Independent support brokers:

The why, what, and how

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Introduction

In Control originally took the position that it was highly preferable for people using self-directed services to be responsible for developing their plans to improve their lives, and for organising the supports and opportunities they required. Help with these tasks - now inexactly described as support planning and brokerage – might be given by family and friends; but outside help, especially from paid workers, was the option of last resort.

This position has gradually softened. Paid brokers are now recognised as one of several legitimate sources of help. And the early IBSEN findings (June 2007) from the IB pilots put new emphasis on *"the importance of support outside of the users own caring networks"*.

Nevertheless, because brokers have been seen as something of an optional extra, rather than as an integral element of self-directed support (SDS) systems, there is still no widely understood or agreed theoretical foundation for the broker role. And, without this rationale, practical efforts to create effective broker resources have tended to be muddled.

So, in this paper, we aim to consider **why** independent support brokers are necessary in an individualised funding (IF) system, discus **what** brokers should do, and suggest **how** local broker resources can be created through a cost-effective development programme.

Why
do we need independent
support brokers?

Designing an IF system that is fit for purpose

There are several reasons why independent support brokers are a necessary component in an IF system. The first of these is not an argument for brokers per se, but arises from the need to redesign the social care system so that it is fit for purpose.   That purpose can be considered purely in moral terms - social justice, social inclusion, etc.   However, that is not the sole purpose. It must also take account of the need to control public spending, and the duty to protect people who are vulnerable.

It may be politically dangerous and morally objectionable to cut spending on social care, but at a purely technical level it is not a difficult task. And though it is impossible to *make* anyone self-determined, the social care system could give people a brutal push in the right direction by simply withdrawing completely from their lives – albeit with some devastating consequences.

Then again, unlimited handouts of cash would undoubtedly yield much improved lifestyles for the (former) users of social care.

Each of these three aims is easy enough to accomplish on its own. The real challenge is to achieve all three of them at the same time: To allow people to have more control over their lives; enable them to improve the quality of their lives; and at the same time cut, or at least hold down, overall spending.

Creating a system that is trustworthy

If this is to be achieved, it requires us to create a social care system that is trustworthy.   In an *un*trustworthy system, the people on the receiving end will respond in ways that are predictable because they are entirely rational. People will take everything they can get, and hang on to everything they've got. And they will tend to stay within social care provision, rather risking the use of mainstream services and informal

supports, because they do not trust the system to let them back in if something goes wrong.

The system may move to individual budgets and yet remain untrustworthy; and if that happens, these behaviours continue to be rational responses. It is entirely sensible for people to make sure that their support plan will require the maximum funding that has been offered to them. Of course, the system can compensate for this upward pressure on costs, but only by shifting away from the goals of improved quality of life and self-determination. One possible counter-move is to slice a percentage off the allocations, so that people are forced to develop cheaper plans, perhaps necessitating reliance on informal supports. This not only undermines the principle of self-determination, but is also likely to mean that the quality of life of some people – those who genuinely need the higher allocation - will suffer.

Alternatively, the system can extend the criteria it uses to determine whether support plans should be 'signed off'. For example, plans might be assessed on whether they are sufficiently 'creative' in their use of mainstream community opportunities. In effect this legitimises the resumption of professional control, curtailing self-determination and abandoning any notions of entitlement.

All these behaviours – the strategies used by people taking individual budgets, and the system's counter-moves – are now visible in self-direct support initiatives in this country.

So we need a system that is trustworthy. In a trustworthy system, the individual 'players' have relationships with each other that are consistent with their role. Wherever possible, roles will be free of contradictory pressures. If conflicts of interest are unavoidable, they will be declared. Unavoidable tensions will be made explicit in the way that the system is structured, and through procedures which resolve those tensions openly. (This contrasts with the naïve notion of 'partnership' based on the false assumption that everyone shares the same goals.)

In Control's approach to individualised funding addresses these requirements in the relationship between the users and providers of social care. Contracts directly negotiated between the person and the provider offer the clarity of an ordinary customer relationship. Providers have a powerful financial incentive to deliver what the customer wants. With the allocation of funding already set, the commissioning side of the social care system leaves the customer to decide whether the service provides good value for money.

But *In Control* neglects the flaws in the commissioning side of social care that make the system untrustworthy. Here, the central problem is the care management role, which contains a major conflict of interest. Part of the role of the care manager is to assist people to enhance their lives, but care managers are also representatives of the council and so associated with the rationing of funding as well as a range of other statutory duties, such as the protection of vulnerable adults. Thus the care management role embodies the most fundamental conflict in social care, between individual aspirations and the constraints of public funding. This not only renders the role untrustworthy (however ethical and competent individual care managers may be) but also means that the tension is not openly reflected in the structure of the social care system or played out in its procedures (in allocation panels, for example).

