

Nottinghamshire good practice case study: front end advice, information and assessment

1. Background

Reducing funding, demographic pressures and a prediction of an unprecedented demand for social care input as a result of the Care Act are just some of the factors which have led to Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) putting significant effort into the development of a new social care offer, an offer which proactively targets people who may be at risk of requiring social care services in order to inform them about ways in which they can make themselves more resilient to any risk to their independence and improve their overall wellbeing.

The new social care offer is developed in the Adult Social Care Strategy and the main purpose is to ensure a sustainable, fair and equitable social care provision for local residents which provides people with an enhanced quality of life and is affordable now and in the longer term.

There are four underpinning principles which form the foundation of the Strategy:

- Promoting Independence
- Ensuring Value for Money
- Promoting Choice and Control
- Promoting Well-Being

A vital part of this process will be the introduction of a digital information, referral and assessment process, combined with a web based portal which allows people to identify for themselves (or others on their behalfs) what they are having difficulty with, what sort of help would be useful, whether this help is available for them in their local area, and how they can access help and support. This links in with Nottinghamshire's aspirational Digital First strategy – we have adopted the Government Digital by Design principles, and it is the stated goal of the authority to build digital services which are so effective that any user with access to the internet would prefer to use them over and above any other method of interacting with the authority.

2. The New Offer

A significant amount of work is underway to look at how NCC address people from the point of first contact – the review of front end services, from initial contact through to service provision.

The diagram below shows the proposed customer journey. It can be undertaken digitally, or by phone with our Customer Service Centre (CSC), with similar tools and resources being available whichever method is chosen. An initial, brief online contact of around a dozen or so questions provides an indication of social care need and eligibility. This contact can either be completed by a user (or their representative) via the internet, or by a service advisor within the CSC.

If eligible, the user progresses to a fuller, needs assessment – it is estimated that we can obtain around 70-80% of the necessary information for our uses in this way. Anyone appearing ineligible will receive a personalised statement, linking them to relevant information and advice. If being undertaken over the phone, this information can be e-mailed, or printed and posted to the user.

This process repeats through a series of online forms, including assessments for Carers and financial assessments, with individualised advice outputting at various points in the process. By controlling the information and advice, and using it at certain trigger points in the process, we are able to

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ensure it follows the direction of travel laid out in our strategy. Vitally, the information from these forms prepopulates relevant fields within next one in the sequence, and is also fed through to and captured on our case management system.

In addition to these forms, there is also a financial ready reckoner. This brief questionnaire gives an instant indication as to whether an individual would be a self-funder or would receive partial funding – the premise being that this may be all the information someone requires from us.

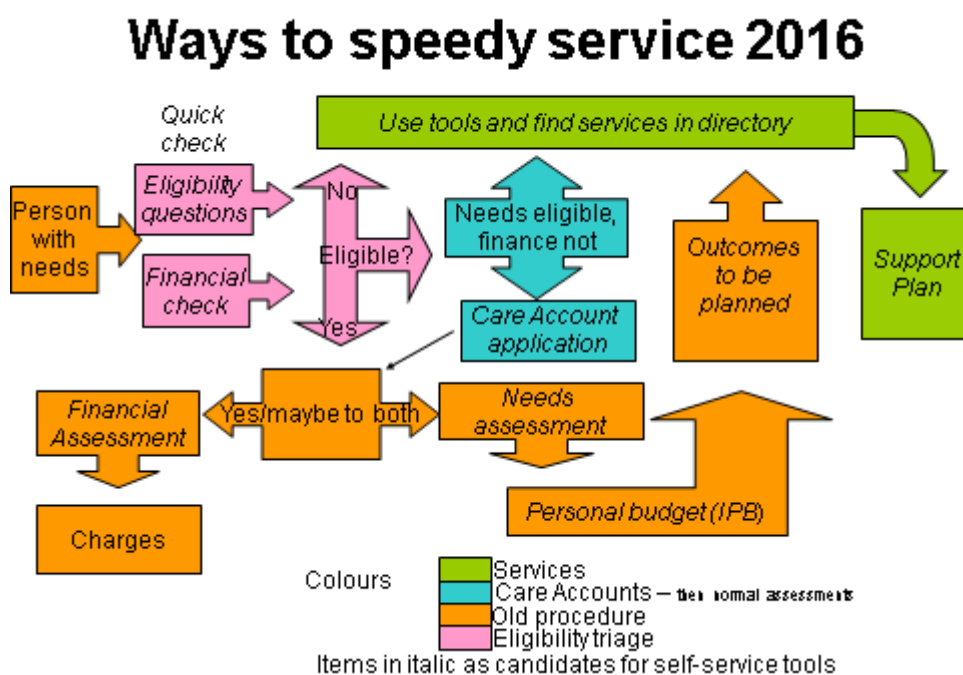


Fig1 – Diagram on which approach was modelled, taken from “The development of online services for information and advice supporting the Care Act 2014”, by Ian Swanson and available via the LGA website

