

The front door (preventing or delaying the need for services)

What this means

Often, activity with local authorities is driven by understanding people's needs and matching them to available services. These services may be care provision, support for assessment or signposting to voluntary services. This is required when people need support for the first time or when their needs change. The processes around engaging with the person, understanding and assessing their circumstances and then providing guidance or support can be time consuming and fragmented. The effectiveness of the process and the selection of the most appropriate pathway can have a significant impact on the efficiency of service provision.

What we've learnt

A single point of access

Having a single point of access to a broad range of services can help overcome the fragmented experience of accessing support. However, this requires that the single point of access has both skills in assessment and knowledge to signpost to other services. This is an appropriate area for support from digital technology, but the technology can only be effective if there is already an established system in place. **Bradford Metropolitan District Council** explored how voice recognition and machine learning might be used to automate aspects of the initial interactions. They already had a single point of contact that could direct people appropriately and so had the manual system in place. There were challenges around the technology working with a range of accents and in the cost of accessing voice recognition services.

Streamlining services

Several projects focused on improving the effectiveness and the speed of interactions. **Stockport MBC** implemented a new team to fast track assistive technology assessments resulting in quicker installs and lower refusal rates. **Lincolnshire County Council** explored a self-serve, online approach to financial assessments that would enable people to quickly understand what the costs of their care package would be. This potentially released resources to deal with more complex cases by automating simple cases. Bottlenecks and slow responses increase interactions, raising transaction costs and resulting in a poor user

experience. Clarity and speed were shown to increase people's satisfaction with services and reduced overall activity.

The importance of data

Having good access to data through a clear digital process was found to be key to service improvement. **Shropshire Council** created a digital tool called 'the Bridge' which uses household occupancy data, care records and thermal mapping to identify where there is a high concentration of people over 65, living alone and in cold homes, not currently receiving health services. They identified those most likely to enter the service at 'crisis point', which often entails the most expensive interventions. The tool was used to successfully identify an at-risk individual who would regularly attend A&E and was identified as having a broken boiler. Fixing his heating system has meant that he has had fewer GP and hospital visits, as well as improved wellbeing.

Recommendations

- Having a single point of access to services provides a focus point for ensuring that processes can be streamlined.
- The single point of access should have both skills in assessment and knowledge to signpost to other services.
- Using digital technology to facilitate people who are able to self-serve online frees up resources for dealing with more complicated cases.
- Streamlining assessment and access to services increases satisfaction and reduces activity.
- Develop data collection (preferably digitally) for every process and use the data to identify opportunities to improve services.