Smart Homes & Independent Living Commission

Outcomes Briefing
Roundtable 1: Commissioning
May 2021

Overview

On 12th May 2021, the Smart Homes & Independent Living Commission held its first evidence session, focusing on issues specific to local authority adult social care service commissioning.

This briefing captures the main insights from the session, which will inform the findings and recommendations of the Commission's final report.

Key Findings

Disabled Facilities Grants are currently too inflexible and bureaucratic to take advantage of smart home products and other modern independent living technologies

"The grant is governed by regulations and legislation that aren't really designed for high volume, low-cost delivery"

Paul Smith, Foundations

- The Disabled Facilities Grant is designed to oversee a relatively low volume of awards were worth thousands of pounds rather than a larger scheme with wider population coverage that funds items costing around just £100.

- Despite some local discretions built into the Disabled Facilities Grant, bureaucratic processes can make it difficult to exploit them for lower cost projects.

    Example of innovative practice with discretionary grants:

    Cannock Chase District Council's housing authority has adopted a housing assistance policy that introduced two discretionary grants: a means tested assistive technology grant worth up to £3,000 and non means tested dementia friendly grant of up to £10,000, which can be used to fund digital to technologies[1]

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[1] https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/05b-appendix_2_-_ccdc-_dfg_policy.pdf

- Many items fall below the means-tested lower limit that determines a person's eligibility for a grant set by local authorities.

- The Disabled Facilities Grant is not currently designed to pay for ongoing costs such as broadband subscriptions and training and support.

A reformed Disabled Facilities Grant would harness the benefits of modern technology and drive innovation in independent living across the country

"What we've tried to do is broaden out and not just think about DFGs, but see them as part of a continuum"

Julie Ogley, Central Bedfordshire Council

- The features of modern consumer smart home technology that can be used to control power, heating, lighting and other household utilities and devices means that the aims of the Disabled Facilities Grant can be achieved at lower cost and in many cases more effectively than in the past.

- Making it easier for local authorities to use the Disabled Facilities Grant to fund smart home technology would encourage disabled and older people, as well as frontline professionals such as occupational therapists, to learn about the technologies and understand their benefits.

- More routinely including smart technology in Disabled Facilities Grant awards could help to drive innovative the development of innovative models of provision showing how technology can be employed to support independent living across the country.

- Ageing population demographics and the increasing prevalence of disability mean that a more flexible and adaptable approach to providing the Disabled Facilities Grant would help health and social care and housing services offer a more holistic approach to care and support throughout people's lives.

Commissioners and service managers must take the lead in cultivating digital readiness within councils and across the local community

"It is important that we also address digital exclusion in terms of access and affordability of internet access, and also the differences in connectivity across urban and rural communities which might further disadvantage certain communities and their ability access smart technologies"

Professor Lee-Ann Fenge, Bournemouth University

- Service commissioners have an important leadership role to play in pushing their colleagues within their local authorities and other agencies to consider how people with care and support needs might be able to benefit from technology.

- Commissioners and service managers can build institutional confidence and expertise by establishing specialist assistive technology roles and career progression paths with their organisations and teams. Examples include:

  The Trusted Assessor Framework allows professionals to train and qualify as an expert assistive technology assessor capable of evaluating an individual's needs and recommending aids and adaptations that might improve their quality of life[2]

  West Sussex County Council and NHS West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group's jointly commissioned Technology-Enabled Care Service in which staff field enquiries about simple aids and technologies that can be assessed over phone, and are supported by more expert colleagues who conduct in person assessments of people with more complex requirements

- There are significant opportunities for local authority service commissioners to increase digital inclusion among disabled and older people, many of whom may be willing to use new technology if they are supported to use it.

- Commissioners and service providers must be prepared to take a range of factors into account when promoting digital inclusion in their communities. These include:

  o Many people lack basic digital skills and may not see a need to have smart technologies in their homes

  o Information and support must be provided in an accessible way that is tailored to the real life needs of beneficiaries

  o Service provision and local information and advice resources should help people prepare for changes in their needs that may occur during their lives - due to ageing, disability or health conditions - and encourage individuals to be proactive in finding technology that they might find helpful

- Local businesses and voluntary organisations are an overlooked source of support for people who are digitally excluded – for example, there is a growing trend for handy person services to help set up and use assistive technology.

