

Adult Social Care Technology Strategy – 2022-2025

Introduction

In its White Paper ***People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform***, the Government sets out that “When technology is embedded seamlessly into care and support services, it can be transformative, helping people to live happy, fulfilled lives in their homes and communities. ...

The use of technologies in social care should:

- enhance the quality of care
- free up time for meaningful human interactions
- create stronger connections between people and their friends, family and care networks

We must ensure that technology reduces rather than exacerbates loneliness and isolation, and that it supports the mental health and wellbeing of people and carers. And, while not all people will want to use technology as part of their care or daily life, we must make sure that professionals and care teams have the right digital tools and data to provide the outstanding, safe care that all people deserve.”

This document sets out our ambition to deliver this vision, building on the progress we have already made in transforming how Gloucestershire embraces technology and digital tools to deliver higher quality, more efficient, safer and more joined-up social care to improve people’s lives. It is our aim to continue this momentum for change through the work described in this Strategy recognising that the drive for improvement must reflect both quality and effectiveness.

We also need to recognise the breadth of issues covered under the label of technology and that they will develop and be implemented at different paces. These include (but are not exhaustive):

- Online platforms and communications for access to all care and to address social inclusion
- Assistive technology deployed in people’s homes

- Predictive analytics to identify vulnerability prior to crisis
- A technically empowered workforce.

For some issues/solutions this is a future vision, but for some the future is already here or soon will be and thus the Strategy also sets out how we'll understand the difference; being both ambitious in our planned improvements and reflective of the need that we must do so acting safely and ensuring that we are enhancing the quality of care.

Drivers and challenges

One of our most important services as a society is adult social care. We want Gloucestershire's elderly, vulnerable and disabled people to live independent and fulfilled lives for as long as possible and know that this is a priority not only for citizens but for their families, carers and the wider health and social care system.

We know that by 2027 almost 21% of the UK population will be aged 65 and above¹ and that people with disabilities have thankfully longer life expectancies. If this trend continues, it is estimated that almost 1 in 6 adults would be required to work in adult social care by 2038 to meet demand², which would be unrealistic in a balanced Gloucestershire economy. We are already experiencing shortfalls in the workforce available in parts of Gloucestershire and in some sectors of care, a picture which has become more pronounced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Proposed changes to legislation also place new duties on local authorities and the cost of social care is increasing while local authority budgets are constrained, so we need to think innovatively and radically to find the right solutions.

The power of technology can help us meet these challenges and improve lives.

Technology through the care journey

It is our aim to increase our use of technology throughout people's care journey wherever there is an identified need that can be met, in part or in whole, by new technologies.

¹ Office of National Statistics

² James Bullion, ADASS President, 2021



Prevention and self-help

Whilst Gloucestershire's population is ageing, most older people do not need or want regular care. The same is true for other vulnerable groups, such as people with physical disabilities who do not want to rely on intrusive care schedules. This means more extensive (but selective) use of technology has an important role to play, opening up opportunities for self-purchase by people who want to take early action to protect their independence. Prevention in social care is about encouraging people to be more proactive about their health and wellbeing. We must make prevention and early intervention a much stronger element of our model of support and of care pathways as part of a decisive focus towards improving population health.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of digital technologies transformed the delivery of care and helped people stay connected with friends and family. Although digital solutions have been a lifeline for millions of people, it has also laid bare inequalities in access. Recent research by Age UK highlighted that the older population are still less likely to be digitally included; among those aged 75+, more than 40% do not use the internet and Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that 14.9% people with a disability have never used the internet, compared to 6.3% of the UK population. Recent research also showed that, nationally, 23% of care home staff cannot access the internet consistently at work.

Our priorities will be to:

- Develop our digital directory, [Your Circle](#), plus chatbots to help people to find personalised advice about the most appropriate local service or assistive technology for while maintaining ways for customers to get help and information by phone and in person, including those that lack digital skills and online access . As people increasingly manage their care through personal budgets we need to ensure that it is as easy as possible for people to purchase and use the technology that would best support their goals.

- Enable people to purchase equipment, assistive technology or services through a digital marketplace and through the development of an online 'virtual smart home'
- Support people to undertake online self-assessments and create care accounts
- Utilise apps and assistive technology to decrease social isolation and improve wellbeing
- Continue to invest in our Digital Innovation Fund to work with the voluntary and community sector enabling use of digital solutions which support independence and inclusion.

Sustained independent living

It has long been Gloucestershire County Council's strategic aim to support more people to remain living independently in their own home, and in doing so to meet our Care Act duty to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care. We recognise that technology can help us to meet these aims and duties so we will promote, expand and embed technology-enabled care by ensuring it is a routine and fundamental part of social care practice.

Smart and assistive living technologies use sensors and devices in people's homes to monitor and help maintain independence for as long as someone wishes. These technologies can help manage the physical environment (such as by closing curtains, opening doors and managing heating and security), help with routine tasks such as medication reminders and also help in preventing social isolation by allowing people to chat with friends and family through their digital television or smart assistant, for example, and support those with dementia by providing automated memory stimulations.

