Collaborating on Care Technology
A guide to partnership working

rethink partners

Local Government Association

Why try to work in partnership?

This may seem like an obvious question, but developing successful partnerships takes time and effort so being clear why working in partnership is a good thing and what you might want it to achieve is an important starting point. It will also help start the process of seeing things from your partners' perspective rather than your own.

There are 3 broad common reasons to pursue care technology partnerships:

- **It makes sense for local people:** this is the most important rationale but can get forgotten. People don't want multiple, unintegrated, potentially duplicate technology in their homes that will only connect to part of the services that support them. It is inconvenient, confusing, expensive
- **Benefits** from council investment in care technology will often fall to other parts of the public sector; seeking investment from partners to recognise this impact can mean services can move faster with more investment or partner investment can reduce council spend.
- **Shared services** the infrastructure and service of the care technology offer could be used to deliver other services for partners or achieve their ends e.g. virtual consultation and remote health monitoring, shared responder services, remote monitoring / health and safety for housing providers. This could include collaborating with other councils in your region.

Shared investment, resource and infrastructure may achieve **greater scale more efficiently at pace.**

Which partners should you consider?

NHS
- Commissioners
- Providers
- ICS

Care Providers
- Home care
- Supported living
- Care homes
- Day opportunities
- PA's and personalised services
- Community and befriending services
- Carers support services
- Other

Community and voluntary sector
- Commissioned partners
- Wider community sector
- Parish councils
- Grass roots / informal community groups

Housing
- District council housing teams
- Internal housing teams
- Social housing providers
- Supported living providers
- Sheltered housing providers
- Housing developers

Local government
- District Councils
- Unitary partners
- Upper tier authorities
- Neighbouring councils
- Elected mayors

Blue light services
- Ambulance
- Fire and rescue services
- Police: Police and Crime Commissioner and operational services

What type of partnership are you seeking?

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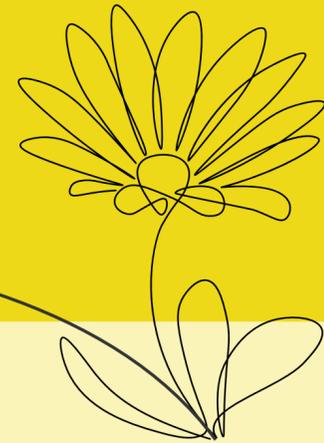
Informal partnerships

Characteristics
- Loose
- Flexible
- Aligned
- No legal or contractual ties
- Based on mutual interest, shared priorities, common values
- Limited governance
- Connected by focus on service users and citizens
- No/limited shared resources; money or people

In practice
- Referral pathways for referral technology
- Sign posting

Formal partnerships

Characteristics
- Close
- Hardwired
- Aligned
- Likely to be underpinned by binding legal agreements; joint contracts; shared services; pooled budgets
- Connected by focus on service users and citizens
- Shared finance resources and roles/ teams

In Practice
- Jointly commissioned / delivered care technology service
- Integrated care technology team
- Single referral pathway

Remember – your partner may want a different type of relationship either as a starting point or long term. Create the space and opportunity for this dialogue to happen, and for the partnership to evolve.

Partnership sweet spots

For different partners consider their priorities and areas where they would want to see benefits as a useful starting point. Also areas of mutual benefit such as falls, stroke rehabilitation, frailty, high intensity users who have multiple contacts across the public sector, people living with mental health conditions.

Partner / sector	Areas of impact	Interventions
NHS	• Reduction in hospital admissions • Reduction in primary care attendances • Reduction in ambulance contacts, call outs and conveyances • Quicker hospital discharge: reduction in length of stay, discharge straight to home	• Falls monitoring / prevention devices • Enhanced social contact enabled through video carephones • Digital care packages to support hospital discharge assessed as part of discharge planning
Housing – district councils, housing providers	• Reduction in on-site support for various types of housing scheme • Improved safety and security to prevent damage to property through early detection and response	• Digital care packages to support independence and social contact • Digital fire, flood, temperature and other devices integrated into an overall management system
Care providers	• Reduction in face to face contacts; remote monitoring and contact to enable remote prompts (e.g. nutrition, hydration); remote social contact • Increased efficiency / improved quality through more targeted, purposeful visits, reduced failed visits and remote contact	• Digital care packages including video carephones with care providers having full access to monitoring dashboards
3rd / voluntary sector	• Improved digital offer to service users • Ability to support people in their communities more effectively	• Digital care packages to support independence and social contact
Blue light services	• Reduced attendances, remote monitoring and remote contact	• Digital care packages to support independence, provide real time data and connect remotely through video carephones

Challenges of working in partnership

Many of the challenges you will face will be similar to those you face when trying to engage internal audiences. Draw on these experiences in working with partners.

