

NHS OXFORDSHIRE

Interview with Sara Price, Communications and Engagement Coordinator



NHS Oxfordshire is responsible for consulting on and planning of health services for over 600,000 local residents. With a staff of approximately 2,500 employees, the trust contracts primary care services from 83 GP, 100 dental and 75 optometry practices, and controls a budget of £898 million.



NHS Oxfordshire is a forward-thinking primary care trust (PCT) with an ambitious vision for improving the health of its county. Key to delivering this vision is the effective engagement of the public and partner organisations to promote well being, support health management, provide a choice of high quality value-for-money health services, and deliver a transformation in local health services by 2012.

In 2009 the trust decided it required a more efficient, robust and accountable solution for engaging and consulting with the public and other stakeholders about its services. Under its commitment to World Class Commissioning (WCC), NHS Oxfordshire has a duty to involve and consult stakeholders when new services are proposed or significant changes are made to existing services. These consultations include

engagement and involvement activities with a wide range of stakeholders across Oxfordshire - including the public, patients, charities and other relevant groups - to ensure services reflect the needs and wishes of the diverse community served by the trust.

Although the trust had been very active in engaging with the public by going out into the local community to communicate important health messages through road shows, public meetings and leaflets, the back-end management of consultations had become a lengthy, inefficient process.

Sara Price, NHS Oxfordshire's communications and engagement coordinator explained: "Without a common consultation management framework in place, older contact information and past project records were recorded in multiple formats

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Sara Price, NHS Oxfordshire

and in a variety of locations. Each new consultation required a great deal of manual searching, duplicate research and time-consuming administration. We needed to use that valuable time more efficiently for targeted consultations focused on quality engagement.”

Consulting online

INOVEM empowers people and groups to work together better. Nowhere is this more important than in the health service. Towards the end of 2009, NHS Oxfordshire’s Communications and Engagement team deployed INOVEM Inclusionware to enable staff to consult online with greater efficiency, transparency, accuracy and accountability.

Inclusionware is specifically designed to help organisations such as NHS Oxfordshire manage complex consultation projects while streamlining their administration of large volumes of responses. The system is easy-to-use and simplifies the creation and management of online consultations providing a framework for continuous and meaningful engagement while freeing consultation managers from repetitive administration tasks.

Sara said: “Before deploying INOVEM we researched the market as well as speaking to partner organisations with experience of online consulting, such as the County and City Councils in Oxford. After seeing demos, Inclusionware stood out not only as the most intuitive software but also the most flexible for tailoring to the particular needs of a health trust rather than trying to shoehorn our requirements into a generic public sector planning system.”

NHS Oxfordshire has seamlessly integrated Inclusionware into its public facing website. A ‘Have Your Say’ tab from the homepage links directly to comprehensive engagement tools including ‘Talking Health’, the trust’s public involvement service, and ‘You said, We did’, an area that allows the public to discover how their comments and feedback in consultations helped tailor services.

“Online consultation is allowing us to reach a new and wider audience to enhance our offline activities,” said Sara. “It enables us to keep thorough, well maintained records of our engagement activities - what is being said and by whom. Importantly it allows us to build relationships with stakeholders who might find it uncomfortable or impractical to contribute in face-to-face meetings.”

“We’re using it for public consultations using structured documents, but we’re also using other tools such as quick polls to rapidly gauge public opinion on trends. Inclusionware allows us to hear the views of new voices that traditionally may not have been the loudest in the room.”

Efficiency is everything

The current economic climate has made it unlikely that funding for the NHS will increase at all over the next few years. Efficiency savings cannot be achieved without the full support of the public and staff, so an essential part of this process will include examining how easily and cost-effectively the trust can include staff and public in critical decisions about the future of health and social care services.

“Within our own team, we found Inclusionware very easy to pick up.

“Inclusionware supports us in both our Duty to Involve and our Duty to Report. Not only are we conducting quality engagement, we are also able to ‘complete the circle’ of consultation.”

Sara Price, NHS Oxfordshire

We had some basic orientation of the software before we were up and running. It significantly reduces the overheads of setting up a consultation and allows us to focus creatively on the quality of that engagement instead,” said Sara.

“It now takes one member of the communications and engagement team 30 minutes or less of clicking within the system to set up a very comprehensive consultation, whereas not long ago it required a team of people and a lot of wasted communication and duplicated effort.”

INOVEM developed Inclusionware to help agencies like NHS Oxfordshire coordinate all their consultation activities while avoiding duplication and providing a scalable framework for best practice and consistency. In time a self-maintaining stakeholder database is created that can be used to profile and target individuals and organisations for particular types or topics of consultation. It’s user-friendly, easy and quick to repurpose and inexpensive to roll out.

“We’ve had no problems at all with the public adapting to online consultation – for them it’s just a seamless continuation of clicking through our website. That gives us the confidence to think of even more creative methods of engagement, enabling further public involvement”

The Duty to Report

New legislation that came into force in April 2010 requires all NHS PCTs and SHAs that commission services to explain how they have acted upon feedback from patients and the public. This ‘Duty to Report’ is a legal obligation for all primary care trusts.

NHS Oxfordshire used INOVEM Inclusionware to create ‘You said, We did’, an area of the website that provides information on exactly how public views were used to shape decisions made by the trust in improving healthcare services across Oxfordshire and what was done or changed as a result of feedback given.

“Inclusionware supports us in both our duty to involve and to report. Not only are we conducting quality engagement with the public and stakeholders, we are also able to ‘complete the circle’ of consultation by being open about how their contributions affected our actions,” said Sara.

“We now have hard evidence - a robust system for recording and sharing not just what people said, but on what subjects and by which methods they’d like to be consulted in the future. Previously, we may have been over-consulting with some people and not reaching others. Now we’re building richer relationships.”

The shape of things to come

Local residents visiting NHS Oxfordshire online today are encouraged under the banner ‘Come and talk health’ to get involved with a constantly refreshed range of consultations, simply by clicking on a project that engages them. Technology is actively complementing face-to-face engagement and providing greater choice and flexibility for citizens.

“Of course public meetings, discussion groups and user forums will continue to be an essential part of public engagement, but increasingly we’re finding we can encourage a level of comment and feedback on policy through structured documents, for

example, that we simply couldn't achieve in any other way," said Sara

"All those comments are fed back into a single document with no further overheads in terms of gathering or amalgamating individual responses. Inclusionware does all that automatically, as well as generating reports, graphing and analysis following consultation."

Online consultation is working hard for NHS Oxfordshire. The trust believes there is huge interest across the public sector in adopting such innovative processes, and that it has already reaped many of the benefits

whilst other trusts may still be deliberating over deploying new technology.

"Inclusionware has definitely improved things greatly for us," confirmed Sara.

"We're finding more and more ways to use it, not merely to fulfil our duty to involve and report, but to engage with the public in a more effective way, driving significant efficiencies in the ways in which we consult, and making the whole process far richer and more enjoyable."

The screenshot shows the NHS Oxfordshire website's public involvement section. The main heading is 'Come and talk health'. Below this, there's a 'You Said, We Did' section with a 'You said We did' logo. A table lists consultations, with one entry for 'Website Refresh March 2018'.

Name	Status	Open Date	Close Date
Website Refresh March 2018	Closed	01 Mar 2018	31 Mar 2020

'Public Involvement & Engagement' services, including 'Talking Health' and 'You said, We did', integrate seamlessly into NHS Oxfordshire's website

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