Effective use of national information sources
One of the web’s inherent strengths is the ability to link from one site to another at the click of a button. Health and social care services have taken some time to develop on the web, but now there are many national and regional information sources that can be linked for the benefit of adult social care users and their carers.

The severe pressure on council budgets and resources means that it essential to make full use of these external assets rather than creating and maintaining unnecessary local web content. The Care Act 2014 provided a simplified national framework for adult social care across England, including guidance on personalisation and eligibility criteria. Although each council still has its own local offer and approach, the new legislation can make the use of national digital resources more relevant.

There is now a wide range of good online content available including widgets, data downloads, application programming interfaces (APIs) and apps that can be used locally. The pre-eminent statutory site is NHS Choices. Gov.uk also provides clear statutory information that is relevant to people with care needs and their carers, including regarding benefits entitlement. There are many others as well as charitable and commercial resources.

**What are the types of national online web resources that councils should reference, and how?**

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

ADASS, LGA and Socitm would like to thank the following people and organisations for their contributions:

- **Tom Knight**
  Affinity Works

- **Tom Ward**
  Care Quality Commission

- **Madeleine Starr**
  Carers UK

- **Janet Seward**
  Disability Living Foundation

- **Ian Singleton**
  IEG4

- **Shawn Mach**
  Lasa

- **Tim Adams**
  LGA

- **Andy Jeans**
  ORCHA

- **Martin Greenwood**
  Socitm

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To what extent does it make sense for 152 English councils with responsibility for adult social care each to develop extensive information, advice and guidance on their websites when there are now good national resources? The prime one is NHS Choices, which developed its social care content in parallel with many councils for the implementation of the Care Act in 2015.

NHS Choices has developed more than 100 articles on social care and support available for councils to incorporate into their local website through syndication. NHS Choices is delivered by the statutory body NHS Digital and therefore all content is consistent with the Care Act. The next section sets out the scope of the content and includes three examples of local uses.

The overwhelming majority of care in England is delivered by providers, who must be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). They are subject to inspection reports and rated for quality on a regular basis. That information is as useful to a person or their family looking for a care home as an Ofsted report is for judging a local school. It can be incorporated into a local resource directory via a straightforward widget or use of an API, as set out in Section 3.

The Local Government Association (LGA) is developing open data standards and proof of concept technology to share details about care providers and community resources across the country and between systems. Section 4 provides an update on this project.

There is a range of other national digital resources from the voluntary and commercial sectors that members of the public and council websites may wish to use. All the specialist charities, such as Age UK, MIND, Mencap, Scope, Alzheimer’s Society, Independent Age, have excellent online resources that can be linked to from a relevant page within a council site.

There are also commercial sites such as homecare.co.uk and carehome.co.uk. Interestingly, these two sites seem to have had good success in obtaining customer reviews on services, unlike any statutory sites, including NHS Choices. A random sample of 150 care homes from across the country found an impressive 40% with reviews. Of course, with any consumer review site the value is limited if there are only one or two reviews. With carehome.co.uk in that same sample 29% of homes had more than five reviews including many recent ones. Council staff should be aware of these sites. Service users and carers may find them useful.

Here we focus on three organisations that offer specific services for councils including use of their widget:

- socialcareinfo
- AskSara
- Carers UK.

Finally, in section 8 we look at the partnership offered by ORCHA to assist health and care professionals recommending apps to their clients / patients.

One word of caution: ensure that the use of any national information sources is undertaken carefully. Their use must serve a clear purpose that the host site cannot easily provide. They should be used to improve the customer journey for a specific task. It is also important to tell visitors that they are being taken to an external site and to ensure that they go to the correct page on that site, rather than just the home page.
2. NHS CHOICES – ADVICE AND RESOURCES

NHS Choices contains a wealth of health-related information including extensive material of relevance to people needing care and support and their carers. It consists of both advice and a resource directory for CQC-registered health and care providers. NHS Choices has the expertise to create and review high quality content and ensure that it ranks highly on search engines. For some people with care needs, it may therefore be the first online site that they find. If you are interested in how NHS Choices page hits are influenced by external factors, the weekly blog is a fascinating read.²

The following overview was provided by the NHS Choices team for this briefing. Links to their pages are highlighted. Almost all the material is available to be embedded into a council website via the free syndication service. However, note that it will present differently and there are multiple options, with varying technical overheads. These are discussed briefly in the subsequent sections, based on the experience of some councils. You also have the option of simply providing a link from your web page to NHS Choices so that users navigate it themselves.

