

# This time it's personal...

*Free availability of personalised and high quality information is at the heart of the transforming social care agenda, says Open Objects director, Gavin Cameron.*

**S**ocial care services are on a transforming path in England and Wales. The landmark 'Putting People First' concordat (2007) outlined a shared vision to provide a personalised adult social care system. Since then local authorities have had the lead role in its delivery, accompanied by a requirement for authentic partnership working with the local NHS, other statutory agencies, third and private sector providers, users and carers and the wider local community.

The program is now into its delivery phases and by the end of March 2011 it is expected that people who use services and their carers as well as front line staff and providers will experience significant progress in all local authority areas.

## Universal access to information

For personalisation of services to work and to enable informed choice, people must be offered a clear view of what is available to them. The need for universal access to information is recognised as one of the key objectives of the program. Local authorities are currently grappling with the practical implications of this and turning to their IT colleagues for answers and timelines for delivery.

## Information Hub

To many an online information hub which aggregates all that is known locally about care services looks like a very good place to start. In effect it would establish a shared information directory which can be updated by all and any of the collaborating agencies and partners. The same Hub can be used to present a single website (or more) to the public, providing care service users and their advocates with a simple route to stay informed about the services on offer.

## First things first...

A much discussed aspect of the transforming social care agenda is that service users and their advocates will hold their own individual care budgets and pay directly for their own services. From here, there have been many extrapolations which have tempted some local authorities to dive early into the whole area of individual online purchasing of services. Some suppliers have suggested creating

online markets ('Amazon-style'). This and other fanciful ideas miss the point; it is the individual decisions about what to buy, and not the means that will drive the real changes. Without first providing comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance about the services on offer, no-one will be buying through online routes. So an over-emphasis in the first instance on the mechanics of the purchase transaction will lead local authorities down an expensive cul-de-sac.

## Adult Social Care Hub

Instead, by collecting high quality information which can be used for making care decisions, and by making it available online in attractive and easily accessible formats, you will drive more profound changes. An online directory of social care services packaged within local social care websites will provide the practical springboard for many services users and their carers to properly engage and explore their own options.

Open Objects' Adult Social Care Hub is a service directory system designed to act as a signposting system to all care services that are available in a local area. The Hub incorporates a data harvesting technology which can automatically scoop up information about services from available online and back-office database sources, and provide a single universal view to all user groups. These tools remove the barriers to authentic information-sharing partnerships between local authorities and all other groups involved in social care, both public and private.

## Self Service

The comprehensive view of care services that can be offered via the Hub encourages a self-service approach among users and their care workers. Service information from all agencies including local authority, primary care trusts, voluntary sector and other third party agencies can all be found in one place. Many routine enquiries or information gathering exercises can be completed using the Hub alone, which will promote greater independence and reduce pressure on face to face enquiry routes and on back office call centres.

Once established the Hub can be used to



reduce contact costs still further by integration of transactional services including purchasing through any number of routes.

## Personalisation

The information on the Hub and its form of presentation needs to answer the personal needs of care service users and their carers. For some of the target groups, this may simply be an issue of accessibility or easy online access to print versions of the information. Documents and leaflets, advice and guidance; all of these should be available to users in forms that they can choose. Also personalised favourite lists and user profiles will enable repeat users to build up their own saved shortcuts and portfolios about services that meet their personal requirements. People should be able to share their experiences and advice with others, through service reviews, ratings, forums and other forms of feedback. By taking an open approach to the provision of service information and to the passing of commentary on it, local authorities have the opportunity to tap into vibrant community resources to assist in the delivery.

## Call to Action

Fortunately specific funds are being provided to local authorities for IT capital expenditure in relation to adult social care IT infrastructure. These grants create an opportunity for local authorities to put information access right at the heart of their transformation process. Off-the-shelf solutions, such as Open Objects' Adult Social Care Hub, provide a cost effective fast-track to highly visible change and a catalyst to collaboration between partners. With 2009 rolling on and March 2011 set as the target for significant progress, now is a good time act.

## Online Demonstration

Open Objects is offering readers the opportunity of a free demonstration of the Adult Social Care Hub incorporating their own services data and information harvested from your own choice of sources. For further information regarding this offer contact Karine at Open Objects quoting this magazine, LGITU. [Karine@openobjects.com](mailto:Karine@openobjects.com)