

# Digital Workforce Management: The Missing Link in the Future of Social Care Delivery

# Mobile Working in Social Care

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Research carried out by TotalMobile on mobile working within social care; June 2015

This paper:

- Analyses the current job performance of workers within Social Care;
- Distinguishes the challenges/pressures faced by workers within Social Care;
- Investigates the current and past attempts their organisations have made in regards to mobile working;
- Outlines the impact that mobile working can have in the future for improvement of working processes.

TotalMobile commissioned this paper as part of research into the Social Care market, which aims to explore the challenges and pressures faced by those delivering care, how mobile working is being utilised and the role it may play in the future.

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# Executive Summary

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TotalMobile commissioned this paper as part of research into the social care market, which aims to explore the challenges and pressures faced by those delivering care, how mobile working is being utilised, and the role it may play in the future.

The findings of this paper were gathered from survey responses completed by social work staff, both frontline and management.

## Current Job Performance

Key results discovered in this section are outlined below;

■ 59% of respondents say that they spend less than 3 hours per day with clients

■ 61% of respondents are not satisfied with the amount of time spent with clients

When taking into consideration that a standard working day is 8 hours, what tasks are taking up the other 5 hours of the day? It is proven to be extremely uncommon for social work staff to spend the majority of their day delivering services. Hearing these statistics may seem shocking at first, but when we uncover the multiple reasons why this is, it may not be so surprising.

## Pressures/Challenges of the job

75% of respondents feel that they struggle to, or are unable to meet the demands of their assigned caseloads each day. Some of the biggest challenges that staff face are “too much paperwork”, “not enough time spent with clients”, “not enough staff/support” and “use of little or no technology”.

54% of social work staff do not believe that they have all they need to deliver the highest standard of care. When asked “What do you feel would help?” they answered “less paperwork”, “modern technology” and “more staff”.

68% of staff cited their work/life balance was “mostly work”, which can result in them experiencing stress and poor staff morale.

## Mobile Working Attempts

It is pleasing to discover that 60% of respondents said that their organisation has made an attempt with mobile working, however only 10% of these people say that it has made a significant difference.

The reason for this? Only 3% of respondents stated that their organisation implemented an independent, purpose-built, mobile working app. The majority of respondents cited mobile phones and laptops as their mobile working strategy.

They cited a lot of challenges experienced with these attempts, which isn’t surprising. The main challenges were “loss of connection”, “can’t access the information required” and it “slows things down”.

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Further results showed that respondents do have great faith in mobile working and the benefits it can bring. Staff hope that mobile working will;

- ▶ Allow them to spend more time with clients
- ▶ Improve work/life balance
- ▶ Provide a higher standard of care
- ▶ Provide a more modern way of working
- ▶ Do away with paperwork/admin

### **The Future**

The most comprehensive result from this survey is that 92% of respondents do not feel that they will be able to work in the same way 5 years from now. This highlights the fact that social care staff feel there needs to be a radical change as service demands increase.

Respondents were asked the question “What do you think needs to change to prepare the service for future demands?” and the results are;

- ▶ More staff
- ▶ Better use of technology
- ▶ Less paperwork/admin tasks
- ▶ Better joined up/integrated care

The majority of social care staff (77%) do believe that mobile working will have an important role to play in the future with supporting these changes, but not the way they are currently doing it.

The current challenges within social care are having an impact on the delivery of service, so it's no wonder the outlook amongst respondents in regards to the next five years is very pessimistic. This isn't going to get better unless a radical change is made to improve the working processes in place. The reality is that there is not one “quick fix” to solve everything, but something that can have a positive impact on how staff can deliver better service is the effective utilisation of mobile working. TotalMobile has been proven that authentic mobile working can save 1-2 hours, per social worker, per day, by removing time consuming paperwork and administrative burdens. Through better use of the right technology, this equates to significant increases in the existing workforce capacity, allowing staff to spend more time to deliver services every day and better cope with their caseloads, resulting in better staff morale.

## 1 CURRENT JOB PERFORMANCE

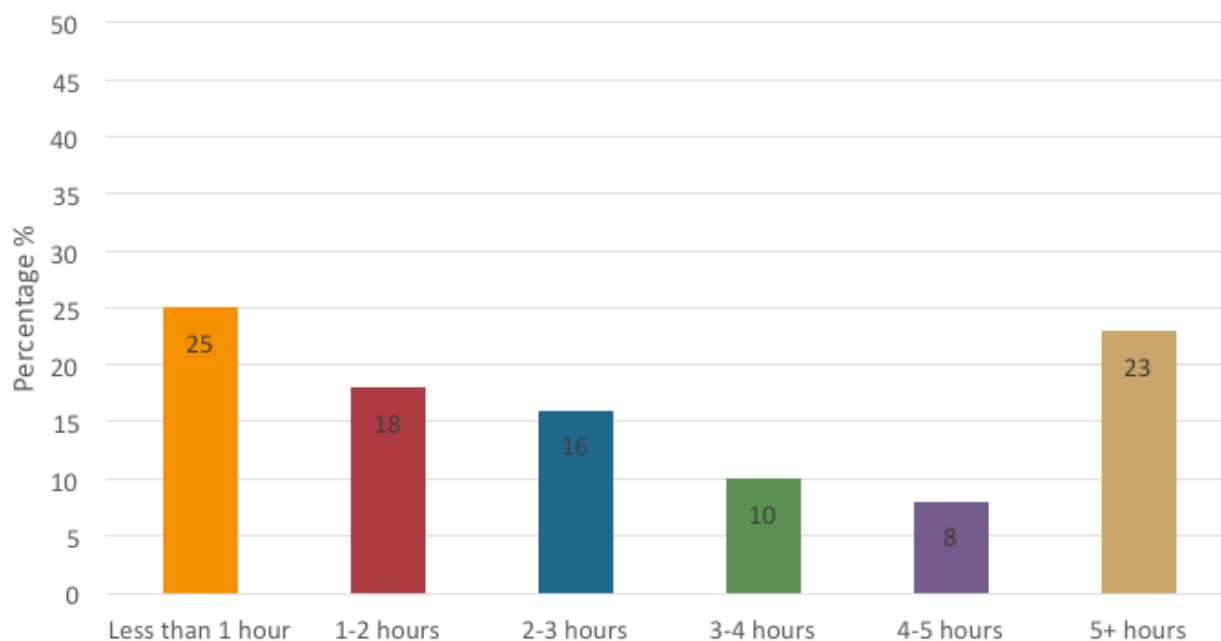
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One of the fundamental aspects of the survey, was to determine how much time is spent with clients on an average day, and how satisfied staff are with this. Regular reports\* show that staff satisfaction is at an all-time low. This report endeavors to discover whether this is the case and if so, why this is?

