

Self-Directed Support: Reducing process, increasing choice and control



Summary

“Self-Directed Support is a tool which disabled people can use to support their inclusion as a valued member of our society, with roles and responsibilities to help with functioning of their community. SDS is part of the journey to reach Independent Living.”

Miro Griffiths, Co-Chair of Making it Real and National Co-production Advisory Group Member

This is a report of three workshops commissioned by the Think Local Act Partnership (TLAP) organised and delivered by Sitra . The workshops were held in April 2013 and aimed at council staff responsible for implementing Self-Directed Support (SDS). The purpose of the workshops was to share experience and ideas on improving and reducing unnecessary process that has grown up around SDS. This brief report explains the background and context to the workshops and summarises the key themes that emerged from the discussion that took place. Some areas for further consideration are suggested. A number of case studies have been put together from councils that took part in the workshops giving examples of developing practice which show what councils are doing to improve their SDS processes.



Introduction

Personal budget delivery is now mainstream business in council social care. The first *National Personal Budgets Survey (POET)*, undertaken by In Control and published by TLAP in 2011, showed encouraging developments in personal budget outcomes but significant concerns about process. The second *POET evaluation*, published in May 2013, highlighted that this remains an area of difficulty for many councils.

As a practical response, TLAP commissioned Sitra to run three workshops to help local authorities improve their SDS processes. The workshops were aimed at council staff responsible for SDS systems and took place during April 2013 in London, Birmingham and Leeds. The workshops were well attended with over 90 people from 67 councils taking part in open and constructive discussion. The workshops provided an opportunity for participants to share their own positive practices and be made aware of practice from elsewhere for reducing process to improve the experience for service users and carers. The workshop programme is attached as *Appendix 1*.

This report constitutes a write up of the key themes that emerged from the workshops, which were seen as important by participants and contributors in making SDS systems less cumbersome. It was clear from the discussion at the workshops that councils are working hard to improve their SDS processes. As a follow up to the workshops, a number of case studies have been collected from councils that took part in the workshops. These provide examples of promising and developing practice, where councils are taking practical steps to improve their SDS processes. The case studies, together with a set of templates containing more detailed information, can be found at www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/SDSandpersonalbudgets

They are grouped around the areas shown below:

- Information and Advice
- Supported Self-Assessment
- Indicative Allocation
- Support Planning
- Co-production
- More Efficient Working
- System Re-design.

Background and Context

Looking back

In October 2011 TLAP published a series of papers designed to help councils implement SDS, one of which was titled, *Adult Social Care – Minimum Process Framework*. This set out in diagrammatic form a suggested core set of (minimum) activities needed for adult social care delivery by councils. This work remains relevant, as do the two companion reports: *Improving Direct Payment Delivery* and *Re-thinking support planning: Ideas for an alternative approach*.

The work on reducing process is connected with two other initiatives that TLAP is leading, a project to improve the take up of Direct Payments and a programme of work designed to help councils improve the delivery of personal budgets for older people. Further information about the work of these projects can also be found on the TLAP website www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk.

Looking at the Personal Budgets Outcomes and Evaluation Tool (POET)

In May 2013, the second National Personal Budgets Survey was published setting out the findings from the POET survey run with 22 volunteer councils in England. As was the case with the results of the first survey, the outcomes for people using personal budgets are generally positive. However, the results show that many people still report the experience of getting a personal budget as difficult and unwieldy. This time round the POET survey looked in more detail at the relationship between process and outcomes. Key findings were:

- For all social care groups, making the personal budget process easier was robustly associated with better outcomes for personal budget holders. The same findings apply to carers.
- Being involved in the planning of your care and support is a very powerful indicator of a good outcome.
- That councils generally find some aspects of the process more difficult than others, although there is significant variation between the 'best' and 'worst' councils.

Based on these findings, the report recommends that councils should strive to get aspects of the process closer to the principles of SDS, meaning that they should personalise their processes, as well as the support people get at the end of the planning process.

Looking Forward

Once passed into law, the reforms contained in the Care and Support Bill will have implications for SDS process. Minimum national eligibility criteria are to be introduced and continuity of care provisions will allow people receiving care to move to another local authority area without their care changing. All those eligible for long term support will receive a personal budget. These changes make it all the more important that councils have timely and straightforward processes so that people can access assessments and support easily. Additionally, the introduction of new arrangements for paying for social care, whereby from 2016 there will be cap on individual contributions to the costs of care, also means that councils will need to put in place effective systems and processes for managing this workload.

