

Public Law Alpha: User research digest

28 August 2018

Summary: work done

- 7 sprints with in-person interviews and observations, telephone interviews and 2 surveys
- Sprints 1-3 focused on testing the concept of putting the form online (13 HMCTS, 7 local authorities)
- Sprints 4-7 focused on how can we make the whole process better and where best to focus our efforts (13 HMCTS, 12 local authorities, 3 judges)

Summary: biggest pain points

- **Lack of clarity around 'urgent' leads to wide variation in number of applications requesting a hearing within 2 days**
- **Poor information design on the form leads to information not being entered or being missed when reviewed**
- **Missing or unclear information leads to delays due to having to go back to local authority**
- **Form not asking enough detail leads to hearings being postponed (eg which party needs an interpreter and in which language)**
- **PDF isn't accessible and when emailed can be sent to the wrong email address. This also presents security issues**

Summary: findings

User research headline findings:

- The principle of making the form an online service is supported by evidence and positive feedback
- 'Urgent' is a nebulous term that means many things to many people. This resulted in the most investigation and design iterations to unpick and plays a large part in why courts find it difficult to process some C110a applications
- By removing duplicate and unnecessary information Alpha research suggests we can get entry time down from 1-2 hours to 20-30 minutes. *(This will be validated in Beta with real experiences)*
- Gatekeepers largely base their allocations on few core criteria and we will look into how we highlight these criteria this further in Beta
- Knowing 'in progress' applications has its uses but we need to refine who can see them plus at what stage an application becomes visible to HMCTS
- There's a case for flexibility for more than yes/no answers, with Beta to explore this further
- There's a case for flexibility in permission to go to the next step of the service to account for how courts work
- Due to the current PDF based process this serves as a natural barrier to accessibility which has made recruitment of accessibility or assisted digital users in Alpha difficult but we will address in Beta

Summary: to be done

Themes we explored in Alpha to the point we were satisfied with the concept and will explore in detail in Beta:

- One size does not fit all and the flexibility we offer
- Urgency and communicating key information
- What makes a minimal viable application?
- How does an online service work with team workflows?
- How will this test with users with accessibility or assisted digital needs?

Some of these will depend on further discussions with:

- HMCTS Policy
- Judicial User Interface (JUI) team
- President of the Family Division (who sets guidance to HMCTS)

Summary: needs

- **Users in general need to:**
 - **Know what the next step is, who it goes to and what the expected action is**
 - **Pass work to colleagues to comment or review and to let them know when it's available**
 - **Be able to work without being held up waiting for an approval**
 - **Have a more flexible choice than just a yes/no to questions and answers**

Prime user

The child

Although we have focused on the needs of local authority lawyers and HMCTS Gatekeepers and admin staff, the ultimate beneficiary of an improved service will be the child who is the subject of the care order.

Problems to solve

- **Providing a streamlined, intuitive online application process will increase efficiency by capturing and promoting only relevant information, reducing error rates, and notifying relevant parties more quickly to enable better resource management.**
- **Offering applicants more options for 1st hearing urgency, between the current extremes of 2 and 18 days, will reduce requests for ‘urgent’ listings, alleviating stress on the early part of the process, and enabling more effective capacity management.**

What we can do

In general user research examined:

- Whether making the PDF form an online service made for a smoother service
- What areas of the existing form weren't needed for allocations and which areas needed expansion
- How can we design out problems (such as around presenting information)
- What are the issues around urgent applications and what this term meant to different users
- What are the main pain points and what are the workarounds
- How does the real user journey differ from the real experience

Main Discovery Epics addressed in Alpha

User	Segment	I need to...
Local Authority	Legal team	Ensure I only submit the information that is needed to consider the application
Local Authority	Legal team	Provide data in a simple, quick, efficient way - without re-keying
Local Authority	Legal team	Know what information is expected of me for the application
Local Authority	Legal team	Consistent guidance as to what constitutes an urgent case
HMCTS	Legal Adviser	Assess the application information in a logical and intuitive order
HMCTS	Legal Adviser	Understand immediately the complexity of the case (for tier and allocation)
HMCTS	Legal Adviser	Be able to make my decision based on only the information supplied to me
HMCTS	Admin	Avoid re-presenting the application information to the Gatekeeper
HMCTS	Legal Adviser	Automate outputting of Standard Directions

