Overview

This paper sets out a commonly-used process of self-directed support. Self-directed support is part of the personalisation of services, through the use of both personal budgets and budget holding by lead professionals to support children, young people and their families to lead fuller and more active lives and to control how they are supported.

Self-directed support is an integral part of the government’s policy of developing outcomes-based commissioning; making explicit the relationship between outcomes achieved for individuals and those set out at the strategic level in commissioning strategies.

The paper is based on work with 22 Children’s Services (as at May 2008) focused on developing personal budgets and addressing the wider personalisation agenda for children and young people across social care, health and education. The work in each site is being supported by in Control (www.in-control.org.uk); development in the first eight Children’s Services began in autumn 2007. Developments are in their early stages and are directly based on the work of in Control since its inception in 2003.

Note: There are alternative models of self-directed support. The DCSF does not favour one model over another. This paper looks at the in Control model, which many local authorities across England have used.
1. Personalising Funding

The essential difference between the self-directed support process and the more traditional way of supporting an individual is that here the funds are identified first and then used to inform the drawing up of a person-centred support plan, whereas the existing system bases the allocation of resources on a completed plan.

Current processes for allocating finance to an individual’s support package are professionally led, with the allocation dependent on an agreed care plan based on an assessment (either Common Assessment Framework or other local process). The process can be depicted in the following way:

With self-directed support, the focus is on the allocation of a personal budget before any planning takes place, i.e. the money is identified up front, and the support plan is designed with that budget in mind:

The key principle underpinning this approach is that of a fair and transparent allocation of resources, based around the individual support needs of a child or young person.

Traditional arrangements can mean that large spends from local authority budgets are allocated to relatively few children and young people. This is often due to the costs of specific interventions or services, rather than there being a huge difference in need compared with the wider eligible population. Through allocations based on support needs, rather than costs, a fairer decision can be taken about the money available to support a child or young person.

With self-directed support, the allocation process is based around what it would take for an individual to achieve the five Every Child Matters Outcomes, rather than the cost of specific “off-the-
participating sites are enthusiastic about exploring this process as a way of joining up funding for a child and using a personal budget to commission a child’s support needs in the round.

2. The Resource Allocation System (RAS)

Central to the operation of self-directed support is the resource allocation system which relates the resources available to support needs. This involves:

- identifying the resources available
- understanding how they currently relate to support needs
- designing a self-assessment questionnaire to identify different levels of support needs
- allocating points to each level
- relating points to the amount of budget to be made available.

The aim is to produce a clear and fair way of allocating the budget in a way that children, young people and their families can understand. This process is known as the Resource Allocation System (RAS) and it produces an individual allocation for each child based on the support they need to achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

3. The Seven Steps – The Operating System

These seven steps have been developed over the last five years of work by in Control and offer a simple narrative to developing self-directed support for an individual.

Figure 1: The Seven Steps of Self-directed Support (www.in-control.org.uk)
Step 1: Money

The first step is to identify the resource allocation to be made available to the child, young person or family so that people can plan the support they want based on a known budget. The funding allocation is made using the Every Child Matters Outcomes framework as a basis. A simple set of questions linked to a points system identifies an allocation for an individual child or young person and the support they need to achieve the outcomes they have identified. The child, young person and those closest to them complete the questions with support if required.

The diagram below shows how the questions are used to identify an indicative allocation. (An indicative allocation is the funding available to meet the support needs of the child from the designated budget).

![Diagram showing the process of identifying an indicative allocation](image)

**Figure 2: Resource Allocation based on the 5 Every Child Matters Outcomes**

The resulting allocation is clearly linked to the support each child needs to achieve the five outcomes, and there is an expectation that this will be acknowledged in the child’s Support Plan. In addition to providing information about an individual child, the aggregated information resulting from this step provides a clear view about the overall use of a whole team or service budget to achieve outcomes.

Concerns are frequently expressed about the likelihood that this system is open to abuse and the ‘over’ expression of support needs. These concerns have been found to be un-based through extensive trialling with both professionals and families in Taking Control alongside the wider work of in Control with 120 Local Authorities. What has been clear from the testing process has been the underestimation of need by family members and the over estimation of need by professionals.
There will undoubtedly be occasions where individuals try to take advantage of the system (as there is at present), so the local authority / funding authority will need to adapt its current moderation process to identify when this occurs. In general though the initial Common Assessment Framework (CAF) will identify possible risks and the fact that the RAS only delivers an indicative allocation and not a final agreed sum of funding means that it will be clear from an early stage where instances of ‘gaming the system’ or simple mis-interpretation have occurred.

Work is still at an early stage at the phase 1 sites; however it is clear that once there is confidence in the information, it is being viewed as key to supporting an outcomes-based approach. Resource allocation is linked to outcomes rather than services, and the achievement of those outcomes can be monitored both individually and at a strategic level, linking together all levels of commissioning.

