



Information for Personal Budgets

Researching improvements to the provision of
information on personal budgets in North Tyneside

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September 2011

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Introduction: Context and aim of report

National context

The Think Local, Act Personal declaration by government and voluntary leaders in November 2010 signalled the continuing drive to radically transform the provision of social care. Since the Putting People First declaration in 2007, all local authorities have been committed to dramatic changes in the social care system (Putting People First, 2007). Of particular importance for this report are the commitments to introduce personal budgets. These plans alter the organisation of social care packages so each eligible person participates in an individualised and costed social care service or personal budget by 2013. Traditionally recipients of social care were assessed by social workers and then allocated services to fit their needs. Government and many disability advocates thought this system was too focused on councils' services and not individualised to allow people to select their own care. There were also fears that the growing number of older people would increase social care costs and 'personalisation' is hoped to be a more efficient and cheaper alternative.

A peculiar feature of the move to personal budgets is the multiplicity of words that have been harnessed to explain similar things. Personalisation, personal budgets, individual budgets, personalised payments and direct payments have all been used to refer to personal budgets.

In this report '**personal budgets**' will be the preferred term as it focuses on the costed social care packages whose introduction has been the source of some confusion in North Tyneside.

'**Direct payments**' will refer to the system of paying for social care support directly from the allocated personal budget and the individual being responsible for how that money is spent.

'**Personalisation**' is a more ambiguous term that usually means something that is part of the process to make public services more individualised and the people less dependent on the direct provision of state services.

Think Local, Act Personal and its predecessor Putting People First (the consortium tasked with promoting the personalisation agenda) advocated four main changes that are pertinent to the issue of information about personal budgets, they are:

- Use of self assessments and a resource allocation system (RAS) to streamline the way people access social care and to make it easier to calculate the amount of money a person should receive.
- Each person to receive a personal budget, which means they will be informed of the amount of money they can spend on their social care. They will then be involved in choosing how the money is spent on the social care either through

- To help people make these choices and to help people who are not eligible but need social care, local authorities will develop information and advice services that give people the knowledge to make informed and safe choices. This information would also help keep people well so they do not become eligible for council support services.
- To give people sufficient choice, local authorities would help develop a social care market in their area. This would involve encouraging alternatives to council services and provide the means for people to find them through developing their information and advice services.

Local councils were given milestones by government to achieve these aims by April 2011. Unusually for such a radical and important initiative these milestones were not legally binding and councils were told to arrange them following best practice in reports by Think Local, Act Personal and its predecessor Putting People First (the consortium tasked with promoting the personalisation agenda) and other sources. It was expected by April 2011 that all eligible service users would have been informed and consulted about personal budgets; that 30% of service users would be receiving personal budgets and that universal information and advice services would be in place providing all citizens with information about their care and support needs (Putting People First, 2009).

At the national level the media has largely ignored the introduction of personal budgets apart from occasional sensationalist pieces where activities considered irrelevant to social care have been purchased. In the absence of government sponsored public information campaigns or media coverage, the work of informing people about the changes has been left to local authorities.

Local context

In North Tyneside the push for personal budgets began with an initial flow of council information resources in 2009 to inform people about the introduction of the new system. A personalisation officer was employed producing information resources and liaising with community and voluntary groups. Leaflets, newsletters and guides were produced and a new learning disabilities website was commissioned.

As 2009 progressed a personalisation working group was set up composed of local voluntary sector groups and individuals to monitor the rollout of the personalisation programme.

Since late 2009 concerns have been raised that more resources are needed to communicate information about a process many people find complex and confusing. In spring 2011 the senior management of Adult Social Care Services was restructured to allow them to focus more time on the demands of implementing the

personalisation programme. In a further move a member of the management team was seconded to oversee the development of the new website.

Aim of report

Aim of report

North Tyneside acknowledged there were concerns about the provision of information and worked with LINK to agree on commissioning research on how their information resources could be improved. As a result of the continuing discussions between North Tyneside LINK and North Tyneside Council the board of North Tyneside LINK decided to commission a report to suggest improvements that could be introduced to aid service user and carers' understanding and experience of personal budgets. This report will look at the non-personal information resources such as printed material, the web, audio and video available in North Tyneside and will suggest improvements. It will not cover personal resources available to put support plans into place or issues such as staffing and developing an information and advice strategy. The LINK personalisation working group will be looking at these issues with North Tyneside Council over the next 12 months.

The report will propose new resources by considering from first principles who needs the information about personal budgets, what they need to know and what best practice has been developed to meet that need:

In the first section we will look at the target audience of information about personal budgets. We will find out who is eligible for social care and from this demographic picture we will have a better idea of what the particular communication needs are of people who are going to receive personal budgets. 'Know your audience' is a truism that holds true as much for personal budgets as in any other field of communication.

In section two we will ask what information a person going through the personal budget process should receive. We will do this by examining the process for stages at which a person needs to make an informed decision. From this we can build a checklist of the information that should be delivered and the point in the service user's journey it needs to be delivered.

Section three maps the currently available non-personal information resources in North Tyneside and assesses them in light of best practice and public feedback. Best practice will cover the work of government bodies, think-tanks and third sector. At the local level the work of other local authorities will be examined to discover examples that can be easily emulated in North Tyneside.

The last section will bring together the report's findings to propose new information resources and methods of delivery that are necessary to fill any gaps in information about personal budgets.

Section 1: Who needs information about personal budgets?

It is valuable to look at who needs information about personal budgets to ensure the delivery and content of that information is relevant and accessible. Any consideration of the provision of information has to be based on a clear understanding of who needs the information, what identifiable groups they belong to and what are the communication needs of those groups, in general and in reference to personal budgets. There is a danger that in the absence of this demographic information that assumptions are made and decisions are taken without reference to the people who will actually use the information. We'll begin by identifying who needs the information in a general sense of benefitting from its provision and then move to consider who is eligible for personal budgets and in most acute need of help.

All groups who need information on personal budgets

Existing social care users and carers

As part of the government's drive to have all service users on personal budgets by 2013 all existing community social care users who have ongoing costed care packages will be transferred onto a personal budget as part of their planned statutory review. The council say that 5,638 people receive funded community based services of which 2,227 or 41.48% have already received a personal budget (North Tyneside Council, 2011). Existing service users will likely require information that explains to them how personal budgets differ from their current social care arrangements. As some people may be accustomed or content with their present setup they would benefit from information that reassured them that in many cases there would be little change if that was their preference.

New social care users and carers

Each year Adult Social Care receives about 14,795 new referrals for help. In 2008 about 2,735 of these people received an assessment to see if they were eligible for funding from the council to receive funded social care (Department of Health, 2008). North Tyneside uses national guidance called Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria to determine eligibility for funded social care support. The council uses the FACS criteria to determine which needs are above the locally determined threshold, of substantial and critical. Following this an individual financial assessment is undertaken to determine if a person will contribute to the overall cost of the required support package. Somebody who is not entitled to financial support can still receive a personal budget from the council and the person would receive an identical service except they would fund some or all of the personal budget themselves.

Self funders and those not eligible for costed care

As some people are not eligible for funded social care because of the FACS criteria or they choose to organise their own care, there is an increasing need for information to help people who have to pay for their own support. Also it is important to note that much of the information on aspects of the personal budget process such as recruiting service providers and managing their support services is as applicable to this group as to people who receive personal budgets. From the perspective of helping these people avoid spending money on inappropriate services and to prevent them becoming more unwell, the provision of information would be a positive development. According to the recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) there are 50,000 people in North Tyneside estimated to have some level of disability (North Tyneside Council, 2008). Having information that has some relevance to this wider group could help people from becoming so unwell that they become eligible for personal budgets.

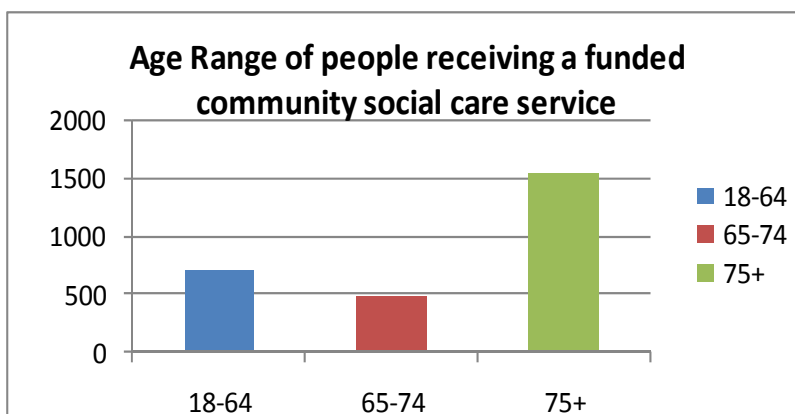
Voluntary sector workers and other professionals

These organisations and groups are a gateway to helping service users and carers make the most of their support. Ensuring this group has up to date and comprehensive information would enable the people who primarily rely on the voluntary sector for information to receive help.

Who is eligible for personal budgets?

