The Invisible Workforce – 
Developing PAs in the Adult Social 
Care Workforce

Final Report 
by 
Peter Fletcher Associates Ltd

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The Invisible Workforce –
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Care Workforce

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The Invisible Workforce – Developing PAs in the Adult Social Care Workforce: Key Messages and Areas for Development

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1. Introduction and background

1.1 The brief

The regional adult social care (ASC) workforce strategy for the North East, Developing an Adult Social Care Strategy for the North East: A Vision and First Steps Forward (June 2009) included the following recommendations on Personal Assistants (PAs) in the workforce:

1. Explore the potential to set up a user-led organisation to provide support across the region for service users wishing to employ PAs (Recommendation 5)

2. Carry out a regional survey to ascertain how many PAs are currently employed in the region and their training and development needs (Recommendation 6)

3. Develop a regional framework for the support and quality assurance of PAs (Recommendation 24)

The purpose of this commission has been to address these recommendations.

As set out in our brief, the work was to be carried out in two Phases:

Phase 1: research to establish a base line of the current numbers of Personal Assistants, their job roles, the skills and qualifications they have and require and the support service users and carers need to employ Personal Assistants.

The work for Phase 1 was to include the following stages:

1. Desk based exercise to establish the current numbers, geographical location, demographics and employment status of PAs

2. Research to ascertain the client groups that PAs support

3. Consultation with sample of PAs to understand the tasks they perform, current skills training and qualifications and future needs in these areas, including what should be mandatory or optional, and literacy and numeric skills

4. Consultation with North-East Regional Advisory Group (NERAG) and Princess Royal Trust Carers Centre representatives to ascertain what training, qualifications and skills they think PAs should have, and what support they need to employ and support PAs, and what form of regulation (if any) should be in place for PAs

5. Developing a regional framework for the support and quality assurance of PAs, to align with the regional framework for non regulated services

6. Producing a research report on the 5 Phase 1 components
Phase 2: develop a business case focusing on ULO organisations and their ability to provide a support service for PAs and the service users and carers who support them

The work for Phase 2 was to include the following stages:

7. Using national good practice, the Phase 1 work, and information from another RIEP project on ULOs; explore the feasibility for one or more of these organisations, or a new ULO, to provide a support service regionally or sub regionally, for PAs and the people who use services across the 12 local authority areas in the NE region.

8. Using information from the feasibility study to produce and present business case options to provide a service on a regional or sub regional basis, with recommendations for “more advantageous option” and present to the Workforce Forum.

9. Develop a detailed business case and plan on the selected option and present to the Project Steering Group, and present final report to the Workforce Forum.

1.2 How the work has been carried out

The work has been carried out in three stages, with a written report at the end of each stage.

With agreement from our commissioners, the work programme was adjusted as the project evolved in order to take account of two main factors:

- Firstly, we found that most of the local authorities in the region were not able to provide individuated data - i.e. data on individual service user employers and PAs in their areas. This meant that we had to revise the work programme and adopt a sampling approach, based on case studies which vary in depth depending on the level of information available in different local authority areas.

- Secondly, the election of the Coalition government just before the start of this commission gave rise to a different financial and operational climate for adult social care authorities in the NE, as well as reducing or removing the drive of the previous government towards regional planning and co-ordination.

In the first interim report in September 2010 we reported on the consultation with service users and carers from the Skills for Care North East Regional Advisory Group (NERAG) and with Carers from the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, and Carers Together.

In our second report in February 2011 we reported on:

- The baseline data we had collected;
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- The views of employers, carers and PAs from surveys and interviews we carried out
- Findings from the fieldwork with local authorities and support agencies for employers
- What is going on elsewhere
- Proposals for a Quality Assurance approach, building on and adapting the Support with Confidence model
- Supporting PAs and employers – a review of the options
- Recommendations and priorities for further development

The First Interim Report (September 2010) and Second report (February 2011) can be accessed on the NEIEP website, alongside this final report: http://www.northeastiep.gov.uk/adult/WFForum.htm

For the final stage of the work we were tasked by the NE Adult Social Care Workforce Forum to take forward two areas of work:

- Consider the building of a visible registration, recruitment, support and quality model for PAs
- Develop a support model for PAs and additional support for employers

In carrying out this final phase of work we have:

- Undertaken further research on models of PA registration and recruitment
- Liaised with the Department of Health about their forthcoming Strategic framework for personal assistants in social care
- Worked with NEJobs and NEPO (North East Purchasing Organisation) about the potential of linking in with their initiatives with ADASS and NE Local authorities more widely
- Investigated other sub regional or local PA registration and recruitment initiatives
- Conducted a further round of discussions with support agencies and/or local authorities about models of support currently offered to employers and PAs
- Collected and analysed a range of material provided for employers by local authorities, ULO’s and other local and national organisations including training material
- Examined local authority and ULO and voluntary sector websites to understand how information and communications are presently conducted vis à vis carers, employers and PAs
1.3 Accountability

In undertaking the work our accountability has been to Ian Hall from NEIEP, and a small Steering Group from the Workforce Forum, which we have met with twice in the course of the work.

