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Case study

One workshop, three forward-thinking, ambitious innovation projects

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Sector

Housing & Social Care

Dec 2023

One workshop, three forward-thinking, ambitious innovation projects

North Star Housing Association is a social housing association based in the North East of England. In a sector not generally known for innovation, North Star wants to be different - to set the standard for how innovation and research can positively impact customers in the sector.

Case study

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While many want to use exciting emerging technology, it's hard to find a way that drives real change and brings about real benefits to customers and bottom line.

To start the process, we ran an innovation workshop with North Star to demonstrate the art of the possible and link their innovation ambitions to tools and partners to help achieve them. We didn't want to run a session that sparked enthusiasm but didn't lead anywhere, our main goal was to leave the day with tangible and actionable projects designed to bring real business value.

What did we do?

The one-day workshop was split into two sessions:

- **Morning one**: Exploring the current state of the sector with our sector experts, looking at what is happening in other sectors, and the work our research partners are doing. Finally, we generated ideas for potential projects – there were over 100!
- **Morning two**: We'd spent some time validating the ideas and filtering them down with North Star before reconvening. Everyone was split into small groups with each tasked with taking an idea and writing a business case for the projects before pitching it back to us. In the end, we had fleshed out three ideas, ready to take to the wider business for support.

What did it result in?

The workshop was driven by the desire to launch a series of ambitious innovation projects. Large step-change projects can begin with a small step – but what are these small steps? We succeeded in finding them, and work has begun on three exciting projects:

1. **Robotics**: How can robotics play a part in the future of care? Along with our friends at The National Robotarium, we are looking at just that.
2. **Safety**: How can we validate the identity of those trying to enter our home, and is there a way to keep a record of those who do? North Star is now working with Amazon Key for Business to look at how this could be achieved.
3. **Property Investment**: How can we ensure boilers are healthy? Working with CENSIS (Scotland's Innovation Centre for Sensors), we are investigating how to use smart sensors for predictive maintenance.

What did North Star think?

"The Innovation workshops run by Waterstons have created a real buzz with staff across North Star. There is energy and excitement about the projects selected to progress and the difference they could make for customers and staff." – James Walder, *Executive Director of Finance & Business Support*

"The workshop that Waterstons ran brought a sense of realisation to people about how effective technology, digital and data can be – not just how it can help them in their jobs, but how innovation can also help our customers. The incredibly engaging session was described by one of our managers as 'The best session she has ever been involved in at North Star'. It has managed to get people who are normally not interested in technology very excited about it." – Sean Lawless, *Head of Digital and Data*.

Want to take part?

How do you transform your desire to be innovative into action? We want to match your ambition to the tools available, to scope out projects that are achievable, tangible, and will allow you to unlock the value of emerging technology!

For more information about our innovation and AI workshops that we have partnered with Microsoft to run, contact us at innovation@waterstons.com

If you work in the social housing sector and would like to find out how we can support you, your team and your residents, get in touch with Sector Principal, Lesley.