  NetFriends is a not-for-profit initiative set up to ensure people can use technology confidently and safely. They help people use with computers, tablets, smart phones, wifi and other technology through home visits and remote sessions[3]

- Provision should be co-produced with residents, representative organisations and businesses to identify barriers and enablers of assistive technology in the local population.

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[2] https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk/dlf-training/about-dlf-training
[3] https://www.netfriends.org.uk/

Effectively implementing holistic and joined up independent living technology services will require cultural as well as structural changes in commissioning practices

"Technology and digital has very much plugged a gap over the past 15 months in particular, but a more strategic, co-ordinated process is needed at all levels to ensure that the tools better facilitate great support and independence for individuals rather than just used as a sticking plaster"

Claire Sutton, National Care Forum

- Most local authorities are aware of the potential of technology to improve how care and support is delivered in their area – particularly since the beginning of the pandemic, which has made it necessary to provide digital alternatives to services that could no longer be offered in person.

- However, a lack of strategic coordination at national and local levels continues to hinder innovation.

  - Funding and decision making within local authorities is fragmented between different departments and further undermined by a lack of integration with the healthcare system. This means funding can often only be spent on a narrow range of items depending on which part of the system it comes from.

  - In two-tier local authorities, administrative boundaries between county councils and district and borough authorities can make it difficult to coordinate differing responsibilities and priorities. Example of good practice:

    Warwickshire County Council and its local district and borough authorities have seconded staff to a countywide Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART), which provides advice and assistance to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants.[4]

- There are a number of assumptions about the scope and design of technology-enabled care services that may need to be adjusted to enable a holistic and joined up approach to provision:

  - Assistive technology is often seen as a long-term intervention for people with permanent care and support needs. But technology can also help people move out of hospital and recover from illness or injury more quickly

  - Some services, such as NHS England specialised environmental control service, contain expertise that allow them to provide high quality assistive technology provision to people with complex needs. But there is a large section of the

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[4]
https://www.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk/info/21036/heart/353/heart_%E2%80%93_helping_you_live_independently_at_home

population that might benefit significantly from accessing such expertise and yet do not meet the relevant eligibility criteria

o Much of the discussion around how the new integrated care systems could support better technology use across health and social care services has so far been focused on the important task of creating inter-agency care records. However, there has been less discussion about how integrated health and social could improve access to assistive technology and give people more choice and control over their lives

o When prescribing assistive technology, commissioners and service providers sometimes an overly generic category-based analysis of an individual's requirements that centres more on the type of product being offered than on their situational needs. Adopting a functional needs approach that pays closer attention to the features and capabilities of technologies across different categories may lead decision makers to render more creative, personalised choices

Attendee List

Name	Position	Organisation
Cllr Sir Paul Carter	Chair	Former Leader of Kent County Council
Liz Twist MP	MP for Blaydon	Labour
David Godfrey	Policy Adviser	Kent County Council
Professor Lee-Ann Fenge	Professor of Social Care	Bournemouth University
Dr Paul Whittington	Postdoctoral Researcher in Assistive Technologies	Bournemouth University
Dr Huseyin Dogan	Acting Deputy Head of Department in Computing and Informatics	Bournemouth University
Dr Hannah Marston	Research Fellow	Open University
Steve Tyler	Director of Assistive Technology	Leonard Cheshire Disability
James Lampert	Head of Tech-Enabled Care	NRS Healthcare
Harriet Gridley	Director (UK)	No Isolation
Paul Smith	Director	Foundations
Zoe Clarke	Assistive Technology Clinical Specialist and Lead Healthcare Scientist	NHS Barnsley
Gerry Allmark	Managing Director	UKTelehealthcare
Professor Sally Dibb	Centre for Business in Society	Coventry University
Claire Sutton	Digital Transformation Lead	National Care Forum
Janet Seward	Programme Manager	DLF
Rob Gregory	Sales Manager UK/Eire	Tobii Dynavox
Philip Bridges	Business Development Manager	Oyster
Jonathan Shaw	CEO	Policy Connect
Robert McLaren	Head of Health & Accessibility	Policy Connect
Clive Gilbert	Policy Manager for Assistive Technology	Policy Connect