Reducing Process and Increasing Choice and Control: Key Themes from the Workshops

Work in progress

At the workshops participants discussed the things that get in the way of creating a simple and effective SDS process. Key themes that came from these discussions are summarised below. It should be noted that this summary is a distillation of the views and experiences expressed and does not represent the position in all councils. During the workshops it was evident that a great deal of energy and commitment is being put in to improving SDS processes, as can be found in the case studies that have been subsequently produced. All those attending recognised that there was some way to go before the marker in *Making it Real* is reached, whereby “processes are streamlined so that access to support is simple, rapid and proportionate to risk. Assessments are kept to a minimum, are portable, where possible, and do not cause difficulty or distress”.

Key Themes

It's not just about process

Long winded SDS processes were seen as both a cause and consequence of a lack of buy-in to personalisation. Improving processes was therefore regarded as something that needed doing alongside changing the culture, to make it more receptive of personalisation, and building the competency of practitioners and their managers to deliver it.

Information and advice

The need for accessible, reliable and up to date information available on council websites (and elsewhere) was seen as essential but not sufficient. There should also be opportunity for people to speak and meet with friendly, knowledgeable staff who can provide honest and accurate information and advice. In making decisions about eligibility, it was felt that staff acting at the first point of contact must be confident and competent in communicating realistic and honest expectations about what the council itself will provide and for whom. The theme of greater transparency throughout the SDS process was a constant thread throughout all the discussions.

Supported self-assessment

Assessments were still seen as often professionally led and lacking in self-direction. This can be the result of a combination of unwieldy processes, which do not lend themselves to easy customer input, and practitioners (and their managers) being reluctant to let go. The sequencing of the SDS process (i.e. the order in which things are done) can also be a cause of difficulty. Most often mentioned in this connection were financial assessments. The time taken to complete them was cited as a frequent cause of delay, as was the view that significant numbers of people having gone some way down the SDS process do not go on to take up a personal budget once they are informed how much they are liable to pay.

Indicative allocation

Achieving an understandable and reliable Resource Allocation System (RAS) remains a difficult area for some councils, although not all. A few councils have (or are considering) moving away from a points based RAS. A number of issues stood out:

Prickly process – The process of working out an indicative allocation and then a final approved budget can take too long, requiring different levels of authorisation, sometimes compounded by a backlog of financial assessments.

Public understanding – It was felt by some that the concept of an ‘indicative allocation’ is not an easy one for the public to grasp, that you are given a budget to plan with that may subsequently decrease or increase.

Practitioner commitment – That practitioners, if they know there is a chance that the indicative allocation is likely to be challenged and possibly reduced, can be tempted to ‘game’ the RAS, in order to maximise the final budget agreed. Conversely, the RAS may create a perverse incentive, with a support plan devised up to the limit of the indicative allocation, stifling the search for more creative options which might cost less.

Pressure on resources – Some concern that the process can be undermined if inappropriately applied to reduce costs.

Support planning and approval

Rigid process can reinforce a risk-averse approach to support planning. Other difficulties commonly cited were that support planning can still be overly budget driven and task and time orientated, frustrated by a lack of clarity and agreement over what a personal budget can be spent on, particularly a Direct Payment. There can also be a lack of agreement on how much time support planning should take, with pressure to get the work done. It was in this area that the theme of culture and competency referred to earlier came out most strongly. Some reported a scenario where first line managers' decisions were challenged by senior managers, so they pre-emptively challenged their practitioners to play it safe. In this way the process becomes an end rather than the means.

One other theme that featured strongly as a barrier was market development. The nub of this was that even where there is a good SDS process, this will do little to improve the experience and outcomes for people using services if there is not an expanded range of resources and services for people to choose from.

Reviews

Uncertainty over the primary purpose of reviews was an issue. In some places they were seen as mainly being used to audit Direct Payment expenditure and/or as a check on how well formal care services are performing, rather than a discussion about whether the outcomes in the support plan are being met. This can be made more difficult when clear outcomes are not included in the support plan. Some reported insufficient capacity to carry out timely reviews and that they were perceived as mainly about reducing costs for the council.