1.4 Structure of this report

In this report for the Workforce Forum we broadly follow the structure of the forthcoming DH *Strategic framework for personal assistants in social care*. We believe that this will help local authorities connect our findings and recommendations with the national policy and practice direction. In each of the sections we set out the likely national direction alongside our findings and proposals for the North East.

Section 2 sets out the national and local context.

Section 3 provides background information on PAs and employers at both national level, and local level by summarising the findings from our earlier reports.

Sections 4 focuses on creating a market to make the PA workforce more visible and to developing an approach or model that supports recruitment and retention, quality assurance and safeguarding and learning.

Section 5 addresses learning and development, and then links this with safeguarding and a PA register.

Section 6 focuses on supporting PAs and employers.

Section 7 looks at the role of ULOs and mutual social enterprises.

Section 8 summarises our proposals and recommendations.
2. Context

2.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we set out the current national policy context, including the forthcoming DH strategic framework for PAs. We then look at the local context in relation to the key findings from our phase 1 work, and conclude by comparing the national and local context.

2.2 National context

As we stated in our second report in February 2011, the external context has changed significantly since the work was commissioned.

Key influences have been:

- The election of a new government, and the new national political and policy context and framework
- The changing and challenging financial context within which adult social care (ASC) is currently operating

The government published its Vision for Adult Social Care in November 2010. The vision was set within a broader framework of government objectives to:

- Devolve power from central government to communities and individuals, linked to the concept of the Big Society
- Support the development of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and encourage greater involvement from these groups in the running of public services
- Have fairness through a new financial settlement between the state and the people on paying for care
- Make the delivery of ASC more pluralistic, including engaging communities and wider civic society
- Break down barriers between health and social care funding to incentivise preventative action

The Vision strengthens rather than dilutes the previous government’s drive towards personalisation, and promotes:

- A growth in the number of people (both people who use services and their carers) with personal budgets and direct payments - this vision challenges councils to provide personal budgets, preferably as direct payments, to everyone eligible within the next two years
• A more diverse workforce, including the growing use of personal assistants
• Using direct payments to carers and better community-based provision to improve access to respite care

The Vision sets out seven principles built around: prevention, personalisation, partnership, plurality, protection, productivity, and people. The introduction to the Vision refers to the development of a new PA strategy – see below.

Alongside the new Vision for Adult Social Care, DH and a range of other organisations, including ADASS, also published in November 2010 Think Local, Act Personal – Next Steps for Transforming Adult Social Care. This is a sector-wide partnership agreement to move forward with personalisation and community based support, and reinforces personalisation as the core direction of travel. It highlights the need for an adequate supply of good quality personal assistant support and the removal of unnecessary rules and practices, whilst still ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place.

The government is also planning a number of reforms for the NHS, set out in:

• Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS White Paper (July 2010). This sets out the shift to GP commissioning, and also the setting up of new local statutory Health and Well-being Boards to support collaboration between the NHS and local authorities.
• Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England (November 2010)

The NHS is also piloting personal Health budgets, and a number of local authorities in the region are involved in the pilots for this.

### 2.3 National Strategic Framework for Personal Assistants

When it published its Vision for Adult Social Care the government referred to the development of a new PA strategy. This is currently under development and likely to be published around June 2011. The forthcoming Developing a Strategic framework for personal assistants in social care will focus on workforce, and as in the discussion paper for the PAs summit in December 2010, is likely to focus on 5 main themes.

• Better understanding of PAs and employers needs
• Recruitment and retention
• Learning and development
• Supporting PAs and employers
• Enabling risk management
The Strategic Framework for PAs is likely to highlight:

1. **The changing context for social care**, including:
   - The important role that PAs already play in delivering personalised services in the social care workforce
   - The implications of self directed care becoming the norm, and the number of direct payments increasing
   - The implications of demographic changes in the population, with the likely more than doubling of the 85+ population by 2033, and 80% growth in the number of older people with a disability
   - The high level of need amongst the 10 million disabled people in Britain, and the large numbers who do not have choice and control in their daily lives (over 20%) and who experience difficulties in accessing good and services (over a third)

2. **The Market for PAs and direct employers**, including:
   - The importance of the market including and working for employers who are state funded and employers who use their own resources to purchase services from PAs, and the fact that both markets are expected to grow
   - Recognition that PAs can also be employed directly by agencies, service providers and organizations providing staff banks
   - Advice from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) that PAs should not be treated as self employed but as employees, meaning that direct payment employers are responsible for ensuring that tax and NI contributions are made to HMRC

3. **Demand and supply for PAs**, including:
   - A view from DH, Skills for Care, and commentators such as Demos, that the number of PA jobs will increase rapidly

4. **Future trends**, including:
   - Personalisation bringing a shift with fewer local authority block contracts and more decision making in the hand of personal budget holders; and an increased focus on the payment of care by outcomes rather than outputs
   - Changes in the PA market in terms of both volume and level and type of need
   - Increased pooled budgets, for example personal care and personal health budgets
2.4 Local context

In our second report in February 2011 we set out our overall findings from the fieldwork. The key findings were:

- **Feedback we received was that growing the number of people who have PAs is not a key driver for most local authorities in the NE.** All local authorities saw a continued drive towards self directed support plans. However, most felt that this would NOT in itself lead to a significant or rapid growth in the number of PA jobs, as many service users would continue to choose traditional services and would not want the responsibility of employing their own PA(s)

- **Local authorities do not see PAs as their direct responsibility – so PAs are invisible.** The main focus for local authorities is supporting employers. Most local authorities access PAs via employers, not directly, and there is no-one there for PAs in their own right

- **Training and the place of PAs in the ASC workforce.** Workforce leads and the Care Alliances see they have a responsibility to develop training opportunities for PAs, but find it is difficult to identify the PA workforce. Training take up by PAs seems to be very low. There are some good examples of training initiatives for PAs in the region, but overall PAs do not always know how to access training

- **Role of further and higher education.** The curriculum content in Colleges lacks specific training about user led care. Local authorities also reported on the lack of awareness of recently qualified social workers about personalisation and the role of PAs

- **Recruiting PAs is not seen as a major issue by most local authorities.** However, some recruitment issues were identified and some employers and carers see recruitment as a significant issue. There are some local recruitment initiatives in the region

- **There is considerable variation in the type and level of support services for employers.** This reflects how far personalisation has evolved in individual authorities. Most support agencies at the present time are NOT ULOs, and local authorities do not see this as changing in the foreseeable future

- **Linking PA and employer development with the wider implementation of personalisation.** Some employers feel isolated and their experiences do not always seem to be feeding back to local authorities or support agencies to improve practice in the future. If got right, the system of DPs and PAs is significantly improving the quality of life and outcomes for people who use services, but the picture is not yet consistent

- **Family carers generally welcome the scope PAs bring for relieving them of caring responsibilities.** However, they also report that it is not always easy to find the right type of PA, and that
the employment responsibilities for carers can be very burdensome, taking them away from their family caring role

- **There are variations in the amount of funding that employers end up with.** This can impact on their quality of life, and on practical issues as to whether employers can pay PAs for things like holiday and sickness cover, and training

- **The future of domiciliary care agencies.** Feedback indicated that most providers do not yet see personalisation as a business opportunity. Some local authorities are looking to enter into different more flexible framework forms of contract which support a more personalised approach

- **Local authorities are looking at the wider market impact on the growth of PAs,** for example on the cost and sustainability of in-house services

- **Employing relatives or close friends** is seen as a major issue by some local authorities, whilst others thought it was a natural consequence of the SDS and DP process

- **There is concern by some authorities that use of PAs might create more safeguarding issues,** but no authorities produced evidence of this, and most felt that if one gets the SDS and risk assessment right then that should identify any safeguarding concerns

- **Most authorities wish to explore further the idea of a light touch regional Quality Framework**

- **There would be benefits for local authorities to share resources,** good practice, e-learning and training material across the region for both employers and PAs

- **There is no appetite from local authorities for a regional ULO support model for employers**

### 2.5 Comparing the national and local context

Overall, the national policy direction strengthens the previous government’s drive in relation to personalisation, and sets higher targets for providing personal budgets, preferably with direct payments, for everyone who is eligible.