Users

Users in scope

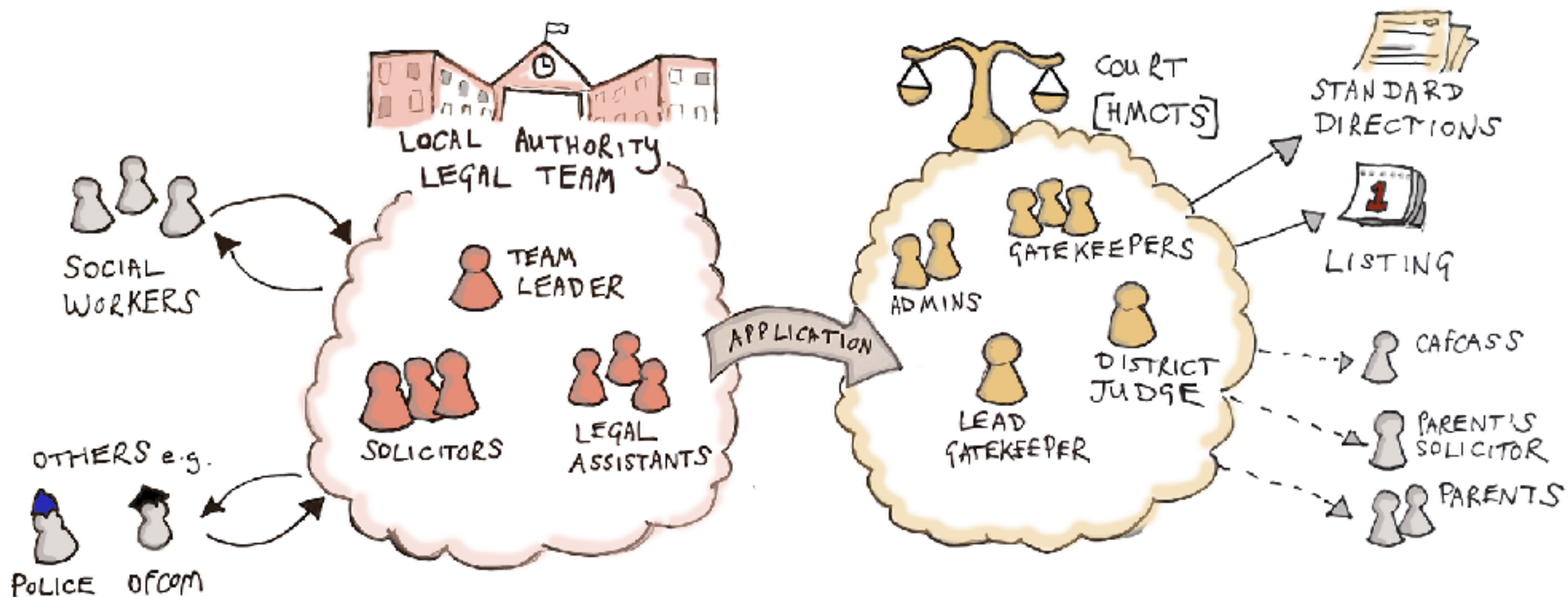
- **HMCTS:**
 - Legal advisers
 - Administrative staff
 - Judges (mostly out of scope but a circuit judge and gatekeeping district judges were consulted)
- **Local authorities:**
 - Solicitors
 - Legal assistants

