells a story based on a series of artworks on the beach and promenade at Cleveleys, with similar plans for Fleetwood and Garstang.

bit.ly/3rSSbQ0

East Midlands

Nottingham City Council, with Nottingham City Homes, Nottingham University Hospitals and a local home care provider, are placing movement monitoring sensors in the homes of vulnerable people recently discharged from hospital.

bit.ly/3TkCdK8

West Midlands

Sandwell Council has installed screens that display live local air quality data in mosques, churches, temples and gurdwaras, showing information that can also be viewed online.

bit.ly/3g4cG9T

East of England

Essex County Council has published a digital strategy designed to support connectivity and tackle exclusion, including a grant scheme for rural areas that cannot access good-quality broadband.

bit.ly/3T00Me2

South-east England

Kent County Council has launched ReferKent, an online referral system designed to link residents hit by financial hardship to appropriate support organisations.

bit.ly/3erlNkn

South-west England

Devon County Council's cabinet has approved a digitised residents' parking permit system, allowing faster applications, immediate changes in vehicle details and by-the-hour visitor permits.

bit.ly/3CCwOaS

London

Barnet Council will spend £42.7 to £57 million on extending its contract with Capita, including to provide IT until March 2026, after which it plans to take direct control of this and other services.

bit.ly/3yyyjFt

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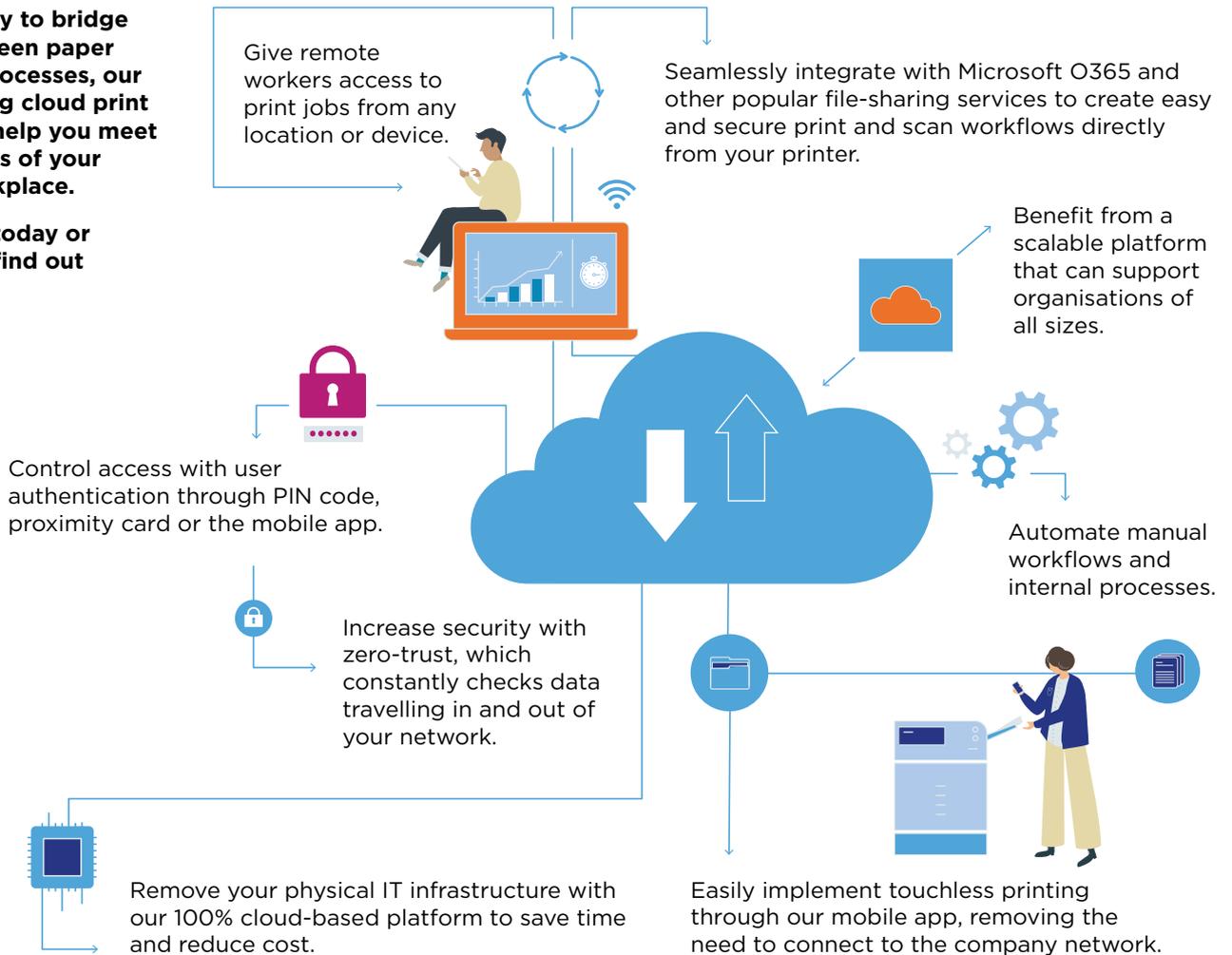


