Personal budgets
– checking the results

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What is this paper for?

This paper considers emerging approaches to developing outcome-based performance measures within social care. It highlights and promotes sector-led developments in building an evidence base for the effectiveness of personal budgets that can be harnessed and used to drive the future direction of local social care systems.

Policy background

The local government and provider sector has produced a proposed partnership agreement which has been endorsed by the Department of Health. Think Local, Act Personal reinforces personalisation as the core direction of travel for social care development, building on learning from the past few years. This proposed agreement, explains how councils, service providers, voluntary and community organisations can make progress happen on the ground. It stresses the need for personal budgets to be "authentic" offering real choice and flexibility, and making a real difference to the lives of both personal budget holders and family carers. This paper explains how councils can check how personal budgets are working in practice.

The wider context

The roll out of personal budgets continues to underpin the modernisation of social care in England.

As a result, councils will need to pick up speed in their efforts to mainstream personal budgets and to move quite quickly to a position where everyone who is eligible for ongoing support is given a personal budget as part of routine practice, along with any advice and support they might need to direct their support themselves.

This undoubtedly presents a challenge to councils. However, there is already good progress at many councils which have begun a journey of transformational change. Councils have made significant progress since 2007 in the delivery of personal budgets across the country. Although in many areas few people have a personal budget, there are a growing number of councils where self-directed support is already the default operating model for people with on-going care needs. The proportion of people using community-based services who have a personal budget increased from 6.5% in 2008-09 to 13% in 2009-10[1].

There are many convincing stories from councils that have made good progress showing the potential of personalisation improve people's lives. However, as councils rollout personal budgets for large numbers of people, there is a risk that the benefits will not always be realised. It is therefore essential for councils to check that personal budgets are authentic – that they are actually resulting in greater choice and control for individuals.

Most councils have yet to build into routine practice systems that will enable them to check the results from personal budgets. Councils need to be able to understand the outcomes achieved at an individual level for people taking up personal budgets and their families and to make use of this information to drive change and identify where things are not working. Without evidence of the impact on individuals, there is a risk that the change to self-directed support and other changes to local delivery systems will fail to make a difference in the way they were intended.

Interest from the Coalition Government and regulatory bodies in the critical question of whether and how people's lives have actually been improved during this transformation process is rapidly increasing, and so far there is little to feed the growing appetite for evidence.

Finding robust ways to understand and measure the success of local implementations of personal budgets and self-directed support is therefore a major challenge for the sector and is set to become one of the key questions which councils will be expected to answer in the next phase of transformation.

[1]*The Information Centre for health and social care, 2010.*

Why invest in measuring outcomes?

In the current financial climate where budgets are under increasing pressure, hard decisions need to be made about spending. Currently the information and intelligence that is harnessed to drive spending decisions tends to focus on the delivery of services typically measuring activity and volume, driven largely by the requirements of regulators and government departments. This focus is not a good proxy for quality because it misses the experience of people receiving services and support where value is received. The current social care performance system does not provide information that makes sense to people who use services and their families, or that helps local people to understand what is being achieved. There are plans to change national data collections that may provide more useful information in future. The Information Centre for health and social care has announced a zero-based review of national data collections. However, this does not remove the need for councils to develop better information on outcomes. There will also be a new national user experience survey. This aims to provide better information on satisfaction and outcomes. However, this covers everyone getting a social care service, rather than just those with personal budgets.

Without information on the outcomes of activity, it is impossible to assess value for money accurately. Information from people receiving support on the outcomes achieved is therefore urgently needed to understand the real returns on investment and to support better financial decision-making. The business case for self-directed support is that people can have better lives with costs being the same or less than for under previous arrangements. This makes it essential to check that good outcomes are actually being achieved.

As well as making sound financial sense, an understanding of the impact of personal budgets on people's quality of life enables councils to be more accountable to their local populations.

This fits with a move away from top-down performance management towards a sector-led approach where councils and providers take responsibility for measuring and reporting performance, and using this information to drive improvement. Until now councils have focused on producing information to feed national returns and performance indicators. Accountability is to government and regulators. Instead councils need to develop ways to use information that are useful locally – enabling managers to improve performance and enabling the council to be more accountable to people who use services, their families and the wider public.

Developing a knowledge base around the impact of personal budgets will complement the information available from national returns, filling a significant gap in the current information available.

Having outcomes information enables councils to share an understanding of how far social care interventions are making a difference to people's lives, which services are working well and which not so well. It also enables the council to engage in a meaningful debate with local people about what that means for the future.

