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P1: My name is P1 and I used to work for [anon.]. Part of that role in terms of the Local Offer I did a lot of support work to ensure that the group kept on track and delivered on its, sort of, targets around what he needed to do in order to set up the Local Offer, etc.

**Interviewer: Yes, and what were you doing at the time when you first, kind of, came into contact with the Local Offer or you first heard about the idea? What was your role in the council [Crosstalk 0:00:35]?**

P1: I was working, I'd just started as a [anon.] which was totally brand new to me, so it was like a complete new world. Prior to that I was a [anon.], so I managed all that. Then that service was cut and I was put into redeployment.

This role came up and I had a really good meeting - it wasn't really an interview - but I had a really good meeting with a couple of colleagues who went through what the job entailed.

It was very much about a new reform, a government reforming how we worked with children, young children with special educational needs and disabilities. They needed somebody to really do, pick up a lot of the project management of some of those key areas of work.

It really appealed to me because I thought I could still be working in Children Services around those areas that I'm quite passionate about.

A lot of the new reform was around ensuring that the voice of parents and young people were very much embedded in everything that we delivered around new reforms. For me that was like a big tick. I really was quite excited about getting involved in that.

I suppose initially as part of that role, I was successful in my discussion/interview that I had. It was the most weirdest thing I've ever had, it wasn't a proper interview at all, but you know, it was interesting.

I was successful and I started out – well it was a 12 month contract. Within that the first thing I had to look at was Educational Health and Care Plans.

As the different thematic groups got up and running it became apparent that the Local Offer Group – although I wasn't part of that initially – it was struggling because they had somebody managing it who really didn't have the capacity to manage it.

People that were within that group were very disgruntled. It was a real shame because it was almost like we were going to lose parents, our voluntary sector colleagues. I was approached to go and support that group a bit.

Myself and another colleague from Connections, we had a, sort of, candid conversation with the chair of the group and said, “Look you know, it's obviously struggling a bit, is there any way that the two of us can really help with this?”

The deal was that the colleague would still report to the project board, but myself and Anne from Connections would chair. I would do all the, sort of, background work that needed to be done. I took the minutes, I made sure that we booked the rooms, that we had everything in place which was lacking.

What was happening was the person was arranging a meeting either on the Monday for the Wednesday and people just couldn't do it. It became very fragmented and a very, sort of, knee jerk, so it needed a bit of proper planning and organisation.

**Interviewer: Dates in diaries, rooms booked, all the pragmatic stuff.**

P1: Yes, so the two of us just completely blitzed it right from top to bottom in terms of making sure that all that was in place, and people felt really comfortable and confident that what they brought to the meeting would very much be valued and taken account of.

That was the other thing, I think right at the very beginning people would come with ideas and views and thoughts. It would then get translated in that council way that then didn't actually reflect anything of the discussions that had happened within the group.

**Interviewer: This was in the minutes or in the notes?**

P1: Well just in what the lead went off and did it was absolutely nothing to do. In a way the group was almost set up and had conversations, but then action happened that had absolutely nothing to do - so there was no ownership over the development of the Local Offer.

What Anne and I did we sat down and went through everything and she brought me up to speed with the areas that people were really quite passionate about.

We made sure that we had, like, an agenda that really reflected those areas so that we started to build in the real voice of the people that were in the room as opposed to just one person going off and saying, “Oh we’ll do it is this way because it's my way”.

That was quite hard, because it's difficult isn't it to try and change some ways. I think sometimes people who have worked for councils have worked in a certain, sort of, very autocratic way. It can be very hard for them to change the way that they act and the way that they can listen and take on board other people’s views.

Yes, so in a way the whole experience of the setting up of the Local Offer was quite interesting. Basically I think we got quite a good knit group. They could see the journey that we’d been on from this horrible, wobbly thing that just went off and did its own thing, to them actually having some input and feeling that they were very much part of the decision making, that they were able to steer the way that we went.

**Interviewer: Your post then, was that the SEND reforms when they were going to be introduced to the new act? The Local Offer was part of the reforms, is that right?**

P1: Yes, it's a statutory duty for all local authorities to have a Local Offer. I think that was one of the things that we were really a little bit worried about Anne and I, because what wasn't being taken into account was it wasn't to be this list of repository, a list of things.

The wording for local authorities is very clear that it cannot be just a list, it has to be very much something that parents and young people can have control over, can add to, can comment on.

As a result a local authority must be able to see where the gaps are and then look at how they change what they deliver in terms of being responsive to what parents and young people say.

I know that we are probably still at that position where we’ve got a list, but we are still looking at creative ways of being able to make sure that we have that happen, but it's a much more flexible offer.

There has always been, because I think with local authorities they've always worked in a certain way, they think, “Right, we’ve got to do this, this and this – tick, tick, tick”. I went to a number of the SEND project board meetings and our lead would say “Oh well we've done this, we've done the Local Offer, we are almost there, we are almost finished”.

It was like a couple of people had to say, “Well actually the thing about the Local Offer it won't ever be finished because that's not the type of work it is”. It's not like “Yes we’ve got a website – tick”, that isn't how it is.

I think there is still a juxtaposition between what the government are telling up to do and what local authorities are interpreting it as.

**Interviewer: There was an interesting discussion, I can't remember if it was the last meeting or the meeting before, I think it was when they were defining the new groups going forward. I think they are called Local Offer Task and Finish Group are they? I'm assuming that means like we need to do it and it's done.**

P1: That's classic – that's been brought up. I took that to [anon] and said, “It can't be a Task and Finish Group”.

The problem is when you work for an organisation that is absolutely so many people on a really senior level that just want to have things they can tick off the list, it's very hard for them to move their thinking into, “Well actually this bit of work will always be developmental and changing”. It's very hard for them to understand that, because they see it as a website.

I think that's some of our problem is it's just seen as that website, even though we keep trying to change the language around that.

I think partly why that's gone wrong is because quite a few months we had one person going to the project board saying that's exactly what it was, it was just like “We are going to have this website, that's it going to be done”.