The only solution – the only way to make the system honest – is to separate the two sides of the care management role.

The element of the role concerned with rationing and statutory duties can, and should, remain aligned with the council.

Anchoring person-centred services in the IF system

What, then, should be done with the other element – the part of the care management role that has a person-centred concern with improving the quality of life? Although the conflicted position of the care manager has weakened the ability of care managers to support people to achieve better lives, it has nevertheless been an important part of the work. Indeed, it represents the social work heart of the care management role. It doesn't make sense to suppose that this important and substantial element of the role can simply be deleted from the social care system, and left to be picked up by the people who rely on social care. That being so, it needs to be given a new place in the overall structure of the individual-ised system – a place that is secure, and yet separated from the council and from provider agencies. So we are led logically to the creation of new element in the design of the social care system. This can be termed the independent support broker role, but it is defined by its function and place in the system, not by its name.

Thus the first argument for independent support brokers is that, at the level of overall design, an IF system is incomplete and untrustworthy unless it includes independent support brokers.

An option, not a requirement or a monopoly

We have to add two riders to this conclusion. Firstly, it doesn't mean that people should be obliged to use an independent support broker. That would not only deny choice and self-determination, but also, in effect, turn brokers into servants of the system. It would be absurd to suggest that people should not be allowed to develop their own support plans and organise their own supports, or to ask their friends and family to help them.

Secondly, it doesn't mean that staff inside the social care system must be banned from giving any help with support planning and implementation. Here again it would

be absurd to tell disabled people that they can't ask their care manager or support worker for assistance, or to tell staff that they are not allowed to give it. Notwithstanding the potential conflicts of interest, these staff may well have relevant skills and knowledge, plus the advantage of an existing relationship with the person who is seeking help. If the person chooses to ask them for help, and there is awareness on both sides of the dangers posed by conflicts of interest, then that is a choice they should have.

The difference between role and function

We need to be clear, however, that staff who provide this help do not turn themselves into brokers. There's a useful parallel with plumbing. If you have a leaking tap, there's no reason why you shouldn't try fixing it yourself. You could also ask your friends or a neighbour to help you. When you and they mended the tap, you would be doing plumbing. You would not, however, suppose that you had become plumbers. In exactly the same way, people who use social services, their friends, neighbours, and social care workers, can all do the *tasks of brokerage*. But being *a broker*, like being a plumber, implies minimum competencies across an identified range of tasks, a contractual relationship that is customer-focused, and a regulatory context to provide safeguards.

The danger of drifting back

Unfortunately, however, the acknowledge-ment that care managers can do brokerage creates an enormous risk. The history of social care demonstrates that social care systems are extremely conservative, and employ a variety of strategies to resist change. One powerful strategy is to take challenging innovations and modify them so that they can be absorbed without the need for substantial change. Thus ideas that might have levered the entire system on its axis only serve, in the end, to keep the existing system busy.

Individualised funding has the potential to transform the social care system, and it is

utterly predictable that, given half a chance, the system will employ this strategy to weaken its impact. The acknowledgement that care managers can perform the tasks of brokerage creates the opportunity for this to happen. All too easily, brokerage drifts away from brokers and back to care managers. Or managers leading *In Control* and IB projects, nervous about the uncertain path to independent broker resources, opt instead to re-badge care managers as 'in-house brokers'. The end result is a resumption of the conflict in the care management role, and failure to produce a system that is trustworthy.

Until there is clear direction from central government, local projects will have to work with this dilemma – and, in particular, how to apportion training investment between users/carers, independent brokers, and existing social care staff. What is clear, however, is that unless the importance of independent brokers is understood, and reflected in the design of the IF system, some essential requirements of the system will be lost. It is all too easy to envisage a future in which care managers provide the brokerage, presume to make broad professional judgements on the wisdom of support plans before signing them off, and hold the individual budget once it has been allocated. For the users of social care, things will have changed very little.

Brokers for people who can't do brokerage, or don't want to

While many people can do the tasks of brokerage themselves, it is inevitable that some people won't be able to. Typically they will be people who have impaired intellectual functioning who also lack any people who could form a circle of support around them. So this is another, and very practical, reason for ensuring that good brokers are available. In these situations, where people are in a weak position to assert their rights, or to assess the trustworthiness of advisors, the case for offering independent brokers is especially strong.

Additionally, many people may simply prefer not to carry out these tasks for themselves. Here again it's worth invoking the comparison of plumbing. Yes, many of us can do some straightforward plumbing work. On the other hand, because it's not something we do often, we have to 'climb a learning curve' each time we do it. It will probably be a bit of a struggle, and take us a long time; and the results are likely to be less than perfect. We could get some training, but for a lot of people it doesn't make sense to invest time in training to gain skills that will only be needed on rare occasions. It makes far more sense to employ someone who has the skills and knowledge 'at their fingertips'. Given the choice, most of us would opt to call in a reliable plumber. Moreover, while some people get a sense of satisfaction from DIY, there's a real sense of empowerment to be found hiring and directing a paid worker. All in all, it's curious that *In Control* implies that, when it comes support planning and brokerage, empowerment means Doing It Yourself.