To receive a personal budget a person must have been deemed eligible under two separate criteria; they must have completed a financial assessment and be found to have savings less than £23,000 and to have an income of less than Income Support plus 25%. They must also complete a self assessment form that gauges the severity of a person's needs. Only if a person is judged to have substantial or critical needs will they receive funding. In 2007/8, the number who received an assessment and then went on to receive council services was 2735. The age range of those who succeeded in being eligible can be seen in figure 1: (RAP 2007/8 figures)

Figure 1



What is immediately noticeable is the predominance of people who are over 75. In total they account for 56% of the people eligible for funded care in 2008. If you include those over 65 it comes to 74% of the group.

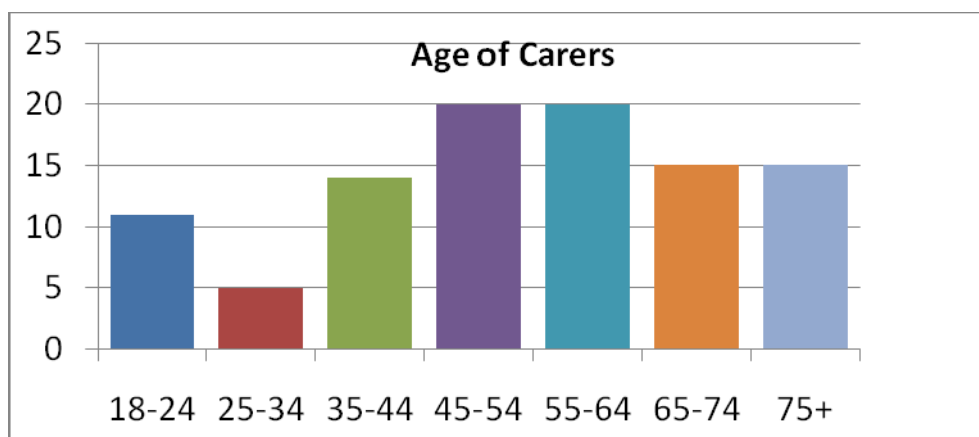
Looking at the support needs of the same group in 2008 you can see in figure 2 that physically disabled people are the largest group. The term physically disabled differs here in meaning from the common use of the term; it includes old age, frailty and sensory impairment. In the age column you can see that older people with some form of physical disability are 63% of all the people who receive social care. After that you also see a substantial minority of people with mental health problems, then younger people with physical disabilities and people with learning disabilities.

Figure 2 – percentage of social care recipients by need

Group	18-64	65+	Grand total
Physical disability	11.20%	63.40%	74.60%
Mental health	5.46%	8.90%	14.36%
Dementia		3.13%	3.13%
Learning disability	6.76%	0.73%	7.49%
Substance misuse	0.30%	0.20%	0.50%
Totals	23.72%	76.36%	100.00%

As well as service users it's also important to try to understand how carers might best be reached by having a clear picture of their profile as well. Using information from the Carers' Centre we can see in figure 3 that carers are also older than the average age in the UK of 39.5(ONS 2009) with 50% of carers over the age of 55.

Figure 3



Carers also depart from the national average in income levels with 64% either receiving state benefits or being retired. Only 27% were in full or part time employment. These two pieces of data point to an older and poorer group than the national average.

Information needs of different groups

The evidence on the demographics of those eligible for personal budgets helps prioritise how we should tailor the information on personal budgets. Future information resources should recognise all groups but they must be acutely conscious of the needs of the main users of personal budgets. This means creating resources that are relevant to older people and must be accessible to people with mental health needs, physical disabilities and people with learning disabilities. It should also recognise the age profile of carers and their income status. It's useful to look at the individual communication needs of each of these groups to establish how Information should be delivered and presented.

Older people

“Information and the ability to act on it, has been shown to be vitally important for older people in maintaining their independence and quality of life.” DWP Working paper no.53

To have a clearer understanding of the communication needs of older people the report conducted a small literature review of information available on what constitutes best practice for communicating with older people in the context of social care. The sources researched were reports or documents published by established authoritative voices in the field of social care and the Office for National Statistics in the last 10 years. The DWP working paper 53 and the work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation stand out as being focused specifically on the Information needs of older people.

The literature review revealed the following findings:

- Low internet use and lack of enthusiasm for developing IT skills. (ONS 2010)
- Older people have preference for face to face communication, especially informal communication. (DWP 2008)(JSF 2005)
- They expect and like official information to be available in hard copy. (DWP 2008)
- They like telephone help lines but these are not good for people with certain impairments or language difficulties.
- Older people are less likely to throw out printed material of value.
- Older people want a variety and choice of personal and impersonal formats of information and advice. (Dunning, JSF, 2005)
- Older people watch and listen to more TV and radio than other group, especially non commercial stations. (DWP 2008)

- In communicating with older people it's important to link verbal and written information. (Dunning, JSF 2005)
- Information should be available from clear contact points. (Dunning, JSF 2005)
- Some older people would benefit from information sessions held in places such as day centres or drop-ins, which some older people use.

Findings – older people

What was most surprising from this review was the extent to which older people were disengaged from using the internet as a source of information. The Office of National Statistics survey in 2010 reported that 60% of people over 65 had never used the internet (Office of National Statistics, 2010).

The Dunning report and the DWP paper both stress that older people's first preference for receiving information is face to face with another human being.

With regards to printed material the reports find evidence that older people still rely on the printed word to understand important information and like to have official information in printed form.

The other sources of information that are seen as valuable are telephone, information sessions, television and radio. An important point that was raised by Dunning is that people often need more than one source of information and that the written word was needed to complement the face to face information somebody had received.

Communication needs of people with learning disabilities

A short literature review of the communication needs of people with learning disabilities took in some of the literature on best practice for information resources produced by the third sector, government and think tanks. This produced the following suggestions:

- For many people with a learning disability the best way to communicate is face-to-face and one-to-one. (Mencap 2009)
- In writing: it is a good idea to use bigger text and bullet points, and to keep writing at a minimum of 16 point. It is also important to remember that too much colour can make reading harder for some people. (Mencap 2009)
- For impersonal communications the best media are audio, audio description, easy read, easy access, Makaton, subtitles. (Office for Disability Issues HM Govt)
- For hard copy, easy read using images and captions is best. (SCIE 2010)
- It's useful to provide summary versions. (Office for Disability Issues HM Govt)
- Where possible provide audio and video versions of information. (SCIE)
- You should always use pictures when you are presenting information for people with learning difficulties. (SCIE)

Findings – learning disabilities

As with older people the most recommended way of delivering information was through face to face communication. According to Mencap this is the preferred way of receiving information by people with learning disabilities. It allowed for further questions to be asked and areas of confusion to be clarified (Mencap, 2008).

For impersonal ways of delivering information there are recommendations by the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the Office for Disability Issues, that audio, video and easy read versions of printed information are the best options. Easy read is an established method of communicating written information to people with learning or language challenges and can be used for a wide group of people. It emphasises clear and simple English, use of captions and images in a thoughtful way to aid meaning and use of appropriate font and colours to help convey information.

People with mental health needs

Compared to other groups there are few references to how information should generally be produced for people with mental health needs. There are two recent pieces of work that shed some light on how information resources on personal budgets can be targeted at this group. The first report from the National Mental Health Development Unit made these recommendations:

- Clear information should be made available in ways and in places that suit different people. (NMHDU 2010)
- Training courses for people with mental health needs should be created to help them understand what is on offer with personal budgets and to gain confidence to use them.
- User-led organisations should be developed as an option to provide information, advice, guidance and support.
- There should be access to information technology and specific training and support to use it.
- Websites designed specifically to provide information for people putting together support plans.
- Dedicated staff who are trained and available to help people use computers and access the internet.
- Regular meetings and discussion groups to consider issues around personal budgets so that there are frequent opportunities for people to ask questions and be given up to date information.
- Capacity for support planning so that people can have a choice of who assists them.
- Access to stories that show how personal budgets can be done differently and uniquely.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence produced a report on the experiences of older people and people with mental health needs who had used personal budgets

(SCIE, February 2011). Although the report didn't differentiate between the two groups in its findings, it did look into their information needs and made the following recommendations:

- Leaflets and booklets should be written in plain English with minimum use of jargon.
- Provide information about different aspects of personal budgets in 'bite-sized chunks'.
- Offer alternatives to written information e.g. DVDs, podcasts etc.
- Information tailored to the needs and interests of different groups of people who use services, with concrete examples of what the money might be spent on (following approval).
- Better information about the financial aspects of personal budgets, for example, managing the money or flexibility in spending the money). (SCIE, February 2011)

From these wide ranging findings we can condense five manageable recommendations that can help us produce relevant information resources that are accessible to people with mental health needs:

1. Clear and simple English in summarised forms.
2. Utilise digital alternatives to written information.
3. Provide one to one assistance at the support plan and brokerage stages.
4. Use peer or community groups to share information and as a forum for training.
5. Deliver information that uses real life examples of how people have used personal budgets.