### 1.1 Time spent with clients

The survey showed that 59% of all respondents cite that less than 3 hours per day are spent with clients (Fig.1). When taking into consideration that a standard working day is 8 hours, this statistic is very significant. It reveals that respondents, or their teams, spend less than half of their working day with clients. Why is this? What tasks are taking up the other 5+ hours of their day?

Fig 1. Time Spent with Clients



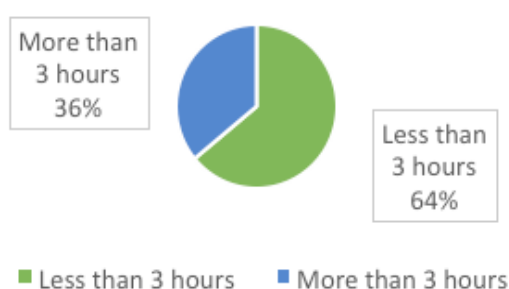
## Current Job Performance

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The paragraphs below examine these results even further, and outline the difference between the answers of frontline staff, versus management.

64% of frontline staff (Fig. 2), answered that they spend less than 3 hours per day with clients, with exactly half of these quoting less than one hour (32%). When the same question was pitched to management, 52% stated that their team spends less than 3 hours per day with clients (Fig.3), with a total of 17% quoting less than one hour.

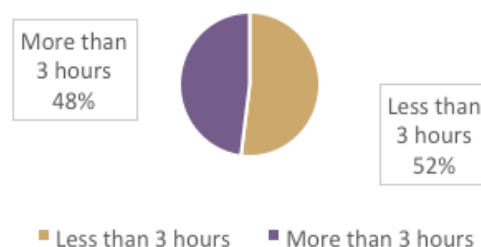
Fig.2: Time - Frontline staff



Over half of frontline workers who cited that they spend less than 3 hours per day with clients are dissatisfied with this. Whereas three-quarters of management are not satisfied with their teams spending less than 3 hours with clients.

When asked to express their views on why they are dissatisfied, frontline staff said “most of their time is spent completing paperwork” and they feel that “they are rushing the clients and not having any quality time with them”. Frontline staff believe there is not enough time in the day, and most of this time is taken up by paperwork, which will have a large impact on the delivery of services now and in the future.

Fig.3: Time - Management

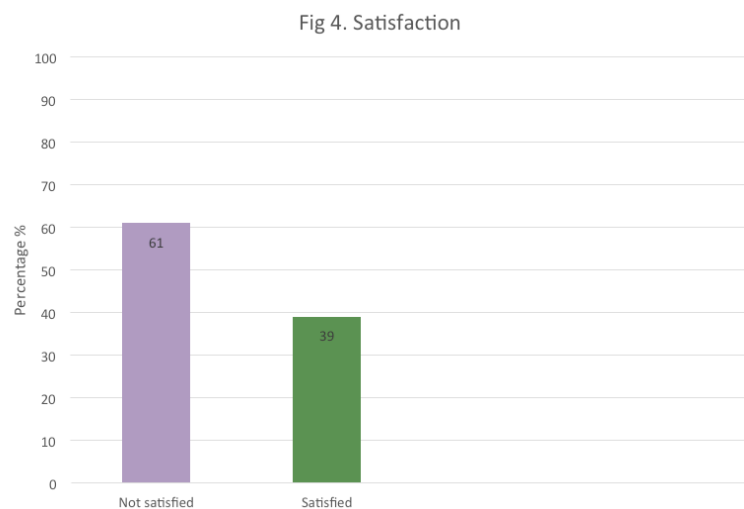


Some reasons for dissatisfaction from management also included “most of their time is spent completing paperwork” along with “not enough staff” and “budget cuts”.

Management are concerned that they and their staff do not have enough resource, and paperwork is a major burden. Management also mentioned the current and imminent budget cuts. Social Services are expected to “do more with less” and this means higher caseloads with less social work staff.

## 1.2 Staff Satisfaction

61% of respondents are not satisfied with the amount of time spent with clients (Fig.4). This statistic was expected, as the principal task of a social care professional is to deliver service to clients. If they are spending less than half of their working day visiting clients, this is surely going to leave respondents feeling dissatisfied. Regardless of how much time staff were spending with clients, it was a general consensus that they were not satisfied, and more time could be spent delivering service.

