

# Money is Tight in Councils - But is That the Real Problem



OAS



# Overview

This article argues that inefficiency is structural, not a failure of effort.

Services were designed separately for past needs and have not evolved to match today's complex, overlapping demands or expectations for joined-up experiences.

Incremental fixes—new systems, channels and digital tools—add capability without changing the underlying model, creating fragility rather than improvement.

Using the Model T analogy, it shows why 'continually upgrading the engine' isn't enough and introduces the Connected Council approach: connecting existing services around people to reduce fragmentation.





# How Yesterday's Sensible Decisions Created Today's Constraints

Most inefficiency in large organisations isn't the result of poor decisions or lack of effort.

It is the cumulative outcome of sensible, well-intentioned choices made over time to meet specific needs, comply with regulation, secure funding, or manage risk. Each decision made sense in the context of its time, but together they formed structures optimised for a world that no longer exists.

Services, systems and processes were built to operate independently, because that was the most practical way to deliver outcomes at the time.

This pattern is not unique to local government. It appears across the NHS, utilities, financial services and large enterprises—anywhere complexity has grown faster than organisational design. Councils are simply a highly visible example of this broader, structural challenge.





# How Services Became Fragmented

Services were originally created to solve specific problems as they existed at the time. Each came with its own legislation, funding model, performance measures and accountability. Over years — sometimes decades — those services naturally developed their own systems, processes and ways of working.

None of that was irrational. In many cases, it was the only practical option available.

What has changed is the environment those services now operate in.

Resident needs are more complex than they were previously. Communities are more diverse. People move more frequently. Issues around housing, health, employment and care increasingly overlap. Problems no longer arrive neatly packaged within a single service boundary.

At the same time, expectations have shifted. People are used to joined-up experiences elsewhere in their lives. They expect to explain something once, be understood, and not have to repeat themselves every time they make contact.

Organisational structures, however, haven't evolved at the same pace.





# The Model T Analogy

A useful way to think about this is the Model T analogy.

The Model T was a brilliant piece of engineering in its day. But imagine trying to keep it on a modern motorway by continually upgrading the engine — more power, better components, newer parts — while leaving the underlying design untouched. It might keep moving. It might even perform better than before. But it was never designed for today's traffic, speed or complexity.

That's effectively what many organisations have done.

As demand increased, the response was incremental: new systems to solve specific problems, new channels to manage volume, new processes to maintain control and compliance. Capability was added, but the underlying structure stayed the same.

Over time, this created something that looks functional on the surface but is fragile underneath — a collection of well-run parts that don't quite work together. **That's when inefficiency becomes structural rather than operational.** A resident updates their circumstances in one place, but not everywhere. Information exists, but not where it's needed. Staff do the right thing locally, yet the overall experience feels fragmented. Time is lost reconciling, checking, re-keying and working around gaps that nobody deliberately designed.





# Why Digital Transformation Often Falls Short

Digital transformation often falls short because it treats fragmentation as a technical problem rather than a structural one.

Digitising forms, introducing portals, or implementing a CRM can improve efficiency at the edges, but they leave the underlying service model intact. Separate services still own separate data, decisions, and processes, so digital tools are forced to work around the same boundaries that caused inefficiency in the first place.

As a result, organisations become better at managing complexity rather than reducing it. The experience improves locally, but remains disjointed end to end. Without changing how services are connected around people, digital investment reinforces the Model T problem: a more powerful engine, but the same outdated design.



# The Shift to a Connected Council

This is where the Connected Council model comes in.

Rather than replacing systems or forcing wholesale transformation, Connected Council starts from a different premise: connect what already exists. It focuses on linking services around people rather than departments. On creating a shared understanding of residents across systems. On orchestrating activity across services instead of duplicating it. In other words, it addresses the structural issue, not just the symptoms.

The goal isn't to build a bigger engine. It's to redesign how the vehicle works — so services can move together, information flows once, and residents experience a single, coherent organisation rather than a collection of disconnected ones. That shift — from service-led to person-led, from siloed delivery to connected outcomes — is what unlocks real change. It reduces repetition, improves decision-making, and allows digital and human services to reinforce each other rather than compete.

That's the space we work in.

Helping organisations move beyond endlessly upgrading the engine and instead rethink how the whole vehicle is put together — so it's fit for the road it's now on.



## In Summary,

Inefficiency is not a failure of effort but of structure. Years of incremental fixes have strengthened individual services while increasing fragmentation overall.

A Connected Council approach tackles this at the root, connecting services around people so information flows once, complexity reduces, and organisations can deliver coherent, resilient experiences fit for today's demands.



# Connected Council

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Smarter together. Not harder apart.  
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