



Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council introduces a new approach to calculating personal budgets for children and young people



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Children's Services at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) has launched a new and innovative approach to calculating personal budgets for children and young people with disabilities in Solihull. The Children's Personal Budget Project Team, which included service leads, commissioning, parent and young people representatives, identified the need to introduce a system that would better support the children and young people of Solihull to receive fair, transparent and evidence-based personal budgets.

Background

After evaluating several possible solutions, the team selected Imosphere's FACE Resource Allocation System (RAS). At the time, the RAS was becoming an established tool within the SMBC Adults' Team and used successfully by over 40 other local authorities. After consultation with staff, parents and carers, it was agreed that it could deliver similar positive outcomes for the Children's Team.

Working closely with Imosphere, SMBC launched a Children's RAS in January 2016, tailored to Solihull's configuration rates and decisions. Introducing any new tools and ways of working requires significant coordination and communication between departments and staff. This was well recognised by the Children's Team. To ensure the successful launch of the RAS, the following stages were carried out:

Stage One: Data Collection

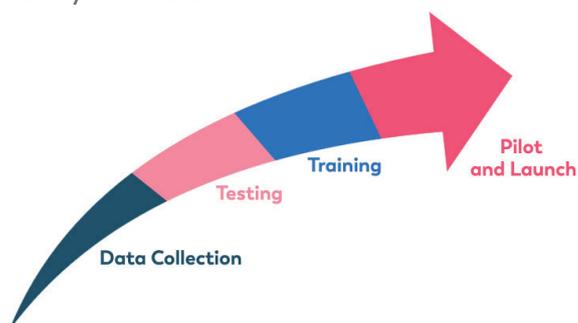
A five-day data collection exercise was undertaken in May and July 2015. This identified Solihull's local assessment practices, service provision and existing allocation methods for children and young people with varying levels of need. This research was then evaluated, quality checked and used by the team at Imosphere to build a RAS that was fully tailored for SMBC.

Stage Two: Testing

In August 2015, six practitioners tested the RAS over two days. They worked alongside an Imosphere Implementation and Support Consultant, discussing the requirements of the system in relation to their current practices and needs. Following the testing stage, SMBC made further configurations to better meet their users' needs.

Stage Three: Training

Imosphere provided training for practitioners on the FACE Child and Young Person's Needs Profile. The Needs Profile examines the child or young person's needs alongside the parental factors that may affect the amount of support provided. The RAS uses the tool to calculate an Indicative (Estimate) Budget. SMBC welcomed this as a good tool to support the assessment of a child or young person and their family's needs.



Stage Four: Pilot and Launch

SMBC piloted the RAS a few months before launching in January 2016. Since the initial implementation, the Social Work Team for Children and Young People with Disabilities has been challenged by a period of great change in relation to staffing, SEND reforms and service redesign.

Throughout these significant reforms, they have maintained the use of the RAS and remained engaged in its development.

Regular project meetings take place between Solihull and Imosphere to report progress, share good practices and discuss future developments.

Julie Hackett (Strategic Commissioner - Children and Young People) said: "It sounded really complicated when we started off on the journey but it was very straightforward. The FACE RAS gives us an evidence-based and consistent way across the service of coming up with an indicative budget. It also allows us to have a really sensible conversation with families about how a support plan might be developed to meet their child's needs with the outcomes they want."

The Results

Imosphere conducted a Health Check on site in December 2016, which explored the efficiency of the RAS and looked for areas of improvement. This highlighted that practitioners were using the Needs Profile to record needs in a more efficient and accurate manner. Excellent scoring was evident. Overall, Solihull report that the RAS has allowed resources to be spread fairly across the system.

SMBC is now looking to move to the most recent version of the RAS, which allows access to Atmolytics. Atmolytics is Imosphere's self-service data discovery platform, which has the potential to give Solihull access to rich information about its services.

Laura Slegg-Newton (Commissioning Officer) said: "The RAS supports practitioners with their professional decision making. It's enabled resources to be spread fairly across the system and is a great way to ensure the package a child or young person is receiving meets their needs now and in the future. It has also made things simpler and because it's a web-based system, it allows us to use the RAS flexibly. For instance, should our colleagues in Health eventually use the health element of the RAS, the functionality is there to allow us all to access the same system."