

Responding to the challenges and opportunities outlined in the Audit Commission's report on personal budgets



The Audit Commission has published a review of the progress towards people taking control of their own social care funding. It says that councils are facing major challenges in getting their arrangements right and that some councils are lagging behind and are not on course to meet national plans. A full copy of the report can be [downloaded here](#).

The report warns that some councils will need to make 'a significant effort' to achieve the milestones agreed in 2009 between ADASS, LGA and the Department of Health which say that 30% of eligible social care users should have a personal budget by April 2011.

In Control recognised these challenges some time ago and set about developing shop4support as a tool that could help councils respond to these challenges.

In their coverage of the Audit Commission report, BBC Breakfast News featured the story of Arvinda Patel and her mother, Kantaben Mehta. Arvinda lives in Harrow and uses shop4support to manage the personal budget that Harrow Council provides for Mrs Mehta.

This document looks at some of the key findings within the Audit Commission's report and how shop4support can address these.

The shop4support Citizen Portal

The Citizen Portal is an easy to use internet based Marketplace where citizens can find:

- Support products and services –similar to other websites, such as Amazon, the Citizen Portal contains stores owned by service providers, full of support products and services. Unlike with other solutions, citizens are able to actually buy these through the Portal
- Free and low cost local groups and activities – encouraging social capital

The Citizen Portal can be tailor made to an individual council's needs, however core features include:

- Opportunities for citizens to feed back and share information about support products and services
- Useful council contacts
- Help and advice about Personalisation, Self-Directed Support and support planning

Citizens and council staff are also able to manage Personal Budgets through the Citizen Portal.



Challenges and Opportunities for Councils

The Audit Commission report identifies a number of specific challenges for councils:

Key challenges	How shop4support can help...
<p>Achieving the PPF and Department of Health milestones</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Citizen Portal is specifically designed to enable councils to achieve all five of the Department of Health milestones. Hitting the 30% target needs individuals to be enthused about “what is out there” and an online marketplace like shop4support and the Support Planning tools embedded within it are an easy way to achieve this.
<p>Scaling up pilot schemes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shop4support was created by In Control in direct response to the ‘lessons learnt’ from their original pilots which found that new systems and processes were needed for the wide-scale rollout of personal budgets. Our evidence suggests that individuals who receive personal budgets who are assisted to utilise shop4support on a trial or pilot basis (perhaps for one specific aspect of their support package) then go on and rapidly become ‘full adopters’.
<p>Updating management information and financial systems to meet the different demands of personal budgets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In our experience, this is one of the greatest challenges for councils, as they need systems for all of the different methods of managing personal budgets identified within table 1 of the Audit Commission report. shop4support is a very flexible platform that can interface with council’s incumbent IT systems through the shop4support ‘partner programme’. We have worked with a number of councils to develop pragmatic and bespoke solutions based upon their current and planned systems and processes:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some councils, shop4support is primarily a tool for those in receipt of a direct payment or self funders. Other councils and organisations are deploying the shop4support ‘Budget Manager’ module which enables staff to fully manage the entire end-to-end process for ‘managed’ or ‘virtual’ budgets in-line with In Control’s 7-step model.
<p>Stimulating a market for social care with a choice of suitable provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst shop4support gives providers a ‘shop window’ where they can market the services they provide, our implementation approach recognises that they often need help in developing their ‘offer’. Where it has been deployed to date, shop4support has acted as catalyst to the stimulation of new services as providers spot ‘gaps’ in the market and see the restrictions that were previously placed on them removed. We have numerous case studies and example of where this has been achieved – such as Link Up and Mencap Community Solutions in Harrow (see www.shop4support.com/linkup and www.shop4support.com/harrowmencap). The report specifically states that councils should ‘record the spending patterns of personal budget holders’ and ‘collect information to assess demand for services by both public and privately funded individuals in their communities’ - shop4support can produce reports of search trends, buying patterns and unmet demand across all individuals which can then be used by councils to inform their market development strategies.

