The Digital Transformation Programme

An evaluation

Foreword

Councils have a long history of transforming local services to better meet the needs of their communities, using digital approaches, tools and technologies to do so. But at a time of immense and increasing budgetary pressure, the need to fully exploit the potential of digital to safeguard the services people value has never been greater.

Drawing on a series of detailed case studies – which are available from our website – this report highlights the major benefits that digital transformation can bring. In particular, our programme has demonstrated the potential of such initiatives to generate significant savings. These have come from identifying and understanding problems early and intervening in a focused way, but also from cutting down the volume of inappropriate or unsuccessful service requests, reducing avoidable phone or face-to-face contact, integrating and automating processes, and cutting ICT and other costs. The participating councils have made estimated savings of more than £2.3 million to date, with many further savings still to come.

Alongside these financial benefits has come much more effective support for people and communities – more joined-up service offerings, increasingly convenient online options, a more rapid turnaround of applications, referrals and assessments, and more tailored advice and guidance for those who do not qualify for direct help from their local authority. Councils and their partners have benefited too through developing a clearer understanding of local needs and demand, enabling them to work together more effectively and improve the skills, capacity and morale of their staff.

None of this has been easy and the report contains a great deal of practical learning about the need to involve both service users and staff in designing services, to engage the whole organisation and its partners in transformation and to focus on culture and processes and not just technology. We must ensure the right resources are in place to bring digital programmes to a successful conclusion and to meet any technical challenges encountered along the way. Many of these points will be very familiar but are nonetheless well worth restating.

The challenges facing local government show no signs of reducing in intensity. I would encourage you to take the time to read this report and our case studies, and consider how a programme of digital transformation could benefit your council.

Councillor Peter Fleming OBE
Chairman, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board

Contents

This report presents an evaluation of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Digital Transformation Programme. It summarises the outcomes (financial and non-financial) achieved by the programme, the key messages and lessons for local government, and recommendations for the design of future programmes of support.

The programme has generated over £2.3 million in financial savings or avoided costs, as well as delivering significant additional benefits in terms of better services to communities and more productive ways of working for those councils that participated and their partners.

Background to the programme

The Digital Transformation programme was established in March 2016 when, following a comprehensive bidding and assessment process, the Local Government Association (LGA) agreed to fund 20 projects involving 35 councils and their partners. The projects are summarised in Appendix 1.

The objective of the funding was to enable the participants to develop and implement leading-edge digital tools and approaches to support their existing work on major (often national) programmes of local service transformation – for instance, their work on Troubled Families, health and social care integration, or public health.

The programme would help to develop and spread digital innovation more widely within the local government community:

- by demonstrating how councils and their partners, by exploiting the potential of modern digital tools and technologies, can target and deliver radically improved services to people, operate more effectively (eg by providing frontline staff with better access to comprehensive information about their clients) and generate efficiency savings

- by offering practical pointers on how best to replicate success and how to negotiate the pitfalls of comprehensive organisational change, including how different organisations can collaborate more effectively

- by generating technical and organisational assets that can be widely shared and implemented across local government – a key criterion for successful bids.

The context for the Digital Transformation Programme was particularly challenging. Central government funding for councils had been cut by in excess of 40 per cent by 2015. The Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipated that spending cuts would continue until 2020.
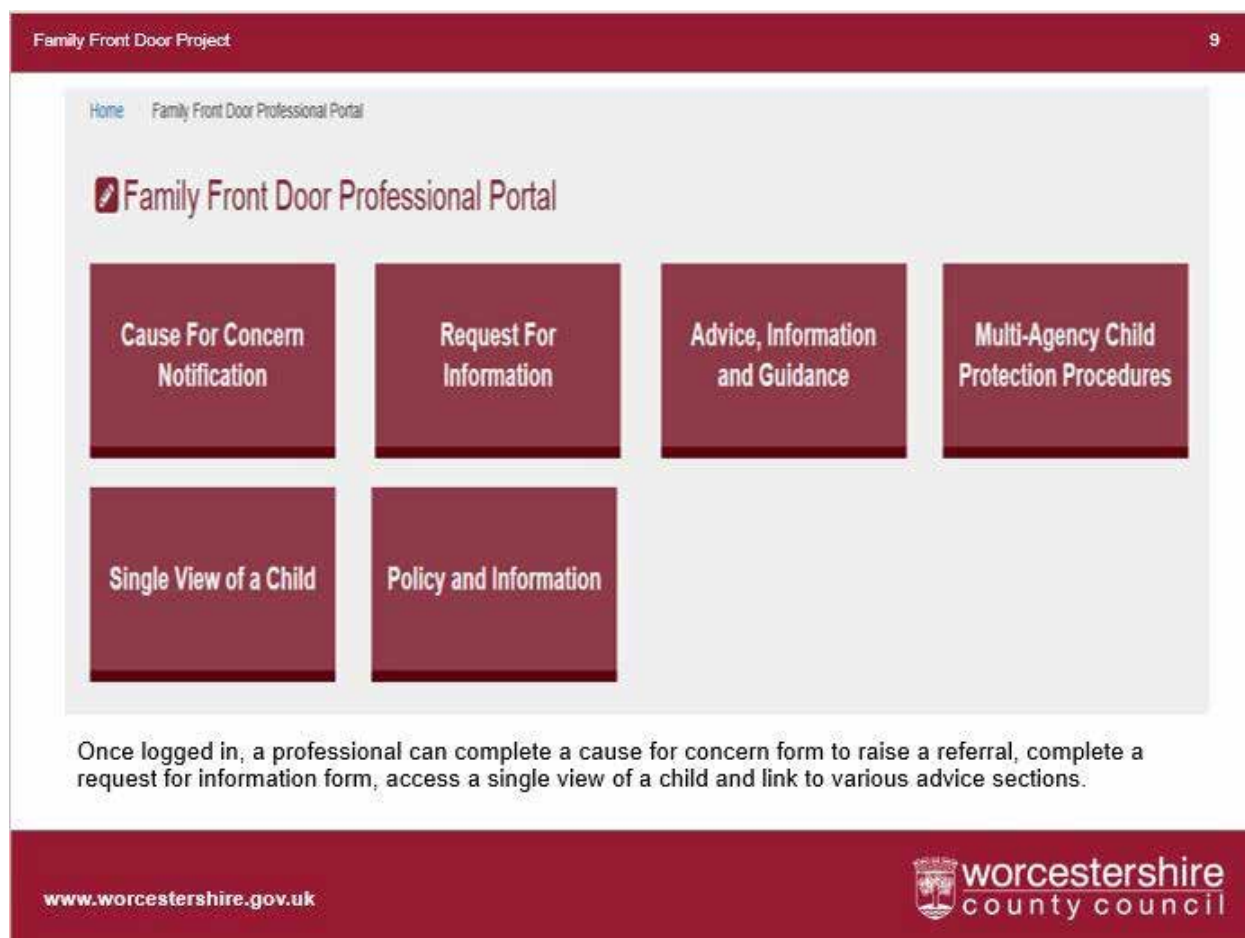
While addressing the impact of austerity, councils also face the challenges of dealing with:

- increased demand, not least through demographic change and the knock-on effects of funding reductions in other public services

- major new government initiatives including Welfare Reform and Troubled Families

- the move towards devolution of public services

- new public health responsibilities

- health and social care integration

- fundamental alterations to the local government finance system

- continuing pressure on core services such as housing and waste management.

From the outset, we recognised that the criteria established for the programme were particularly ambitious:

- The funded projects were focused on complex 'wicked' issues that no single service function or organisation could solve. These issues, such as the safeguarding of children, are often high-profile and sensitive, meaning that the projects had to manage risk very carefully.