Most of these themes are consistent with the findings in the National Personal Budgets Survey previously mentioned. As the POET work shows process is important because there is a strong association between easier process and positive outcomes for personal budget holders and carers.

Areas for further consideration

Councils face real challenges in balancing the desire for flexibility, as required by personalisation, with consistency of approach. There is no single, simple remedy that will bring about a miracle cure for sluggish SDS process.

To help councils develop practical ways of improving and reducing their SDS processes, it is suggested the following pointers are given consideration. These are mainly derived from approaches that some councils are taking as illustrated in the case studies previously mentioned.

- 1) Take time to regularly review your SDS process. Despite the best of organisational intentions, there is an innate tendency for layers of process to accumulate. An annual stock-take may limit this. Start with the user at the centre of the process and work out from there.
- 2) Co-produce any reviews and resulting changes with people who have direct experience of the SDS process: people using services, carers, practitioners, and service managers.
- 3) Be modest in what is changed and the frequency, as constantly changing the process can be frustrating for practitioners and the people they work with.
- 4) Consider using the POET Survey, (if your council does not already) as a low cost way of receiving reliable and comparable feedback on the experience of personal budget users, including your process. Use the results to inform what you change, alongside local people using personal budgets and practitioners.
- 5) Make sure that your efforts to improve process are planned and undertaken alongside work on embedding the culture of personalisation and achieving the right mix of skills and competencies in the workforce.
- 6) When reviewing your processes, particularly look at whether they support or hinder the ability of practitioners to exercise professional judgement.
- 7) Look at whether you have the optimum mix of self-service through your website and access to professional advice.
- 8) Be pragmatic and aim for a Resource Allocation System that gets it right for most people most of the time.
- 9) Consider whether more could be done to communicate with staff, people using services, and the public the full range of support options that already exist in your area and hear back from them where further market development activity is required.
- 10) Learn from others by exchanging ideas and developing practice with other councils.

The workshops

The workshops brought together people working in councils who are committed to finding ways of improving access to care and support in adult social care. There was recognition and a large measure of agreement on the obstacles and barriers that can make it more difficult for practitioners and people using services to navigate their way through council systems.

It was evident that progress is being made, as can be seen from the case studies that have been collected. Continued effort is required in order to achieve the streamlined processes that all aspire to, in order that the 'pockets of promising practice' can become consistent and widespread. Creating opportunities for councils to learn from each other and the engagement and assistance of practitioners (and their managers) and people using services and carers will be fundamental to reaching this goal.

Further reading on the TLAP website

The first National Personal Budgets Survey (POET), 2011

<http://bit.ly/18hLDNR>

The second National Personal Budgets Survey (POET), 2013

<http://bit.ly/1eKwc1M>

Self-Directed Support: Reducing Process, Increasing Choice and Control

<http://bit.ly/12xwst9>

How to commission really good direct payments support

<http://bit.ly/161K9Az>

Leaner approaches to council operating systems

<http://bit.ly/12l7cEa>

Rethinking Support Planning

<http://bit.ly/18hNnqv>

Appendix 1

Self-Directed Support – Reducing Process, Increasing Choice and Control Programme

09.00-09.30	Registration and refreshments
10.00-10.15	Welcome and Introduction Tim Parkin, Sitra and Miro Griffiths, TLAP National Co-production Advisory Group
10.15-10.35	Gearing Up
10.35-10.55	The Care and Support Bill: Preparing for the New Social Care System Paul Woods, Department of Health
10.55-11.15	Making Use of POET: The Effect of Process on Outcomes (Personal Budgets Outcome Evaluation Tool) Chris Hatton, University of Lancaster and John Waters, InControl
11.15-11.30	Short Break
11.30-12.50	Let's Just Do It – Group Work
12.50-13.30	Lunch and Networking
13.30-14.30	Trading Tables – Sharing of Developing Practice
14.30-15.00	Action Planning (Quick Time)
15.00-15.20	Innovation Laboratory
15.20-15.50	Panel Discussion: What Next?
15.50-16.00	Closing Remarks
16.00pm	Finish

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Think Local Act Personal is a sector-wide commitment to moving forward with personalisation and community-based support, endorsed by organisations comprising representatives from across the social care sector including local government, health, private, independent and community organisations. For a full list of partners visit www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk