Citizenship Through Social Work

A Discussion Paper from In Control

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Summary

This paper aims to help Local Authorities to consider whether professional social workers have a part to play in the transformation to Self-Directed Support. It looks at the way social workers define their role, and contrasts this with the role they currently undertake. It then asks whether we can make the transformation without social workers, and sets out some of the contributions social workers are well placed to make. It concludes that although a move to Self Directed Support without the involvement of professional social workers is possible, such an approach may not make best use of the skills and experience that social workers bring. The paper concludes by describing how Local Authorities can work out the size and shape of the local social care workforce needed for Self-Directed Support, and take account of the contribution of professional social workers.

Our starting assumptions

This brief paper is designed to assist those English Local Authorities which are working to transform their social care function into one that enables citizenship. It looks in particular at the resource represented by professional social workers, and asks whether –and how– Local Authorities might use that resource to further this strategic end.

We start with the following assumptions:

- The Government is committed to a new relationship between citizens and the state, where individuals are more in control. The term used for this is personalisation.

- Social Care has led this movement through the work of In Control in developing a system of Self-Directed Support

- Self-Directed Support is both more efficient and more enabling of citizenship than is the old system. It achieves this by dispensing with elaborate and cumbersome processes to ration resources and regulate provision, and liberates the creativity and energies of ordinary citizens and their families.

- Everyone brings their own gifts, no-one is inherently dependent or passive, so active citizenship is the norm.

- People are members of families, communities and other networks. Self-Directed Support relies on these ordinary connections.
What are we seeking to achieve for citizens?

No one in society defines their life or their ambitions simply in terms of receiving social care. Duffy (2003) suggests that one way of thinking about what we need from life are the keys to citizenship, namely:

- Self determination
- Direction
- Support
- Money
- Home
- Community Life

The Local Authority Circular which followed Putting People First (DH 2008) suggested, amongst other things the need for citizens to:

- Live independently
- Exercise maximum control over their own life and, where appropriate the lives of their family members
- Participate as active equal citizens, both economically and socially
- Have the best possible quality of life, irrespective of illness or disability, and
- Retain maximum dignity and respect

The Government’s Independent Living Strategy (2008), based on consultation with disabled people, includes the following demands from the community of disabled people:

- Choice and control
- Choice about where to live and who to live with
- Inclusion
- Choosing their own support
- Choosing how needs are met
- Being able to take risks
- Being respected and having rights
- Self-directed support
- Being in control
- Being an equal citizen

As can be seen from the above, whatever the words we use, however we conceptualise it, a clear pattern emerges from these documents: people want and need to live rounded, fulfilling lives in supportive communities, and they want to define those lives themselves.

First Story

When I first met Nan a 94 year old lady who needed social care support I was struck by how determined she was to stay as independent as possible and in her own home. She knew exactly what she wanted and how she wanted her support to be organised. Having choice and being in control was crucial to her as was being able to continue living at home and in the community she had known since she was a child. What was also clear was that the ‘traditional’ approach to social care would have found it difficult to meet her needs in a way that made sense to her. Throughout the Self- Directed Support planning process Nan became her own assessor and planner with appropriate support from friends, family and myself as her social worker. The more Nan was involved in the process the more her confidence grew. This approach certainly fits well with the ethics and values of social work such as empowerment, anti oppressive practice and person centred support. As a social worker I have really enjoyed working with Nan and her family, I have seen the positive impact this has had on both Nan and her daughter and her husband. All this without it costing the department any more money than the traditional system would have cost.

Social Worker
This story and the collective experience to date suggests that people need something different from - and something more than - menus of "social care services." People need friends, homes, jobs, money, access to community resources - and a sense of purpose.

**What does this mean for Local Authorities?**

In Control argues forcefully that the seven step model of Self-Directed Support requires Local Authorities to re-think how they use their staff and other resources. In straightforward terms the argument is:

- that “front-end” determination of need is best left to the Self Assessment and Resource Allocation System;
- that many (but not all) people are able to plan for themselves or with their friends or family;
- that much **more** time, effort and focus needs to be given to reviewing, learning from and re-designing support after the initial stage.

In summary, Local Authority resources need to shift from traditional assessments to reviews. The review process will play a significant part in helping people to genuinely increase the choice and control over their lives and help them to move towards real citizenship within their own communities.