- Success would depend on the participants and their partners taking a multi-agency partnership approach and using all the 'assets' at their disposal – typically drawing on the expertise and resources not just of the local public services, but also of voluntary and community bodies and private sector suppliers, as well as local people themselves.

- Addressing these issues would require the strategic redesign of services, necessitating not only changes to operational processes and staffing structures but also to the participating organisations' roles and cultures.

- The projects would depend heavily on extracting and pulling together data from different sources and linking different systems, as well as creating new digital assets in many instances. It could be anticipated, therefore, that they would face significant conceptual, technical and data protection issues (particularly with the General Data Protection Regulation on the horizon).

- Many of the projects were part of a council-wide or even partnership-wide programme of transformation or were pilots that would subsequently be rolled out across a broad range of service users, staff and organisations. This placed a high premium on the user engagement, leadership, project management and communication skills of the project teams.

Worcestershire County Council's family front door professional portal

The current evaluation

Given the ambitious scope of the transformation programme, it was no surprise that some of the initiatives originally identified for funding by the LGA could not, in the end, proceed as planned.

Of the initial 20 funded projects, five encountered significant issues at an early stage or changed the scope of their projects so that they no longer met the criteria for the programme, leading the councils to return their LGA funding. The challenges these projects identified are discussed in the next section of this evaluation.

Of the 15 projects that proceeded, nine had made sufficient progress by early 2018 for us to capture their progress and learning in a visit and case study, which could be shared with the wider local government community.

A further three projects were making good progress but still had various issues to address and were not ready therefore for a visit and case study. However, each of these projects was being monitored with the aim of capturing a case study later in 2018, should their project have progressed as anticipated.

The remaining three projects had met some of their initial milestones or delivered a prototype but had decided for various reasons not to take their work any further.

In the spring of 2018 we therefore commissioned an evaluation, which involved for all twelve projects underway at the time:

- An analysis of the original bids, the monthly progress reports since April 2016 and the notes from various teleconferences and other contacts with the council leading the project. This background information was invaluable for reaffirming the original ambitions of the projects and reviewing progress against their original objectives.

In addition, for the nine most advanced projects:

- a site visit to each lead authority where interviews were held with a range of key participants, including council staff but also partners and service users where possible[1]

- each visit resulted in a detailed case study, covering the main issue the project was trying to address, the local context, the project objectives and targets, the approach and progress to date, the outcome including the successes and challenges, the financial savings generated, the non-financial benefits for both communities and the participating organisations, key learning points and next steps

- each visit also generated a series of short films in which key participants in the project set out in their own words why the project was important and what it had enabled them to achieve.

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1   In the case of Northumberland County Council, it was agreed with the project team that the case study would be based on a series of telephone interviews rather than a site visit.

All the above information was collated in the current evaluation report, which summarises the outcomes (financial and non-financial) achieved by the programme, the key messages and lessons for local government, and recommendations for the design of future programmes of support.

In addition to this report the case studies, films and useful background documents (such as communication plans) from the individual projects are available on our website (www.local.gov.uk/digital).

Here you will also be able to find many other case studies, films and shareable assets from previous LGA-funded initiatives such as the Digital Experts programme.

We have also collected a series of technical assets, such as the code written by developers for each of the projects and other diagrams or templates that might be useful, from the participating councils.

Why some projects did not continue

As for the five projects that returned their funding, their reasons for doing so were varied and illustrate the challenges facing councils undertaking ambitious transformational initiatives.

In one instance, the lead council proposed to develop an app for a specific customer group. However, when the council carried out further user research to refine its proposal, the findings indicated that an app would not be the best way to engage this customer group. Following discussions with the LGA, the council decided to return its funding as it no longer planned to proceed with its original project.

Another successful bidder underwent a restructure that resulted in the loss of key in-house technical resources. Even though we agreed to give them some extra time to identify and bring in the necessary support, the council decided not to proceed with the project and so returned the funding.

A third council had agreed a multi-agency project. However, a key partner proved not to have the necessary resources in place to enable them to commit to delivering the project, so the funding was returned.

Although these developments were disappointing, by recognising the issues early on and having discussions with these councils, we were able to agree the best way forward with them and as a result public money was not wasted.

As for the three projects that did carry out some work but stopped before completing their project or did not deliver a final working solution, again the reasons were varied and included technical difficulties, information governance issues, and lack of buy-in from other service areas or partners to properly utilise the solution.

The benefits of the programme

The benefits of the programme have been analysed under three broad headings: financial savings; benefits to people and communities; and benefits to councils and their partners.

The key benefits of the Digital Transformation Programme:

- **financial savings in excess of £2.3 million** – by reducing the volume of unsuccessful or inappropriate applications, integrating and automating processes, reducing avoidable phone or face-to-face contact, eliminating rekeying of data, cutting ICT, printing and postage costs, making better use of in-house systems and expertise, identifying future problems and intervening earlier and in a more focused way

- **better support to people and communities** – by providing a more joined-up and integrated service, better targeting of support to those who need it, improving online service options, completing referrals and assessments more rapidly, connecting people to a range of voluntary services, providing a personal action plan where the council is unable to help

- **more productive ways of working for councils and their partners** – by enabling new service delivery models, developing a clearer understanding of local need, demand and take-up and the impact of current patterns of service provision, better targeting of staff resources, creating new capabilities and improving staff skills, morale and work allocation, fostering greater collaboration with other service providers, providing better intelligence to central government and key partners.

Financial savings

Based on calculations from the nine most advanced projects, the Digital Transformation Programme has already enabled the participants to generate total financial benefits of more than £2.3 million, through a combination of reductions in administration, one-off cost savings (eg on ICT) and cost avoidance.[2]

Many of these savings, such as the reduction in administrative costs, will continue on a per annum basis. And given that most of the projects, even those that have progressed furthest, have significant scope for expansion to new service areas and new users, and have resulted in the creation of digital infrastructure or assets that the participating councils will continue to exploit in the future, the financial savings can be expected to increase substantially over time. Camden Council estimates, for instance, that if even half of the potential users take up its family support dashboard, an additional £40,000 plus of savings in staff time will be generated annually.

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2   In most cases, the financial benefits have been reinvested in productive staff capacity rather than taken as cashable savings.