What we learnt about users

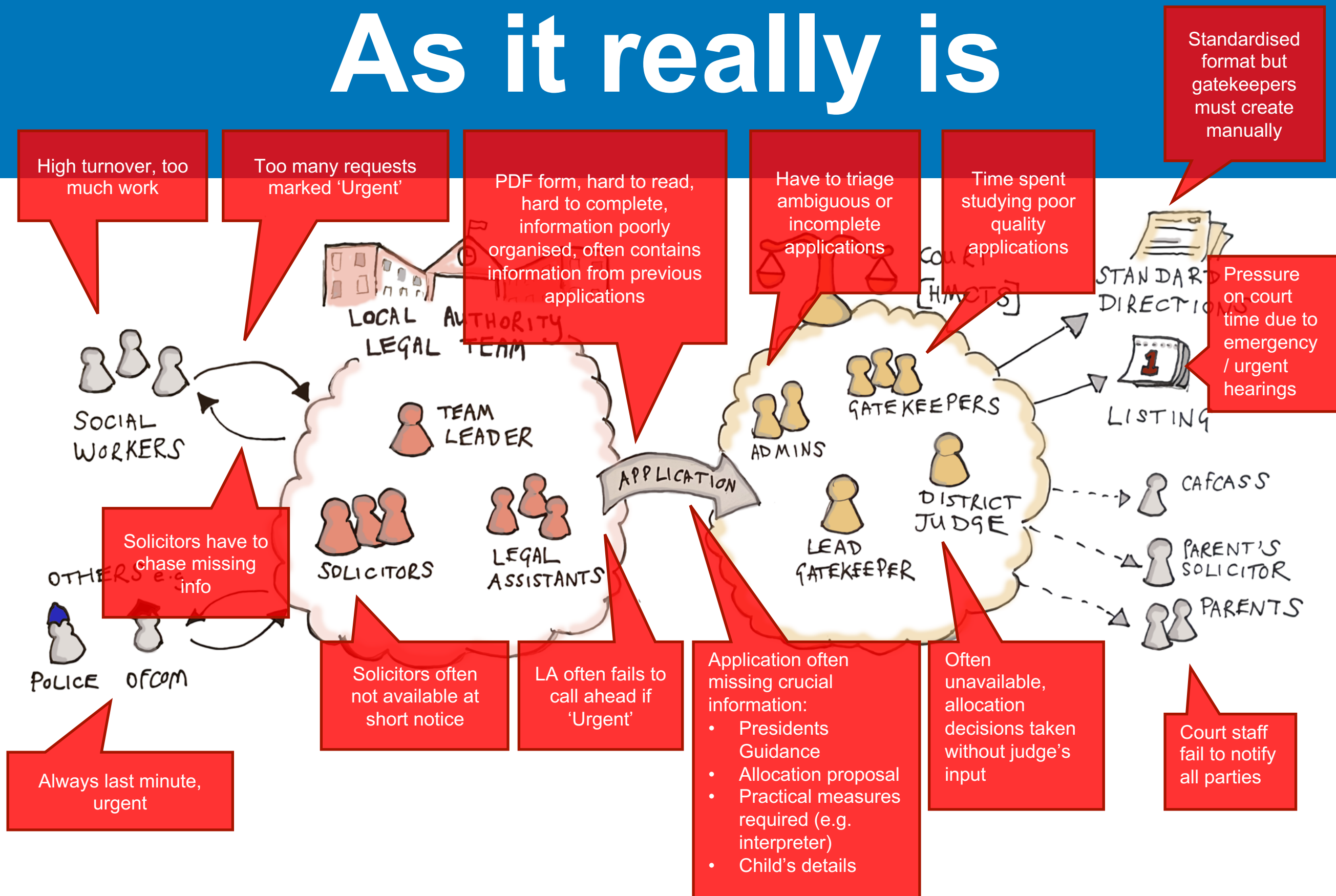
- All:
 - Very few identify as having accessibility needs (expect around 3%) and fewer for assisted digital due to current online PDF processing. This meant most users we met were on 7 to 9 on the digital inclusion scale, although we are looking to find others beyond this
 - Work in teams with tasks passed between members
- HMCTS:
 - Admin staff do a lot of the pre-triage work and Gatekeepers and judges depend on them to help filter applications
 - Division of labour with Gatekeepers leaving as much admin to others (either admin staff or asking local authorities to send draft Standard Directions)
 - Very pushed for time due to number of cases being heard
- Local authorities:
 - Applications vary from up to 8/day in London to 1/month in north Wales
 - Vary from a single solicitor completing it to a team of legal assistants, social workers and solicitors completing the form in sections as a team effort
 - Tend to put in urgent if requested by social worker to bump application up the queue
 - Don't always complete the form completely due to lack of knowledge on how to complete or lack of access to things such as the President's Guidance
 - The decision to apply is only made after a long process of discussion and interaction with social workers

