



An evaluation of the *Herts Local* pilot project

“Herts Local is a pilot project to provide an enhanced level of signposting and information about VCS activity to Health and Social Care professionals in two areas of Hertfordshire”

The Herts Local Pilot was commissioned by the All Age Personalisation Steering Group and delivered by North Herts CVS and CVS East Herts and Broxbourne

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Executive Summary

This report presents an evaluation of a time limited pilot initiative to identify community-based activities in two localities and then make available an enhanced level of information that can be accessed easily by professionals, referrers and local people. The aim of the pilot was to promote awareness and make available accessible information about local services and activities that will play a role in addressing low level health and social care needs and prevent use of primary care services and the need for more intensive care and support. An evaluation was commissioned to gain feedback on the pilot activity and identify the learning that could inform future development and commissioning decisions. Eleven professionals were interviewed for the evaluation. These were selected to provide a range of views from frontline and strategic roles across health, social care and the voluntary and community sector. A summary of findings is set out below and these are detailed in full in the main report.

The majority of those interviewed, either agreed or strongly agreed that *Herts Local* was easy to use and navigate. There was enthusiasm for having a tool that promoted and enabled access to local community-based options. Most felt the type and amount of information provided would enable professionals in front line teams to refer confidently. Some felt there was potential to use this approach to stimulate new community-based development and encourage providers to communicate with each other within and across localities, although a number felt this was dependent on a number of factors and was too early to say with certainty.

There were concerns raised about the possible development of a separate, stand-alone *Herts Local* web tool. It was felt that this would present issues in terms of communications to professionals and the public about where there should go for information as this could conflict and compete with existing directories. It was also mentioned in many of the interviews that if developed further it was important that there is an integrated approach with other initiatives such as Community Navigators, Herts Help and social prescriptions.

The feedback and learning from this pilot raised important questions regarding the development of his work within what is a complex system of information, guidance and support within localities and across Hertfordshire. In particular:

- How can learning from this pilot now be used improve what we have currently in place, enhancing existing infrastructure such as Herts Help and Community Navigators?
- What would be needed to implement an effective localised approach to developing community-based activities and networking within Hertfordshire that would support objectives of prevention, early intervention and recovery?
- How can key stakeholders across sectors be brought together to realise the delivery and market development potential of approaches such as *Herts Local*?

Background to *Herts Local*

This pilot was initiated following the NESTA hundred-day challenge in Hoddesdon. This was completed in early 2018 and aimed to demonstrate how local collaboration, even with limited resources and in a short period of time, can drive innovation and make real progress in tackling local issues.

In this spirit, the Herts Local initiative was established to address a key issue identified as part of the hundred-day challenge. That is that information on community-based options to address low level needs is difficult to find and that referrers, GP practices and others were frustrated in attempts to steer people to the options that would help them locally.

The *Herts Local* pilot was commissioned and overseen by the All Age Personalisation Steering Group and targeted at two localities - Stevenage and Hoddesdon. The pilot was developed and delivered by North Herts CVS and CVS Broxbourne and East Herts. The intention is that the findings would inform the future development of approaches and tools to support professionals wanting to link people with low level needs to services that will deliver improved outcomes for people and prevent the need for statutory services.

A grass roots approach was taken to development and implementation, capturing a range of local community-based activities for older people and people with disabilities. A part time project manager was employed to lead the project. She spent between 3-4 days a week between June and September reviewing available sources of information and going out to referrers, GP practices and local services to gather intelligence and promote awareness of the project. The project manager worked alongside in-house IT support to collate and store data on community-based options and develop a simple user interface to enable this data to be searched.

A summary of the evaluation findings

During September a weblink to the *Herts Local* data was made available to a range of professionals and teams in the pilot areas. The project manager visited these locations and spoke to people to introduce the project and to encourage them to test the website and provide feedback into the evaluation. The evaluation was undertaken through two short structured telephone interviews in order to deliver a proportionate and timely independent evaluation of the pilot project against the stated aims defined by the steering group leading this work. In total 12 professionals from a range of frontline and strategic roles across the VCS and statutory sectors were interviewed.

