



# The Three Conversations<sup>®</sup>

EVALUATING THE IMPACT

Partners4Change

Evaluating the Impact (September 2025)

By Jonathan Kilworth and Sam Newman

CONTACT:[sam@partners4change.co.uk](mailto:sam@partners4change.co.uk)



# INTRODUCTION

P4C works with senior leadership's willingness to try something very different, with open curiosity about what happens when work is done differently.

Three Conversations is a means to enable a fundamental shift away from a focus on 'triage and screening' and processing people by assessments for services towards building an understanding of what really matters to people and working out how to assist them live their chosen lives without prior assumptions about what 'help' might look like.

Innovation sites are set up to try out this new way of working, collecting data from the perspectives of people and families, staff, finance and 'performance', to help decide how to widen the approach across a department or organisation. They collect evidence every day to try and answer the question "Are we making things better?"

The benefits frequently include people waiting less, not being passed around, reporting being listened to by staff committed to help. Staff report being more motivated, work being more satisfying with more time spent with people and less on systems, more fully utilising and developing their skills and being able to manage workloads better. The aims of the Care Act start being more fully realised in the organisations using this approach.

Our evidence also shows that if you focus on doing the right thing rather than processing people through an 'eligibility and services factory' you create real money and time savings that can be reinvested in supporting people's lives. Time and money is saved as fewer people wait and fewer new care packages or increases to long term care are needed.

Our key indicators of success always focus first on the views of people and families who experience this very different working style, second on the experience of staff working in the system and only if we get the first two things right then we turn to our third success factor - the money and resources - to see if we can prove that *the money just follows*.

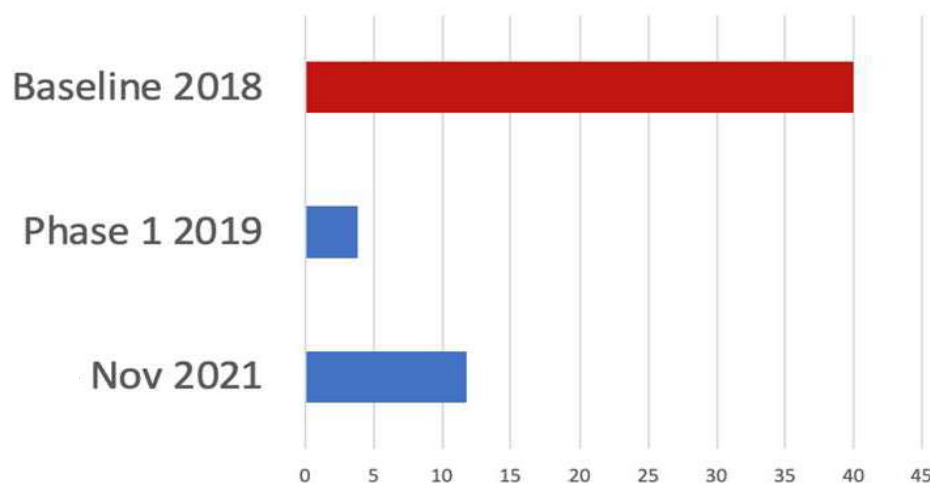
The earlier document 'Results from Our Partners' presented national data as evidence from four councils who've used this approach. It's available on the P4C website. While that report looked at evidence available nationally, what follows here is some focussed data about money and resources from selected organisations where the impact could be measured really clearly. The data and associated cost savings may look impressive - if we are seeing this repeated across organisations who have implemented this approach successfully, might it be something that will work more widely?