Developing a shared understanding of how social care interventions are working for people can in turn strengthen the social contract between councils and their local populations. This information can help councils to have open and transparent dialogue with the public about priorities and how money is being spent in order to meet people's needs and aspirations.

As a result, an opportunity exists for the sector to develop and own its own approaches to demonstrating accountability to its local community and to evolve ways of capturing and using information from people using services to drive the future direction of local care systems.

Emerging approaches

There is no common framework currently in existence to capture outcomes-based data. Although the number of approaches currently being used is relatively small the way in which different tools are used is quite diverse. A recent Department of Health good practice paper outlines the most common approaches currently in use (see table below), and includes some detailed case studies[2].

The challenge to councils moving forward will be to capture and utilise outcome-based information in ways that enable deepening engagement with their local communities in the strategic development and management of social care systems. Using information in this way makes it possible to ensure that the things that are important to people in their lives drive the strategic direction and the commissioning decisions of local social care systems.

Approach	What is happening	Who is involved in development
Self-directed support outcomes evaluation framework	Development of questionnaires to measure the experience of people taking up self-directed support.	• In Control • Councils • Disabled people and families
Three wishes – developing a new way to measure success in public services	Proposed new national measure – the number of people who achieve their three most important outcomes	• Oxfordshire County Council leading work by a group of councils
Outcome-focused reviews	Development of a toolkit to help councils carry out reviews that focus on outcomes	• Department of Health • Councils • Disabled people and families
Working together for change	Development of an approach that uses information from reviews in aggregate form to understand results across whole populations and communities	• Department of Health • Councils • Disabled people and families • Providers

[2]*Changing lives together: using person-centred outcomes to measure results in social care, Department of Health 2010.*

A number of councils have successfully used a process called *Working Together for Change* to share information in a structured and accessible way with people using services and carers to inform commissioning and the development of services. Lancashire's adoption of *Working Together for Change* is an example of this.

Co-production in commissioning

Lancashire County Council was an early adopter of the *Working together for change* approach to engaging people in commissioning and service development. *Working together for change* is a simple six-stage process for using person-centred information from routine support plans and reviews in aggregate form to set the direction for market shaping and the framework for public engagement in decision-making. It involves doing reviews in a particular way, so that open questions are asked about what is working, what is not working and what is important for the future in people's lives – this is called a person-centred or outcomes-focused review. Information can also be collected in other ways when *Working together for change* is used in areas where statutory reviews are not routinely undertaken, such as in public health.

This person-centred information is taken into a workshop where commissioners, providers and people with support needs, their carers and families work together through a staged process to identify common themes in what people are saying, analyse root causes for what isn't working and develop action plans for what needs to be done differently. In Lancashire, *Working together for change* is being incorporated into core commissioning activity across the whole county.

The council expects multiple benefits from this work derived from ensuring the best possible fit between people's needs and aspirations and the types of support commissioned. So far, the council has used the approach in a variety of ways, including for specific client groups and across pathways such as with stroke services, older people's day services and dementia services in the county. In addition, the approach has been used with providers to support them to improve the quality and responsiveness of their

services and the degree of choice and control people experience. So far this has included extra care housing, domiciliary care and community support. A senior commissioning manager describes *Working together for change* as "the golden thread between what people say they want and what we commission".

A local toolkit has been developed for use by commissioners who will use *Working together for change* as the methodology behind service reviews three times annually in each of three PCT areas – nine times per year in total. An internal training programme has been designed to ensure all commissioners have the capability to use *Working together for change* independent of external support and the IT system has been adapted to ensure that standard review data is collected in a way that facilitates the process. The use of *Working together for change* is not confined to social care environments. It has been used by schools, in children's services, in public health and by the local strategic partnership to determine joint action on cross cutting issues.

The published guidance for *Working together for change* is available at: www.puttingpeoplefirst.org.uk

Developing a strategic approach

Move to an outcome-focused way of working requires councils to develop a strategic approach to the collection and use of outcome-based information. As local programmes begin to increase in scale and the number of people receiving personal budgets increases, the need for councils to check the "authenticity" of their local programmes will become more critical. At this point in the development of outcome-based methods of working, there are some emerging examples that illustrate what a good strategic approach might entail.

Key features of a best practice approach to checking results

Commitment and leadership: A common feature in areas that have made significant progress in embedding personalisation is strong leadership, at different levels throughout the organisation. Making a commitment to capture and use outcomes-focused information can give a strong signal to staff and local communities that can help to build and maintain leadership for driving personalisation forward. Part of this cultural change is a willingness to be open to challenge and acknowledge that some things are not working well – and see this as a positive opportunity to improve.

