

VOICES

VOICES
OF
INDEPENDENCE
CHANGE &
EMPOWERMENT IN
STOKE-ON-TRENT

The VOICES Model of using **Personal Budgets in Service Coordination**

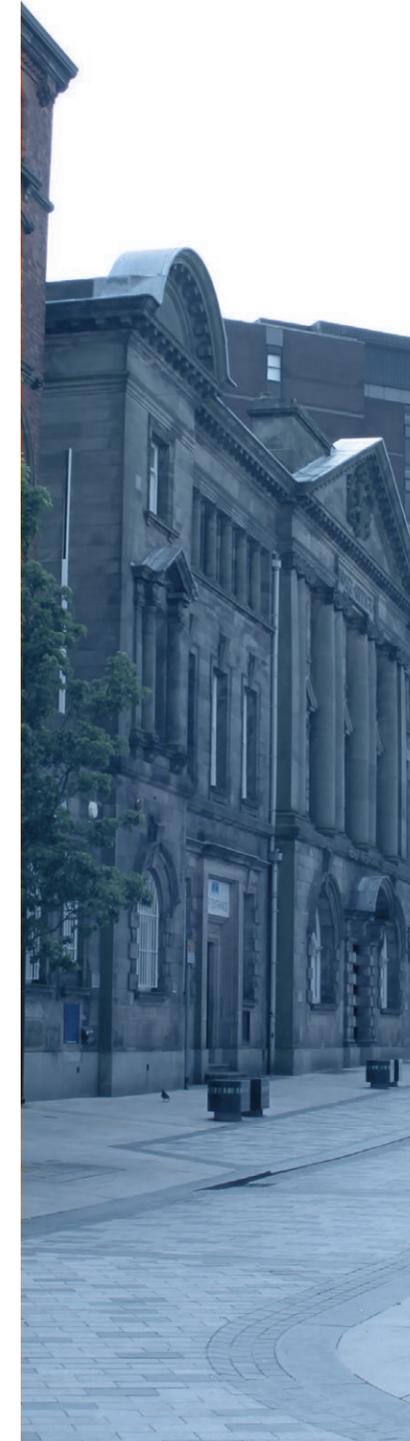


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1 Executive Summary



1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a small-scale independent evaluation of VOICES innovative model of using personal budgets in Service Coordination work.

VOICES is funded through the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Fulfilling Lives programme; Stoke-on-Trent is one of 12 areas covered by the programme.

VOICES Stoke-on-Trent seeks to empower people with multiple needs such as mental ill-health, substance misuse and homelessness to change their lives and to influence services. The programme is aimed at testing alternative approaches to supporting people with multiple needs through casework and assertive advocacy to help people access services. Service Coordination is at the core of the programme.

Personalisation, including the use of personal budgets, is a long-standing policy theme in the statutory health and social care sectors. There have been a variety of initiatives to personalise services for people with multiple needs. Many of the Fulfilling Lives projects use personal budgets and these have been identified as one of six areas of 'promising practice'.¹

1.2 VOICES model of personal budgets

- The implementation plan for VOICES described 'personal budget[s], managed with the Service Coordinator, to ensure that the right help is there for [customers] on their journey'. The inclusion of personal budgets was based on an aspiration to provide choice and control for VOICES customers.
- Customers of VOICES are allocated annual personal budgets of £1,000 per year that are utilised in partnership with the Service Coordinators. This amount is flexible and the actual amount used varies. While customers are aware of personal budgets, they are designed to be used flexibly as and when needed, rather than being an amount that a customer is entitled to spend.
- Crucially, all expenditure is linked to the work being done by the Service Coordinator to achieve positive outcomes, from securing initial engagement to creating a home or connecting the customer with services.
- The Service Coordination team all reported that personal budgets were central to their work and they described a flexible and creative approach.

¹ Moreton, R et al (2018) Fulfilling Lives Evidence Review: Promising practice key findings from local evaluations to date

² Fulfilling Lives in Stoke-on-Trent Project Plan 2014-2022

There is no detailed written guidance on the use of personal budgets at VOICES; however, there are some guidelines that the team adheres to:

- o expenditure links to support planning and achieving positive outcomes
- o purchases are of good value and reasonable quality
- o items or services are always purchased directly by the staff member.

- The data shows that there were many very small transactions, usually for a hot drink, snack or bus pass.

1.4 Outcomes and learning

The evaluation evidenced that personal budgets supported outcomes in the following areas:

Addressing immediate needs and promoting engagement

One of the first uses of the personal budget for many customers is to meet basic needs such as for food, clothing and toiletries. At this point people are often rough sleeping or sofa-surfing. Using the personal budget to resolve an immediate issue quickly demonstrates that the service is working in a way that is aligned with the customers' needs at that moment and promotes engagement. Buying a drink or meal out with a customer was widely cited as being a good way to create rapport and a sense of having a normal conversation.

Finding and sustaining accommodation

There are several key ways in which personal budgets help people to find and keep accommodation including:

- providing emergency accommodation (e.g. by purchasing nights in basic hotels)
- securing access to private rented sector accommodation (e.g. by providing rent deposits or agents' fees)
- making accommodation 'feel like home' (e.g. by buying

furniture, bedding, utensils and soft furnishings)

- managing moves and crises (e.g. paying moving costs and cleaning costs).

Addressing services

At the heart of Service Coordination is working with the customer to ensure fair access to the services they need. The research identified two key ways that personal budgets work to support this:

- practical support to ensure that people know about, and can get to, their appointments by paying for travel and ensuring customers have a basic pay-as-you-go phone with credit.
- access to independent expert assessments of customers' needs to enhance advocacy work – e.g. securing an occupational therapy (OT) and/or mental health assessment, or legal advice to advocate for access to health and care services.

Independence and Wellbeing

Both customers and Service Coordinators often refer to the challenges of finding positive ways for customers to spend time and the risk of boredom and isolation when they move away from substance misuse. This impacts on mental health and creates a risk of relapse. Some examples of items purchased that were recorded under the outcomes star area 'meaningful use of time' are: gym memberships, fishing equipment, cycling equipment and clothing, newspapers, art and craft equipment such as sketchbooks and colouring pencils, and veterinary services for a cat.

1.5 Learning and recommendations

The research evidenced that in the VOICES model:

- personal budgets help build trust and connection
- a relatively small amount of money can make a big difference
- personal budgets support Service Coordination work
- personal budgets promote creativity, positivity and problem solving
- personal budgets enhance advocacy work.

Several challenges and risks were identified:

- VOICES personal budgets work lack a degree of clarity for customers. Customers are not provided with the amount of budget they have at their disposal and to some extent lack control over monitoring and spending their personal budgets. The budget is used as a flexible 'enablement fund' by Service Coordinators rather than a predefined pot of funding.
- The flexible and creative nature of personal budgets has a built-in challenge in ensuring consistency & fairness.
- Customers and Service Coordinators both referred to the risk of people just wanting a VOICES worker 'for the budget' and/or developing unrealistic or unreasonable expectations about how the budget would be used. When the budget becomes the main focus for a customer

it can impede rather than support Service Coordination, although this was reported to be rare.

- One of the risks highlighted by the Fulfilling Lives evaluation report is that personal budgets are used for 'basic living costs and managing crises rather than the intended life-enhancing activities' and to 'plug the gaps in services'. This is a tension in the VOICES personal budgets model; many of the things purchased with VOICES personal budgets should be available to customers via welfare benefits or access to health and social care services.

Recommendations include the continued use of personal budgets by VOICES and promotion of this model to other services, especially in the context of exit planning for the end of the VOICES programme in 2022.

In 2018, Most customers who accessed a personal budget spent...



Only 14 people exceeded the annual allocation of £1,000



Between October 2014 and December 2018:



174 customers

made use of Personal Budget Allocation

and found...



Total spend during that period £164,500

Maximum spend with an individual > £5,153



The 3 Highest categories of expenditure during this time...



