

Ask Cornwall project update

March 2021

Purpose of this report

- To provide the Board with a progress update following discussions at the January Board meeting.
- To share current thinking and recommendations on the future of the Ask Cornwall platform - *the management team consider the preferred option is to terminate the current Ask Cornwall platform and await the roll out of a new Healthwatch England provided platform in Autumn 2021.*
- To gain approval from the Board on proposed next steps

Background

After discussion at the January meeting, the Board requested further investigations be carried out looking at two principal options - a possible amalgamation of Ask Cornwall and Cornwall Link and ceasing activity in respect of Ask Cornwall.

MD subsequently held review meetings with Age UK and Made Open. Helen Newton supported this work with one day a week allocated to the review. This paper provides an update and recommendations on next steps.

Update on discussions with Age UK and Made Open

Two meetings were held with Age UK. One as an initial introduction to their participation in Cornwall Link and a further follow up to discuss outline considerations for a merger of the two sites. Three meetings were held with Made Open; a run through of the two sites; outline consideration of a merger of the sites and a discussion about resource allocation required for the merger, in line with the instruction from our Board.



Update on current Ask Cornwall performance

Significant further development of the platform is required to resolve outstanding issues including confusion as to the site's purpose for new users and reporting capability. Progress in implementing change requests to address these issues appears to have stalled.

The original objective of Ask Cornwall was to deliver an effective citizen panel with a representative sample of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly population, of circa 1,500 members to:

- Influence decision making and ensure better care and improve health outcomes
- Ensure influence brought to bear is representative of what matters to the local population rather than those with the loudest voices
- Demonstrate statistical rigour so Leaders appreciate consideration of it is genuine
- Target specific groups and localities to influence what is important to their geographic area
- Support a more efficient and joined up approach - something HC consistently hear is a priority for people
- Inform members on health and social care matters

Given the disappointing levels of engagement with the platform it has not been possible to achieve these objectives - *further user engagement statistics are given below.*

In addition, due to a lack of reporting functionality available from the platform, we have been unable to generate the desired statistics to show:

- Membership in demographic and geographic categories
- Segmentation by a variety of categories
- Frequency of interaction - distinguishing between passive members, contributor, endorsers, and enthusiasts
- Trending topics



- Respondents to surveys

User engagement

User engagement has been disappointing, with only 229 members currently signed up on the platform (a reduction from the 234 members at the end of January 2021).

Whilst proportionally, user visits would appear to be increasing when compared to 2020, returning visitors and member numbers are declining. Time spent on the site and the number of pages viewed have also more than halved whilst drop out/bounce rate has increased significantly from 55% to over 82%.

Period	User visits to the site	% of returning visitors	Pages viewed per session	Average session duration	Bounce rate
1 January - 31 December 2020	4,052	11%	4.42	3.58 mins	54.99%
1 January - 28 February 2021	1,077	4.8%	2.26	1.01 mins	82.37%

Member interaction on the platform is also minimal with only one new idea posted in the last three months and only 7 responses to ideas posted in the last year.

	Last three months	Last Year
Number of idea activities	1	13
Number of ideas submitted	0	12
Number of comments added	0	2
Number of comments added to ideas (replies)	0	7
Number of comments added to comments (replies)	0	3
Number of votes against ideas	0	21
Number of endorsements against ideas	0	11
Number of teams created from ideas	0	0



Considerations for a collaboration with Age UK

When considering a collaboration with Age UK, the following points are worth noting:

- Age UK Cornwall would become the lead software licensor and the primary contact with the Made Open team
- HWC would become a development partner/sub-licensor, operating through Age UK, with an associated reduction in licence fee, but would only have administration access to the platform
- All site amendments/change requests, usability issues etc., would be handled by Age UK with Made Open, potentially increasing their resource commitments for which they may wish to recharge HWC. A working process would also need to be established for feedback, campaigns, communications, member management and site moderation
- Additional development of Cornwall Link would be required, incurring additional costs, to ensure current Ask Cornwall functionality continues, including:
 - Enabling the Ideas, Events and Conversations features
 - Implementation of a sub-homepage on Cornwall Link to provide an appropriate landing page for Ask Cornwall members
 - Transfer of 200+ Ask Cornwall members and activity data
- An extension to the current software licence and support would be required until integration is complete, incurring additional cost
- As lead licensor, Age UK Cornwall would own the IP for all user-generated content and data (they would be the data controller), as such a data sharing agreement would be required, and Terms and Conditions would need to be updated
- The Made Open solution is still very much a ‘work in progress’ and requires ongoing revisions and improvements to achieve the required standard of functionality and reporting and as such a question mark remains as to whether a more purpose-built package may be a more effective solution for our needs