Carers' information needs

Carers are often central to the decisions made about social care and information around personal budgets should be relevant to this group. It is also now possible for carers to hold direct payments on behalf of their cared for.

Carers, especially of people with conditions like dementia will play a large role in developing a support plan, recruiting a personal assistant and then managing the personal budget. They are also entitled to direct payments in their own right following a carers' assessment. It was difficult to find research or good practice that primarily discussed the needs of carers and personal budgets, the literature that did discuss the subject did so as part of a wider study looking at the needs of service users. Two examples of recommendations of good practice are the NMH DU's paths to personalisation (National Mental Health Development, 2010) and SCIE's research on older people and mental health (SCIE, February 2011).

NMHDU's report has a chapter on the support that carers need to successfully use personal budgets and recommends the following features be developed:

- Information should be available very locally, for example in local shops, pubs and GP surgeries.
- Websites should be designed for carer information and support and access to the internet (and if needed, training and support to use information technology).
- Local networks and peer groups should be available for support and exchange of information.
- Well informed staff who can give the right information and advice or can signpost to other sources of help.
- Health and social care telephone systems that are warm and responsive and can answer questions or quickly direct to the right place. (NMHDU 2010)

Less space is allocated to carer needs in the SCIE report but they suggest:

- Information should be available that is specifically designed for carers.
- Local authorities to provide guidance for personal budget holders and carers about employing family members as personal assistants. (SCIE, February 2011)

Many of these recommendations are very general and apply equally to service users as much as to carers. They point to carers benefiting from one to one support, having little access to the internet and that they benefit from receiving information through peer groups. The two reports also highlight that carers need to be recognised and considered by the professional working with them as important contributors to the whole personal budget process.

Section 2: What information is necessary to have a personal budget?

This section will consider the content of the information a person should receive. We will ask what knowledge a person should have to successfully make the right decisions about organising their support and then go onto manage their personal budget. To do this we are going to examine the personal budget ‘journey’ an individual goes through to gauge the stages of the process a person needs information to make decisions. We will map the process of receiving support and then ask if information resources need to be differentiated according to criteria such as belonging to a disability group or whether someone is a new or existing social care user.

Mapping the process

It’s useful to begin by examining the process of receiving a personal budget. In Control, the organisation that advocates for the introduction of personal budgets, argue that there are 7 steps to the process:

- Step 1** My money – how much can I have?
- Step 2** Making my plan
- Step 3** Getting my plan agreed
- Step 4** Organising my money
- Step 5** Organising my social care support
- Step 6** Living life
- Step 7** Seeing how it works

In Control’s template is a useful way of engaging with people about the process as it segments the process into manageable chunks. It also makes efforts to simplify what is a complex process so that people can begin to understand and participate in the process of organising their own support. Despite these strengths the overall approach does have some flaws; it does assume that everyone has the capacity or motivation to spend a lot of time discussing their support needs. Conversely it minimises the key areas of choosing a direct payment over the alternatives, the complications of recruiting and finding support and of then maintaining a personal budget and perhaps taking on the responsibility for managing a personal assistant (Sheffield Council/In Control, 2009).

The 2009 Information, Advice and Advocacy (IAA) report offers an alternative list of information areas that could be communicated by councils to service users about organising their support. They are (Putting People First, 2009):

- **Assessment**
- **Entitlement to services**

- **Choice of services**
- **Quality of services**
- **Support with funding**
- **Costs of services**
- **Signposting to external and internal information**
- **Advocacy**

These recommendations range more widely than In Control's, touching upon areas such as signposting, recruiting support and advocacy. It also focuses on the needs of the individual during the brokerage stage when a direct payment holder or self funder will need information on what local services they can choose. The IAA report recognises that service users and carers will need to know if the services they choose will supply appropriate help at the right time and are safe and affordable.

Neither the In Control nor IAA suggestions look in detail at the question of how a person's information needs will be shaped by whether they decide to use a direct payment or go with council managed services. We are going to look at what information a person going down these two 'journeys' would need according to the decision stages that accompany the process. The number of decision stages differs according to whether a person goes down the direct payment route which requires more input from the service user and carer or chooses the less participatory option of allowing the council to organise support.

The direct payment route has the following information and decision stages:

Assessment

At this beginning stage a person will need to be informed how to complete the self assessment form and where to ask for help if they need assistance or advice to complete it. They will need information about how to complete their financial assessment. In order to understand how their assessment is being judged and in case they need to appeal, a person should be made aware of the financial criteria and Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria. The person will also need to be introduced to the process as a whole and have some understanding of personal budgets and what will come next in order to be in control of the process and have time to begin considering their own wishes (Local Government Improvement and Development, 2009).

Indicative budget

Following the assessment a person will need to be informed whether or not they are eligible for funded care, what their support needs are and the sum of money that has been allocated to meet their support needs. If someone is not eligible they will need to be signposted to alternative means of support if they exist. Those not eligible but in need of support should also have access to information about local social care providers according to the best practice on self funders (Putting People First, 2009).

Direct payments or managed care decision

Once someone is aware of the money they have been allocated it is appropriate to begin hearing information about the choices they have to organise their support. Each person who has the capacity to do so should be made aware of the main options and what the pros and cons are of each choice. Much of the literature on personal budgets promotes direct payments as been the primary option for service users and carers. This approach can be seen as positive if it encourages a wider group of people to consider direct payments. The promotional approach is less beneficial for those who need to know there is an alternative to direct payments because they either do not want the responsibility or are content with their present arrangements. People therefore need non promotional resources that help them make the decision based on their personal preferences having been informed of the choices.

Creating a support plan

The support plan is the document that sets out how a person's support needs are going to be organised with the money that has been allocated. Central to the whole idea of personal budgets is that the service user or carer will be intimately involved with the plan and make the decisions about their support. This is of course has to be dependent on the extent to which a person wishes to be involved and the amount of help they receive to complete the document. A person will therefore need to be informed about the support plan process and given a choice over their level of involvement.

It is difficult to be prescriptive about the amount of information a person should receive as that will depend on the preferred level of engagement with writing a support plan. Ultimately, this will rely on the skills of the social worker to balance the goal of everyone participating in writing the plan with swamping someone with unwanted information and planning decisions. If somebody has chosen to be involved with the writing of their support plan and has taken the direct payment route they would need to make decisions about these things:

- What changes would they like to see in their life?
- Whether to consider alternatives to the usual menu of personal assistants and day care centres.
- Whether to use services from the council's preferred providers or search elsewhere.

Having a support plan agreed

When someone is happy with how they want to allocate their money in general terms they will need to make sure that Adult Social Care will approve their decisions. The stories about personal budgets in the media have led some people to have unrealistic expectations about what they can spend their money on. Information is needed that sets out what personal budgets can and can't be used for, although this would pose a challenge as something which is acceptable for one person's budget

might not be acceptable for another person. Information about risks would also be necessary to make sure someone was informed that Adult Social Care will not pay for a service that puts someone in harm's way.

Putting a support plan into operation (brokerage)

Support plans and brokerage tend to merge into one another as ideas about how somebody wants to organise their care are translated into the practicalities of recruiting support and comparing prices for different things.

People on a direct payment will need to be informed of the service A4e provides. A4e are funded by the council to work with eligible service users and carers to put their support plan into place at no cost to the individual. They will also need to know that A4e and others will provide further services such as payroll and personal assistant management as a paid service that will come out of their personal budget.

If a person chooses not to spend their personal budget on this type of support they will need information on how to organise the paperwork of a direct payment that can include:

- Sending receipts of all payments to Council's Direct Payment team on a quarterly basis
- How to look for service providers
- Given a choice of local service providers and personal assistants
- Being informed about prices, quality assurance, availability of local providers and personal assistants
- Being informed of safeguarding issues such as insurance liability and CRB checks
- Help with conducting interviews
- Help paying tax and national insurance
- Organising arrangements for holidays or sickness of personal assistants.

Managing a personal budget

With the support plan agreed and put into place a person will need ongoing information and support to deal with any issues that emerge. This is particularly true for those who are employing personal assistants. Taking on this responsibility will require having access to information that details the legal duties they may have to fulfil. They will need information on how to deal with problems with their personal assistant or re-arranging their support hours. It's important that service users and carers know who to contact if things go wrong; such as a personal assistant becoming unwell and there is an urgent need for a replacement.

Review

When it's time for the arrangements to be reviewed it would be useful if the person having a review was given a second opportunity to revisit the decisions and choices information offered during the first assessment. It's likely that when a person is first

assessed it will be shortly after a traumatic life event that has precipitated the request for help. At that point, questions of support plans and direct payments might not be as important to someone as it will be later on. A year or six months later someone who has had the experience of receiving services can see what works and what needs changing.

What information is necessary for people choosing a council run service?

The information needs of someone who chooses a council managed service are less complex than those using a direct payment. The brokerage stage and ongoing management stage require less involvement but a person would still need relevant information about the choices available from council managed services.

