Supporting ICS leaders to harness the potential of the digital agenda

Paper 1: The emerging picture of delivering digital across ICSs

This is the first of our quarterly insights papers published as part of the Digital ICS programme. It plays back the key messages from our conversations and interviews with ICB leaders.

Over the summer we talked to a range of ICS leaders to find out more about what's happening in their systems, along with the challenges and opportunities that the digital agenda presents. We used this insight to help us design the support we're providing to help ICS leaders to achieve their four strategic purposes of integrated care:

- Improving population health and healthcare
- Tackling unequal outcomes and access
- Enhancing productivity and value for money
- Helping the NHS to support broader social and economic development

The Digital ICS programme provides ICBs with the strategic space to consider how to lead the digital agenda in their system. Whilst our offer is primarily to ICBs, we think that to have the most impact we will need to create a deeper engagement over time with each ICS. This will mean working with senior ICB leaders at an operational level and the wider integrated care partnerships (ICPs) too.

Digital as an enabler of transformation

Digital is a fundamental enabler of the overall ICS ambition and effective collective leadership of digital opportunities at a board level and at a system level will be a key driver of success for ICBs and ICSs.

Each Integrated Care Board (ICB) will need to create an ICS-wide digital and data strategy that drives 'levelling up' across the ICS and is underpinned by a sustainable financial plan. ICBs are expected to identify ICS-wide digital and data solutions for improving health and care outcomes by regularly engaging with partners, citizen and front line groups, and

invest in regular board development sessions to develop digital competence. These expectations are underpinned in the [What Good Looks Like Framework (WGLL)](#) which sets out how all ICS leaders should *promote digitally enabled transformation to efficiently deliver safe, high quality care*.

The ICB picture - what we heard

Our discovery research showed us just how varied and complex each integrated care system is - size, shape, local challenges. Some ICSs serve around half a million people, others up to 3 million, with health inequalities varying greatly across systems.

The configuration of providers, local authorities and wider partners also varies between systems, making the membership and delivery mechanisms for each ICB unique, with different place and provider collaborative arrangements.

Our discovery work highlighted an emerging set of examples and good practice stories as well as some consistent challenges. There was a strong desire from leaders to learn from peers in the sector and wider and to be able to dig deeper more effectively by asking the right questions about cyber, governance, policy, clinical safety and data management.

When we spoke to leaders over the summer we could see that many ICBs were still "forming and norming". Those more advanced were moving beyond set up and looking at system-wide challenges, whereas others were still agreeing what is best done where. Almost all are balancing immediate requirements with long-term transformation. Many had key posts still vacant, and were worried about how they might attract good candidates to those roles. Despite the variation in maturity and design amongst the 42 ICSs there were several key themes we drew out of our research.

A different form of leadership is required

A key challenge for ICB leaders is deciding what is best done where in the system - acting as stewards in the system. Done well, the balance is heavily weighted towards system convenor, not performance manager. To do this leaders across the system will need to create a culture of collective ownership of the digital agenda and alignment towards a shared mission, without duplicating what partnership organisations are already doing.

South East London has set out their key digital responsibilities as an ICS:
- Taking action where it makes sense to do so at ICS level (e.g. involving interoperable digital architecture)
- Taking a lead to test or de-risk an initiative, or to research different options or to bid for national funds

> - Taking ownership of issues where the responsibility for addressing them is either unclear or does not sit with individual organisations
> - Brining system-wide coherence and consistency through shared goals, targets or standards that our constituent organisations will then deliver
>
> Bringing organisations together where there are multiple interests to be managed, and potential trade-offs to be agreed regarding ICS-wide investment priorities. Read the ICS's digital strategy here.

Effective collaboration needs trusted relationships

ICB leaders know that to be effective they will need to work collaboratively with others across the system, building trusted relationships that enable leaders and teams to work together towards shared goals. This is of course easier said than done. There are opportunities here to build collaboration by starting small and then replicating - for example by creating new multidisciplinary teams around a problem which bring people from more than one organisation in a system together.

> *"Our role is to build a platform of trust. Organisations are sharing their data so that it is conducive to improvement, not to be performance managed. An ICB needs to set the overall culture and tone on this".* Sam Burrows, chief transformation and digital officer, Frimley ICB
>
> Frimley is building on the success of their Connected Care programme to give primary care a live view of ED attendances across the system. Read more

Developing a shared picture of population health is crucial

For some ICBs this is the first barrier to overcome. Finding, sharing and using shared data requires not just technical skill, but the trusted relationships and willingness to collaborate at every level across the system.

Getting this shared picture is a fundamental starting point for digital transformation and innovation. As with collaboration and trust there's an opportunity to start small and replicate, for example by focussing on one area of the population, such as in Surrey Heartlands work with over 65s on more than one waiting list.

> Surrey Heartlands' success has been underpinned by an innovative information sharing mechanism which uses a subscription-based agreement. Read more and access the agreement model here.

Finding and keeping the right digital skills and capacity is a shared challenge

Recruiting and retaining the right digital and data skills, from Board level through to effective operational teams is a challenge many ICSs face. Many leaders we spoke to didn't feel like their boards had the right skills and capacity to lead digital transformation well, and at an operational level were also concerned about capacity and skills for delivery. This is an area where ICSs will need to think about development of existing workforce, including their board leaders and clinician engagement, as well as about how to pool and share specialist skills between organisations at an operational level.

> *"We need to get capability and capacity right. ICBs shouldn't be afraid of digital being the driver for service transformation. Put it front and centre and invest in your teams".* Patricia Miller, Dorset ICB
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> Dorset is exploring ways it can host a single digital team across the ICS that will pool together the resources from the system's partner organisations. The ICB hopes this means the whole system has access to the best digital skills and capabilities.

Our offer

Our focus is on supporting ICS leaders to use the digital agenda as an enabler of delivery against their four strategic purposes - an integral part of the core strategic thinking.

Overall the Digital ICS programme will:
- Build digital awareness across ICBs – demystifying the digital agenda and showing the art of the possible
- Improve the understanding of board members – helping leaders to ask the right questions around strategy, cyber, governance, policy, clinical safety and data management.
- Challenge boards and build confidence and capability of leaders to assure themselves of digital delivery
- Share applied learning on specific topics such as population health management, shared care records and virtual wards implementation.

We bespoke our offer to each ICB, making use of case studies from peers and from further afield (different sectors and different countries) to inspire and connect leaders to best practice and the art of the possible.

Get in touch with us to explore the ways we can support your ICB.

About the Digital ICS programme

The Digital ICS programme is a free and voluntary offer for ICBs, thanks to funding from Health Education England as part of their Digital Academy programmes. It builds on the learning from the NHS Providers' Digital Boards programme which has engaged over 1,800 board members from 200 NHS trusts, including delivery of over 80 trust board development sessions.

The programme is available to all members of NHS Confederation's ICS Network, and will work closely with existing ICS forums to capture and share board level good practice and learning on digital transformation.

The Digital ICS programme is also being delivered in partnership with Public Digital, a consultancy that has experience of working with over 30 governments, global businesses, and multilateral organisations on digital transformation.