

Cambridge Centre
for Housing &
Planning Research

FirstStop Evaluation

Summary to DCLG

July 2014



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

1) Summary of research

Evaluation of FirstStop

The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research at the University of Cambridge has been undertaking an independent evaluation of the FirstStop service since November 2009.

Previous reports from the evaluation can be found at:

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010>

The evaluation has covered four broad areas:

1. Outcomes for service users

This has focused on what the impact of the support received from FirstStop has been for the individuals who have used either the national or a local housing options service.

2. The FirstStop model

This has focused on the development of the national/local network model through which information and advice is provided.

3. Savings to public budgets

This has focused on identifying potential savings to public budgets of the local housing options services.

4. Broader outcomes relative to housing, health and wellbeing agendas

This has focused on identifying broader outcomes generated by the work carried out by FirstStop, for example, awareness raising of the role of information and advice and housing options.

1.1 Methods

The research has included:

- Literature and policy review
- Postal survey of 1000 users of the national service (feedback on service, issues looking for help with and outcomes), 30% response rate
- Interviews with 60 users of the national service (feedback on service, issues looking for help with but more focus on outcomes)
- A web survey of users of the FirstStop web pages was piloted but did not prove effective
- Interviews with national FirstStop partners
- Interviews with national FirstStop staff

- Analysis of national CRM data
- Analysis of other monitoring data
- Analysis of progress against DCLG targets
- Feedback and support to improve data collection and monitoring
- Analysis of unit costs of the national service
- Analysis of unit costs of the local projects
- Evaluation of the national training programme
- Interviews with different rounds of local partners and other local stakeholders
- Analysis of local partner monitoring data
- Analysis of samples of client case information to identify outcomes
- Analysis of local partner successes and challenges
- Interviews with service users of local partner projects (focus on outcomes over longer term)
- Interviews with service users of MMB local projects (focus on outcomes)
- Analysis of costs and potential savings to public budgets of local projects
- Dissemination of research

1.2 Gaps in research

Gaps in evidence include the outcomes for people who used the local projects and were Level 1 and Level 2 cases. These are the people who received information and advice in group settings or where contact was brief and/or one off.

A further gap in evidence is the long term outcomes for people who received different levels of support from the national service. The postal survey and interviews with people who had contacted the national service (by phone or email) collected information about outcomes as far as possible but a key issue is that outcomes can take a relatively long time to happen e.g. moving house, and the research has not tracked people over longer time scales. There is also little evidence of the outcomes for people who accessed information and advice through the website.

In part this gap will be tackled with the proposed next stage of the research which will interview a sample of service users who received different levels of support to discuss outcomes and test the viability of attributing outcomes to the information they received. However, these are proposed to be one off interviews and the sample can only cover a certain range of presenting issues/demographic profiles/types of support received from what is a large number of service users. Without robust evidence on outcomes for users of the national service it has not been possible to explore potential financial savings.

1.3 Next stage of the research

This section outlines what has been planned for the next stages of the research in case a change of emphasis is required in discussion with DCLG.

Two reports have been produced for the 2013/14 research, both focusing on the local partners. One has been published (focusing on progress, outcomes, organisational issues) and one is complete in draft and was presented at the local partner conference (focusing on

unit costs and costs and potential savings of outcomes), but will need updating as more data is collected from the partners as the projects progress.

Planned research for the next stage is an evaluation of a sample of national telephone cases for attributable outcomes to test the viability of evaluating the value for money of the national service. The cost side of how much an interaction costs is relatively straightforward but benefits are more difficult to identify. The proposal is for interviews by telephone with a sample of people who have used the national service. The cases dealt with by the national service are categorised into one of seven categories by the FirstStop advisors. The proposal is to interview a small sample from each category (maximum ten for the 6/7 categories), starting with pilot interviews with category 6/7 which have the greatest level of complexity and degree of contact with the service to test whether outcomes can be identified through a relatively small sample of interviews. The interviews will inevitably pose challenges in collecting information about outcomes, for example, if contacted soon after receiving support from the FirstStop service people are very likely to remember the support provided but may not have yet taken action, but after a longer period of time are likely to be less clear about who supported them or may have moved which means they cannot be contacted. These issues were raised in the initial 60 interviews with users of the national service in an earlier phase of the evaluation.