You may also be interested to know that a new page for health and care related apps has been launched as a beta version at: apps.beta.nhs.uk

Each month, around 10 million people access NHS Choices content via more than 600 partner websites, applications and other internet-connected devices, including more than 200 NHS organisations, local authorities and commercial companies such as Microsoft, Mumsnet and Boots.

Syndication Introduction, NHS Choices, January 2016²
2.1 NHS CHOICES: SOCIAL CARE AND SUPPORT GUIDE

NHS Choices (NHSC) is the UK’s leading online health and social care information service. The site attracts more than 40 million visits each month and was originally established in 2007 to meet the demand for authoritative and trusted health content.

In 2013 social care content was integrated into the website. All NHSC content is certified by the Information Standard (NHS England’s commitment to driving up the quality of health and care information).

The NHSC social care guide receives more than 300,000 visits each month and the syndication programme plays a key part in achieving the objective of transparency of information and open government.

YOUR GUIDE TO CARE AND SUPPORT ARTICLES

The social care and support guide has been created for people who have care and support needs, their carers and people who are planning for their future care needs.

The guide contains a wealth of information in the form of more than 100 articles which are all available to local authorities via the NHSC syndication programme. The content within the guide is categorised into four key sections.

- **What’s your situation?** 13 articles tailored to a person’s individual situation, eg *I need help caring for someone* and *I need help at home*.
- **Care services and advice** – 28 articles providing information on:
  - how to get care services, eg *Assessing your care needs*
  - the *Types of services* that are available including *Care at home* and *Mobility equipment*.
  - wellbeing advice, eg *Meals, nutrition and feeding* and *Medicines: tips for parents*.
- **Money and your rights** 31 articles with information on How to fund your care, as well as disability benefits and The Care Act and your rights.
- **For carers** 25 articles with information on carer’s rights, benefits and caring issues such as Caring and Sharing your home.

VIDEOS

The NHS Choices syndication programme also has a number of videos available for local authorities. These are syndicated through our Brightcove API.

The current list of 8 social care videos includes:

- NHS: how the care system works
- Accessing care and support: planning ahead
- The Care Act what it means for me
- What to do when you first become a carer
- Supported living
- Recognising yourself as a carer
- Home care.

HEALTHY LIVING CONTENT

NHSC also has a variety of healthy living content that could be used to augment the core social care information.

The lifestyle content provides guides, tips and high-quality information on how to live a healthier life.

The section is growing, with new articles, videos and interactive tools being continually added, covering topic areas such as:

- Men’s health 60-plus
- Women’s health 60-plus
Evidence shows that many people turn to their council for information on general health and local health services. Reforms to the NHS mean that councils are expected to take up more responsibility around health and social care in the community, which means more people will turn to their local councils for information and advice.

With Services near you, NHS Choices offers councils an opportunity to incorporate a comprehensive directory of NHS and other health and social care services to their websites. All directories and information are regularly updated by NHS Choices, and all updates are automatically fed into your platform. By incorporating the ‘Find services’ content, users will be able to find location details and services for CQC registered services as well as local NHS and third sector organisations on the local authority site. These services, which are searchable by postcode include:

- Local authority needs assessment
- Local authority adult social care
- Care home and care at home
- Carers
- Disability Information and support
- Shared lives
- Supported living services

**CONTENT SYNDICATION**

The entire social care content and data catalogue is available through the NHSC syndication feeds. The content can be styled in line with the local authority site branding and updates to content are automatic (when you run the service) which means that your content is constantly up-to-date. We provide the CQC data through an API which is updated on a weekly basis. The CQC data set is augmented by enhanced listing information supplied by providers or their partners.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

**SYNDICATION FEEDS**

For syndicated content via the API platform, some knowledge of .xml is required, as well as consumption of .xml using a backend scripting technology such as .net. You would need to develop a content/data plan and have access to in-house development resource or an external agency to integrate the syndication feeds into your website.