- **Other priorities:** too busy or don't have the capacity / leadership to prioritise this area in the face of other pressures.

- **Partnership priorities:** Everyone wants to work in partnership on their priority, not engage in their partners' priority. Establish a dialogue and see how you can meet their agenda alongside yours.

- **Language, culture, and building understanding:** silo'd working and not using the same language can be practical barriers; each sector and organisation has it's own language, culture and ways of doing things. Try to understand yours from your partners perspective and also theirs. How do they make decisions? Organise themselves? What do they respond to?

- **Governance:** consider practical governance barriers - information governance, risk appetite – as well as where and how they make decisions. How can you access these meetings and systems? Are there existing partnership governance structures that you can use rather than creating new ones?

- **Funding:** why would they invest in your service (if that is what you are seeking) when resources are tight for everyone?

- **Resources:** whose job might it be to work on this agenda with you? How can you make it easy and low effort for partners to engage – whilst making sure they are meaningfully engaged?

Tips for developing effective partnerships

So you've got a passion and conviction that care technology is a wonderful thing and can see huge benefits for your partners and for the people that you all serve. But what seems obvious and a priority to you will not be so obvious to your partners whose plates are already overflowing. So how can you get their attention and commitment?

Do the ground work

- Understand the context and sector: how is it structured? Is there a commissioner / provider split? Do they have national "must do's" or more local autonomy?
- Understand the wider governance landscape
- What are your partners priorities?
- What is their business planning cycle? When are they going to be likely to commit resources to your project
- What partnership work already exists? Successful projects, integrated working, pooled budgets, Better Care Fund. Can you link to or learn from any of this work?
- Map the stakeholders at a detailed to flow through through sector, organisation, teams / functions to identify individual people. Then work out if anyone in your organisation has an existing relationship you can use for that first contact.
- What do you want to achieve? Be clear on what the ask is or what the opportunity is – perfect your partnership pitch
- Understand the quality of relationships in your system and start where they are good, not where they are strained.

Start somewhere and play the long game

Engage at all levels: We tend to think we need to engage senior leaders as a starting point possibly in the hope that they will simply direct their organisation and teams to engage. The work is rarely like this. Engage at different levels to find the people with the passion or the actual "problem owners". Working from the bottom up – engaging with the frontline, finding your peers, and then influencing up rather than starting at the top can be more effective than going straight to the top. Be tactical, agile and flexible. And don't give up if your first few efforts to engage don't succeed. Fundamentally you want to build connection and trust with the people you are working with. This takes time, effort and shared endeavour.

Timing is everything. Try to engage early to avoid the "not invented here" syndrome.

See the world from their perspective

Stand in their shoes: sector, organisation and role. Given their own priorities – why would they engage with you? And how can you meet their needs and priorities alongside yours?

Where are there opportunities for mutual benefit? What's in it for me (WIIFM) – not just at a strategic level but at an individual level. Why would an already busy manager, team member, IT lead, commissioner make time for this? What do they care about? What are they passionate about? See and engage with the person, not just the job role.

Create a dialogue not a monologue so there is room for partners to shape and contribute. We are all more vested in things we have created.

Focus on local people

This is the unifying agenda for all public sector partners in a place. It is the agenda that unites us all and where there should be common ground. Make it real and bring it back to the impact on real people's lives to get partners round the table.

Make it easy

Start with the people, not the money - low effort and low cost will get people to come forward and build out from there.

Consider starting small – building on success over time is an easier sell than a big bang / big investment.

Create a flexible approach so that partners can join when they are ready. Start with the partners who want to work with you (one hospital, a few care providers) – effort early on at trying to get a whole sector to engage will be exhausting and fruitless. But be welcoming and enable people and organisations to join in at a later stage. Without bad feeling because they didn't join at the start.

Where to start?

