

Building Blocks for Real Time Advice and Information

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This study examines three major and complementary initiatives amongst case studies demonstrating good practice.



Building Blocks for Real Time Advice and Information

Over the last two years the need for advice and information in the area of social care and housing has emerged as an essential need to be fulfilled. At last there is a wave of recognition that empowering people to make informed choices about their housing and care can improve lives and wellbeing and save time and money for people, their carers and the public purse. Recent reports call for it indeed, in its review of national arrangements for providing information and advice to carers¹ the Department of Health highlighted that access to information and advice has been identified as a significant aspect of policy development over the past two years.

- The Government ICT Strategy² (published March 2011) promises to deliver online transactional services and share information with citizens and businesses to make life simpler and align with the modern world where digital media is the norm.
- The Law Commission Report on Adult Social Care³ (published May 2011) strongly recommended that there should be a general duty in the statute which would require local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance and, for example, where someone is not eligible for services, wellbeing may best be secured through advice, information and signposting to universal services.
- Fairer Care Funding, The Report of the Commission on Funding of Care and Support⁴ (July 2011). The Commission strongly recommends that the Government should develop a new information and advice strategy – one that both provides trustworthy basic information and signposts people to further advice both locally and nationally. From a source that is always up to date and can be trusted.
- An Information Revolution⁵ a summary of responses to a consultation (August 2011) about giving people more information and control and greater choice about their care. The information revolution is about transforming the way information is accessed, collected, analysed, and used so that people are at the heart of health and adult social care services.
- Caring for our future: shared ambitions for care and support⁶ (September 2011) brings together the recommendations from the Law Commission and the Commission on Funding of Care and Support and reiterates the need for better information and advice.

All these led to the Social Care White Paper (July 2012) which dedicated much of a chapter to Advice and Information. It promises:

- Better national and local information that will help people to understand the options available to them and to plan and prepare for their care and support.
- To establish a new national information website to provide a clear and reliable source of information on care and support;

- To support local authorities to develop new online services that provide people with more consistent and more easily accessible information about their local care and support options, with start-up funding of £32.5 million.

So where are we today in mapping the road to clarity and understanding of our social care system?

Preceding the White Paper, a report published by the Department of Health, 'The power of information: putting all of us in control of the health and care information we need'⁷ includes a chapter 'Better access to better information' which outlines a strategy for how we will access information, including a new, single, website 'portal' provided by the Government from 2013, and one 'routine' number. It sets out moves towards a new culture of transparency, where we will be encouraged to provide instant feedback about services, and where information about the quality and performance of health and care services is easily accessible. But what about advice and what about integration with housing and money? Sign posting is not a solution. A solution is a single port of call where the advice and information can be holistic, personal and local. Three major initiatives are cited amongst case studies demonstrating good practice already taking place, each complementing each other. Two other organisations specialising in feedback on health services are also mentioned.

FirstStop Advice,⁸ funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and whose directories and web functionality is underpinned by development funded by Department of Health S64 funding between 2005 and 2010, recognises the need to deliver integrated advice and information to older people their families and carers to help them in planning ahead and coping with changing care and support needs. Integrating advice and information on housing, care, finance, and rights both nationally and locally can empower people to make the right decisions based on the many variables of their personal circumstances. Not only does such a service enable older people to make the right choices about their care and support but it also prevents people from living in unsuitable accommodation for example moving into residential care homes when other options might be more appropriate. The cost saving benefits achieved through preventative measures and making the right choices have never been accurately assessed but must be enormous to both individuals and hard pressed council budgets.

The success of FirstStop is highlighted in an independent evaluation undertaken by the Centre for Housing and Planning Research at the University of Cambridge.⁹ Key findings from the evaluation were:

- Demand for the national service has continued to grow as funder targets are met. Measures of usage of the website show that over 150,000 people visited it in 2011/12.
- The local advice and information services seed funded by FirstStop have evidenced success by being on target this year to deliver face to face support to 2,300 older people – demonstrating demand
- These local projects have also demonstrated how their involvement has generated savings to the public purse. For example, analysis of the Somerset West local project suggests that, once the

cost of providing the service was taken into account, it generated savings to the public purse of more than £45,000 over a one year period.

- Another benefit of the national/local model is the way in which the local case workers are able to use the national FirstStop resources in their local work. Many clients have complex needs and information is required on a range of issues from housing, to care, to benefits and finance. Being able to draw on up to date and detailed information from the national FirstStop service was very useful to the local case workers. This bank of information would be very difficult and expensive to replicate in local areas.
- The service is meeting broader aims of empowering older people to make informed decisions, giving them full knowledge of all the options available and supporting them in appraising the options effectively.
- Analysis of the follow-up survey of a sample of clients supports the view that advice supplied by FirstStop is effective in supporting housing transitions, including downsizing. Analysis of FirstStop's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and postal survey data gives an estimate of 1,788 clients from the national service who actually downsized, a great success against a target of 750.