Financial implications of progressing a collaboration with Age UK



	% of cost to be borne by HWC	Cost
Development costs		
Development work required to integrate Ask Cornwall into Cornwall Link, implementation of sub-homepage	100%	£1,500 + VAT
Interim extension of software licence and support fee (per month) until integration has been completed	100%	£437.50 + VAT
Part time digital co-ordinator resource to manage transfer/integration from HWC side - <i>this role would need to be recruited to as the current temporary arrangement ends on 31 March</i>	100%	Approx £1,000 + on-costs
Ongoing costs		
Annual organisational licence fee as a 'development partner'	100%	£3,750 + VAT p.a.
Shared part time digital co-ordinator resource - (someone that has a background in communications, digital, engaging communities, and partnership building), plus management support and contribution to admin and overheads	50%	Approx £10,000 p.a. + on-costs
TOTAL		Approx £17,000 to include development and ongoing costs for one year

Recommendation based on platform performance and financial implications of progressing a collaboration model

Based on the evidence provided within this report, and given the continuing underperformance of Ask Cornwall, the costs to develop a 'fit for purpose'



solution from Made Open, and the question mark around whether the Made Open platform is the right one for our purposes, it is recommended by the Chief Executive Officer that the Board approves the termination of Ask Cornwall with immediate effect. In order to avoid incurring on-going licence fees we recommend that decision is communicated to interested parties immediately.

Risk implications of the proposed termination of ‘Ask Cornwall’

- EPIC paid £10,000 to become a ‘special interest partner’ for three years, 50% of which was paid to Made Open.

As Ask Cornwall has only been in operation for one year, it is possible that EPIC may consider that they are due a refund for the remaining two years that the agreement has left to run and the lack of delivery of the platform’s objectives to date - *however, see ‘Mitigation’ section for details of an alternative solution which may avoid this.*

- Seed funding was granted by NHS Kernow and Cornwall Council to support the development of the platform - if we are unable to recruit an online community whether because the platform is not user friendly or lack of engagement for other reasons we cannot deliver what we set out to, therefore the initial £40K development funding could be seen as resulting in no innovation.
 - *NOTE: Seed funding was given to ‘explore and develop’, and funded the Project Officer’s salary and fees paid to Made Open. This ‘exploration and development’ has concluded that this is not the right platform for our purposes, however we have acquired considerable knowledge, expertise and networking that can be transferred to an alternative (Healthwatch England) platform - see ‘Mitigation’ section for further details.*
- Heavily invested in developing public involvement - closure without pursuing potential with CL could be perceived as contrary to values - *unfortunately, the original objective of giving the public and providers an equal voice to exchange feedback has not been achieved due to the lack of engagement with and functionality of the current platform. In addition, the cost of continuing the current platform beyond the initial seed funding grant is not sustainable. However, the ‘Mitigation’ section contains details of a much more cost-effective alternative.*
- We may be seeking further support from the System to develop a public involvement framework which will require a digital element - closure may lead them to consider whether HC would deliver - *the System continue to be interested in engaging with a digital engagement platform and we will*



continue our networking with them, and other interested parties, to ensure other solutions are not overlooked - see 'Mitigation' section for details of an alternative solution.