**WIDGETS**

For organisations that are lacking technical knowledge or resources to implement the feeds, content is also available in the form of widgets. The widgets are easy to implement and embed code can be cut and pasted into a web page.

**ASSISTANCE WITH SYNDICATION**

You can read more about our syndication services in the Syndication section of the NHS Choices website as well as syndication documentation to assist with implementation.

To become a syndication partner you can register as an organisation this is an automated process. NHS Choices can also assist with implementation. For further information please contact:

Vanessa van der Schraft, Digital Partnerships Lead: vanessa.vanderschraft@nhs.net

James Lumgair, Digital Partnerships Implementation Manager: james.lumgair@nhs.net
2.2 LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPERIENCES WITH NHSC SYNDICATION

A ‘widget’ is effectively a window from within one web page out to another organisation’s content. This makes it very easy to include the other organisation’s content. The ‘care and support guide’ widget shown in the previous section has, for example, been used by Kirklees on its first page about ‘Getting social care and support’. Note that the council has first set out in five clear steps the specific processes for their council before enabling a web visitor to find out more in-depth national guidance via the NHS Choices widget. The widget articles contain links to further NHS Choices material that open in new browser tabs. See for yourself here: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/social-care/how-to-get-support.aspx.

Suffolk’s InfoLink is a searchable directory of many services and community groups across the county, including those for adults with support needs. Suffolk have embedded a simple widget within the home page that allows a user to find very quickly the six NHS services closest to their postcode under each of the headings of GP, dentist or pharmacy.

A different approach was taken by the West London Alliance with CarePlace. It decided to use the full syndication service for articles. Tom Knight, Technical Lead, comments:

‘We wanted the articles to be searchable from within our directory. The syndication feed allows us to cache them within our database and index the content as well as adding them into our own categories. A nightly refresh checks for updates from NHS Choices. The other advantage is that our self-assessment can signpost users to particular articles according to their circumstances. It did take a significant amount of development work to achieve and requires some ongoing maintenance when NHS Choices make technical changes.”

To see an example, click on ‘Advice about healthy living’ at www.careplace.org.uk/Categories/10 and then on the ‘Information’ tab. This lists articles written by NHS Choices, which, clearly marked as such, as well as advice sections developed locally.
Most providers of care services are required to register with the CQC which will then inspect them. This leads to a report and, for most, one of four ratings: Outstanding / Good / Requires improvement / Inadequate. This information is available on [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk) and a widget is available that can be embedded against the service on a council web page.

The CQC provides a ‘flat file’ download of all registered services. This can be built into a local resource directory and includes the Location Id which is needed to return the specific rating and link to the report from the widget. Details are here: [www.cqc.org.uk/content/how-get-and-re-use-cqc-information-and-data~directory](http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/how-get-and-re-use-cqc-information-and-data~directory)

The code for embedding the widget is at the bottom of this page: [www.cqc.org.uk/content/cqc-widget-%E2%80%93-help-and-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/cqc-widget-%E2%80%93-help-and-frequently-asked-questions)

Benefits of using the widget are:

- Members of the public find it very helpful to see the official rating and be able to find the report from the regulator of care services.
- It is easy to include on a web page.
- It will automatically reflect changes in ratings and updates of reports.
- If the CQC changes the format in future, no change is required on your web page.

More recently, and staying in line with Open Data principles, CQC has also made available an API that allows for CQC data about registered services to be retrieved quicker and more efficiently by external stakeholders wishing to make specific and fully automated use of this information via their own web services.

The following data items included in the API are available for use under the Open Government Licence and are refreshed daily:

- The name of the service
- The starting date of their registration under the Health & Social Care Act
- The ending date of their registration under the Health & Social Care Act (for deregistered providers only)
- The type of organisation (e.g. social care, NHS healthcare)
- The address
- Any information on linked organisations (such as when a location was previously run by a different provider)
- The regulated activities registered
- Service types and specialisms (for locations only)
- Latest published ratings
- Publication dates for the latest report.

