This document has been jointly produced by Harrow Council and shop4support to capture some of the practical experiences and lessons learnt from the implementation of shop4support in Harrow. It is intended to assist local authorities and other organisations with an interest in the development of a retail e-Marketplace.

Background

Harrow Council and shop4support entered into a partnership in 2008 to develop a business case for, and design and implement an online marketplace for adult social care in response to the personalisation agenda.

The site went live in December 2009 (see **www.shop4support.com/harrow**). The site receives in excess of 1,500 visitors per month and enables individuals to:-

*   Search for local support organisations and free services;
*   Search for (and purchase) products and services;
*   Manage their personal budget and transactions online;
*   Access and participate in forums and other social capital building tools.

It allows providers to market their products and services, communicate with customers, manage the entire purchase-to-pay process and automate their back office processes.

The Harrow site now features in excess of 300 local and voluntary organisations alongside over 100 service providers that together offer in excess of 1,000 different products and services. Spend processed in Q1 of 2012 was in excess of £100,000 across self-funders, cash budgets, council-managed budgets and ISFs.

Achievements

During this period, Harrow moved from a one star CQC rating to three stars. Whilst there were many reasons for this, the partnership with shop4support has been a key aspect of the transformation that has occurred. Some of the efficiencies include:-

*   Stimulation of new services – such as culturally specific alternatives, which are often at a considerably lower cost than 'traditional' services e.g. day care alternatives that are £20-£35 per day cheaper;
*   Transparency – which has driven providers to refine their cost structures e.g. a third-sector organisation previously charging £19 p.h. reduced this to £15 p.h. without any deterioration in the service being provided;
*   Self funders – the 'opening up' of preferential rates agreed with the Council to individuals e.g. Harpers Gym rate saves self-funders £120 p.a. (20%);
*   Out-of-borough - identifying opportunities to replace expensive placements with local services;
*   Market management – for the first time, citizens can easily nominate or request new services, and management information is provided to the Council to identify gaps in provision;
*   Provider back office - an efficient and effective way to manage the back-office implications of personalisation e.g. online invoicing.

The success of the Harrow site has been recognised via:-

*   Several case studies in Central Government publications (e.g. 'A Vision for Social Care', DoH November 2010);
*   Winning a regional Health and Social Care Award in September 2010;
*   Being the only social care finalist (from 1,500 entries) in the National Finals of the same;
*   Featuring on BBC Breakfast News as part of their personal budgets coverage;
*   Assisting Harrow Council in winning 'The Most Improved Council' at the MJ Awards 2011 and 'Transformation in IT' at the MJ Awards 2012.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The process of ensuring wide-scale adoption of the e-Marketplace across Harrow has been a challenge. Some reasons for this and five points for other LAs to consider are as follows:-.

Area	Comments
Clarity of vision	• Both Harrow and shop4support have always been clear about what the objectives of their e-Marketplace were. However, the combination of following a user-led approach and the differing definitions of what an e-Marketplace is across the sector have sometimes created confusion and acted as a barrier. As with all new concepts, dissemination to a multiple audience has taken some time to perfect and it has very much been a 'learning model'. • Our test is not whether the website looks good, but whether we are making a difference in terms of choice and control for Harrow citizens.
Launch & comms	• Because of the 'trailblazer' nature of the partnership, a low-key phased approach was undertaken to rolling out the e-Marketplace. • Other LAs will benefit from a proven concept and this may allow them to set more aggressive targets and associated PR/communications plans. shop4support now have a greater appreciation of LAs as potential partner organisations.

Customer journey	• The e-Marketplace will only be successful if it is fully 'wired in' to the entire customer journey. The realignment of care management was incorporated in the development of the Harrow site, helping focus communication to service users and other stakeholders.
	
	• In Harrow, this has resulted in a 'development approach' (see 'What Next?' section) that addresses some of the constraints such as:-
	
	   • The criticality of support planning;
	   • Desire for flexible/ innovative budget deployment models (e.g. ISFs and external brokerage);
	   • Making Cash PBs more efficient and attractive (e.g. the Electronic Purse).

Whole system thinking	• The e-Marketplace may be a catalyst to change, but it isn't the change itself. In Harrow, the e-Marketplace has been used as a tool to help deliver their overall transformation project. Examples include embedding reablement and facilitating changes to the charging policy, providing an alternative method of purchase for equipment and facilitating transport PBs. • Work continues on the technical integration of the various systems across the Council (e.g. financial assessment and case management). However, whilst this is clearly needed in order to realise some of the anticipated efficiencies as the solution scales up, it has not presented a major barrier to date.
Market development	• Whilst provider feedback on the concept was positive, the existence of upfront costs created a barrier to entry. As a result of this, the commercial model was amended to a 'pay-as-you-go' model which has led to much greater engagement. • Providers have found it difficult to produce marketing materials about the services they provide and how to distil these into a 'menu of services'. This has been overcome by working closely with them. • It has taken time and effort, but there are now over 1,000 different products and services available in the Harrow e-Marketplace, the majority of which are 'non-traditional'. Our experience suggests that the LAs should recognise that it takes time but that the market will respond and develop once providers can visibly see the 'opportunity'.

What Next?

Together, we continue to innovate in response to the above challenges. We are now working with Harrow Council on three further innovative projects:-

1. Support Plan Costing – the e-Marketplace will soon become the default method for developing support plan costing. This will result in (i) more creative support packages; (ii) greater detail and accuracy in support plans and (iii) further embedding of the e-Marketplace in the customer journey.

2. PayPal Partnership – this will offer an alternative budget deployment option, so that individuals can transact in the e-Marketplace but the funds are held in a PayPal account (Electronic purse). This will help manage the process of transfer from block contract arrangements to personalisation.

3. 'My Harrow' Citizen Portal integration – the e-Marketplace is going to be linked to Harrow's award winning Citizen Portal, which currently aggregates a citizen's online activity such as library renewals, Council Tax payments, etc.

Other Resources

A series of case studies have been developed, which highlight practical examples of the Harrow e-Marketplace being utilised. Copies can be obtained from harrow@shop4support.com