Brokers benefit the whole system
This leads to the other major reason for creating independent support brokers. Although the role of brokers is strictly to provide a service under contract to each individual, the work they do has wider benefits. Good support plans will make effective use of public funds to improve the quality of the person's life, making use of mainstream and informal supports where appropriate, with a balanced approach to risk. Good brokerage will yield clear and tight contracts for support from appropriate sources. It is in the interests of the state and the taxpayer that these outcomes are achieved. While it is not for a broker to dictate the plan or the service specification, the input of a competent broker will often make them more likely. It helps no one to leave people struggling to complete brokerage tasks on their own because no acceptable source of support is available, or because there are powerful disincentives (e.g. the cost) to getting help.

What
do independent brokers do?

Defining the role of the broker

The logic of the previous section led to the identification of a new and distinct role in the social care system, to which we can assign the label 'independent support broker'. (This is surely a more robust approach than the alternative – often found in UK discussions – of starting with the term and guessing what it means.) The logic clearly indicates some of the key characteristics of the broker role. In particular, an independent support broker –

- is independent (which must mean free of any link to organisations which might cause conflict of interest, but also an absence of loyalties to these organisations or associated professional groups, and a perspective which is broad enough to encompass working with the community as well as the system);

- is recognised as having a role that is important in the effective operation of an IF system

- provides a technical service focused on enabling people to choose, organise and implement plans that will help them achieve changes in their lives;

- provides assistance on a contractual basis, with the person who is the focus of change as the customer;

- is accountable solely to the person who is the focus of change, where appropriate with assistance from family, friends, and allies;

- has no power to make decisions;

- provides support with the range of tasks that each person requires, and on the terms the person requires.

The scope of the broker's work

There is one other important aspect of the broker role to be defined: the *scope* of the role.

It is generally accepted that brokers can (subject to the requirements of each person) help people to –

- decide what changes they want to make to their lives;
- assemble, cost, and write up a plan that will achieve those changes;
- find and liaise/negotiate with support providers;
- find and liaise with community resources;
- identify sources of funding
- prepare for implementation of the plan.

However, the broker role has also been used as a convenient place to locate various other duties that may be needed *after* the point of implementation. Typically these are support coordination, which is concerned with ensuring and monitoring the delivery of support services; recruitment of personal assistant staff; and payroll and accounts administration. *In Control* also identifies the broker as an appropriate person to hold the individual budget.

There are good reasons, based both on principle and practical benefits, why the broker's role should *not* extend beyond the point of implementation.

Post-implementation tasks belong in the plan

Firstly, these post-implementation tasks are essentially services of the same kind as support delivery. (Payroll and accounts administration are implicit in the service that a provider agency offers alongside the delivery of support.) So, logically, they should be incorporated as

elements of the support plan. If brokers are assisting in the development of a plan which may specify a service that the broker will also deliver, there is an obvious potential conflict of interest. Though perhaps not comparable to the conflict that currently exists in the care manager role, it is still enough to undermine transparency and trustworthiness. Incidentally, the potential conflict still exists, albeit in a reduced form, where one organisation is employing brokers and also offering support coordination, payroll services, etc. This points to the awkward conclusion that Direct Payments support schemes are not best placed to take responsibility for local broker services.

A tidy job: Arrive, deliver, leave

The second reason is that developing, organising, and implementing a plan is by nature an episodic task. It's something that people only want to do occasionally. As with many other commercial services, the broker arrives, deliver a job in a relatively short time, and leaves. If the customer wants the service again, a new contract is agreed and another episode started – with the significant benefit that the customer has the freedom to use the same person again, or choose someone else. This tidiness and clarity is lost if the role may also include ongoing duties beyond implementation.

Reserving the broker for a special but limited role

Thirdly, and more pragmatically, the tasks before and after implementation are likely to be suited to different people. This is partly because the skills required for support planning are very different from those needed for the oversight of workers or for accountancy; but there are also other reasons While it is true that provider agencies (as with any commercial sector) could enter into dubious alliances (support provider and landlord, for example), the issue of independence is not so critical, especially as a well-constructed contract will define what the customer wants from the provider.