[anon] and I had to do a lot of work with them to try and say, “That's not how it should be - read this, look at this, it can't be like that, we need to be much more creative in the way we approach it”.

Unfortunately, you know what happens when you start saying, “It's this, it's this, it's this”, people then have that in their minds that it this thing. It's a square, but actually no it's a circle, so you are having to keep saying “It's a circle” and everything you talk about “It's a circle”.

I think it's been a hard slog and there have been things against us. There's been that overarching the way the council works where they like to tick things off. Then there's been that layer of somebody not quite getting it and then being quite dangerous and go into it and, sort of, put in the wrong, you know, messages out there. Then we've been battling against that.

**Interviewer: When you had your conversations with people about what the Local Offer should be, or what it's meant to be anyway in terms of how it's being proposed, how do you explain what it should be when they think it is just a website? How did you and [anon] deal with that?**

P1: How did we explain it? Well we said that “We can't tell you what it's going to look like. What we are saying to you is that we are going to be working with the University over a period of time and working with young people and parents to look at how we can make something much more fluid and creative, which is very much part of the community as opposed to it being a ticky box website”.

That is a really exciting, fantastic resource that we have and we’ve got a really good opportunity to do something really fantastic here in [anon]. That's what we are aiming towards, so it isn't just a website.

Certainly to the Director of Education I, sort of, said to him “You are going to have to have faith that this is going to happen. It won't happen overnight, it will probably take quite a few years for us to get this off the ground and working.

You are going to have to have faith and it will happen and it will actually be good for the local authority, because not only will it be innovative, but it will also probably save you a lot of money in the long run”.

I was merciless, I did use the fact that we are going to have to think about doing things differently when budgets are becoming... His ears pricked up because that's probably about the only thing that he understands is it's not going to affect my budget and it's going to be good.

It is in there but whether it will stay there because you need somebody at him all the time reminding him about that. It would be good if there is somebody, if Anne is still on the group or somebody like that who will probably get to see him quite regularly and keep that in his mind.

**Interviewer: Keep it in the mind’s eye.**

**Do you think quite often things like the Local Offer can be seen as a way of dealing with funding issues within organisations like councils?**

**What is it about things like Local Offer that make the ears twinkle or whatever?**

P1: What I meant by that was that at the moment we’ve got the website which you have to, somebody has to keep up to date.

It has to be administrated which takes up quite a lot of time, it needs somebody on top of that all the time. It is quite a resource that you have to keep up to date.

I suppose if we are looking at something much more that's owned by a community, that they might do some of that or they might be way down the line. That was the bit I was thinking about in terms of trying to say to him the resource.

**Interviewer: Yes, it's like self maintained in many respects.**

P1: Yes a self maintained, so that's the bit and if we can do more of that it's only got to be good.

It also links very much with the ethos of the Education Health and Care Plan. Within that what it's saying is in the past what we did and this is relevant, it all links. In the Education Health and Care Plan it used to be what was called a statement.

Young people would be given a statement which meant it itemised everything that that child might need to support them in education in order to do well at school. It was quite a long, arduous process and parents, for years and years and years and you can say “This is really rubbish, we hate it, it's all been done to us”.

The whole new reform is about, it's going to be an Education Health and Care Plan that brings people together to look at that and putting that child at the centre of the discussion.

What makes it different is that the initial conversation shouldn't be about services that the council provide, service land is what control who I now work with call it, the service land.

We are not talking about the service land, these special places, the special schools, special transport, special this, special that.

What we need to do with our conversations with family is looking at “What would you need to be able to be integrated in your local community? If your child was to go to your local school?”

“How could we be much more creative and use your community wealth that you have as a family?” When we talk about community wealth we are talking about “Who you know, what your links are, what your networks are. How could we make that work really well?”

Some of that could be low cost, no cost and we tend to not have those conversations at all which actually builds resilience with our families, starts getting people thinking about taking ownership and being in control of their own lives.

It's very much we do those conversations first, then we start looking at the things that we might need to bring in to support that young person to do really well at school.

It's on its head, whereas before we’ve gone in and said “The pizza” and gone “No, look what we bring you, all these lovely services”. Then we immediately slot young people into these special places and they are cocooned for all their lives. As soon as they are 18, bang they are out in the wide world and it's like “How do I cope in this world?”

**Interviewer: Yes, so it's, kind of, bringing forward what's normally seen as like the planning or the transition phase to adulthood, right through, much earlier in life and make it just the new, your attitude to...**

P1: It's a massive culture change because parents expect, “If I have this bit of paper I'm eligible for X, Y and Z”. That's why we have so many issues around travel because it's “Oh your child has got special, oh we’ll get a taxi” – tick and give you the taxi.

We’ve been doing that for years “There you go, there's your taxi” – that young person possibly, quite a lot of them absolutely capable of travelling on their own with support maybe to begin with. What we do is we put them in a taxi and then they become isolated in their own bedroom.

I was speaking to a young man last week. I said, “Oh, did you travel” he said “Oh yes” he said “I learnt when I was 19” I said, “Oh 19”. He said “Oh it was fantastic, up til then I never had any friends and I'd never gone out and I never did anything, I just went to school and back and sat in my bedroom. Now I've got friends, I go out”.

I thought, it was just all those years he has not had any friends or anything and he was like “It was fantastic” his life had completely changed. You just think we’ve done that, we’ve done that and we've actually made parents feel that they need to have that support.

I think local authorities have a lot to answer for in terms of, “Oh we tick the box”. It's easy, it's been easy to do that. Now we’ve got to change the way we do it, we've got to look at that community wealth.

The way I see the Local Offer, it's very much about that. How can we look at that community wealth? What have we got out there that we can integrate our young people we send into and support them to be able to access what's out there?

That might take really small bits of money to do that, little bits of money, but not masses of money that putting people in these special institutions doing special swimming and doing special this that and the other, I mean it's madness.