Northumberland County Council – map showing uptake of health checks against IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) decile
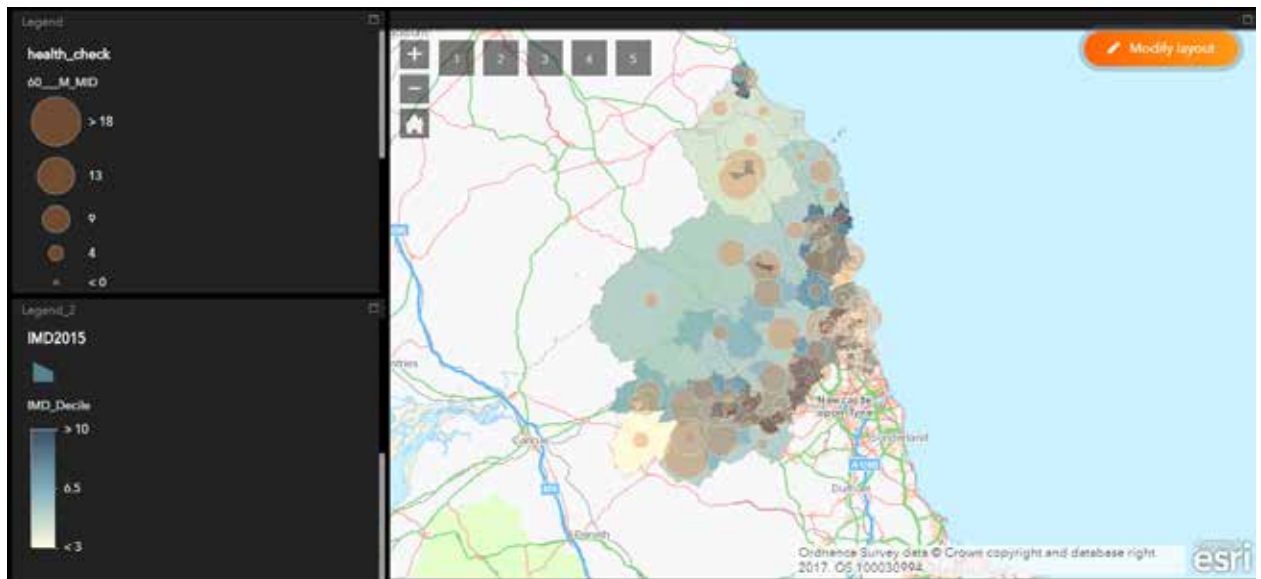
Administrative savings have come in various forms:

- From reducing the volume of unsuccessful applications or inappropriate referrals received.

> The Kent councils have seen a significant reduction in housing applications as a result of their project, while in Dorset the level of formal referrals to central children's services has fallen as school staff now work with a team of other locally-based professionals (eg 'zone' staff from children's services, health staff, police and so on) to discuss the situation and agree a course of action.

- From reducing the amount of hard-copy paperwork and telephone and face-to-face contact handled by staff in contact centres, one-stop shops and other frontline functions.

- From giving frontline staff easy access to the integrated information they need to work effectively with their clients, thereby cutting down on the time they spend searching for information on the internet or in different source systems.

"There are so many moving parts to our role. The dashboard really helps me to plan my work and manage my caseload, which means I can spend more time with the families I support."

Family Support Worker, Camden Council

- From redesigning and streamlining the work involved in processing applications or referrals, including the rekeying of data, by automating elements of the workflow and providing direct links into back-office systems. Staff in Worcestershire now benefit from a much smoother and more integrated process for handling referrals, while in East Sussex the forms used in the Troubled Families processes have been significantly improved.

- From cutting down the time that staff such as analysts spend on gathering data and creating spreadsheets, both for internal operational and performance management reporting and for returns to central government agencies. East Sussex, for instance, has been able to delete an admin post previously dedicated to collating data.

- From eliminating or reducing printing and postage costs.

- From simplifying the work required by partner organisations, such as pharmacies and GP surgeries, to deal with the council and vice versa.

> Northumberland's project aims to save both local pharmacies and GPs time in sending information to the county.

The cumulative effect of these savings has typically been to allow staffing structures to be reshaped and officers to be allocated to more productive and high-value activities, rather than basic administrative tasks. So, housing staff in Kent are now able to focus more on verification and fraud reduction rather than chasing application details.

In addition to these relatively visible financial benefits, there were other potential savings. For instance, some projects are now making greater use of existing investments in digital platforms rather than commissioning the external development of new systems, while others have developed greater in-house skills and capacity, therefore avoiding the cost of employing expensive external consultants.

And although the benefits are more difficult to quantify, several of the projects are also anticipating that their emphasis on encouraging greater digital confidence, resilience and self-service among service users will help to reduce the pressure on councils to provide services directly and therefore generate longer-term savings. Similarly, with staff being given the tools to manage their own workloads more effectively, managers can concentrate their time on the most difficult cases.

Finally, identifying potential future problems and getting the right help to the right people much earlier, as many of the projects have achieved, is a crucial way of preventing situations from escalating to crisis point.

Using data operationally and strategically

Many of the digital transformation projects, including those led by North Somerset, East Sussex, Worcestershire, Camden, Dorset and Wigan, have involved extracting and bringing together data about communities and service users that was previously stored across numerous different systems. In several cases, notably Camden, North Somerset and East Sussex, this work has been specifically related to the national Troubled Families programme.

Bringing together data in this way has delivered many benefits:

- It has given frontline staff (typically via a dashboard) a much more coherent and comprehensive view of the residents and families they are dealing with, enabling them to deliver a better service.

- It has enabled councils to respond more effectively to Government initiatives such as the Troubled Families programme, generating much-needed additional funding.

- It has allowed participants to develop a much better understanding of the needs of their areas, the people who live and work there and the impact of different policies and approaches.

- It has created opportunities to identify potential problems earlier through predictive analysis (including problems that might lead to future crises) and to develop more focused, relevant and cost-effective interventions. East Sussex's short-term service, for example, has taken advantage of the county's analytical work to identify families who would benefit from a significantly shorter intervention than would otherwise have been delivered, both aiding the family and avoiding costs to the county of around £1,800 per family.

"A case was raised in the Out of School Panel concerning a child that had stopped attending school for a few days. The rapid and accurate information provided by our new system meant that an intervention could happen immediately rather than allowing the situation to drag on for weeks and non-attendance to become the established norm."

High Impact Families' Practitioner, North Somerset Council

As these examples suggest, the financial benefits of earlier and more focused interventions are potentially significant. A study by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, published in 2015, suggested for instance that intervening to help people when they first become homeless can save between £3,000 and £18,000 for every person helped: www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2015/research/crisis-homeless-research

However, bringing together data and carrying out predictive analysis is not without its challenges. These include:

- Technical: agreeing the right data sources (including national address data), extracting up-to-date data from different systems, cleaning and matching it, identifying appropriate analytical tools. One learning point is that some sort of manual intervention is usually required for a small, but still significant, number of cases. It is also crucial to ensure that the solution (such as a dashboard) is updated when the underlying systems providing the information change – for instance, when the health service or police upgrade or renew their systems.

- Conceptual: developing appropriate analytical frameworks and approaches, including the key criteria for identifying families at risk.

- Managerial: North Somerset's project involved a four-stage process – mapping the existing digital architecture; mapping the data sitting within that architecture; aligning the architecture and the data to create a relational database; developing a user interface that would highlight both the data available and areas of concern.

- Cultural: getting staff to accept the validity of the data when it challenges strongly held pre-conceptions and giving them the skills to use the data effectively.

- Ethical: deciding how best to intervene and support people, particularly where the analysis highlights potential future problems and individuals have not asked for support.

Data protection, of course, remains a major concern. Only those members of staff with appropriate authority should have access to the relevant shared data, meaning that people must not continue to have access to the system when they leave the organisation. When a nurse or health visitor leaves the NHS, for example, the council needs to be informed.

"Having clean data is really important. It's nitty gritty work, but you have to do it. If you can just get the data right at the beginning it makes everything so much easier."

Family Keywork Data Manager, East Sussex County Council

Better support to people and communities

The main aim of all the projects was to provide a better, more tailored, responsive, cost-effective and proactive service to communities. People have benefited in many ways:

- Referrals and assessments are triaged and completed more quickly, meaning those in the greatest need are identified sooner and get immediate attention, while

staff have more time to spend with them. In Worcestershire, for instance, staff can now allocate a priority to referrals and start quickly on the most important ones. If an urgent case comes in first thing, it can be in triage by 11.00 am the same morning.

- Applicants can be connected to a range of appropriate services, including those provided by the community and voluntary sector.

> An important element of Adur and Worthing's project was the development of a directory containing details of a wide range of local services, community groups, events and other assets. 'Community referrers' use the directory to signpost people to appropriate support.

