

Notes of the Data Ethics Committee (DEC) meeting 26th February 2025 via Teams

Attendees

Presenters

Nicola Mallett (Head of Profession for Data & Analytics, Essex County Council)

Treesa Carter (Senior Business Partner, Essex County Council)

Adam Thomas (Intelligence Manager, Essex County Council)

Katy Bennett (Senior Analyst, Essex County Council)

ecda members

Nicola Mallett

Jennifer Housego (ecda partner, Essex Police)

DEC members

Martine Clark (Chair)

Katerina D Hadjimatheou (Vice Chair)

Yani Tyskerud

Andrew Knott

Rosamund Powell

Iain Birtwell

Anton Beer

Robin Taverner

Karthik Durgaprasad

Helen Hitching

Essex County Council members

Femi Biyi (Project Support Officer)

Project overview

Essex County Council (ECC) is currently testing six proof of concept projects to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of different AI solutions in addressing different business challenges. The 'transcription' project is testing an AI technology called Magic Notes, which essentially records, transcribes and provides a summary of the recorded conversation. The social worker is then able to input notes into the case management system based off the summary provided by Magic Notes. ECC is involving 30 social workers in trialling this tool within Adult Social Care services.

The pilot is three-quarters complete, with potential for an extension. Two teams are involved: a discharge to assess team and a community-based team.

The project is seeking time savings in administrative tasks that can be used to relieve operational pressures within adult social care teams, increasing efficiency, allowing social workers to focus on higher quality work and complex cases. Magic Notes is intended to complement, not replace, the case management tool and social workers' judgment.

Conclusion from Committee discussion

Following the discussion among committee members, they agreed that the project is largely in the public interest and were satisfied with its intentions. They made a number of

recommendations (below) for consideration before the project progresses to the next phase or is expanded further within ECC.

Committee observations raised and responses provided:

- Committee members shared concern on the accuracy of the output given by Magic Notes. ECC advised there were ways to feedback inaccuracies to Beam, with Beam being very receptive to improving output.
- Pilot should address who has accountability of using this data should an issue occur.
- For social workers or adults who are using Magic Notes the least, there needs to be reassurance and encouragement in place to increase participation. A Magic Notes champion within ECC was suggested to help.
- Consider lessons learnt from social workers who have used other tools or been part of other pilot projects.
- Committee asked about the physical location of the cloud. Data safety is ensured by storing data within a private Amazon server in the UK. ECC assured this meant data was used for ECC purposes only.
- Different governance processes to be established if expanding to other services, such as children's services. Treesa, Senior Business Partner at ECC, clarified that the current trial is focused on gathering data only on adult social care experiences and case outcomes from using Magic Notes. Nicola, Head of Profession for Data & Analytics at ECC, assured that there are no immediate plans to expand Magic Notes, but any future expansion would consider the specific requirements of different departments. ECC have created a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to ensure that Magic Notes is safe and meets compliance standards, as well as using the ECC Data Ethics Framework to assess that Magic Notes satisfies the ethics standards and requirements.
- Accuracy of the tool raised; how well does the tool interpret written and spoken language, i.e. actual meaning vs intended meaning? They brought attention to the 4% inaccuracy which needed further investigation to avoid inaccurate notes being input into the case management system, ultimately impacting the case outcome, with decisions being made on the notes produced. ECC recognised this as valuable feedback and acknowledged that whilst mistakes can be made by both AI and humans when it comes to note taking, Adam, Intelligence Manager ECC, reassured the committee that social workers are encouraged to review the transcription produced by Magic Notes to verify its accuracy. Any inaccuracy in outputs can be fed back to Beam (Magic Notes parent company) via the support function within the tool. Adam highlighted that those authorities who had used the support function in their trials found Beam to be very responsive with an improved transcript being sent back within 24 hours.
- The committee questioned the data retention practices for Magic Notes. ECC advised they had set the retention period to the pilot's length, however the committee advised to ensure data availability beyond the pilot.
- The committee questioned what is being done to combat low participation rates? ECC offered reassurance that support is available to the social worker. Information sheets are provided to educate them on what Magic Notes is and how it uses information. The social worker is then able to offer better assistance.
- Service Managers are responsible for motivating social workers with low Magic Notes usage or consent rates. Their goal is to understand the social worker needs and ensure they gain the confidence to use Magic Notes effectively.

- The committee queried whether there was hesitancy from adults to disclose information, given that conversations are being recorded. ECC shared positive responses from other local authorities who found that being recorded gave the adults the confidence that everything they said was being heard, with nothing missed out.
- Committee raised over-reliance on Magic Notes as a potential issue. Treesa emphasised that social workers are encouraged to review the transcripts and due to saved time the worker can upload the notes on the system at a sooner date, closer to the interview date, and therefore have a better recollection of the conversation.
- Questions arose about how robust the project evaluation process was. Katy, Senior Analyst at ECC, advised the current project evaluation methods include pre and post-pilot surveys, Worker Logbook, Worker Surveys, Lived Experience Survey, to measure social workers opinions on AI, ease and comfortability with Magic Notes, impact it had on their work, and questions on accessibility.
- Committee questioned if ECC had a way of measuring success? ECC advised the threshold for success varies on the subject matter expertise and experience feedback provided by the social worker. The aim is to see if Magic Notes improves relationships and conversations with adults. This improvement would be considered a very important success metric, however it was acknowledged by ECC that there is currently no solid threshold to measure what success looks like. The Committee advised to think further about the success criteria, beyond just admin time saved.

ECC thanked the committee for their feedback and acknowledged the concerns. They reiterated that this is a small pilot project to understand the benefits of using Magic Notes and recognised the need for further consideration before expanding the project.

Project recommendations

- Gather more input from the adults/clients who have had their interviews recorded and transcribed by Magic Notes, to add robustness to the evaluation by including thoughts from people who will benefit from this technology.
- The committee stressed the need for a clearer success criterion, beyond just time saved.
- It was noted that the testing environment is an incredibly artificial environment, and the committee recommended further thought to be given to the research design.
- Reach out to other local authorities who have piloted Magic Notes to understand their lessons learned and use to inform ECC's pilot project.
- Share the DPIA with the Committee to understand the data flows and data processes, to ensure that there is good data governance in place.
- Committee seeking clarity on consent, there should be a separation from agreeing to the transcription and agreeing to summary. Consenting to the recording and consenting to the summary are slightly different.
- 4% inaccuracy which needed further investigation to avoid inaccurate notes being input into the case management system.

General recommendations

- Members advised that it is best practice to present proof-of-concept projects to the Data Ethics Committee at an earlier stage during.