Summary of key messages from the first stage interviews

Interviewees were asked for their views on the role played by community-based options in meeting low level health and social care needs

- There was consensus that professionals in health and social care services valued the role of community-based organisations in providing important support to people that can prevent the need for health and social care services
- Recognition that often the issues that people presented to statutory services with were best addressed by community or mainstream services rather than statutory health or care provision
- Across all respondents there was a recognition that community-based activities could provide valuable alternatives to meet low level needs but current arrangements for enabling this to take place could be more effective

How aware are front line teams of the options available?

- The majority of respondents reported that the level of knowledge within health and social care frontline services about community-based options was mixed at best
- The pressures on teams and staff who have to prioritise crises and emergency issues were cited as key issues, as were changes to working practices
- Herts Help, Herts Direct and the Herts Directory were mentioned by all respondents although often the terms were used interchangeably
- Some felt that Herts Help was most effective use for higher level “statutory” needs and there was a need for more information on community-based activities to meet lower level needs and prevention
- The knowledge within teams and individuals was valued and word of mouth was cited as an important way in which people get information

What would help make the identification of options and use of community-based activities more effective?

- All respondents mentioned the challenges of keeping any system up to date with the right type of information and getting this right was crucial to the success of any approach
- It wasn't clear to some respondents why there were separate directories / tools, and this made navigating and finding options more difficult
- Developments such as Herts Help and Community Navigators were valued and presented an opportunity to promote options, share best practice and stimulate new options in areas where they were needed
- Effective local networks were essential to support and compliment these systems
- All key stakeholders and end users should be involved in the ongoing development of tools and approaches

Summary of key messages from Stage 2 interviews

For Stage 2 of the evaluation interviewees were provided with a link to a tool that enabled people to search for locally based community options for older and disabled people in Stevenage and Hoddesdon. They were then asked for their views on the tool at the second stage interview.

- Most of those interviewed strongly agreed that the information on the website was accessible and easy to understand. All but one of those interviewed felt it was easy to navigate, liking the categories and ability to refine searches. A number of respondents did however find that they felt the tool forced them to specify a day of the week which they felt was an issue and would limit searches
- Respondents were impressed by the look and feel of the tool particularly the simplicity of the user interface
- Most of the respondents interviewed felt that access to this information would improve awareness of the range of activities available locally, although a number qualified their response recognising that at this stage it is a trial site and not comprehensive in terms of coverage

- The two respondents who did not agree commented on the availability of existing online tools already in use - Herts Help and the Herts Directory. They did not feel having another tool was necessary and having more than one database meant people would potentially have to make multiple searches
- The majority of those interviewed said that *Herts Local* would encourage workers to look for local community-based options and refer people with confidence
- Most reported that there was a good selection of activities identified. One respondent felt there was scope for more content related to sport and physical activities
- One suggestion was that categories could be reframed to focus on outcomes and needs so that people can understand how it will benefit them
- The importance of navigators was highlighted by one respondent as reliance on an online tool would potentially lead to beneficial options being missed as the conversation and opportunity to explore issues further would not happen
- Most agreed that *Herts Local* would help increase referrals directly from the public although one disagreed referring to Herts Help which “people are more likely to have heard of”
- Generally, respondents felt that the type and amount of information for options was pitched well and would give people what they needed to know including contact details, opening times and the nature of the activity
- Six of the 10 respondents agreed that *Herts Local* could help stimulate new options to establish. Two respondents disagreed, and two said they didn’t know as this would be dependent on other factors

1. Background

This is an evaluation report for the *Herts Local* pilot initiative to provide an enhanced level of information about Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) activity in the areas covered by the Integrated Personal Commissioning (IPC) hundred-day challenge - Stevenage and Hoddesdon. The pilot was developed and delivered by North Herts CVS and CVS Broxbourne and East Herts and commissioned and overseen by the All Age Personalisation Steering Group.

It was prompted by feedback following the hundred-day challenge from stakeholders involved in the project reporting that people were frustrated at the lack of easily accessible information available about the range of activities and services available locally. This hindered organisations in the statutory and VCS sectors from effectively linking people with needs to the activities that would benefit them.

