

# E3



## ELECTRONIC APPROVAL OF BUSINESS CASES

NORFOLK & SUFFOLK NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

EAST OF ENGLAND, MENTAL HEALTH



FOR INFORMATION ON THE  
INNOVATION PROGRAMME  
[CLICK HERE](#)

# THE INNOVATORS

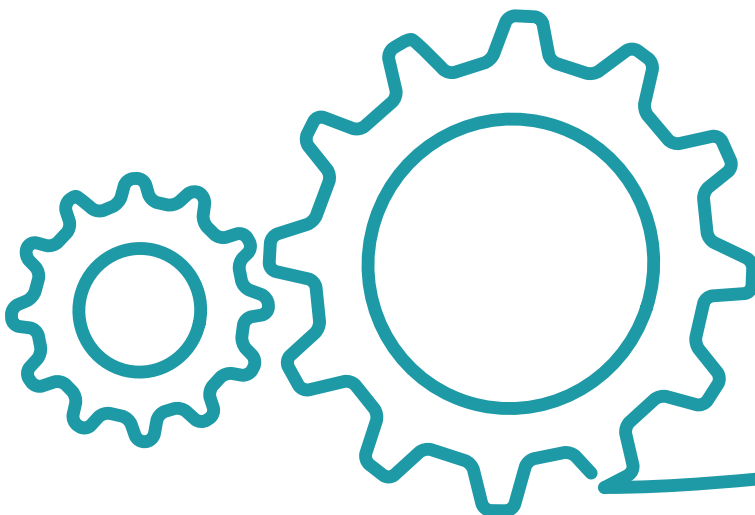
The strategic finance team and ICT systems support team.

## THE PROBLEM

The manual business case sign-off process does not allow users or management visibility of how many cases are currently in the system or where they are in the process of sign-off. With increasing hybrid working there is no effective way to flow the cases to those required to approve them and there is no simple process to inform departments when cases are approved. Business cases are not being approved and mobilised quick enough and there is no mechanism to set and monitor timeframes from submission to approval/ rejection.

## THE CHALLENGES

- How might we improve the manual business case process so that there is an easy way to track how many business cases there are and where they are in the system?
- How might we improve the quality of the business cases so that the executive team can allocate resources effectively to schemes that deliver real quality improvements?



# THE INNOVATION

- We worked with the ICT systems support team to create an electronic workflow system, via Power Apps. This is accessed through SharePoint, on our intranet.
- We set up a dashboard in the app so users could track their business cases and easily see what approver it was currently with.
- We reduced the number of approvers of business cases and avoided executive sponsors having to approve it twice. Deputies were assigned at all levels to avoid delays.
- We set rigorous and challenging timeframes (15 days) for approval and combined corporate department approvers, giving them only two working days to approve.
- We set a limit of 28 days maximum to approve in extra-ordinary cases following which the system rejects the case.
- We set up an email notification when business cases are approved so all departments and the owner are notified and can commence mobilisation of the scheme immediately.
- We set up a mobile app so approvers could meet these deadlines if they did not have access to their laptops. We listened to managers who submitted cases and learned from their experiences of trying to navigate the old process.
- We enhanced communications to the business and created clear, simple user guides, process maps and example business cases.
- We liaised with clinical commissioning group/ integrated care board colleagues to create a business case template that was fit for purpose for both organisations to reduce duplication and speed up funding streams/ external approval when required.
- We enhanced our training offer to the organisation and met with senior clinical managers to support them in producing quality business cases and avoid multiple changes or rejections in the workflow process.

# THE LESSONS LEARNT

## We learnt to:

- **reduce the approval process timings by combining stages, so that approvers could review at the same time rather than the business case having to be approved at each stage before moving on to the next person**
- **increase visibility of where the case was in the process via a visual dashboard as the initiator of the cases had no sight of where the case was in the process when it was their deliverable**
- **challenge ourselves in terms of timeframes for approval to allow funding to flow to frontline services quicker.**

## THE OUTPUTS

The 'tangible' products that came from our innovations were:

- a formal electronic process for tracking and approving business cases
- a user-friendly dashboard to clearly identify where the business case is at in the process
- a formal process map and timeframe signed up to be the executive team
- a robust business case template with helpful guidance at each section
- an 'example business case' to refer to when completing the template
- enhanced business case training documentation.