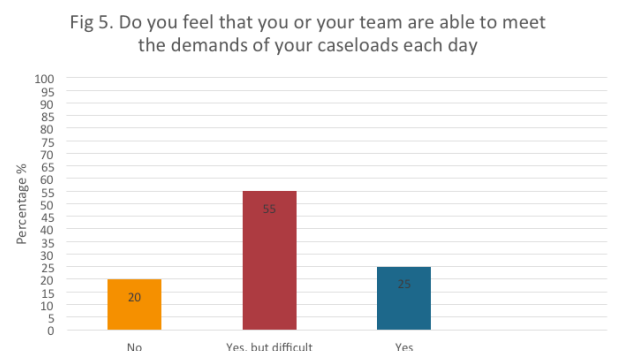


## 2 Pressures/Challenges of the Job

Another purpose of this survey was to determine the challenges and pressures that social work staff may face day to day. Pressure and stress of the job is commonly reported within social work\*\*

### 2.1 The Struggle With Caseloads

75% of all respondents feel that they or their team struggle to, or are unable to meet the demands of their assigned caseloads each day (Fig.5). This is a very significant number, depicting that, throughout Social Services, they all agree that the number of caseloads is very high and it is a struggle to keep on top of them.

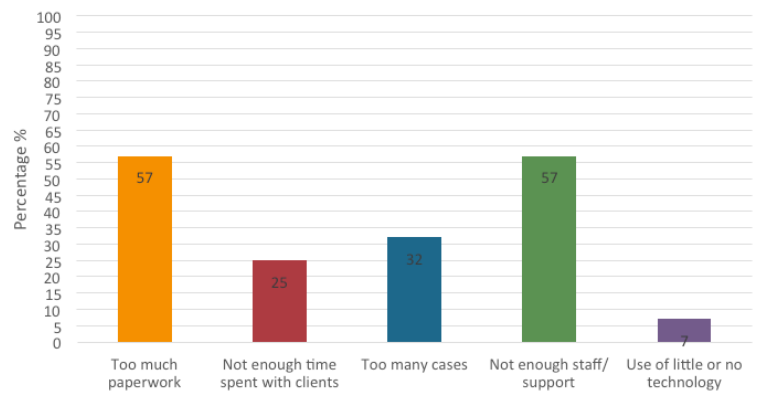




## 2.2 Challenges – Frontline Staff

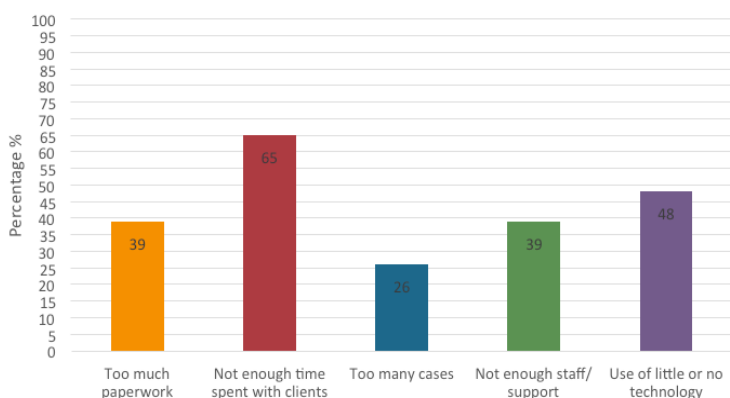
Of frontline staff, 79% cited that they struggle to, or are unable to meet the demands of their assigned caseloads each day. This is a substantial amount of staff, and is very worrying. Respondents could choose multiple reasons why they feel this is, and the reasons that came out tops were “too much paperwork” and “not enough staff/support” (Fig. 6). This is the second time that “too much paperwork” has come up as a response, and is verifying the fact that something needs to be done to transform the working processes within Social Services. These challenges, along with others, are outlined in the graph to the right;

Fig 6. Biggest challenges in your role - frontline staff



70% of management said that they believe their team are struggling to cope with assigned caseloads each day. This, again, is a very weighty percentage. It shows that they are in agreement with staff that the volume of caseloads is too large for the resource available. The challenges that they believe their team face, are outlined in Fig.7.

Fig 7. Biggest challenges your team face - management



The most popular answer here was “not enough time spent with clients”, followed by “use of little or no technology”. As you can see by comparing Fig.6 and Fig.7, the answers cited are quite diverse. This will be discussed further in the conclusion of the report. Management further named “increased workloads” and “using traditional styles of working” as some reasons for their team not meeting their assigned caseloads. “Traditional styles of working” can be assumed to be outdated styles of working, such as paper-based processes and a requirement to spend a certain amount of time in the office.

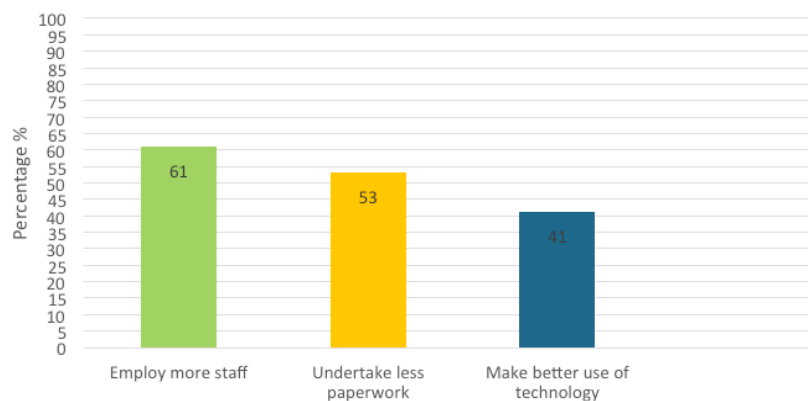
## 2.3 What Should Change

When asked “what would you change to allow you to undertake your job to a higher standard?” (again, respondents could choose multiple answers here), 61% of total respondents answered “employ more staff”, 53% cited “undertake less paperwork” and 41% answered “make better use of technology”. (Fig.8)

From these results, it’s evident that both frontline staff and management believe that undertaking less paperwork will result in a higher standard of service. It’s also pretty unanimous that staff need more support and perhaps a larger workforce is required to provide a higher standard of service.

