

# SCDIP Discovery Phase - Newcastle City Council

Newcastle City Council's project helps people to maximise their independence by accessing the right equipment at the right time.  
**Improving access to equipment**

## The context

The joint loan equipment service is commissioned jointly by NHS Newcastle Gateshead CCG and Newcastle City Council and is delivered by Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. There is a significant issue with waiting lists for equipment, compounded by insufficient equipment to meet demand and insufficient funding within the current budget to purchase new equipment. One cause is the delay in retrieving equipment from service users once it is no longer needed.

## The challenge

At present the information on whether a piece of equipment is still required comes from annual surveys sent out to service users. There are several issues with this as service users may have moved, be unable to complete or return the survey themselves or simply forget to return it. The project team chose to focus on addressing the problem statement "*How might we ensure that people can maximise independence by accessing the right equipment at the right time?*"

## What did the project involve?

The discovery phase involved undertaking research which included:

- literature review (including grey literature)
- journey mapping activities to understand the process from different perspectives of service users and health and care professionals
- discussions with service managers to understand the wider context in which the service operates
- semi-structured interviews with social care staff and occupational therapists
- analysis of findings from the annual satisfaction survey of service users
- focus groups with professionals using semi-structured approach
- observation of the work of the occupational therapists' practitioner panel
- research into approaches taken in other areas.

## Stakeholder engagement and user research

Engagement has taken the form of discussions with service managers, semi-structured interviews with service staff and focus groups with professionals. The project team also conducted workshops with practitioners and undertook surveys with service users.

Additionally, analysis of the annual satisfaction survey with service users was undertaken. The idea of the project focussing on the equipment loan service came from consideration of key problems with the adult care social management team and involved discussions with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.



*“Being part of the digital project, has been invaluable for me, and led to better understanding of processes and highlighted areas of strengths and weaknesses and to enable the work going forward to effect change.”*

**-Jan Collett, Occupational Therapy  
Team Manager, Newcastle City Council**

## Benefits of the proposed solution

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

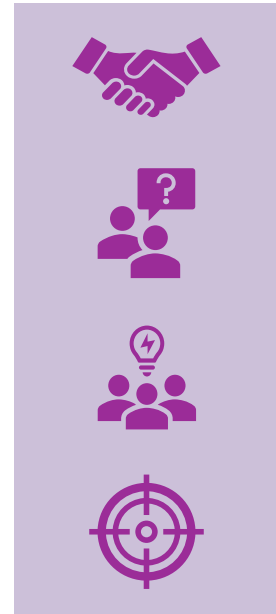
- improved understanding of the challenges faced by health and care staff, particularly the barriers from a lack of information on the use of equipment
- a better sense of what was practical and feasible to understand about how equipment was being used
- the flexibility to test out and learn from ideas
- buy in from across the council
- the opportunity to showcase the work to inform future digital projects.

In the implementation phase, the council plan to further develop the system by developing a mechanism and process to automate the sharing of information across organisations, creating a joined-up data set, analysing this to support an improved knowledge base. The likely benefits from the implementation phase are anticipated to be:

1. For the equipment loan service: reduced pressure on budgets in the wider system due to reduced duplicate purchasing; and time saving through efficiencies moving from a manual system and better stock control.
2. For service users: equipment available for re-use sooner; fewer people with long waits for equipment; most appropriate equipment allocated according to current needs; and people enabled to maximise independence because they have the right equipment at the right time.
3. For health and care professionals: increased availability of equipment identified through assessments; and better-informed assessments.

## Key strengths of the project

- **Building relationships:** The project team has built upon pre-existing relationships with the hospital which enhanced the willingness to engage with the project as a whole.
- **Securing buy-in:** The team encouraged all key stakeholders to provide feedback on the project which supported good relationships and buy-in.
- **New approaches:** The project was a significant learning experience for the project team, particularly around 'test-and-learn' type approaches, which they plan to use in future projects
- **Providing focus:** The project provided a focus for the team and they suggested that without this project, these ideas would have remained as 'nice to have' rather than being put into practice.



## 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. From this, a number of key outcomes and measures of impact have been identified as follows:

- more equipment available to clients for re-use sooner, measured by the percentage of equipment lost or written off and the percentage of equipment returned versus that issued
- fewer people with long waits for equipment, measured by the average number of days between assessments to delivery
- most appropriate equipment allocated according to current needs measured by increasing reference to equipment in annual reviews undertaken
- people enabled to maximise independence because they have the right equipment, at the right time, measured by an increase in professionals reporting this as an outcome (qualitative)
- reduced costs associated with purchasing additional equipment due to inappropriate allocation or delay in return.

## Challenges to delivery and lessons learned

1. the project team explored a range of options in the discovery phase including use of movement sensors on equipment to identify how often certain pieces of equipment were in use, however challenges (including cost) and potential risks meant that they had to be flexible and open minded to changing this approach
2. lack of clarity on the scope of the project led to some indecision initially. A lesson was to acknowledge there is no 'right way' and to not let indecision hamper progress
3. there were some difficulties engaging certain stakeholders highlighting the need to start conversations early and develop a common understanding on the aim of the project
4. practicalities and availability - bringing teams together took time. This work requires commitment and buy-in from the top, and perhaps more frequent meetings between project leads.

## Next steps, including sustainability and spread

Based on the research gathered through the Discovery Phase, the expectation is that the proposed solution would enable more people to maximise independence by accessing the right equipment at the right time. This will be achieved by identifying equipment not being used, making unused equipment available sooner and re-issuing it to those in need and thereby reducing waiting lists. The team have developed a multi-layered platform covering user experience, workflow management, knowledge base, asset management, and reporting and analysis to achieve their expected benefits. In the implementation phase, the team intend to focus on how professionals are informed about significant changes of circumstances for service users and patterns between the condition of service users over time and the equipment they have been issued.

### Contact details

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### Link to relevant documents

Newcastle City Council's Discovery Phase review report:

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