

Digital innovation in adult social care: how we've been supporting communities during COVID-19

What we have done, what we have learned and what next for digital innovation in adult social care





Acknowledgements

We would like to offer our personal thanks to all the councils and national partners who invested their time in speaking with us as we have developed this report, particularly during such challenging times.

The views and practical examples they shared assisted in developing our understanding of the key issues and opportunities.

It also shaped our thinking on the resulting key messages required to drive and deliver continued progress in the area of social care digital innovation.

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Introduction: a new ‘normal’ for digital?

We are all affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in our daily lives.

Despite the many challenges, we have seen the adult social care sector and more broadly local government adapt at scale and pace to support communities through this time.

Technology has played a significant role in supporting the work of councils in collaboration with local partners and communities.

Locally, we are starting to see people experience ‘virtual’ care in their community as well as continued collaboration between councils and care providers to support digital adoption, building on existing progress in this area.

We are also realising the value of technology for connection, wellbeing and bringing communities closer together.

Nationally, there is drive from government in supporting the adult social care sector to invest in and embed more technology and capturing recent learning will be part of the legacy that will shape future support.

However, whilst progress is being made councils are facing extraordinary and ongoing funding pressures. Over the last decade councils have lost £15 billion¹ of core government funding and additional cost pressures and income losses as a result of the pandemic leaves the sector with a funding gap of £7.4 billion.²

In adult social care, only 4 per cent of directors are fully confident their budget is sufficient to meet statutory duties.³

Unsurprisingly, this reduces the ability for councils to invest in technology and digital services sustainably and makes it challenging to find evidence to make the business case for

technology, innovate at scale or move beyond one-off funded projects.

Though some evidence of the financial benefits from investment in digital approaches, there is stronger evidence about improved outcomes for people. Councils need resources to take an investment approach in this area in partnership with people and providers.

We know that technology alone will not solve all the challenges facing social care and the NHS but it can under the right conditions be an enabler of preventative, personalised and joined up care and support.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) statements to help shape adult social care reform places digital at the heart of that reform.⁴

“It is vital that we harness all of the power that technology and digital innovations offer us.”

We asked the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University to work with us and councils to capture examples of where progress has been made in this area in recent months.

This report is intended to share our learning and offer practical considerations for councils, their partners and national bodies on how best to support greater digital innovation and adoption across the adult social care sector.



Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman, LGA Community Wellbeing Board



James Bullion, Director of Adult Social Care, Norfolk County Council, ADASS President

1 www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/29.17%20The%20future%20of%20care%20and%20support_03.2%20-%20Final.pdf

2 www.local.gov.uk/lga-analysis-covid-19-council-funding-gap-widens-ps74-billion

3 www.adass.org.uk/adass-budget-survey-2020

4 www.adass.org.uk/adass-publishes-nine-statements-to-help-shape-adult-social-care-reform

About this report

The Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) initially commissioned this report in early 2020 but it was soon paused to prioritise the local government adult social care COVID-19 response.

It was resumed in June 2020 with a revised focus on capturing progress made in social care digital innovation particularly in the immediate response to the pandemic and to provide practical messages to help new approaches be sustained and embedded.

Our insights and key messages from our engagement with councils before the pandemic are still relevant now – if not more so given the pace and scale of recent digital innovation and adoption.

Therefore, this report draws on engagement and learning both before and during the adult social care COVID-19 initial response. It has been compiled from engagement with councils and key national bodies by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University. It has three parts:

Part one: What have we done to support the use of technology for connection, wellbeing and bringing communities closer together?

Part two: What have we learned about the factors which lead to successful digital innovation in adult social care and those that don't?

Part three: What next if we want to keep up the momentum and sustain new learning, approaches and ways of working?

Part one of the report includes case study examples of digital innovation in adult social care, although it is important to remember that social care is embedded in a wider network of local government functions that enable people to live the lives they want to lead.

It is also grouped into the following four themes, although these are not mutually exclusive and are enablers of each other.

Promoting wellbeing and independence

Flexible and enabled working

Digital for everyone

Working together with partners

In each theme, we link with Think Local Act Personal's (TLAP) 'Making it Real' Framework which articulates what co-produced, personalised and community-based support looks like.⁵

For councils, it is hoped this report is a useful stock take of recent digital activity across local government which can be used to promote and stimulate continued work in this area with local communities. The key messages for councils are practical considerations to help develop and embed digital approaches to support people live the lives they want to lead.

For national bodies (including the government in collaboration with the LGA, ADASS and partners), this report captures key areas of continued work needed to enable successful and sustainable digital innovation in adult social care. The key messages for national bodies are practical considerations to enable digital approaches to be embedded in adult social care through the right level of support and investment.

This report is not intended to be detailed or technical but rather highlight the breadth of digital activity underway across the adult social care sector. As use of technology supports personalisation and the wider integration of health and care, so will the need to ensure that approaches are underpinned by the right information standards, interoperability requirements and robust data and cyber security.

In response to the pandemic there has been an increased reliance on digital communications and services; new data sharing arrangements; accelerated digital innovation; and new working conditions. This has led to an increase in cyber threats, and risks associated with a cyber incident.

Work is underway across these areas supported by the LGA and partners including NHS Digital, Digital Social Care and NHSX but is not within the scope of this report.

