The UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector

By Newham Council and the University of East London

Newham Council has partnered with the University of East London (UEL), a leader in AI research, to establish the UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector. This collaborative venture aims to harness the transformative power of AI to address complex challenges in local government, driving innovation and improving services for the community.

By focusing on real-world applications, the centre seeks to inspire other councils to adopt AI solutions tailored to public sector needs.

Launched in September 2024, the UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector focuses on leveraging AI to enhance critical service areas, including social housing, temporary accommodation, social care, repairs and maintenance, the local economy, and climate change mitigation. The centre represents a strategic effort to integrate cutting-edge technology with public services, ensuring ethical, effective, and impactful use of AI.

Key objectives include:

- To promote the use of AI in improving services in areas such as temporary accommodation, local economy, social care, and climate change mitigation.
- To ensure ethical and effective use of AI through robust governance and compliance frameworks.
- To contribute significantly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as Arts and Culture, Young People, Sustainability, Health Inequalities, Economic Inequalities, and Data Economy or Cybersecurity.

Newham faces significant challenges in managing temporary housing, with annual expenditures exceeding £20 million—one of the highest in the UK. This partnership aims to address this pressing issue through AI-driven solutions:

- **Predictive models:** Developing tools to forecast housing demand and homelessness trends.
- **Streamlined processes**: Exploring AI systems to optimise the procurement and allocation of temporary accommodation properties.

Building on the Newham Data Analytics Framework (NDAF), the partnership will integrate data from diverse sources to generate actionable insights. These efforts will also extend to research in health and education, ensuring a comprehensive approach to improving public services.

The centre places a strong emphasis on engaging the local community and fostering collaboration across disciplines. Training programs will equip public sector staff and residents with the skills needed to utilise AI effectively. This commitment to inclusivity ensures that the benefits of AI are accessible to all.

A steering committee comprising representatives from Newham Council, UEL, and the London Office of Innovation and Technology (LOTI) will guide the initiative. An advisory board of experts from academia, industry, and the public sector will provide strategic oversight, ensuring that research findings are applicable to broader local government contexts. Ethical considerations remain a priority, with governance frameworks designed to align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The immediate priorities include:

- **Stakeholder engagement**: Collaborating with key stakeholders to refine objectives and gather feedback.
- **Securing funding**: Establishing financial support to sustain the centre's operations.
- **Pilot projects**: Launching initiatives in priority areas to demonstrate the potential of AI-driven solutions.
- **Training programs**: Equipping public sector employees with the knowledge and skills to integrate AI into their work effectively.