A key assumption / hypothesis to be addressed through the pilot is that:

“Busy health and social care professionals are often not aware of local voluntary and community sector services which can make a big difference to individuals and their families/carers. They have little time to do such research and cannot fulfil the role of information point other than on an informal basis and may have a small amount of knowledge of a local voluntary group which may not always be up to date”

2. Project aims

The *Herts Local* pilot project aims to:

- Promote understanding of the voluntary and community sector and the services it provides
- Provide a complimentary, but significantly more in-depth locally facing service to Herts Help ensuring that community sector information is strengthened and shared effectively
- Support the identification of services for those with low level support needs following discharge from hospital, linking them better into their community

3. The approach to evaluation

The aim is to provide a proportionate and timely independent evaluation of the pilot project against the stated aims defined by the steering group leading this work. The evaluation sought to capture learning to inform future commissioning / service development as well as improvements to the existing networks and mechanisms that are in place to enable efficient and effective access to essential community services by vulnerable people in the community and NHS colleagues facilitating that access.

Resolving Chaos who lead the Connect Hertfordshire initiative were commissioned to undertake this evaluation and have a track record of developing and implementing approaches to evaluation that assess the impact of community-based initiatives designed to maximise the use of community assets to improve health and wellbeing of people.

The evaluation specification and approach were developed with the steering group and implemented alongside the implementation of the pilot to ensure that a good cross section of views were gained and that interviewees had the opportunity to view and test the tool.

Key evaluation questions

- Has awareness of existing VCS options been improved amongst key professionals?
- Have pathways / referral routes to accessing identified community options been improved?
- Will the range of options increase through the provision of information about unmet needs?
- Has the project built or enhanced social support networks?
- Has the pilot led to more detailed and accurate information about voluntary and community activity in the 2 pilot areas?
- Has the pilot been successful in delivering an information and referral point in the 2 pilot areas that is more effective in providing local advice and information?

A two-stage phone interview process was developed. The first interview aimed to baseline current views and practice in relation to identifying and referring to local community-based solutions. The second interview was to gain views on the look and feel, functionality and potential application and impact of *Herts Local*.

The evaluator worked closely with the project lead and commissioner to identify a broad representation of interviewees that included health social care and other professionals involved in signposting people to options to meet needs. It also aimed to capture the view of people with a strategic interest in taking the findings to inform future developments within the wider Hertfordshire context including the current approach to social prescriptions, community navigators and Herts Help / directory.

Nine people were interviewed for the first stage interviews. Eight of these were also interviewed at the second stage. The second stage interviewees were supplemented with two additional frontline interviewees from GP practices.

The evaluation was commissioned at the end of August and the pilot website disseminated in the first week of September. The aim was to interview as many participants as possible prior to viewing the website and then providing participants with up to 3-4 weeks to use the tool and where possible share with others in their teams.

The implementation of the pilot and the identification of participants continued into September and the tool was made available for a further month to allow all participants sufficient time to view and use the tool.

The *Herts Local* project manager continued to update the tool and add new activities to the list throughout September.

4. First stage interview questions and summary of responses

To what extent do you feel that health and social care staff recognise the benefits in having a range of local VCS services available for people with lower level H&SC needs?

Across respondents, there was consensus that professionals in health and social care services valued the role of community-based organisations in providing important support to people that can prevent the need for health and social care services.

“There is now a clear and consistent message within the GP forward view that there is evidence that active signposting and social prescribing is effective”.

“Staff in teams get the importance of the preventative agenda”

It was also reported that often the issues that people presented to statutory services with, were best addressed by other community or mainstream services rather than statutory health or care provision.

Across all respondents there was a recognition that the VCS could be used more effectively by professionals and teams.

“More needed to help change mindset of what is possible for some and to support the majority who do see the benefits”

How aware are they (health and social care frontline staff) of what is available locally?

The majority of respondents reported that the level of knowledge about community-based services was mixed at best.

“Some people who have been around for a while have better knowledge, and they are good for new members to tap into experience”

“It’s very hard to keep up with changes in the VCS as it changes so quickly”

“The very best will still only know about 70% of what’s in their area”

“Some have great deal of specialism in particular areas eg ASD – it would be great if this knowledge can be tapped and made available to others”

The pressures on teams and staff who have to prioritise crises and emergency issues were cited as issues.

“They have less and less time to do the research and then work with the individuals to contact, make referral and then actually support them in accessing services. This is very time consuming for them, and they are not necessarily aware of what is available locally”

Where would they go to find information about what is available?