User journeys

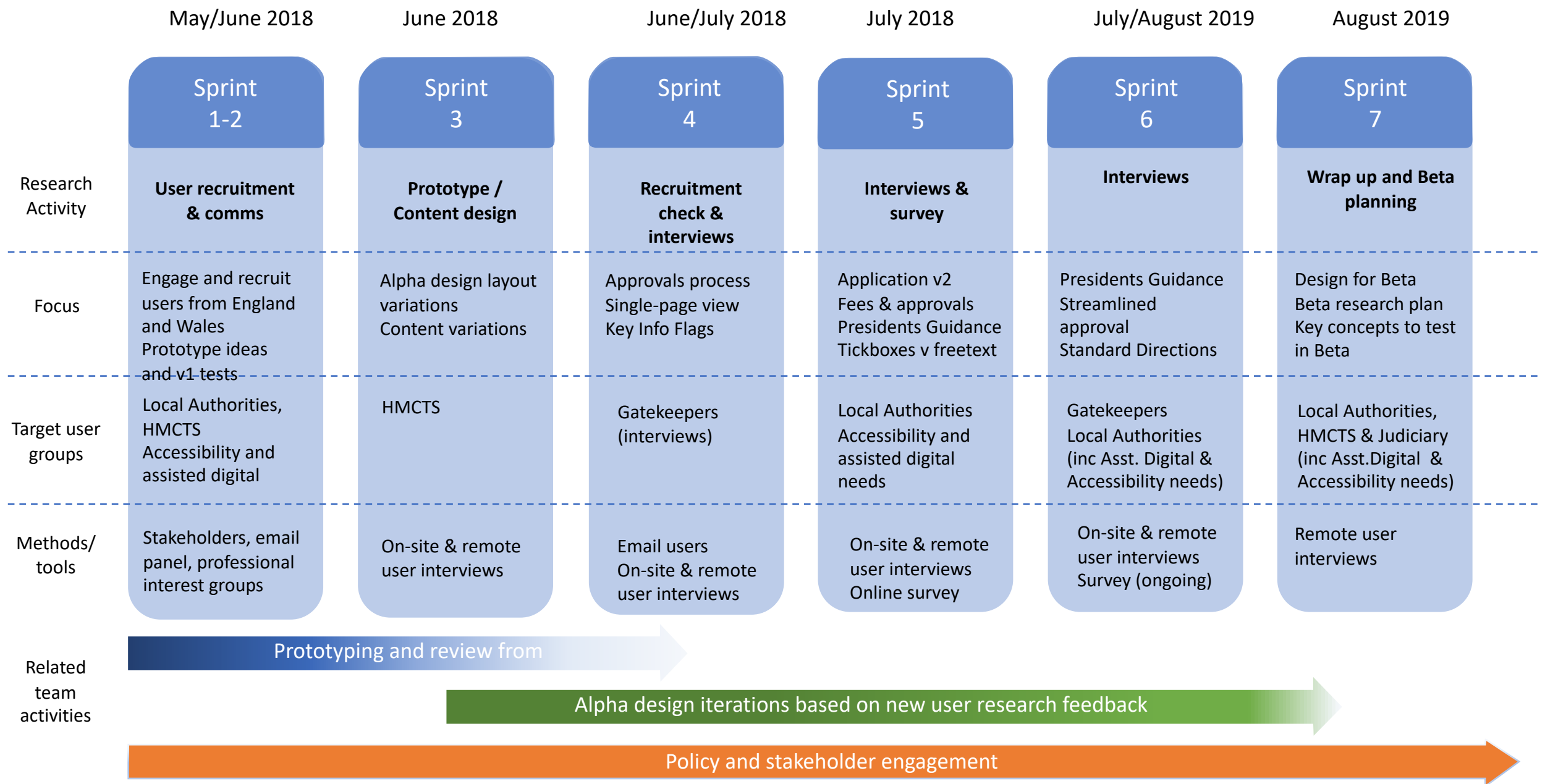
The ideal



As it really is



Public Law Alpha Research Plan



Sprints 1-3

Hypotheses

“By making the C110a form an online service we can make the application and allocation more efficient”

“By reducing the burden of questions answered by local authorities we can get better information to gatekeepers”