In addition, experience suggests that the tasks before and after implementation suit people with different personal qualities and circumstances. For example, people with varying and unpredictable workloads may be able to commit to a short period of work, but not to responsibilities that will have to be honoured over months or years. Some support coordinators may have to be ready, when planned support fails, to step into the breach at any time of day or night, whereas planning tasks can be done in scheduled sessions. All this suggests that if the broker role is not kept separate from the post-implementation tasks, it will be very difficult to train and sustain a group of people who have the distinct competencies and characteristics required to provide support in planning and brokerage up to implementation.

This leads to the last, and yet more pragmatic, reason for limiting brokers to tasks before the point of implementation. It is becoming apparent that many support provider agencies have identified the delivery of broker services as a potential growth opportunity for their own organisations. For the reasons identified in this paper, it would be a serious mistake to let them realise this ambition. On the other hand, if post-implementation tasks are kept separate from the broker role, then there is a legitimate and important opportunity for provider agencies. Many of them have HR departments for whom staff recruitment is everyday work. They will have admin staff, and computer systems, to do payroll. And they will have managers who are used to organising and monitoring the delivery of support. The constructive challenge to providers is to ask them to make these assets available separately (rather than packaged with support delivery) as services to people using self-directed supports.

How
should independent brokers be sourced and overseen?

If the arguments in this paper are accepted, then *In Control* and IB projects will need to consider what action is required to ensure that the services of independent support brokers are available.   So, in this final section, we offer the outlines of a development process.   These recommendations reflect our work with a number of councils in England, as well as lessons from international work and observation.

Setting the strategic direction

It is often said that the development of *In Control* and IB projects is a learning process, and that issues and problems will have to be addressed as they arise.   To some extent this is true.   But some critical strategic decisions are entirely foreseeable at the outset, and to delay making them will merely cause extra problems later.   Furthermore, some components need to be put in place in a logical and timely sequence, and so a coherent development process is required.

For these reasons, we strongly recommend that a strategy for local broker resources is decided at senior level at the earliest opportunity.   The foundation for this strategy must be a shared view of the role of the independent broker, and so this must be the first topic for discussion.

Once that has been achieved, the main decisions will concern –

- The relative investment in training for users and families, for social care staff, and for independent brokers.

- Preferred sources for broker services – in crude terms, choosing between 'supply side' contracted services; and 'demand side' self-employed brokers.

- The most appropriate model for regulation and oversight of brokers in the long term.

- The location of responsibility for supporting and overseeing the development of broker resources in the short term.

- Payment of brokers

There are many lower-level decisions that will also have to be made, but these will fall into place within a clear overall strategy.

To look at these issues in more detail –

The relative investment in training for users and families, for social care staff, and for independent brokers.

Although we have argued the case for independent brokers, we have also acknowledged that people who use social care, and their families, may take on the tasks of brokerage; and social care staff – care managers especially – will also have a role.   This implies that all these groups will benefit from training.   The decision, therefore, is how to divide funds for training between each of these groups.   We suggest that the factors to take into account are as follows:

Users and carers
Training people so that they can complete their own support planning will have genuine benefits, and cost advantages, too.   However, its symbolism as an act of empowerment can lead to an overestimate of the practical benefits.   Realistically, it will only reach a small minority of people, each of whom will only use their new skills a few times (if at all) so in simple numerical terms the return on investment will be small.   The main argument for providing training to this group is that it is likely to yield some 'early wins', and people who will model and champion SDS services.

Care managers

Care managers undoubtedly need some training, which will also serve as an opportunity to share the anxieties that they are likely to feel about the changes in their role. They will need to be familiar with the self-assessment process; and may also, depending on the operational arrangements of the project, need to know how to apply criteria to plans for 'signing off'.

More broadly, care managers need to have an understanding of the new system, in terms of principles, main systems and procedures (e.g. the RAS) and the changing relationships with other stakeholders. In particular, they need to understand the role of brokers, and to have a positive but realistic appreciation of the contribution that brokers can make. We have seen projects where access to brokers was blocked by care managers, and others where care managers redirected disabled people and their families to brokers indiscriminately, without offering adequate information.

This leaves the question of whether care managers should be trained to provide the tasks of brokerage. As discussed earlier, offering such training opens an opportunity for the emerging SDS system to drift back into ways of operating that do not support role clarity and trustworthiness. Moreover, our experience suggests that while some care managers will prove themselves to be latent brokers, a significant proportion will find it very difficult to make the switch, both in terms of competencies and in the way they relate to service users. A compromise option that made better use of training funds more effectively might be to identify a group of care managers who showed strong potential to work in the way that is required, and offer them in-depth training. Once trained, they will be able to offer brokerage to people who request it, while also providing a

model for other staff, a constructive interface with brokers, and a readiness to steer the evolving system in the right direction. A small group of care managers could be provided with skills in support planning by participation in a *Planning Live!* event. Alternatively, separate training in support planning could be organised. In our view it is very important that this training provides a sound understanding of the IF model, so participants are able to evaluate developments in policy and practice, and recognise the limitations of the help they can offer which are a consequence of their organisational position.