Further research is also planned to evaluate the benefits to local partners of the FirstStop package of support:

- Interviews with current round of funded local partners (completed)
- Interviews with (previous) local partners who remained connected to FirstStop without funding.
- Interviews with previous local partners who decided not to remain connected to FirstStop without funding.

2) Summary of key findings on successes and outcomes

There is clear evidence of demand for the FirstStop information and advice service and the number of service users has grown year on year.

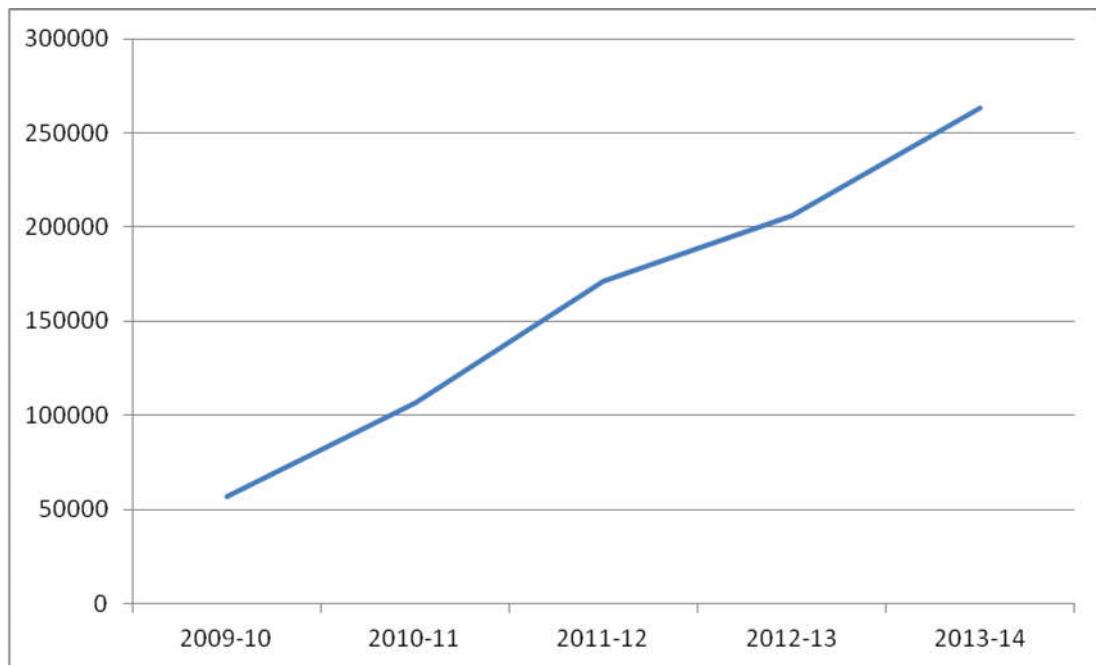


Figure 1: Total number of service users through all channels by year

Overall since the FirstStop service began in late 2009 it has provided information, advice and support more than 800,000 people through the website, national helpline, local projects and peer to peer support, as shown in the tables below.

Whilst FirstStop is primarily funded by DCLG, funding from other sources has also been levered in to support the service, for example, through the Comic Relief funded Managing Money Better project. The figures below show the total number of people provided with information and advice through all channels and the estimated number of people who were supported directly by DCLG funding.