This process will only be effective if the information it holds is comprehensive. To this end, a partnership is being formed. The information contained will be provided by all members of the partnership, and all will seek to refer their users to it. At present this partnership includes two of the six County CCGs, and work is underway to bring others in, as well as Nottingham City Council.

The voluntary sector will also be heavily involved. Their contribution at all stages in the process cannot be underestimated. We envisage that as many, if not more, people will have their forms filled in for them, as will complete them for themselves – all studies appear to show that we are at least a generation away from universal digital usage, with uptake amongst the over 75s remaining very low. In some instances this may be by family or friends, but it is equally likely that it could be someone representing a voluntary organisation.

To this end, we are already working closely with representatives from across the voluntary and community sectors, to train them in what we want from them, and to harvest some of the information they currently hold and use. We are assisted in this aim by our forthcoming Grant Aid

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allocation process – all organisations applying for funding from NCC in relation to services for Adult Social Care need to display a high level of information and advice provision as part of their bid.

To increase the range of people able to complete these online tools, we are also looking to train up librarians. Future plans include the provision of dedicated tablets in community pharmacies and GP surgeries. Where CCGs are planning Information Hubs, we would envisage CCG staff using these tools to provide accurate and effective social care advice.

The introduction of these digital tools builds on existing successful work which has been undertaken in the past at the NCC front end. The CSC currently responds to over 60,000 social care enquiries a year, 38% of which are looking purely for information and advice. We have established a triage process, the key elements of which are:

- Identified Customer Services Advisors who respond to all social care enquiries
- A range of tools and resources to assist “triage” in the form of “on screen ” information, scripts, process flow charts and assessment
- A multi-disciplinary Adult Access Service who deal with more complex referrals and undertake a range of assessments previously completed within operational teams
- From March 2105 introduction of a “self-serve” option at First Contact. A system where people have the information they need to take control of their care and support and choose the options that are right for them

What has been the impact on work flow? Over 70 % of social care enquiries into the CSC are now resolved at the front end reducing work flow into operational teams and freeing up professional staff to focus on more complex cases. During October 2014, they responded to 1,958 social care enquiries of which only 400 were forwarded on for an assessment of needs within operational teams.

Within the CSC a multi-disciplinary Adult Access Service (AAS) deals with more complex enquiries as well as undertaking non-complex assessments, reviews and minor package amendments across both social work and occupational therapy. A number of pilots are taking place within the AAS with the aim of reducing process and providing a more timely service. These include:

- Identifying older adults undergoing pre-elective surgery who will require re-ablement potential upon discharge
- Triage of more complex safeguarding referrals
- Telephone assessments of non-complex occupational therapy assessments and assessment of eligibility for services.
- Minor adjustments to existing social care packages
- Carers telephone assessments

The introduction of a new contact form in September 2014 (the content of which has been broadly replicated for the first stage of the online process) will enable a pull through of vital information into future assessments, both OT and Social Work which should reduce the amount of associated

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assessment bureaucracy and assist with mobilising the workforce (as less to type). It will also enable a greater resolution once processes and policies have been amended to reflect this.

This move towards greater mobilisation is aided by the use of unique Total Mobile software, which replicates the forms used to assess service users, allowing workers to complete them whilst away from the office, alongside the service user. By providing the workforce with a mobilised solution, which feeds into our case management systems we aim to increase the speed of response and delivery of services by taking away many desk-based administration tasks, freeing up staff to do more social work.

The initial pilot saw over 223 assessments carried out in this way, with supporting information added to case files over 1,500 times. Usually these tasks would have been completed in front of a computer screen, but instead were completed out in the community where service users are based. Working in this way has the potential to increase the number of service users we can assess by 14% over the next 12 months. It will also bring NCC a number of other benefits, such as reduced workplace stress, related absences and a reduced requirement for office accommodation.