

Information for Personal Budgets

Summary of findings and recommendations

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Introduction

North Tyneside LINK Board commissioned this report to look at who needs information about personal budgets, what they need to know and what best practice has been developed to meet that need. This summary gives the findings and recommendations of the report.

The full report on information for personal budgets looks at information resources such as printed material, the web, audio and video. It does not cover resources 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.

For a copy of the full report call LINK on 0191 643 2623, email link@voda.org.uk or go to North Tyneside LINK website at www.linknorthtyneside.org.uk

Report findings

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

The existing resources focus 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
- 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. There will be concern that providing a summary could lead to misunderstanding but this risk can be taken if people are told how to find more information.

Lack of more detailed guides that people can refer to

There is a shortage of more detailed reference guides for people to 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. A North Tyneside guide 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 informing people about the care assessment process, eligibility criteria for Fair Access to care Services (FACS) and financial assessments are well written and accessible introductions to these subjects. Their format would benefit from less pages and more images to make it easier to read.

Printed material is necessary, a website alone is not enough

Recent research on internet usage show that the internet should not be the primary means by which the council and its partners share information about personal budgets. 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 will have to be available in hard copy. The cost implications 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. Using the web to create up to date, detailed and accessible information should be put in place as quickly as possible.

Audio and video

The council does not currently have any video versions of their information. Audio

and video are accessible media for people with learning disabilities, people with sensory impairments and people with literacy and language problems.

There is a single system of personal budgets for all groups which 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 be adapted for North Tyneside if contact numbers and links were changed and permission given. Information should be differentiated by:

- Choice of summary or more detailed resources
- Information for people who choose direct payments and 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 does not have a brochure or directory of services and does 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 does not currently provide a comprehensive list of services or display information on the cost, quality or local personal assistants. The site does not have the facility to produce a list of suitable services based on personal preferences.

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

Being an employer is one of the most challenging and potentially stressful aspects of taking a direct payment and suitable resources are needed to guide people. Other councils have produced their own guides and North Tyneside would benefit from their doing so.

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. They rely on the verbal advice of their social worker putting too much reliance on a single point of information.

Easy read material needed

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 there are websites with easy read features and online videos to share information.

Recommendations

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

The council should produce a new set of leaflets which 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.

Gateshead LINK created their own introductory leaflet following a simple format with basic facts about personal budgets. North Tyneside should produce a similar leaflet that discusses options other than direct payments.

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 make case studies and FAQs accessible to people who do not use the internet. Age UK have produced an overall guide to personal budgets which would be of great help to people who need more than a basic summary.

Direct payments or managed budgets?

There is a need for a leaflet that sets out the options in an open way, giving the pros and cons of each option. Information should be presented in a way which will encourage as many people as possible to read it and understand the choice they have to make.

Support plan booklet

The support plan booklet should clarify how the individual can participate in the

process if they choose and give information on what can or cannot be bought with a personal budget.

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. Two types of written material are proposed:

- A short introduction to help people decide if they want to employ a personal assistant through a direct payment.
- A reference guide giving full information about managing a personal budget and being an employer.

Easy read versions of all printed material

The gaps in provision of information for people with learning disabilities should be remedied with the introduction of easy read leaflets for each personal budget stage.

Create new distribution systems for printed materials

North Tyneside Council should actively distribute resources to a wider audience than those who have been in touch with Adult First Call. Resources could be sent to local voluntary organisations, day centres, community centres, health centres and hospital departments, libraries and public events.

2. Internet developments

A new website should be developed following models and good practice recommendations considered in the full report.

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 website should have case studies and practical examples of how people have used their personal budgets. It should have facilities to search and allow people to download documents so they can print them out if they prefer.

The council do not have any permanent information staff to maintain 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 for people with a direct payment or self funding to find suitable services to meet their support needs.

The internet is ideal for presenting information which has to be regularly updated. You can create databases that enable a person to find a service to meet their

individual needs. Lists of available services could be downloaded from the website and printed out and given to people without internet access.

Provide information on accredited personal assistants

To create real choice and safeguard against employing inappropriate workers a directory could be established. It should provide information on personal assistants in the area, giving details such as their gender, if they are insured, if they have a car, recent CRB checks, work experience, and so on. It should be the means by which people can quickly find a worker who fits their individual circumstances.

3. 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 cheap and the main cost is the initial production.

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