**Interviewer: Can I ask you what you mean by community wealth? I think I know what you might mean, it would be good to hear what you just [crosstalk 0:18:35].**

P1: Community wealth – yes it's like when you live in a community there's an awful lot of things out there – it might be the people you know, it might be your neighbours, it might be local groups that happen.

It might be your local community centre, it might be an artist that works down the road, but all these are networks and people that if you spoke to them might actually support you to do something different with your child or young person. What it is it's like trying to get people to think about really creating different way of working.

An example of that is there was a young person in [anon], he was obsessed with art, he had autism, was in school. When it came to leaving school there was nothing he could do. He needed really intensive one-to-one support.

We looked at giving him a personal budget to do something different. He had another young person supported him and he did a day a week with an art collective that's just down the road from him.

What he did his day a week was, he was working in the artist and he’d clean up and he’d make teas and coffees and he'd do anything that needed doing around.

Then they asked to see his artwork, he showed them his artwork and then they said “Well, you could...” and it got to that he started then going in working alongside.

Now he does three days a week working and doing his own art and displaying his own art. When they display their artwork he displays his artwork. It's been a fantastic thing, he has absolutely done something incredibly meaningful with his life doing what he really, really likes best.

That came out of just a conversation, it wasn't a funding placement, it was just like, “Would you mind if he came along, he’ll have a support worker with him”. It worked brilliantly to the point where the support worker doesn't actually need to go, he's actually quite confident going there now and he’ll go there three days a week fine. It's things like that - if that was out of conversation.

I think parents and workers don't tend to think that that is a value, “Let's go into special straight away”, or “We’ll keep you in doing college”. There are no outcomes to that but, “We are just going to keep you babysat for another few years.

Then when you are 21 you can come out and you’ll sit at home for five days but you might get, you might be able to go to a day centre once a week and something like that”.

That is how come we’ve got so many adults who are isolated and they’ve not explored that community wealth that sits around everybody.

Everybody has it and those that don't have very much community wealth, then yes we probably do need to give them a lot more support, but as organisations we’ve just gone straight to service land and not actually thought about that.

**Interviewer: The network stuff on the system, that might exist.**

P1: Yes and if you don't ask you don't get. It's like “Why don't we ask more?” That young person has as much right to be part of their community as anybody else. It's like “Why are we hiding our young people away like we do?” instead of saying “Well you can go that community centre”.

“What would it take to enable you to go to that community centre, so what would it take?” I think that's the question we are not asking, “What would it take? That's what the new reform is about - how can we have more of those conversations about what would it take?

**Interviewer: How would you see the Local Offer, maybe not now but in the future supporting those types of conversations? Do you see it supporting?**

P1: Absolutely I do and what I think we need to be, because I think at the moment we’ve got all the Local Offer, all the usual stuff and a lot of that is special stuff.

**Interviewer: Service land.**

P1: Yes, it's like service land stuff, it's all on there. What I think we need to have more of, and it was something that I wanted specifically to talk to you about because I'm just going to talk briefly about my new role.

I'm just about doing some work with somebody called [anon] who works for In Control as well - he is a young person himself, he is in a wheelchair. You've met [anon], yes him.

He has been doing some work with young people to get some In Control young people together, so that there is a group of young people who we can between us him and I support to learn about being an associate and what you do.

We feel that if we can involve young people in what we do and that they can learn those skills of facilitating and working with other groups, because they are the experts in their own lives. We feel that that's a really positive way of moving young people’s participation and involvement on, is if we can have some peer leaders. He has been developing that bit of work.

I'm working with him on looking at how can we embed thoughts of young people within local authorities with everything that they need to do? It's there all the way through the new reform, it states it everywhere that you must take account of young people’s thoughts and views.

What's happened everywhere and that is it's all parents – it's very little about the young person or their views or their voice. It's almost like, “Oh we’ve done all this, we do this fantastic engagement work with parents”, but actually the young people are just like shadows in the background.

I know the parents are fighting on behalf of their child or young person, but actually I know a lot of those young people have quite different views to what their parents are.

I mean you can imagine being, sort of, 16 and your parent was constantly speaking for you. I mean could you imagine, can you imagine – you'd be going “Ahh”.

With the best will in the world they do not know what you as a 16 year old really, really want to do. I think that's the problem we’ve got. Quite often our parents have been battling very hard on behalf of their child or young person all their lives and so the young person feels that they can't challenge that. The power is like really, they are very...

**Interviewer: I guess in a way you don't necessarily want, we don't want to necessarily challenge it in a negative way, not actually making it equal.**

P1: No, but it's how do we balance it out? Within that we are looking at how we can put together an offer for our local authorities who are members of the charitable organisation - it's a national charity - how can we give them an offer of a variety of different workshops that we could support them with?

One of those things is around community wealth, how can you as a local authority utilise the community wealth that you have out there for you to be able to develop the voice of young people?

I think by doing that we are also getting them to think about how their Local Offer might work. That was what I wanted to, because I think that we need to get local authorities much more enabled of looking at organisations that already exist, already do lots of great work but how do you tap into that.

**Interviewer: But are outside of the normal remit.**

P1: The normal, yes, so it's about and I think we've got to start looking at very creative ways of doing that.

**Interviewer: It's a feeling that I've had throughout the Local Offer meetings. I think I've said it a couple of times, I don't feel as though I should always be saying it because it's just so hard setting it up in the first place.**

**How a lot of the energy has just gone into getting stuff on there from schools. Getting that specific school to actually write the information on the website. That in itself has been massively tedious I imagine for whoever has been going around doing it.**

**You'd imagine there's actually local organisations, voluntary sector organisations or the guy providing something down the end of the street, the local artist or whatever who would jump at being able to put himself on this system, but they are being missed at the moment aren't they?**

P1: Yes they are because it's been like, “Oh got to get these...” The thing about the schools is it's they have to be on. Otherwise if they are not, if then the local authority would have been penalised if they hadn't been on. That's why certain things have been...

