

Discovery user research report from the first 2 #VerifyLocal pilots

How to learn from your existing service users to build something better

The goal for user research during this phase of the project, as outlined in the [service manual](#), was to find out:

- who your users are
- your users' needs and how you're meeting them
- needs you're not meeting

Achieving this in the relatively short within the timescales of our discovery, and at sufficient scale, across all participating councils presented a challenge, especially given that most participating councils had never conducted user research for project discovery.

Our approach

1. We developed a discovery user research toolkit to help local authorities interview existing service users, map their experience of the service, and record these experiences and the associated needs they highlight. The toolkit includes:
 - a. [Guidance on recruiting interviewees](#)/users to get diverse feedback
 - b. [Interview prompts](#) for user researchers
 - c. [Permission form](#) for interviewees to fill out
 - d. [Guidance on how to capture users experiences](#) in a journey map format
 - e. [Guidance on analysing your findings](#), prioritising them and feeding them back to the service
2. We ran a training day for councils ([see our training day slide deck](#))
3. We collated everyone's interview results and discussed them as a team
4. We summarised the common themes in 2 high-level journey maps, one for each service we worked with:
 - a. Existing parking permit applications service [user research summary](#)
 - b. Existing older persons' concessionary travel [user research summary](#)

Timelines

How we did discovery user research collaboratively

To achieve scale quickly, we provided [training](#) for all of the participating councils early in the discovery phase of the project. Because we had between 7 and 14 councils carrying out research on the same 2 local services, we were able to conduct approximately 150 interviews with existing service users. And, we were able to analyse these findings and share them with their teams in just 2 sprints (4 weeks).

The value of this approach is not just in those numbers. For some, this approach encouraged collaboration between internal Local Authority teams that had not previously worked together. Other Local Authorities have been able to apply these approaches in other projects.

How you could build on our research

To build on these findings we recommend that you use our toolkit to conduct interviews with users of your service. Doing 6 to 10 of these interviews will give you a good understanding of how your users experience your service and where their needs might differ from those seen in the common findings. More interviews will then be necessary to properly capture needs that are unique to your local context.

How you could use our templates to research a different service area

If using our toolkit in a different service area, you'll be less able to build on the work done by our #VerifyLocal pilot researchers. You'll have done enough research when you understand the different kinds of people who use your service and what they need from it, including those with support and access needs. It is likely that you'll need to do at least 15 interviews to reach this point. You should aim to be speaking to users at regular intervals throughout a project, every two weeks is typical. This allows you to build an understanding of user needs over time and to answer new research questions as they emerge.

Summary of user research findings

What we've learnt about concessionary travel

[Older persons' concessionary travel user journey map](#)

Most notable were the relatively low levels of confidence and online skills of these service users. This presents a number of potential issues in terms of the usability of the service, as well as in concerns about privacy and security of digital services.

A very large proportion of those we spoke to were either unwilling or unable to complete the application process unaided and needed got help from a friend or family member. It is worth noting that those assisting were often unable to complete online transactions that required them to scan documents or uploading photos.

Initial awareness: Most were aware that they would be eligible for some form of concessionary travel, however, it was important for them to be able to check to get official confirmation of this before applying.

Some applied when they reached 'the age' and considered it a milestone in their life that they wanted to recognise. Others only applied when a circumstance changed which led to increased dependence on public transport.

Discovery & application process: From the outset, a significant proportion of those we spoke to needed assistance with the process. This was especially so where the application process had to be completed online. In most cases, this was provided by a family member or carer.

Very significant concerns were raised by this much older group about the difficulty and security of completing an application online. Most were unwilling to do so, preferring to visit a contact centre or apply by post.

The most common cause of issues in completing the application process was the need to provide documents to prove identity and eligibility. This problem was most significant in digital applications, with many unable to complete without assistance.

Processing & fulfilment: Once applications had been submitted users needed to know that they were being processed, as well as when they would be issued.

These users also tended to be less confident about their applications, and there was a greater need to know that they had completed the application correctly.

Renewal: Some users were concerned they would forget their renewal, so wanted to be reminded when the date was due. In most cases, when it came to renewing, users were disappointed to have to complete another full application, as they thought their information would have been saved.

What we've learnt about residential parking permits

[Parking permit applications user journey map](#)

Users of these services came from a much broader demographic, and showed a much broader range of skills and confidence.

Though this more digitally confident user group results in slightly lower barriers in moving to digital channels, many of the same problems persist, especially with providing documents as evidence. These issues were especially acute in households where the car registered keeper of the car wasn't paying the bills, such as with younger car owners.

Awareness & discovery: In most cases, users were aware of the need for permits. What was less clear was how or where to apply and exactly what permit to apply for. In areas with a two-tier local government structure, it was not always clear who to apply to.

When seeking information about application most users visited the council website or phoned the council. Some visited GOV.UK, however this did not always provide the correct information, especially under two-tier local structures.

It was at this point that users decided how to complete their application. A significant number of those we spoke to were less confident online, and needed significant reassurance to complete a digital application process.

Application process: The most common cause of issues in completing the application process was the need to provide documents to prove identity and residency. This problem was seen with both digital and paper-based applications, but the impact was most significant in digital applications.

A few users were only able to complete digital applications with assistance from friends and family, whilst others struggled to provide sufficient evidence of their eligibility.

Processing & fulfilment: Once applications had been submitted users needed to know that they were being processed, as well as when they would be issued. This can be a difficult time if the user has to make alternative parking arrangements whilst waiting for their permit. Some users contacted their council to find out what had happened to their application, as it was not clear to them at this point.

Renewal: Some users were concerned they would forget their renewal, so wanted to be reminded when the date was due. In most cases, when it came to renewing, users were disappointed to have to complete another full application, as they thought their information would have been saved.