Not quite as many chose “make better use of technology” however when we break this down, the results are quite interesting. 32% of frontline staff chose this, compared to 65% of management - more than double! This could be due to a fear of change or fear of the unknown from frontline staff regarding technology. This will be discussed further in the conclusion.

Fig 8. What would you change to undertake your job to a higher standard?



## 2.4 Challenges - Management

Management were asked “what are the biggest challenges that you face in your role?” and the results are laid out in Fig. 9 below;

Fig 9. Biggest challenges in your role - management



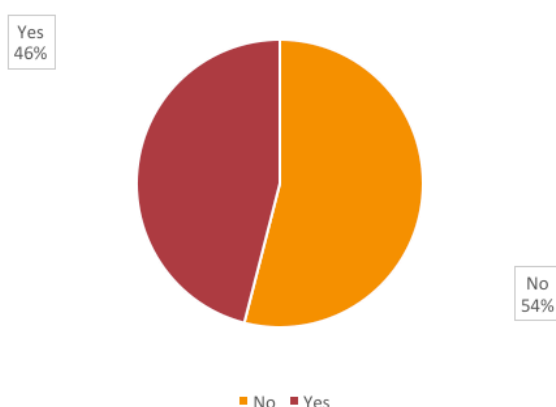
They could also choose multiple reasons why they feel this is, and the reasons that came out on tops were “increasing service demands”, “difficult to find qualified/skilled staff” and “lack of staff”. It’s fair to assume there is a correlation between the “lack of staff” and “too many agency staff”. The lack of staff is a major challenge, which results in utilising expensive agency staff, therefore creates an extra burden on available budgets and also results in very little consistency between social worker and service user.

## 2.5 Work/Life Balance of Staff

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When frontline staff were asked “are you satisfied that you have everything you need to deliver the highest standard of care?” just over half answered “no”. (Fig.10).

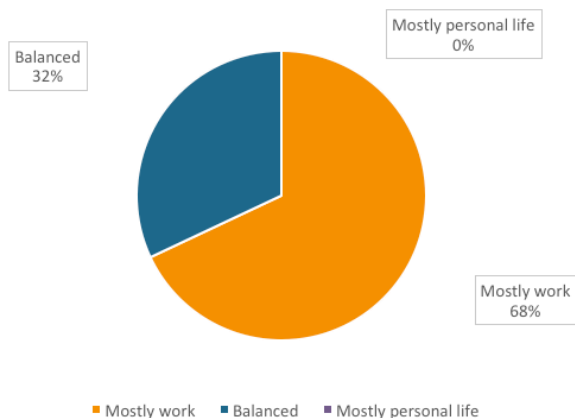
Fig 10. Do you have everything you need to deliver a high standard of care?



It's very concerning that over half of staff do not feel that they have all they require to deliver a high standard of service. When these respondents were asked what they feel would help, some responses were “less paperwork”, “modern technology”, “more staff” and “more user-friendly systems”.

Frontline staff were asked “how would you describe your work/life balance” (Fig. 11). This is the ultimate indicator of how happy staff are. 68% answered “mostly work”, which implies that they are not satisfied, and are prone to experiencing stress and poor staff morale. Perhaps it is not surprising that no one answered “mostly personal life” and that their lives are primarily dominated by caseloads.

Fig 11. Work/Life Balance



Think back to the first question of this research paper – “how much time do you spend with clients on an average day?” 64% of frontline staff cited “less than 3 hours”. If staff feel that their work/life balance is poor, yet the majority are spending less than 3 hours per day with clients, then what is causing this unnecessary stress? It is evidently due to lengthy administrative tasks and not enough support. This is not the work that they are employed to do – they are employed to deliver a high standard of service. These administrative tasks and lack of support will have a huge impact on satisfaction and morale.

## 3 MOBILE WORKING ATTEMPTS

It is widely recognised that by adopting an effective mobile working strategy, social work staff can ease many burdens, such as paperwork and other administrative tasks, and lead the way in delivering an excellent standard of care. So it was important that the survey discovered what current mobile working attempts organisations are embracing.

### 3.1 Current Mobile Working Attempts

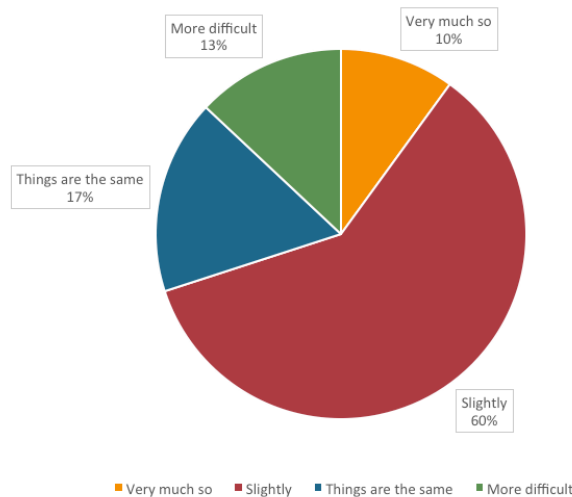
Overall, 60% of respondents state that their organisation has made an attempt with mobile working (Fig. 12).