**Interviewer: Really pushed forward.**

P1: Yes, yes, because otherwise the DFE and Ofsted would be going “Whoa, hang on a minute, this is really bad. You haven't done the basics”.

It's quite interesting, because although the legislation is saying “We’ve got to do it, we’ve got to be a bit more creative in the way we do it”, they are still also saying “You have to tick all these boxes”.

What the local authority goes “We must do this because otherwise we are going to get bad Ofsted or we are going to get bad stuff written by DFE” which nobody wants.

That's the problem, it's like we’ve got this whole culture change which comes from the legislation, but then you've still got that thread of “Tick this off, tick this off”.

**Interviewer: Sometimes there's a sense that stuff gets done because if you don't get it done you are going to get, not because they think it should be done, but because you are going to get told off.**

P1: Oh yes, no yes. Well I mean I've sat in a meeting where you've had the Director of Education and the lead for Local Offer and they said, “Right, so have we done this, have we done that? Ah right, so we are going to be alright when we have that conversation with [anon]” or whatever.

“Yes, right that's good, we’ve done that, we’ve done that”. It was like and I said, “Look, you know, and what about all the other stuff that we are doing?”

When I had the conversation with [anon] because they came the DFE and they had these - I made sure they knew all about this development work and why that was important. Yes we might have done this but that isn't the key thing, don't get...” and they were like “It sound really good, this sounds really good”.

They needed that enthusiasm to know that “Actually we are going to be doing something completely different, so don't be surprised”. That was just like a holding thing really because there's all this other work will be going ahead.

I think that went down well, even though when I emailed our Director about it, he went “What's all this about?” because that was the thing. He had a DFE visit and he'd only ever heard from the lead who hadn't told him any of the other stuff that we were doing. We just got this like tick box list.

I then had to be hauled into the Director’s office to brief him on all the other aspects of the work before he had his meeting with [anon] at nine o’clock in the morning, it's like \_\_\_[0:29:39] panic.

Well I had sent him this email, I just said, “Oh yes, I'm just going to talk to him about...” because he was checking what everybody was going to be saying to the DFE. I said, “Oh yes I'm going to tell him this, I'm going to tell him this and that” and he said, “What's all this, I don't know anything about any of this, can you meet me”. I had to go and meet him before he had his meeting.

**Interviewer: Was it okay when you had the meeting?**

P1: It was fine, it was fine with him, it's just he didn't know any of it.

**Interviewer: It's interesting, it's like there's a tick box mentality. You had these things that you are going to be assessed or measured on, so because of that you focus what you are going to brief people about around “Yes we’ve met these tick box exercises and we’ve got that sorted”.**

**And because that was always the system and the way people react to the system means a lot of the other stuff always gets lost and ignored. If you can't see how it could gain momentum and snowballs.**

P1: If we presented that they would have been over the moon and leapt through a burning hoop and done a triple back flip because that is actually what it would have been held at and it's good practice.

Sometimes I think people are very scared to try and be innovative unless it's within a certain parameter. That's a bit of a frustration I think for, certainly a lot of people who were working in local government who think, “Well actually we could do this very differently”, but you are always hitting your head against a tick box.

Or there's always somebody somewhere that goes “Oh yes but we haven't done this yet and ooh you've got to do it this way”.

**Interviewer: Talking about engagement, because that's what you moved onto a moment ago - I know that's a very important thing for you generally. I think you had the remit of engagement didn't you in your role in the [crosstalk 0:31:31].**

P1: Oh yes, well when I first came to [anon] I was the Young People’s Participation Coordinator for the city, so that meant I had to do stuff locally, regionally and nationally around involvement and participation.

That's how people originally knew me in that, sort of, role when I first came in. That was when like participation was like a bit of a buzz word and there was loads of money chucked at it.

I think I was one of the first participation workers in the North East actually and then several more - there's one in Sunderland and then we got together and then gradually a few more came about.

**Interviewer: Has it nosedived a bit now then the whole participation...?**

P1: All those, quite a lot of those posts are cut. I mean out of that group the Children’s Right’s team all got cut alongside Youth Service and Play Service.

**Interviewer: On the Local Offer as well as coming in and basically getting stuff organised, it sounds like in many respects, did you have to do any of the engagement work as well throughout the course or the project – I call it a project?**

P1: Yes I have done some of the engagement work. I certainly did quite a lot around transport and involving peoples’ voice in that. When I first came into the role, that was when I realised that nobody had done any of that work.

I got in touch with the youth council and worked with some of their disabled members. They agreed to meet with me and we did some work around some of the issues around transport. Just what they did and how they got about and what their life was like and things like that.

That was really, really important and it was just eye opening for people because I just brought that and said, “Well actually this is what young people are saying”. “It's only a small cohort of young people, I know they can't speak on behalf of everybody, but this is some of the things that are coming forward”.

Certainly a lot of that work and subsequent work that I did with young people in some of the special schools informed how we move forward in terms of looking at independent travel and the act development and all that.

It became very clear that's is a massive issue between what young people really wanted to do and what their parents were letting them do and how soon. It's that whole thing about not letting go and to thinking that they are capable.

**Interviewer: Yes, that's another project that I'm not really sure what's going on with now actually, the O2. I don't know if I've ever told you...**

**Interviewer 2: It that the travel app?**

**Interviewer: Yes this is the travel app.**

**Interviewer 2: Yes I think me and [anon.] were talking about it, it supports independent travel or not? Is it a tracking app actually?**

P1: It's a bit of both, because what we found out was even if we were travel training young people and they were really competent, really good, really wanted to go and do it on their own, really up for it, the parents were saying, “No, sorry, they need to stay on their taxi”. It was like, “What's all this about?”

The local authority weren't prepared to say, “Sorry” - because I have a feeling that if you've given that resource, which is quite a lot of hours and money goes into travel training a young person, but actually that's what your contribution is towards that extra support that that child might need to get to school.

It doesn't have to be a taxi, but we are quite within our rights I think to say that we’ve given... Then obviously if for some reason after travelling for whatever they don't want to, we can then rethink that and give them more training.