Herts Help, Herts Direct and the Herts Directory were mentioned by all respondents although often the terms were used inter-changeably.

The Herts Help drop-ins were mentioned by one respondent and the Care Navigators were also seen as a useful resource. One respondent said there needed to be more outreach from these services to frontline teams and community-based services.

The knowledge within teams and individuals was valued and word of mouth was cited as an important way in which people got the information they felt was most useful. Other methods included posters in buildings and communication / flyers that hits their desks.

There was mention from a couple of respondents that teams and services used to share knowledge of services and activities through team meetings and co-location with others and that this happened less now.

The role of the CVS was mentioned by one respondent and it was felt that some were better than others as a source of information of what's available locally. One respondent mentioned that there were still some "brokers" in Children's and learning disability services who help with finding the right support services.

How effective is this?

In terms of directory based online systems, all respondents mentioned the challenges of keeping them up to date with the right type of information.

"It needs to be easy to update as things change so quickly"

A number of respondents mentioned how important it was for online tools to be easy to use as the time pressures on staff in frontline teams was an issue.

"I often just use Google and can search through my iPad"

"Herts Help can be effective when people are used to the system and how to make searches"

"Many staff don't have time – although some are clued up"

Respondents involved with Herts Help had reported an increase in calls and requests. They felt the service was valued by those people that use them although it was recognised that some people and teams used them more than others.

Herts Help was seen as mostly of use for higher level "statutory" needs. Some respondents felt there was a need for a tool that focussed on community-based activities that would meet lower level needs and prevention.

It wasn't clear to some respondents why there were separate systems.

"Difficult to find details for specific needs – physical disability or learning disability for example"

"We need to make Herts Help better rather than develop more local options that aren't strategically developed or implemented"

There was a general support for more networking and communication of local alternatives. Sharing information through word of mouth in team meetings and visits to local providers are coming under strain through constant change and time pressures.

Smart working and hot desking were felt by some to restrict opportunities for informal information sharing. It was also suggested that the use of mobile IT and iPads has meant there are opportunities to conduct searches face to face with clients in their homes or in community locations.

The rate of change and staff turnover in the VCS and statutory services was felt to impact on knowledge retention.

What else would help?

In response to this question a number of themes emerged:

There should be a focus on the audience of the tool including end users.

Any information resource should be used by a range of audiences - health and social care staff, Community Navigators, VCS staff and others who signpost and give advice.

Importantly it should also enable end users and their carers to access it easily themselves so they can be empowered to exercise choice and control themselves. The tool should provide options that are personalised and local;

“It should be used by people with a wide range of needs”

“Need something that places the persons needs and wants at the centre – the outcomes they want to achieve rather the service that’s provided”

“It should enable people to find services close to them”

Information should be accessible in different ways and not just online.

A number of respondents emphasised the need for a variety of communication channels to be considered in addition to online tools, including telephone hotline, face to face contact as well as the need for one to one support to help people navigate the information available and then support them to attend and utilise the activities identified.

“Make it easier and more attractive for people to find what they need and give information about key things such as transport”

Implementation of any tool needs to be adequately resourced and supported if it’s to be effective.

“Herts Help and VCS needs to link together more effectively – activity is fragmented at the moment”

“Community development, networking and relationship building were important elements to any strategy”

“Someone is required to chase and keep info up to date and develop the online tools available”

“Currently Herts Direct is difficult to navigate and sometimes people resort to Google”

“There should be community champions within frontline teams. They would have responsibility for sharing information and feedback into central source”

“Social media could be used more effectively. An accessible online providers network forum or central database – but searchable by locality”

There is an opportunity to think about how this can help support wider development of activities and options.

“Can such a tool be used to identify gaps in services – sometimes the issue is just lack of specific niche services in each area”

“Providers are not always good at promoting what they do, so involve providers as this could be a great promotional tool that will also enable networking”

“This tool needs to support the development of a diverse market for direct payments so people have real choice”

“A partnership model is needed that supports complementary community commissioning”

5. Second stage interviews

The trial site for *Herts Local* was distributed to a range of local agencies and individuals in early September. This included people interviewed in the first stage interviews and reflected a range of VCS and statutory services and people with both operational and strategic roles.

