

Technology and Workforce Survey- April 2016

Interim Report

Background:

Many councils are already deploying or are considering deploying technology solutions to support the social care workforce in meeting people's needs and ensuring quality of service. This is arguably made more pressing by the fact that councils are facing unprecedented pressures through reducing budgets (councils have made £5ⁱ.3bn worth of savings to adult social care budgets over the last 5 years) and increasing demand and complexity of need, as well as dealing with challenges in recruiting and retaining staff (the sector is currently facing a vacancy gap of 5.1% and a turnover rate of 25%).ⁱⁱ

Methodology:

This survey was undertaken at the ADASS Spring Seminar 2016 at Yarnfield, Staffordshire, with the support of Capita One. Attendees at the Seminar were invited to participate in the online survey to provide further insights into the barriers and arising solutions in the application of technology to support the social care workforce.

There were 72 completed responses, of which 71 identified the council type. 31% were from County Councils, 25% were from London Boroughs, 21% were from Metropolitan councils and 23% were from Unitary Councils.

In terms of representation from the 9 ADASS Regions the analysis shows the North West region is fully represented and there was high levels of responses from Yorkshire & Humber and Eastern regions, but relatively low levels of responses from the North East particularly and from the South East and South West. These patterns however are not a reflection upon the extent of whether technology solutions are being applied or not.

The survey report is anonymised. No individual council data is shared with 3rd parties and the details of the report remains the property of ADASS.

Data Analysis:

Question “What are your top 3 workforce management priorities for the next 2 years?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Improving staff wellbeing	27.14%	19
Recruitment and retention	65.71%	46
Investing in staff training and development	57.14%	40
Investing in management systems	12.86%	9
Reducing costs and improving efficiency	65.71%	46
Investing in integrated working	64.29%	45
Total Respondents: 70		

Comment

The responses clearly indicate that councils are equally prioritising recruitment and retention, reducing cost and improving efficiency and investing in integrated working. These themes reflect the immediate pressing pressures of high vacancy gaps, the ongoing financial challenges and working towards full integration by 2020, as opposed to prioritising making more long term investments in systems and staff wellbeing.

Question “Do your social care staff record data electronically at the point of interaction with the individual or carer?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
No and no plans to introduce this	4.35%	3
No but we are currently in the process of introducing this	36.23%	25
No but we are planning to introduce this in the next two years	24.64%	17
Yes (Please go to question 5)	34.78%	24
Total		69

Comment

Technology advancements now allow for data to be captured in real time at the point of interaction between the person using services and/or their carers and the member of staff - as opposed to being written up later back in the office. The responses indicate that the overwhelming majority of councils (72% of respondents) are either already, or are currently in the process of introducing this type of technology to support front line staff and 36% are planning to introduce this over the next 2 years. Only 4% of respondents are not planning to introduce new technology.

Question “If yes, what proportion of your social care workforce is recording data electronically at the point of interaction with the individual or carer?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 25%	51.28%	20
Between 25% and 50%	25.64%	10
Between 50% and 75%	15.38%	6
More than 75%	7.69%	3
Total		39

Comment

However on closer inspection, the extent by which new technology is being rolled out is more limited- indicating that most councils are only at early stages of more wide-spread implementation. 51% of respondents had only introduced new technology to under 25% of its' front line staff and only 8% of respondents had been more ambitious with more than 75% of front line staff using technology to record data at the point of interaction with the individual or carer. It is noted that 61% of respondents are in the process of, or are planning to introduce technology to front line staff within the next 2 years.

Question: “What are the three greatest barriers to introducing new technology solutions within your services?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Lack of staff technical skills	61.90%	39
Concerns about data security	38.10%	24
Concerns about technology reliability and availability	61.90%	39
Lack of Member support backed by business cases	6.35%	4
Lack of budget	46.03%	29
Total Respondents: 63		

Comment

In describing the reasons why a more wide-spread application of new technology has yet to materialize, respondents have noted the biggest barriers related to lack of staff technical skills and concerns about technology reliability of availability (62% of respondents cited these as the main barriers). These barriers are likely to be overcome with wider application as staff become familiar and confident with the technology.

Despite significant pressures upon council budgets, over half of respondents did not identify lack of budgets as a top three barrier to more wide-spread application and the vast majority of respondents felt confident that Lead Members would be supportive of introducing new technology based upon business case evidence.

Question: “Where would having more effective technology bring the greatest benefits to staff in your service?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Mobile working	73.53%	50
Multi-agency working	55.88%	38
More efficient administration	29.41%	20
Support self-service capability i.e..self-assessment	38.24%	26
Total Respondents: 68		

Comment

In terms of the setting where new technology would have the greatest impact, 74% of respondents identified with mobile working for front line staff (reflecting the flexible nature of technology solutions) and 56% of respondents note the advantage that technology brings to multi-agency working. However only 29% respondents felt that the introduction of new technology would offer more efficient administration.

Question: “What do you need to make better use of technology in adult social care?”

This was an open-ended question and respondents identified the following issues (in no particular order):

- Some radical thoughts based on the art of the possible.
- Investing in culture change.
- Better project and change management support (increased capacity for change delivery).
- A business process that is supported by a robust, reliable and easy to use IT solution.
- Improved staff skills and expertise through training and cultural change including the “back office”.
- Budget for IT infrastructure and kit.
- Budget for staff training as 'down time' - budget for staff time for analysis and use of the data.
- Better Wi-Fi connection in rural areas.
- Connectivity across the health and care sector and greater collaboration with the NHS to include joint investment and Information Sharing Agreements.
- Time to develop technology solutions in an integrated manner with health colleagues.
- Expertise, commitment at corporate centre. Vision across council - backed up by confidence of investing in the right solution.
- Raising awareness and knowledge of what's available.
- Support from the Centre.

Conclusion:

The survey analysis points to councils increasingly engaging with technology to support front line staff, with 72% of respondents planning to introduce technology solutions over the next 2 years and only 5% respondents indicating that their council had no plans to do so.

This growing momentum and awareness is significant particularly in the context of greater mobile and multi-agency working practices, and respondents have called for more central support to be made available in terms of cultural change and staff training investment , raising awareness of the potential benefits of technology solutions and better (rural) connectivity and reliability of systems.

The message is clear that whilst the widespread roll-out of technology is still in the early stages of evolution, technology is seen as important tool to support front line staff in responding to individuals effectively within an expanding modernised and integrated setting.

ⁱ <https://www.adass.org.uk/budget-survey-2015/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/reportengine/dashboard.aspx>