Taking an outcome-based approach to reviews: Councils can use reviews to check the outcomes achieved for individuals. This helps to build an outcome-focused approach into routine practice. While one-off evaluations can be useful, using reviews and other routine activities to measure outcomes gives a richer picture of progress and can better support strategic planning.

Building outcome reporting into information systems: Capturing and reporting data on outcomes in ways which can drive change is a significant challenge for many councils. IT systems need to be adapted to reflect new processes and capture new information. The system and training implications can turn the task of capturing outcomes data into a major project and can slow progress down. Councils need to adopt approaches to capturing and reporting data which are simple to implement and easy for people to understand.

Using information on outcomes to drive strategic change: Even good outcomes information is only useful as far as it is used to improve practice. Councils need to develop an approach to the sharing and use of information that engages local staff and communities in reviewing what is working and what needs to change to make the best use of resources and to improve peoples lives. This might include the publication of regular *How are we doing reports* linked to periodic stock-takes undertaken with the full engagement of staff, service users and carers in developing responses to issues raised and steering the direction of the local social care system, so that it meets the needs of the local community. Techniques such as *Working together for change* can be very effective

ways to include people in thinking through issues and planning together with people using services, to deliver change.

Independent challenge and triangulation: There is a risk that information collected at reviews may be coloured by the relationship between the person asking the question and the person receiving support. To counteract this and to enable a more rounded picture of the outcomes achieved or individuals, it is a good idea to implement more than one single approach to the collection of information, and to ensure that people have an opportunity to tell their own stories outside of the contact they have with social care professionals.

One option for achieving this would be to commission local user-led organisations to carry out independent checks. The case study below shows an example of how this approach can work.
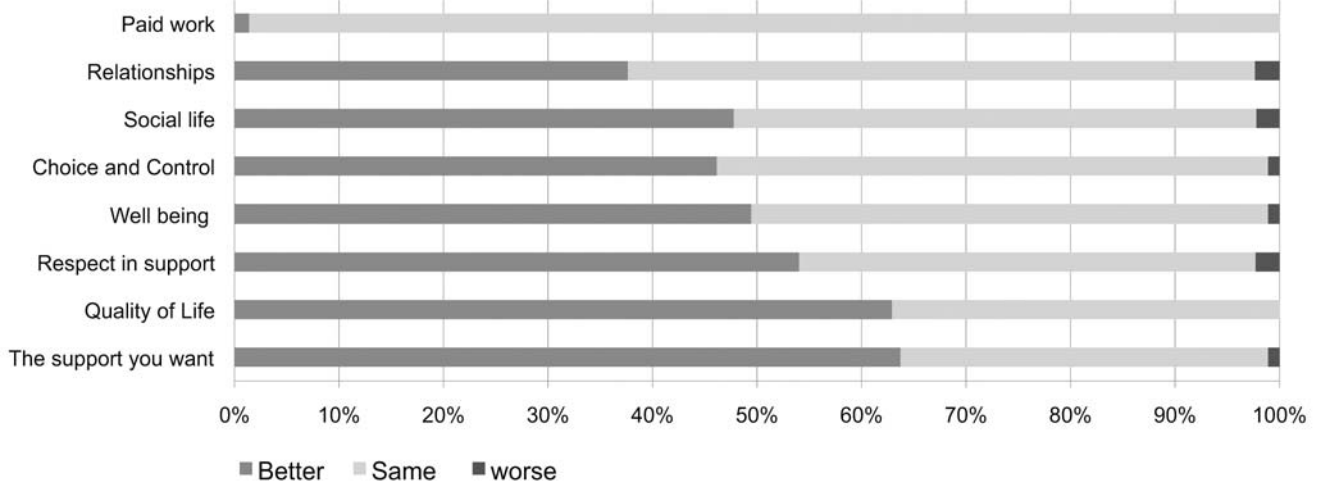
Independent checks by a user-led organisation

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has a strong track record of direct payments and was one of the early sites to work with In Control to mainstream personal budgets. In August 2008, the council adopted self-directed support as the default way of working and began to offer everyone with ongoing support needs a personal budget.

During 2009, the council adapted the review process and the social care IT system so that staff could capture information about how people's lives were being affected by personal budgets. A series of outcome-focussed questions were asked at each review, using an approach developed by In Control. Staff asked people whether things were better, same or worse since changing to a personal budget. Staff then recorded this information into a database, allowing the council to begin to build an evolving picture of whether personal budgets were making a difference to people.

This information also allowed the council to compare how personal budgets are working for different client groups and in different parts of the borough. The graph on page 6 shows the overall results for 90 people.