A council managed service would either be a directly run council service or a third party organisation that had been accepted onto the council's framework of approved service. There will probably not be a great deal of difference between these services but some do exist and it would be beneficial for there to be a way for service users to compare them. The information and decision stages of those choosing the council managed option are:

- **Assessment**
- **Indicative budget**
- **Direct payments or managed care**
- **Creating a support plan and having a support plan agreed**
- **Review**

Developing information for different groups

In addition to the differences in information needs between those who choose direct payments and council managed services what other information is needed to help people with personal budgets?

Information content for different service user groups

By examining the personal budget journey it became clear that the information a person needs depends on their capacity to understand the information and whether they choose the direct payment option, council managed option, third party managed option or a mixture of the first three options.

As personal budgets are a system of organising support that does not have different rules for different disability groups there do not appear to be grounds for differentiating the content of the information resources.

The way the information is delivered would certainly need to be differentiated according to the accessibility needs of different people but the actual rules and policies remain consistent.

Geography does not play a significant role in personal budgets with the provision being the same if someone lives in Wideopen or in North Shields.

The implications of the one size fits all nature of personal budgets is that information resources do not need to be individually produced for different groups. Instead questions of accessibility, capacity and choice are more useful guides for considering new information resources.

Information needs of new versus existing service users and carers

If the content of information does not need to be differentiated according to disability needs, does it need to take into account the fact that personal budgets are being introduced for existing service users and carers?

As we saw earlier when discussing who needs information on personal budgets, 59% of existing service users of community social care still have to be transferred onto the new system. The 2009 Age UK report on support planning and brokerage for older people pointed to the low take up of direct payments by older people and their concerns that the system would involve new stresses and burdens (Age UK, 2009). This would be exacerbated if people were content with their present arrangements and saw the move to personal budgets as threatening their support.

There is a good case therefore that information should acknowledge these fears especially as choosing a council managed personal budget would usually mean the person's support would not be substantially changed. People could be reassured by producing information resources that introduce them to personal budgets and explain the differences between direct payments and council managed services and inform them of their choices.

Section 3: Current information resources

In this section we will look at the Information resources on personal budgets currently provided by North Tyneside Council and their partner organisations. We will map and categorise them according to the medium of delivery and their function leading to an assessment of their usefulness. We can then identify any gaps in provision by comparing local resources with examples of good practice. The section will conclude with a consideration of North Tyneside Council's plans for developing their information resources.

North Tyneside Council

Introduction

These resources will be assessed by looking at their comprehensiveness, accessibility, relevance, distribution, adherence to best practice and value for money.

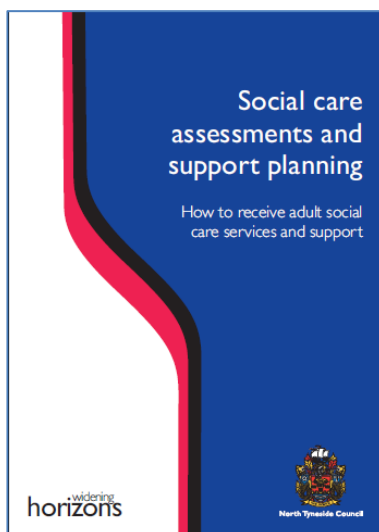
The impersonal information supplied by North Tyneside Council can be categorised into three separate groups according to the medium of delivery, they are:

- **Printed material**
- **Web based material**
- **Audio and video**

We'll begin by looking at the printed material the council uses to inform people about issues connected to personal budgets.

Printed materials

The council currently provides 3 booklets relating to information on different aspects of the personal budget process. All of the booklets appear to be aimed at people who are new to social care.



They are primarily distributed in colour A5 paper format as part of the information pack distributed by Adult First Call or social workers when they initially visit a person who has enquired about receiving social care. Other leaflets in the folder cover confidentiality and data protection and more recently a carers' assessment booklet has become available. The alternative method by which these leaflets can be accessed is via the council's website where they can be downloaded.

The booklets all share a similar style and presentation being 12 to 16 pages long in 14 point black Gill Sans light font in a double line spaced layout on a white background. The information is presented in columns of text separated by headings or bullet points with no images used apart from a chart used to explain how eligibility to personal budgets is decided.

Distribution

The booklets are accessed either through contacting Adult First Call, the council's telephone access service for social care, contacting a social worker or downloading from the internet. The council having decided to limit its delivery of printed materials to these two channels. Distribution through libraries, GP surgeries, the voluntary sector, the NHS or public outreach at events, meetings or stalls has stopped. More recently the council has said they are reviewing their distribution policy.

The three booklets are:

What is Adult Social Care?

This is a general 12 page introduction to adult social care, explaining briefly who they help and what they do before going on to say how eligibility to their service is assessed through the Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria.

The booklet does use some of the standard social care jargon and presents the FACS criteria as long lists of legalistic points. This is a communication challenge and there is clearly a tension between speaking to the public in understandable language and conveying accurate information that has legal implications. No examples are given to help clarify what the different points or levels might mean to a person. There is one external link to a Department of Health website. One coloured graph is used to help explain the different eligibility criteria.

Charges for Adult Care Services? How charges are assessed and how to pay

This 16 page booklet explains how the council assesses the amount a person should pay towards the funding of their social care. It is written using plain language and does a good job of explaining a complicated subject.

It has a page explaining what a personal budget is and choosing between a direct payment and a council managed service. The section on personal budgets is very short and no space is given to support planning, how a personal budget could be spent or the pros or cons of choosing a direct payment.

Out of the 16 pages, 4 are taken up with periphery information such as complaints procedures and diversity statements. Apart from a council contact there is no information on local or national sources of further information or advice.

Social care assessments and support planning

This booklet provides a short overview of the personal budget process from care assessment to review but it does not have the term personal budget in its title or use the term until the fourth page.

It is well written in clear English and largely avoids jargon although it does make a confusing statement in the review section when it says a person can choose to have a personal budget or a direct payment. Parts of the personal budget process have more attention devoted to them than others, for instance there is good summary of the care assessment process and the review stage but the support plan, brokerage and ongoing management stages are hardly referred to. The direct payment decision stage is referred to with a focus on the benefits of choosing a direct payment and there is less information on the benefits of choosing the council managed option.

The booklet is free of images but does use large font and lots of white space. There are no references to external organisations that could provide further information or advice, even to A4e which is contracted to provide information about direct payments.

Best practice for information

The council's printed material can be assessed by comparing it with the good practice discussed in reports by Putting People First, the Department of Health, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. From these reports areas of good practice can be seen:

Comprehensiveness

The three council booklets are summaries that focus on the beginning of the personal budget process and good practice suggests a comprehensive set of resources should be made available (Putting People First, 2009).

Only a small amount of information is given on what comes after the assessment stage. The existing booklets are good summaries of this beginning stage and could be useful in conjunction with a full set of printed material that included the other stages of using a personal budget. They are too short to help someone get to grips with the various decisions and information the personal budget pathway demands. Areas such as choosing a direct payment, support planning, brokerage or personal budget management are not given enough attention or are hardly touched upon.

Information on support planning

Only half a page of one of the booklets by North Tyneside Council discusses support planning, an important feature of personal budgets.

In Control and other information providers have written 20 or 30 page guides just on support planning (In Control, 2009). These guides ask people how they want their life to be different and encourage them to think creatively about the support they need to realise their goals. In discussions with workers who are in daily contact with service users they often cite examples of people lacking information on what can and cannot be bought with a personal budget. Information on support planning that gave people an explanation of what you can spend money to meet an assessed need would help clear this confusion. Without a written guide, service users are reliant on their social worker to comprehend a difficult subject and it is good practice for written information to supplement verbal information.

Information on local social care market providers

There do not appear to be any printed resources giving information about local social care providers that direct payment holders or self funders could choose from.

Instead people will be dependent on verbal information from social workers or A4e workers who may or may not print out lists of services from their computers. SCIE and Putting People First, as well as the Department of Health say information should be provided on social care providers and the current reliance on individual advice from workers is problematic. Self funders will probably not have access to one-to-one help from workers and in any case workers have only limited time to spend with clients.

Information on managing a direct payment

There is an absence of information about the legal responsibilities of direct payment holders to be accountable for their direct payments and to be the employers of personal assistants. Again, information will come verbally from social and A4e workers. A number of organisations have recognised the challenges facing direct payment and have produced detailed guides. Leeds Council and Skills for Care have written 60 page long guides that people can refer to when they need to.

Signposting to other sources of help

There is little information on local or national services that could help people with the issues discussed in the booklets. This is unusual for information on personal budgets and differs from the council websites where there are some links to other organisations that could help. There is also no information on advocacy services that help people if they have a problem or need someone to speak on their behalf. Good practice from a number of sources suggests signposting is necessary and could even reduce the local council's workload.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) and case studies

Both FAQs and case studies are suggested as good practice to answer questions and make the personal budget process more human and understandable. The Department of Health report on support planning and brokerage for older people argues that councils should spend time gathering local stories and examples of how

people have used their personal budgets. All three council booklets were missing examples of how real human beings had used personal budgets and the help they would have provided. (DH, Putting People First Support Planning and brokerage for older people and people with mental health problems 2010). The council had produced FAQs on personal budgets in 2009 but this booklet is no longer distributed or updated.