2 Introduction and Methodology

This report is part of the local evaluation of VOICES. It presents the findings of a small-scale independent evaluation of VOICES innovative model of using personal budgets in Service Coordination work. It is intended for those with an interest in VOICES and/or the use of flexible personal budgets in working with people with multiple needs related to substance misuse, homelessness, mental health and offending.

2.1 About VOICES

VOICES is funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund as part of Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs. The Fulfilling Lives programme is aimed at testing alternative approaches to supporting people with multiple needs. Stoke-on-Trent is one of 12 areas to share the £112 million funding over eight years.

VOICES in Stoke-on-Trent seeks to empower people with multiple needs to change their lives and to influence services. It is a partnership project between a wide range of organisations and people with lived experience of multiple needs.

Service Coordination is a key element of the VOICES project and is delivered by an operational team of nine Service Coordinators and

two Systems Brokers. The team works with people with multiple needs such as mental ill-health, substance misuse and homelessness, which impact on their access to services and opportunities to flourish and progress. Part of VOICES' mission is to change systems through casework and assertive advocacy to help people access appropriate services.

Central to all the work undertaken are the voices of those with lived experience of multiple needs. The Expert Citizens group, supported by VOICES, has formed their own community interest company and are central to the progress of change in the city and the legacy of the VOICES project.³

2.2 Methodology

The report is based on:

- a brief review of literature and policy on personal budgets
- analysis of data about personal budgets spending from the VOICES InForm monitoring system – information without identifying data was supplied to the evaluation team to analyse using Excel
- a focus group with the Service Coordination team
- in-depth interviews with two Service Coordinators

including discussing data about customers' budgets summarised from InForm data

- face-to-face interviews with four customers about their personal budgets and overall experience of VOICES
- brief phone interviews with two further customers about their personal budgets.



Stoke-on-Trent is one of the 12 areas to share funding of



£112 million over 8 years

3 Background

3.1 Personalisation in health and social care

Personalisation, including the use of personal budgets, is a long-standing policy theme in the statutory health and social care sectors. In the 2007 paper 'Putting People First', the Government outlined its vision to improve adult social care by adopting a personalisation agenda. The idea was to enable individuals to have choice and control over the resources allocated to their care. This included the use of personal budgets, where people are told how much money is allocated to their care and, through various mechanisms, are able to choose how this money is spent and the type of services they receive, rather than simply being told what services they can access.

Although personal budgets are a key feature of the social care landscape, there are challenges in delivering them, especially in the context of budget cuts; for example, some personal budget holders find that the rules about what is considered eligible for personal budget expenditure are overly restrictive. Under the Care Act 2014, from April 2015 all users of local authority social care must have their care paid for through a personal budget of some form. The agenda moved forward into health services

with the NHS Long Term Plan including the aim for people to benefit from personal health budgets.

3.2 Personalisation in services working with people with multiple needs

There have been a variety of initiatives to personalise services for people facing multiple needs, including through personal budgets, especially within the homelessness sector.

In 2009 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded four personalisation pilot projects for people who had long-term experience of rough sleeping in the City of London, Nottingham, Northampton, Exeter and Devon. The City of London project evaluation found that by the end of the pilot out of 15 people who had been sleeping rough for between four and 45 years the majority were in accommodation (seven) or making plans to move into accommodation (two). During the same period, a Greater London Authority project called the 'Rough Sleepers 205 project' used multi-agency monitoring data to identify the people most entrenched in rough sleeping and supported local authorities to provide



³ For more information about the Expert Citizens see www.expertcitizens.org.uk

⁴ Department of Health (2007) Putting people first: a shared vision and commitment to the transformation of adult social care
⁵ Abrahams, C (2017) How personal are personal budgets in 2017 Community Care: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/09/19/personal-personal-budgets-2017/> (accessed May 2019) and National Audit Office (2018) Adult Social Care at a glance
⁶ National Audit Office (2018) Adult Social Care at a glance | ⁷ NHS (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan
⁸ Hough, J and Rice, B (2010) Providing personal budgets for entrenched rough sleepers
⁹ Teixeira, L (2010) Still left out? The rough sleepers "205" initiative one year on, Crisis



a personalised approach to working with this group; after a year of operation the majority of this group had moved off the streets.

In 2013, Homeless Link published a review of personalised services for rough sleepers finding that 'personalised approaches were effective in supporting rough sleepers who had previously not engaged with services to move off the streets; that they put homeless people at the centre of their support; building trusting relationships with project workers was essential; being given a choice was central to engaging rough sleepers; flexible approaches of staff enabling them to be responsive were important; can enable rough sleepers to engage with other local support services'.

Overall there is wide support for personalisation, including personal budgets, within homelessness services; a rapid evidence review of what works in homelessness identified person-centred responses as effective. The Crisis report 'Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain' cited strong evidence for using personal budgets to support rough sleepers. The report highlighted the key role of personalised budgets in delivering a person-centred approach for longer-term rough sleepers with higher support needs.

3.3 Personal budgets in the Fulfilling Lives programme

Many of the Fulfilling Lives projects use personal budgets and these were identified as one of six areas of 'promising practice' in a report produced as part of the national evaluation of the programme. Within Fulfilling Lives, personal budgets consist of 'money for individual beneficiaries to use to buy additional support and engage in life-enhancing activities'. The report concluded that personal budgets can help to engage beneficiaries, support the development of trusting relationships and empower beneficiaries, and that personal budgets may be associated with greater progress in beneficiary recovery, but further evaluation is needed. The report highlighted some of the challenges and unintended outcomes of personal budgets, for example: 'All evaluations reviewed report[ed] that personal budgets were being used for basic living costs and managing crises rather than the intended life-enhancing activities. This highlights "the massive gap in provision for people who have absolutely nothing". At least one evaluation suggested that personal budgets are being used by keyworkers to "plug the gaps" in services.'

4 The Model of Personal Budget at VOICES

4.1 Using Personal Budgets

"A VOICES personal budget is a personalised budget to overcome barriers and improve engagement to support customers to achieve their goals."

— VOICES Service Coordinator

At the heart of the Fulfilling Lives in Stoke-on-Trent Project Plan 2014-2022 are 'personal budget[s], managed with the Service Coordinator, [to] ensure that the right help is there for [customers] on their journey'. The inclusion of personal budgets was based on feedback around choice and control from people with lived experience of multiple needs who coproduced the plan, and experience from previous projects such as the Rough Sleeping 205 project and the City of London personalisation pilot.

"We want to have some control over our next steps. We want choices."

— Expert Citizen

Customers of VOICES are allocated annual personal budgets of £1,000 per year that are utilised in partnership with the Service Coordinators. This amount is flexible and the actual amount used varies greatly. Amounts of up to £100 a day, and/or £50 per item, can be used by a Service Coordinator independently; for larger purchases, Service Coordinators must get sign off from a manager. The introduction in 2018 of preloaded charge cards for smaller purchases has increased the efficiency and ease with which Service Coordinators can spend smaller amounts of money.

Customers are aware of personal budgets; they are told about this aspect of the service when they are introduced to VOICES. However, budgets are designed to be used flexibly, as and when needed, rather than being something that a customer is entitled to spend all of or with a running total provided to the customer. All expenditure is linked to the work being done by the Service Coordinator to achieve positive outcomes for the customer, from securing initial engagement to creating a home or connecting the customer with family.