**Design changes
(board)**

Main findings

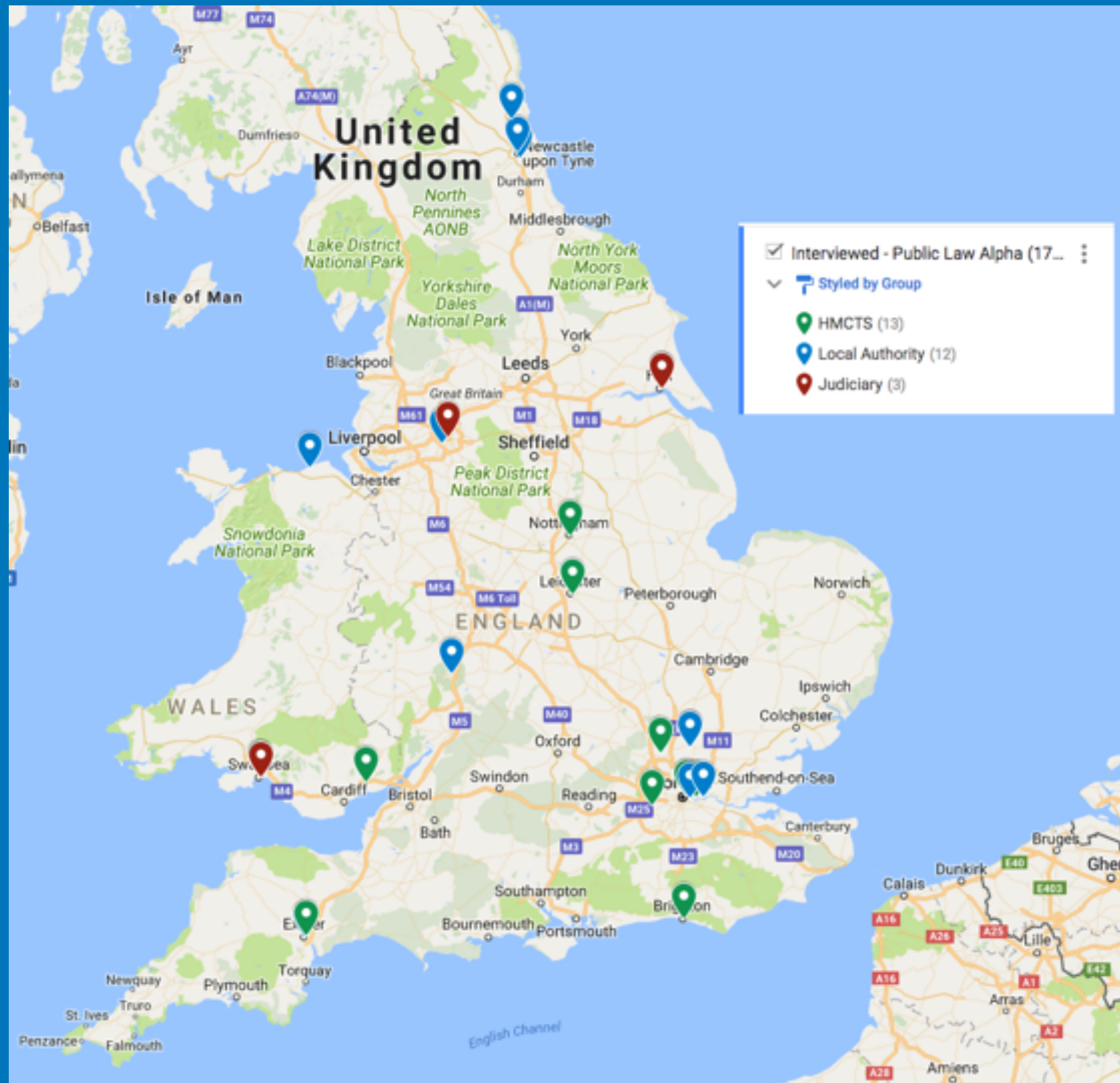
- Local authorities and Gatekeepers generally happy with making the C110a form an online service
- We have scope to reduce some of the questions asked as not all are needed (caveat: Policy team to be consulted but positive)
- JUI interface for Gatekeepers less than ideal, information still seen as confusing
- HMCTS has problems knowing what applications may come their way and planning for urgent hearings
- GDS principle of one thing per screen not appropriate for local authority professional users
 - Compare with C100 form which is citizen facing one-thing-per screen and takes 45 minutes compared with our 20 minutes