Fig 12. Mobile Working Attempts



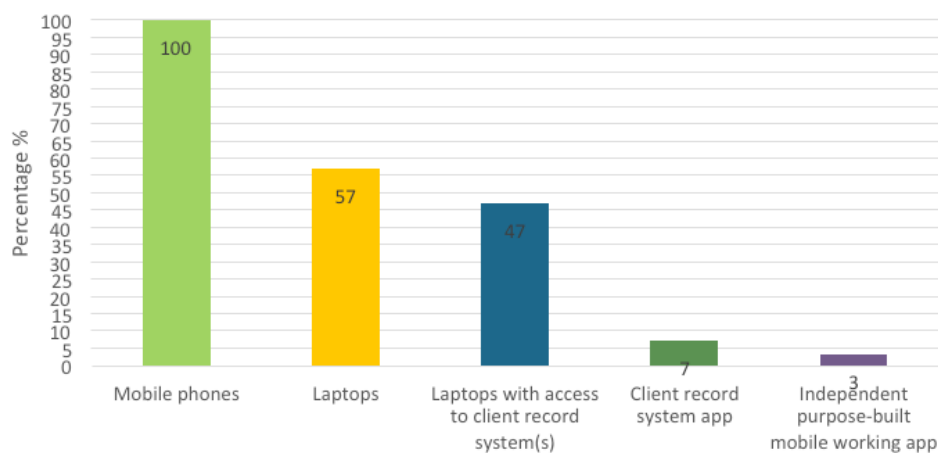
However only 10% of these people say that it has made a significant difference (Fig 13). Some even go as far to say that it makes their work more difficult! How can mobile working possibly make their work more difficult?

Fig 13. Have these attempts improved the way you work?



The answer in this may lie in the type of approach that organisations have been adopting. Respondents could choose multiple options here and the results are laid out in Fig.14 below;

Fig 14. What have these mobile working attempts included?

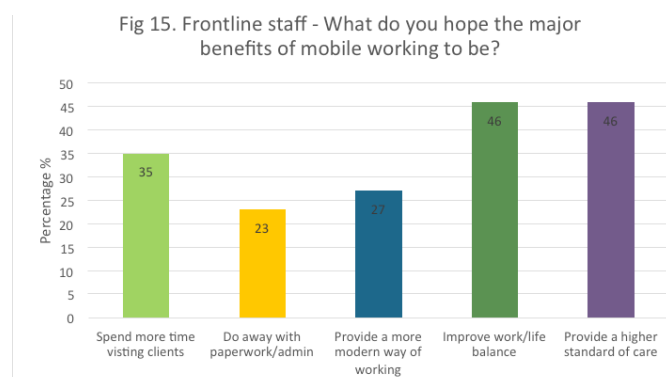


100% of total respondents answered that they had been given mobile phones. Mobile phones do not equate to mobile working, at least not by themselves. 57% say they had been given laptops, and 47% said laptops with access to client record systems.

From this, it is unsurprising that some respondents said that these attempts actually make work more difficult. The drudgery of lugging around heavy laptops and pulling over in their car to log into the client record system to gain client notes is a major burden on frontline staff, plus it is not the most user-friendly!

## 3.2 Assumed Benefits of Mobile Working

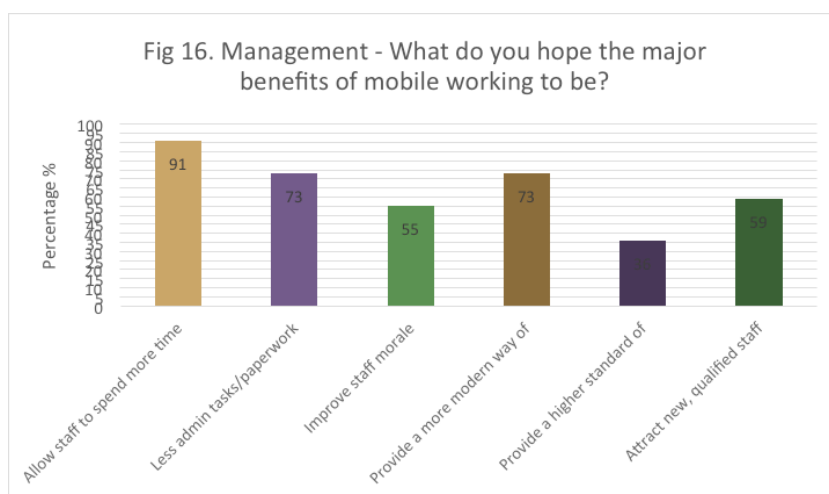
Frontline staff were asked “what they hope the major benefits of mobile working to be?” and the results are laid out in Fig. 15 below;



Respondents could choose multiple benefits here and the top results are “provide a higher standard of care” and “improve work/life balance”. This shows the two most important benefits to frontline staff. Their ultimate concern is the standard of care that service users are receiving. When deciding on embarking upon a social care vocation, the sole attraction surely, is helping others. So if frontline staff are not feeling that they are delivering the highest possible standard of care, this is disheartening and in turn, will affect their work/life balance.

The next benefit that had the majority of answers was “spend more time visiting clients”, which will empower the provision of a higher standard of care. “Provide a more modern way of working” and “Do away with paperwork/admin” were other options with a significant amount of respondents choosing these. However it is evident that the fundamental benefit in regards to frontline staff is “providing a higher standard of care”.