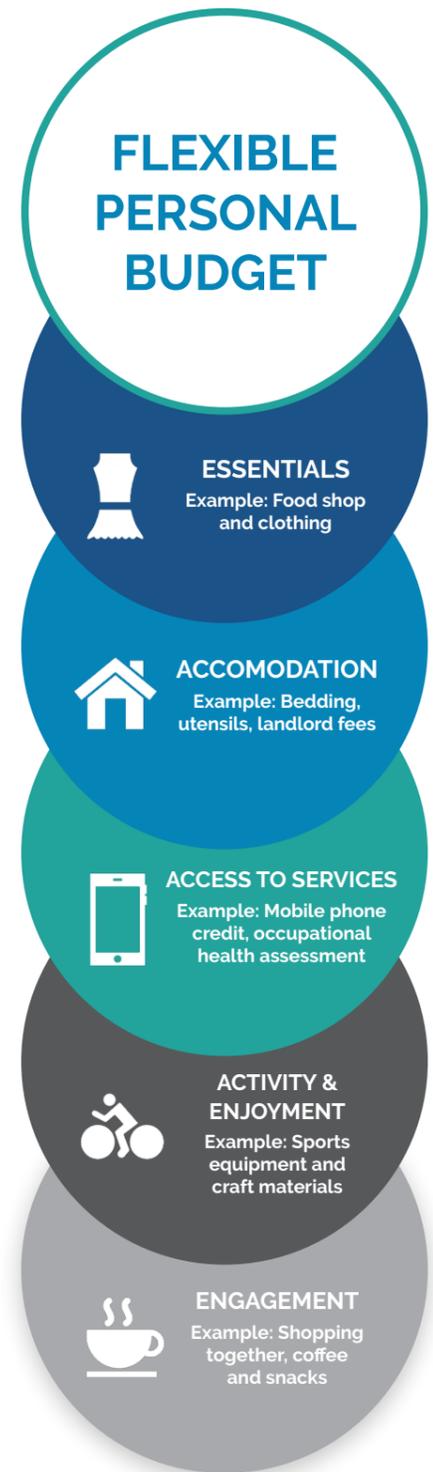


Figure a:
An overview of the model of personal budgets at VOICES

All purchases made with personal budgets are entered into the VOICES monitoring system, InForm. Each transaction is coded by the type of goods or services purchased (for example, clothing or electronics). Since January 2018 each expenditure is also categorised by the area from the outcomes star that relates mostly closely to the expenditure. For example, if someone is provided with a bus pass to get to an appointment with probation services, the spend is categorised as 'travel' and the outcomes star area is 'offending'.

There is no detailed written guidance on the use of personal budgets at VOICES; however, there are several internal processes that ensure that person budgets are used appropriately and effectively, would meet the requirements of audit trails, and that staff are empowered to make decisions on the ground and use budgets in their day-to-day work:

- Staff are trained on how to access and use the budgets as part of their induction process.
- There is a monthly management meeting at VOICES in which personal budgets are discussed; the team reflect on the spending against outcomes star categories and debate some specific examples of spending as appropriate. If an unusual or new use of personal budgets has occurred, the team will consider how well this worked. Where a trend emerges from data, this

will also be discussed; for example, the management group reviewed the budget being spent on bus passes and taxis and as a result the team has been careful to consider whether customers might qualify for support with transport costs via accessing free bus passes, or through benefits or a social care package.

- The quality assurance group at VOICES facilitates peer audit of case files which includes auditing the use of personal budgets and how they relate to customers' outcomes.

The Service Coordination team all reported that personal budgets were central to their work. Most of those attending the staff focus group felt that they would struggle to work as effectively without personal budgets. The approach to personal budgets at VOICES has developed over time. The team felt that flexibility and creativity were part of the ethos behind personal budgets.

There are some guidelines that the team adheres to:

- Expenditure should support planning and achieving positive outcomes such as engagement, housing and health.
- Purchases should be of good value and also of reasonable quality.
- Items or services should always be purchased directly by the staff member.
- The budget should be used for things that are not available from other sources at the time.

- Budgets are not to be used for cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol or illegal substances.
- Sleeping bags are not generally purchased for people who are sleeping outside because the team would always seek rather to make an offer of accommodation.
- Televisions are generally not purchased because there is a high risk of resale, proven by VOICES' experience of providing some televisions toward the start of the programme.

4.2 Personal budget spending by type and outcomes star category

Data on InForm, the VOICES monitoring system, was analysed for October 2014 to December 2018.

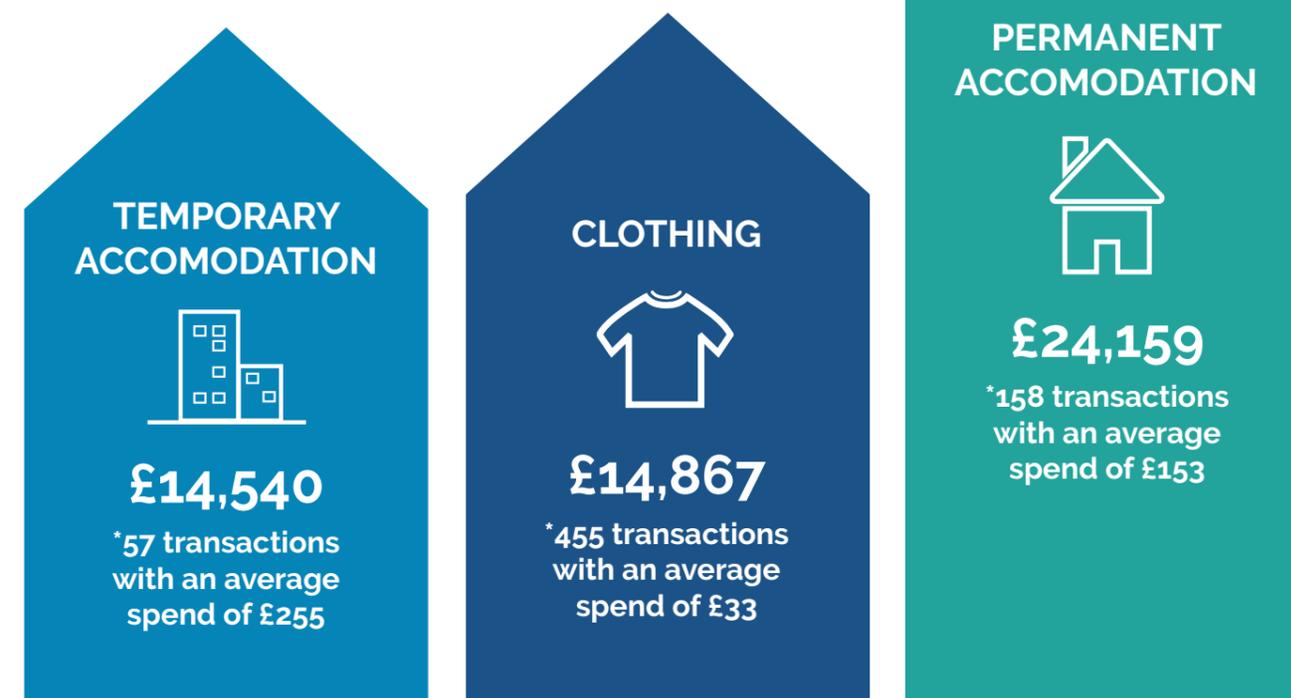
During this period 174 customers made use of a personal budget allocation. The total amount of money spent during the period was £164,500; the maximum amount spent on an individual was £5,153 and the minimum was just 80 pence. Figure (b) shows that in 2018 most people who accessed a personal budget spent between £100 and £500, with only 14 people exceeding the nominal annual allocation of £1,000. Some people included in the table will not have been on the team's caseload for the whole period, which explains some of the lower spends.