A very short summary of the key messages in this report

	Promoting wellbeing and independence	Flexible and enabled working	Digital for everyone	Working together with partners
What we have done	Made greater use of technology to help people of all ages and in all settings get connected and stay connected, independent and well	Adopted digital technology to keep vital services up and running	Worked with communities to provide digital support to those who need it	Collaborated with others to adopt digital technology at pace and scale
What we have learned	Simple technologies can help people with daily activities and reduce isolation	Digital transformation requires strong leadership and a culture shift	It's not just about the kit, but about enabling outcomes for people and communities	Sustainable and meaningful change needs strong partnerships and commitment
What next	Think beyond social care as technology can be used preventatively to support self-management of own health and wellbeing	Invest in people to achieve digital change and transformation	Invest in local and co-produced digital approaches as they work best	Invest in digital to support longer-term adult social care reform which is co-produced with key stakeholders and communities

Part one: What have we done?

a) Promoting wellbeing and independence

“Living the life I want, living safe and well”

TLAP, Making it Real Theme

Adult social care aims to support people to live the lives they want to lead. It is rooted in supporting people's wellbeing in line with The Care Act, 2014. Councils play a key role in providing information, advice and guidance (regardless of whether a person has eligible needs or not), as well as support to individuals, unpaid carers, families and communities.

There has been lots of gradual progress in recent years across local government to utilise technology to support people to live well, connect with their communities, families and friends and meet their aspirations. However, increasingly, and more recently in response to the pandemic, we have seen activity accelerated.

“Social care has shown itself not as an end point on a journey toward a service or services, but as the way in which people are supported to continue their own personal journey in life”

LGA, 'Re-thinking local', 2020

Approximately 1.7 million people (with eligible and non-eligible care needs) are supported by technology-enabled care (TEC) and demand has increased in recent months.⁶

Kent County Council: supporting adults with autism through use of technology

The occupational therapy team providing enablement support for adults with autism in Kent is embracing blended physical and virtual approaches. Digital technology can help people have greater independence and self-management over their lives.

For many people with autism, technology can be an accessible, autonomous and accepted way to be supported. In Kent many individuals are exploring the use of electronic whiteboards and apps to help with organisational and planning skills so that they can carry out day-to-day tasks independently. Whiteboards and apps can be set up to provide step-by-step prompts on 'how to' do something. Prompts can be via pictures, written or voice activated, sync with a person's calendar on their phone and be added remotely by carers or support staff.

Day-to-day tasks such as making a hot drink or washing bed linen can be made easier by utilising personal photographs demonstrating how the process can be broken down into smaller steps.

“[technology] allows support in a way that is accepted by him. My son is 25 years old and has a degree but without the level of prompts provided by the technology to help with daily tasks, they wouldn't get done”.

[Occupational therapist in Kent speaking of her experience of using technology to support her own son with autism].

Care technology (or technology-enabled care) involves the provision of services such as telecare (long distance monitoring of people to support them to live independently at home), assistive technology and telehealth which provides arrangements for people to manage short and long-term conditions. It can also include the use of newer technologies including video phones, data tools, self-help apps and the wider 'Internet of Things' that help put people in control of their own health, wellbeing and support.

Care technology approaches in the sector are wide ranging – from supporting people at home after being in hospital to technology to help young disabled people live at home independently. As well as direct support to people, technology can also play a huge role in supporting those who care for others, such as providing reassurance about their loved ones' safety and activity throughout the day.

Essex, Kent and Suffolk county councils made commitments early in the pandemic to utilise greater care technology to support people receiving care in their own home. They identified a secure tablet device called a Video Carephone to enable people to contact their care workers, family members and other approved services via 'virtual check-ins'. These are being used in a variety of ways from prompts or reminders about taking medication or drinking fluids, to observing changes in people who might be presenting with COVID-19 symptoms. They are also being used for daily, informal contact with friends and family. The full case study sets out how over 5,000 devices were purchased by the councils for roll-out over an eight-week period supported by a mobilisation partner and technology supplier.⁷

The councils and partners have also ensured contactless delivery and on-going technical support to provide any troubleshooting or reassurance about using the device.

“The best part is that I don't need log-ons or codes to be able to see or speak to people. I also hope I can receive my private physio sessions on the Carephone and I like the idea that it can prompt me to move every hour to prevent me getting sores and to keep doing my exercises”

Robert Greenfield, editor of MS magazine and recipient of the device in Kent.⁸

The technology-enabled care sector includes 158 alarm receiving centres in England which co-ordinate responses to help people if, for example, they have had a fall and an alert is triggered through a device that they wear (such as a falls pendant). Most alarm receiving centres (approximately 72 per cent) are delivered in-house by councils and the rest by housing associations, the private sector and community interest companies.⁹

Recent research by the Technology Enabled Care Services Association (TSA) shows how the TEC sector has had to adapt quickly to continue to provide support to those who need it, despite a 35 per cent reduction in staffing levels.

7 www.local.gov.uk/covid-19/covid-19-local-examples-care-technology-approaches

8 <https://kccmediahub.net/kcc-launches-videophone-system-for-vulnerable-residents745>

9 TSA, Data and cyber security research in the technology enabled care sector, July 2019

In some areas, to meet increased demand, additional staff from the council or organisation have been re-trained or re-deployed to support frontline activities like call handling, discharge support, proactive calling and outreach activity. A number of case studies on the technology enabled care sector's early response to the pandemic is available in TSA's new report, including learning from Bury, Hampshire, Stockport, Sunderland, and Torbay and South Devon.¹⁰

Recent research by TSA suggests that older Alarm Receiving Centres (relying on traditional analogue communications) have encountered challenges moving to alternative working models. There is an opportunity to work more closely with Government to support technology enabled care services to manage the forthcoming analogue to digital transition.

The LGA has also been providing support in this area, including tailored support for councils leading care technology responses to COVID-19. In April 2020, a new COVID-19 rapid care technology deployment tool was published to help councils identify common adult social care challenges and offers potential care technology responses to these.¹¹

With ReThink Partners, and with input from over 30 councils the LGA tool is intended to be an aide to help with care technology planning, decision-making and mobilisation. It also includes a number of practical case studies on local care technology approaches in the area of home care, care homes and hospital discharge. A planning and diagnostic tool is also being developed which will enable councils to review their own care technology approach and support targeted action planning. This new tool, developed with councils and ReThink Partners, will be available in summer 2020.