We are not actually doing young people any favours by just constantly chucking them in a taxi. It's about how do we get around that thing your parents won't let go? One of the things that came up with the work with parents is that they are really scared, they think their child is far too vulnerable, this, that and the other.

The idea of having a way of tracking them is really, really, really helpful. We think it might be a way of saying, “Right well this is the resource that you get” - with provisos around that, that you are not going to be able to track him forever.

They could be seen as like big brother, but to be honest I come from youth work where I think young people should have their freedoms, but in this case I absolutely think if that's enabling that child or young person to be able to have friends, get out, do their own thing it's worth it.

**Interviewer: It's almost like - and I shouldn't dwell on that point too much because we’ve talked a lot about that. I don't know whether it's, has it happened, has the thing been made now do you know?**

P1: I don't think so, I think they would have told me. The thing is because I've wrote, I don't know whether you know, but I wrote [anon.] are an organisation that work for the Department for Education.

They publish loads of publications about pathfinder sites. They published a bit from experiences in [anon] around personal budgets and independent travel, so I wrote this piece. Since I've written that loads of people have asked me if I’ll help them around their travel.

It's been quite good because I've been able to do some - I was in Rochdale and I went to a whole day session with Oldham, Rochdale and Bury Councils where they were looking at how they were going to do independent travel training differently and also personal budgets for travel, personal transport budgets.

I was there to talk through some of the things we did in [anon]. There's a lot of interest in that and linked to that is, before I did that I spoke to [anon] said, “Is that alright to do that?” and they said “Absolutely fine”.

They would keep me up to date with how things were going, because people are asking me “Is the app up and ready?”

The thing is I'm almost like promoting it. As I said, “I'm not wanting a cut, I’m just letting, you know, I'm promoting it” but people will need to get in touch with you.

**Interviewer: I know, I mean we haven't done it consciously really but we’ve just fallen out of the project, because it just seems there was no way for us to be actually involved.**

**it was funded by O2 – O2 were just, well I don't think they were trying to be a burden to us, but it was always like completely abstract when they would actually deliver anything, or to do any like user engagement whatever. There was nothing we could do.**

**I feel a bit guilty because I'd fallen out of the loop of that project, but it was just really going nowhere.**

P1: Well the last I heard it was meant to be this quarter that they were going to be doing the engagement work.

**Interviewer: Yes, this project started last April, the whole idea was there was engagement work at the start which came into the design of the app.**

P1: Which is what we said.

**Interviewer: Which was what was funded.**

P1: The pitch, that was what the pitch was.

**Interviewer: Yes and that what they really enjoyed. Then the director or the project leaders which have changed multiple times.**

**The first ones were really up for it and then they disappeared, but that's nothing to do really with the council team, that was just everything O2 – just bizarre.**

P1: It was wasn't it.

**Interviewer: Very strange, very strange – I’ll delete this bit – never to be heard, but a very, very strange organisation. Bringing 20 odd people in suits from London to sit around the table with us, the most expensive meeting I imagine I'd ever attended.**

P1: Oh I mean like major, major people.

**Interviewer: Just to design an app.**

P1: It was just extraordinary wasn't it, it was unbelievable.

**Interviewer: It was like they’d never been up north before – “Oh the trains come this far”.**

P1: It was a bit like that, anyway it was so funny because we’d been down to their offices and it's like state of the art.

It's like one of these places where they've got your pool table, you've got your gym, all open plan and it's just unbelievable and nobody really has desks.

**Interviewer 2: Screens up everywhere.**

P1: Yes, it's quite extraordinary working place and then they came to...

**Interviewer: We are just glad to have a place with windows now. \_\_\_[0:40:26] but we have windows. Sorry, I'm digressing.**

**Yes so the engagement elements, so did any of that feed into the Local Offer? I know there was consultation sessions and stuff like that, but they were they mostly with parents, is that right?**

P1: No, [anon.] and I did quite a lot of stuff with young people as well. We went to schools, we went to events and things like that. What we did was we put all that on, the things that have come out of there.

Quite a lot of that work helped us with how people searched for things, the look of it, what worked really well. All that information helped with the building of the site.

It was all very much more about how the site would work for people as opposed to innovation really, it was much more around those things really.

It was quite interesting, because the more we did the work with young people, they were going, “Oh we’ve never thought about looking for things”. It was fascinating and it was like “This is really good”. It just made you think, “Well what's going on in schools if you are not actually learning how to research things or look up things?”

It's quite interesting because it's almost, it really said to me that those young people had loads of potential and yet nobody was doing anything that could really help them to do things for themselves. “Oh my mam would look for stuff for me”.

We don't ever support our young people to be active, to do things for themselves, to build up their own resilience in life. Everything is always done for them and to them.

I suppose out of that there was quite a stark reality that actually out of that came some good stuff because a lot of them said, “I've done...” and we got feedback from them saying “Oh a lot of the young people have started looking up things now” after we did this little session. It never occurred to them to think they could actually look up online - it's interesting.

**Interviewer: That's brilliant.**

P1: This is the young people in [anon.], because it's a school for autism and a lot of their young people...

**Interviewer 2: Do they have people that have smart phones? People that already have smart phones?**

P1: Some of them did, some of them weren't allowed them. It's that “You're not allowed it because you might lose it” and all that sort of stuff.

**Interviewer: Yes, well it's interesting isn't it on how do you start to get, populate that mentality? It would be interesting to see whether that seed is just enough to get people started.**

**I guess there was a perception that something like the Local Offer isn't for me, it's for mum or it's for the carers.**

P1: Yes, and that's what we really need to get over. I said that bit at work that [anon] and I are doing, that is one of the workshops is going to be around that about supporting young people to be able to access the Local Offer.

How do the local authorities build that in, how do their build the voice of young people in and how do they make their local authority really reflect the needs and voice of young people? That's one of the things that we are building in.