- On the other hand, people who are unlikely to qualify for a service, such as social housing, are given a clear signal not to waste their time filling in lengthy and complex forms only to meet with disappointment. Instead, as in the case of the Kent councils, they are provided with an action plan tailored to their circumstances.

- Where people do apply for a service, they are able to do so online, at a time that is convenient to them. Online services should be extensively tested with users and designed to be mobile-friendly, a benefit for applicants who may not be able to afford a PC and home internet connection or who are homeless. Where service users move across local boundaries, for instance between the Kent districts, they meet with a more consistent customer experience, including similar application forms.

"I've used the homelessness tool with rough sleepers. The language is straightforward and it's as easy to use on a mobile as on a PC. It also seems to cater for a whole range of situations and groups. So it's short and sweet."

Assessment and Resettlement Worker, Porchlight, Kent

- When applying online, people are only asked for relevant information (through the development of 'intelligent' forms). They can scan supporting documentation and submit it electronically with their application, rather than sending it separately through the post.

- Where face-to-face or telephone contact is involved and where appropriate, staff now have comprehensive and up-to-date information about the person at their fingertips, as well as access to information on a wide range of different service options, meaning the applicant does not have to repeat their story and enabling the member of staff to provide a much more joined-up and sensitive response. Camden's frontline workers, for instance, now benefit from having a comprehensive Family Support dashboard.

- Overall, the projects have resulted in greater clarity and, as a result, have contributed to greater wellbeing and confidence among applicants.

Proactive support – an example from Dorset County Council

Her school was surprised when Sophie (not her real name) showed up on Dorset's new business intelligence tool. She had perhaps been a little quiet lately but there was no real indication of a problem in her school work. However, information from other agencies showed that both her mother and her brother were disabled and that her father was struggling to cope, resulting in Sophie being under considerable pressure. The introduction of some family support relieved this pressure and a potential problem was avoided that could have resulted in Sophie needing help for mental health issues or 'crashing out' in some other way.

Adur and Worthing Councils: The story of Miss Bloom

Miss Bloom has always been very independent with lots of friends, fit and never lonely. She now wants to visit the doctor weekly and seems to be increasingly distressed. As she is leaving the surgery she mentions that her time of life is a sad one as all her friends have died and she feels left behind. Her doctor could:
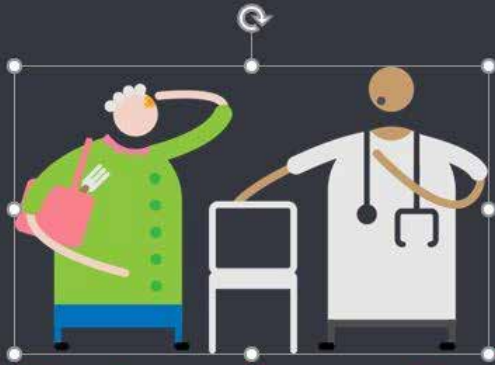
1. Pretend not to hear saying 'see you next week'
2. Put her in touch with a local older people's service running generic activities
3. Refer her to a community referrer at Going Local who discovers she loves gardening and that she is the perfect match for a local project where young people want to set up a community garden but need some expertise...

The Story of green-fingered Miss Bloom

GOING LOCAL

> **"The efficiency and accuracy offered by this system means that we are now getting children back in to school within days rather than weeks."**
>
> **High Impact Families' Operational Manager, North Somerset Council**

More productive ways of working for councils and their partners

The Digital Transformation Programme has delivered significant benefits to the participating councils and their partners, including:

- Support for broader strategic goals, such as providing a more integrated and personalised service to communities, making better use of existing community-based assets, developing greater community resilience, and moving towards an 'enabling' rather than a 'doing' role. The projects have also supported the drive towards creating 'digital councils' and to developing shared local digital infrastructures.

In Wigan, the digital transformation project has been a key enabler of the council's new delivery model (seven Service Delivery Footprints) that offers services on a coordinated, area-based and multi-agency basis.

- A clearer view of the demand for and take-up of services, the pattern of current provision across both the statutory and community and voluntary sectors, and any gaps, thereby informing policy formulation by councillors and senior managers as well as future commissioning decisions. In Northumberland, for example, the improved health intelligence delivered by their project highlighted the fact that the individuals receiving free health checks tend to live in more affluent areas. Consequently, a new delivery model has been proposed which will target patients living in the most deprived areas.

A major benefit of the focus on data in most of the projects is that there is now an evidence base to confirm or refute claims, rumours or generalities such as 'this child hasn't attended school for weeks'.

- A much clearer understanding of the difficulties service users face with current processes, gained both through carrying out user research (for instance, filming people – with their permission – as they use council systems), and by monitoring people's use of current online options.

- New capabilities, such as the ability for staff to access information remotely and in real time, to link transactional data and therefore understand communities' needs better, to monitor the outcomes delivered by service interventions (demonstrating improvement against historic trends) and to map customer journeys more clearly. In Northumberland, the experience of using QR codes in a public health setting will now be applied to domestic waste permits.

"I was involved in testing the Single View system which involved comparing performance with and without the tool. Having used the tool it was horrible when I didn't have access!"
Team member in Wigan's Early Help hub

- A comprehensive, often real-time view for managers of all the work passing through the organisation, leading to more effective work/case allocation and performance management (including self-management by staff) and the prevention of slippage on key actions.

- More effective collaboration between teams and the sharing of good practice. Community and voluntary sector organisations receive more informed and better structured referrals.

In Dorset, local professionals now deal with cases concerning children via regular 'round table' meetings rather than reacting to each individual case. This has generated a significant time saving and helped foster a more collaborative approach, as well as increasing the staff's sense of empowerment.

- A more robust technical and information infrastructure, including better data quality and enhanced data security (for instance, with documents stored and shared electronically rather than via paper files). East Sussex hopes to use the information assets developed for its Troubled Families programme more widely, in areas such as adult social care and transport.

- More confident, empowered and 'data savvy' staff. Meanwhile, senior managers can drill down into cases and feel more connected to their teams' daily work, while specialist staff such as analysts have developed new skills adding further value. In North Somerset, for instance, the teams have development new skills in Access and SQL.

"I can use the dashboard to explore individual families and how we are working with them. It really helps me to understand people's stories and to keep a connection with the families we help and with my staff."
Service Head, Camden Council

- Quicker and more accurate responses to central government requirements for information and a clearer audit trail of activity for bodies such as Ofsted.

- New digitally-supported working cultures that encourage professional self-management and emphasise the importance of keeping community data up-to-date and accurate. For example, several councils in Kent have now established digital teams as a result of the work there, including our digital transformation project.

- Better reputation management and clearer expectations among service users about what public services can and cannot deliver.

The key messages from the programme

The evaluation of the Digital Transformation Programme has reinforced the benefits that these ambitious and complex projects have delivered, as well as highlighting the vital role that digital tools and technologies continue to play in supporting customer-focused innovation in local government.

However, developing and implementing such projects is by no means easy, and some clear messages about how to maximise the likelihood of success have emerged. These are:

- focus constantly on users and test often

- engage, engage, engage

- make sure the right project personnel are in place

- think organisational culture

- don't expect partnering to be easy

- anticipate technical challenges

- make sure the resources are in place.

We examine each of these messages in turn.

Focus constantly on users and test often

It is a cliché that you should not build a system and assume users will come. However, the Digital Transformation Programme has underlined the continuing relevance of this message, not just in relation to communities but also colleagues and partners.