**Step 2: Making My Plan**

The planning process draws on person-centred approaches and ensures that the child’s voice is central to the final plan. The plan will focus on the child, their life and that of their family and carers and set out how they will use their budget to build on the support they receive from those closest to them and how the budget will make a reality of the five ECM Outcomes for them.

The funds allocated through the RAS amount to an ‘indicative allocation’; whether this sum will suffice or not will be identified through the drawing up of the child and family-centred support plan. The allocation is a fair share of the available budget based on the support needs of the child and their situation. As it is unlikely that in every case the allocation will mirror the current spend, there is an implicit challenge within the planning process to be creative and flexible about how support is accessed and used. To date families have taken this challenge on, and produced innovative (as evidenced in the later case studies) solutions to supporting their son or daughter. If there is an identifiable deficit in support which means that a child is without crucial support and this deficit is clearly down to a lack of funds, then there is a basis for negotiation with the funding authority about increasing the amount of the initial indicative allocation.

**Step 3: Getting My Plan Agreed**

Since the support plan is the means through which the local authority’s Duty of Care is delivered, the Authority will need to be satisfied that each plan meets this duty for each individual. The Support Plan is person-centred and so will include creative and individual ways of using the budget to get the best support possible up to the limits of the financial allocation.

**Step 4: Organising My Money**

Expecting every family whatever their circumstances to be able to manage a Personal budget and
all that this entails is unrealistic. Whilst all can take part in decisions about how money can be used, there needs to be a range of options for managing Personal budgets, from which families can choose. These might include using the services of a nominated representative, an Independent Living Trust, a broker or support provider, a Budget Holding Lead Professional, a care manager or other representative of Children’s Services. How the money is managed, and by whom, will be set out in the support plan.

**Step 5: Organising My Support**

The support plan sets out an individual’s request for services built around how they live their life, their support needs and how and by whom they want to be supported. It will explain responsibilities around employment, liability, insurance and the expected outcomes of the support for the child or young person.

This step highlights the implicit challenge to all providers of support. It will potentially mean a fundamental change in the relationship between commissioners and providers. Providers will need to ensure that they are offering the support which the child and those representing the child want. Furthermore, the prime relationship becomes that between the provider and the recipient of support, rather than the statutory agency.

Securing the support that will work best for individual children and their families will often require purchasing goods and services that have not previously been bought and possibly from new kinds of providers. Commissioners working at the strategic level will need to gather intelligence about what this means for the market as a whole.

Each child/family is likely to be looking for a person-centred response which will mean providers offering a broader and more flexible menu of support or services. It will also mean that in some instances, they are competing with individuals the family might choose to employ, so they will need to justify their charges and demonstrate why it is worth purchasing their services rather than employing an individual on a less formal basis. The approach does encourage and enable families to make better use of their own informal support networks.

For commissioners, there are also enormous implications for market management, and, it is anticipated that personalisation will have a profound impact on the market. For early sites market development is seen as the next step; moves have already been made to involve local providers and to share learning about the likely impact on the demand for support from families. Scaling the activity up is likely to see fewer block contracts being offered and services having to deliver ‘quality’ responses to individual requests for support or services.

The ‘responsibility’ for driving the development of a market, ensuring that families and those using
an Individual Budget have access to sources of information and the support needed to make decisions and choices will rest with the commissioner.

The development of self-directed support is not only about service redesign but also about looking to develop within the local community independent supports, sources of information and a diverse array of support options. There can be no reliance on families being able to do this for themselves, or the simple ‘rebranding of care managers as brokers’; while some families will have the capacity to take this on, many will need and want support and advice of different kinds. While in some cases, care managers may be heavily involved in supporting a child or those caring for them, the real drive is seen to be the development of capacity within the community as a whole so that ‘support brokerage’ is available to all those who need or want it.

**Step 6: Living My Life**

Getting on with living; this “step” sees the support plan in action, and includes the opportunity to seek help if things go wrong, if support needs change or there is a crisis.

**Step 7: Seeing how it has worked**

The review will look at whether or not the money has been used to provide the support as agreed in the support plan; it will also monitor the extent to which the budget has been used in support of achievement of the 5 ECM outcomes by the child or young person.

If, during the year of support delivery there is a crisis then it would be expected that those supporting the family, in particular the lead professional would react in a similar way as they do at present; i.e. taking immediate action to support the child and/or family through the crisis. If there are significant changes to the support needs of the child which require an increase in resource then this can be accessed through simply re-visiting the RAS exercise and making available an additional allocation. Conversely if the child and family come to the end of the first year with a significant saving i.e. they haven’t used all the resource made available then the local authority and the family will use the support plan, which will include an agreement about such a situation, as a basis for a discussion about savings which the family can roll-over and savings which are paid back to the local authority.

**4. Work to date**

As of May 2008 there were 22 Children’s Services undertaking work to introduce these steps and the wider agenda of Personal budgets to children and young people. Most services have begun by developing the approach for disabled children and young people, and their families and carers; however some are already broadening their brief to include other groups of young people, including
those in care.

