

This edition of *Research, Policy and Planning* provides four interesting papers that focus on various aspects of some of the current challenges in providing health and social care (in the main to adults) in the UK, that is:

- the views of service users and carers of developments in mental health service provision
- the use of service users' self-assessment to allocate equipment and adaptations in adult social care
- a critique of the development of personal budgets as a vehicle to empower social care service users
- the design of a new set of social care eligibility criteria that will result in the fair allocation of resources to meet adult social care needs.

Brenda Roe and colleagues report on a study conducted in two English mental health services NHS trusts of the views of service users, carers and staff of service developments. Transformational change in service provision is a key priority currently and this paper presents analysis of how these key stakeholders believe services should develop, namely a move away from traditional models of psychiatric care to more integrated person-centred community care which focuses on recovery, rehabilitation and self-care.

Sue Tucker and colleagues present the findings of research into the service user's use of self-assessment to assist in the allocation of equipment and adaptations in adult social care. As they observe, little work has been published thus far on the effectiveness of self-assessment. Their paper looks to address five key questions: how might self-assessment be employed; who is self-assessment suitable for; what services should be provided via self-assessment; what does self-assessment cost; and, fifthly, how satisfied are service users with self-assessment? They conclude that there is a need: for clarity of what is meant by self-assessment and the roles to be played by any facilitators / mediators in the self-assessment process by service users; for clarity over the purpose of self-assessment, not least whether it is intended to substitute for or complement traditional professional assessment processes; to provide alternative arrangements for those service users who will find it difficult to self-assess; and, for an appraisal of the potential costs and benefits of introducing or expanding the use of self-assessment.

Peter Beresford presents a topical piece on whether personal budgets (PBs) in social care empower service users and, if they do not, what the purpose and effects of their promotion are. For Beresford, there is a need to critique the promotion of PBs as the mechanism to promote greater flexibility, choice and control as well as greater efficiency. Beresford states that the mechanisms used in the implementation of PBs are bureaucratic, reduce eligibility and levels of support in terms of cash/budget size, and do not provide service users with sufficient support to manage their PBs. In addition, local authorities are responding to the policy imperative in such differing ways as to create a 'postcode lottery' of social care provision and, in addition, one in which some local authorities are simply rebadging adult social care arrangements as a PB in order to meet central government targets for PB take up. Beresford expresses his disappointment that the development of PBs has not built on the positive work associated with the implementation of direct payments, that is being predicated on the social model of disability, service users being in control, and with the wider aims of social inclusion and service users' full and equal participation in society. In order, therefore, that the (at best) ambiguous development of PBs and personalisation is to be truly progressive, Beresford argues it will need to associate itself more closely with the principles of independent living and the disabled people's movement.

Colin Slasberg presents the case for a new eligibility framework to be used to aid the allocation of social care resources to service users. He acknowledges that there is a need for an eligibility framework due to finite resources and the need to ensure that rationing is fair, transparent and effective. In his paper, he describes why the current 'Fair Access to Care Services' (FACS) is not fit for purpose. Slasberg then presents a new framework, based on notions of universal human needs which, it is argued, would ensure the fair allocation of resources.

The book review section includes reviews of texts on the topics of: cognitive behavioural interventions for mental health practitioners, child well-being, developing reflective practice in child care social work, professional decision making in social work practice and, finally, courtroom and report writing skills for social workers. All are topical and of relevance to practitioners, researchers and managers. Our thanks, therefore, go to the book reviewers as well as to our reviewers of the four papers in this issue. As ever, the journal would not be possible without their valued contribution. Indeed, we welcome offers from readers of the journal willing to join our review teams as we are always looking to add to these.

Guy Daly

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