Quality of life monitoring

Horizontal bar chart showing Better, Same, worse percentages for:
- Paid work
- Relationships
- Social life
- Choice and Control
- Well being
- Respect in support
- Quality of Life
- The support you want

X-axis: 0% to 100% in 10% increments. Legend: ■ Better ■ Same ■ worse

In general the picture looked positive, with most people reporting that personal budgets had made a positive impact on their lives. But the process also threw up challenges such as the relatively very low impact self directed support was having on younger people's ability to enter or retain paid employment.

The council also commissioned a local user-led organisation called Richmond User Independent Living Scheme (www.ruils.co.uk) to carry out in-depth interviews with a sample of people receiving personal budgets. This served as an independent check on the results coming out of reviews. RUILS also asked additional questions about the process of getting a budget. These interviews similarly showed that personal budgets were having a positive impact on people but also highlighted areas where the process was not working and enabled the council to focus its attention on improving problem areas.

The council published the results of the user-led evaluation and information from its own outcomes monitoring system in January 2010. Since then the council has gone on to produce regular reports analysing the outcome data. These are scrutinised by a group of stakeholders at the Personalisation Partnership GroupBoard.

The report *Your support your way* is available at: www.puttingpeoplefirst.org.uk

The case for a common framework

Personalisation requires collaborative development between local communities and councils to be authentic and to work effectively. Information that makes clear what is working and not working in people's lives is a key component of a personalised system.

In turn, finding ways of working together to make use of such data means making a broader shift to an outcome-based way of working and requires a clear process which staff, service users and carers can engage in to understand what is working and not working and to work out together what needs to happen next.

Developing methods to achieve this should be considered a key priority for local programmes. However, developing a method of collecting and analysing data can mean a significant resource investment. Depending on the approach it can require significant investment to adapt local IT systems, as well as training implications for frontline staff, even without considering how the information may then be used. The work involved in every council developing a local approach would be significant and difficult to justify in the current climate. There are clearly efficiencies to be gained from moving towards a common approach.

A critical issue for those councils who are investing in collecting data is the lack of consistency in approach. Councils have collected information on a one-off basis, using a range of tools. This makes it hard to compare results over time or between

councils. Developing a common toolkit offers the possibility of minimising development costs and being able to share and compare data that could enrich a local areas understanding of its own progress and be further used to drive the development of regional and national agendas.

It is important to put in place low-cost solutions that provide information on outcomes and that allow councils to compare their results. The tools described here have the potential, if harnessed in the right way, to deliver much of what is required to support this cultural shift, with the right level of engagement.

There is an opportunity for the sector to take a lead in driving this forward, building on what is practical and useful. Taking the initiative in this way will help drive forward cultural change within a local area, as well as strengthen the sector's role more widely in shaping how the personalisation agenda moves forward.

Personalisation outcome evaluation tool

The Putting People First consortium has worked with In Control and Lancaster University to develop an evaluation tool, which councils can use to check how personal budgets are working. This is a sector-led approach, which is applied locally. It enables councils to collect information in a consistent way that can be compared over time and between councils.

The tool is part of In Control's evaluation framework. This has been developed over several years, working with councils across the UK. In 2007, In Control published the results of an evaluation covering 196 people with personal budgets in 17 councils. Following this, In Control extended the evaluation framework, adding questionnaires for family carers and social work staff. The questionnaires have been co-produced with people taking up personal budgets and family carers.

More councils have been using the revised framework as part of in-depth evaluations of local progress and results. Councils also held evaluation events, and some have carried out additional work such as asking a user-led organisation to carry in-depth interviews to understand better the experiences of people taking up personal budgets.

Another important feature is public reporting. In Control has worked with nine councils to produce a local evaluation report, so that the public can see the progress being made in their area. The reports have been published by the councils are also available on the In Control website at www.in-control.org.uk/evaluationreports. The data from the local evaluations was used by In Control and Lancaster University to produce a national report based on responses from over 500 people[3].

By involving local people and user led organisations in the evaluation process and by publishing results of evaluations openly, local authorities can increase their accountability to local people, and share with them the effect of their work.

Councils have found that using the framework helps to promote a meaningful dialogue with councillors, front-line staff, local user-led organisations and partners organisations.

In Control has now worked with the Putting People First Consortium to update the personalisation outcome evaluation tool. The tool is now available online, with questionnaires for both personal budget holders and carers. There is also a hard copy version in easy read format, providing an alternative for people who don't have internet access or would find it hard to complete an online questionnaire.

The latest version of the personalisation outcome evaluation tool is available at www.in-control.org.uk or www.puttingpeoplefirst.org.uk.

[3]*A report on In Control's third phase – evaluation and learning 2008-09 www.in-control.org.uk/phase3report*