Dr Gemma Burgess, who led the research, said: "Most people want to stay in their own home as they age, but often through lack of support or preparation become unable to do so. This can mean older people move into residential homes, which is not only a move they do not want to make, but also one that is hugely costly to the taxpayer."

"With better information and advice about how to deal with the housing, care and financial challenges of ageing from a service like FirstStop, people are able to remain independent in their own homes or move to housing that really suits them, not only saving the taxpayer money but, more importantly, improving the quality of life for older people."

FirstStop Advice and Information is delivered by telephone through an advice line, over the internet through a website with searchable databases of all types of accommodation and care and support services for older people, live chat and email and face to face where local FirstStop Services exist. FirstStop Advice provided by the charity Elderly Accommodation Counsel is a very person centred service and can deliver personalised reports on an individual's care, support and accommodation options whilst working in partnership with other organisations in enabling and delivering appropriate services.

The second, a more recent initiative, is **Find Me Good Care**¹⁰ launched by the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE). This is a website that includes information and guidance on how to choose and pay for care together with a directory of providers and the opportunity for users to provide feedback on care services and experience. It is a self-help website with signposts to organisations that have signed up as partners and may also be relevant to a person's needs. The website is divided into three main sections,

'Good care planner' looking at care in a crisis, planning future care or changing care needs. 'Search for care and support' where you can search by type and specialisms in care provision however, detailed listings and extra information is only available from care providers who choose to pay for an enhanced listing, and 'Paying for care' with information for those needing care funded by the council and those that are self-funding with links through to finding an Independent Financial Adviser.

Unlike FirstStop which is specific to older people, Find Me Good Care has directories of care services for both younger and older lives and differing ranges of disabilities or impairments. The initial setup costs of Find Me Good Care were funded through SCIE's budget which in turn is mainly funded by the Department of Health, Department for Education, Welsh Assembly Government, and the DHSSPSNI in Northern Ireland. Ongoing funding is intended to be from subscriptions from care providers who can pay for enhanced listings in the website's directories. Because Find Me Good Care is a fairly new initiative it may be a little while before an evaluation can reveal the effectiveness of this model.

The third case study which leads on from advice and information is **My Support Broker**¹¹ which has a national network of agents providing independent assessments of need and consumer based care brokerage. My Support Broker recruits and trains people who either have experience of having to use services themselves or have personally supported a disabled person, people with long term health conditions or mental health needs to become Peer Brokers who then assist other people like themselves to plan, find and manage their support and healthcare services. Their services include individual assessments of care needs, planning care and support, finding appropriate care and support services, managing paperwork, budgets, payroll and insurance and links into community activity. The services are all individually priced and paid for either from the individual's council funded personal budget or their own cash if self-funding.

The services they provide include helping people to:

- develop their support plan, using a range of person centred planning tools;
- work out how they will use and manage their individual budget;
- get their support plans agreed by the local authority and/or to fit with their personal available means;
- implement the plans by researching and providing information about local services and opportunities and negotiating with service providers on people's behalf to get the best deal;
- Communicate effectively for example by helping people who do not use words to communicate or are suffering from dementia and understand information in a way that is accessible to them individually.

Because brokers are peers they are able to draw upon their own experiences and empathise with their customers' needs and situation.

My Support Broker provides all the technology and business support brokers need to undertake work the brokerage attains from Councils, the NHS and private individuals. Peer Brokers can work in arrange of capacities to suit their personal situation including as self employed or freelance brokers, on internships or in salaried positions with My Support Broker agents across the UK.

The other two organisations cited as case studies and specialising in patient feedback, which could be adapted to apply to social care, are Patient Opinion and iWant Great Care.

Patient Opinion¹² was founded in 2005 and since then has grown to be the UK's leading independent non-profit feedback platform for health services. Patient Opinion is about honest and meaningful conversations between patients and health services. Patient Opinion is an independent site about people's experiences of UK health services, good or bad, which passes people's stories to the right people to make a difference. Over 46,000 people have told their stories and the team at Patient Opinion works hard to involve, encourage and support health service organisations and staff in reading and responding to the stories people have contributed. In the month to mid January 2013, 39% of stories received a response and 2% of responses to concerns led to change. Over 450 organisations subscribe or are registered with Patient Opinion.

iWantGreatCare¹³ (IWGC) was founded in 2008 and ensures excellent experience across health and social care by:

- Making it easy for patients to provide feedback on their care
- Trusted, independent information to help others find great care
- Detailed patient experience as outcomes for providers and commissioners

iWGC offers a modern, multi-channel data collection and interpretation solution that is based on first-hand understanding of delivering clinical services

Where Next?