We have encountered councils that feel obliged to train large numbers of staff in support brokerage as an interim measure, even though they envisage independent brokers as a better long-term solution. This may be a necessary tactic, but can be avoided by good planning. As discussed below, independent broker resources can be created in a six-month period.

Other social care and health staff

A well-designed IF system will have fundamental implications for a very wide range of staff in health and social care. It is vitally important that they are provided with information that will enable them to make the required changes in their own policies and practices. This may usefully include awareness days as one element of a wider communication strategy.

These staff may be asked by individuals and families to help with the tasks of support planning and brokerage, so in theory there's a case for offering them full training in the skills required. But that would involve an enormously expensive and lengthy training programme, resulting in staff with competencies that will rarely be used. It is likely that, most of the time, these staff will be acting as contributors to support planning, rather than acting as the sole or lead

facilitator. So the main requirement is that they have the values and interpersonal skills to contribute in a person-centred, customer-focused, way. And since these values and skills should underpin much, if not all, of their work, it makes more sense to incorporate their development in staff training programmes as a whole.

In our experience, many provider agencies are far from ready to respond to social care users who, armed with a funding allocation and a support specification, approach them to discuss a potential contract. The need for change will be clear enough when the enquiries start being made, but it would be better if change had begun earlier. Provider agencies may want expert help to review their systems and practices, but we suspect the primary need is to set the change agenda they must address. This can be achieved at a one-day event for managers.

Independent support brokers

Training for independent brokers is part of a larger development process. Our experience demonstrates that a wide range of people can reach the minimum required competencies through a five-day training course. However, it has to be recognised that, firstly, these are only *minimum* competencies. For that reason, participants need to demonstrate a continuing commitment to their own development as brokers. Secondly, it will be necessary to assist people after training through an apprenticeship phase, when they will have higher levels of supervision than would normally be expected.

It should be added that training is always necessary for people moving into the broker role. People with a background in social care may have the advantage in terms of specialist knowledge, but still need to learn the technical skills of brokerage. And even those staff who have progressive, 'enlightened' attitudes often struggle to feel at home with the broker role.

Preferred sources for broker services

The supply-side option

When sources for independent brokers are being considered, the basic choice is between two options. One, the 'supply side' option, involves contracting with an independent agency (i.e. one with no conflicting services or loyalties) which then recruits salaried staff to work as brokers.

Clearly this approach has simplicity. Contracting and recruitment are familiar mechanisms in social services. Once completed, the arrangement offers the certainty that brokers will be available locally. Provided that the agency has been chosen carefully, and understands the nature of the broker role, this option should also secure the independence of the brokers.

However, there are significant disadvantages. The salaries of the brokers, plus management and admin. overheads, will have to be paid even if there is no demand for brokers. On the other hand, high demand for brokers may exceed the fixed capacity available. In addition, the inevitably small number of brokers will restrict the choice for people wanting their services. And the brokers, secure in their salaried positions, will not have a financial incentive to deliver a quality service.

The demand-led model

The 'demand-led' approach, in contrast, leaves the market to offer broker services, delivered by people who are paid on a fee-for-service basis.

The demand-led model, in its most extreme form, leaves this market to develop in response to demand, and operate on its own, with no controls. Anyone can set up as a broker, and the market defines the services that the brokers will offer.

Markets that are entirely uncontrolled rarely work in the interests of customers, which is why most ordinary commercial markets have some form of regulation. In the context of broker services, there are additional reasons to believe it would be dangerous. Many of the customers would be people who are vulnerable, and – more importantly – are not accustomed to asserting choice and customer rights in the context of social care services. Good, up-to-date information (a critical requirement for effective free markets) would not be available, allowing poor and corrupt practice to persist long enough to harm people. Conflicts of interest and other perverse incentives could easily operate without customers being aware of them.

Adding regulation to the market

However, these dangers can be minimised if the market is regulated, and it would then have significant advantages in comparison to the supply-side model. There would be a cost for the regulatory body, and for training to build and sustain the broker market (though ultimately even these could be charged back to brokers), but the fixed overhead would be substantially lower than the cost of salaried brokers. A market of brokers could offer a much wider choice, and the capacity to deliver broker services would rise and fall with changing demand. Furthermore, as discussed below, the regulatory body has the potential to make a link between brokers, the local community, and the people who are likely to require broker services.

The regulated market may seem less reliable than the supply-side model, since there is no guarantee that suitable people will offer themselves for the work. But this, we believe, is more about perception than reality. In our experience, more than sufficient numbers of suitable people can be found even in diverse and fragmented communities. The security of broker services delivered by a couple of salaried staff will be lost if one broker goes on extended sick leave or departs unexpectedly, whereas the loss of one self-employed broker is far more easily accommodated. That said, it is important to ensure that the market of brokers is large enough to offer reliability and choice, and it is for this reason that we believe the regulatory body should be ready to encourage people to become brokers, and offer training opportunities.