Figure (b) Amount of spending on personal budgets by number of customers in 2018

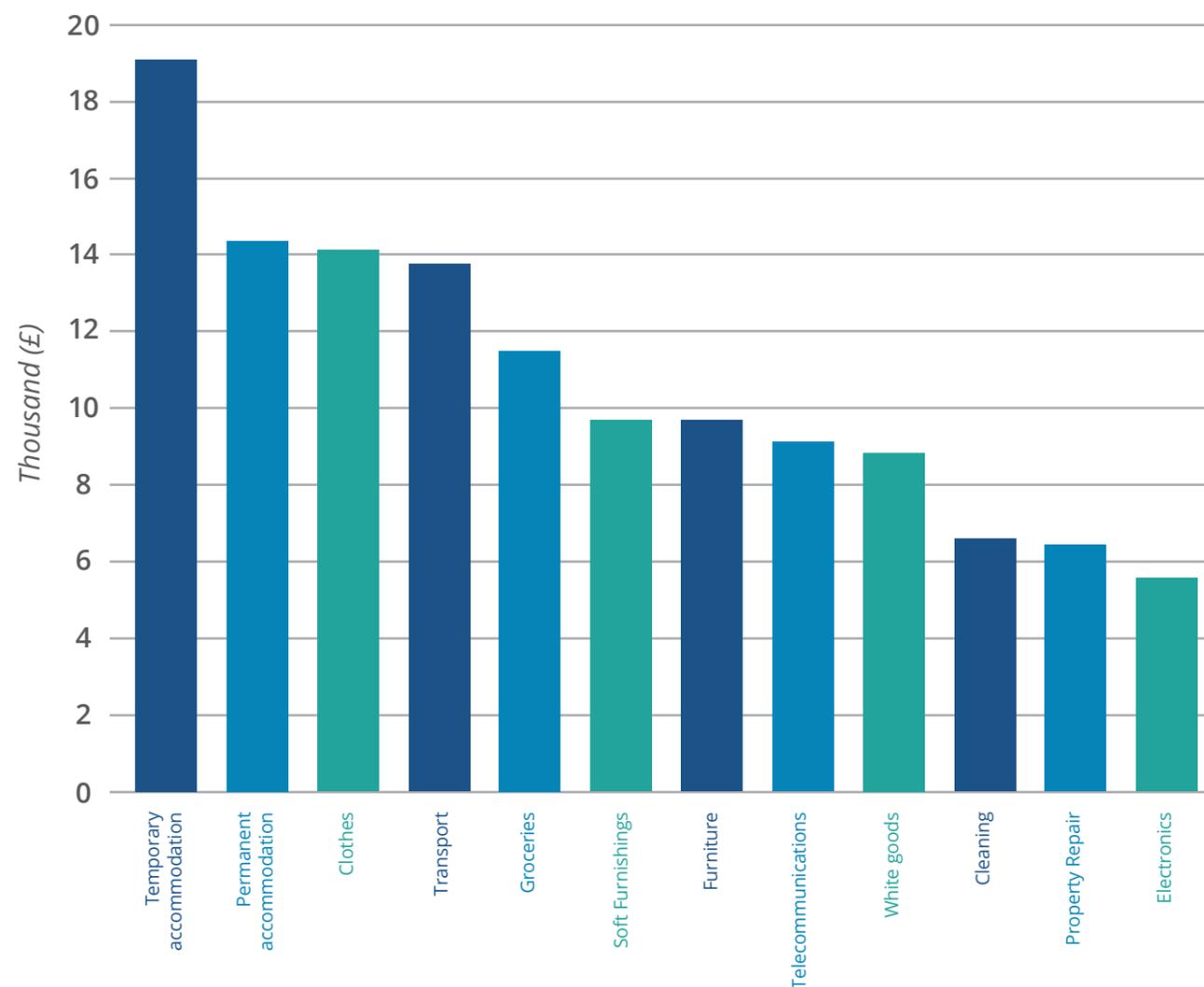
Amount	Number of customers who accessed this amount during the period	Percentage of all customers who accessed a budget in the period
Less than £50 (more than £0)	23	24%
£50-100	11	12%
£101-500	30	32%
£501-1,000	17	18%
£1,001-5,000	14	15%
Total number of customers accessing a personal budget in 2018	95	100%

The data shows that there are many very small transactions, usually for a hot drink, snack or bus pass.

Over the whole period, the three highest categories in terms of overall spend were:



**Figure (c) Personal budgets: overall spend by category
(12 categories accounting for the highest level of spending)**



Just under 30% of the personal budget spend was associated with an outcomes star category because this coding was only introduced in 2018. Figure (d) summarises spending across outcomes star categories. The

category with the highest spend was 'managing tenancy and accommodation' at £20,880; the second highest was 'self-care living skills' at £11,843; and the lowest spend was for 'offending' at £146.

Figure (d) Personal budgets by outcomes star category

Outcome star category	Total spend in period	Number of Transactions	Examples (Top categories)
Managing tenancy and accommodation	£20,880	257	Permanent accommodation Cleaning Temporary accommodation White goods (e.g. fridge) Property repair
Self-care living skills	£11,843	394	Clothes Health care (e.g. OT assessment, skincare) Legal services Groceries White goods
Physical Health	£4,967	258	Temporary accommodation Groceries Clothes Engagement Transport
Motivation/taking responsibility	£3,154	261	Telecommunications (e.g. mobile phone) Transport Engagement (e.g. coffee or lunch) Leisure Clothes
Meaningful use of time	£2,241	74	Leisure (e.g. fishing and sports equipment) Clothes Engagement Transport
Social networks and relationships	£1,628	186	Telecommunications Engagement Transport Soft furnishings (e.g. duvet, cushions) Groceries
Mental wellbeing	£1,439	59	Clothes Temporary accommodation Counselling Engagement Transport
Managing money and personal admin	£878	65	Telecommunications Groceries Clothes Engagement Electronics
Substance abuse	£315	29	Transport (e.g. bus passes, taxis) Telecommunications Engagement
Offending	£146	9	Transport Engagement Telecommunications

Base: all transactions with an outcomes star category associated with them on InForm

5 Outcomes

This chapter presents findings from research with Service Coordinators and customers. It explores how the personal budgets are used in the Service Coordination relationship, how the budgets make a difference and the learning from the VOICES personal budgets.

5.1 Addressing immediate needs and promoting engagement

One of the first uses of the personal budget for many customers is to meet basic needs – for example, when a person is rough sleeping, spending is often on clothes and food. People sleeping rough are less likely to have welfare benefits in place to meet their needs for food and clothing, and are sometimes using alcohol and drugs more heavily so are unable to prioritise spending on the essentials. In other cases, problems with benefits, financial exploitation or difficulties budgeting leave those in accommodation in dire need of food, clothing and other essentials such as electricity. The personal budget can be used to resolve an immediate issue quickly, showing that the service is working in a way that is aligned with the customers' needs at that moment. Spending on clothes and toiletries is also often recorded for hospital

stays when people are unable to access money and need essentials such as fresh nightwear and shower gel to ensure their comfort and dignity.

“Going shopping is basically building great rapport; every contact is rapport building and when you need the most basic thing of food – getting food [will be the thing to build rapport]. Service Coordination stuff is more important but [spending the personal budget in this way] helps us get there quicker.”

— Service Coordinator

CLOTHING

£29 on some boots



“I was taking the customer to the council [about her housing] and she was wearing flipflops in the snow [because of her swollen feet]. On the spur of the moment we went and got thick socks and boots. It was good to be able to do that with the budget. Just walking around – it made the situation easier.”

Spending on food and drink for engagement – often a coffee or a meal such as McDonald's, Subway or a Staffordshire oatcake – tends to be higher at the start of a case. Customers are often staying in a hostel setting that they are finding challenging, rough sleeping or sofa-surfing at the time of their introduction to VOICES; giving them some choice about where to go and a different place to have a conversation are valuable offers in themselves. Having a meal or coffee out provides a place to talk, something to discuss that sets a different tone from a standard 'assessment' or key work meeting, and also addresses one of the primary needs of the customer if they are hungry and unable to afford food.

“I tend to [have something too]; it makes it more social. I just have a drink or a bag of crisps. It's what you would do with a friend and it makes people feel more comfortable when they can have a coffee with you.”

— Service Coordinator

5.2 Finding and sustaining accommodation

There are several key ways in which personal budgets help people to find and keep accommodation:

- Helping people manage in their current accommodation (while a more suitable alternative is being found)
- Providing emergency accommodation
- Securing access to private sector accommodation
- Making accommodation feel like 'home'
- Managing moves and crises.

5.2.1 Helping people manage in their current accommodation

Personal budgets can help people cope and persevere in unsuitable accommodation while a better option is found for them, rather than them falling back into homelessness – for example, purchasing storage boxes for people who are staying in a hostel and need to move on, and buying a CD player and newspapers for someone who is in self-contained temporary accommodation and struggling with benefits issues and boredom while he waits for his permanent home.

“It's helped me a great deal; I got a CD player and I try and get a couple of CDs (with the money I get), getting my laundry done too – I don't have a washing machine here... It's quiet and lonely here... He gets me a paper as I like to read the paper.”

— Customer

5.2.2 Emergency accommodation

Budgets are used on emergency accommodation options, usually cheaper hotels such as Travelodge, for people who would otherwise be rough sleeping or in dangerous sofa-surfing situations. Sometimes this has been done to try and encourage people who are reluctant to engage and move off the streets towards longer-term accommodation.

5.2.3 Accessing private rented sector accommodation

The use of larger sums to secure tenancies in the private rented sector for people was considered by the team to be one of the highlights of personal budgets. Personal budgets have been used in a wide range of ways to help people find and keep accommodation in the private rented sector. Often this has been in line with Housing First principles, providing accommodation

ENGAGEMENT

£15 on snacks and coffee



“When we were first introduced, the [customer] was struggling at the hostel; he had psychosis and paranoia; his head was in his hands all of that first meeting... [After he was evicted from the hostel] we would meet in town and I would buy him a milkshake, building up the relationship. He was very mistrusting; it helped build the relationship. Getting a drink was a “selling point”. Somewhere to go rather than sitting on a bench in the street.”

£78 over more than two years

“We go for coffee and McDonald's. It's helpful as he wants to vent sometimes. We go to an appointment and you don't get the chance to sit – it's good to sit and speak about them [the customer]; it's something nice to do.”

to someone and then ensuring the services they need are available around the tenancy. In some cases, VOICES has provided a full deposit for private rented sector accommodation; in other cases, where the customer has access to the local authority bond scheme, the personal budget can be used to pay agents' fees or an enhanced deposit in the absence of a guarantor.

EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION £624 for 11 nights

“We had a customer in her 50s. The client was rough sleeping through winter; the people organising SWEP (severe weather emergency provision) knew she was there and provided placements in the Travelodge but she wouldn't go, and wouldn't go into hostels. [The System Brokers in the team] had the idea to actually book a room and let the customer know it was available – “there is a [specific] room available and feel free to use it” – rather than just making the offer of a room. Sometimes it was empty but she went and stayed there.”

“Stoke City Council took over the funding for the Travelodge until she refused an [alternative] offer of accommodation. This was a critical point where she could have been lost, but VOICES once again took over the funding for the Travelodge while she bid for properties through choice-based letting. When she first saw her new accommodation, she didn't want to leave the Travelodge; the gas was capped off still [at the new property] and [she loved] the Travelodge by then. So, we booked in one more night in the Travelodge. She has now been in her tenancy for over six months.”



ACCESSING THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR £600 for application fee and rent up front

“I had a new client to the service in PRS accommodation which did not meet her health needs and she was also getting into arrears due to benefit shortfall for the rent... Her situation was desperate the landlord had not given notice but was hounding her for the rent she owed including threats of violence. VOICES paid the deposit on a new place with her personal budget. We needed ID urgently to secure the property – it would have taken two weeks but I used the personal budget to get next day delivery.”

“The current new accommodation, it's not the best property but... it's helped with engagement; she didn't want me to go to the old shared flat. [Being somewhere I can work with her has] helped get her involved with drug services and the district nurse.”

5.2.4 Making a house a home

Moving into a new tenancy is a period of change, uncertainty and anxiety for many people with multiple needs; a tenancy comes with additional responsibilities and represents a move away from a familiar routine. One of the types of expenditure that customers and Service Coordinators referred to most often in interviews was purchasing items to help the customer set up a new home, whether in the private rented sector or in supported self-contained accommodation. The amount of equipment provided by landlords varies from basic furniture only (private rented accommodation) to a fully equipped kitchen (some supported housing). Towels, bedding, cutlery, utensils and a kettle and toaster are needed by most people who are resettling in accommodation. Some people have purchased larger items including white goods, tables and chairs, and cabinets with their personal budgets. Sometimes furniture is sourced second hand.

“Especially with Housing First clients it helps that they are not moving into an empty house.”

“Being able to pick what [the customer] wanted gave him a sense of ownership and pride [in his new home]; he was very thankful.”

— Service Coordinator

5.2.5 Managing moves and crises

Personal budgets can be used to help deal with problems in tenancies and help customers move to another home when appropriate. An example is a customer who needed to move to a new area due to domestic violence and anti-social behaviour at the property; however, to move her possessions she required a specialist service to assist with needle disposal and cleaning. Her personal budget paid for this and she was able to move her possessions to a new property. In other cases, personal budgets are used for professional cleaning or repairs to damaged property to help sustain a tenancy that is at risk.



CASE STUDY



Name **Joe**
Age..... **20's**
Budget..... **Approx £700**
around six months

Struggling to maintain his hostel place and facing multiple needs including long-standing alcohol dependency, Joe met with a VOICES worker to find out more about the service. They brought him a coffee and provided a mobile phone, which he admits he sold because he was 'heavy on drink and drugs'. He was evicted from his hostel place soon after and spent a period sleeping rough, drinking heavily and begging. During this period his Service Coordinator spent money from his personal budget on essentials including food and clothing to maintain engagement and meet his basic needs.

“When I was rough sleeping I needed clothing, jeans, gloves, a hat – you don't need a big budget to get clothing. It was a godsend to what I was wearing – my trainers were falling apart... makes you feel better in yourself... They did [grocery shopping with me]; I am a registered alcoholic and before my benefits were properly in place most of my money went on drinking.”

VOICES worked with Joe to identify the best housing solution for him; he moved into supported, self-contained accommodation. With his benefits in place Joe no longer needed as much help with the basics; spending from his budget shifted to helping him set up a sustainable home. Purchases included an easy chair, a table and chairs, a cabinet, lamp and a slow cooker and kitchen utensils. Some items were second hand; others were new. As televisions are not generally part of personal budgets it was agreed that Joe could use his personal budget for a large grocery shop to free up his own money to get a television.

“You don't need the biggest things in life to make a home; sometimes I can use my own money but sometimes I can use the budget... My TV and phone I got myself; this helped me to understand about money... I've got that flat the way I want it now. I want to get a new rug when I get my benefits payment soon.”

With his accommodation stable for over a year, benefits in place and access to regular support for his mental health, Joe is now seeking to expand his range of activities. He has purchased a bike with his personal budget, which enables him to get around and see family members, and has more recently started to explore fishing and a course to help him move towards employment.

Continued on next page >>

CASE STUDY



Name **Joe**
Age.....**20's**
Budget.....**Approx £700**
around six months

“I was sat indoors all the time. [Now] I have been fishing and I am starting to change my lifestyle. I need to get new people to hang about with... I want to travel about to get me out of the house and see new places.”

Joe feels that his Service Coordinator's support has been transformative and values this above the personal budget; but both he and his Service Coordinator agree that the budget has helped them work together to enable Joe to achieve change.

“I am now eating well and have money – before I was not in a proper place... Even if I didn't have the personal budget, VOICES has been a support. Basically [my Service Coordinator] is my biggest support network – if I have questions I need answering, if there is anything I need help with, she is there... She helps me get my point across.”