The LGA is also providing funding and support to councils who want to work collaboratively with other councils in looking at new ways of helping people to stay independent and well beyond the immediate response to the pandemic. Five councils are working together to develop a new digital approach to support people with learning disabilities as part of the LGA social care digital innovation accelerator programme.¹²

“The provision of outcomes focused support that helps those with learning disabilities to improve employability and/or manage their health and wellbeing and reintegrate back into social settings post COVID-19 – in a cost-effective way – will be a key challenge nationally.”

Stephan Liebrecht, Operational Director, Adults Care and Support, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

The project is looking to develop a digital approach to providing people with tools and resources to help manage their own health and wellbeing. It is being led by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, in collaboration with the London Borough of Haringey, Telford & Wrekin Council, West Sussex County Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils. It is also being designed to provide employability support to people with learning disabilities.¹³

¹⁰ From Stabilisation to Innovation: The Response and Redesign of TEC Services during Covid-19 (TSA)

¹¹ www.local.gov.uk/caretechtool

¹² www.local.gov.uk/scdip

¹³ <https://cc2i.org.uk/virtual-support>

The project, which is co-funded by each participating council with match funding from NHS Digital through the LGA, is being undertaken in collaboration with people with learning disabilities across each of the councils, a technology supplier and local employers.

The accelerator programme is also supporting Walsall Council, in collaboration with local health and police partners, to lead the development of a new data-driven approach to safeguarding.¹⁴ This project will support collaboration at organisational and operational levels, enabling multi-disciplinary teams to see one version of the truth while accessing and updating live data so care professionals can provide effective, timely and person-centred support.

As part of the national offer of support to the social care sector, NHSX partnered with Facebook to provide over 2,000 portal devices (tablets) to help those in social care settings connect with family and friends through video calls when visiting was restricted during lockdown.

A number of areas have been involved in piloting the devices in care homes, including North Yorkshire County Council, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent Council. In North Yorkshire, use of the portals is part of a suite of support offered to council-run care homes across the county.

In collaboration with services managers, care workers and with feedback from families, a package of support (including three different video calling solutions) were provided to each of the ten care homes. Feedback has been positive, for example, in one care home the use of video calling enabled residents and families to celebrate VE day. Most people preferred devices which are portable as they are easier for staff to move around the care home and hence better supports private calls in a person's room rather than public spaces.

Across each of the projects, the councils have worked together with individuals and care workers to put in place comprehensive packages of essential support to help people use devices, provide troubleshooting and technical support as well as putting in place the infrastructure needed to support use of the technology where this has been a barrier.

Similar approaches have been taken by Walsall and Dudley councils who, in partnership with local organisations and businesses, have been providing tablet devices to local care homes to help residents maintain contact with loved ones.

¹⁴ <https://cc2i.org.uk/aim-active-intervention-management>

b) Flexible and enabled working

“The people who support me”

TLAP, Making it Real Theme

In recent months technology has enabled many of us to continue to work and maintain contact with others.

Within and across councils, the reduction in most face-to-face contact due to COVID-19 restrictions has necessitated the introduction of simple but effective digital collaboration tools such as shared email directories, calendars, service directories or instant messaging platforms.

A survey completed by over 2,500 local government staff from over 90 councils suggests that approximately 82 per cent of staff have been able to work from home - up from 5 per cent before lockdown.

Socitm, Digital and ICT Impact Survey 2020¹⁵

Councils have also found other and often new ways to interact with their communities during this period.

In some councils, we are starting to see, where appropriate, more virtual forms of social work professional practice. This is a big shift from face-to-face contact as the foundation of personalised care and support. Technology has played a key role in enabling social work professionals to continue to carry out key functions safely and effectively where personal contact has not been possible particularly in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

Kirklees council and North Yorkshire county council – supported through national and local guidance – have been carrying out virtual deprivation of liberty assessments for the first time through a combination of video and telephone calls where it is appropriate to do so.

We have also seen more remote assessments and reviews being used in occupational therapy and social work. Many areas, such as Staffordshire county council and Stoke-On-Trent council, are doing so using consumer, or everyday technology like WhatsApp or Facetime, which many people are already familiar with.

Practical guidance on video-calling applications and professional practice has recently been developed by Socitm in partnership with a number of councils. See appendix one for details.

Derbyshire county council, with funding from NHS Digital via the LGA social care digital innovation programme, has explored approaches to occupational therapy remote assessments for equipment using various platforms such as Microsoft Teams, as well as formalising new processes to utilise photographs and videos.

Additional funding to accelerate this project and develop a broader community of practice in collaboration with the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, Skills for Care and Digital Social Care is planned for later in the year.

In rural areas like Kent, remote assessments and reviews (where these are appropriate for the individual) are also creating opportunities for social workers and occupational therapists to spend more time with people and families and less time travelling to visits across the county.

It is important to remember that there are ongoing pressures in rural areas where mobile reception and internet access may be limited. Although in some areas this can be overcome through use of data-enabled devices, this is not always a viable option for those in rural areas with poor overall connectivity.

¹⁵ <https://socitm.net/download/covid-19-digital-ict-impact-survey-results>

As engagement in services is set to become more digital, it is important now more than ever for people to have faster and more reliable connectivity or Wi-Fi options, particularly for those most vulnerable and at risk of social isolation.

Work is underway in NHSX to improve connectivity infrastructure for adult social care providers, including the negotiation of various internet connection deals with the UK telecommunications sector.¹⁶

Did you know that Digital Social Care is a free online resource run by and for care providers to assist with all things digital?

Funded by NHS Digital, Digital Social Care provides support to adult social care providers to help them on their digital journeys.

A digital self-assessment tool has been developed in partnership with Skills for Care to help social care organisations measure their digital skills and readiness.