- Back to square one in addressing our long-term goal of digitally enabling ordinary people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to share ideas, inform and co-produce Health and Social Care services - *however, see 'Mitigation' section for details of an alternative solution.*

Financial implications of the proposed termination of 'Ask Cornwall'

	Cost
Termination of the Made Open contract if cancelled on/by 31 March 2021	£0
OR: if no decision before 31 March - temporary extension of software licence and support fee to the end of April to allow the Board to make a decision at their next meeting	£437.50 + VAT
Refund of partnership agreement payable to EPIC <i>(3 year agreement for £10K of which one year has been completed, and £5K already paid to Made Open. We believe that EPIC would be prepared to transfer to a new platform although no formal negotiations have been opened yet)</i>	£0 - <i>subject to EPIC's agreement to transfer their partnership arrangement to a new platform in the Autumn</i> OR: potential refund of up to £3,000
There is no financial agreement with Age UK	£0
TOTAL	Maximum £437.50 + VAT - if decision not made by 31 March
	PLUS, potential refund to EPIC, maximum £3,000



Considerations for the termination of Ask Cornwall

- Liaison with EPIC to secure their agreement to closing down Ask Cornwall but transferring their partnership arrangement to an alternative platform in Autumn 2021
- Communication to and relationship management of partners/interested parties - Age UK, NHS Kernow, Cornwall Council
- Discussions to take place with Duchy Health Charity as a possible interested party in view of their commitment to Social Prescribing
- Communication to Ask Cornwall members and request for migration/continued participation in community activity of this nature.
- Preparation of reactive public statement

Mitigations to terminating 'Ask Cornwall'

Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England have acknowledged that since the start of the pandemic local Healthwatch have been forced to adopt a 'digital first' approach to engage safely with local communities.

They accepted that while face-to-face engagement will eventually return, we are likely to be restricted to online methods of engagement for many months to come.

In response to the increased levels of digital engagement already seen from the public they have launched a pilot of two community engagement platforms to further support this type of engagement.

Two platforms are currently being piloted by 10 local Healthwatch. The pilot is due to conclude in June followed by a period of evaluation.

Once evaluation is complete Healthwatch England will offer the chosen platform to all local Healthwatch at no charge, other than the investment in resource required to implement locally. All licence fees and ongoing support costs will be borne by Healthwatch England.

The platforms being piloted offer significantly greater functionality than the Made Open platform is capable of and as the development work will already have been completed implementation will require less effort than that required to bring Made Open/Ask Cornwall/Cornwall Link up to the required standard.

More specific functions of the Healthwatch England platform include:



- online forum discussions and breakout rooms
- surveys and quick polls
- petitions, questions and answers
- email marketing
- interactive mapping (using interactive maps to stimulate feedback/discussion)
- idea collection and voting
- a ‘hub and spoke’ approach, whereby data would automatically be shared with HWE, and advanced data analysis
- targeted engagement based protected characteristics and other demographic information
- multi-way communication between members, communities, partners and providers

Disappointingly the Made Open platform only delivers the first and last of these functions.

EPIC

From a general discussion with EPIC’s new Marketing and Communications Officer, they remain enthusiastic about the potential of a community engagement platform, particularly in relation to how it may be used to support and challenge EPIC’s work with SME’s in developing new and innovative health technologies.

The development of an improved, purpose-built platform, backed by Healthwatch England, would provide EPIC the opportunity to continue their involvement in a replacement solution.

RCHT

From initial discussions, prior to the pandemic, the RCHT Patient Experience and QI teams expressed an interest in looking at our platform offering. At that time discussions were paused awaiting further development documentation and the need to address a number of platform concerns. Many of the issues remain with the current provider, however the timings for the implementation of a potential alternative platform would enable the reopening of these discussions and the opportunity for a further partnership, especially as the Healthwatch England platform is likely to address the issues with the current platform provider.

Duchy Health Charity

We will continue discussions with the Duchy Health Charity to establish whether the funding offered for promotion of Ask Cornwall would also be available for working with the new Healthwatch England platform in the Autumn (via Trestadow CIO).



Summary of recommendations

The Board is asked to agree to:

- Immediate termination of our commitment to Ask Cornwall
- To inform Made Open of the decision
- To advise Made Open and Age UK that we will not be pursuing the option of the merger of the sites
- To advise other interested parties of the formal decision - RCHT, Cornwall Council and EPIC
- To continue to review progress with the HWE pilot with a view to seeking Board approval for an alternative platform at a later date and subject to finding internal resource support.

