



LOCAL AUTHORITY CASE STUDY

Westminster City Council

Harnessing the
council-wide power of
mobile footfall data

CACI

DO AMAZING
THINGS WITH DATA



Highlights

- Anonymised, fortnightly footfall data with demographic profiles
- Evidence base for effective decision-making
- Reporting in PowerBI dashboard for maximum impact and clarity
- Consultancy advice to achieve full value from the data
- Local Authority sector knowledge blended with data and technology expertise

About Westminster City Council

Westminster City Council is a London borough council made up of 60 councillors from 20 wards. The Council is responsible for local government activities including council tax billing, planning, housing, waste collection and environmental health. It shares some strategic policy responsibilities with the Greater London Authority and provides some shared services with neighbouring councils.

Boasting a 24/7 nightlife, iconic shopping destinations such as Carnaby Street and famous tourist attractions including Buckingham Palace, Westminster is one of the UK's most alluring places to live, work and visit. Before the pandemic, more than one million people passed through the borough every day. Understanding how residents, workers and visitors engage with the city is key to successfully accommodating such a diverse demographic.



City of Westminster



The challenge

Using footfall insight for evidence-led decision-making

In 2020, Westminster Council became the first local authority to acquire mobile footfall data as a means for evidence-led decision making. The Council is using it to monitor footfall in the city across time and space, analysing associated geodemographic information to differentiate between the activity of residents, workers and visitors.

The data has an exciting range of potential uses. But using such a large dataset posed a technological challenge. Working with CACI, the Westminster City Council team, led by Research and Intelligence Analyst Dr Curtis Horne, has begun to generate insights for different departments across the council.

The approach

Exploring a vast array of data to reveal priority insights

Curtis Horne explains:

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We have been getting our heads round how to use this massive resource for the first time – having access to millions of rows of data is a huge amount in comparison to datasets we’ve previously worked with.

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CACI talked to us about our requirements and how we could make best use of the dataset. Our IT team and database administrators moved the data into Azure in the Cloud. We load the data into PowerBI where we’ve created interactive dashboards that provide trend information for a range of decision-making areas.

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The anonymised, aggregated and GDPR compliant mobile footfall dataset provides demographic insight, with estimated home location data. This has helped Curtis and his team analyse residents, business users and visitors from outside Westminster.

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We could show we had spent wisely on the campaign, using a targeted approach to reach the right audience and achieve a good return. Going forward, we believe campaign recipients will be more satisfied with our communication, because they're receiving tailored and relevant information.

Dr Curtis Horne, Research and Intelligence Analyst,
Westminster City Council

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The outputs

Actionable information for business, hospitality and transport

Curtis Horne describes a recent project: "We've been monitoring changes in footfall relative to pre-COVID levels at different locations throughout Westminster, both in the interest of public safety and economic recovery. We can see, at a top level, how different demographic groups are returning and how their behaviour is changing, including tourists. The data reveals new opportunities and relevant audiences."

"Working with our Campaigns and Communications team, we've been encouraging households to come back to the West End for Covid-secure leisure and dining outdoors. We identified consumers with the means to do this but whose footfall has been below average recently. The **#SightseeCrowdFree** social media ad campaign in August used Acorn to target the Home Counties to resume their spending in the Westminster area, to help our hospitality businesses recover."

Curtis and his team measured a 50% uplift in visitor footfall from the target areas, compared to uplift from other London boroughs of just 10%.

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During the pandemic restrictions, Westminster City Council has also used footfall data to review the flow of pedestrians and traffic around the borough. Responding to patterns of travel and behaviour, the Council has been able to apply effective social distancing barriers and direction systems on the streets, to keep visitors, workers and residents safe.



The benefits

A data dashboard that gives Council teams clear and actionable information

What does the data deliver? Curtis Horne says:

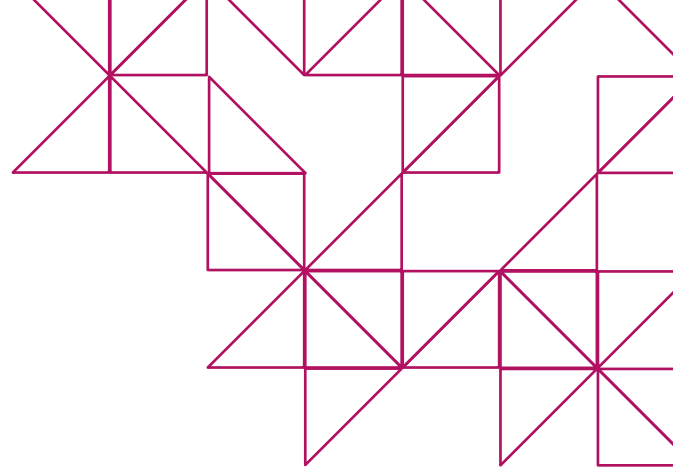
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This mobile footfall dataset provides a more accurate and trusted baseline for measuring change. Whether that's for Covid-19 or other situations and interventions, we can see more clearly whether our policies and strategies are making a difference. Using before and after measurements, we can learn continually about what works and improve the effectiveness of our activities and communications.

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“The dashboard we've created gives people across the Council an easy and relevant way to understand sophisticated data. It provides evidence for decision-making that helps us deliver better services and get the most value from our budgets, because we can act with confidence and target precisely.”





The future

Driving value from sophisticated data for every Council department

Demand for insight from the footfall data is coming from all around the Council. Curtis and the team plan to create hotspot maps from footfall data, showing the busy and quiet parts of Westminster. They can use this information to encourage visitors and residents to enjoy places off the beaten track at certain times. Footfall information will also help with event planning, predicting demand for transport and likely areas of pedestrian and traffic congestion, so the Council can act in advance to meet these peaks.

Licensing is a particularly important application. With footfall data showing who is using local restaurants and hospitality venues, it's easier to predict the levels of noise and disruption that granting a new or extended license might create. Evidence-based insight helps decision-makers strike a balance between the comfort and well-being of residents and supporting local business growth.

The footfall data can also help the Council to understand crime and disorder rates better and manage its response. Curtis explains: "Our crime rates can look high per number of residents – but when you take visitors to the area into account, it may be less disproportionate. Understanding these metrics helps us use resources better to safeguard our residents and businesses."

Regeneration and business growth programmes will benefit from the footfall dataset. For example, in Oxford Street, Westminster Council can assess the demographics and provenance of people in the area at different times. Insights derived from the aggregated and summarised data can then be shared with stakeholders, such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). "Shopping centre footfall data is used widely by private sector property owners and retailers for their own sites. We can now see a complete picture across our whole area. This will help us plan new developments and target communications campaigns to meet clearly defined needs."

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We're ambitious – we know we're at the start of our data journey and the potential is exciting. We've gained a lot of value from the consultancy sessions delivered by CACI after we bought the dataset. These were delivered virtually. The team showed their knowledge of the Local Authority sector, providing clear and relevant answers about how we could best use the data and how to bring it into our systems.

Dr Curtis Horne, Research and Intelligence Analyst, Westminster City Council

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To find out more about how CACI can help you support your community, please get in touch:

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