

A HOMELESS REDUCTION ACT DIGITAL COLLABORATION



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The UK has seen a sharp increase in homelessness in recent years. It can be a devastating and isolating experience for anyone who may face this in life.

People sleeping on the streets on average die at the age of 47. People sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence.

More than one in three people sleeping rough have been deliberately hit, or kicked, or experienced some other form of violence whilst homeless. Homeless people are over nine times more likely to take their own life than the general population.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017...

A 2017 private members bill, sponsored by Bob Blackman MP, places extra duties on Local Authorities to reduce homelessness, placing more responsibility on case management and the reporting to central government.

The three Councils of Camden, Islington and Haringey have come together to create a solution that will serve the homeless in their specific boroughs.

The idea for this joint project, flowed from the design work on a Shared Digital service for the three councils.

The three Housing Needs Services, were already working together to collaborate, exploit and learn from each other, so the idea to produce a common solution was a natural conclusion.

When the project is complete, we can expect the three councils to have met the key requirements of the Act. People that may become homeless can be assessed online/face-to-face and be sign posted to services accordingly.

From the start, our Chief Digital Officer Ed Garcez had suggested that the partners look at areas, that may be easier to start from and provide more easily achievable outcomes.



It's 75% about relationships

A number of my colleagues from across the three councils came together from the Shared Digital IT service, to identify areas across the Housing Needs Services which we could collaborate on. We collectively became the Housing Product group for the Shared Digital service.

The first few meetings focused on getting to know each other and building relationships across the Shared Digital service. We rotated the meetings across the three councils to enhance the collective ownership of the project.

We then explored opportunities for teams to help each other operationally, but a lack of resources across each of the teams made that challenging.

We then brainstormed to identify areas, which we could collaborate on. It became obvious that if we were to re-engineer existing services, it could be a difficult place to start.

Through discussion, the advent of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) became an area we all felt would be a good place to start.

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Housing Needs Service managers and ICT team facilitators working on the business requirements.

We invited the organisation Shelter, to take part in the initial workshop, to play devils advocate on the businesses thinking of the impact and interpretation of the Act.

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My colleague Vince Huntley, from Islington Council, and I were a catalyst for bringing the partners together into the product group and agreeing to work on a shared HRA solution.

The team is really starting to 'gel' now; we have gone through the 'forming & storming' stages and are now performing!

The next steps:

- Identification of likely suppliers
- Demonstration of prototype by supplier.
- Business Requirements workshops

The timetable:

- Business Requirements - Finalised by mid-August 2017
- Project Brief (including Outline Business Case)– August 2017
- Procurement exercise by the end of August 2017

The learning :

Even though the project has some way to go before completion, some learning can be shared:

1. **Get senior leadership visibility and support.** The initial kick-off meeting and discussion, was attended by our Chief Digital Officer, who helped focus minds on the task at hand, and was supportive in getting the initiative off the ground.

2. **Facilitate the partnership in advance of the change.** We found that facilitating the Housing Needs Services to develop a working relationship across the three boroughs was an advantage.

They will be implementing the Act and they were best placed to discuss their similarities and differences.

We invited the organisation Shelter, to take part in the initial workshop, to play devils advocate on the businesses thinking of the impact and interpretation of the Act.

The services seemed to be happy working together and were on the same page.

3. **The partners should lead the change.** All too often you hear stories where IT led the change and the outcome was not fit for purpose.

In this project the Housing Needs Services across the three councils have led the change, thinking critically about their requirements and how they may be met.

It has been refreshing to have them very engaged and leading the way, with the IT capability facilitating the collaborative transformation that is taking place.