Before exploring this shift in role in more detail, Local Authorities will need to give fundamental consideration to what it is that their social work staff are asked to do. This analysis needs to be undertaken in full recognition that the role-defintions that exist do not provide a good picture of the job social workers are asked to undertake under the old system (prior to Self-Directed Support). In fact, they more accurately reflect what social work once was, several decades ago – and potentially what it may become again in the future.

**What is it that social workers do?**

The Department of Health says that:

> Social workers form relationships with people. As adviser, advocate, counsellor or listener, a social worker helps people to live more successfully within their local communities by helping them find solutions to their problems. Social work also involves engaging not only with clients themselves but their families and friends as well as working closely with other organisations including the police, NHS, schools and probation service.

This definition sits very well with the ideas about Self-Directed Support discussed above. However the reality within many local authorities is that since the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act the main role social workers have been expected to undertake has been epitomised by the following descriptor:

> There is a specific status associated with the job title "social worker". Social workers are professionally qualified staff who assess the needs of service users and plan the individual packages of care and support that best help them.

In essence, social workers became assessors and care managers, that is to say gate-keepers of the system. Some were unhappy about this, and some even left the employment of Local Authorities.

Many social workers, both within and outside the Local Authority also have important roles in:
Advice and information giving

Advocating for individuals

"Brokering" services for individuals

Reviewing care packages

Quality assurance of supports and services

Community development and “prevention”

Certain statutory duties, for example within the Care Programme Approach

And especially, and increasingly in helping people to stay safe

All of these functions are important in a new world of empowered citizens. The Local Authority’s role in ensuring these and other functions are available for citizens is crucial, whether this is via social workers or others.

These functions need to be situated within a clear community/preventative agenda which focuses on information, advice giving and guidance, along with the development and testing of models of real engagement with the wider community. This means a shift of attention away from a narrow and exclusive focus on “referrals,” - the immediate needs of “eligible individuals” - and a growth of appreciation of the need to build community capacity, so that citizens can readily find housing and jobs, and engage in learning and other fulfilling activities.

One way of achieving this may be via Local Area Co-ordination, an approach which aims to build both on the strengths of individuals and the capacity of communities. Local Area Co-ordination was developed in Western Australia and is used now in many parts of Scotland. Co-ordinators do not necessarily work for the Local Authority, but the model is clearly reminiscent of community social work during the 1960’s - and is an effective use of social work skills. It is a model that In Control is now beginning to test, alongside other home-grown approaches to community capacity building as one of the projects in the Total Transformation programme.

Social Work Professionals

Social workers currently form a key professional group in social care (a professional is a “person having impressive competence in a particular activity” – OED). Their training and interests equip them to work with individuals, families and communities. Their salaries and associated costs represent a large investment for Local Authorities, and their status and professional ethos constitute a major resource. A fundamental question is whether this significant resource is one we can afford not to utilise to its maximum potential, particularly in the current climate of rapid change?

Two issues we therefore need to think about are:

- Do Local Authority social workers have a role in the transformation of social care support to the Self-Directed Support model?
- If so, what is this role, and how will their remit and focus change?

Transformation, with or without social workers

If we were starting from a blank sheet, it would certainly be possible to introduce Self-Directed Support into a Local Authority without social worker involvement. (It is worth noting perhaps that this is also true of other professional groups).

The following table identifies key elements of the Self-Directed Support process, and suggests who may fulfil some of these functions in a hypothetical world where social workers do not exist.
### Self-Directed Support: the Seven Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>How citizens might get information and support to make this happen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My money, finding out how much</td>
<td>Through on-line resources, supported by families, friends, brokers and other paid or un-paid support - voluntary sector organisations or user led organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making my plan</td>
<td>Through families, friends, brokers and other paid or un-paid “non-professionals”, voluntary sector organisations and user led organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting my plan agreed</td>
<td>By Local Authority managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising my money</td>
<td>Through families, friends, brokers and other paid or un-paid “non-professionals”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising my support</td>
<td>Through families, friends, brokers and other paid or un-paid “non-professionals”, user led organisations etc. Perhaps with specialist support from a staff recruitment agency, payroll service or care agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living life</td>
<td>Through a personal network of supporters, in some cases including paid staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing how it is working</td>
<td>By Local Authority managers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

So it is certainly possible for people in need of support to become full active citizens in this way and without the intervention of a professional social worker. Some people have done this over the past four or five years: many of the stories on the In Control website from English Local Authorities illustrate situations where all of the above tasks are carried out by people with no background in professional social work (though we are not aware of any where this applies to all seven steps in any one locality).