The unfamiliarity of a market model

We suspect that the hesitation by councils and projects to opt for the development of a broker market is often because it involves unfamiliar kinds of work. The creation of services through contracting and recruitment is 'bread and butter' work for councils and provider agencies. Stimulating markets and developing regulatory bodies certainly isn't. Moreover, finding people to be self-employed brokers involves working with 'the community' – a disconcerting prospect for target-driven managers who want the assurance of guaranteed outcomes. We agree that finding and training brokers from the local community does mean working with uncertainties. However, we have now been through the process enough times to know how it can be done effectively, with little risk of failure and within a timescale probably no longer than the period necessary to recruit salaried staff. The last section of this paper outlines how this can be done.

The most appropriate model for regulation and oversight of brokers in the long term.

Although it may not be possible to prevent unsuitable and incompetent people from setting up shop as support brokers, people who want the services of a broker should be able to access a list of brokers where there is –

- Some certainty about the minimum skills and knowledge being offered

- Some assurance that the broker does not have a criminal record and is not likely to behave unethically.

- Confidence that the brokers do not have obligations or loyalties that might affect the advice they give.
- A complaints system that can offer redress if the services of a broker are unsatisfactory.

These requirements can only be met in a demand-side broker market by the creation of a regulatory body, which poses questions about the nature and authority of such a body.

The supply-side option – an independent agency contracted to supply broker services - offers the *organisational* capacity to perform these functions. Here again, though, the weakness of this model becomes apparent. Experience of commercial markets and public services strongly suggests that it is very unwise to allow one provider to have a monopoly on service delivery and to be the judge of whether those services are satisfactory. And if the form and standard of broker services is built into the contract with the council, then the brokers themselves begin to slide back under the control of the council.

The best answer, in both cases, is to put the oversight of brokers under the control of people who represent the actual and potential users of broker services, i.e. social care users and families. So the independent agency that is contracted to deliver broker services establishes a committee of users and carers to oversee broker services. This will not remove the basic flaws (a limited choice of broker, and a monopoly provider) but it will help to ensure that the provider stays focused on the interests of the customers of brokerage services.

In the demand-side option, a regulatory body that is controlled by users and carers adds further strength to this model. Without interfering (except in the event of problems) in the relationship between brokers and their individual customers, the regulatory body can shape the overall market to reflect customer requirements. Moreover, a body that has oversight of

brokers in one area can help to ensure that brokers remain linked to the local community. One of the most commonly expressed concerns about the emergence of support brokers is that it will produce another professional group that is self-serving and disconnected from the people it was intended to serve. Oversight of brokers by local regulatory bodies, controlled by users and carers, is the best available defence against such a trend.

Local oversight does not mean that everything has to be done and decided at the local level. There can still be national guidance on independent broker services, national accreditation of broker training; and 'baseline' accreditation of the kind already offered by the National Brokerage Network. But local oversight can fine-tune general guidance to serve the local community, decide which training courses to accept as sufficient evidence of competence, and determine which brokers will be accredited to work locally.

On a practical note, local broker oversight bodies do not need to be complex or expensive. They will essentially take the form of a committee that meets once every two or three months, with very little expense. They will, however, need an 'executive arm' in the form of a worker accountable to the committee. Depending on the number of brokers and the level of demand for their services, this worker might be salaried, or paid for a few hours a week as required.

The location of responsibility for supporting and overseeing the development of broker resources in the short term.

The supply-side option, though weaker in many ways, does simplify the development process – especially for the commissioner, who delegates many tasks to the contracted agency. Nevertheless, the agency will still need to understand the role of brokers, translate that understanding into management arrangements that do not unduly undermine the relationship between

brokers and customers; recruit staff as brokers; and enable them to access training.   Unless the agency has in-depth knowledge of the broker role, external guidance will be needed. Information about broker services, and about the brokers themselves, will need to be developed and disseminated so that the (limited) choices available to potential customers are well informed.   On the social services side, care managers and other staff will need to understand the broker role, and be ready to convey information to potential broker customers in a way that is fair.

The development of the demand-side option is more complex. Ultimately, the oversight body will take responsibility for almost all matters relating to independent broker services; but the oversight body itself is part of the development process. Moreover, it makes sense to recruit users and carers to the committee once they have experienced the value of brokers for themselves.   This implies that the body will only start to emerge several months after the commencement of independent broker services.   Until that time, someone else will need to –

- Find and implement methods to reach potential brokers in the local community.

- Select potential brokers.

- Commission and arrange broker training.

- Ensure brokers have early post-training opportunities to practice as brokers, with a high level of supervision and support during this apprenticeship phase.

- Accredit brokers.

- Compile broker profiles and make them available to people requiring broker services.

- Work with care managers and others in Social Services to create awareness of independent broker services and appropriate working relationships.

- Mentor the brokers, and facilitate peer support arrangements.

- Respond to any difficulties in the delivery of broker services.

- Recruit people willing to participate in the oversight body.

- Organise training for the newly-established oversight body.

Ideally these tasks will be delegated to an independent person or organisation, so that the interests and perspectives of the council do not taint the arrangements that emerge. But most of the work can probably be done in-house, provided that it is done by someone with a clear understanding of the principles of individualised funding and brokerage – which probably means with access to expert guidance. Experience suggests, however, that it is not safe for a person within the council to act as the mentor and supervisor of the brokers.   There is a particular danger that newly trained brokers, still lacking in confidence and certainty about their place within the system, will too easily fall into an acceptance that they are, in reality accountable to the council.

For this reason it is important to find an alternative source for these responsibilities.   It may be impossible to find someone who has in-depth experience as a broker, but the person supervising the brokers should be genuinely independent, have completed broker training, and demonstrate a commitment to working in ways that support the rights and self-determination of people dependent on social care. We also believe they will need access to expert guidance.

Payment of brokers

In Control has taken the position that people who want to use an independent broker should pay for the service from their individual budget allocation.   The stated reason is that people should have the freedom to decide how best to spend the money available to them.   If, the argument goes, money were set aside for

broker services, it would reduce the choice and control allowed to people who use self-directed supports.

This apparently enlightened position has some surprising political implications. (If, as a nation, we really accepted this argument, the logical action would be to abolish national health, education, and social services, and return the money to citizens through the tax system.) But the more immediate consequence is that it creates a powerful disincentive to use a paid broker. While, as discussed earlier, no one should be obliged to use a broker, it is also highly inadvisable to encourage people to struggle on with a process that they are not equipped to complete alone. Support plans that don't deliver what people really want, or cost more than they need to, or leave people at risk, are not only failing the people concerned. They also represent failure for councils and taxpayers.

There is, at the very least, good cause to consider whether to create a more neutral system, with neither pressure to use a broker, nor discouragement. This would mean setting aside specific funds, and some way to ration those funds to reflect the differing amounts of work that brokers would need to do. One obvious way would be to link an allocation of broker funds (or broker hours) to the RAS points system.

An outline development plan for independent support broker resources

This final part of this paper outlines a process to develop a local resource of independent support brokers, with a local oversight and accreditation body and other necessary systems. The exact plan will of course differ, in line with local circumstances. The aim here is to identify the main stages and critical decisions, and show how they form a plan with the capacity to create a local resource of independent brokers in around six months, with independent oversight in operation in 12-15 months.

The plan is shown in the following table.

Approx time from start	Task	Details
0	Agree strategic direction for broker services	- Development of independent broker resource agreed. - Balance of training between users/carers; brokers; social care staff is decided. - Responsibility for development work allocated. - Someone suitable to oversee brokers in the short term is identified, or agreement made to recruit person. - Policy on payment of brokers agreed. - Need for external support in development process assessed.
1 month	Access potential brokers in the community	Use networks reach potential brokers; in addition, use local media to reach community more widely.
1 months	Plan *Planning Live!* event, and identify people to use the opportunity to make their own plans, and their circles.	If the development strategy opts to invest in training for users, families, and social care staff, this two day course offers a way to train some people and also generate 'early win' examples of IB use. The training can be offered by Helen Sanderson Associates (HSA), or as part of the NDT/HSA integrated package. With the integrated package, potential brokers also participate to learn the support planning element.
2 months	Shortlisting potential brokers	Receive and screen interest in broker training; settle participant list.
2 months	Hold awareness day	Event for social care staff; users and families; providers; and potential brokers.
2 months	Initiate process to identify first broker customers.	Required to ensure that brokers are able to 'follow through' from their training, and to work through an 'apprenticeship phase' with higher levels of monitoring and support.
2.5 months	Initiate CRB checks and request for references for brokers	Starting CRB checks now runs the risk that a small cost may be unnecessarily incurred if people do not go forward to become brokers, but avoids delays after training.
3 months	Run *Planning Live!* event	Can be run as a standalone event, delivered by HSA, or as part of the integrated training. If the latter, attended by brokers as part of their training.
3 months	Training for care managers and other social care staff	Purpose and priority for this need to be identified in strategic plan. Some staff will need to be able to support self-assessment and (probably) 'signing off' support plans. There is a good case for providing training to a larger staff group, and in more depth than will have been possible on the awareness day, so that staff understand their own role in the SDS system, and the role of brokers, and have thought through the implications for practice.
4 months	Run broker training	The NDT standalone broker training course requires five days, usually spread over three of four weeks. Training includes assessment, which can then be used to guide accreditation and to highlight areas of practice that need to be monitored during the apprenticeship phase.