Management were asked the same question “what they hope the major benefits of mobile working to be” and the results are laid out in Fig. 16 below;

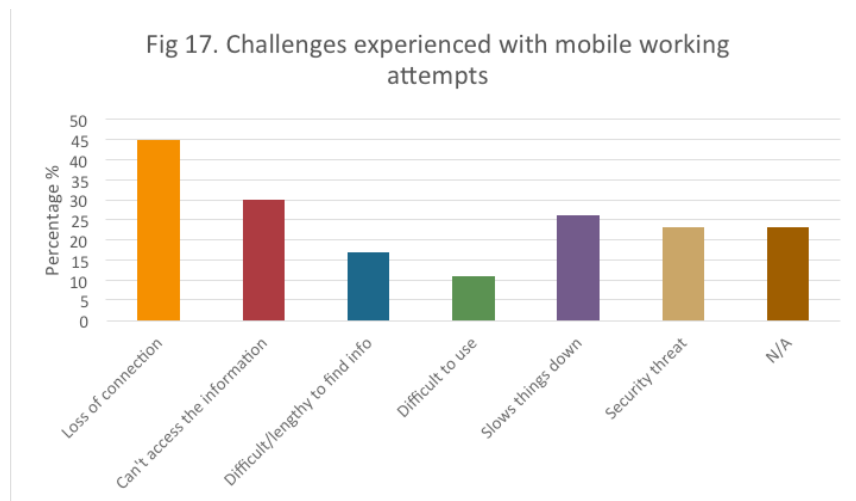


As you can see here, the major benefit management hope to gain from mobile working is “allow staff to spend more time with clients”. This somewhat coincides with the frontline staff, when they chose “provide a higher standard of care”. Some may argue that these go hand-in-hand with each other. This was followed by “provide a more modern way of working” and “Less admin tasks/paperwork”.

You can see a recurring theme from frontline and management that this is a common issue. Management also wish to “attract new, qualified staff”. This is currently difficult, partly due to perceived job pressures and negative media coverage. Could a modernised way of working ease this issue? Agency staff are extremely expensive, and also temporary. Management look for permanent, more cost effective staff.

### 3.3 Challenges experienced with current attempts

Respondents were asked “what challenges have you experienced with mobile working attempts?” (Fig. 17).



The majority of people cited “loss of connection” as the main challenge experienced (45%). This is not surprising as the main mobile working attempt was with laptops, so connectivity would be an issue. Respondents also said that they “can’t access the information they need”. This could be due to a number of reasons; loss of connection, system crashing, logging into client record systems only to be bombarded with irrelevant information, scouring the system to find the information they actually need, the list goes on! Respondents mentioned that their current attempts with mobile working “slows things down”. Surely the purpose of a mobile working strategy is to speed things up and make things easier? Again, this is explained by the type of attempts adopted.

## 4 THE FUTURE

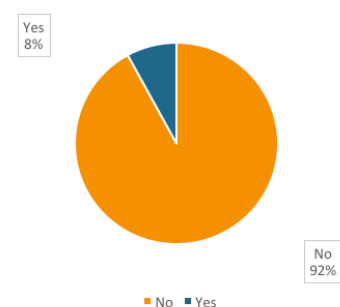
The future of Social Work is quite ambiguous, however two things that are certain are budget cuts and an increasing demand on services. Councils in England are facing a £1.1bn shortfall this year, on top of “almost unendurable” cuts since 2010, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has warned (BBC news) .\*\*\*

### 4.1 Future Demands

Respondents were asked “As demands on services increase, do you feel that you will be able to work in the same way 5 years from now?”  
92% of total respondents answered “no”.

The most comprehensive result from this survey is that there needs to be a change, both from the perspectives of frontline staff (92%) and management (91%).

Fig 18. As demands on services increase, do you feel that you will be able to work in the same way 5 years from now?

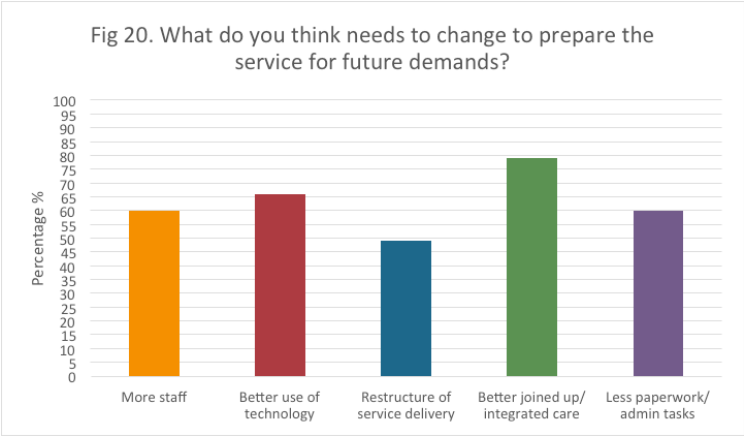


When asked to provide comment on why they felt this, the answers were pretty clear. Please see Fig. 19 below;

Fig 19. Why do you feel this?

Frontline staff	Management
More creative, flexible and innovative approach towards Social Care is required. Employees should be encouraged to embrace flexibility and to be versatile.	Need to embrace new technology.
Too much stress and pressure.	Lack of staff morale.
Too much paperwork and in 5 years, there will be even more.	Growing population with no staff to cover this.
Funding cuts in manpower, hours, wages, overtime etc.	Reduced budgets.
Heavy workload	Don't have the resource to cope with heavy caseloads.
Expected to deliver more with less.	

