

SCDIP Discovery Phase – Derbyshire County Council

Derbyshire County Council aims to explore the potential for smartphone technology to support rapid assessments for adaptations of client's homes.

Improving assessment processes for home adaptations

The context

Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Community Care Workers (CCWs) undertake assessments for both major and minor adaptations to domestic properties in the county. The OT profession has a vacancy rate of 15-20% in Derbyshire and a high demand for their services. The number of assessments is affected by vacancy rates, travel time for staff and limited investment in technology. Present figures indicate that there are 600 clients across the county on the waiting list, some of whom may wait up to 11 weeks for an assessment.

The challenge

The project team focussed on addressing the problem statement: "*How do we improve assessment processes for equipment and adaptations?*" as the basis of their project.

What did the project involve?

The discovery phase involved:

- formalising governance structures for the project
- conducting workshops with staff from partner organisations, metropolitan housing and Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust to maximise engagement and understanding of needs and contribute to shaping work
- developing a communications strategy for public engagement and workshops with clients/citizens to establish a user perspective on important factors
- scoping available technology
- development of the implementation plan.
- Prototyping of skype assessments with two OT's

Stakeholder engagement and user research

Engagement has taken the form of qualitative feedback gathered from clients, carers and staff. Workshops were also conducted with approximately 50 staff from partner organisations which maximised engagement and understanding needs as well as contributing to shaping of the work. The team have worked to develop new portal functionality within the adult social care case management system to provide a more structured framework and guidance for referrals which will allow professionals, clients and carers to collaborate on support needs. The portal has been tested with stakeholders and received positive feedback from both staff and service users:

“This seemed an efficient, effective, proportional and less intrusive way of working than sending someone out for a minor adaptation to a known service user.” (Email from a carer)



Benefits of the proposed solution

The council has identified the following benefits as having resulted from the discovery phase (note that most of the benefits at this stage have been non-financial/non-quantifiable):

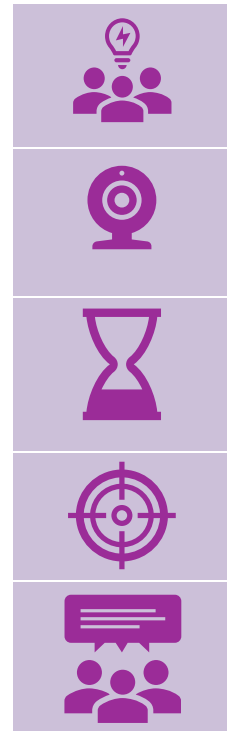
- reducing delay and duplication as much as possible
- improved understanding of the challenges faced by health and care staff (including thorough analysis of data)
- a realisation that non-technical as well as technical considerations needed to be made, and that process change was a key element of the solution
- a multi-disciplinary project board ensured that different points of view were considered (including members of the public)
- the ability to utilise existing IT investment, e.g. Microsoft 365 and Skype.

In the implementation phase, the council plan to focus on currently available but underutilised systems as well as maximising the use of standard mobile technology to improve efficiencies. Likely benefits from the implementation phase include:

- clients get access to the right service at the right time for the right cost
- more assessments will be carried out remotely at first point of contact
- increased efficiencies in processing will allow a refocus of workload, with more emphasis on complex cases and prevention
- greater consistency of approach, improving the outcomes for individuals.

Key strengths of the project

- **public engagement:** members of the public demonstrated a willingness to engage around achieving better outcomes
- **positive reception:** prototype Skype assessments by OTs have been very positive and are an efficient way to reduce travel time
- **reallocation of time:** changing the way that some aspects of work are carried out allows more time to be spent on complex cases or redirected to prevention work
- **providing focus:** having a project with a deadline and funding has helped to prioritise and implement changes
- **communication:** the project has helped bring health and social care teams together and improve communication between them.



The potential impact

During the discovery phase, the council developed a logic model to guide the implementation phase and to help in quantifying the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts which are likely to result from the delivery of this project. The team have established the following six outcomes as success measures for their solution going forward:

- a reduction in the duplication of assessments and documentation
- reduced waiting times
- an improvement in client satisfaction with service due to faster assessments, provision of equipment and adaptations made
- an increase in the percentage of referrals resolved at first point of contact
- easier ability to share information from assessments (such as photos) with multi-disciplinary teams
- a reduction in the number of incidents such as falls, due to adaptations being implemented more quickly.

Challenges to delivery and lessons learned

- a culture change was required for staff to upskill and become familiar using technology
- there were challenges around the integration of the various systems, and decisions had to be made around which area to focus on
- improvement may result in more referrals and increase pressure on budgets
- there was a need to maintain focus, given lots of potential tangents and that this was an additional project on top of operational workloads
- data gathering was complex across eight districts, each with their own ways of working
- a key learning from the process was the need to question each other, challenge and test potential solutions (working from the problem) rather than come up with a solution first
- the project team indicated that it would have been beneficial to have access to pertinent data at the start of the project to have improved understanding of the situation from the outset.

Next steps, including sustainability and spread

This project has the potential to allow more assessments to be carried out remotely at first point of contact, improving efficiency of the team and allowing a refocus of workload, with more emphasis on complex cases, reablement and prevention.

This project also promotes service modernisation through the use of technology to enhance user experience. To enable this to happen more evidence is needed to improve buy in and show how it could be applied to different areas.

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Link to relevant documents

Derbyshire County Council Discovery Phase review report:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Derbyshire%20Discovery%20Phase%20Review%20WEB.pdf>