Key challenges	How shop4support can help...
<p>Giving service users the right information and support they need to manage their personal budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based resource directories that only provide a simple list of providers fall short of this requirement, as they leave the service user with much to do. • shop4support tackles this by providing:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Information and advice, such as an embedded Support Planning tool, an ‘ask the expert’ forum and other people’s stories & experiences; o Detailed information about specific services and products (cost and quality) so that informed decisions can be made; o Ability to order online and automate the entire transaction process; o A full ‘budget management’ tool allowing service users to manage all aspects of their personal budget replacing the need for paper files, manual reconciliation and lengthy reporting / auditing procedures.
<p>Getting the governance arrangements right</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A host of safeguarding features are incorporated – including councils being able to control the accreditation of providers and authorise movements in price, incorporating preferred T&Cs and exception reporting for over/under spend. • shop4support provides reporting and auditing functionality that means councils can efficiently and effectively monitor usage of personal budgets.
<p>Building a cooperative relationship between staff and personal budget holders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End users are at the heart of shop4support, which was set up by In Control and is structured as a social enterprise. • Regular feedback workshops are held with a broad range of users which drives the development of shop4support. • Building social capital is a key aim of shop4support, which has led to rich functionality such as ‘My Life’ which incorporates support planning tools, ‘ask the expert’ forums and ‘shared stories’ which complement the marketplace functionality.
<p>Cost neutrality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Audit Commission report states that whilst personal budgets can sometimes reduce the cost of care, Government expects them to be cost-neutral overall. • Evidence from users of shop4support does confirm that the cost of care can often be reduced. • However, our research suggests that the transfer from the current ‘wholesale’ model to a ‘retail’ model of personal budgets will increase the ‘back office’ costs of administration unless efficient and effective systems (such as shop4support) are in place. • The Audit Commission report states that ‘Councils should review options for funding recurrent spend after the Social Care Reform Grant ends in March 2011’. The commercial model underpinning shop4support is based upon it being entirely self-financing, and our detailed modelling suggests that it can entirely mitigate the impact of a shift to a retail model and even lead to cashable efficiencies.

The Audit Commission report includes a checklist for councils to assess their progress, which includes the above challenges. The shop4support team are happy to meet with councils who are working through the checklist to assist them in identifying how shop4support could help address their specific issues.

Case Study- Arvinda Patel

In their coverage of the Audit Commission report, BBC Breakfast News featured the story of Arvinda Patel and her mother, Kantaben Mehta. Arvinda lives in Harrow and uses shop4support to manage the personal budget that Harrow Council provides for Mrs Mehta. To view the interview, [please click here](#).



Arvinda Patel and her mother, Kantaben Mehta.

Arvinda Patel and her family are just one of countless Harrow citizens to benefit from the service, in her own words, Arvinda says:

"Having a personal budget has not only changed mum's life, but our whole family. Having a set budget allocated means we can decide what care to buy. So it is about what is right for mum and what she needs and wants. I have just started to use shop4support very recently and already I can see that this is also going to make our lives easier too."

"Having an online shop for care and services is an excellent idea - and it's easy to use. It's self explanatory really, you can browse through what is on offer and see what is available. Everything is in the one place and it also gives you ideas for things you might not have even thought of. When you request a service or product, the cost of that comes straight out of your personal budget."

The Harrow Council Citizen Portal has been singled out by the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement and put forward for the regional final of the Health and Social Care Awards.

Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, Margaret Davine said: "This is all about putting residents in control and supporting them to live full and active lives as independently as possible. We are of course proud to be leading the way on this nationally and it is great that we have already been nominated for an award."

Find out more...

To read more about how the shop4support Citizen Portal can help Local Authorities realise the benefits of personalisation, please download the flier on our website [here](#) or contact David Bowes at info@shop4support.com or on 01942 826 788 if you would like to discuss how shop4support can help address any gaps in your Council's readiness checklist.

Together we can make personalisation happen!

Julie Stansfield, In Control

Join with us!



In Control is not alone in thinking that shop4support is the outstanding online marketplace. **'Putting People first in London – What Good Looks Like'** (the recent report by London ADASS and London Joint Improvement Partnership) highlighted shop4support's partnership with Harrow as an example

of best practice in London's Transformation Programme for Social Care.



shop4support was also featured in the recent Government White Paper, **'Building a National Care Service'**. It described shop4support's work with Harrow (supported by the Department of Health) as 'a unique shopping experience'.

To view Harrow Council's shop4support pages visit www.shop4support.com/harrow.

Why wait?

Harrow has led the way and has a successful shop4support site. Authoritative reports approve of shop4support. So why wait? Contact us for more information today.

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