Respondents were asked “What do you think needs to change to prepare the service for future demands?” and the top two answers were “better joined up/integrated care” (79%) and “Better use of technology” (66%). This is the first time the survey has touched on integrated care. There is no doubt in the near future that integrated care is a pivotal step to preparing the service for future demands. These results also show that everyone knows that technology has a vital role in social services in the near future. These results, along with others, are outlined in Fig 20 below;



As you can see from Fig 19. previously, the next two most popular answers were “more staff” and “less paperwork/admin tasks” (60% each). Both of these responses have popped up previously. Another option here was “restructure of service delivery” (49%).

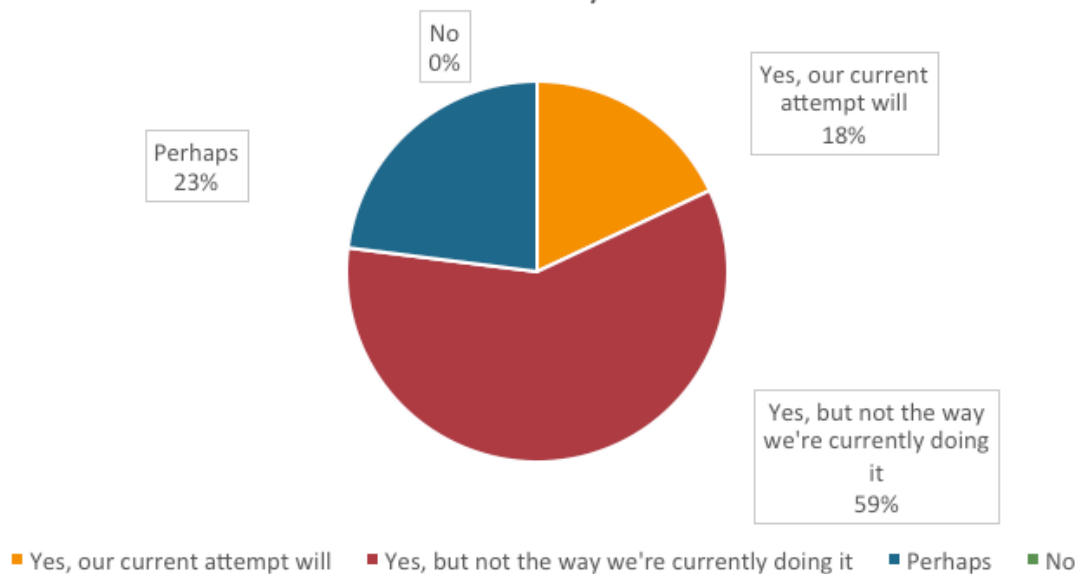


## 4.2 Mobile Working and The Future

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The final question that respondents were asked was “Do you think mobile working will play an important role in service delivery in the future?” The results are portrayed in Fig. 21 below;

Fig 21. Do you think mobile working will play an important role in service delivery in the future?



77% in total, firmly believe that mobile working will play an important role in service delivery in the future. 23% feel it may play an important role. It is significant to note that no one answered “no” to this question. Every respondent believes that mobile working is, or could be, a major factor in the future of delivering care. Following on from the answer of “better use of technology” from Fig. 20, it is evident that mobile working is one of these technologies that should be implemented. The faith in mobile technology and the benefits it brings is still there. It’s the current strategies that organisations are adopting that are not working, with only 18% feeling their current attempt will make play an important role in the future.

## 5 CONCLUSION

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### **Time/Satisfaction**

It is proven to be extremely uncommon for social work staff to spend the majority of their day delivering services. Over half of total respondents cited that they or their teams spend less than 3 hours with service users every day. These social work staff are only spending small portions of their working day actually delivering services to clients! Hearing statistics like these may seem shocking at first, but when we uncover the multiple reasons why this is, it may not be so surprising. It is clear that staff are having to focus on and dedicate their time to the completion of a range of other tasks, outside of the delivery of care.

It is expected, and pleasing to see, that these respondents are not satisfied with the amount of time they are spending with service users. Over half of respondents cited that they are dissatisfied with how they are spending their time during the working day. It is showing appreciation that their time is not as productive as it should be, as the primary role of their job should be visiting clients and delivering a high standard of service. If this is not their fundamental task during the working day, this will inevitably lead to poor staff morale and difficulty in staff retention, having a greater impact on the wider delivery of care. Both, frontline staff and management, are concerned that most of their time is spent completing paperwork and other administrative tasks. The burden of paperwork is well publicised; it is not a new revelation. This paperwork is clearly encroaching on the time that could be spent delivering service to clients and there is also cause to raise questions about the security and ability to access information in a timely manner.

Frontline staff are also concerned about not spending enough quality time with clients and building that vital relationship. This is a concern as building a trustworthy relationship between social worker and client is essential to deliver a high quality of service. If little time is being spent with the client, or temporary staff need to be called in, then this relationship becomes difficult to develop and may impact on the greater care experience.

### **Challenges**

Management are concerned about not having enough staff and coping with imminent budget cuts. This has been the cause for the last number of years and recent projections indicate that the situation is due to worsen. There is a common demand to “do more with less”, i.e. provide a higher standard of care to clients, with reducing resource. This is currently proving to be a real challenge and is set to become increasingly difficult with longer life expectancies and an increase in long term conditions, placing greater demands on service providers.