**Interviewer: How do you think that can practically happen? It sounds quite good on [crosstalk 0:43:44] be able to do it.**

P1: Well I think what we are looking at doing, we do a workshop with groups that are local to the area - let's say Rochdale. Rochdale they've got a number of different voluntary organisations that work with young people with special educational needs.

What we would do is myself and maybe a couple of the young people from I See would have worked at a workshop and we’d work with the people that work with young people. Skill them up around what the key things are, around Local Offer and their involvement and how they can work together.

How they don't necessarily need to have extra money to deliver on this work, but how they can build that into what they currently do and get them to come up with how they might do it.

What we are trying to build is not add capacity, but whatever resource already exists, how can they add in this support to the young people to be able to be part of something without having to have extra resource to do it? It would be that conversation and getting them to come up with the solutions to how that might work.

Then we’d probably do some sessions with some of the young people that they work with and look at those young people. Skill them up to feel confident about accessing and being part of a group that would work very closely with the council and with others that might be working on the Local Offer.

That would be a way of supporting that to actually happening, because otherwise it isn't going to happen. Unless you've got the people that work with young people really switched on knowing why we are doing it, what's it all about, how they can do it.

Whenever you speak to anybody they say, “Oh well we need extra money to do that” as opposed to thinking about “How could you embed that in what you do?” It's about using what we’ve got.

I think that will really appeal to local authorities to do stuff like that with a view to then them carrying on the work via these organisations.

It isn't necessarily the council having to do it, what they are doing is they are tapping in to what already exists and all we are doing is trying to facilitate that involvement and that drive to make sure their voices are really heard.

**Interviewer: Can I shift it on a bit - actually it's going back to something you mentioned a little while ago right at the start as well around feedback. This idea that young people or parent’s voices are heard to a higher degree than they are currently.**

**A big element that I've always interpreted about the Local Office is people are able to feedback into the services. Sometimes things like Trip Advisor has been mentioned and then the Trip Advisor is being thrown out of the window.**

**I was just wondering how does feedback work, or how does feedback work at the moment or how has it been for the first year or so of getting the Local Offer up and running?**

**Then long term how do you think it might work?**

P1: I think it's been really sketchy and I think people aren't very confident about feeding back. I mean people talk a lot about stuff, but they don't necessarily - they are not bothered really about clicking on the button and sending us any information, it's really hard to get people to do that.

I don't think we’ve got anything that works for people currently to do that and that is based on what's there already. To be honest it's really hard because to get feedback on what's there already, because I think it's all service land stuff that's there's already.

A lot of the stuff that people use perhaps isn't on. I think that's another bit of work that needs to be done is about - and that's what you started to look at what were people using. The thing is they were only thinking about the service land stuff because they thought, “Oh it's just the special stuff that we need to be talking about”.

I think what we are doing is with the Local Offer, because the Local Offer is all about special educational needs and disabilities, we are not really bringing in what's actually happening or that other stuff and that's more important in a way

I think there's a massive bit of work about integration and people to feed in what they would need in order to be integrated into some of those activities.

I think the way we’ve got the feedback in hindsight, the feedback is probably not quite right, because we almost need to be pushing the integration side of things and I think families are still in service land. Parents still think everything should be service land and they are really quite scared about how they might do things out in the big wide world.

**Interviewer: Yes, and also I guess in a way before you can have feedback you need to have - if you think about it as a map you need to have a map of the things .**

**It's quite difficult - I've never been put in the position. If I imagined I only had use of something, which is not a very good analogy - my local bank - if I was in a situation where there was only one bank in [anon].**

**I was pretty much stuck to [anon] and to Lloyds TSB and actually I'd like to go somewhere else, but you can't go anywhere else because you only have Lloyds TSB.**

**What's the point of me giving feedback on it because what else am I going to do? If you've only got one I don't know particular school you can go to in your local area, would you feel confident giving feedback critical or constructive or otherwise if there is not actually an alternative?**

**You are not really sure if it's a critical comment or critical feedback, whether that's actually going to have a negative impact actually or whether it be heard.**

**Actually opening that up to other things, I think this is what you were saying actually is really beneficial, but you can't really do that until the stuff is on the map.**

P1: Yes there is that, and I think there is a big bit of work to do and it's all about that culture change and that is about how integration will work. I would want to see the Local Offer much more about integrated services.

**Interviewer: By integration, sorry I don't know...**

P1: Well I mean so the young people can access ordinary stuff that's going on, that families feel really confident that they’ll be accepted and it be okay. They are going to have an okay experience.

It's all that stuff isn't it about - which we started to get into at the parent conference. There was some really good conversations about somebody was talking about they tried to go into a coffee shop with a working dog – a dog that it's not like a dog for the blind, it's a dog - because her child had quite severe autism.

The dog whenever the child starts to have a fit, the dog goes to the child and calms them down and they don't have a fit, I don't know if you've heard of these dogs? They are amazing, they are absolutely extraordinary.

It means he can go out in public loads more, but it means she can only go places where the dog can be accepted. She was talking about the different places and which places were fantastic which she never had thought in a million years would have the dog in and the child, but were absolutely fantastic.

It's all that, sort of, stuff is coming out and it's that. It's like doing normal stuff that every other normal family does. That's about integration, it's about being able to go to your local school, being able to go to ordinary dentists or being able to go to the cinema and things.

**Interviewer: I don't know whether you know, but, the fee finder app is being developed, when the second alternative versions of it that's being developed now is dog friendly shops, so there we go.**

**Patrick has a dog, that's where that idea actually came from, but yes I’ll try and make sure that person gets access to that actually, it's really handy.**

P1: Yes, because it's not just guide dogs that are used young people with SEND, it's also dogs like that.

**Interviewer: That's an example of every day. I mean I would think every day services, just things that exist which just happen to be SEND friendly, or accepting or inclusive.**

P1: I think there needs to be a bit more work done around that. I think sometimes we’ve been framing things and because of parents especially are very much in service land, they immediately think of all the service land things, they are not actually thinking about experiences they might have had trying to access ordinary stuff.

