



## The Client

London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

## The Project

Co-production of a digital solution for short break grants for parents and carers of children with a disability

## The Opportunity

Historically, the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham had a Short Breaks Personal Grants Scheme which administered a £200 grant to eligible families in the form of a direct payment.

During 2016, the Council consulted with parents and reviewed the Scheme, which found that:

- Families did not know what short breaks activities or services were available, so were unsure of what to spend the money on.
- Over 70% of families did not send in the receipts to the Council - this could have been because receipts were misplaced or they forgot to get one.
- Sometimes the money was used for things like food shopping or towards general household bills instead of short breaks activities.
- Managing the scheme was very time consuming and expensive for the Council.
- The Council didn't know what the money was being used for and how it was benefiting families.
- Parents disliked having to send in receipts for activities.

One option was to stop giving out the grants and to go back to having a few providers on a framework with activities booked through the Council. However, it was felt this would restrict families' choice and that there must be a 'better way'.

Working with families, the Council therefore set the following goals:

- To reduce cost and time of resourcing scheme.
- To ensure accountability, evidence impact and ensure legitimate spend.
- Raise awareness of activities within the borough.
- Give families flexibility, choice and control over how they spend their grant.

## The Solution

The Council engaged with Public Partnerships, and together we worked with parents to configure the Virtual Wallet platform to meet their needs and achieve the Council's objectives.

There was extensive and genuine consultation with families regarding the design of the solution and the choice of short breaks that would be made available. This resulted in buy-in from the families and widespread support for the change from direct payments to the Virtual Wallet.

## Year 1 IN NUMB3RS

Following evaluation of the first year of operation, the solution has been tweaked and continues to operate successfully. The numbers speak for themselves....

**65%** saving on costs of Council administering the scheme

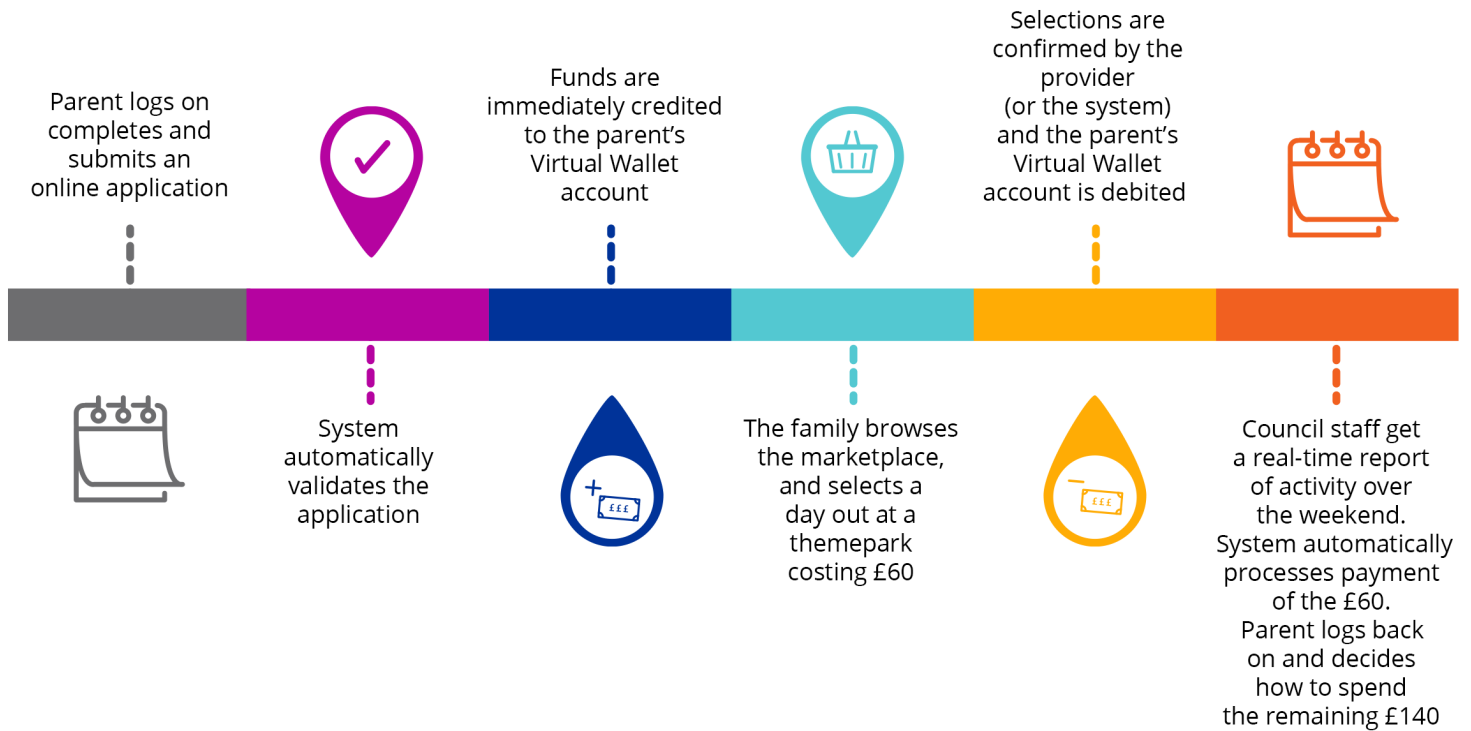
**10%** of funds were unspent and were clawed back at the end of year 1

**80%** of applications are auto-validated, with funds credited to their Virtual Wallet within hours

**45%** of site users access it via mobile phone

## How It Works

We listened to parents and the Council, and came up with a very simple hypothetical scenario:




## The Result


The new solution went live in April 2017, with 126 applications in the first week and some 500 families being allocated a grant during the first 12 months.


The concerns that people wouldn't be able or willing to use a web-based solution have been largely unfounded (although the Council does provide support for the small number that do have difficulties).


Feedback from parents and providers alike has been excellent – and – despite the 'weekend scenario' being hypothetical, we have real examples of families utilising the solution in exactly this way.

### Parents & Carers

 *24/7 service – families can access the solution at a time that suits them*


 *Visibility – people can see the full range of things they can spend their grant on, providing both inspiration and certainty*


 *Top-ups – parents and carers can add their own funds to their Virtual Wallet*


 *Low admin – no banking and no need to retain or submit receipts*

### Providers


 *Shop window – a way to market their services*


 *Low admin – the process is simple, largely automated and results in faster payments (typically 5 days)*


 *Guaranteed payment – orders can only be placed if there are sufficient funds, so there is no bad debt risk*


 *Nil cost – although it is possible to push charges on to providers, the Council chose to absorb the operating costs themselves*


### Council

 *Monitoring – officers can see activity in real-time, as well as receiving regular reports*

 *Market Management – using spend analysis and feedback as the basis for what services to make available*

 *Community – promote free local services and activities alongside paid-for services*

 *Clawback – unspent funds can be recovered by the Council (10% in 2017/18)*

 *Efficiency – significant savings in officer time in relation to assessments, payment processing and audit activity.*