5.3 Accessing Services

At the heart of Service Coordination is working with the customer to ensure fair access to the services they need. The research identified two key ways that personal budgets work to support this:

- Practical support to ensure people know about and can get to their appointments by paying for travel and ensuring customers have a phone.
- Access to independent expert assessments of customers' needs to enhance advocacy work.

5.3.1 Practical support to access services

PHONES

Providing basic pay-as-you-go phones and phone credit from personal budgets was described as having a range of benefits. Phones help the Service Coordinators keep in touch with the customers, including to remind them about appointments. The customer can use a phone to make contact with the Service Coordinator, but also as one customer interviewee commented, to get in touch with the police when she was in danger due to domestic violence and exploitation. Customers also use phones

“I have had a couple of phones – they got taken from me, they got taken from me by my ex-partner... I need to have a phone; I need to be able to call the police.” – Customer

to make contact with friends and family. For some customers phones are a frequent purchase (there are examples of people having four or five phones purchased) because they get lost or damaged, especially when people are sleeping rough or living a very unsettled lifestyle. One customer commented that if he were working for VOICES he would limit customers to two phones because it is tempting to sell them. The VOICES approach is to buy multiple phones as long as there is a reasonable chance of them being used for contact with Service Coordinators; if buying several mobile phones at a cost of £15 moves someone towards accommodation and services it is considered a worthwhile investment, even if a small number are likely to get lost or even sold. Being given a phone and agreeing to keep in touch can be a breakthrough in the early stages of engagement with someone who is not in contact with services. When phones are provided the Service Coordinator adds their own work mobile phone number and the VOICES number to the phone and discusses the importance of keeping in touch on a regular basis.

“My customer loses phones! Lost a load of them but it's best to get a new phone – when he has it he uses it. He rings most days and answers the phone when we need to get hold of him.”

– Service Coordinator
customer's total spend was £50 on phones and credit

TRAVEL

Personal budgets are often put towards travel costs, usually day bus passes and sometimes taxis for people who would be unable to get public transport for mobility or mental health reasons. These are small but very significant expenditures because providing travel can help people access services and encourage them to start attending appointments independently (after a period of attending accompanied by the Service Coordinator by car). Sometimes having a bus pass can make the difference between attending an appointment or ending up in custody.

“We provided bus passes to get to probation when I couldn't take him. There was a risk of him being breached. One was to get to court; if he had not turned up he would have been taken into custody overnight and bailed to appear the next day.”

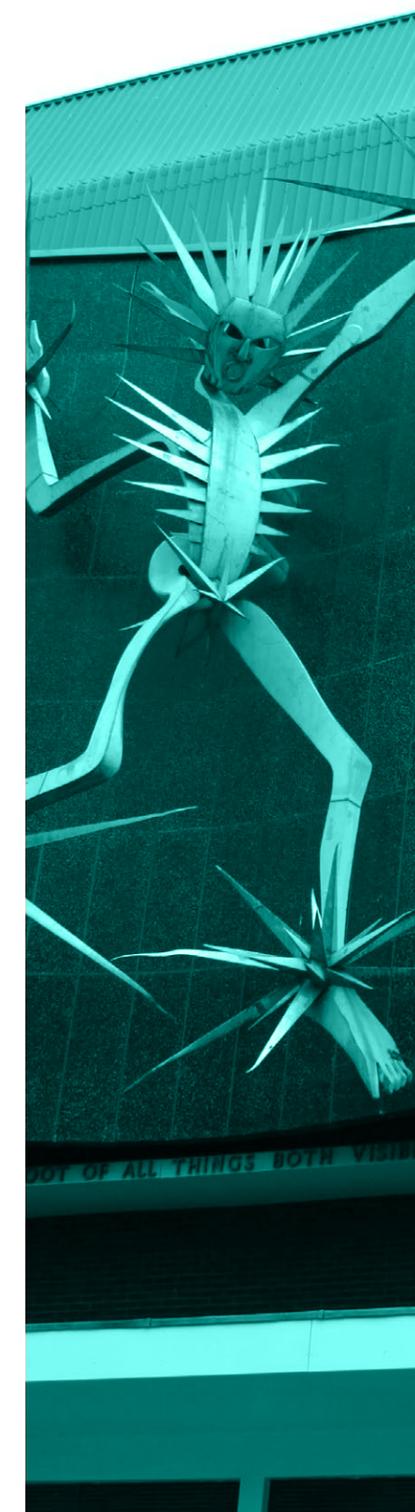
– Service Coordinator

One customer, on a very low income due to problems with his benefits, described the challenges of getting his methadone script while he was located some way from his pharmacist in temporary accommodation. Anxious about being teased and harassed by school children about his appearance, he would leave to go very early to avoid certain buses. On one occasion when he did not have a bus pass to get home, he described having to beg for the small amount of money for the fare, and how this felt like an uncomfortable step backwards:

“Sometimes I have no money and I have to ask [my Service Coordinator] for bus passes. I have to go to get my script early... Last time I didn't have a bus pass I had to beg. I went into three churches and showed them my [previous] bus passes – three different [churches] and they all put some pennies in my hand then this bloke gave me the rest... but I've not been doing that sort of thing begging for a long time... it did not feel good.”

– Customer

The above illustrates that providing the customer with a bus pass on numerous occasions, while representing a very small spend from his personal budget, helped him to avoid situations that generate a sense of shame and exclusion such as begging, walking further than he could cope with.



ASSESSMENT

£325 Mental Health Act



“The customer had not had any support with his mental health and we had been battling with the access team, but they would say, “He’s using [substances] so we can’t assess him.” There were a few incidents when he had threatened to take his own life, so last month VOICES paid for the assessment to be done privately by a mental health nurse. He was assessed as having severe depression and anxiety with suicidal ideation and [the assessor] provided a list of recommendations including the need for a designated mental health team. I took [the customer] to the GP and he was re-referred to the access team: the signature and title on the report made a difference – the referral was made from the GP but with supporting evidence from a mental health nurse.”

5.3.2 Occupational therapy and mental health assessments and legal advice

In Autumn 2018 the team started to commission independent occupational health reports and mental health assessments from practitioners with specialist skills in working with people who have multiple needs. This was because of the ongoing challenges in securing fair access to services for people with co-occurring needs. The team had found it particularly hard to access mental health support and social care for people who:

- Had a high level of substance misuse that was often regarded by statutory teams as a barrier to making an assessment of need or evidence that the main problem for the customer was their substance misuse.
- Had fluctuating needs and/or did not self-report the level of need effectively when meeting with statutory services.

So far 11 reports have been commissioned. Each report costs around £320 and there have also been a number of small cancellation fees. The assessments are intended to assess ‘daily living abilities, cognition and mental health’. Scenarios described by Service Coordinators and customers in the interviews range from people in extremely poor health with very visible mobility needs to those where needs were less apparent but the person was not able to remember appointments or negotiate

some essential tasks such as finding their way around or cooking.

The experience of commissioning private reports has been very positive so far; Service Coordinators feel that having a report from an approved professional has helped make the case for input from mental health and social care services. For example, when a customer was in hospital and seeing a social worker there, the report was an immediate way to communicate the customer’s needs; in another case, a GP referral to a mental health service was strengthened by having the report from a Mental Health nurse appended.

In casework for one customer, legal services were purchased through CASCAIDr to uphold his legal rights in relation to accessing accommodation and a care package concurrently. This action was taken when other forms of advocacy and attempts at joint working had been exhausted. Issues in the case included an unwillingness to undertake a needs assessment in a location suitable for the customer given his disability and temporary accommodation provided that was unsuitable and therefore rejected by the customer. The main facilitators of change were two letters co-produced by legal experts and practitioners to inform multi-disciplinary meetings ensuring that the local authority were in line with requirements set against the legal frameworks and performing their statutory functions legitimately — thus

helping the organisation to avoid legal hazard. The letters outlined the evidence for the local authority potentially contravening the Care Act and the suitability of accommodation offer under housing law terms. The costs of legal support amounted to £3,100. The final outcome for the customer was their own tenancy fully adapted for their mobility needs and regular visits from carers for support with daily living tasks, including personal care. The positive progress the customer made with this support in place meant that the package of care could be reviewed and the level of support reduced as the customer’s wellbeing improved.