Go where the energy is

- **Start with who you know (or who the people you know know)**
- **Start small**
- **Talk to people - outside of meetings where you can**
- **Test out and engage from the outset**
- **Help partners see what you are trying to achieve**
- **Invite people in to help and advise**
- **Find a sweet spot of mutual interest**
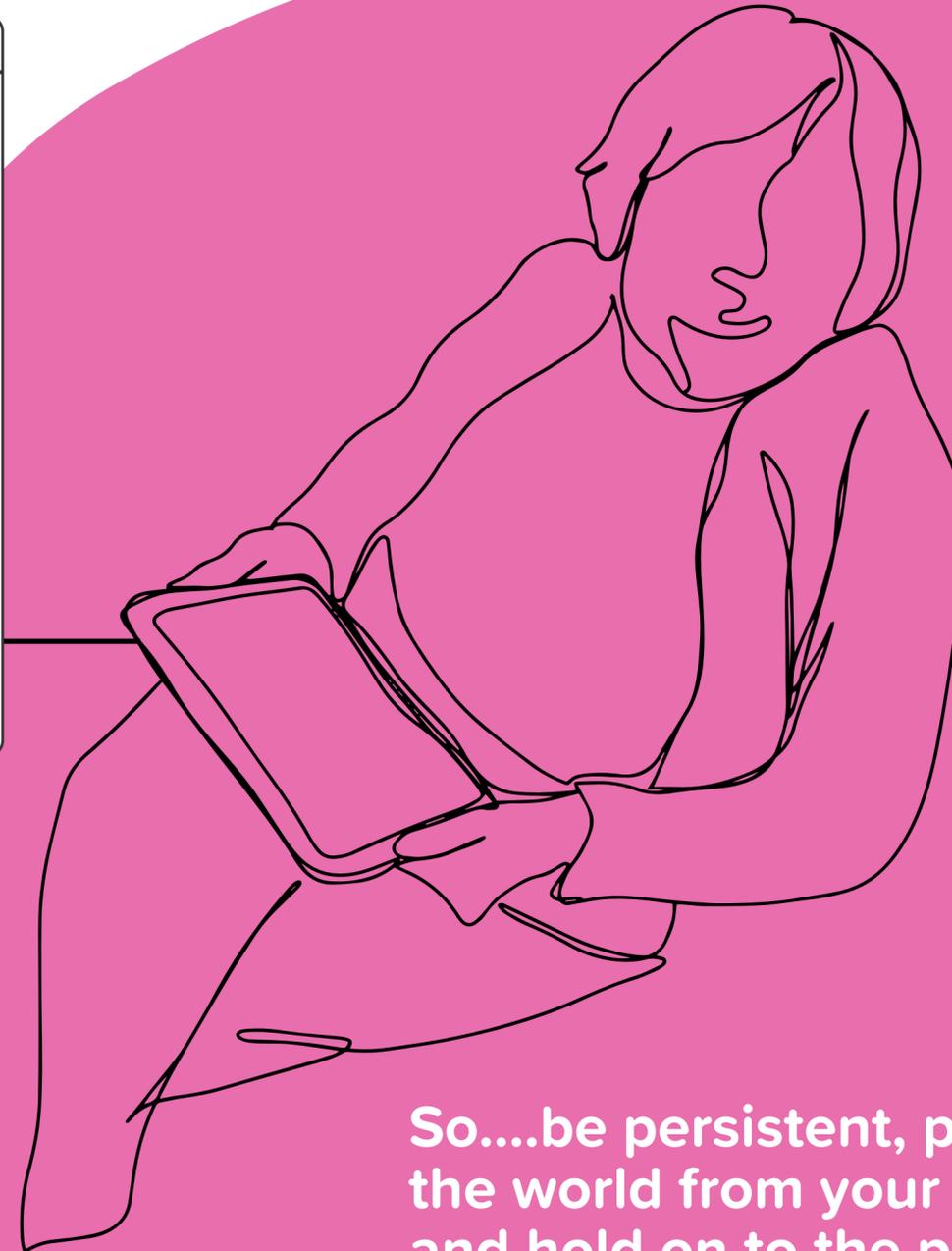
So....be persistent, play the long game, see the world from your partners' perspectives and hold on to the prize at the end.

It is worth pursuing.

Good luck!

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