## "Time and money is saved as fewer people wait"

– Edinburgh and Wirral

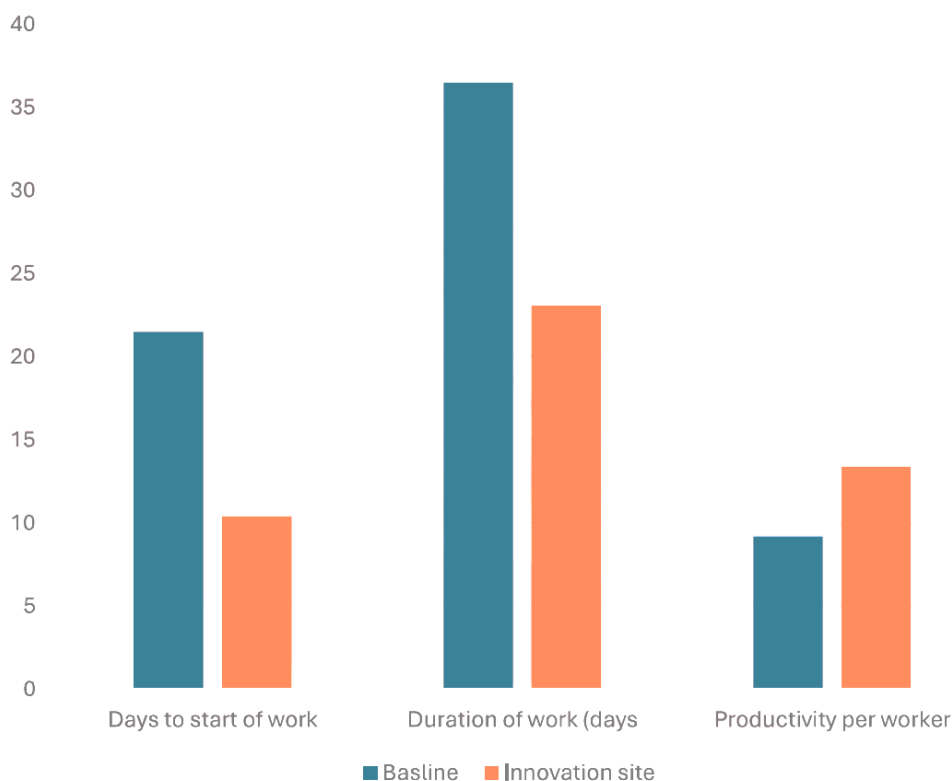
Speeding up how long it takes for people to start working with someone qualified to help may sound difficult, but we see evidence of this when teams start applying this approach to how they think about 'demand'.

### Calendar days wait to start of conversation



## Edinburgh

In Edinburgh the waiting time dropped by about 90% initially. Even with the impact of Covid-19 the time taken to start working with people remained manageable.

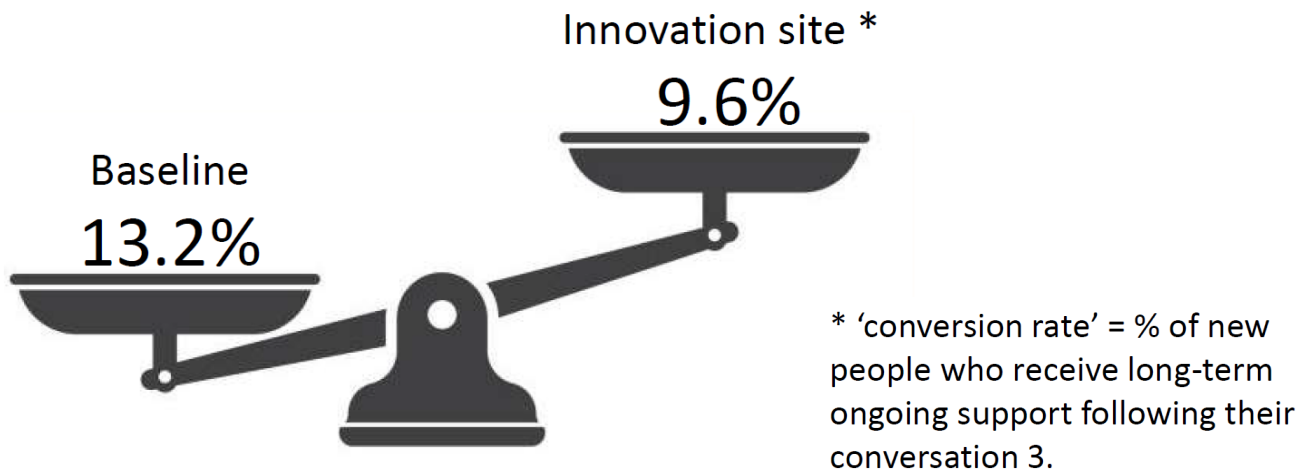


## Wirral

From our work in Wirral the council was able to collect data not only on a quicker start to work but also that the work overall took less time, enabling a higher number of completed conversations per worker (what we mean by 'productivity') than previously.

Through their data Wirral were also able to make the connection to *cost-avoidance* at their 'front door' by showing how fewer people were going on to receive long-term support as a result of their conversation, compared to the previous way of working.

## Conversion rate\* for new people



Reduction is equivalent  
to an annual saving of  
**£42,750** per **100** people

We only have to think about the hundreds or even thousands of people who 'come through the front door' each year to know how significant this cost-avoidance may be.

## **“fewer new care packages or increases to long term care are needed”**

For this evidence (in additional to that presented in our earlier document ‘Results from Our Partners’) we show the financial impact these changes represented.

P4C worked with Birmingham for more than two years across the whole adult social care service, including the development of locality- based neighbourhood networks, strengthening supportive relationships with the third sector and community organisations, emphasising connections and facilitating the development of support at a local level. Staff were enabled to work with more people more quickly than before and encouraged to work creatively, with an emphasis on ‘knowing your patch’ and utilising local community support. This helped to see a reduction in the cost of care packages.