## THE OUTCOMES

The benefits to the organisation experienced as a result of the innovation were:

- faster approval of business cases
- greater awareness and oversight as an organisation of what services are requesting and what we are investing in
- quicker mobilisation of funding to frontline services
- improved quality of business cases submitted
- greater engagement between frontline services and corporate departments at the outset of the proposal leading to better strategic planning and faster mobilisation.

## THE QUICK WINS

- Start by liaising with your ICT system support team ensuring they have capacity to provide support.
- Identify the single point of failure and ensure the new solution resolves that. For example empower deputies.
- Start thinking about how you will communicate the new process; we have a business case section on the intranet.

# THE REVIEWERS SAID

**“DIGITAL APPROVALS ARE A BIG WIN AND WRAPPING THEM AROUND BUSINESS CASES WITH A SUPPORT PACKAGE OF TEMPLATES, GUIDANCE, TRAINERS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IS CERTAINLY ADDRESSING THE NEED TO IMPROVE BUSINESS CASE FLOW AND VISIBILITY.”**

**“A FANTASTIC INNOVATION AS THIS IS SOMETHING MANY TRUSTS STRUGGLE WITH. THE INNOVATION IS WELL THOUGHT THROUGH AND IS CROSS CUTTING ACROSS ORGANISATIONS INTO THE ICB.”**

**“HAVING A DASHBOARD ALLOWS THE BUSINESS CASES TO BE MANAGED BETTER, AND THE USE OF A MOBILE APP FOR AUTHORISATION IS DEFINITELY A POSITIVE. ”**



# WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

## SUBMIT INNOVATION

**If you recognise the problem stated and have implemented your own innovation** to overcome it please submit this innovation to the programme and give others more examples to learn from.

## REGISTER INTEREST

**If you recognise the problem stated and would like to know more details about this innovation in particular,** we will be hosting showcase and workshop sessions throughout the year, so all interested staff can gain ideas and inspiration from innovators in a manageable one-to-many format.

## SUBMIT PROBLEM

**If you have a problem but don't currently know of a solution to it,** then please submit it here and in 2022 the Forum intends to crowdsource solutions to problems that don't currently have known innovations.

## LEARN MORE

**If you would like to learn more about about the innovation programme** please click for more details.

## ENDORSEMENT DISCLAIMER

The Finance Innovation Forum's Innovation Programme asks NHS Finance peer reviewers whether the "Innovation overcomes, successfully addresses, or solves the problem identified". The programme does not endorse, recommend or provide any assurance of software used or mentioned in any of the published innovations. If you think a published innovation is being used to falsely validate a commercial product or company please contact [finance.innovation@nhs.net](mailto:finance.innovation@nhs.net)



## IN SEPTEMBER 2021 THE FORUM LAUNCHED...

- A national Innovation Programme for NHS Finance staff to submit their innovations for peer review. Successful innovations will be published and accessible to all on the One NHS Finance website
- A 'Software Skills For Finance Staff' event series taught by NHS Finance for NHS Finance including MS Excel, PowerBI, SQL etc.
- An 'Art of the Possible' briefing which explains two new technologies AI & Blockchain and discusses the opportunity for NHS Finance
- An Automation Group to review and improve the efficiency of existing national processes and returns

## WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Submit your innovations for peer review
- Sign up to be an innovation peer reviewer
- Read Art of the Possible
- Sign up for Software Skills for Finance
- Register your interest in automation and all things innovative

### Innovation Programme



### Software Skills



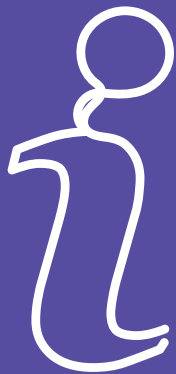
### Automation sign up



### Be a peer reviewer



### Art of the Possible



## FURTHER INFORMATION

Website: [FinanceInnovation.nhs.uk](https://FinanceInnovation.nhs.uk)

Email: [FinanceInnovation@nhs.uk](mailto:FinanceInnovation@nhs.uk)

LinkedIn: [One NHS Finance](#)

Twitter: [@OneNHSFinance](#)



One NHS Finance brings together the Future-Focused Finance, National Finance Academy, and the Finance Innovation Forum programmes and networks to make sure that everyone working in NHS Finance has access to skills, knowledge, methods, and opportunities to influence and enhance patient services.



An NHS Finance platform for the discovery and development of problems, ideas and innovations.