	All clients				
	Website	National	Local	Peer-to-peer	Totals
2009-10	46,347	10,432			56,779
2010-11	91,407	14,421	1,069		106,897
2011-12	150,856	18,191	1,902	230	171,179
2012-13	184,575	18,020	2,795	466	205,856
2013-14	238,813	20,355	3,879	453	263,500
Totals	711,998	81,419	9,645	1,149	804,211

Table 1: Total number of service users through all channels

	DCLG funded clients				
	Website	National	Local	Peer-to-peer	Totals
2009-10	46,347	10,432			56,779
2010-11	91,407	14,421	1,069		106,897
2011-12	150,856	18,191	1,902	230	171,179
2012-13	184,575	18,020	2,545	466	205,606
2013-14	238,813	17,050	2,362	453	258,678
Totals	711,998	78,114	7,878	1,149	799,139

Table 2: Service users through all channels directly supported by DCLG funding

2.1 Outcomes for service users

The evaluation has identified a range of types of support received by service users. These include:

- Signposting to information and/or services.
- Information and advice provided.
- Support in decision making.
- Advocacy on service users behalf.
- Benefits checks and financial information and advice.
- Changes to more appropriate care packages.
- Supported to move to more appropriate accommodation.
- Supported to stay in their current home e.g. adaptations (Burgess et al, 2011¹).

The research also identified a number of benefits to the individuals who used the services:

- Feeling more confident in making decisions, feeling more informed and more able to choose between different options.
- Clients were supported to stay in or move to the accommodation of their choice, empowering them to live in the housing that they felt suited them best and giving them wider choices.
- Prevention of housing related health problems e.g. falls and unplanned and unwanted moves into care homes.
- Some clients were financially better off through receiving financial advice and/or benefits checks.
- Maintaining independence.
- Reduced anxiety.
- Improved wellbeing and quality of life.

The casework service has received positive feedback from clients and a range of positive outcomes have been achieved, including continued independent living, higher incomes, reduced isolation, access to housing equity and a better quality of life. Without the support of the local FirstStop services, people would have struggled on and endured a lower quality of

¹ <http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop-Evaluation-2010>

life and wellbeing, and many of the people who were level 3 cases would have experienced health problems, hospital discharge or entry into residential care.

A key challenge identified in the evaluation is the lack of housing supply to enable older people who want or need to move to do so, or lack of funding for repairs and adaptations.

2.2 The FirstStop model

This has focused on the development of the national/local network model. The research shows that the combination of a national service with telephone helpline and website and local face to face services creates the ability to deal with a range of issues of varying degrees of complexity. The evaluation found that as the service developed there was a reduction in unit costs and increase in efficiency. The research shows the value of the national resources to the local services, particularly the information available on the website, which would be very difficult and prohibitively expensive to replicate at local level, but equally the research shows the value of local knowledge in supporting vulnerable older people with complex needs who benefit from face to face support.

Service user feedback and satisfaction with the national and local services is very positive. Feedback from level 3 service users who received face to face support from the local partners found that 99% would recommend the service to other older people. The survey of users of the national service found that 94% found the service easy to use and satisfaction with the information received was high.

2.3 Savings to public budgets

The evaluation has focused on identifying potential savings to public budgets of the local housing options services. These are generated when the interventions provided by the services prevent vulnerable older people from requiring more costly housing, care and health support. For example, without support many older people who used the FirstStop service were at risk of continuing to live in unsuitable housing where they were experiencing fuel poverty, disrepair and access problems e.g. unable to access bathrooms. Other outcomes for people without support were the risk of falls at home, hospital admission, delayed hospital discharge, increased need for care support at home, entry into residential care, anxiety and depression and social isolation.

The evaluation shows that the provision of information, advice and support to vulnerable older people through the local partners leads to outcomes for older people that generate financial savings to Health and Social Care budgets. For example, the data for the local partners currently funded by DCLG suggest that of the estimated 657 level 3 cases across all projects in one year 198 people would have been at risk of a fall. At an average cost of just over £2000 per fall (a conservative assumption as serious falls can lead to health and social care costs of more than £30,000), these falls could have cost just over £440,000 in health care costs alone.

The most recent research with the current local partners conservatively estimates that, minus the cost of funding the service, the average estimated saving to public budgets for

each partner is just over £140,000 in a year. This is an average estimated saving of just over £220 per person receiving level 3 casework support.