Design changes made

- Redesign of information entered into local authority application
- Complete rethink of Gatekeeper view - away from JUI tabs to a single page view
- Introduction of 'in progress applications' section
- Added link to President's Guidance to see whether it was useful
- Summary flags

Sprints 4-6

Users interviewed



Hypotheses

- “By removing some questions and adding new check boxes we are neither removing key information nor making it too cumbersome for local authorities to complete”
- “Placing the essential information about the application upfront in the form improves cohesiveness of the overall argument put forward and allows gatekeepers to assess applications ‘at a glance’.”
- “Having the Gatekeeper information on one screen provides all the information needed and is intuitive enough to issue a standard direction without seeking help”

**Design changes
(board)**

Main findings

- In progress applications - there is a need for them, but the users who need to see them, when and what they can see is to be explored further
- 'Urgent' isn't good enough a term - this is effectively an opinion, we should explore turning it into something tangible (eg hearing date needed, application applied for)
- Adding a hard-lock approvals page that a judge must log into to approve is a blocker as it's too inflexible
- Yes/no is not always the answer - binary answers can create a false belief that something is a fact when it's not. We need to expand capabilities of the online form to reflect current concerns and issues with the form(eg deceased parents, confidential addresses)
- There's a case for having a summary for Gatekeepers of key application information but the information in there is still to be decided
- Getting a Gatekeeper to list a hearing at the same time as an allocation proposal is not working
- The link to the President's Guidance was very useful to local authorities and Gatekeepers and now we need to work out how best to display it

Design changes made

- **Removed the approvals screens for Gatekeepers and judges**
- **Changed the placement of next step buttons to make it flow better with the workflow**
- **Changed information shown in in progress applications**

Version 2.1

Welcome Laurie Taylor

Dashboard

New applications

View new applications, make your allocation, list for hearing and then you can issue standard directions.

Application	Hearing	From	Type	Date	Action
C110A 00388	SAME DAY	Borough of Southwark	Care and EPO	20 Jun 2018	View
C110A 00382	3 DAYS	Borough of Camden	Care and EPO	20 Jun 2018	View
C110A 00383	5 DAYS	Borough of Fulham	Care order	20 Jun 2018	View

Cases in progress

View case information, directions status, view order, ask questions, issue directions order and more.

Case	Status	From	Type	Date	Action
PL00388	CMH scheduled	Borough of Southwark	Care and EPO	20 Jun 2018	View
PL00388	CMH scheduled	Borough of Fulham	Care order	20 Jun 2018	View

**User needs (high
level)**

Themes of needs from Alpha

- Users in general need to:
 - Know what the next step is, who it goes to and what the expected action is
 - Only deal with what is needed and at my expertise level
 - Do as much work as I see fit without waiting on someone's authority to proceed
 - Know who has made a decision or given authority
 - Have urgent defined in terms of work to be done and by whom
 - Pass work to colleagues to comment or review and to let them know when it's available

Full needs are detailed on [this spreadsheet](#)