## **Birmingham taking the initiative – Changing the nature of what we do**

Figure 1: Reproduced with permission from internal presentation



Birmingham go on to say that;

**This has resulted in almost £5 MILLION savings - recurring.**



As well as the figure being verified internally, the authority's work was examined by Fawcett. et. al (2021) in the British Journal of Social Work. An extract from page 9 of that paper is presented below.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

## Birmingham Taking the Initiative: Changes and Challenges in Working Differently with Adults

Barbara Fawcett ✉, Miranda Johnson, Fiona Mould, Jaspreet Ubhi

*The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 51, Issue 7, October 2021, Pages 2554–2570,  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa109>

When comparing the previous care management assessment system to the Three Conversations approach, there has also been a marked change in the annual support package costs. The difference from the start of the roll-out to the eighteen-month evaluation point has amounted to £4,926,780 in saving benefits. This incorporates a spread across both citizens 'new' to the service and those who already had an 'older style' support package in place. The change to the Three Conversations approach has also provided an overall saving of £1,473,869 to the EAB service.

Additionally, there have been significant changes in relation to Direct Payments. These are payments made by Local Authorities and local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to those who would prefer to arrange and pay for their own services rather than receive services directly. Whilst fewer people have taken up packages of care within the Three Conversations framework, more of these took up Direct Payments in order to fund what they wanted. For example, prior to the 'new' approach being implemented, there was a 24.8 per cent take up of Direct Payments across the city of Birmingham. After eighteen months of roll-out of the Three Conversations approach, these figures increased to 33.4 per cent across the city, with some teams increasing Direct Payment uptake by 13.1 per cent. It also has become apparent that those citizens opting for Direct Payments through the Three Conversations route have used less money than previously. Overall, there has been an 11.4 per cent reduction in the amount taken up and, interestingly, a rise in overall reported levels of satisfaction.

How often we hear of cuts to services leading to complaints, whereas here savings came about because of focussing on a better approach by staff and managers to the work being done and people are more satisfied while using less public money.

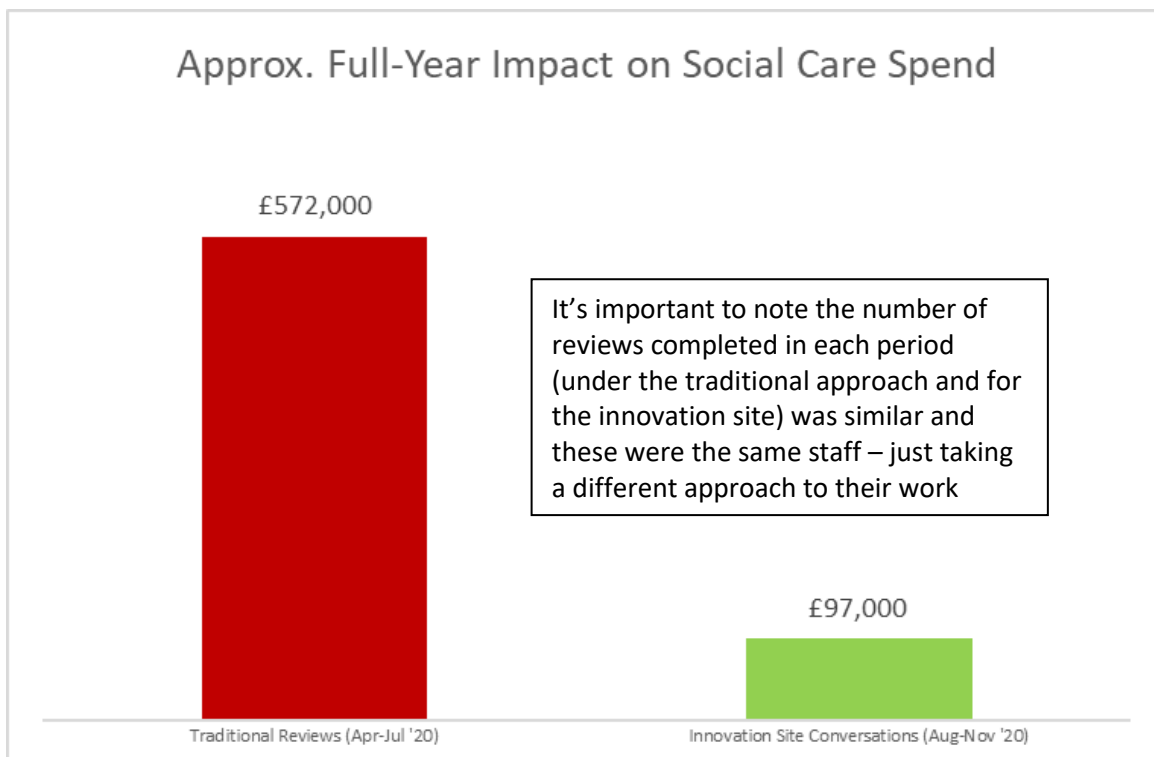
## “fewer new care packages or increases to long term care are needed”

The Three Conversations was introduced as an approach to adult social care in June 2019 initially working in the Early Intervention Team.