In Kent, for instance, filming customers using the previous online systems (with their permission) really helped to make the case for change.

"Our videos of customers trying to go through the existing online housing application process were really powerful. It's easy to make assumption about customers. But we found they were confused by terms and questions that we thought were perfectly clear. And it took them much longer to fill out the forms than staff expected. In the end, although there was some initial resistance, everyone realised we had to change."
Member of Kent Smarter Digital Services Team

Some of the less successful projects in the programme managed to develop and implement systems that seemed to offer many strategic benefits, only to find that take-up was much less than expected, undermining the business case for the project and its longer-term sustainability. Typically, these projects had failed to take the opportunity to draw on the insight or address the concerns (real or otherwise) of those who were meant to use the new technology or system, and there had been inadequate user engagement, testing and communication.

The more successful projects, in contrast, involved potential users (both internal and external) from the outset in the shaping, design, development and testing of the project, including how information would be presented or 'visualised'.

As an officer in one of the Kent districts commented: "People are not going to use digital if it's more difficult."

They also thought carefully about how the new capabilities should be communicated and rolled out internally – for instance, by engaging an initial group of key users as 'champions' who would promote the benefits of the system to their colleagues on a peer-to-peer basis.

Wigan initially focused on training a fairly small number of staff on their new system, either in small groups or even on a one-to-one basis. Producing short instructional films proved helpful. Dorset also found short training films to be very valuable, as they allowed end users to manage their own training timetable.

Many of the projects used an 'agile' methodology.[4] With its emphasis on detailed user research, involvement and testing, the development of a 'minimum viable product', and short sprints that produce a rapid series of system versions each reflecting user feedback, this approach represented an effective way of engaging staff and communities in the project.

However, the challenges of employing an agile approach should not be underestimated. In some cases, it proved difficult to persuade frontline staff and their managers to commit adequate time to participating in the agile processes and to take ownership of a system that was largely being developed for their benefit.

The agile v traditional development approach[3]

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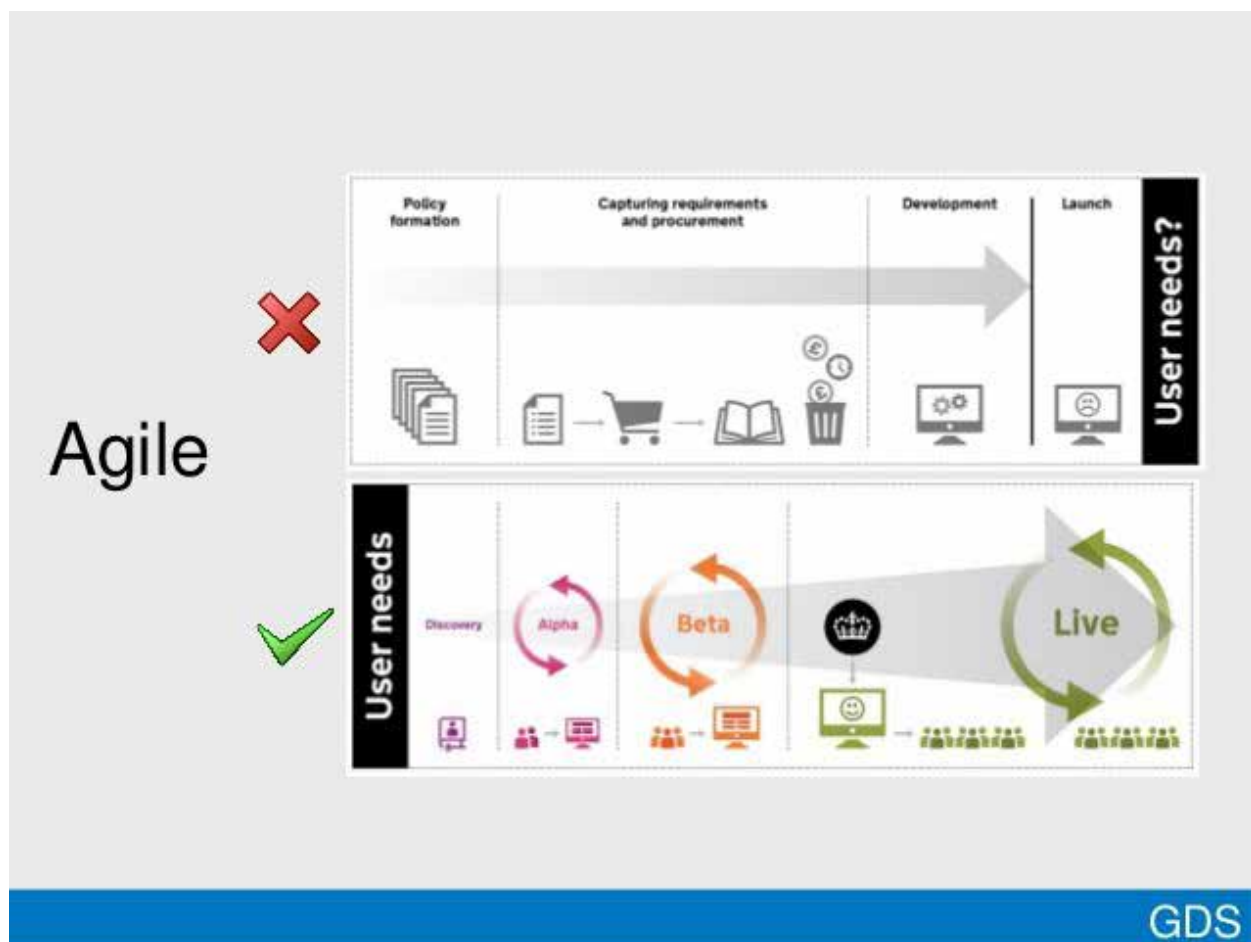
3   Taken from a Government Digital Services blog www. slideshare.net/intscotland/tom-loosemoregovernment-digital-service and reproduced under the Open Government Licence www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/

4   For a basic overview, see www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery/agile-government-services-introduction

Engage, engage and engage

Given the current day-to-day pressures on councils, it is a significant challenge to build and – equally important – maintain commitment to a project that may stretch over many months, involve considerable initial and ongoing effort and only deliver its real value in the medium to longer term.

The most successful projects in the programme therefore engaged:

- upwards with councillors and senior managers, communicating how the project's objectives aligned with the strategic objectives of the council and its partners

- sideways with colleagues and partner organisations in associated functions who might be working on initiatives to enhance the council's wider digital infrastructure or to improve its use of data

- outwards with frontline staff, their operational managers and with residents themselves as the ultimate beneficiaries of better information and digital support.

In Camden, the project team presented their work to relevant strategic service leads and groups and began to provide analyses to support these colleagues. Details of the digital transformation work was included in papers on organisational digital strategy presented to councillors and the chief executive. A meeting with the cabinet member for finance, technology and growth proved particularly helpful.

The Adur and Worthing project involved GPs and their practice administrative staff, patients, community referrers, frontline staff at both borough/district and county level and voluntary and community sector providers.

The work in Kent supported the joint Kent chief executives' vision to coordinate approaches to ICT systems and procurement to reduce the duplication in spending and effort on shared requirements. It also reflected the chief executives' desire to share business intelligence, particularly around people at high risk of developing greater needs in the future.

The evaluation has underlined how it is important to engage early and continually with these different stakeholders, rather than waiting until the project is 'ready', and to be able to articulate a clear vision of how the project will deliver practical benefits to communities in terms of better and more cost-effective services.