Provide summaries

The booklets would fit the SCIE best practice for creating information resources for people with mental health problems in that they provides a summary version of parts of the personal budget process, a technique the SCIE report says can be useful for communicating with that particular group.

The social care assessments booklet attempts to be a short summary guide to the overall personal budget process but at 12 pages is too long for many people. Some people, especially if they have language problems or are recovering from a traumatic health episode, would be dissuaded from a booklet this size. A shorter summary that excluded the 4 pages on periphery information and gave the bare bones of what a personal budget is would be more likely to be read.

Accessibility

The booklets are not suitable for those whose needs are better served by the easy read format such as people with learning disabilities. Again, this would not be an issue if there were easy read alternatives published by the council. The information is presented as one long column of text separated by bullet points and headings and would benefit from images to add meaning and easy presentation.

Producing material in a number of formats is good practice that is cited in number of documents on personalisation and social care. Both the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and the Office for Disability Issues promote the use of easy read materials to make information accessible to people with learning disabilities.

The three booklets are all well written in simple English and largely avoid jargon with large font and lots of white space to help people with various language problems and this is to be commended.

Reassurance and making informed choices

Although this is a subject that most of the literature on personal budgets has shied away from, it could be argued that there is a need to reassure people who are content with their present arrangements or who are worried by the prospect of having to organise a direct payment.

In the social care assessments booklet the direct payment choice is given prominence and talked about in largely positive terms whereas the council run choice is briefly discussed and is the third of four choices. Given that only about 350 people are receiving direct payments out of the 6000 or so recipients of community

based social care this is inappropriate. More information could be made available on the council managed option being an appropriate choice for people who do not want change or the stress of organising their care.

Relevance to existing social care users

As the booklets are aimed at new people being introduced to social care, the booklets are of limited value to an existing service user wanting to know how a personal budget is different from their current set up and whether they need to choose a direct payment. This group might also feel confused and anxious by the process of change and they would find little information to reassure them that choosing a council run service is very similar to their existing arrangements.

North Tyneside Council internet resources

The enthusiasm for communicating public information through the internet is now encompassing how the internet can deliver the universal information and advice services advocated in the Putting People First agenda to promote prevention and inform social care users of their choices. Councils up and down the country are investing large sums of money in websites that will give the public information about health and social care services that can be accessed for free. They are also investing in systems that will allow the self assessment, calculation of a personal budget and finding suitable support services all online.

North Tyneside Council is considering investing in a new website that promises to improve the way information about personal budgets is currently delivered. In this section we will consider the current council website and the anticipated future website. We will compare them with the good practice as set out in the IAA report and my own more recent study of 30 Council websites.

We can then make some recommendations as to how new internet resources on personal budgets can develop.

To provide some context for the discussion of internet resources we will begin by looking at the 2010 Office of National Statistics survey of internet use to understand who the internet will and will not reach.

2010 survey of internet use

Context in relation to the internet is useful because of the enthusiasm for developing new resources on the web, seen as a cheap and more participatory medium of communications than traditional face to face or printed materials. There is a danger that primary considerations such as the needs of the audience are lost in the march to provide new technology and keep up with one's peers.

The 2010 survey of internet use is a salutary reminder that the internet is still not a valuable way of communicating with many groups in society. 60% of people over 65 have never used the internet, 41% of people in the North East do not have access to the internet in their homes and 31% of people of an income of less than £10,399 have never used the internet. Many people will be surprised to discover that internet use by the population of the North East fell from 2009 to 2010. Internet figures show a rise overall in England and across most demographics but it is useful to recognise the internet has its limits in its ability to communicate information about personal budgets in North Tyneside.

I will now examine the council's current websites. The council's social care web presence is centred on its pages in the Adult Social Care section of the general North Tyneside council website. The council also has a small website devoted to learning disabilities that discusses personalisation on one of the pages.

Adult Social Care web section

The Adult Social Care website pages are accessed about two clicks away from the main council's home page via a link on the health and wellbeing menu option. There are pages on the following subjects:

- [Carers](#)
- [Dementia](#)
- [Drug treatment](#)
- [Getting involved](#)
- [Learning disabilities support](#)
- [Local Involvement Networks \(LINKs\)](#)
- [Mental health](#)
- [Physical disabilities](#)
- [Safeguarding adults](#)
- [Support for older people](#)
- [Supporting people](#)
- [Autistic Spectrum Condition](#)
- [Direct payments](#)
- [How do we decide what to do?](#)
- [Who is eligible for adult social care services?](#)

Most of the information that could inform someone about personal budgets is held on three pages, the main adult social care page with links to pdf downloads, a page on direct payments and the who is eligible page.

If you are reading this report on-line you can click through to the web pages listed above (Control + click the web link).

Navigation

As Adult Social Care is part of the Health and Wellbeing section on the website a viewer would have to be aware that the two are related if they wanted to access the pages for the first time. They could alternatively use the search box on the home page but this produces a number of misleading results. The viewer might also be

confused as links to other pages are placed hierarchically in the side menus without any directions or context given in the main central column as to where to find information.

Accessibility

The pages are entirely text based, using bullet points and headers to mark out the information. Information is presented on long pages that you have to scroll down to read. The overall effect is of a printed page having being transferred to the internet without altering the format to make it easier to read on the internet. There are options to have the page read out aloud for people with visual or reading problems and one can change the size and colour of the font to make it easier to read.

Search directory

The general council website has an alphabetical search directory of services and a search box, the alphabetical system relies on people having some idea of what a service is called and clicking on the letter that name of a service might begin with. Unfortunately it is often the case that the names of services and organisations are not always descriptive and somebody would need to know what the name of the service was.

The directory of services is a general list of council related services and local organisations. It does not feature a comprehensive list of local social care providers or information to allow someone to compare them. The search box has limited functionality, having entered the term personal budget; the first five results had little to say on the subject:

1. [Army Cadets Force](#)
2. [Home Safety Check](#)
3. [North Tyneside Employees Credit Union](#)
4. [Northern Oak Credit Union Sessions - Riverside Centre](#)
5. [ParentTalk Project](#)

If you are reading this report on-line you can click through to the web pages listed above (Control + click the web link)

Links

There are links in the right hand column to national and local voluntary organisations, all of them possibly will be useful for people accessing personal budgets:

- [A4e](#)
- [Action for Blind People](#)
- [Age UK North Tyneside](#)
- [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\)](#)
- [Carers Direct](#)
- [Housing care](#)
- [LINK North Tyneside](#)
- [My Signpost](#)
- [North Tyneside Disability Forum](#)

- [RNIB](#)
- [RNID](#)
- [Taking Part Workshops](#)
- [The National Care line](#)

The links on the health and well being page take you to more official government sponsored sites:

- [North Tyneside Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)
- [Directgov](#)
- [Health and Well-being Partnership](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [NHS Direct](#)
- [North Tyneside PCT](#)
- [NT Information Observatory](#)

There is not a page devoted to the links or an explanation inside one of the other pages to say who the organisations are or what information they might provide.

If you are reading this report on-line you can click through to the web pages listed above (Control + click the web link)

There are 3 pages where information related to personal budgets is set out:

Main Adult Social Care page

This page briefly describes what adult social care is and gives information on how to contact Adult First Call, a link to the carers page and the option to download the council's five booklets on social care, three of which we discussed in the printed materials section. The information is text only with no images.

Direct payments page

This page presents information about direct payments and tries to help someone decide if they might like to choose one. The page doesn't discuss the context of deciding between different options other than a direct payment but it does give some idea of the benefits and the responsibilities of choosing a direct payment. It mentions which groups of people can access a direct payment and gives some examples of what the money is often spent on. The information is presented on one long page that the visitor has to scroll down to read.

Who is eligible for adult social care services page

This short page describes how the council uses the Fair Access to Care Services criteria to decide who is entitled to receive assistance with their support needs. There is an option to download a four page summary of the FACs criteria. Again, the information is just text.

NTLD online website

This website was set up by the council in early 2009 to provide information to people with learning disabilities and their carers. It has one page that refers to personalisation and personal budgets (though it uses the term 'individual budgets'), it describes what personalisation is, the eligibility criteria and links to some In Control and old council information on personal budgets. On the home page it uses images and captions to guide the viewer to choose different sections but the actual information pages are text based. The site does not appear to have been updated since October 2009.

Best practice for internet resources

The Information, Advice and Advocacy report was written to help councils promote and inform the public about personalisation and it usefully devotes a whole chapter to discussing best practice for informing people via the internet. We will primarily use their framework to discuss the current council websites and how they can be developed. The authors of the report have a good practice checklist for websites:

Content

Assessment

Councils should inform viewers of the assessment process to make sense of what is a complex process that requires their input into the self assessment and the financial test they will have to complete.