Particularly significant savings are made when people are prevented from entering local authority residential care which has an average cost of £53,352 per year (Curtis, PSSRU, 2013²). The average DCLG funding received by one local partner via FirstStop was £31,600 per year for the current group of partners. The evidence suggests that without support just over 100 vulnerable older people would have been at risk of entering residential care without the support of the FirstStop service. On average, only one third of people entering residential care are able to self fund, meaning that two thirds would have been reliant on the local authority for their care costs at an estimated cost of just over £3.5 million in one year alone.

The evidence also suggests that in one year more than 80 older people will be supported to increase their income. For example, the research found that the average increase in income after a successful benefits check was £2045 and that people spend the additional income on heating their homes and improving their diet.

2.4 Broader outcomes relative to housing, health and wellbeing agendas

The evaluation has identified broader outcomes from the FirstStop service than the outcomes experienced by individual users of the national and local services. One impact has been wider capacity building in organisations delivering services to older people through the FirstStop training programme and awareness raising. The agencies in which the local projects are embedded reported wider organisational learning about housing options for older people. The funding enabled them to increase their capacity and assist a greater number of older people with more in depth support than they were otherwise able to provide.

The research identified how the local partners have raised awareness of housing options and information and advice with local professionals in different areas of service provision such as health and adult social care. This has supported improvements in joined up thinking and service provision and helped to embed housing options in wider services and initiatives.

The evaluation has also identified how the service supports downsizing and contributes to more efficient use of housing stock, and supports more effective use of housing equity.

² <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/2013/>

3) Outputs from the research

FirstStop Evaluation: Report on progress of the funded local partners 2013/14

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/news/FirstStop-Evaluation-Report-on-progress-of-funded-local-partners-2013-14>

Managing Money Better Project Evaluation 2014

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/news/Managing-Money-Better-Project-Evaluation>

Analysis of FirstStop Local Partner Client Case Studies - Did clients benefit long term from the housing options support they received? 2013

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Local-Partner-Client-Case-Studies>

Evaluation of the FirstStop information and advice initiative for older people: findings 2011/2012: Summary 2013

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Evaluation-Findings-2011-12/Summary/view>

Evaluation of the FirstStop information and advice initiative for older people: findings 2011/2012: Main report. 2013

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Evaluation-Findings-2011-12/Full-Report/view>

Lincolnshire Home Improvement Agency Value for Money Assessment of the Housing Options Service 2013

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2013/Lincolnshire-Housing-Choices-Options-Assessment>

Local Partner Value for Money Case Studies Report. 2012

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Evaluation-Findings-2011-12/Local-Partner-Case-Studies-Report/view>

Training Programme Evaluation Report. 2012

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Evaluation-Findings-2011-12/TrainingReport/view>

Evaluation of the FirstStop Initiative Summary Report April 2012

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Report-Apr2012>

FirstStop Evaluation Source Document 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/Source-Document-2011/view>

FirstStop Evaluation National and Local Pilot Project Report 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/National-Local-Pilot/view>

FirstStop Evaluation Summary Report 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/FirstStop-Evaluation-Summary-Report/view>

FirstStop Evaluation Local Pilot Project Report 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/Local-Pilot-Project-Report/view>

FirstStop Warwickshire Value for Money Case Study 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/Warwickshire-Case-Study/view>

FirstStop Somerset West Care and Repair Value for Money Case Study

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/FirstStop-Phase2/Somerset-West-Case-Study/view>

Evaluation of the FirstStop information and advice service for older people, their families and carers: Summary 2010

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Phase-1-Evalutation-Report>

Presentation of FirstStop evaluation research findings 2011

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Findings-Presentation>

FirstStop Evaluation Phase 1 Report 2010

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/Phase-1-Report>

FirstStop evaluation 'moving on' 2010

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2010/FirstStop2010/MovingOn>

4) Contacts

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