What are the barriers to that, how could we make that different? How could we encourage ordinary outlets to be much more accepting and [crosstalk 0:53:14] and stuff.

**Interviewer: I guess that leads on to another report I had around commissioning then.**

**A big thing about the Local Offer has always been it's better feeding to new services and that might be service land services. I can visualise it, service land.**

P1: Oh yes, we’ve got a great slide actually that has like a circle and in it it's got all your specials in it. Then on the outside you've got all the things that you would do as an ordinary person like go to discos, getting married.

**Interviewer: But that doesn't count in there.**

P1: Yes, but it's that and when you see it graphically like that on the screen, people are going “Whoa”.

**Interviewer: I guess people think broadly around commissioning. I mean I see commissioning as also being something which could be in the outside of the circle, of course.**

**How do you think that's worked? I know it hasn't worked so far in the Local Offer, but what challenges have there been then?**

P1: Massive, it's a nightmare, it's a nightmare.

**Interviewer 2: Commissioning?**

**Interviewer: As in commissioning new services.**

**Interviewer 2: Oh right, actually creating.**

P1: We have a whole group of commissioners in Children’s Services who commission. They tend to do it in three year blocks.

It's very specific and it's very “Right we are going to commission”, it's not very fluid. The way they commission things it has to be like this, it has to be like that and it's not open to change or accepting of.

If somebody has a personal budget you might not need all that that they are commissioning, because what we might end up doing is people might spend their money differently on different things.

At the moment the commissioners are saying, “Well you can't do that, we can't let them have that as a personal budget because we’ve bought all this stuff and we’ll have to get it from here”. Then the family might say, “Well actually we don't want it like that, we want this personal budget and we want to do it in a different way”.

Because we've already spent a huge amount of money on buying in whatever it might be, say Speech and Language Therapy for instance - that's a biggy - then it has an impact on what you might be able to use for a personal budget.

What's going to have to happen over time and that is commissioners are going to have to really rethink how they commission things. When personal budgets take off which might take two, three, four years if people really get to grips with how it could revolutionise their life - because I think at the moment they are still holding onto service land saying, “Oh no”.

**Interviewer: Do, you know, what a personal budget is, [anon.]?**

**Interviewer 2: Not really, is it, it sounds well I can guess, is it new anyway is it something that wasn't around [crosstalk 0:55:51]?**

**Interviewer: It's been around for about five years but it's constantly been delayed in terms of its roll out.**

P1: With a statement you often get attached to what you might need in education, it might be X amounts of money attached to that, so you might be a certain child, you might be in a certain banding and you might be eligible for certain money. You’ll get your transport and things like that. There is always quite a big chunk of money per child with special education needs and disabilities.

What the new legislation is saying is that every person who has an Education and Healthcare plan. If you come into that threshold of an Education and Healthcare plan you can ask as a parent, you can ask for a personal budget. You needn't actually have everything tied up.

Of course, you can only have a personal budget –if you decide to go to a special school then a lot of that money is completely tied up in the special school because it's tied up in that specialist provision, so you probably wouldn't have much leeway for a personal budget. You might get a little bit of personal transport budget possibly or there might be a little bit of top up funding that you might be able to get, but it wouldn't be very much.

If you were going to a mainstream school, this is where the personal budget can work really brilliantly. If you were going to a mainstream school but you had significant needs, but we took some of the money and we got some different bits of money, we might be able to put together really, quite a creative package.

That would really enable that child to a) attend his local school and do things like, for instance, an example I heard of only the other day was a young person with really difficult behaviour got a personal budget to pay for an hour’s trampolining between eight and nine o’clock in the morning. Then when he is in school he is absolutely fine, he is no crawling the walls.

How brilliant is that? Simple, does a fantastic job, that child is absolutely fine for the whole school – doesn't need a one-to-one personal assistant in school because he has done that trampolining, he can be a normal member of the class.

Before when he just went from home to school, he was crawling the walls, he had to have one person with him all the time, his behaviour was off the wall. Actually that one little thing has completely revolutionised school and he is able to access normal school etc, etc.

It's things like that, how can we think really creatively about the needs of that individual child, as opposed to what we tend to do is commission, block commissioning, “Oh this will do for all of our children with ASD, this will do”. We've got to change that mentality in how we work.

**Interviewer: Yes and so personal budgets is something that's going to affect all social care provision.**

**Interviewer 2: As a plan you get individually, you get a plan?**

**Interviewer: Well the idea is that you define the plan on an individual basis.**

**Interviewer 2: It's very much led by the family.**

**Interviewer: You have, I can't remember who it is, but there is like nominated people to look after the budgets.**

**Then there is, I can't remember who they are, but it doesn't necessarily have to be people that are working for the council or an agency.**

P1: You don't have the budget yourself, I mean because I think the difficulty is in Social Care it's been around for quite a while and it's known as a direct payment.

Social Care would then give the family a direct payment which they manage themselves, or they could have a third party who managed it for them or the local authority can manage it for you.

A personal budget is a similar sort of thing but it doesn't have to be a direct payment. A family could have a personal budget but the local authority could manage it or a third party could manage it for them, but it's still their personal budget.

They can employ people if they want to, but they could do that through a third party as well. There's been a bit of hoo haw about parents employing, “Oh what about safeguarding, what about this, that and the other?”

I mean if you're a local authority you are going to want to make sure that there are safeguards and checks in place.

Your third party organisation would help with that, would help with training and that's what happens in [anon]. Any of our parents that employ personal assistants themselves they go through a bit of training about employment law, and then they've always got support from our third party organisation which is Skills for People.

**Interviewer: Yes, we know them very well. We’ll talk about that in a moment actually.**

**That's really interesting, so it seems like the whole commissioning element is one of the biggest problems.**

P1: Huge - it really needs to be sorted. I mean I know at the moment in [anon] they are looking at Speech and Language Therapy alongside Health.

They've been doing all this big consultation with parents and young people around how they might change that commissioned work. It's jointly commissioned Speech and Language Therapy and they are looking at how they would do that differently.