We also recognise that care provision cannot and should not be entirely automated, and this is also the approach taken in the White Paper. Human interaction should not be replaced by technology, but we can support the teams and individuals that deliver this vital service to use technology differently and more routinely to support a more sustainable care market. Technology has a vital role to play in sustaining carers, both paid and unpaid, and in creating much needed additional capacity in the workforce.

Our priorities will be to:

- Fully integrate technology within the care journey, making technology enabled care a core part of service specifications and of our social work practice (assessments should always include a consideration of technology as a part of a strength-based approach).

- Understand the benefits of digital technology and have the evidence to target spending to effectively deploy technology that meets people's needs.
- Promote and use digital tools to help people keep in touch with loved ones and professionals, reducing social isolation and promoting inclusion, linking with other community services to ensure we reach all parts of the county.
- Promote and use off-the-shelf as well as more specialist technology. Devices such as virtual assistants can be personalised to provide reminders (for example, to take medication, to hydrate or to lock the door) and can also be integrated with domestic appliances and home management systems to further support independence.
- Roll out technologies which support the delivery of care in people's homes. This could include devices such as sensors placed in people's homes which discreetly monitor daily patterns of behaviour, sending alerts when changes are detected. As well as providing peace of mind for family, this technology can also help care providers manage their limited resources more efficiently, reducing costs and maximising impact, removing reliance on self-reporting by vulnerable people and can provide early indications of incidents or ill health.
- Invest in digital remote monitoring and personal alarms (known as telecare) which raise alerts as soon as a potential issue, such as a fall, is identified. We will also identify and use more proactive and predictive solutions which could ultimately prevent the fall in the first place.
- Link the most appropriate technologies to different care pathways and to different personal circumstances or preferences. For example, people with dementia will have a different set of needs and capabilities to those undergoing rehabilitation and will therefore require a personalised approach to the best technology for the situation.
- Continue to explore innovations in care technology which help people to live as independently as possible, for as long as possible. This will include, for example: testing apps which support people with mental ill health and/or autism to progressively manage their condition with less professional intervention; assessing the use of a QR code based technology to help people with learning disabilities by supporting them to independently do daily tasks like making simple meals or cleaning their home; testing the use of watches and other wearable devices to support people with dementia; and trialling systems in care homes and the community which use reminiscence and digital activities to manage behaviour that challenges.
- Explore the potential of enabling a portal into our case management system which allows people with an active social care case to view and interact with their care record and social worker online.
- Give people access to the adaptations and technologies which help them live well and make meaningful choices over their housing arrangements

Facilitating recovery

Technology can have the greatest impact (and cost-effectiveness) when offered an early stage, as it may have the best opportunity to reduce the need for longer-term care. Technology should therefore be an essential part of any reablement service or other short-term intervention which aims to help people recover their life skills after a period of illness or hospitalisation.

Our priorities will be to:

- Extend the use of telehealth, telecare and digitally enabled care to people in the Home First Service (including rapid installation of equipment to allow remote monitoring to be quickly set up)
- Support people in the community and following discharge from hospital by integrating technology into their care and support plans
- Enable reablement workers to remotely view people's care notes and update them in the field through the provision of new devices and software
- Explore the use of data to assess whether people discharged from hospitals are becoming increasingly independent through the use of activity monitoring systems in their homes. These systems can also use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to detect a deterioration in someone's condition, providing early warning to reablement teams to prevent readmission and improve outcomes for the individual. If successful, by intervening early, these tools could reduce the need for therapy time and reduce the amount of long-term care someone requires.

Sustainable care workforce

Social care of the future will use technology routinely in all care settings and at every stage of the care journey not only to provide the best outcomes for people, but to support our workforce to do their jobs effectively. We will therefore make sure that our care workforce has the right digital tools, training, skills and data to provide the outstanding, safe care that all people deserve. Using digital tools to support workflow, care-planning and decision-making, care professionals will be supported to do the right things at the right time in a person's care journey to deliver the highest standards of personalised care.

Our priorities will be to:

- Introduce digital shared care records to provide accurate information to the team supporting care and to improve transfers of care and the hospital discharge process. The development, implementation and regular use of shared care records will give the care workforce a step change in their ability to deliver efficient, effective, high quality care.

- Explore technologies which can play an active role in frontline care delivery. This might include using AI to better schedule care visits in localities, eliminating wasted journeys and freeing up valuable time for the carer to spend with people receiving their support.
- Extend our use of a Provider Portal to facilitate online interaction between the Council and care providers. This will streamline the commissioning of care, thereby reducing delays and freeing up valuable care staff time.
- Continue to work with Integrated Care System partners to extend access to NHS systems to care homes to provide high quality information, free up time and improve system flow
- Consider the use of collaborative robots (cobots). In the care sector, the most advanced area of exploration is robotic exoskeletons, external apparatus worn to protect carers as they deliver physical care, moving and lifting people in their care. This can help the carer (either paid or unpaid) to work more independently and with reduced risk of sustaining an injury. There may be instances in which care which would traditionally require two carers working together, could be delivered by a single individual using a cobot and other specialist equipment.