Results from the first year of working in this way indicated a significant reduction in new requests for support associated with fewer ‘repeat’ requests (people returning within a year). Although extra two staff members were needed, the reduction in new people requiring long-term care and support was significant, falling from 7.2 to 5.5 people per week, worth an estimated £696k in 2019-20 in cost-avoidance.

When Measured	Requests leading to new long-term care provision per week	% of new requests that were 'repeats'	% of new requests leading to long-term care provision
Mar-18	8.3		12.9
Sep-18			
Mar-19	7.2	33	10.8
Sep-19	6.1		
Mar-20	5.5	25	9.3

For those people with existing care and support the approach was introduced in August 2020 (during the pandemic!) and led to fewer increases in the costs of ongoing support with a full year equivalent saving of more than £450k in just four months of work.



## “fewer new care packages or increases to long term care are needed”

Data from the final council in our roundup wanted to remain anonymous. Work with them involved both new people and those already in receipt of support. We first worked with an area team (one of three) with new people.

The council calculated their own version of one of our key metrics for new people – how much more effective is it (for resources) to work with new people using Three Conversations, as opposed to the more traditional way of working. By following people (before and during the innovation phase, for the same team) from ‘assessment’ for a period of time (usually four months) after the end of the worker’s involvement, the total amount of costed services are added up.

Their Finance team checked this data extensively before the results were shared locally.

### Baseline

- **57%** (24) people matched to a service

Cost per person/intervention/week  
= £163

### 3 Conversations

- **31%** (15) matched to a service

Cost per person/intervention/week  
= £93

---

**Provisional Cost  
Avoidance - £59 per  
person per week**

This data suggests it’s much more cost-effective to work with people using a Three Conversations approach than with traditional ‘assessments’.

The approach was also evaluated (in the same team) for people who already had support in place. Again by following what happens to people for a period of time (usually 12 weeks) after the review ends, the cost impact of the work done can be estimated.



# OUTCOMES – KNOWN PEOPLE

## Change after 12 Weeks from end of Review

### Baseline

Change	No	%
Increase	19	37.3%
Decrease	11	21.6%
No Change	21	41.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

From the baseline data it's clear that a lot of reviews lead to an increase in costs. The innovation site did not set out to 'cut' or reduce people's services but worked with the Three Conversations principles in mind and only much later was it possible to check if the 'third success factor' (money) followed.

### 3C's

## Change after 12 Weeks from end of conversation

Change	No	%
Increase	9	17.0%
Decrease	19	35.8%
No change	26	49.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Under the innovation site the number of increases has more than halved (in percentage terms) with many more decreases to support. Almost half of conversations resulted in no change being required to the level of support provided. It's worth noting here too that the number of reviews done in the same period has not dropped – so the 'productivity' of the team has been preserved while achieving these results.



# EVALUATING 3 CONVERSATIONS



## CONCLUSIONS

That use of an approach such as Three Conversations appears to be connected with sometimes dramatic improvements and there is evidence they can be sustained.

But Three Conversations is not a cost-saving programme – it's a different way of seeing the world, a different way of thinking, being and acting when we are at work - a different way for whole organisations to organise and behave.

These cultural changes are not supplementary to the success of this approach – they are fundamental to it. The commitment of senior leaders to do things differently, the creativity of staff to embrace this approach positively and to find ways to get people connected and supported with the things they and their families most value, is what makes it happen.

Only after getting this right, and having evidence that both people and families AND staff think this way of working is better do we check whether benefits for public money and resources have followed. The focus with staff is never on the money and resources. Going about things this way is not common, and we think it's why so many 'transformation programmes' aimed at saving money ultimately fail.

**We'd love to talk to you**

---



07967 509057



[info@partners4change.co.uk](mailto:info@partners4change.co.uk)

# FURTHER RESOURCES

The data provided in this report was provided by partners. Any errors inadadvertently made when re-presenting it here are our own.

**Edinburgh** data was based on local records (unpublished)

**Wirral** data was based on local records (unpublished)

**Birmingham Taking the Initiative: Changes and Challenges in Working Differently with Adults**

Barbara Fawcett, Miranda Johnson, Fiona Mould, Jaspreet Ubhi

*The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 51, Issue 7, October 2021, Pages 2554–2570, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa109>

Also see

Pages 2 – 5 based on data collected at <https://partners4change.co.uk/3-conversations-in-bcc/>

**London Borough of Harrow** adapted from material presented in from <https://partners4change.co.uk/the-three-conversations-in-harrow-story-of-change/>

-blank page-