Further information and access to the API can be found here: [http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/how-get-and-re-use-cqc-information-and-data#api](http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/how-get-and-re-use-cqc-information-and-data#api)
In summer 2016 the LGA started a project to enable the sharing of descriptions of local support services by establishing open data standards. It will also enable discovery of appropriate services based on identifying a citizen’s need.

The vision was to develop a data standard that describes locally delivered services such that all local providers – including local authorities and their partners – can publish the availability of their services according to the COUNT principle: ‘Collect Once and Use a Number of Times’.

These services would then be discovered by innovative and flexible apps according to a citizen’s needs and circumstances by developing the Local Government Business Model (LGBM) further.

Expert standards support has been provided by the Local eGovernment’s standards body, iStandUK with Director of Standards, Paul Davidson and his team.

Briefing 8, e-marketplaces, e-brokerage and wellbeing portals, sets out a variety of resource directories that councils are establishing including use of dedicated staff to add and update hyper-local community services. There clearly could be merit in this information being shareable with other councils and independent sector apps.

A prototype app has been developed by IEG4 to test access to the online local services information published against the data schema and using a need assessment to identify appropriate services for the citizen. The pilot programme has focused on Lancashire as a place with all sectors coming together into a task group around Chorley.

Gary Hall, Chief Executive of Chorley Council, said ‘We think giving our frontline workers a digital assessment of need that then, based on personal circumstances, automatically generates suggestions of hyper-local services from a place-based directory will help our citizens wellbeing and hopefully prevent their need for statutory services’.

Sefton Community and Voluntary Sector is also implementing the application for the wellbeing of older people. Bolton has been investigating the approach for its anti-poverty partnership.

Programme Manager, Tim Adams, says: ‘We are currently unsure what level of take-up, interest and practical success this pilot will achieve. We all accept it is just a start to an ambitious new way of supporting places and citizens, with local services matched to their locations and needs. It will draw together local government, voluntary and private sectors into the same discovery channels.’

The LGA vision and links to the draft schema are available at: about.esd.org.uk/news/vision-finding-right-local-services.

Going forward we would like to see national information platforms as well as apps drawing on these locally published information sources so as to match citizen needs to local services that help meet those needs.
Lasas is a charity dedicated to supporting organisations in their use of technology and the delivery of social welfare legal advice to disadvantaged communities.

Supported by London Councils and the LGA, it has been funded by the Law Society Charity and the Access to Justice Foundation to develop socialcareinfo.net. The new web tool allows the public to find organisations that can help them with social care advice based on their postcode, starting with the relevant local council and linking to its social care pages. It then also lists local Citizens Advice offices, Age UK, Mind, etc as well as offering links to a number of national organisations. The tool was launched in 2016, covers the whole of the UK, and receives thousands of visitors a month. There is also a postcode-based widget that can easily be embedded in your own website.
There is a wide range of specialist equipment available to help people remain independent in their own homes for longer. The Disabled Living Foundation charity (DLF) has been providing an online tool to help people find what is most appropriate to their needs since 2008. The independent site is certified to the NHS Information Standard and maintained by a team of in-house occupational therapists. It has more than 200,000 users per annum and over 80% of them are visiting for the first time.

People are generating on average each month over 3,000 reports from AskSARA nationally. The tool offers a choice of more than 90 topics and over 1,000 advice-based articles make up the reports. When viewing their personalised report, users can follow links to related products. They then access DLF’s database of equipment, which contains more than 10,000 products from over 950 national suppliers.

AskSARA is available to be licensed by third parties, including councils that add their own branding and link to it from their web domains, adding their own signposting. Licence-holders have access to reporting via DLF that includes website traffic statistics, user reports analysis and user satisfaction results. The typical cost to a local authority is approximately £4,000 one-off set-up costs and £7,500 per annum. If the tool delays admission to residential care by some months for local service users, then savings will quickly exceed the cost. One county council has found that 71% of users are using it on behalf of someone else. Typically, councils will work with local equipment providers to ensure that they are listed in the individualised report the system generates.