Details for Digital Social Care can be found in appendix one.

It forms part of wider work across NHSX to support the digital transformation of adult social care and health which the LGA continues to engage in.

The use of technology by adult social care providers has changed rapidly since the pandemic started. Information governance compliance requirements have been temporarily relaxed, a new quick process to give care providers free access to NHSmail and Microsoft Teams has been set up and some free digital tools have been made available to care providers.

More information is available on the Digital Social Care COVID-19 pages¹⁷ - and a report about the use of technology by adult social care provider services during the initial pandemic response has been published.¹⁸

We have also seen the benefits of technology in supporting adult social care recruitment. Self-isolation, shielding and/or taking time to fully recover after being ill have all had an impact on the number and availability of social care staff in recent months.

For example, in the West Midlands, a collaborative digital recruitment drive between 14 councils, the regional ADASS branch and West Midlands Employers has helped to maintain a flexible and diverse social care workforce.

The approach to recruit to the sector during the initial pandemic response saw the development of three tailored campaigns – one to attract former social workers,¹⁹ another for recruiting final year social work students²⁰ and the final to attract social care staff²¹ into the independent care sector across the West Midlands.

Through a combination of targeted digital communications such as social media, collaboration with local universities, and digital campaign materials (videos, dedicated campaign websites) over 1,000 new applications were received between April and June 2020 from candidates looking to join or return to social care.

¹⁶ www.nhsx.nhs.uk/covid-19-response/social-care/internet-connection-deals-care-homes

¹⁷ www.digitalsocialcare.co.uk/covid-19-guidance

¹⁸ https://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/Technology_Action_Research.html

¹⁹ <https://comebacktocare.org.uk>

²⁰ <https://stepupnow.org.uk>

²¹ <https://timetocare.org.uk>

c) Digital for everyone

“Flexible and integrated care and support”

TLAP, Making it Real Theme

Across the country, councils are working with communities to ensure that people are able to use digital channels to do things which benefit them in their daily lives.

Technology has changed the way councils do things and the pandemic has amplified this more than ever. But we know this is not always easy and there are a range of factors that can impact how people engage digitally, including skills and levels of digital confidence, connectivity and infrastructure, as well as technology accessibility and affordability.

The work councils are doing to support people to be digitally included is broader than digital interactions with adult social care or other council services.

Councils have taken new strides in identifying and supporting those most vulnerable, isolated or shielding and who may not have access to the technology used by many to maintain contact and daily living.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council: DigiKnow

Stockport council has been working over the last two years to set up the Stockport Digital Inclusion Alliance, also known as DigiKnow.²²

Initially setup to support digital uptake across the borough through a range of initiatives, many of which have accelerated due to the COVID-19, it is a partnership between the council, the voluntary and community sector and other public and private sector partners.

DigiKnow was set up by a local digital champion movement comprising a team of volunteers from the community, local organisations and businesses. Before COVID-19, volunteers would deliver digital skills and training sessions in areas such as community centres or communal areas of supported housing. Support is now virtual and focused on providing assistance to anyone needing help with using technology to stay well and connected.

The digital champions have helped several churches reach their congregations online as well as support Stockport Advocacy to continue its services virtually. It has also provided technical support to residents and care workers from care homes who have received tablet devices from the council.

The council has also been helping people who want to improve their digital skills and confidence but are restricted by the cost of buying a device or connecting to the internet through developing a digital device lending library. Through this lending library anyone can borrow a device with free access to the internet and be supported, if needed, on how to use it by a digital champion.

Hear from 91-year-old Mabel on how she is benefitting from receiving a tablet through one of the schemes supported by the Stockport Digital Inclusion Alliance.²³

Of course, work with communities to enable and support digital inclusion in local government isn't new and in many areas isn't about 'digital' but about inclusion and people.

Local health and care system leaders (councillors and officers) in Leeds city council have embraced a city-wide approach to digital innovation. Shared governance arrangements, joint digital posts and pooled budgets – focused upon Health and

²² <https://stockportpa.co.uk/digiknow>

²³ www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLSYeLAz7Vw&feature=youtu.be

Wellbeing Board objectives – guide the city’s approach to digital transformation.

It is supported by the wider 100 per cent Digital Leeds programme which takes a community approach, in collaboration with local organisations, to actively tackling digital exclusion.²⁴

Through the programme, residents of the city can develop their digital skills and confidence, by borrowing technology through the tablet lending scheme and access support through the digital champions offer. The scheme has over 1,000 trained volunteers at hand to provide digital support to anyone who needs it.

Community Circles and Social Care Future²⁵ are helping people living in accommodation with support to stay connected with family and friends by setting up a ‘Kit for Connection’ scheme. This involves linking people who need kit, like tablets or phones, with people who can offer it, or can donate some money to buy it.

In the London Borough of Camden, a project to develop a community map app to help improve travel confidence and connect communities was adapted in light of COVID-19, to focus on digital connection and inclusion to support people to regain confidence after lockdown.

There was also a council and voluntary and community sector response to support people who are digitally excluded which includes delivering bespoke digital skills training and set-up support, providing laptops or tablets and ways to access the internet for those most in need.

Many councils are starting to consider the learning from the adult social care digital response to the pandemic in the wider context of council digital transformation and its relationship with local people, businesses and communities.

Norfolk county council’s future approach to digital technology includes supporting improvements in the way staff can work, better use of data to support integrated and interoperable systems and investments in local connectivity infrastructure to help people, businesses and organisations access the internet.

They have also committed to help people contact the council through digital means supported by a wider digital inclusion programme.

The digital inclusion programme in Norfolk similar to other councils is cross-directorate – bringing together schools, libraries, ICT, adult social care and other council functions to develop the digital skills and confidence of local people and provide technology (through initiatives like issuing recycled laptops) to people who need it.