The evaluation has also highlighted how the most successful projects have engaged all different parts of the council, rather than just a discrete part – from service heads and frontline staff, to contact centre and one-stop managers, ICT professionals and website designers.

Make sure the right project personnel are in place

The role of project manager is therefore crucial. The most successful project leads seem to have been able to combine a passion for their work with organisational skills, sufficient technical expertise (without coming across as a 'techie'), the ability to position the project within a broader political and service context, and a sensitivity to the needs and concerns of frontline staff.

The Camden project team recognised the concerns of frontline staff about how data on vulnerable families and children would be used. Their sensitivity to these concerns helped them establish a good working rapport with colleagues.

However, the project manager should not be working alone. The senior responsible officer played a particularly important role in the successful projects – providing day-to-day advice and support for the project manager, helping to secure additional resources (internal or external) where necessary,

negotiating with service heads and managers in other council departments such as ICT, and holding external suppliers to their commitments.

Meanwhile, other colleagues, such as staff in the council's communication function, can offer valuable specialist expertise in fostering engagement, communicating the objectives and progress of the project and briefing staff.

The overall governance arrangements for the projects are also vital. The most successful adopted a business rather than an ICT perspective on the project, thereby emphasising the value the project would bring to the partners' strategic goals for their 'shared customers' – the community. They also involved senior level sponsors such as chief executives or leading councillors who took an active role in determining and supporting the broad direction of the project and in clearing any organisational or political blockages that the project team encountered.

Wigan's digital transformation project was governed through existing structures including the Start Well programme board, the health and wellbeing board, the partnership board and the information management and technology board, all of which included councillors. The director of children's services acted as the senior responsible officer and the service manager for IT Reform and Transformation directly managed the project.

Think organisational culture

Transformational change may be seen by staff as threatening rather than liberating. This is particularly the case in digital projects, where:

- the introduction of a new digital solution removes the need for staff to rekey data into different systems and therefore is seen as potentially leading to the loss of administrative jobs

- success relies on changing apparently tried and tested ways of working and changing the organisational culture

- information that was previously difficult to gather or hidden (eg performance data) is now brought clearly to light

- a council is perceived – rightly or wrongly – to have an organisational culture that focuses on blame rather than support.

The way in which digital transformation projects are presented is therefore very important. The most successful projects in the programme have emphasised how:

- the new system or capabilities will help staff to deliver a much-improved service to service users

- the enhanced information now available will help to make visible the work that staff were doing that previously went unrecorded, thereby enabling operational managers to balance caseloads and provide more effective support

- frontline staff will be able to take much more control over their own day-to-day activity, spending more time with service users who need their assistance and less time doing basic administrative tasks or searching for information in disparate systems

- job roles will be enhanced and officers, including administrative staff, will be able to focus on more productive and rewarding work, rather than routine tasks.

"We've all got more time to do our jobs properly in the way we'd want to do them."
Business Support Officer, Worcestershire Family Front Door Team

Learning from previous programmes

Many of the lessons from previous LGA-funded digital programmes, such as the Digital Experts programme, remain relevant to projects focused on digital transformation.

The lessons include:

- make sure the mechanisms are in place from the outset to identify and capture the financial benefits of the project
- digital technologies are more prevalent than ever – for instance, Kent found that homeless people were heavy users of mobile devices
- customer-led design is critical, and the guidelines produced by the Government Digital Service remain very valuable
- there is already a great deal of infrastructure and data in local government, the challenge is to exploit it to its full
- the more it can be shown that digital initiatives deliver real benefits to communities and meet councils' strategic goals, the more investment will be forthcoming.

Dorset County Council's Family Partnership Zones dashboard
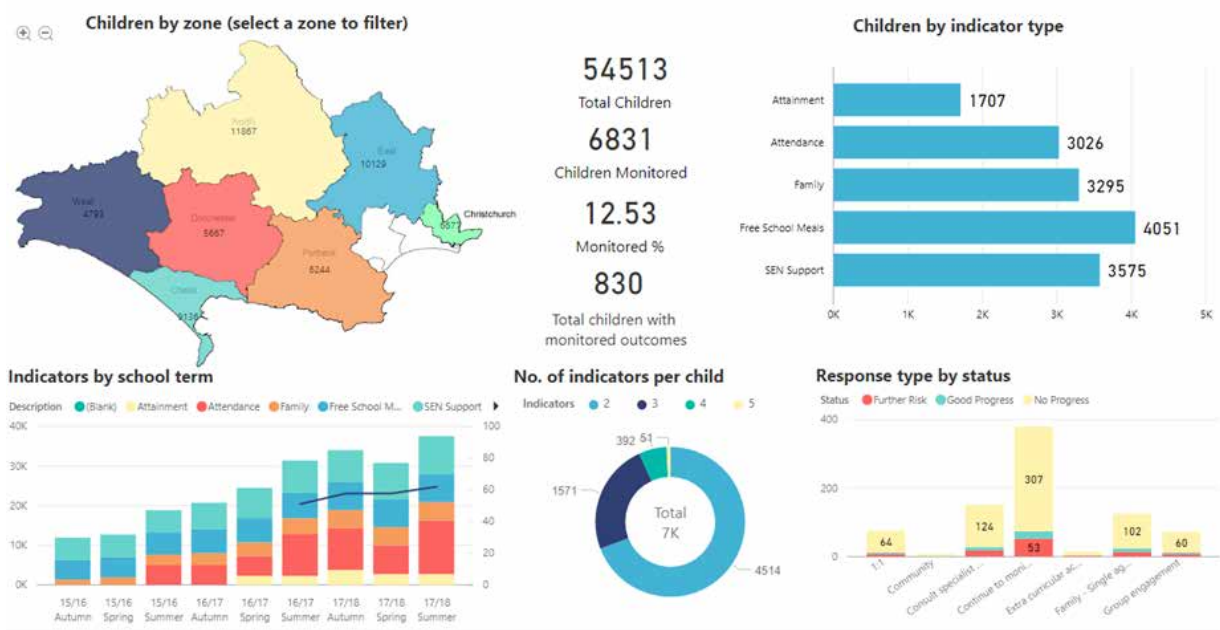
Don't expect partnering to be easy

The multi-agency nature of the projects has played a vital role in their achieving their transformational objectives. The partners have brought different perspectives, a range of resources and assets and an essential element of challenge to the development process.

The result in most cases has been a much enhanced and joined-up service for users and much closer working relationships between the public service partners, creating the opportunity for further collaboration in the future.

However, partnering has not always been easy:

- The very ambition of the projects, and the variety of organisations involved, has complicated the task of controlling the specification and development process. In some cases, the base data for measuring the impact of the project was not collected consistently across the different partners.
- To communicate the project outputs, it has at times been necessary to rely on different partners cascading information via email – not always successfully.
- It has sometimes been difficult for the project leads to work out who to approach in partner organisations.

- Some smaller partners have lacked the basic infrastructure that would be expected in a larger organisation. Meanwhile, the national operating procedures of some private sector partners around issues such as data security have created inflexibility at local level, as have decisions on ICT outside the control of the project. For instance, some of the small pharmacies in Northumberland did not have wi-fi, while the county struggled to persuade Boots to allow access to the secure wi-fi system in its pharmacies.

- The use of locums in GP surgeries and pharmacies can mean that new systems go unused because the temporary staff have not been trained to use them.

On the other hand, simple practical steps, such as providing a room for community referrers in the GP surgeries participating in Adur and Worthing's Going Local project, have proved very powerful in helping to build relationships locally.

Anticipate technical challenges

The Digital Transformation Programme has highlighted the considerable range of systems and digital infrastructure already present in local government, as well as the wealth of data that councils and their partners collect. The projects themselves have developed new assets that other councils can share.