Staffordshire has incorporated the tool into its ‘Staffordshire Cares’ site which is aimed at self-funders as much as people eligible for council-funded care. Jim Ellam is Commissioning Manager and Assistive Technology Lead. He comments: ‘We are keen to promote assistive technology and AskSARA has proven a good way to guide residents to the right equipment. For carers who don’t want to come near the local authority, it allows them to get on with things.’

AskSARA is designed for users who have a need, but are not sure of what equipment might be suitable for them. For those who do know what they want and are looking for suitable products and suppliers the DLF has Living Made Easy which itself attracted over 1 million users in 2016.
Carers UK is one of the national charities that has placed a particular emphasis on the benefits of technology. It has several web pages devoted to the topic, including an overview of health and care technologies and how to find them, and sensible advice on practical uses of ‘everyday technology’. It has also developed an app called Jointly to help carers coordinate care for their loved one.

Public awareness of health and care technologies is very low – a YouGov poll conducted for Carers UK in 2013 found that fewer than 1 in 3 people were using technology for health and care. Carers UK is running an awareness campaign in 2017 in partnership with the Digital Health and Care Alliance (DHACA) to help carers and service providers understand the benefits of technologies in supporting caring. As better awareness will be key to adoption in the future, the YouGov poll tested whether low adoption was caused by lack of awareness by asking if respondents had used telecare, before defining telecare and the way it functions. Based on their existing knowledge, only 12% of the population said they would use telecare, with 80% admitting that they weren’t sure what telecare was. When telecare was explained to them, the 12% shot up to 79%.

Carers UK also offers a tailored support package to councils combining its digital products and online resources with links to local information. The package uses a landing page which enables carers to access all the resources on offer through a single link.

The ‘Digital Resource for Carers’ includes:

- the Jointly app
- About Me - an e-learning course designed to build resilience
- an e-learning guide to nutrition
- Upfront - a simple self-assessment tool for carers using Carers UK’s own information resources
- Looking After Someone – a guide to carers’ rights
- Being Heard – a self-advocacy toolkit.

Councils subscribing to the Digital Resource for Carers have a dedicated dashboard that they can use to access data on use and outcomes via registration details, clicks through to the different elements of the landing page and feedback questionnaires embedded in the online resources. They also have access to promotional materials and a roll-out toolkit. The Carers UK website has more information and a list of councils currently subscribing to the Digital Resource. See also dhaca.org.uk/carers

Feedback has been highly positive from carers and also from partner councils. John Bangs, Carers Strategy and Development Manager, at Surrey CC comments:

‘There are over 108,000 carers in Surrey and as budgets get tighter we need to work smarter in reaching out to them. Embedding digital as part of service transformation will allow us to provide greater levels of support to more carers – more effectively and more cost effectively. Critically, the Digital Resource for Carers will help local authorities meet their Care Act duties on information and advice, prevention and wellbeing, and deliver on the NHSE and ADASS Memorandum of Understanding to support carers across health and social care. We are proud to be offering this resource to carers in our area through joint work with our partners in health and community services.’
Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria includes Lancashire County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. They have partnered with the Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Applications (ORCHA) to offer a validated selection of health and care apps to the public and professionals.

ORCHA, an independent enterprise, carries out impartial reviews of apps against value and safety. This function is essential given that there are an estimated 170,000 such apps. It is impossible for members of the public or care professionals to know which are safe and valuable to use and recommend without an independent assessment. ORCHA carries out a rigorous 118-point review process and presents the results in clear, searchable web content with rankings.

Dr Amanda Thornton is Clinical Director of Lancashire Care Foundation Trust and a digital champion. She comments:

‘We’re excited to be working with ORCHA to give citizens and clinicians more confidence in considering what health apps are out there to look after themselves. Clinicians can know what risks and value are attached to these apps and recommend ones if, say, their patient wants to eat well, exercise more or manage their diabetes.

We will be building particular apps into our pathways, for example, people waiting for a rheumatology appointment might be recommended a pain management app, so that when they come to the clinic they’ve started thinking about managing their pain. They can share the information with the clinician and collaboratively consider the history of the previous months and decide on the best outcomes and support plan.’