Entitlement to services

It suggests councils explain how eligibility to services is decided and who is likely to receive services. They say the information should be conveyed in a question and answer format such as, 'who do we help?', 'what services do we offer?' and 'what to do next?' in order to make the information more digestible for people but also to manage unrealistic expectations that funded help will be forthcoming.

Information on availability, cost and quality of local social care services

It says councils should provide information on what support services, free and paid-for, are available in their local area. There is a recommendation that councils provide information on the costs of services that people might wish to use for their support needs. They praise Sefton Council for the 'wealth of information' on how much services are likely to cost and also for their financial assessment and benefits check service that can be used by visitors online.

Councils are recommended to communicate information about the quality of services that a social care user might wish to use. This would be particularly useful to people on direct payments and self funders. Sites could refer visitors

to Care Quality Commission (CQC) reports, satisfaction survey results and information about the quality assurance processes to which providers might be subjected.

The present council website does have a link to the CQC website where some social care organisations (but not individual personal assistants) are given a rating but the CQC site does not give people the detail or ability to easily compare providers. There is a link to MySignpost, a directory of local support organisations but this site does not provide an exhaustive list of support or of personal assistants and does not provide information on the cost or quality of organisations.

Support with funding

The IAA authors suggest keeping information about funding for different groups in one place to make it simpler to organise and access. They also suggest that councils give information on how much money a person might be entitled to with a personal budget if that was possible. SCIE report on personal budgets and mental health service users also recommended that people on personal budgets be given practical examples of how people have spent their personal budgets.

Signposting

It says telephone numbers should be given to help people who prefer to speak to someone one to one. With regard to links to other websites, it recommends that councils say what services the organisation provides, telephone number, email address and opening hours.

Advocacy

There should be information on what advocacy is and how an individual can access an advocate.

Information aimed at the public not professionals

Information should be intelligible to a general audience and not be restricted to people who are familiar to social care terminology and practices. It should address viewer as 'you' as in 'to receive an assessment you need to first contact the adult social care department' to aid understanding.

FAQs

The authors of the IAA report say this is a useful technique for answering questions and should be used. Despite the council having once produced a printed FAQ booklet on personal budgets it doesn't have an online or current printed version. This would be an easy and cheap addition to the online and printed library of resources.

Practical information

The IAA report and the SCIE literature recommends that practical examples of the information conveyed be used to reach people. Examples could include case studies

of real people or real life situations that reflect somebody's likely experience or challenges. For instance there could be a case study showing how somebody has spent their personal budget or how somebody felt when they had to recruit a personal assistant for the first time and how they managed the situation.

Practical information that relates the steps a person has to take or forms they must fill in are also valuable. If the focus is on generalities or promoting personal budgets this could cause stress and lack of understanding. In North Tyneside the website appears to ignore personal examples completely preferring brief generalities that some people would find difficult to relate to.

Comprehensive information

The IAA authors advocate that enough information should be provided to help someone navigate the whole process of receiving social care and what happens after the initial assessment. The present North Tyneside Council site offers a more limited experience and leaves out information on a number of important subjects that are integral to using a personal budget. As was the case with the printed resources; support planning, brokerage and ongoing management are absent in the present website. A future website would need to expand on the current approach to meet good practice.

Information to aid choice

In recent Putting People First, Department of Health and SCIE reports there is an established body of good practice advocating that councils support their service users to have choice in selecting social care providers and explore alternative ways of meeting their social care needs. To do this people need a range of information about these providers that is relevant to them; will the personal assistant they are looking for have a car to take them places? or will the day care centre they are looking at be open over the Christmas period? Without this type of information the job of finding appropriate support becomes more difficult and there are no ways to meaningfully compare alternatives.

The council website does not provide information to aid choice or how to find a provider; it appears to have delegated that task to MySignpost, a local website we will discuss later. Without this information being suitably provided the goals of personalisation are difficult to realise.

Navigability

The IAA authors say that that the structure of a website is vital because of the complexity of the subject and the need for people to find information quickly. The structure of the present council site is grouped according to different disability groups; this is a very small section with probably no more than 15 pages.

A new larger website that aims to properly inform people about personal budgets and personalisation would need to cope with possibly hundreds of pages facing a visitor. One way to tackle this would be to group information according to the help

people need as opposed to the disability group they belong to. As seen in the section on the personal budget journey the information a person needs is not dependent on their disability group but their capacity and motivation to engage with the process. Information on a new website could follow sections on different stages of the personal budget process with an emphasis on the introduction stage where the other sections will be given a context.

Information held at high level

This means that information should be accessible with one or two clicks from the home page, the worry being that if people have to read too many pages before they find the information they will abandon their search.

At present the council's pages on direct payments or carers are three clicks away which is probably too many. There is also the issue of the prominence given to social care on the council's home page with the 'health and wellbeing' link living on a small side menu alongside many other options. An alternative might be for social care to feature more prominently on the home page and have a direct link instead of being grouped under the more ambiguous 'health and wellbeing' heading. Another alternative might be for social care to have its own website that can focus on social care and the wider personalisation agenda of prevention and providing universal information and advice services. Stockport, Newcastle and Barking councils have taken this route and information is quicker to find as a result.

Search options

The IAA report discusses having a clear structure and easy to navigate site so people can find information quickly, and having a search box so people can type in information queries.

The search options in the present site need updating to help people use the website. More information needs to be 'tagged' so that search queries are twinned with their destination that shows people the correct information. The IAA report praises the alphabet lettering search method but at least in North Tyneside's case there are problems with this method as more subjects need to be added but that could result in making the lists unmanageable for visitors to easily glance down.

Databases are wonderful tools for personalising information to the individual's needs. Stockport's MyCare, MyChoice website uses a database to help people carry out a basic online self assessment that will help the social worker understand their support needs. It uses images and drop down boxes to help people share the needed information and it's a good example of databases that produce the right information but are easy for the visitor to access.

Personal assistant directory

In contrast to the absence of information about personal assistants on the council website, Brighton and Hove Disability Federation have set up an accreditation scheme and the online tools so people can quickly find someone to provide them

with social care support. It uses an online database to ask people about their preferences in a future worker, it asks the visitor if they need a male or female personal assistant, if somebody has a preference for employing a worker with a car, what experience or skills they want the worker to have and so on until they are satisfied with their choices. They will then be presented with a list of personal assistants who meet their criteria.

One council that has taken a lead in this is Worcester with their Carewise site that also allows service users to choose personal assistants according to a number of considerations such as gender, experience, CRB checks and so on. In a short space of time a qualified, experienced and CRB checked individual can be found at no cost to the individual (Worcestershire County Council)

Future plans

After a review of over 30 Council Adult Social Care websites and reading the Transforming Adult Social Care: Accessing Information, Advice and Advocacy report (IDeA 2010) that sampled 50 Council social care websites, I have drawn some conclusions on the current application of good practice with regards to social care on the internet.

Most council websites are years behind commercial organisations in using the web to inform or access services. Many sites rely on the early internet pattern of using long columns of text and bullet points to convey information. This format suits printed material but is hard to digest on the internet and fails to make use of the interactive functions such as databases that make the internet so attractive. Nearly all the sites reviewed had major flaws connected to lack of information, lack of accessibility, difficulty navigating and poor presentation. Some sites however have made progress in informing their publics about the complex area of adult social care and have begun using features such as forms and databases to give people information that is personalised to their unique situation.

Of the sites I reviewed the site that incorporates most elements of good practice is the Stockport 'My Care My Choice' website. Stockport's site web developer is a company called Quickheart, they had a remit to create a new social care website that would guide people taking a personal budget and also provide information on general wellbeing. I will highlight the features in the website I believe should be emulated, the mistakes that should be avoided and additional features that are not present on the Stockport site but should be included. After looking at Stockport I will examine some other sites that have particular features worth imitating.

Stockport site overview

The Stockport site appears to have been designed at least in part as a response to the Accessing Information report because in contrast to most council sites it has taken on board most of their recommendations for the content and usability of the

site. The site holds over 250 pages and is designed to offer the visitor information on a wide variety of social care needs, even areas such as transport and leisure options. It appears to be trying to offer a 'universal information service', at least in relation to Adult Social Care, that was promoted in the 2007 Putting People First document. The information appears to be accurate and kept up to date as well as being exhaustive.

In contrast to most council websites the information is presented as a series of images and captions, with the individual clicking on the image to take them onto the information they need. This appears to be almost like an easy read version of a website with long columns of text abandoned for the simplified combination of images and short paragraphs. The idea, say Quickheart, was to present the information as a kind of a journey that follows how people actually prefer to find out about their social care. They say this approach is based on detailed research on the needs of service users. The site also offers a text based alternative for people who are more comfortable with text and have a good idea about the information they need to find. The site also works well with screen readers for people with visual impairments. Therefore the Stockport site seems to offer an accessible route to people with a variety of communication needs and preferences.

