

# Questions for system thinking



## Principle 1: Start with the service user

Adopting a user-centred perspective on a system can help you understand how it interacts with and impacts people.

### Ask who?

- Who are the end users in our system? This might be citizens, partner organisations, colleagues, managers or another user group.
- Do different groups have different experiences of the system?

### Ask why?

- Why do they interact with the system?
- What are their core needs in relation to the system?
- Do they have other peripheral needs?



### Ask where and how?

- Where and when do they interact with the system?
- How do they interact with the system?
- Do other departments/teams interact with the user?
- How frequently? What factors prevent the user from accessing the service/system?

### Top tip

Incorporate diverse user perspectives on how they experience the system. Factors like ethnicity, gender, and education-level can influence how people experience services and how policies affect them.

# Questions for system thinking

## 2

### Discover the thinking behind the system

Systems are driven by assumptions, beliefs, incentives and their own internal logic. Uncovering these mental models can help you understand why a system performs the way it does. And it can enable you to experiment and test whether a different set of ideas could produce better outcomes.

### 5 questions to help uncover mental models

- Are there any values that underpin the overall structure of the system?
- What beliefs and assumptions do you hold about your users, including different groups of users? What are they based on?
- What incentives drive users to behave the way they do?
- What beliefs do you hold about your capacity to meet the user's needs?
- What are the core interests and incentives of other actors and stakeholders in the system? How do these individually affect the user?



#### Top tip

Think about the mental models underpinning the system and apply your critical thinking skills to analyse whether the key beliefs and assumptions are based on evidence or deduced from a principle (see lesson 1.3 for a reminder).

# Questions for system thinking

## 3

### Get everyone involved

Systems are complex and dynamic structures because they are made up of different actors moving and interacting with each other to create outcomes. Identifying these stakeholders can help you to see the system from their perspective and understand what drives them to act the way they do. Having this insight can enable you to develop a more holistic and nuanced strategy.

### 5 questions to help identify system stakeholders

- Who do service users interact with most closely and frequently?
- How much influence do these service providers have over the way the system/service is designed?
- What feedback have you received from those who interact with users?
- Which other teams could help you to predict and mitigate any potential challenges?
- Are there other teams who have dealt with similar strategic issues?



### Top tip

Remember to really listen and reflect on what your front-line colleagues are telling you about the system. Their perspective and insight will be invaluable in understanding what works and what doesn't.