- GP surgeries in the Stevenage and Hoddesdon area
- The Community Navigator service
- Health and social care commissioners
- VCS provider and support organisations
- The lead for Personal Health Budgets and Direct Payments
- Social work teams
- Members of the IPC steering group

All were given between 3 and 4 weeks to trial with staff and were encouraged to share with others in their teams and to trial with live cases if possible. The pilot project manager spent time visiting teams and to introduce the tool and to encourage participation in the pilot and evaluation.

Feedback and interview findings

All had used the trial website for searches including dementia and friendship groups for older people, activities for carers and services for people with disabilities and mental health problems.

All but one respondent said that they had made successful searches and found relevant activities.

Question 1

The information contained on <i>Herts Local</i> is accessible and easy to understand		
Strongly Agree 7	Agree 2	Neither Agree or Disagree 1

Most of those interviewed reported that the information on the site was accessible and easy to understand.

“Really user friendly and easy to use”

“I liked the categories, search facilities and ability to search by day of the week”

“Liked the conciseness as not overloaded with information on the first page – Herts Direct is more difficult to follow”

Question 2

<i>Herts Local</i> is easy to navigate when searching for activities		
Strongly Agree 7	Agree 2	Neither Agree or Disagree 1

All but one of those interviewed felt it was easy to navigate

“Liked the search bar which is always visible”

“Liked the activity menus and the ability to focus on a locality”

“Very simple and excellent that it includes days of the week and contact information”

“Nice and clear – good layout and colours – however could not find a home button”

A number of respondents did however find that they felt the tool forced them to specify a day of the week which they felt was an issue and would limit searches. One in particular felt this was barrier to effective navigation.

Question 3

Using <i>Herts Local</i> will improve awareness of the range of activities available locally			
Strongly Agree 4	Agree 4	Strongly Disagree 1	Neither Agree or Disagree 1

Again, most of the respondents interviewed felt it would improve awareness of the range of activities available, although a number qualified their response recognising that it is a trial site at this stage and not comprehensive in terms of coverage. The two respondents who did not agree commented on the availability of existing online tools like Herts Help and the Herts Directory.

“I strongly agree that this will improve awareness based on the information that was collected to date and its potential for the future”

“It’s a work in progress but has potential”

“This depends on the way it is promoted and the way in which it is used”

“I don’t see the need for a separate website and in fact I think it makes people not finding things more likely”

Question 4

Using <i>Herts Local</i> will encourage workers to look for community-based activities as options for meeting low level health and care needs		
Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
7	2	1

Nine of those interviewed said that it would encourage workers to look for community-based activities. One strongly disagreed.

“There isn’t currently a directory for community activities like these”

“Workers do not know what’s available in a locality and the ability to search by location is helpful”

“Very easy to use and very clear”

“Looking at the activity types may prompt searches they hadn’t thought off”

“Not at all. Waste of limited resource for no obvious reason. The design of the community navigator service, based on Herts Help, allows GPs, to make a referral for the conversation with a navigator, without having to know even exactly what the discussion will be about. The navigator can then do the searching and they will use Herts Help”

“County wide and national services may often be more useful than local ones, but people won’t necessarily know to look for them. They may then help people access appropriate local services”

Question 5

This question asked if there were other activity types that should be included.

Most reported that there was a good selection identified. Some areas of need were felt to be under represented including activities for people with mental health issues, hearing and sight impairment and learning disabilities. Some additional activities and information about transport, keep fit and lunch clubs were requested.

One suggestion was that categories could be reframed to focus on outcomes and needs so that people can understand how it will benefit them. One respondent felt there was scope for more content related to sport and physical activities.

One respondent felt that it would not be useful to try and capture a full range of activities.

“Google will probably be more useful on many occasions than even Herts Direct”

The importance of navigators was highlighted by one respondent as reliance on an online tool would potentially lead to beneficial options being missed as the conversation and opportunity to explore issues further would not happen.

Question 6

Herts Local has the right information to enable workers to confidently refer people directly to community-based activities				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know
5	2	1	1	1

Most agreed that *Herts Local* would enable workers to be more confident about referring people. Two disagreed, one citing that having more than one database meant people would potentially have to make multiple searches. Another felt that it was too early to say.