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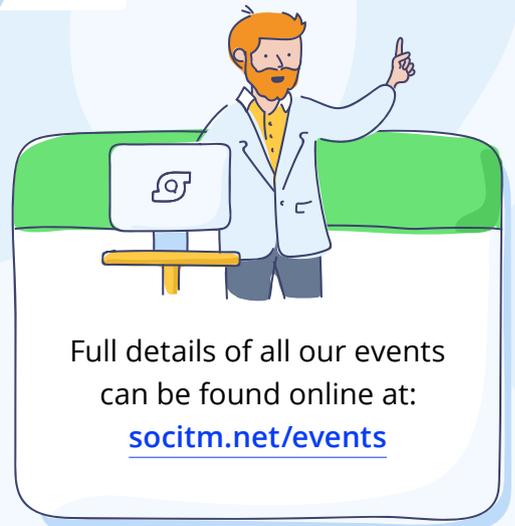
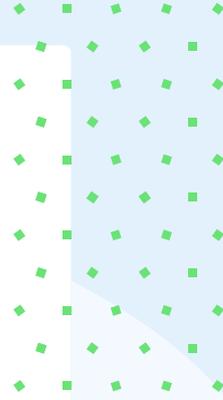
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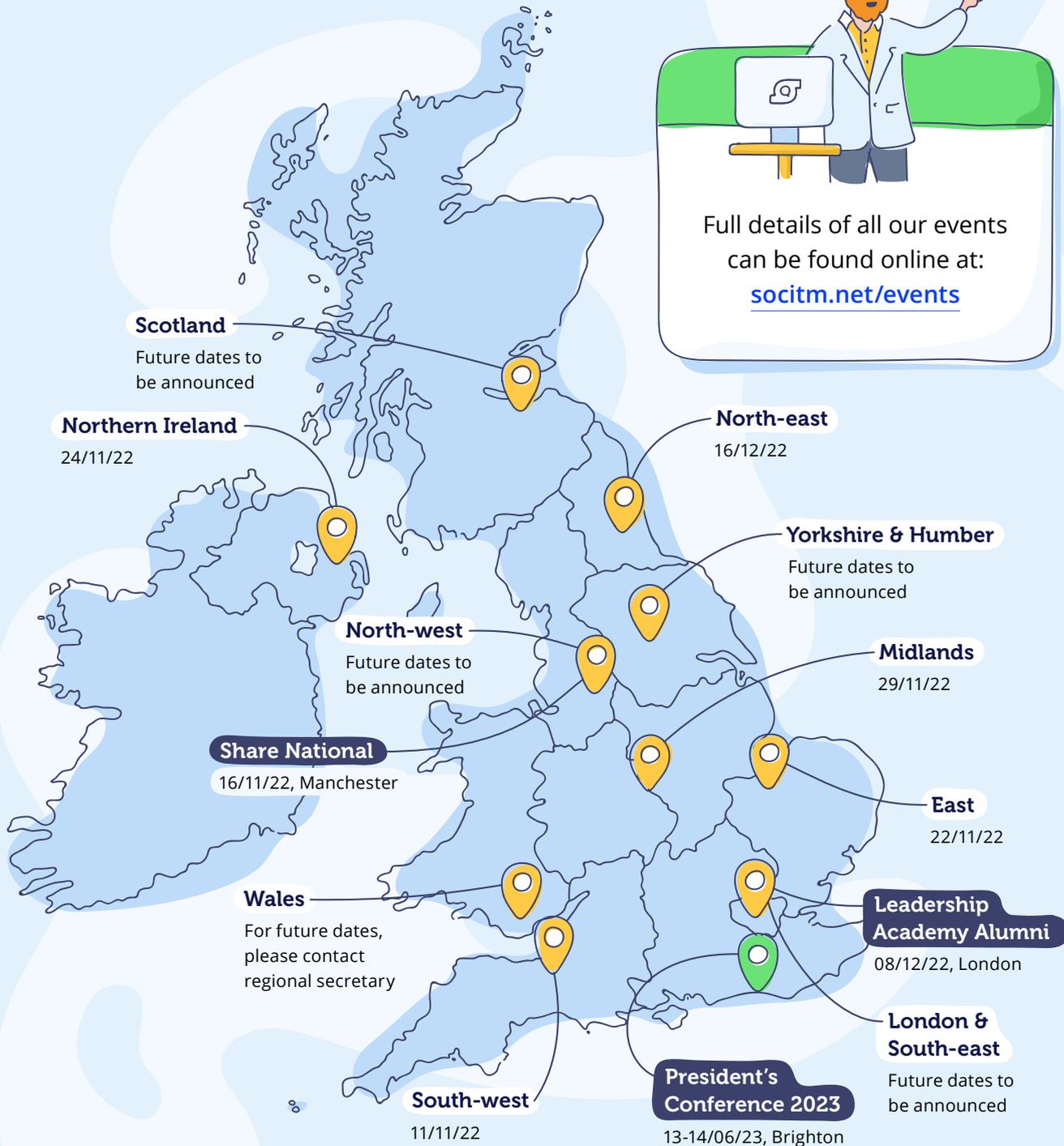
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See the bigger picture

Local and national events calendar



Full details of all our events
can be found online at:
socitm.net/events



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