Whether any learning will come out of that I don't know, but it's been done in a very specific way within the constraints of commissioning.

**Interviewer: Do you ever see something like the Local Offer being able to inform decisions?**

P1: It has to, we will have to be able to demonstrate this. I'm absolutely certain that Ofsted will want to see that as part of when they come in and their checks and balances will be around that. I don't think that our commissioning team in [anon] have really got to grips with that yet.

**Interviewer: There's been a struggle engaging them hasn't there with Local Offer?**

**Yes, I mean for me I struggle, to be honest with you the council is still a bit of a black box to me quite a lot of the time, so the commissioning element does confuse me.**

**I've always seen the potential of Local Offer is actually to almost visualise what is being provided in specific areas. Maybe then actually the community itself.**

**By community I mean like volunteers or local businesses, start ups or whatever, actually filling the gaps instead of maybe the council. That just seems to be where it's a lot more flexible.**

P1: That's where I think commissioning really could probably do with a kick up the arse actually because they really need to be thinking about that.

The problem I think we've got is that nationally local authorities have been squeezed and squeezed with budgets and we will end up with commissioners and that's all that will be left. That will be commissioning hubs, but they are going to have to be very different types of commissioning hubs.

At the moment, you know, they do everything in a certain way, but there is going to have to be more of that working with the community wealth, that whole thing.

That's why I want to build it into the participation and engagement stuff that we do within control, because I think that's quite a massive area that really nobody has really thought about looking at and it's fantastic. There is so much that could be done within that area, so I'm quite keen for that to be part of what we do.

**Interviewer: I won't drag it out too much longer, P1, but I wanted to say thinking about, because there has been obviously there's a lot of stuff that's been developed with the Local Offer Group, there's probably a feeling that there are some things that could have been done a little bit differently as well.**

**For you, if you could start it all again, what would you personally have done differently? That might have been something, you might have done something differently that you were involved in, or it might be just what the group in general should have done differently.**

**If you could roll back the time what would that be?**

P1: Oh well, roll back the time – well for a start starting with the right message I think about what the Local Offer is and being much clearer to senior people what it is and what it could be.

I think that that's been our downfall really because I think it's very much seen as start a task and finish. I think that was a big, big mistake, because it's almost firmly lodged in people’s brains that's how it is.

Despite all the conversations to the contrary, it's a really hard thing to shift, so I think that has really hampered the way we’ve been able to develop things.

I mean the other area is really starting with the engagement of young people and how could we have built that in right at the beginning in a very different way.

I think it could have been a bit more creative in the way we maybe did things right from the off, as opposed to going for the safe option of “Oh we’ve got family information service and oh we can just bolt that on”.

I think there was very much a “Oh let's just go with it because it's going to be dead easy”. I think what we’ve got is something that I think is going to be around for quite a while now until we can change that or they can change that.

**Interviewer: Yes and it bought in the Open Objects stuff as well which I think that was a commissioning decision in a way wasn't it or a procurement decision.**

P1: Yes, because it was going to be cheaper than starting afresh.

**Interviewer: Yes, and because other councils were doing it.**

P1: Yes.

**Interviewer 2: Open Object?**

**Interviewer: Open Objects is basically the database.**

**Interviewer 2: Yes the data management system.**

P1: Yes and they do a lot of the family information services across the country.

What they very cleverly did was just went “Wayhey we can do your Local Offer for you” and they got all this work in, masses of work in.

**Interviewer 2: They are just managing the backend of the website?**

**Interviewer: Well it's managed by [anon.], I mean [anon.] has always been the manager but they basically they built it and set up the system. That was about nine months ago now that was getting set up.**

**I mean the [anon] site looks different to practically every other site, it's definitely one of the better ones in terms of design. Some are just very, very clumsy, but pretty much every local office site I've seen across the country and family information services site is an Open Objects database.**

P1: I don't think very many of them have done the work that we did though with young people and parents, because we did some very specific workshops about the feel and how it would work.

**Interviewer: It feels, most are branded with the council template and [anon]’s isn't. It feels very different like I say.**

**I guess my follow on question for that is what do you think the biggest challenge is going to be for the [anon] Local Offer going forward?**

**What's going to be the hardest thing to get right? It might be something you've already mentioned.**

P1: Well yes I mean it is just moving it on isn't it from it not being this tick boxy website, for it to be something that's much more intuitive and much more user led and very much owned by the community.

I think that's a massive - it would be brilliant if it can be done – I'm still saying we, but I do feel quite passionately about it, that's how it needs to go.

I think with input from the university we could really do something fantastic. It's like making sure and I worry we need that spark, we need that to keep going.

I know [anon.] is absolutely up for that if she has the time to be able to, sort of, pursue it, but it's making sure. It would be interesting to know who is going to be leading the group and who will keep that burning and that that bit doesn't get lost, because it is like you say as you go up slightly higher I don't think they’ve really grasped how that could work.

**Interviewer: It's interesting, because that means letting go of it in a way or letting go of control.**

**Interviewer 2: The council letting it go?**

P1: Oh it's hard, hard.

**Interviewer 2: They won't do that will they?**

P1: It has to be done and it is actually at the heart of everything around special education needs and disabilities. Can we walk with families, can we let go of power? That's what all the reform is about, how can we do that? I think that that's crucial.

I've got a slide that I use actually in quite a lot of the work I do and I challenge people with that question, “Can you let go of power?” Oh God, yes I mean it's the key and it has to be done.

**Interviewer: To end on a positive, what do you think the biggest opportunity is - I've got a feeling I know what that might be.**

P1: Yay, well it is, it is doing it and it's doing that. I think in [anon] out of anywhere you are really well placed because we've got all this to tap into all your expertise.

We've got a great community out there that I know that we can work with, it's just getting it going really. I think, you know, I really look forward to it happening. I'm positive about that it will.

**Interviewer: Great, I'm going to turn this off now, but that was fantastic, thank you very much.**

END AUDIO