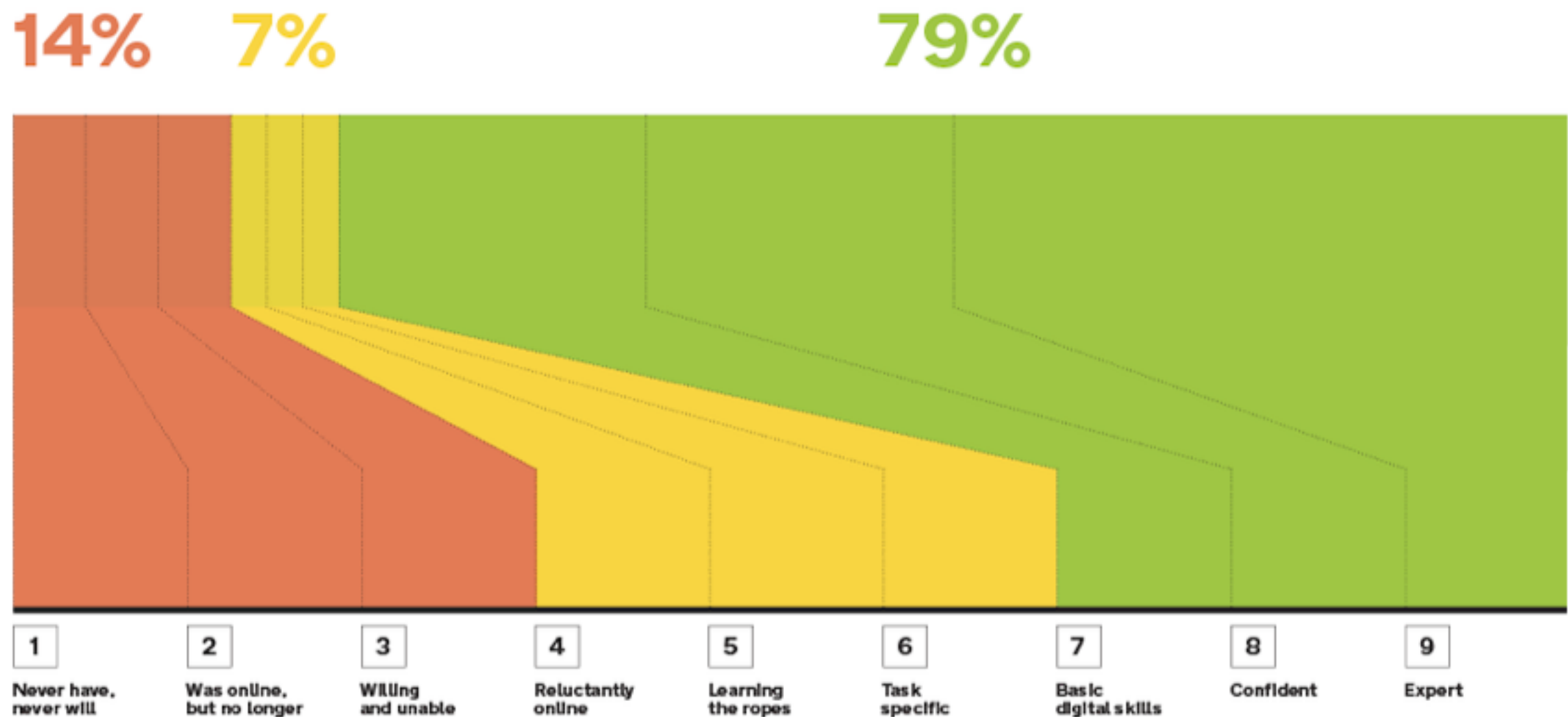
Accessibility Needs

- We have access to a panel of 105 target users (Local Authority Solicitors & HMCTS Gatekeepers)
- We polled them asking if they had any physical or other conditions which affected their computer use
- Of the responses received no one stated that they had any such conditions
- We therefore need to take a more targeted approach to recruiting users with accessibility needs in Beta eg we are currently working with HMCTS Reform Family Law team to reach out to professional groups for legal professionals with disabilities

Assisted Digital Needs

- We believe that Local Authority participants in our research average 7-8 on the 9-point Digital Inclusion Scale (based on researchers' observation, not questionnaire responses)
- The distribution of presumed scores was narrow, the highest being 8.5 and the lowest being 6.5
- In conversation with other legal professionals and in the course of onsite visits, we did encounter some evidence of (mainly older) team members who:
 - were nervous at the prospect of new digital services
 - preferred to dictate for colleagues to 'type up'
- This highlights that our panel is currently made up of volunteers who are generally positive about the prospect of new digital services
- It is clear that in Beta, we need to engage with all the members of each participating Local Authority team so we can better understand the extent of AD needs within the overall user population

Digital Inclusion Scale: UK population & Local Authority users



Design principles for Beta

- The computer can never say 'no' and block an application. This is vital as some cases go from application to hearing in 2 hours
- The next step is clear and what the action is and who will act on it is clear
- The hierarchy of information for both entering the information and reading it means that key information for making an allocation is completed/presented first

To explore further in Beta

- Urgency - how can we best get away from a qualitative 'urgent' to terms and tasks that are clear to users?
- How can we best summarise a case and communicate information and what makes a minimal viable application?
- How does team workflow and jobs to be done fit into an online service aimed at single users? *(Will work with JUI/PUI too as this is wider than just Public Law)*
- Lack of one size fits all for this - how flexible or editable does our service need to be while allowing for traceability of applications?
- Accessibility and Assisted digital - though we worked to recruit users we did not find any and this needs to be addressed

Public Law Beta Research Plan