The LGA, as part of the digital inclusion programme, is funding 10 councils to work with communities to develop digital skills, infrastructure and confidence by providing tailored support, assistance and one to one mentoring.²⁶

The projects being funded are wide ranging from provision of 4G enabled laptops to people in deprived areas to funding technology support for young people transitioning from children’s to adult social care.

²⁴ <https://librarybookings.leeds.gov.uk/digitalinclusion>

²⁵ <https://socialcarefuture.blog/2020/04/22/helping-people-living-in-accommodation-with-support-stay-connected-with-family-and-friends-by-setting-up-a-kit-for-connection-scheme>

²⁶ www.local.gov.uk/digital-inclusion-programme

d) Working together with partners

“Flexible and integrated care and support”

TLAP, Making it Real Theme

As with all new ways of working, technology is often the easy part. Digital innovation is at its strongest when the technology is just one part of a wider approach to transformation.

Technology is important and needs to be functional, but a number of other conditions must be firmly in place for new approaches to be sustained, including strong leadership, co-production and sustainable resourcing.

Approaches to the use of technology must also exist in a wider network of on-going support and training. These conditions are best achieved when people and organisations work together.

As democratically accountable leaders of place, councils play a key role in bringing local partners together to work with and support their local communities.

In adult social care, councils have been working together with the NHS, housing, voluntary and community sector and care provider partners to make sure that people, their families and carers can achieve their greatest potential, whilst living full and meaningful lives in their community.

Digital technology has played a huge part, enabling not only the continuation of formal care and support but also facilitating social connection and contact with loved ones.

In Nottinghamshire, close local partnership with the NHS has helped to share data and join up care before and since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Joint working between Nottinghamshire county council and Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust enabled the creation of a new digitised ‘discharge to assess’ form to support transformed roles, structures and ways of working between hospitals and social care.

This enabled local colleagues to take a discharge to assess approach in line with new COVID-19 hospital discharge service requirements.

Learning is being shared and will inform the NHS Digital funded LGA social care digital innovation accelerator project which is developing a digital discharge to assess platform through collaboration between Southend-on-Sea borough council, Birmingham city council, Herefordshire county council, North Lincolnshire council and the London Borough of Sutton with local health and care partners.²⁷

In Camden and Stockport, technology has enabled people with learning disabilities in supporting living settings to continue to talk to professionals and people important to them, including each other.

This was vital given the temporary closure of many day services as lockdown measures were introduced, and as people voluntarily reduced their use of services in order to stay safe.

Both councils, in collaboration with local learning disability providers, have funded tablet devices which enable video-calling with others. Some areas, including Camden, are also supporting people wishing to purchase their own technology via a direct payment or carers grant to be able to do so.

In Hull and Lincolnshire councils, new technologies have been introduced to support virtual clinical assessments and remote monitoring in care homes.

²⁷ <https://cc2i.org.uk/digital-d2a>

This is helping important activities such as virtual consultations between care homes and primary care, electronic referrals into community health and enabling the recording and sharing of baseline observation data across health and care.

Across Lincolnshire, the county council has been working with the local care association, CCG and a technology supplier to rapidly expand a telehealth pilot project to support care homes during the pandemic.

A simple telehealth kit provided to care homes, allows basic observations like blood pressure, temperature, pulse and oxygen levels to be reviewed and shared with health and care professionals remotely, allowing health partners to ensure a number of commitments under the NHS care homes directive are met.

150 care homes have been provided with the telehealth kit to date and training has been given to care staff across all homes and primary care network staff.

Feedback from local partners has highlighted the collaborative 'peer to peer' approach that has been taken to support the sector as a major factor in the successful roll out.

A business case has now been approved securing funding for additional kits to enable 100 per cent coverage of care homes in the county as well as two years funding for licenses and admin costs.

In many areas, much of this activity was already underway before the pandemic. For example, Durham county council in partnership with County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust have supported all older people's care homes in the county with using technology to improve data

sharing and interfaces with the NHS, as well as remote monitoring approaches.²⁸

This includes not just the deployment of the technology itself, but more importantly the wraparound support to help with uptake, training and ongoing troubleshooting or technical assistance. The impact of the pandemic has led this to be achieved 14 months earlier than the original timescales. The approach is now being extended to other social care settings.

Councils have been working with care providers on technology adoption. Many have been supported through formal, national programmes such as the NHS Digital Social Care Programme,²⁹ (including the LGA social care digital innovation and accelerator Programmes) as well as the Cabinet Office funded social care data and cyber security programme.³⁰

There has been significant progress through locally led approaches too. For instance, in the immediate response to the pandemic we have seen significant digital adoption by the independent care provider sector.

Though many providers as independent organisations are considering technology as part of their future operating models, there are also opportunities for councils to support providers as part of wider market shaping work. One area that councils may wish to consider providing support to care providers, is in the safe and secure handling of information, whether physical or electronic. The LGA in collaboration with the Institute of Public Care has published practical support to assist commissioners in this area.³¹

28 www.local.gov.uk/covid-19/covid-19-local-examples-care-technology-approaches

29 <https://digital.nhs.uk/services/social-care-programme/digital-social-care-pathfinders-programme-2019-21>

30 www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/informatics/cyberdatadiscovery

31 www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/innovation-and-transformation/cyber-security-for-commissioners

Collaboration between councils

We are also seeing more collaborative approaches to innovation being taken between and across councils. For example, in the East of England, all 11 councils with responsibility for adult social care have committed to adopting the same platform to collect and share data and intelligence to support a high quality and sustainable market – based on principle of 'doing once and not 11 times'.

The region named the system they developed PAMMS (Provider Assessment and Market Management Solution) which brings together care quality and financial data from over 2,000 contracted suppliers and 20,000 people to enable comprehensive care market overview.

Providers are also benefitting from the approach with improved CQC ratings, peer benchmarking, a reduced need for multi-agency assessments and evidenced service improvements.