Where next is very dependent on the Government's commitment to delivering a structured advice and information resource. The ingredients are there, FirstStop Advice, Find Me Good Care and My Support Broker are all good examples with feedback services such as Patient Opinion and iWantGoodCare demonstrating how customer feedback can work; but more work is required to harness, build upon and add to these resources to provide a complete service that people can trust and rely on with national consistency and local knowledge. Building on these resources will provide directories of local care and support services backed up by telephone, face to face and web based advice and information, complimented with a library of guides and factsheets to help people understand what's available and how

to get it, backed up by independent feedback services. Such a service would require just one template co-branded for use by all authorities linked to local services like brokerage, home improvement agencies, befriending and local day and support centres. The investment therefore is not so much in developing services because they already exist; the investment is in coordination, integration and ensuring sufficient funding is available to enable them to continue and develop.

What is the stumbling block? Is it cost? We have already seen that Local Authorities have available start up funding of £32.5 million for developing A & I services and the need for this was revealed by Independent Age in their research report 'Getting over the threshold for advice'¹⁴ published in December 2011. The report analysing data collated by Care Quality Commission (CQC) from 7,500 detailed mystery shopping calls quotes that, while some councils are providing good quality information and advice services, the majority are - at best - average.

- Only 5 of 150 English local authorities are rated as carrying out a good or excellent exploration of needs at first contact.
- Only 30 of 150 were rated good or excellent when it came to asking about care and support needs before financial circumstances.
- Only a handful were rated 'good' or 'excellent' on three indices of whether callers understood the assessment, outcomes and next steps.
- Only 8 score good or excellent when it came to providing information to allow a caller to follow up initial information.

Overall, 26 councils were rated 'best performing' and 55 'better performing' but 49 were regarded as 'fair performing' and 20 as 'least well performing'.

The report also makes the observation that none of the nine scenarios used in the 7,500 mystery shopping calls were designed to capture how individuals who have enough income or assets to fund their own care are dealt with by local authorities. Including such a scenario would almost certainly have been detrimental to the performance results as it's a common issue recognised by FirstStop and, as the report suggests, Counsel and Care, that councils do not, in practice, provide advice and information to those people who are self-funding their care.

It will be interesting to see if Government prescribes how this money should be spent. There must be a strong argument for prescription and also a strong argument for further investment in advice and information services independent of both local and central Government. The net cost of providing advice and information services is greatly reduced when considering the savings and the value for money Advice and Information can deliver. Savings include avoiding the delivery of inappropriate services or costly unnecessary moves to residential care, reducing hospital admissions and readmissions through preventative measures such as home adaptations. The cost of treating an older person who has had a

serious fall including follow up care is around £30,000 and there are many cases of recurrent falls and hospital re-admissions. Advice and information about home adaptations or moving to more suitable accommodation to make someone's environment safer can produce real and significant savings to both NHS and Council budgets. Savings from making best use of the housing stock through older people downsizing and moving to more appropriate accommodation, there are many older people living alone in council owned family homes that would be safer and more secure in smaller more appropriate accommodation. Savings through people living better as a result of obtaining the welfare benefits they are entitled to plus the resulting injections of cash into local economies through benefit uptake; and, importantly, care and health professionals and citizens save time in having an integrated advice and information service with a national consistency combined with local knowledge.

Which Department should fund this? At least three have a stake in the outcome good quality A & I can achieve. Department of Health is concerned about health and wellbeing, hospital admissions and re-admissions, Department of Communities and Local Government about housing and people living in the right place at the right time, the availability of adaptations or the benefits of down-sizing and the Department of Work and Pensions about benefit uptake, people getting the right support when they need and are entitled to it. Much work has gone in to developing the initiatives that already exists. Resources that would be difficult to replicate without extreme costs and investment of time preserving these are essential with all three departments sharing the responsibility and costs. It makes sense if people are to receive truly integrated advice around care and support, housing and accommodation, money and rights.

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- 1 *Department of Health: Review of national arrangements for providing information and advice to carers*
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/08/review-of-carers-direct/>
- 2 *Cabinet Office: Government ICT Strategy* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/government-ict-strategy>
- 3 *The Law Commission Report on Adult Social Care*
<http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/publications/1460.htm>
- 4 *Commission on Funding of Care and Support: Fairer Care Funding*
<http://www.dilnotcommission.dh.gov.uk/our-report/>
- 5 *Department of Health: An Information Revolution*
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_129405
- 6 *Department of Health: Caring for our future: shared ambitions for care and support*
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_129923
- 7 *Department of Health: The Power of Information* <http://informationstrategy.dh.gov.uk/>

- 8 *FirstStop Advice for Older People* <http://www.firststopadvice.org.uk>
- 9 *Cambridge Centre for Housing Policy and Research: FirstStop Evaluation*
<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/projects/detail.asp?ProjectID=166>
- 10 *Find me Good Care* <http://www.findmegoodcare.co.uk>
- 11 *My Support Broker* <https://www.mysupportbroker.com/>
- 12 *Patient Opinion* <https://www.patientopinion.org.uk>
- 13 *iWantGreatCare* <https://www.iwantgreatcare.org>
- 14 *Independent Age: Getting over the threshold for Advice*
http://www.independentage.org/media/172750/getting_over_the_threshold_for_advice_1312111.pdf