Nonetheless, many of the projects experienced technical, contractual or other problems, which included:

- Delays caused by upgrades to existing systems or the implementation of replacement systems. In several instances it proved difficult to integrate the new versions or systems into the work already completed by the project team, leading to extensive delays while the problems were resolved. Where a new piece of software was being introduced as part of the project, the ICT team might need to carry out a formal assessment of its compatibility with the existing ICT infrastructure.

- Extended negotiations over price with private sector suppliers. In one project, the original quotation for developing forms was way outside the council's budget. The supplier subsequently proved not to have a suitable forms development platform and had to acquire new software, all of which contributed to delays.

- Lack of capacity and skills in the council's ICT department, meaning that additional external support had to be identified, acquired and integrated into the project.

- Issues over data quality in core operational systems. Some project teams took a deliberate decision not to assume responsibility for this issue, as they felt it would have seriously diverted the project from pursuing its original objectives.

- Lack of computing power within the council's existing ICT infrastructure, requiring agreement for additional investment.

The projects in the Digital Transformation Programme were all aware of the imminent implementation of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018. In some cases, concerns over how to interpret GDPR slowed progress. This highlights the need to seek advice at an early stage about data protection issues, to design systems with GDPR in mind, but also not to let GDPR become an excuse for delaying progress that would benefit local communities. East Sussex has developed a carefully considered approach which involves identifying the data items to be matched; identifying the systems in which these items exist; reviewing the permissions/consent already obtained; having privacy impact discussions with information governance staff; and working on data/systems whether there is no current consent to use the data.

# Camden Council's single view dashboard structure

5. SINGLE VIEW DASHBOARDS display information from a variety of sources for particular individuals/groups. These may be built for a variety of use cases: operational (reducing time spent info gathering by frontline staff); strategic (with KPIs based on data drawn from a variety of sources); or analytical with research into patterns of interactions of particular groups.

SINGLE VIEW DASHBOARD

4. Both **INTERACTIONS** info. (from QV Transform Layers) and **IDENTITY** info relevant to the particular use case of the single view dashboard is loaded into a new QlikView environment. Linkages are made via the Source System IDs.

LINKED ENVIRON -MENT

CRI REPORTING TABLE

QlikView

3. Info. pertaining to residents' **INTERACTIONS** with particular services is extracted from databases. This info. is processed in transform layers then presented in dashboards.

Dashboards

Transform Layers

1. A variety of databases are used by services to record information pertaining to the **IDENTITY** of customers as well as info. pertaining to customers' **INTERACTIONS** with those services.

SOURCE SYSTEMS

2. **IDENTITY** info. is extracted from source systems. Each record is matched against all other records from all systems. Records that pertain to the same natural person are associated via a 'citizen id'. These associations are held in in a reporting table.

CAMDEN RESIDENTS INDEX

CRI REPORTING TABLE

MATCHING ALGORITHM
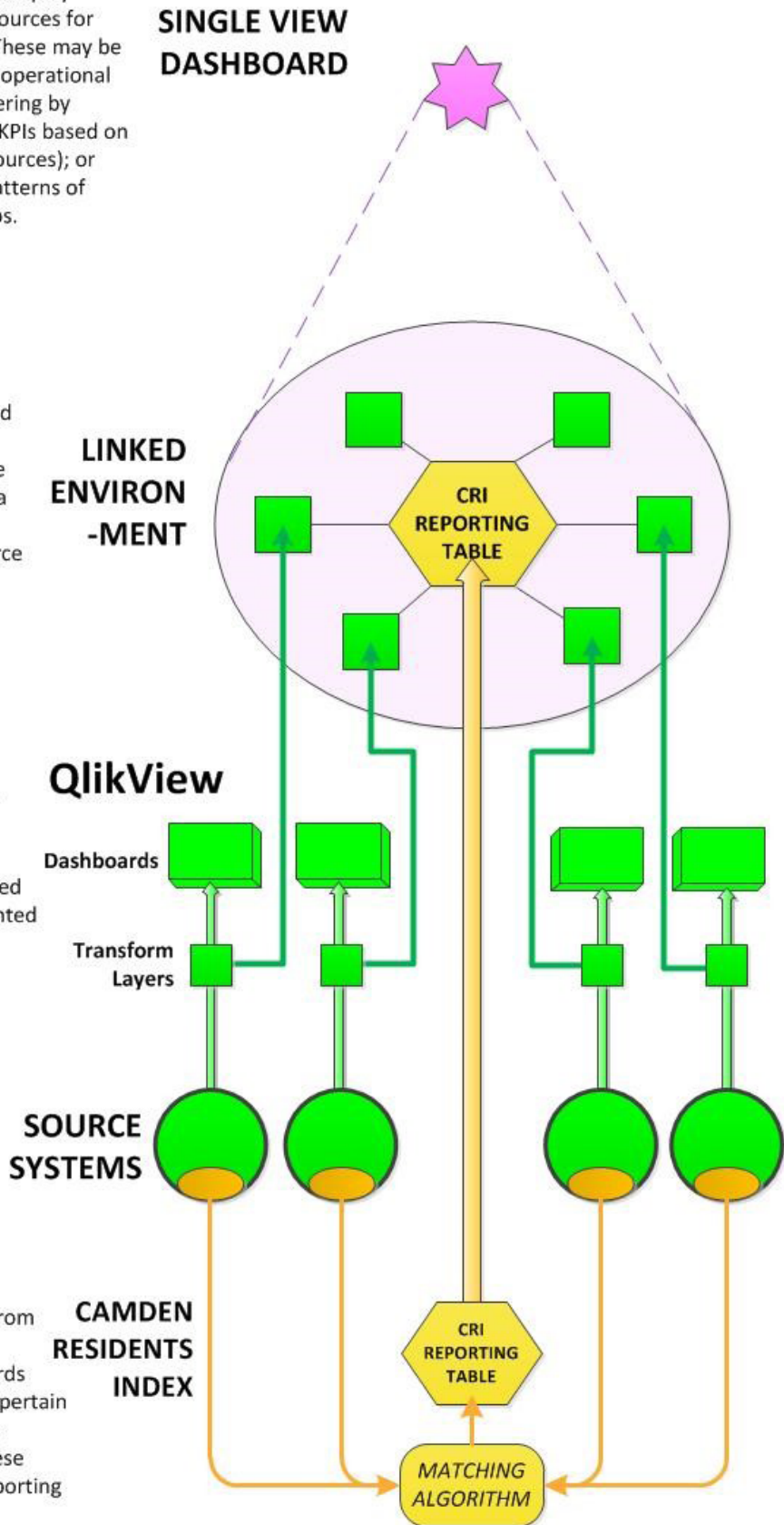
Make sure the resources are in place

All the messages above point to the need to devote adequate resources to the successful completion of digital transformation initiatives and to establish realistic timescales.

Many of the projects in the programme were over-optimistic in their initial assessment of both the resources required and the timescales within which work would be finished – hardly surprising given the ambitious and often ground-breaking nature of their bids. In several cases, unplanned events, such as Ofsted inspections, diverted key staff from the project for periods of time.

A key message, then, is that councils embarking on similar projects must think carefully not just about the resourcing of their project teams but also the impact on:

- other parts of the council, such as their service functions, contact centre, ICT and communication teams and so on

- their public and voluntary sector partners, who may also need to commit scarce resources to the project

- their suppliers, who may already be struggling to maintain and upgrade their systems and to meet the demands of an expanding user base.