Additional modules can be added as required which helps sustainability and scalability.

In supporting the region during COVID-19, the system has been used to broadcast specific 'online' questions directly to providers around their response management. The region is now looking at how it can be used to help support recovery.

The collaborative approach has also been enabled by each council's commitment to co-fund dedicated resource which is co-ordinating intelligence collation and also helping to strengthen local relationships between councils and provider partners.

Capital savings of £550,000 have been delivered to date with further estimated ongoing annual savings of over £550,000. The approach has also seen a 10 per cent improvement in measurable provider quality.

Part two: What have we learned?

In this report we have shown the breadth of social care digital activity underway to support both the immediate response to the pandemic and the longer-term social care digital transformation agenda to enable connected communities, preventative, personalised and joined up care and support.

Councils have adapted to new challenges to protect vulnerable people from risk of infection whilst making sure they continue to receive personalised care and support.

They have worked creatively with providers to ensure that care workers, who are self-isolating and unable to care in person, can continue to work. They have also had to find easy and safe ways for family members, neighbours, volunteers and local community services to play their part in supporting people.

Councils are increasingly putting themselves at the forefront of using technology to sustain and enhance important activities that help keep people connected, safe and well.

In this section we reflect on some of the key learning, shared factors and conditions which help to enable successful local digital innovation and adoption. We will look firstly at what councils have achieved and highlight what has worked well to date, then at the challenges and opportunities for development.

These reflections may serve as helpful underpinning principles to inform local, regional and national social care digital approaches. They also form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