The above is an important point because it reminds us that there is nothing special or exclusive about social work, rather it is constituted by a set of values (captured by the General Social Care Council Code of Practice), procedures and competencies, which form what we might describe as a “composite professional” – perhaps a person with impressive competence in the way a complex social system functions.

Given the above, we now turn to the questions of how social workers might in fact make an effective contribution to Self-Directed Support, and of how their skills and experience might add value.

### Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>The contribution of the social worker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping someone with the Self Assessment Questionnaire and identifying different sources of money</td>
<td>Certainly in the early stages of implementation, Local Authorities are finding that some people need a lot of help to understand and have the confidence to complete the assessment questionnaire. Supporting someone to do this activity can be more complex than the person doing this for themselves. Successful completion of this function requires significant interpersonal skills, insight, excellent communication skills and an ability to build rapport, often within short timescales. In addition it can be advantageous to have knowledge of systems. Good social workers are well equipped for this. It is however important that managers ensure that this is part of a responsive and flexible system where people have choices about the support they have not one where it is prescribed and controlled or delivered purely by social work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helping someone who is isolated or someone with high support needs to plan

Local Authorities are encouraged to put in place a wide-range of options to help people with support planning, and to encourage families and other community supports to be the first recourse. When this is not possible social workers are often in a good position to help people to plan, either in complex situations or those where the person has no natural supports. In other cases, the person may choose the social worker to take on this role, as a personal preference. In any event, choosing (or not choosing) a social worker to help with planning needs to be a positive choice for someone.

Holding and managing a Personal Budget for someone

In Control has always promoted the Local Authority as one of the deployment options that should be made available to people. Social work expertise and skills are particularly relevant in complex cases where things change rapidly or where there are difficult family dynamics or health issues and/or where large numbers of other professionals are involved.

Helping someone to stay safe

Self-Directed Support is not about exposing people to un-due risk, a number of Local Authorities are experimenting with variations on the theme of “risk enablement” or positive risk taking. There are some situations where people are at particular risk (this could be in families, alone, in the community or in institutional care), where close support and monitoring by a professional social worker can be the key element in the success of a support plan.

Helping someone who needs certain kinds of specialist support

Social workers are “social care specialists” and in many cases are also experts in old age, disability or mental health. They work in multi-disciplinary teams with others with a similar focus, and often have access to knowledge and experience with particular services or types of service that people require from time to time. As such they can have a valuable role in meeting these needs or signposting people to more appropriate places.

Reviewing

Duffy & Sanderson developed the “4 plus 2” questions that form the basis of the review process. Local Authorities need to help people who need support to answer these questions in order, to work out whether their support plan is working effectively. Social workers are trained to ask open-ended questions in ways that support the effectiveness of this process, and in complex cases in particular they may be the best people to do this.

We are suggesting then that it is possible to introduce Self-Directed Support both with and without social workers in a key role. (Similar arguments can be made in relation to other professional groups – including nurses and occupational therapists.)

The reality is however that social workers do exist and are an available resource. Social workers’ education, status and their very existence means that they also have an important say in shaping the changes currently proposed within adult social care. Social workers have traditionally seen themselves as advocates for those same groups of citizens that the old social care system has excluded, and that Self-Directed Support seeks to assist. In fact many social workers who have
become involved in Self-Directed Support have become its greatest advocates, because they see it as a process of empowerment for excluded citizens.

**Second Story**

*At a service meeting last year we were introduced to the concept of Self-Directed Support for the first time. Soon after I began to think about this approach for a particular lady I was working with. She had a physical disability and relied on occasions on her neighbours for support. This often left her feeling a bit of a nuisance. She had recently been thinking about how she would like to buy her neighbours a gift to say thank you, but could not afford to in her financial position. When I talked to her about self directed support she was interested. Following completion of the assessment questionnaire I was concerned because she was not allocated any more money through this process. I began to feel like I may have raised expectations the programme might not be able to meet. However I now feel my fears were largely misplaced, through the support planning process this lady has been able to put together an outcomes focussed plan that meets all her needs and keeps her safe. The process we worked through really placed the person at the centre of their life via their planning process. Karen’s ideas for how she wanted her life to be were not in short supply and nor did they include time tasked agency care. What they did include were a range of ways to build her life so it worked for her and her children whilst keeping her healthy safe and well. Karen also planned for medium to long term aspirations and needs as her budget did not allow her to do all the things she wanted to do in the first year.*