“Specific detail is deeper than on Herts Direct, for instance times of operation, however I recognise it needs to be kept simple”

“It’s all good relevant information – don’t want it to be too long – this is a good summation of activity”

“Website is clear and includes relevant information such as the lead contact”

“Having two databases simply means you don’t know if either is correct without checking both which is extra work and not needed”

Question 7

Herts Local will help community-based organisations to attract new referrals / enquiries directly from the public			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
4	4	1	1

Most agreed that *Herts Local* would help increase referrals directly from the public. One disagreed comparing it to *Herts Direct* which “people are more likely to have heard of”.

“Herts Help already tried to do this but it has not really worked for us – it all depends on how it is promoted”

“This will depend on inclusion of contact details and keeping information up to date”

“It would be good to promote this with families to help them be more independent – they won’t always need or want support and can help themselves”

“Great way for them (VCS services) to show what they offer”

“It’s a tool that needs promotion”

“This will promote what they (VCS) do directly to people”

“Information partial and not well organised and people are much more likely to have heard of Herts Help and Herts Direct so where is the advantage of a separate site?”

Question 8

Question 8 asked what other information you would like to see captured on *Herts Local* to support referrals and enquiries.

Generally, people felt that the amount of information was right

“It says what you need”

“Good detail – don’t want to bombard people with too much information”

There was also some suggestions for additional features

“Can the tool enable buddying service to match people with others also interested in the same things, activities and providers”

“Can this include information about how it will benefit health and wellbeing and mental health?”

Question 9

<i>Herts Local</i> will stimulate the development of new community-based options			
Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
6	1	1	2

Six of the ten respondents agreed that *Herts Local* could help stimulate new options to establish, but this needed support. Two respondents disagreed and two said they didn’t know as this would be dependent on other factors.

“As it stands, I don’t think it will stimulate new development. However, it may support research and make it more attractive for providers to promote their offer”

“It’s so new so can’t know at this stage – but there is potential”

“Needs good promotion, marketing and branding”

“It will raise awareness, but then it’s how it’s used and whether new options can actually be funded”

“Not sure it would do this – I can’t see how?”

“It would need someone with an overview and the vision to fully identify gaps“

“Resources would be required although could be part of a wider noticeboard or community of providers. We could have a monthly bulletin to promote popular and new services”

“More duplication based on tribalism and ego rather than networking for the benefit of citizens. This risks missing the opportunity of using the community navigator service’s local resources to build local networks linked to Herts Help etc. If you want to make Herts Help feel more local slap logos/links on it that appear based on the postcode of the enquirer. True integration”

Question 10

<i>Herts Local</i> will encourage organisations and groups to connect and network with each other		
Agree	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree
4	5	1

Similarly, there was some difference in views when asked if *Herts Local* will encourage organisations to network. Most felt that they didn't know at this stage if it would. Four agreed with the statement, but only if promoted and supported through the development of forums or networking.

"In an ideal world it would but would still need support"

"It should do if promoted as a network"

"Needs to have a facilitated online forum or discussion group"

"Competition makes this difficult – would be nice but not sure how this would work"

Is there anything else you would like to add?

A number of respondents liked the tool and felt that it had potential to improve awareness of community-based options.

"Great and would like to see it extended and would like it in Hertsmere! We have iPads and can actively support people to view"

"Brilliant!"

"Think it's great and excellent – needs maintaining and developing"

"Will like to print out pages to give to people – the hardest thing will be getting it out there so people can use it"

"Good – very much enjoyed using it – eye catching"

There was also recognition that any tool needed to be integrated with existing initiatives in this space and developed within a partnership between the statutory and VCS.

"Needs to link with community navigators and social prescription. Needs to be more preventative – and not just in response to admission and crisis"

"If the problem is real then what is needed is to make Herts Help feel more local and ensure all the relevant local information is on there"

"Local stakeholders (should) feel Herts Help is theirs and take some responsibility for its improvement"

"I think people should put the effort into improving the networking of/with Herts Help and improving the content. It is then available to everyone who wants it. Herts Help will inevitably be the cornerstone of the STP's marketing of social prescribing and community navigation and if you are fully networked into that you save money and your citizens will have a better chance of finding what they need."