The journey to securing services and customers’ engagement with them can be long and challenging; one Service Coordinator described his frustration that the social care team commissioned to help a customer with cooking and review his ability to undertake tasks in the kitchen was only currently preparing sandwiches due to problems with the kitchen facilities in his supported accommodation. One of the customer’s aspirations is to be able to prepare a hot ready-meal, but it is not clear whether this will be possible for him. The Service Coordinator and customer were concerned that both sides would lose interest in the process and that it could fall apart before the customer’s needs were fully assessed due to the lack of basic facilities. The Service Coordinator in this case was liaising with the support provider to fit a working cooker.

5.4 Independence and wellbeing

Both customers and Service Coordinators often referred to the challenges of finding positive ways for customers to spend time and the risk of boredom and isolation when they move away from substance misuse and reduce the risk of tenancy breakdown. This impacts on mental health and creates risk of relapse and/or tenancy breakdown. Usually customers who are housed are living on their own on a very low income and not working. Personal budgets are used in a variety of ways to help address these challenges.

“Positive things, meaningful occupation and use of time... People get on a script and get housed, but they are bored. Gym membership, rock climbing, I think personal budgets are really good from that point of view.”

— Service Coordinator

Some examples of items purchased that were recorded under the outcomes star area ‘meaningful use of time’ are

- Gym membership
- Fishing equipment
- Cycling equipment and clothing
- Newspapers
- Art and craft equipment, such as sketchbooks and colouring pencils
- Veterinary services for a cat.

ASSESSMENT

£325 Occupational therapy and mental health



“The customer is in his 40s with extremely complex health and care needs. VOICES was sure that he required a level of support and care only possible through a care package. Due to the fluctuating nature of his needs and very heavy alcohol use, he was not, at that time, considered suitable for a social care assessment. VOICES paid for an occupational therapist [OT] and mental health assessment from his personal budget. When the customer was in hospital we were able to send off the OT report to the hospital team and relay concerns. He was tested for memory loss and is now under the care of the Bennet Centre (for neuropsychiatry and memory loss services) and there is a multi-disciplinary meeting scheduled.”

DRIVING LESSONS
£500



PROVISIONAL LICENSE AND PHOTO
£48

“A customer interviewed for a previous evaluation report, ‘Hard Edges in Stoke-on-Trent’ (2016), described how driving lessons paid for from his personal budget had helped him. Leo (not his real name) had told his VOICES Service Coordinator that the thing he most wanted to do was learn to drive. Having been in prison for a few months, his drinking had stabilised meaning that this was a viable option to use the personal budget funds.”

“Reasons for being arrested several times a week would usually be for drunk and disorderly behaviour, criminal damage or getting aggressive if I was kicked out of a hostel or not let in – always alcohol related... It’s like my mind focused on the driving and drinking took a backseat. I didn’t think it would be possible, but it’s having the right support. I love driving. I knocked weed on the head so I could save up for a car; I saved for a year. I have had virtually no contact with the police... I have medication to help me rest at night. Before my family were not speaking to me... but now I am driving I do speak with them.”

— Service Coordinator
customer’s total spend was £50 on phones and credit



CASE STUDY



Name **Daniel**
Age..... **30's**
Budget... **Approx £1500**
around 18 months

Daniel was introduced to VOICES by the High Volume Users Team who work with patients who have frequent A&E attendances and non-elective admissions, seeking to link them in with more sustainable and preventative health and social care. He suffered alcohol withdrawal symptoms, which would result in regular hospital attendance.

“I would end up in A&E with drink withdrawals... If I was arrested and taken into custody and the police doctor was not

there I had to be taken to A&E. I have stopped drinking... now, I want to change.”

Hostels have not been a safe alternative to rough sleeping for Daniel who experienced serious physical assaults during his last hostel stay. Moving into shared supported housing with VOICES’ help has been successful for him and he is currently the only resident in his flat. His personal budget was used to pay off previous service charge arrears to enable the move. He has

been in the property for over a year and a half. He used his personal budget to buy cooking appliances, bedding, towels and storage drawers. The budget was also used for a number of food shops, but now Daniel is receiving a personal independence payment (PIP) so he no longer needs as much assistance with basic provisions.

Daniel’s Service Coordinator was concerned about his memory and cognitive function and agreed with Daniel that they would use some of his

personal budget to pay for an OT assessment, followed a few months later by a mental health assessment from an independent mental health nurse. The results of the OT assessment enabled Daniel’s Service Coordinator to make a good case for a full social care assessment and as a result Daniel is working with the enablement team from social services to build up his independent living skills and consider whether further investigations into his memory are needed.

“This is the first time I have been secure. I’ve taken drugs since I was 13; I have grown up now and am in the right state of mind to rebuild my life. Things are working out better. I couldn’t live in a hostel again or on the streets... Without VOICES I wouldn’t be here [in accommodation] and I wouldn’t have no control over things.”

6 Learning and Recommendations

6.1 How personal budgets bring about change

The research identified several themes in relation to how personal budgets support Service Coordination and bring about change.

6.1.1 Personal budgets help build trust and connection

Personal budgets demonstrate to customers from the outset that VOICES is person-centred and wants to understand their needs and priorities, as opposed to being a fixed service that customers are required to fit around. Being able to buy a hot drink, food, basic clothing and toiletries were considered by the team to 'show someone cares – that the customer is part of society' (Service Coordinator) at the early stages of engagement. Barriers that exist in more traditional services, such as requiring people to meet in certain locations or comply with the requirements of existing structures, are broken down by using personal budgets.

Both customers and Service Coordinators pointed out that if someone is wearing very inadequate clothing or is hungry, this is likely to be a priority for them or very demotivating and will reduce

the likelihood of them attending an appointment or focusing on an assessment or support plan. Personal budgets can be used to alleviate these immediate needs and help customers focus on other aspects of their work with VOICES.

Going shopping or making a plan to buy something is often an effective rapport-building exercise. Customers can feel stigmatised in public places and going shopping or having a meal with a Service Coordinator can help to build their confidence.

6.1.2 A relatively small amount can make a big difference

VOICES has an approximate allocation of £1,000 per customer per year for personal budgets. This amount is rarely used in full; if it is, it tends to include larger sums for accommodation and/or an assessment. Customers often said that they 'try not to ask for things unless I really need it'. Examples were given during the research where customers had split the cost of a purchase with VOICES, paying half from their own money and half from the personal budget; this included paying for rent deposits. People commented that once their welfare benefits were in place they did not need food or other essentials

paid for from the personal budget, and that the discussion around the budget would shift to improving the person's living environment or finding meaningful ways to spend time.

6.1.3 Personal budgets support Service Coordination

Customers pointed out that personal budgets are used by VOICES alongside support; several people said that it was their allocated worker who was most important to them. Where it is working well, the personal budget is considered to be an additional advantage to enable Service Coordination, rather than the focus.

6.1.4 Personal budgets promote creativity, positivity and problem solving

At both a team and individual level the availability of a flexible fund fosters a sense of possibility and creativity. Personal budgets stimulate debate within the VOICES team and have also encouraged positive risk-taking. The team no longer provides televisions to customers on the basis of experience of them being sold or damaged; workarounds have been found in exceptional cases, e.g. where the Service Coordinator has purchased a

bulk amount of food to free up the client's own money from welfare benefits to purchase a television. Sometimes people get a gym membership and do not use it; sometimes an OT assessment is missed. The team is able to explore why this has happened and provide the customer with another chance or discuss alternatives with them without this creating a barrier to future engagement.