ORCHA makes the results of its reviews public on its website, but the advantages to the NHS and councils in partnering with them are:

• Clinicians and care professionals can login and issue a recommendation to their patient/client that generates a personalised link for downloading the app, by text message or email.

• The person can then read about and download the app, and will soon be able to leave feedback about it.

• Dashboard management information is available about numbers of recommendations, click-throughs, etc.

• The site can be ‘white-labelled’ with the local public sector organisations’ branding.

• ORCHA is funded to carry out more reviews, including every time that an app is updated.

For more details see: www.lancashire.orcha.co.uk
The examples in this briefing are just a sample of the extensive digital resources available nationally that can assist members of the public. The questions for someone responsible for a council’s digital engagement strategy for adult social care are ‘Which resources to use locally?’ and then ‘How do you embed them in your own site?’.

Simple hyperlinks from specific pages in your own web structure to relevant external sites are clearly the easiest approach. However, the person is then taken away from your site, which may or may not be desirable. It is important to make a deep link to the precise page relevant to the visitor’s task, and not just to the home page, which would put the onus on the visitor to navigate to the right page. You will also need to check that the external links remain valid over time, e.g. by ensuring that every one of your web pages is triggered for review periodically and someone tests the links manually. Or you could set up dedicated software to check for broken external links.

Widgets are the next easiest method and the briefing includes some useful examples.

As syndication, data downloads and APIs require higher levels of technical resource, they need to be assessed more carefully. Your software supplier, e.g. for an e-marketplace, may already be using them and be happy to include the features for you – potentially at a cost. If the supplier has not yet developed them, there may be merit in working with other customers to agree common requirements and share the development costs.

Finally, there is a variety of digital services such as AskSara, the Carers UK package or the ORCHA service where a partnership agreement means that you gain added local value from the national resource. Local branding also reflects well on the council and residents’ sense of place.
NEXT STEPS FOR YOU

• Select carefully the external site or sites that you wish to use. They should be easy to use. Just because a site exists is not sufficient reason to use it if the content is not relevant to the task in hand and not easy to find.

• Review where you can refer website users to an external site that they will easily be able to navigate for useful information. This will save you creating the content on your own site and may give users the independence to avoid reliance on council support.

• If you are not using the widgets outlined in this briefing, check where they might be most helpful and for which users.

• If you see the value in more technical integration to other national resources through syndication, data downloads or APIs, then write a brief business case for sign-off before committing the technical staff.

• Include an element of public review of any extensive development proposals and co-produce them with representatives of people in need of support and their carers.

• Work with service managers to assess the appetite for partnering with national service providers, potentially trialling things first with a particular user group.

• Ensure that all your social care staff, especially first contact staff, are aware of the changes that you make so that they can refer residents to those specific website features.

• Review use of the facilities on an ongoing basis and offer feedback to the national providers where appropriate.
FURTHER INFORMATION

1. NHS Choices Syndication pages: [www.nhs.uk/aboutNHSChoices/professionals/syndication](http://www.nhs.uk/aboutNHSChoices/professionals/syndication)
2. NHS Choices weekly website report: [blogs.nhs.uk/choices-blog](http://blogs.nhs.uk/choices-blog)
4. Local e-Government standards body: [istanduk.org/](http://istanduk.org/)
5. The widget from socialcareinfo is available here: [socialcareinfo.net/about/widget](http://socialcareinfo.net/about/widget)

### Engaging Citizens Online

List of briefings: topics

- **01** Identity and authentication
  - December 2015
- **02** Methodology for developing the online user journey
  - December 2015
- **03** Business case for digital investment
  - March 2016
- **04** Planning online transactional facilities
  - March 2016
- **05** Online tools within a needs assessment process
  - February 2017
- **06** Supplier offerings of social care financial assessments
  - February 2017
- **07** Effective use of national information sources
  - May 2017
- **08** E-marketplaces, e-brokerage and wellbeing portals
  - May 2017
- **09** Promotion of online services
  - May 2016
- **10** Role of the third sector and care providers
  - May 2017