Active at 60: Local Evaluation research: business case

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Objectives of the business case

The business case examined: the financial inputs; expected and actual outcomes; stakeholder benefits; and lessons learned from Area 1. Due to the early closure of the pilot in Area 2 and consequent lack of data, this is not included in the business case. Limitations in data from Area 1, particularly in terms of the unavailability of activity and financial baseline data and gaps in the monitoring data relating to participation, meant that a full economic appraisal or cost-benefit analysis could not be carried out. However, the business case provides Local Authorities (LAs) with information on the potential benefits of smartcards, primarily in qualitative terms, and also quantitatively, where data are available; the financial inputs required to deliver these benefits; and the key issues which are likely to be of relevance to other LAs, considering the introduction of smartcards.

Financial inputs (cost analysis)

A budget of £198,925 was allocated to the project, with all elements of the project being delivered within this budget. The three largest areas of spending related to:

- developing the online registration portal (£78,000);

- staff resources and overheads (£35,000);

- consultation and communications (£20,000).

Expected and actual outcomes

In overall terms, an existing smartcard scheme was already in operation, and the overall aims of the pilot were to build on this existing infrastructure for smartcards, by providing new routes for accessing smartcards and access to new entitlements and initiatives. The primary routes through which this would be achieved, including actual outcomes, were as follows:

- **Online registrations:** although the LA was not able to achieve its overall target for online applications of 30 per cent over the first year, there was an increasing rate of online applications in the second six months of the pilot year and the target was achieved for the second six months of the pilot period. The online portal will also be used for renewals from 2012.

- **Real-time authentication:** once initial issues over authentication were addressed, the LA exceeded its target of 80 per cent on a month by month basis, for the proportion of online registrations which could be completed in real time, using online identity checking.

- **Hard to reach groups:** a successful outreach programme took place in two libraries and the target was achieved in relation to applications from individuals who had been eligible for smartcards for more than six months but who had not previously taken up their smartcard.

- **Overall participation:** the LA was not able to demonstrate increases in participation or uptake of the smartcard over the pilot, although it identified several factors which had affected participation outside the direct control of the council. The LA also encountered difficulties in trying to track individual card usage to support their evaluation of participation levels.

- Replication in other LAs: two other LAs are now working with the same technology for a web portal and have begun to achieve online registrations. A number of other LAs are also working with the providers of the online portal to look at other implementation options.

Benefits to participating stakeholders

The main benefits by stakeholder group have been summarised below:

- Benefits to LAs in using online registration:
  - more efficient processing of applications;
  - higher quality/completeness of online applications;
  - building up a database of information on service users;
  - identifying gaps on service need and unmet need;
  - cost savings – Area 1 *'estimated savings of over £30,000 if 10,000 cardholders renew online rather than visiting council offices'.*

- Benefits through links between LAs and key stakeholders:
  - improved communication between LA departments;
  - better engagement with local community groups and the voluntary sector;
  - increased understanding of needs of service users.

- Benefits to service users:
  - faster and easier access in receiving cards through the online process;
  - simpler renewal process;
  - new sources of support, e.g. libraries, housing managers;
  - more information about activities provided through the online portal;

- Wider economic benefits of increased participation:
  - physical activity reducing the risk of developing major chronic diseases and falls.

Lessons learned

- Investment – introducing online registration requires up-front investment for: project management; hardware and software; user engagement; developing the web portal; acquiring necessary licences; and establishing processes for identity checks.

- Cost savings versus increased uptake of services – online registration and renewals processes can result in cost savings, but there may be an impact on activity levels, with an associated cost, if participation or access to entitlements increases.

- Project management – engaging with services users, community groups and the voluntary sector for all aspects of design and implementation requires significant time input to be fully effective.

- Communications – LAs need to consider low cost communication routes e.g. email rather than print, and the use of social media, depending upon the target audience.