Much of this broadening has been the result of the development of the role of the Budget Holding Lead Professional, and there are a number of similarities between the approach to self-directed support, and the way in which Budget Holding Lead Professionals operate (e.g. the resource allocation system and the challenges to the local market).

With reference to Budget Holding Lead Professionals, the Department for Children, Schools and Families has set up a pilot to test whether better service packages for core groups of children and families with additional needs can be delivered by giving lead professionals a budget to procure goods and commission services directly from providers. A national evaluation of this pilot will report in autumn 2008.

The following Pen Pictures are examples of how three young people have made plans to use their Personal budgets from Children’s Services. These plans have all been agreed and are now ‘live’. They are for young people in a specific transition focused project called Dynamite.

Dynamite in this local authority area has run as a pilot project for nearly 18 months, beginning working with young people and families in March 2007. Seven families got involved and had their first experience of self-directed support through the £200 practice budget. This proved a good way of introducing the seven steps of the process and the flexibility of an Individual Budget.

Once informed of their Indicative Allocation the young people, their families and a supporting facilitator started to develop their support plans. Over the following six months they took part in training, joint meetings with other families and one-to-one sessions with their facilitator.

The local authority retains the responsibility to agree people’s plans. In this local authority a group was convened including the senior managers from children with disabilities services, the social work team manager, an adult team manager and colleagues from the Learning and Skills Council (who had joint funded the project and wanted to continue to share learning). The group established a risk and opportunity register to document the issues arising in children and young peoples support plans to assist with a consistent approach to decision making.

A decision was made to set aside 12% of the total spend as a contingency against which insufficient funding, crises or changes in need could be set. However, it may be that by the end of the first year there will be a surplus within the contingency that will demonstrate the expected efficiencies that Individual Budgets are already delivering across adult services (as evidenced by in Control).

Families were involved in all stages of the work; they particularly appreciated the transparency of
the allocation system and the more flexible and person-centred approach to designing the support plan. They particularly highlighted the very different relationships with professionals created by this process, i.e. where everyone can see the plan and think of how best to use the money without there being an ongoing drive from local authority representatives to tightly manage the budget.

This project is in the early stages of supporting families to 'go live' with their budgets. Evidence to date supports the finding from across in Control that families are able to make far more efficient use of resources than historic local authority practices.

5. Pen Pictures.

1. Getting up in the morning:

Beth is 17 and lives at home with her family. She has high and complex support needs around her day-to-day health, mobility and has complex learning disabilities. Beth needs support to get up in the morning and get ready for the day. Family life is busy and her brother and sister are much younger.

The family day starts at 7am. The first priority for Beth and her family is to see how they can all start the day one hour later. They are going to use some of their money to get supporters in each school day morning to get Beth up at a better time, and to take the start of the day at her pace. Beth has her own van and instead of getting school transport she will get to school in her own vehicle. Some of the money that Education Services had spent on a taxi for Beth will come back to her in mileage to help her pay for her petrol.

Beth and her family are starting to think about her leaving school in the next 18 months. Beth's mother is really keen that Beth has new experiences and starts to build relationships in her local community. People who know Beth well and support her are starting now to get out with Beth. The family can do this because they know how much money they have to plan with for the future.

2. A Musical and a Curry

John is 16 and has needed 24 hour support from his family. He has epilepsy and learning difficulties. His family have used Direct Payments for a number of years but have found that the regulations that go with Direct Payments have left them with little flexibility and few breaks from the caring role.

John does not get to spend much time with other young people; in his support planning circle they have realised the importance of his cousin Rob and their relationship. Rob and John have agreed to do some stuff together, going in to town shopping on a Saturday, going to the pictures, going for a meal - John loves curry.
John has a passion for musicals, he gets to a show each year and he is going to use some of his money to go to London to see Dirty Dancing in April. He can’t wait! John and his family have written in his support plan that he will get to another show later in the year. When we spoke to John’s mother in November about his personal budget she said;

'Why have you [i.e. the care manager] been sitting in my living room for the last 10 years - if you told us this 10 years ago we would have just got on with it, that’s all we wanted'

3.      Breaks at the Coast

Jed is 17 and when he turns 18 in eight months time, he will finish visiting the short break residential unit that he has enjoyed using throughout his childhood. Jed has learning disabilities and attends a local special school. Life, new people and new places are difficult for Jed, as is change.

In his support planning circle they started to look to the future, they talked about family holidays in caravans and how much they enjoyed them. Jed and his family are planning to buy a caravan and Jed will spend £5,500 of his budget on this and his family will pay the rest. Jed doesn’t claim his own benefits yet so he will rent his caravan out when he is not using it. He and his family will go up for holidays; Jed also has a small team of supporters who he likes and has chosen to go up with him when he wants to get away from the city.

The programme of work with Children’s Services is called ‘Taking Control’ and is one of a number of programmes being led by in Control (www.in-control.org.uk). If you would like to find out more please contact Nic Crosby, Director Children and Young People nic.crosby@in-control.org.uk.

For further information on commissioning and market development, including further case studies & resources, please see: www.ecm.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning