

Personal Budgets

The following list of frequently asked questions has been put together to help young people, parents and professionals improve their understanding of the plans to implement Personal Budgets by London Borough of Merton Children Schools and Families Department as part of the Children and Families Act 2014 Part 3.

1. What is a Personal Budget?

A Personal Budget is a new approach that allocates a sum of money to deliver support and services that meet education, health and care needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and promotes positive outcomes.

2. What are the benefits for children, young people and families?

Children young people and their families will receive an allocation of money, via a fair assessment and allocation process, that provides them with more choice and control over how their needs and outcomes can be met. So instead of a package of care being organised by the local authority, Personalised support could give children, young people and their families opportunities to identify how and where they would like to spend their allocation to meet the outcomes in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Families in other Local Authorities which have already developed Personal Budgets offer have found the Personalised approach a clear and positive experience, particularly as the focus is on more flexible ways of meeting needs and agreed outcomes for the child or young person while taking into account the whole family.

Many parents who have participated in the process have said it was extremely helpful and encouraged them to look at things more creatively and welcomed the input from other key professionals.

3. What are the benefits for the Local Authority?

The Children & Families Act 2014 Part 3 promotes the use of Personal Budgets and there is a statutory requirement for local authorities to consider services that could be offered via Personal Budgets and to **offer** them to children, young people and parents.

By introducing Personal Budgets we believe it will in time stimulate the local and national market for some services, as well as helping to give greater choice and control to families.

The introduction of Personal Budgets helps us to create a fair and transparent allocation process that informs the decision as to what funds a young person or parent will receive.

In the future, Merton is working towards young people and parents being able to combine Personal Budgets across education, health and care (EHC) to meet their assessed needs in a more holistic way, which should promote a more integrated service. This is in line with the DfE and DoH guidelines.

4. What services is Merton initially considering for Personal Budgets?

We are initially offering Personal Budgets for some users of our SEN transport services and are working on plans to offer Personal Budgets for some of our short breaks services from April 2015.

SEN Transport

SEN transport is currently provided to several hundred pupils via a range of provision including buses, taxis and mileage allowances (see Merton's SEN Transport Policies in the Local Offer). In the first instance, those families receiving mileage allowances will continue to be offered direct payments which will effectively be Personal Budgets for this provision. The families of pupils currently travelling in taxis will also be offered Personal Budgets.

Short Breaks

Short Breaks in Merton provide disabled children and young people with an opportunity to spend time away from their parents or carers. Short Breaks also provide families and carers with a valuable break from their caring responsibilities. The council currently provides Short Breaks during the day, evening, over-nights and at weekends. These short breaks happen within the community, within the child or young person's home, within the home of an approved carer or within a residential setting.

From Spring 2015, we plan to offer some of these Short Breaks services via Personal Budgets and will keep families informed of the specific services in due course.

The council is considering other services that could be offered via a Personal Budget post April 2015 and is keen to hear from young people and parents about what services they would like to see offered. Families may also apply for a Personal Budget for other services for children with SEN and disabilities provided by the council. Although it will consider any application, the council is not obliged to meet assessed needs via a Personal Budget.

Additionally, we will consult with education settings, social care providers and health providers about what services could potentially be offered in the future.

5. Why have we looked at Transport and Short Breaks first?

The setting-up of Personal Budgets is a big change and requires a lot of work. We need to make the process fair and transparent so the Personal Budget offer for the future is accessible, adequate, and sufficiently integrated across education, health and care.

Merton has therefore looked first at local services that are relatively straightforward and would lend themselves to a Personal Budget for families. We believe both transport and short breaks fit into this category.

Additionally while the new EHC plans and reforms are being developed and embedded this gives us an opportunity to see how Personal Budgets will fit into the EHC process in the future.

6. What is a Resource Allocation System (RAS)?

A resource allocation system is a tool or mechanism used by professionals, usually a social worker, lead professional or support worker, for establishing an appropriate Personal Budget for a child and their family **who has requested a Personal Budget**. A resource allocation system has two specific elements:

- A questionnaire which quantifies the needs of the child/ young person
- The resource allocation model which converts the results of the RAS into a financial allocation which is the basis of a Personal Budget

The RAS assessment questionnaire is an additional tool that works within the statutory framework for the assessment of children. It does not seek to replace the professional analysis and judgement regarding the child and family circumstances. It seeks to provide a financial framework for the calculation of an amount of funding that is expected, in most cases, to be appropriate to meet the child's identified needs.

Merton has chosen to use and tailor a nationally recognised RAS developed by the Department for Education and Health partner In-Control. This RAS includes an assessment questionnaire that families will complete with a professional. The questionnaire is based around the Every Child Matters outcomes framework to ensure it looks at all aspects of the child's development. Based on the information in the assessment questionnaire, the resource allocation system will then determine a Personal Budget amount/value.

7. Does the RAS tool change or replace my EHC or social work assessment?

No. An EHC or social work assessment is a statutory assessment that provides a structure for recording information that is gathered by discussion and enquiry and identifies what actions need to be taken to address the recognised or eligible needs.

The RAS is a separate tool that will be completed alongside the above **EHC or social work assessments** as a complement to these assessments.

It is not a child’s holistic assessment, rather it is a tool to reach a fair funding decision for Personal Budgets and make the process more transparent and participative.

8. Who is expected to complete the RAS and when?

At the moment we offer two types of RAS so this will vary depending on the services required. The following table outlines what we currently expect will happen:

Personal Budget Type	Who completes	When
* Transport	Transport Co-ordinator or Direct Payment Support Worker	Following DMG (Decision Making Group)** approval of a Personal Budget request or new EHC Approval
Short Breaks	Short Break Co-ordinator or Social worker together with a young person or parent	Following a short break referral, a Common Assessed Shared Assessment (CASA), or a single assessment
Other future services	To be confirmed as and when these are available	N/A

* Merton is using a dedicated matrix for transport and not a RAS

** Decision making group (DMG) used to be called a panel or moderating group

NOTE: Personal Budgets is an option not a requirement for children, young people and parents who meet the eligibility criteria for individual services

9. Who will manage the Personal Budget?

After being allocated a Personal Budget, a young person or parent will be able to manage their allocated money and purchase services that meet their assessed needs or specific outcomes.

Alternatively a third party can manage the Personal Budget for you if this your preferred option, although this is likely to incur an administration cost which will need to be met by the Personal Budget allocation..

NOTE: In the set-up phase support will be offered to assist families to efficiently set up and manage a Personal Budget if this is required. Further details will be made available.

10. How will we make sure it works well?

- By working with a selection of pilot families to make sure the allocation and process works
- By making sure all Personal Budget requests are recorded and considered fairly
- By responding in writing to all successful / unsuccessful requests
- By working together with children, young people and parents when completing the RAS or allocation tool via a face to face meeting or telephone conversation
- By making sure each agreed Personal Budget has a support plan (agreed outcomes) and/or is recorded in the EHC plan (Section J)
- By reviewing all Personal Budgets after 6 weeks to make sure everything is going ok and to see if families need any assistance
- By regular monitoring of the outcomes to make sure they are being partially or fully met

11. How long will it take from my initial request?

If you are requesting a Personal Budget as part of a new EHC plan this will be built into the EHC process and we will try to conclude this within the 20 week assessment period.

If you are requesting a Personal Budget as part of a review we will try to conclude this within the 14 week period.

If a family is unable to secure or arrange the services as part of a Personal Budget within the above timeframes they can choose to access existing commissioned services until arranged.

For further general information on Personal Budgets please see the Special educational needs code of practice: 0 to 25 years pages 179 – 185.