The one area currently underdeveloped in the site is that of personal budgets which appears as a small section on a page about care assessments. This is because they are currently working on a personal budget extension to the site. We can have some idea of what this section would look like because the company has produced a pdf with screenshots of an online self assessment that leads to an indicative budget with options on how this money can be spent on services and adaptations. If successful this new section would allow someone to know how much they were entitled to in minutes and begin to consider their choices (it is unclear what further assessments or information the council would ask for). This feature, if it worked, would appeal to self funders and people who like to know as soon as possible what support they are likely to receive. The website would then give the people who had completed the assessment a selection of services tailored to their individuals needs.

As social workers or A4e workers have only limited time to spend with direct payment holders and perhaps limited knowledge of social care options, it would be very useful for service users to be able to explore the selection of services or ideas presented to them by the website. Also at the moment self funders have few sources of information on local services and could receive personalised and trustworthy information for free. If the services listed also had individual information about their CQC ratings, CRB checks, costs and availability it would make the site a valuable tool for people and help create a local social care market. At the moment it is not certain that all these features could be incorporated onto a future North Tyneside site or will exist on the future Stockport site. It's also unclear whether an online self assessment and indicative budget tool would work in practice or how some people

would cope with so many decisions being taken online without the guidance of social workers or face to face help.

Problems with the Stockport site

Although the Stockport website is well designed there are some flaws that could be improved. It doesn't have a search option and this means you have to find information through navigating between the pages and given the complexity of the subject and the size of the site, this was a mistake. If North Tyneside council develops such an extensive site with over 250 pages they will need to organise dedicated worker time to set up and maintain the website on a permanent basis.

The Stockport site does not use videos to accompany pages and this would benefit those for whom web pages are inappropriate or who do not use screen readers.

It's also curious that in such a well designed site there is an absence of FAQs and case studies, despite both of these techniques being good practice in the Information, Advice and Advocacy report.

Another difficulty with the Stockport site is that it doesn't allow people the option to download information in an easily printable or pdf form. For people with moderate visual impairments or whose eyes tire easily this should be an option.

A final consideration is that we don't know what Quickheart's personal budget extension will look like in practice so choosing their site might be a gamble.

Audio and video

The council currently provide audio versions on request of all their information resources and the council website has an inbuilt software application that reads out whatever is on the page although this is can be difficult to navigate for the uninitiated. There are currently no video resources supplied by the council.

The council website does not use videos or audios that present information on a web page as a short, narrated story to help someone quickly understand. Some councils and learning disability organisations have begun using video as an accompaniment to each web page. The Easy Read website and Barking and Dagenham council websites are good examples of using this medium. It is good practice to provide video resources for people with learning disabilities and for people with mental health needs according to SCIE.

These videos can also be burned onto dvd discs very cheaply when needed and distributed by social workers to service users and carer who might benefit from them. Newcastle City Council has produced a six minute long video explaining direct payments that uses social care users and carers to tell their stories and how they have used their direct payments. This is a great use of an accessible medium to share case studies of how personal budgets are being used in practice.

MySignpost

Overview

The MySignpost website has been designed to provide useful local information to social care users. It is hosted by the Independent Living Zone organisation, a not-for-profit social enterprise. They have received funding from the North East Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to develop the site. As well as containing links to services and information in North Tyneside it also has a sub-regional remit and they provide information on social care support services in Newcastle and Northumberland. MySignpost is recognised by North Tyneside Council as a source of social care market information in the area with a link to the site from the council website. It has a crucial role as the only provider of social care market information in the area for people using personal budgets.

MySignpost as a social care market information provider

There are three main issues with MySignpost's role as a provider of social care market information. These are the limited number of organisations and people it has information on, the limited information they supply on these organisations and the difficulty in finding relevant information.

1. At the time of writing, the website has limited information on support services and adaptations. The site does not contain a comprehensive list of local organisations or personal assistants that would be useful for someone with a direct payment or a self funder to choose from. There are no categories linking to personal assistants, domiciliary care, home care, dementia or support workers.
2. The local organisations that are listed do not contain information relating to cost, working hours, information on insurance or CRBs or the quality standards they might be judged by. There are also no links to a database of information on personal assistants that some sites such as the Brighton and Hove Disability Federation or Worcestershire Council websites feature.
3. Another issue is that of searching for information on the site. If a visitor enters the word 'personal assistant' into the search box, you are given five responses, only one of which is a service that supplies personal assistants. There appears to be more information on disability adaptation equipment than on support organisations or people. The information on adaptations is presented as an alphabetical list so an individual would need to have some information already about the equipment they need. Other websites like Ask Sara from the Disability Living Foundation use a series of images and questions to guide people find the information they need (Disability Living Foundation).

There is a need for a website that supplies detailed information on local support services. Without a comprehensive and detailed database of local support, the public has limited sources of information for using their personal budgets to select their support. In the absence of this information people could select inappropriate services and people or be overcharged.

Section 4: Findings and recommendations

Findings

From this report's study of the information resources needed in North Tyneside it is possible to identify some key areas that could be addressed by North Tyneside Council and its partner organisations.

The content of available information resources on personal budgets is too limited

The existing range of resources focus only on part of the personal budget process and as a result leave service users, carers, voluntary sector workers and self funders without the information to make informed decisions to organise social care support. The gaps in information are: an introduction to personal budgets; the direct payments question; support planning; brokerage; social care market provision and the ongoing management of personal budgets.

Current literature lacks material in short summary form

The current resources lack simple introductions to personal budgets and direct payments. Best practice recommends that short summarised versions of information be made available. Although the printed materials are relatively short, at 12 to 16 pages they are too long and would deter some people from reading the information. Summarised versions of personal budgets and the direct payments in particular are needed because they present the most important points where some information should be communicated even if it's a short summary. There is bound to be concern that providing a summary could lead to misunderstanding but this risk can be taken as long as there are links to where people can ask for further information.

Lack of more detailed guides that people can refer to

As well as a lack of short summaries there is also a shortage of more detailed reference guides that people could consult when they encounter problems or need more information. Leeds Council and Skills for Care have produced large manuals to guide people to be employers of personal assistants that fulfil this reference role. Such a guide in North Tyneside would help service users and carers in a role that many will not have ever experienced before taking a direct payment.

The current booklets are well written and accessible guides to the initial stages of a personal budget

The existing three booklets that inform people about the care assessment process, eligibility criteria for FACS and the financial test are well written and accessible introductions to these subjects. Their format does require some tweaking and would benefit from a reduction in the number of unnecessary pages and the introduction of images to make it easier to read.

Printed material is absolutely necessary, a website alone is not enough

From comparing the demographics of which groups of people use personal budgets and their communication needs with the recent research on internet usage it is clear that the internet should not be the primary means by which the council and its partners share information about personal budgets. That is not to say a new website resource is unnecessary but it is an unavoidable fact that a majority of older people who make up 74% of those who receive support do not use the internet. Their preferred means of receiving information are face to face and then the printed word.

The new range of information resources needed to fill the gaps in information identified in this report will have to be available in hard copy. There are cost implications in this finding but that will have to be accepted by the council and its partners if they wish the rollout of personal budgets to have the informed participation of their clients.

Website needs to be updated or replaced

The current website with its limited range of information and confusing navigation needs to be replaced with a new, larger and more interactive site. The ability of the web to create up to date, detailed and accessible information should be harnessed as quickly as possible. The Quickheart model provides much of the accepted good practice in communicating social care on the internet.

Adult Social Care does not employ anybody on a permanent basis to maintain their current web resources and a manager has been temporarily seconded to oversee the development of a new website. This is an important issue as the learning disability website has not been updated since 2009 and without changes to staffing levels that could be a precedent for the new website.

Audio and video

The council does not currently have any video versions of their information. They are accessible media for people with learning disabilities, people with sensory impairments and people with literacy and language problems. They are also relatively cheap to distribute online or on dvd once the cost of producing them has been absorbed.

There is a single system of personal budgets for all groups and it is non geographical so there is potential for resources to be shared across groups

Separate leaflets or web pages for disability groups in relation to personal budgets are not needed. The personal budget system does not differentiate between different disability groups and there are no geographical considerations in how people access them.

Information developed for other council areas could easily be adapted to be used in North Tyneside if contact numbers and links were changed and permission given. Instead the main criterion for how people access them is their own capacity to understand a complex process and the willingness of a person to participate in the

different stages of decision making. This means that information supplied should be differentiated according to these criteria:

- Choice of summary or more detailed resources;
- Information for people who choose the direct payment route and who will need information on handling the paperwork and perhaps managing a personal assistant;
- Information on writing a support plan for those who wish to engage with that stage of the process.

There is a lack of information on available support for direct payment holders and self funders

The council do not compile a brochure or directory of services and they do not give information on the comparable cost or quality of these services. MySignpost has a remit to supply information on local services and adaptations but they do not currently provide a comprehensive list of services and they do not display information on the cost, quality or other details that would enable someone to compare what's available in the local social care market. There is no information on local personal assistants or how to find a suitable assistant. They also do not have a database that could ask people for their preferences and then produce a list of suitable services.

There is not enough information on what direct payments can be spent on

Some people have unrealistic expectations about what they can buy with their direct payments. There does not appear to be any literature or information on the council website to explain how a person's eligible needs could be met.