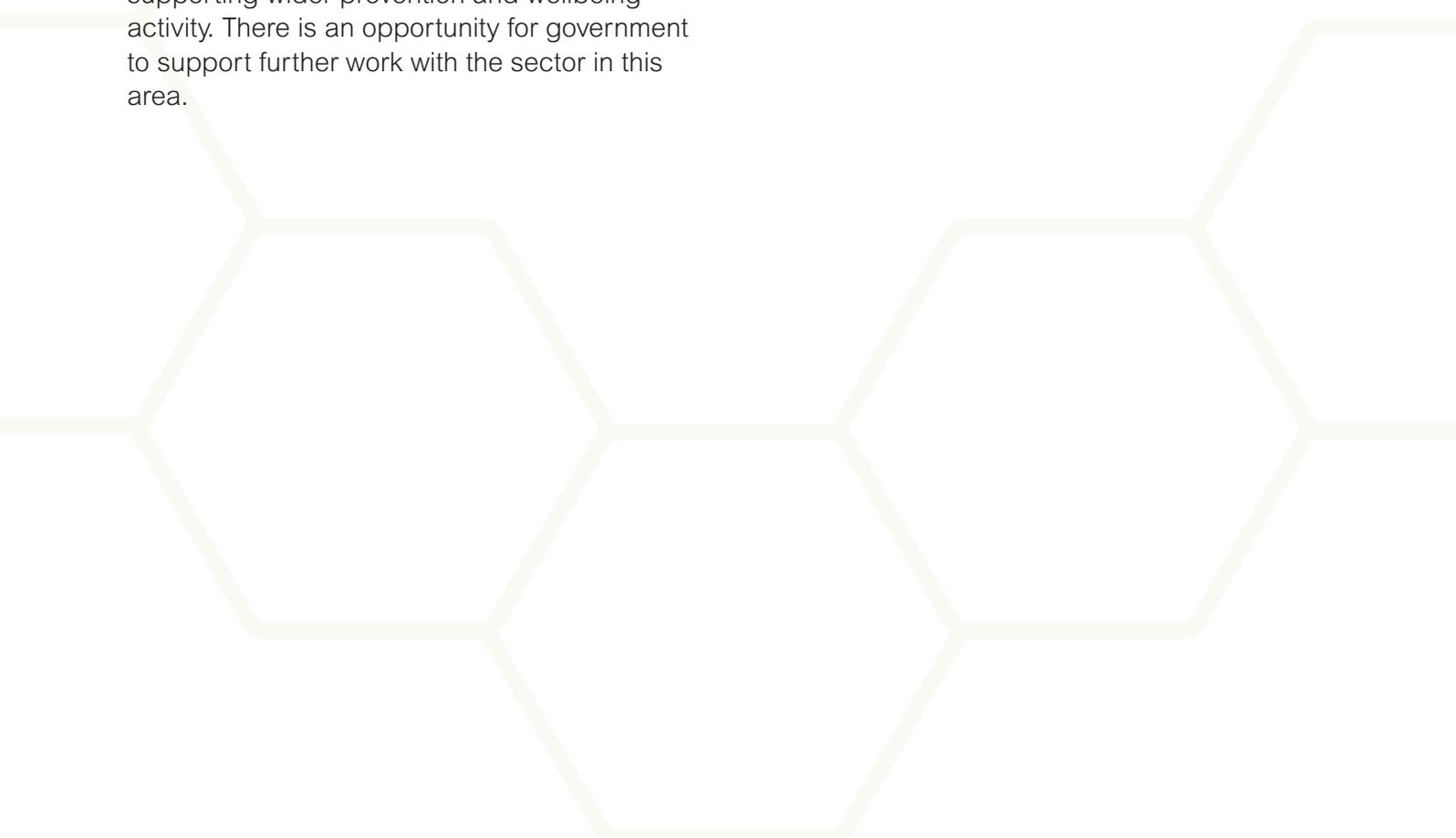
What has worked well

1. **Local works.** Councils continue to demonstrate their ability to ensure people have the care and support they need to be safe and well whilst maintaining essential business as usual in pressured circumstances. Councils have shown through activity before and in response to the pandemic that they can in partnership with their communities and with the right tools and resources, drive forward local innovation and transformation across adult social care at pace and scale.
2. **Culture change and leadership.** Digital transformation requires strong council leadership and an organisational culture that encourages innovation. This is needed at all levels: political, strategic and operational. The examples in this report highlight what can happen when digital innovation is supported and enabled by effective leadership. This will be crucial if innovations are to be embedded and sustained.
3. **Better together.** Digital transformation isn't enabled by any one piece of kit or technology, but by local, regional and national collaboration. The progress we have seen across the sector in recent months is underpinned by strong, and in most cases long-term, partnerships with care providers, the voluntary and community sector, government, IT suppliers and most importantly, people and communities.
4. **Technology for wellbeing.** We have seen how simple digital technologies can help people maintain daily activities which are important to them, such as contact with loved ones. We have also seen the opportunities provided by technology to support self-management of health and wellbeing and connection as much as focusing on clinical outcomes or direct care delivery. There is an opportunity to use this learning to inform future approaches to digital

transformation of adult social care in the context of early intervention, individual resilience and taking a whole person approach.

5. **Flexibility and accessibility.** Use of technology has been vital to enable organisations to continue to operate and it has helped the sector adapt the way it supports communities. A more permissive environment, through for example, the temporary relaxation of information governance requirements, and targeted funding to improve connectivity has made it easier for local partners to work together and provide accessible and personalised care and support.
 6. **Accelerated activity.** In recent months we have seen new approaches to digital innovation across adult social care, particularly where additional resources or support has been made available. But we have also seen the acceleration of digital activity which was already planned or underway prior to the pandemic. Though the pandemic response to-date has helped to further develop some of the conditions which enable digital transformation, learning from existing and new digital activity will be of equal value as we look ahead to the 'new normal'.
- ## What could work better
1. **Culture change, not just technology.** The sector has come a long way in a short space of time to lead communities through the ongoing pandemic. In adult social care, and across local government more broadly, technology has played a huge role. We have found that digital transformation works best when embedded in a wider network of support, training and infrastructure which is determined by and fits with local circumstances.
 2. **Funding and long-term investment.** Councils have been able to continue to operate and support communities despite additional costs incurred due to the COVID-19 response. Much of the way in which councils have done this has been supported by the use of technology, but this is not a sustainable way for councils to invest in this area. Without adequate and ongoing funding and resources, we risk stagnating progress that has been made in this area, limiting innovation or not moving beyond one-off funded pilots or projects. There is an opportunity as part of the forthcoming Spending Review to address this with a long-term and sustainable funding plan for adult social care and wider local government services.
 3. **Supporting and enabling versus command and control.** The last few months have seen local and national government supporting each other and working closer together. Where this activity has focused on supporting the adult social care sector with technology adoption, we have found that a 'one size fits all' approach rarely meets the diverse needs of the sector. Additional support and resources from government in this area is welcome but is most effective when it allows flexibility for local systems to adapt the offer to meet local circumstances.
 4. **Beyond direct service delivery.** We have seen how technology can play a huge role in helping people to live the lives they want to lead – both within and outside of traditional service provision. There is an opportunity to use this learning to further develop approaches to using technology preventatively alongside a wider offer of support that makes the most of community assets as well as in traditional social care and NHS settings.

5. **Outcomes and benefits.** It remains a challenge to evidence the financial benefits of digital technology. Given relatively low levels of funding available for digital innovation in social care it is often difficult to assign dedicated resource to measuring financial or non-financial benefits. While anecdotal evidence of impact may be achievable in shorter timescales, a robust analysis is more likely in years rather than months. There is also no one framework or methodology upon which to support local benefits realisation approaches, particularly where digital innovation might be supporting wider prevention and wellbeing activity. There is an opportunity for government to support further work with the sector in this area.



Part three: What next?

The key messages in this final section are intended to offer practical considerations for councils, their partners and national bodies on how best to support greater technology adoption across the adult social care sector.

Though we know that technology alone will not solve all the challenges facing adult social care and the NHS, it can, under the right national and local conditions, be an enabler of preventative, personalised and joined up care and support.

These messages are drawn from our engagement with councils before and during the first few months of the pandemic, as well as our continued work on national social care digital activity.

Key messages for councils

1. **Leadership at all levels.** Adult social care digital transformation does not need to be a technical exercise when it is driven by people with skills or enthusiasm to embrace the opportunities of digital. Effective leadership means that digital innovations can be embedded and sustained. Everyone can play a part in this: strategically, politically, operationally and across all levels of the organisation.
2. **Inform current practice.** There is an opportunity to consolidate the current enthusiasm and culture change that has enabled rapid digital transformation in recent months. This means ensuring digital innovation continues to inform all practice, including professional practice, and being proactive in growing a culture and mindset for innovation. Where there are opportunities to explore a digital approach, explore it.
3. **It's not just about the technology.** The technology market is vast and fast-paced, but councils have shown that this need not be a barrier to digital innovation and adoption. Keep working with communities to understand their needs and what is valued and important. Have an in-depth understanding of the problem you're seeking to address first and then find the technology to help with that – it is usually already out there.
4. **Take a collaborative approach.** As we have seen, good digital transformation happens best when people work well together at a local, regional and national level. Continue to share expertise, experience and knowledge between your organisations and with others including care providers, IT suppliers, local organisations, national bodies and most importantly, people in your communities. Collaborate with other councils too, be transparent about what you do and be prepared to ask questions of others – the LGA can support with sharing approaches.
5. **Plan how you will measure the impact of digital.** Get into the habit of thinking about and capturing benefits realisation as early as possible. Taking an outcomes-based approach will help you make the business case for additional investment. Financial benefits are important but so too are outcomes for people. Think about the investment, or risk, against the potential impact for people, not just the pound signs.
6. **Keep the pace.** Councils are great innovators and demonstrate considerable flexibility in adapting to new challenges and opportunities to support their communities. Sustainability is important too. Consider what new approaches from recent months you want to stabilise and embed but always with an eye to 'what next'. Innovation (digital and non-digital) is about continuous learning.