The lack of time spent with clients, along with the low satisfaction levels of staff, are impacting upon job performance, or indeed how staff perceive how they do their jobs. 79% of frontline staff are struggling to perform the job they have been employed to do. This is clearly not from a lack of trying to provide a high standard of service, but instead is due to a number of burdens that have been placed upon them, especially administrative tasks. Frontline staff and management have a slightly different perspective when it comes to distinguishing the challenges

that social work staff face day-to-day. Management highlight the biggest challenge as “not enough time is spent with clients”. However, frontline staff focus on why this is the issue, by citing challenges such as “too much paperwork” and “lack of staff/support”. If management perhaps look to address these causes, it will invariably lead to staff being able to dedicate more of their time towards those that require care.

The concept of hiring more staff to help ease the challenges was particularly popular with frontline staff, and whilst this may seem simple and a quick-fix solution, looking long term and as service demands increase, will this really provide a remedy? There are already pressures on budgets and this has led to difficulties around hiring more permanent staff. Perhaps the most effective way to tackle this problem is by looking into creating additional capacity in the existing workforce. It’s already been established that there are a number of inefficiencies that if solved, could allow for this extra capacity to be created. One way to do this is to make use of better technology which was a popular choice by management, who see technology as an enabler. It wasn’t as popular a choice among frontline staff; is this due to a ‘fear of change’ or perhaps negative experiences through failed IT projects?

Management cited some challenges that they experience in their role and some of them are; “difficult to find qualified/skilled staff” and a “lack of staff”. These challenges lead to organisations depending on expensive agency staff, which is already a burden on an ever decreasing budget. It also leads to difficulty in relationship-building between social worker and service user (as mentioned previously) as there is no continuity or consistency.

### **Work/Life Balance**

With regular reports highlighting the poor staff morale within the social care sector, it was anticipated that this report would find a negative perception towards the work/life balance of staff. However, with so little time being spent on the actual delivery of services, there is a certain irony towards staff viewing their lives consisting of mostly work. Clearly staff are feeling pressures brought about by tasks outside of delivering care. This is due to the aforementioned burdens of paperwork, travelling and other administrative tasks, that are required to be completed. Surely this can be undertaken in a more productive way. This poor work/life balance will impact on the health of social work staff, leading to them becoming stressed and anxious, and resulting in a difficulty retaining qualified staff and hiring more social work staff further down the line.

### **Mobile Working**

On the surface it seems very reassuring that 3 out of 5 organisations are making attempts to improve working processes through mobile working. However when delving deeper into what these attempts have consisted of, it becomes very clear that these attempts look like “quick fixes” rather than thoroughly planned strategies. The fact that so few attempts have included a purpose-built mobile solution proves this. In order for mobile working to be successful, organisations need to provide a solution that is specifically designed to meet all the needs of their mobile workers. Simply providing direct access to back office systems on a mobile device delivers a very poor user experience, not least because of connectivity problems, and often means such projects struggle to find success. This view is proven by the fact that only 10% of respondents believe that their current attempts at mobile working has improved the way that they work.

Regardless, across the board, expectations of mobile working are high and respondents generally believe that it will improve the way they work. They hope that mobile working will allow for more time to visit service users, remove administrative tasks and see more clients per day. The faith in mobile working is definitely embedded within social care, just not in the way they are currently doing it.

Some challenges that respondents are facing with their current attempts at mobile working include “loss of connection” and “find it difficult to/cannot access the information they need”. Since the majority of respondents cited laptops as their current attempt at mobile working, it is not surprising that connectivity is a major issue. If they are to visit a client who lives in an area of poor signal, the social worker would be unable to access any information about the client on their laptop, or any solution that requires connectivity to directly access record systems. Even if social work staff have connectivity, it can be lengthy to scroll through endless information in the back office system. They require immediate accessibility to the information relevant to the client.

It is clear that organisations’ current approaches are not working. Organisations need to look at providing tailored solutions designed around the needs of the staff and what they need in order to perform their jobs. It is extremely important to deploy an authentically mobile solution; that is a solution based around the mobile environment and the needs of your staff when working in a remote setting, instead of just a basic extension of an existing back office system. Placing unsuitable technology in the hands of social work staff is proven time and time again to not be effective and leads to a waste in resource and poor staff satisfaction. Only by providing an authentic mobile solution, designed around the way people work, will organisations truly experience the benefits that mobile working has to offer.

## **The Future**

The outlook amongst respondents in regards to the next five years is very pessimistic. This isn’t going to get better unless a radical change is made to improve the working processes in place. The reality is that there is not one “quick fix” to solve everything, but something that can have a positive impact on how staff can deliver better service is the effective utilisation of mobile working. TotalMobile has been proven that authentic mobile working can save 1-2 hours per social worker, per day by removing time consuming paperwork and administrative burdens. Through better use of the right technology, this equates to significant increases in the existing workforce capacity, allowing staff to spend more time to deliver services every day and better cope with their caseloads, resulting in better staff morale.

This survey highlighted that there is a unanimous agreement that mobile working will play an important role in service delivery in the future. Not one person said that it wouldn’t. However this will not be the case if organisations continue with their current attempts of mobile phones and laptops. An authentic mobile solution is the only way that a social care department can truly revolutionise the way in which their staff operate and will increase morale. After all, a happy workforce means a more efficient workforce.

## 6 REFERENCES

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## Company Overview

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TotalMobile is a fast growing mobile software company that transforms complex service delivery within healthcare, government and industry, throughout the UK and Internationally.

Established in 1985, TotalMobile create innovative technologies that disrupt conventional ways of working. This is driven by the desire to make work not just more productive, but more enjoyable. This is achieved by providing products that people love to use.

Belfast headquartered and with staff throughout the UK, TotalMobile have a track record of delivering effective software solutions to the public sector. The latest of these is TotalMobile, a solution that enables service transformation by empowering staff with effective mobile working technology.

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