Lack of information on how to be a personal budget employer or how to manage the financial side of direct payments

There does not appear to be any appropriate information on how to manage being an employer. As this is one of the most challenging and potentially stressful aspects of someone taking a direct payment there needs to be suitable resources to guide people. Other councils have produced their own guides and North Tyneside would benefit from their availability.

There is a lack of information on choices available to people using council managed services

At present people who opt to use council managed services are not given any written information on the services they can choose from. Instead they rely completely on the verbal advice of their social worker and this puts too much reliance on a single point of information.

Easy read material needed

Although easy read material is generally considered good practice there are no easy read resources produced by North Tyneside Council to help people with learning disabilities and other groups to understand personal budgets. Other areas have

produced easy read printed material and this can be emulated. The Quickheart model website does have some easy read features and this is one of its advantages especially if it was combined with online videos to share information.

Recommendations

To address the gaps in the range of information and the way it is delivered, North Tyneside Council could develop the following resources and changes to give people improved information on personal budgets.

Publish a set of printed materials to support understanding of personal budgets

The council should produce a new set of leaflets, although in many cases other council and voluntary organisations' materials could be reproduced if permission was given. Costs could be minimised by using the new leaflets produced alongside this report or from other councils who normally allow councils to reproduce their material for free. The job of printing the material could be outsourced to a third party and so avoid the council's lengthy and expensive tendering process. Examples of all the recommended new leaflets can be seen in the next section. The range should include:

Introductory or capture leaflet

A brief introductory leaflet is needed to introduce service user and carers to personal budgets for the first time.

Due to the frustrations service users were experiencing in Gateshead, their LINK organisation created their own introductory leaflet following a workshop with service users. They discovered that service users preferred a very simple format with only the basic facts about personal budgets presented. We should follow their example and produce a similar leaflet but one that discusses options other than going down the direct payment route. It should also give the information in a balanced way that does not emphasise the direct payment route. It was difficult to find a leaflet that introduced the subject without the emphasis on direct payments and so I have created a draft leaflet that could be considered and can be seen in appendix 1a.

Overall guide

There is a need for a publication that brings all the information together in one place that can be referred to as and when needed.

It would be useful for people who need more information than summaries and would create a space where case studies and FAQs could be accessible to people who do not use the internet. Age UK have produced an overall guide to personal budgets that has all these elements and would of great help if distributed to people who need more information than the basic summaries.

Direct payments or managed budgets?

Despite the question of how to manage your personal budget being central to the process, there are few examples of resources that give the question the significance it deserves or present the issue in a non biased way. Most leaflets on the subject actively promote the take up of direct payments. I have therefore created a draft leaflet that tries to set out the options in an open way, giving the pros and cons of each option. The information is presented in a summary way to encourage as many people as possible to read it and understand the choice they have to make. The leaflet can be seen in appendix 1b.

Support plan booklet

As there are currently no resources on the support plan part of the process and it is dependent on the interaction between the social worker and the individual, a support plan resource would be useful to clarify how the individual can participate in the process if they choose. It would also be helpful if there was information on what can or cannot be bought with a personal budget.

There are lots of examples of support plan booklets or templates, many produced by In Control but these often assume a significant level of participation by the service user or carer. What is needed is a resource that gives people information without being as prescriptive as In Control's seven stage templates. Kirklees Council have produced a suitable booklet that gives a 26 page summary explaining how support plans can be written that would assist someone to understand the basics. This booklet should be emulated or reproduced.

How to be an employer guide and factsheets

Becoming an employer for a personal assistant is a serious undertaking and people need information to prevent problems and stress. I propose two different types of written material.

1. A short introduction to help people decide if they want to employ a personal assistant through a direct payment. St Helens Council has produced a summary leaflet that should be reproduced.
2. A large reference guide people that people can refer to for information about managing a personal budget and being an employer as published by Leeds Council and Skills for Care. Both are substantial and useful guides and should be introduced into North Tyneside.

Easy read versions of all printed material

The gaps in provision of information for people with learning disabilities could be remedied with the introduction of the easy read leaflets developed by In Control and other councils. There are easy read leaflets available for each of the different personal budget stages and these could be easily introduced. However as most of this material belongs to In Control there might be cost implications. Alternatively a third party could be contracted to produce easy read material based on the readily

available leaflets recommended in this report and this could prove to be cheaper than using In Control.

Create new distribution systems for printed materials

Spending time producing new information resources could be wasted labour if those who need them can't access them. There needs to be a policy by North Tyneside Council to actively distribute the resources to a wider audience than those who have been in touch with Adult First Call. This would be useful to people who are not currently in touch with Adult Social Care or who are self funders. Resources could be sent to local voluntary organisations, day centres, community centres, health centres and hospital departments, libraries and public events.

Internet developments

A new website should be developed following the Quickheart model or a similar model that makes use of the good practice recommendations in the IAA report.

There are some caveats though, there needs to be public discussion about whether an online self assessment and resource allocation system calculator application are positive developments and clarity over whether these calculations would have official standing or whether they would have to be followed by some type of assessment by a social worker.

The Quickheart model has some gaps in its format, it needs a FAQs section, it requires case studies and practical examples of how people have used their personal budgets, it needs a search box and it needs to allow people to download documents so they can print them out if they prefer.

There is also the issue of who would maintain the site with new information. The council do not have any permanent information staff that could take care of the website. Without allocating worker time to maintaining the site it could quickly become a white elephant and an expensive misuse of funds.

Develop new social care market resources

There needs to be an information resource so that people with a direct payment or self funding can find suitable services to meet their support needs. The present gap in information on the local social care market will need to be resolved either through MySignpost expanding the number of services listed and the detail they present on each service or through the council managing their own social care market resources through Quickheart or developing an alternative.

The internet is ideal for presenting this information as it will need to be regularly updated and you can create databases that enable a person to find a service that meets their individual needs. Lists of available services could be downloaded from the website and printed out and given to individuals without internet access.

Provide information on accredited personal assistants

To create real choice and safeguard against employing inappropriate workers a directory could be established either on the MySignpost site or in a separate location that provides information on personal assistants in the area, giving details such as their gender, if they are insured, have been CRB checked recently, their work experience, if they have a car and so on. It should be the means by which people can quickly find a worker who fits their individual circumstances.

Brighton and Hove Disability Federation have created a personal assistant directory that can be accessed via an online database that asks people for their preferences through drop down lists. If a similar scheme was established in North Tyneside, service users and carers would be in a far stronger position to make choices about their support.

Use digital resources especially video and audio

The council need to produce video versions of their information about personal budgets; they are accessible media for people with learning disabilities, people with sensory impairments and people with literacy and language problems. The cost of printing dvds or putting a video on a website is very cheap and the main cost is the initial production. Newcastle's video on adult social care with its emphasis on service users and carers sharing their experiences should be emulated rather than the Barking and Dagenham model of a member of the council's staff talking to the camera.

Appendix 1: Proposed printed resources

Appendix 1a, page 1 of the newly designed introductory leaflet

Quick Guide to Personal Budgets



Personal Budgets are the new way of organising your Social Care

North Tyneside Council provides social care to help people live independently in their homes and community. The council can provide equipment or somebody to help with everyday tasks/activities. For carers, it can mean a break from their caring role.

Personal Budgets are a way of organising your social care and are designed to give you more choice about the help you receive. Don't worry if it sounds complicated, as you can choose for other people to look after the organisation. If you ask the council to organise your care, you will mostly receive the same care and not be aware of any differences.

How do I get support?

If you are not currently receiving social care, the first thing to do is to contact North Tyneside Council and ask for an assessment. If you already receive social care and want a personal budget or a review contact Adult First Call.

A social worker will ask you questions about your health and life or they will ask you to fill in a form. From your answers they will decide what help you need and how much money you will be given to meet these needs. This money is called your **personal budget**.

Who is entitled?

The Council decides if you qualify for a personal budget based on your income and needs. Sometimes the council is unable to fund your social care but its still important to have an assessment as the advice can point you in the right direction for more help.

Support in North Tyneside



Deciding if Direct Payments are Right for You

How to choose and organise your social care

If a social worker has said you are entitled to a personal budget you now need to decide which type of support is best for you. There are now 4 ways of receiving help such as home care, equipment or social activities. The choices are:

- **A managed personal budget** - the council will organise your social care
- **A direct payment** - you are given the money to organise your support
- **A third party manages your personal budget**—someone like a member of your family or a voluntary organisation organises your support
- **A mixture of the above**

Managed Personal Budget

Pros

More straightforward The council will offer you a smaller choice of support but they will take care of managing your care. They will pay the bills and make sure that your personal assistants, day care or equipment is looked after. As the council takes care of the support, you do not need to spend as much time making decisions.

Cons

Less choice The council will only give you a limited amount of choice about the services you receive. Council services focus on personal assistants and day care. Sometimes these services will not be suitable for you or they will not be available when you need them. For example, council services often only operate during set hours and use many workers, which can mean getting used to seeing different people. This isn't always the case and some councils will try to provide the same worker.



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