In retrospect, the team in Dorset believe that some form of 'help desk' would have proved valuable in supporting the roll-out of their project.

Meanwhile, the completion of the initial phase of work is typically only a first step. Most of the projects had ambitions to roll out their new systems more widely – to further groups of users, or to a wider geographical area. Some had only achieved a proof of concept by the end of the first tranche of their work.

North Somerset's project followed the key agile methodology principles of:

- adaptive planning

- evolutionary development

- continual improvement

- rapid and flexible response to change.

The project team also espoused certain values:

- tools and processes are important, but it is more important to have competent people working together effectively

- good documentation is useful in helping people to understand what we are doing, but the main point of the project is to create a usable tool, not documentation

- a project plan is important, but it must not be too rigid to accommodate changes in technology or the environment, stakeholders' priorities, and people's understanding of the problem and its solution.

The question therefore is how to ensure that success is built upon for the benefit of the participants, their communities and local government as a whole. Clearly, the main responsibility lies with the councils themselves to continue developing their initiatives. And the good news is that, with appropriate planning and focus, councils can carry out most of these projects in-house with existing staff, avoiding the need to employ expensive external consultants. Meanwhile, we may also have an important role to play.

North Somerset Council's development approach

Building on success – messages for the LGA

The Digital Transformation Programme has once again highlighted the role that the LGA can play in stimulating digital innovation in local government. Several of the projects commented that our seed funding was vital in getting their work off the ground.

We also assisted by putting related projects in touch with each other and bringing the funded projects together in a series of workshops which enabled the project leads to share and compare their respective issues and successes and provided both practical help and some gentle peer pressure.

In a number of cases, individual project leads who met at the LGA-hosted workshops, and who were working on projects that were similar in terms of approach or customer group, continued to liaise on their respective projects afterwards – in some instances helping each other to deal with specific issues as and when these arose.

"I had a valuable conversation with the project manager of East Sussex's digital transformation project. This encouraged me to more actively involve Camden's managers in discussions about the analytical functions of our new solution."

Project Manager, Camden Council

In terms of the structuring and management of the programme:

- Given the complexity and ambition of such projects, a two-year funding and delivery horizon might be considered at the outset in the future.

- The teams appreciated the opportunities to meet their peers at the LGA-sponsored workshops, which combined experience-sharing with work on specific topics such as benefits realisation. The 'kick-off' meeting proved particularly valuable, where we set out the resources the participating councils would need to deliver their projects successfully, based on the lessons learnt from previous programmes about how best to plan for and manage complex digital projects.

- The regular monthly cycle for progress reporting generally works well. However, the original reporting template required changes to show progress against original milestones more clearly and to focus on the activity planned for the coming period (thereby helping us to offer advice and anticipate difficulties in advance).

- The project teams found teleconferences with LGA staff useful in resolving issues and helping them to maintain focus on the key outputs they had committed to delivering.

- Our role in expressing concern over delays (where appropriate to the projects' senior responsible officers) also proved useful in clearing internal and external obstacles to the progress.

> "It was really useful having the LGA challenge us consistently about deliverables and timescales. It helped us keep our focus on what we had committed to deliver."
> **Project Manager, Camden Council**

A key issue is how to make the most of the valuable intellectual and physical assets that the Digital Transformation Programme has helped to produce.

The case studies and films of individual projects, and this evaluation report, are a first step. We are also hosting a digital showcase in autumn 2018 to help share the learning from these projects alongside other innovative digital work being done by councils. This will also help promote the assets developed by successive LGA-funded programmes to a wider local government audience.

Finally, in March 2018 we funded a digital housing programme to test the veracity of mainstreaming the learning from previously funded digital projects – by piloting the work done in the Kent digital housing project in five other councils.[5] The objective is to test whether the assets and learning developed by the Kent councils could be reused in these other councils to help them replicate the outcomes.

5   www.local.gov.uk/providing-digital-support-housing-and-homelessness

Disseminating the learning – next steps

To build on the learning from this programme, and specifically to enable the take-up and reuse of the assets developed by some of the most successful projects, we have created a funded digital programme for 2018/19 that will support a group of five councils to work with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the Kent districts and Medway Council on piloting the reuse of their online housing tools.

As well as providing funding for each of the participating councils, the 2018/19 programme delivers a programme of support, using an active learning set approach, which includes onsite visits, teleconferences and a series of workshops to support the five participating councils through the process of implementing and using the housing tools, using a step-by-step approach that draws directly on the experience and learning of the Kent councils. The workshops will address practical topics such as user engagement, user testing, data management and communications. The councils will have access to the tools that were developed by the Kent project, as well as ongoing support from the LGA throughout the lifetime of this new programme. The five councils are scheduled to implement their own online forms by the end of March 2019.

Depending on the outcome of this pilot, we may look to roll out this programme further in the following year.

Appendix 1 – Digital Transformation Programme funded projects

Participating councils	Project activity
Bournemouth Borough Council	Integration of data across the council, health and range of partner agencies working together to support Troubled Families – to improve data quality and provide insight to inform decision making.
Wigan Council	To develop a single view of a child's record to support integrated working across partners, reducing duplication and improving outcomes.
Northumberland County Council	To support the further development of cloud based public health portal including: enabling real time data from GPs, implementing QR code technology in pharmacies and integration with other data sets, eg Lower Super Output Areas and ward levels.
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, all Kent districts and Medway Council	To develop and implement a new online homeless triage process, an online housing application pre-assessment form and a redesigned, simpler version of current online housing application form.
London Borough of Bexley	To develop a data analytics system to link the existing Employment and Skills Management Information (MI) system, housing and the Troubled Families data to facilitate early intervention to tackle financial exclusion.
Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council	To ensure that customers/clients have access to consistent information/advice or access to services from a range of 'front doors' that will enable them to resolve their needs, delivering the concept of 'No Wrong Place' – based on developing a shared data standard across the partners and a model for feeding data to a range of partners.
Thurrock Council	Integration of various sources of health and social care data to maintain a healthy population.
East Sussex County Council	Data matching and analytical tools for identifying and supporting vulnerable families and children.
Blackpool Council	The development of a social care financial assessment app to enable greater levels of self and assisted service.

Adur and Worthing Councils and West Sussex County Council	Digitalising an existing Going Local pilot community referral service for health and wellbeing – creating a suite of digital services and apps.
London Borough of Camden	Integration of data sets from different partners supporting Troubled Families to better facilitate and evaluate multi-agency working.
Dorset County Council	To develop a business intelligence digital dashboard to deliver better targeted preventative services based on predictive data to support children.
London Borough of Lewisham	To develop an app for adult social care to provide access to information and services to support wellbeing and maintain independence – Live Well Lewisham.
London Borough of Hounslow	To develop a multi-agency intelligence tool for identifying the top 20 adults with complex needs and chaotic lives.
Cumbria County Council	To implement 'live' integration of GP and local authority social care records to providing access (based on consent) to information for social care and health staff.
North Somerset Council	To create data analytic tools enabling early identification of those families most likely to benefit from intervention.
Leeds City Council and Calderdale Council	To define the open data standards – underpinning an open platform for the integration of health and social care. This will support the development of a dataset that can be used to develop new applications.
Worcestershire County Council	The creation of an information sharing platform for all the different organisations involved in safeguarding children.
Halton Borough Council	To develop an app to capture and analyse data from high risk patients with complex needs living at home or in residential care to improve their quality of life.
Birmingham City Council	To develop a web app that will include a selection of web forms and tools to aid workflow and education and health care plan processes.

Local Government Association
18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk

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