Social Worker

In Control also recognises that people needing support are diverse in all sorts of exciting ways:

- They have different personalities and interests
- They have different cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- They have different educational histories, and sometimes professional backgrounds
- They have different abilities, gifts, dis-abilities and personal histories
- Some live in families, some alone
- Some live in urban communities, some in the country
- People come to need support at different stages in their life, and for different lengths of time

For all of these (and more) reasons, some people want more hands-on control of their support than others, and some people are better able to manage that hands-on support without extra help, or with only very small amounts of extra help. In Control has published materials on supported decision making, and on support brokerage – both of much relevance to these debates, and Local Authorities are encouraged to explore and invest in processes to facilitate both. Many Local Authorities, particularly those in the Total Transformation programme have now begun to think imaginatively about how older and disabled people can get maximum choice, with as little, or as much direct management or responsibility as they wish. Helping people to make this transition is a key aspect of the empowerment role social workers see as central to their job.

**How can Local Authorities assess the shape of the workforce needed?**

In an earlier discussion paper (Casey and MacNeil, 2007), in Control argues that we need to think about the workforce in terms of three concentric circles:

- The personal circle
- The community circle
The present paper is an attempt to provide a sketch of aspects of the professional circle, and to make it clear that both efficiency and effectiveness require us to determine this by promoting the personal and the community circles. In a very real sense, what is left for the professional circle is residual, an additional layer of quality assurance and a safety net when all else fails. This links with the quality management role noted earlier and supports the effective delivery of the assumptions and principles outlined at the start of this paper.

This is not to de-grade the importance of the professional circle, or to suggest that we dispense with it, for some people this circle is of crucial importance. The key issue is that the professional circle is not the major driving force in any one person’s life. With this in mind, Local Authorities implementing Self-Directed Support will need to appraise the size, shape, role and skills required of the social work workforce.

It is suggested that Authorities carry out an exercise, making use of a modified Project Management methodology with the following characteristics:

- The exercise should follow from the process map for Self-Directed Support, which in most cases will pre-exist. If not, one should be created.
- The exercise is best carried out as part of a whole-system review of the Local Authority (provided and commissioned) workforce, as it is re-configured for SDS, i.e. the exercise should appraise more than the role and contribution of social work. Clearly professional roles impact on each other. The scope of the project needs to be clearly defined.
- Independent and senior level leadership and clear project management of the process are vitally important from inception to completion. The process is probably best managed by Human Resource specialists.
- The above process should be a thoughtful one - not mechanistic, and the experience of social workers and their managers needs to be part of the process at each stage. Care should be taken at all points in the process to hold to the vision, preserve the integrity of the Self-Directed Support model, and not to allow special pleading or vested interests to prevail.
- The project might begin with a preliminary desk-top exercise to propose, agree and set out appropriate roles for social workers (and others), as in the table in the preceding section and to provide some provisional “weighting” against each, so that staff numbers can be arrived at.
- A full audit of both the existing, and the planned contribution of qualified social workers to the Self-Directed Support process is at the heart of this process. Traditional approaches to case load measurement and evaluation can be adapted and employed, to set alongside the desk-top exercise.
- A presumption should be built in that the existing workforce should decrease by a specified percentage (10/20/30%), and that this recovered money will be made available for Personal Budgets. This could be achieved via natural wastage. (This is based on the starting assumption that it is desirable to put a higher percentage of social care resource in the hands of citizens, and that a redesigned system will need fewer professionals. At this point this remains an untested assumption, one which the exercise described here will begin to test.)

Undertaking such a process in the context set out above will help in determining the role and function of social work within transformed Local Authorities.
Conclusion: Can social workers help enable people to be active citizens?

Social work has long proclaimed itself as a profession that "empowers the disadvantaged members of our society." The old social care system has meant that social workers' aspirations in this way have been in direct conflict with the role given them by "Community Care." Self-Directed Support aims to enable those same disadvantaged members of society to claim their rights as full citizens. It is an approach that removes the conflict for social workers, created by their acting as both the gatekeepers of resources and as the advocates of the individual; and as such it enables them to fulfil their stated aim to champion the rights of disadvantaged and marginalised people. Achieving this demands personal and professional transformation - but this transformation is something that social workers are beginning to see themselves as well placed to make. In essence the profession itself faces a significant challenge - it is one well worth taking on.

References


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