		If the integrated training package is used, brokers will have attended *Planning Live!* and will only require a further 3 days training.
5 months	Brokers complete accreditation	As CRB checks and references are completed, and brokers finish their apprenticeship phase, their suitability to be accredited as local brokers can be decided.
6 months	Broker profiles completed and made available, with supporting information.	Potential customers need access to information on accredited brokers so that they can make informed choices. They also need general information about the services brokers can offer, the basis on which it is offered, and at least some sense of how much it will cost. This information is likely to change, so is best held as a database that can be updated easily (e.g. Web pages with downloadable profiles). **ONCE THIS POINT HAS BEEN REACHED, THE INDEPENDENT BROKER RESOURCE WILL HAVE BEEN CREATED.**
From about 6 until about 15 months	Operation of independent broker services with interim support arrangements	Broker resources operate with support from an individual who is independent and has appropriate expertise, preferably with access to expert external guidance [which can be provided by the NDT]. This person also monitors outcomes and satisfaction with broker services.
9 months	Planning for development of local oversight body.	- The growing broker customer base is reviewed to identify potential interest in participating in oversight body. - Other users/carers alerted to oversight body development. - Organisational options for oversight agency identified and reviewed (i.e. linked to appropriate volorg or new constituted entity?). - A provisional constitution for the oversight body is drafted in outline. - Costs of oversight body estimated and budget identified. - Appropriate person to perform duties for oversight body identified, or recruitment of worker started.
12 months	Review and planning day	An event for people who use services, their families and allies to review the delivery of broker services and to identify changes required. Also, importantly, serves as an opportunity to explain role of the oversight body, and to recruit people interested in participating as committee members
13 months	Training for oversight body	One day training event for people interested in becoming members of the oversight body, to equip them with understanding of individualised funding principles, the context of *In Control* or IB developments, and the role of broker.
14 months	Oversight body operational	Oversight responsibility passes to oversight body. **THE INDEPENDENT BROKER ELEMENT OF IF SYSTEM NOW FULLY OPERATIONAL.**

About the author

Steve Dowson has been involved with social care services for thirty years, in a variety of roles, including seven years as national director of the campaigning group, *Values Into Action.* Over this time his work has covered a very wide range of topics, including the development of service audit and person-centred planning tools; research on the new genetics; day service modernisation; trends in self-advocacy, and global innovations in disability policy. This has resulted in a substantial list of publications.

The common thread to Steve's work is an interest in the way that the structure and culture of social care impact on the lives of people who use services. In 1989 he first encountered the Individualised Funding and support brokerage model, as it had been developed in Canada, and this quickly became a major area of interest.

After leaving Values into Action in 1994 he became an independent consultant, and for several years worked internationally as a specialist on individualised funding and brokerage. Much of this work was under the banner of *Emprise International Training and Consultancy*, a business partnership with Brian Salisbury, who is based in Canada and known worldwide for his expertise on, and commitment to, the development of support broker resources. The partnership with Brian included planning the programme for the First International Conference on Self-determination and Individualised Funding, held in Seattle in 2000. This event brought together 1200 people and some 70 presenters, from many countries. Steve and Brian also provided consultancy and training for organisations in Canada, Australia, and the United States, including support over three years to the development of the Self-Determination programme in San Diego, California.

Through this work, Steve is known internationally as a senior contributor to the development of thinking on individualised funding. In the UK, Steve worked with a campaigning group to promote individualised funding in the UK, and, in 2002, authored *Not Just About the Money: Reshaping social care for self-determination*.

Steve joined the National Development Team in 2003, and continues to provide a wide range of consultancy and training services, on individualised funding, brokerage, and on other topics. Recent projects include the Brent and North Somerset *Life Planning* projects, which were based on the individualised funding model. He is also currently undertaking a project, funded by the Department of Health, to explore the training and accreditation of independent brokers.

Relevant publications

Steve's main publications on the topics of individualised funding and support brokers include -

> *Who Does What?: the process of enabling people to achieve what they need and want*, Values Into Action, (1990)

> *Means to Control: A review of the service brokerage model in community care*, Values Into Action (1995)

> *Foundations for Freedom: International Perspectives on Self-Determination and Individualized Funding,* TASH, USA, (2001) – co-authored with Brian Salisbury

> *Not Just About the Money: Reshaping social care for self-determination,* published jointly by Community Living and Emprise International Training and Consultancy (2002)

He has also published many shorter papers on these topics. Several of these are available for download on the NDT Website, www.ndt.org.uk.