Personal budgets assist in the delivery of solution-focused practice, which the team is trained to deliver – for example, ensuring that they talk about people's past and present skills, qualities and interests. The personal budgets mean that these can be explored further – for example, by purchasing leisure equipment, cooking equipment, travel to see family members or rock-climbing sessions.

6.1.5 Personal budgets as part of systems change advocacy work

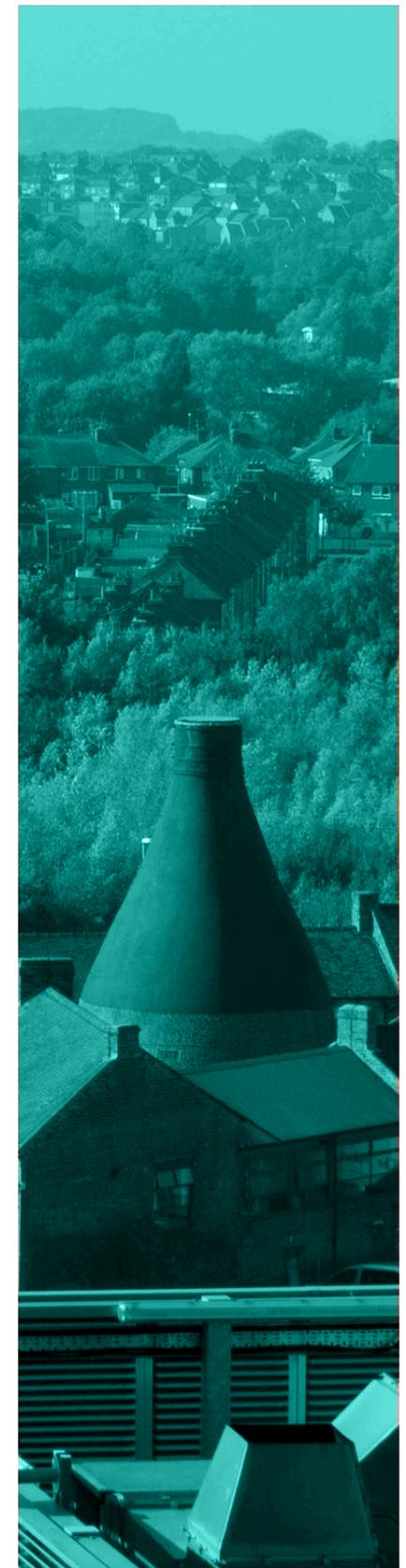
VOICES' use of personal budgets to secure independent OT and mental health assessments with a registered mental health nurse is an innovative and relatively new development. The approach of securing private assessments when there have been challenges to accessing NHS or local authority assessments can unblock access to services and help add weight to a referral from a Service Coordinator or GP. In several cases this has secured access to health and social care for a customer.

The use of personal budgets to access Housing First placements in the private rented sector was initially done without input from Housing Solutions. The Housing First model was demonstrated to Housing Solutions by VOICES delivering Housing First tenancies directly and by convening a masterclass for the staff at Stoke City Council. Having seen Housing First in practice, the local authority started to provide access to the bond scheme for people who previously would not have been considered eligible. In this way using personal budgets to facilitate Housing First placements influenced systems change within Housing Solutions.

DOG SITTER £325



“One of my favourite examples of being really creative with personal budgets was for a female customer who wanted to do rehab but had three dogs and really didn't want to leave them. A kennel just wouldn't cut it for her. Her dogs [and other pets] were a barrier to detox. With her personal budget we were able to organise a dog sitter; the customer met with dog sitter and was happy and went on to have a successful detox which just wouldn't have been possible without the budget.”





6.2 Challenge and Risks: Clarity and Equity

VOICES personal budgets lack a degree of clarity for customers. Customers are not provided with the amount of budget they have at their disposal and to some extent lack control over monitoring and spending their personal budgets. The budget is used as a flexible 'enablement fund' by Service Coordinators, with planning of expenditure co-produced with customers, rather than a specific budget to be allocated in advance. While this approach can risk a lack of clarity, VOICES are keen to prevent the budget being seen as an 'entitlement' and ensure that the Service Coordinator and customer work together, thinking of ways to use the budget to problem solve and help them meet the customer's goals.

The flexible and creative nature of personal budgets has a built-in challenge in terms of being consistent and fair. This is mitigated by the shared approach to managing personal budgets that has emerged in the team, but remains an area for ongoing review and discussion.

Personal budget spending varies considerably, from the price of a cup of tea to a rent deposit or OT assessment. The nominal allocation of £1,000 per customer theoretically means that those who are in greatest need of more expensive items/services have less flexibility to spend money on other things. This is not how the budgets work in practice: if

someone has had an expensive assessment it would not preclude them spending the budget on smaller items, but it is an area for consideration in terms of making the budgets transparent and clear to customers. The £1,000 allocation is used more as a planning assumption for budget forecasting for VOICES overall, rather than a strictly defined allocation.

6.2.1 Customer Expectations

Customers and Service Coordinators both referred to the risk of people only wanting a VOICES worker 'for the budget' and/or developing unrealistic or unreasonable expectations about how the budget would be used – for example, continuing to request expenditure on food or clothing after their benefits are in place. A Service Coordinator described getting into a 'pattern' of buying lunch out for a customer on a very regular basis; they found that this was not moving the customer's situation forward in any way but had become an expectation.

“Whenever he saw me, he wanted me to get food, and it became a bit of a pattern. People get used to something and expect it – I become a bit trapped.”

— Service Coordinator

In some customer relationships the personal budget is 'a blessing and a curse' (Service Coordinator); when the budget becomes the main focus for a customer, it can impede rather than support Service Coordination, although this is reported to be rare and the risk of this is minimised through reflective practice and quality assurance measures.

6.2.2 Masking Needs

One of the risks highlighted by the Fulfilling Lives evaluation report is that personal budgets are used for 'basic living costs and managing crises rather than the intended life-enhancing activities' and to 'plug the gaps in services.' This is a tension in the VOICES personal budgets model; many of the things purchased with VOICES personal budgets should be available to customers via welfare benefits or access to health and social care services.

VOICES' work shows that at the outset of customer engagement personal budgets are often used to cover costs that should be covered by people's welfare benefits entitlements. However, benefits are not always in place; some people are unable to manage money; and some are focused on an immediate physical and/or psychological need for drugs or alcohol. In these situations, personal budgets are appropriately used to meet basic needs and facilitate initial engagement. The risk is that this is continued once people

are in receipt of benefits and in accommodation; at this point the provision of food and basic clothing on a regular basis is unsustainable.

VOICES provides private assessments that should be available to customers via statutory services. However, these initial assessments are designed to unlock access to full assessments and it is hoped that, as services become more experienced in working with people who have multiple needs, the need for private assessments will reduce.

6.3 Recommendations

- Personal budgets should continue to be a key Service Coordination tool at VOICES because they have been proven to support engagement and outcomes.
- The concept of personal budgets and variations of this model, such as flexible petty cash processes and provision of preloaded cards, should be promoted to other services in Stoke-on-Trent working with people with multiple needs, especially as VOICES starts exit-planning for the end of the programme in 2022.
- The broad framework for using personal budgets identified in the evaluation (page 10) could be developed into written guidelines or principles for Service Coordinators.
- To embed the use of personal budgets more widely, commissioning approaches

for services supporting people with multiple needs should enable those tendering to build personal budgets into their responses, where appropriate – for example, an outcomes-based commissioning approach promotes a flexible and creative use of resources in line with the principles of personal budgets.

- VOICES' experience demonstrates that once people are in accommodation and have welfare benefits in place, the personal budgets are more likely to be used for recreation, creating a home and social connections. This experience should be shared with Fulfilling Lives evaluators at CFE research and the University of Sheffield because it is relevant to concerns around personal budgets focusing on immediate need as opposed to the intended 'life enhancing activities'



VOICES

VOICES
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INDEPENDENCE
CHANGE &
EMPOWERMENT IN
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