Key messages for national bodies

1. **Co-produce with people.** Adult social care is inherently person-centred. Approaches to digital innovation should be genuinely co-produced with people, carers and families who are the experts by experience to understand what is valued and important to them. Co-production will also help to understand people's needs so they can be assisted to use digital services, supporting wider approaches to digital inclusion to build resilient communities geared towards prevention, wellbeing and public health. Think Local Act Personal's 'Six Themes of Making it Real' can be used by organisations to support work in this area.
2. **Invest in digital to support longer-term adult social care reform.** It is vital that we harness all of the power technology and digital innovations offer but digital transformation is not about investing in specific technologies, quick fixes or short-term imperatives. Where there is targeted national investment in adult social care digital transformation, it should be in people, communities, staff, approaches and outcomes and it must support the longer-term ambition for adult social care funding and reform.
3. **Don't forget technology for wellbeing and prevention.** There are lots of examples of technology supporting direct care delivery in all settings, but there are also opportunities to support wellbeing and connectedness beyond traditional social care services. The broader opportunities that technology offers in enabling people to live the lives they want to lead, which make the best use of the assets of communities should be considered in national programmes and digital funding opportunities. This must also consider the role of technology in supporting informal carers and care networks.
4. **Flexible and agile local approaches.** Digital innovation works at the local level. Councils are good at working in an agile, developmental way and this should be supported nationally through resources to take an investment approach in partnership with people and providers. Ambition for certain technologies or approaches to be nationally scaled should be balanced with a recognition that they need to support local delivery and allow for flexibility to fit existing local conditions and arrangements.
5. **Help develop capabilities to measure impact.** Councils will take different approaches to measuring the impact of digital innovation. However, there is no standard methodology or guidance that can be used in an adult social care context to support benefits realisation. There is an opportunity to develop practical and tailored materials and tools which are sector-led and enable councils to better measure the impact of local digital activity in adult social care and the wider health and care system.
6. **Removing barriers to innovation.** The immediate response to the pandemic has enabled a more permissive environment for innovation through for example temporary relaxation of information governance requirements, targeted funding, prioritising innovation, and people rapidly changing how they work. It is important to learn lessons from recent months and make adjustments, where safe and appropriate, to national policy guidance, regulations and practice to create an environment which is more supportive of digital innovation.

Appendix:

Social care digital tools and resources for councils

Below are a number of practical tools and resources to support councils with their local digital innovation activity. It is not exhaustive and is made up of resources cited by councils and key partners as this report was developed.

If there are other tools or resources you are aware of which might help other councils, please let us know at socialcaredigital@local.gov.uk.

BASW/SCIE: Digital capabilities for social workers – support for social workers to develop skills and knowledge in the use of digital technology.
www.basw.co.uk/resources/publications-policies-and-reports/digital-capabilities-social-workers

Care Quality Commission: Innovation and inspiration: examples of how providers are responding to coronavirus
www.cqc.org.uk/publications/innovation-inspiration-examples-how-providers-are-responding-coronavirus-covid-19#hide2

Digital Social Care: A range of resources, guidance and support for adult social care providers on technology and data protection
www.digitalsocialcare.co.uk

Digital Social Care and the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University: New report highlighting how care providers have been using technology during COVID-19
https://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/Technology_Action_Research.html

Digital Social Care and Skills for Care: Care provider readiness tool - free tool for care providers to use to help them measure digital capabilities and supporting infrastructure
www.digitalsocialcare.co.uk/measuring-digital-readiness

LGA: Social care digital innovation programme – current and previous learning from councils funded to deliver digital innovation projects in adult social care
www.local.gov.uk/scdip

LGA: Social care digital innovation accelerator programme – current and previous learning from councils co-funding and collaborating to develop solutions to shared social care challenges
www.local.gov.uk/scdia

LGA: COVID-19 good council practice – a range of good practice examples on the local government response to the pandemic including on cyber and digital solutions
www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-good-council-practice

LGA: Digital inclusion programme – summaries of the ten digital inclusion projects being funded through the LGA's sector led improvement offer
www.local.gov.uk/digital-inclusion-programme

LGA: Local government social care standards and interoperability – report following discovery project on information sharing and interoperability in local government adult social care
www.local.gov.uk/local-government-social-care-data-standards-and-interoperability

LGA and Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University: Guidance for commissioners on data and cyber security
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/innovation-and-transformation/cyber-security-for-commissioners

LGA: COVID-19 rapid care technology tool – practical tool to support councils with care technology planning and implementation with local care studies

www.local.gov.uk/caretechtool

LGA and Technology Enabled Care Services

Association: guidance for technology-enabled care services on data and cyber security

www.tsa-voice.org.uk/downloads/good_practice_guides/tsa_lga_cyber_security_guidance_full_doc.pdf

NHS Digital: Digital social care pathfinders programme 2019-2021 – summaries of 16 digital projects being funded to support data standards and interoperability between health and care

<https://digital.nhs.uk/services/social-care-programme/digital-social-care-pathfinders-programme-2019-21>

NHS Digital: Digital inclusion guide for health and care

<https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion>

Social Care Institute for Excellence: technology checklist for video calling an adult or carer link

www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/social-workers

Socitm: Getting the most out of video-calling applications – best practice for supporting social care professional practice with video calling

<https://socitm.net/download/getting-the-most-out-of-video-calling-applications>

Technology Enabled Care Services

Association: From stabilisation to innovation – highlighting examples of rapid service redesign and innovation through enabling technology during Covid-19 and recommendations for future development

www.tsa-voice.org.uk/campaigns/download-the-tsa-sector-insight-report-2020



Local Government Association

18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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REF 25.172