National policy and guidance from DH sees a key outcome of the growth in self-directed care will be a rapid growth in the number of PA jobs. This view is matched by Skills for Care, and other commentators such as Demos, whose work with the Centre for Disability Research (Bartlett 2009) concluded that 44% of respondents would spend their budget on a personal assistant. Evidence from the IBSEN study suggested that in pilot areas 59% of people receiving personal budgets would spend some or all of their budget on PAs.
The national policy direction also identifies and highlights the need for support for PAs as well as support for service users who are employers.

It also promotes the importance and value of ULOs in providing support services.

These conclusions were not matched by our findings from most of the local authorities in the NE, as set out in our February 2011 report.

Although the policy direction is the same at local and national levels most local authorities in the NE do NOT see:

- A rapid growth in the PA workforce
- Support for PAs as their direct responsibility, but rather see any communication with PAs as being through employers
- ULOs as the vehicle of choice to provide support services for PAs or employers
3. Better understanding PAs and employers needs

3.1 Introduction

The forthcoming national Strategic Framework for PAs in social care is likely to highlight the importance of gaining a better understanding of PAs and employers needs. In this section of the report we first of all set out key messages from the DH report. We then go on to summarise what we found in our research on PA and employer needs, as set out in our phase 1 report.

3.2 National agenda

The forthcoming national Strategic Framework for PAs in Social Care is likely to identify a number of barriers to better understanding the role PAs have for enabling service users have choice and control in their daily lives.

The barriers include:

- Lack of awareness and information about the PA role
- Lack of understanding of the uniqueness of the PA role
- The relationship building factors between PAs and micro employers.

National policy is likely to highlight the importance of:

- Raising awareness of the PA role, and its focus on improving the quality of life for service users
- Highlighting the multiplicity of tasks that the PA role includes
- Understanding the keys to success in building relationships between PAs and employers
- Further research to: track the growth in PAs in the workforce; understand better the diversity of both the PA workforce and the range of service user employers

3.3 What we learned from our research about PA and employer needs

The research we undertook to understand PA, employer and carer needs (reported fully in our February 2011 report) is in line with the key messages from DH about the lack of awareness and understanding of the multi faceted nature of the PA role, and the lack of consistent information about the role.
3.3.1 Key findings from the research on employer's needs

The key messages from employers are:

**Sources of PAs:**
- Identification and recruitment of PAs was said to be important but there were issues around the difficulty of PA matching, in terms of suitability, and finding holiday and sickness cover (e.g. general dissatisfaction with using care agency staff for cover)
- The majority of people source PAs through family and friends, and the support agency. This identifies the importance of the networks people have and the barriers to sourcing PAs when these routes aren’t available

**Safeguarding:**
- The majority of employers want access to CRB and identity checks for their PAs. Others are confident in recommendations about PAs from friends or family

**Training:**
- Having formal qualifications and means of checking them is sometimes important. However, this depends on the tasks expected of a PA
- Often ‘getting on’ with someone, and/or having similar interests or willingness to engage in social activities, are more important than having particular skills or qualifications
- Views on training were varied, but overall employers said that training is a good thing
- Many said that training is not essential (partly because many PAs are family members or friends), depending on the tasks required
- Particularly where a care task is required, employers said that PAs should have basic care knowledge and experience
- Social aspects of support, such as listening and talking, and taking people out places, came out as a priority

**Attitudes about being an employer:**
- There was some confusion over the legal aspects of what becoming an employer entails. People generally don’t understand their responsibility
- Many do not see themselves as an employer, especially those who employ family members and friends
What works and what doesn’t:

- Employers generally said that they feel more in control and have more flexibility over the type of service and care being provided at a time that suits their needs.
- However, people also said that what does not work well is recognising PA/employer boundaries, too much bureaucracy, a lack of employment advice and support with legal problems, and not enough face-to-face support from support agencies.

3.3.2 Key findings from the research on PA’s needs

The key messages from PAs are:

Recruitment:

- The majority of PAs previously knew their employers as family members or friends. Most of those who did not went through a formal recruitment process and had a CRB check.
- PAs said they would like to use an organisation or agency that matches suitable employers and carries out CRB checks.

Role:

- PAs reported conducting a wide range of tasks with an equal emphasis on care and leisure support, and domestic tasks as personal care tasks (e.g. taking people places).

Contract arrangements:

- 78% of PAs had a contract (this varied from 70% in one authority to 100% in another). This means that 22% of PAs had no contract, and for 27% of PAs there were no arrangements in place if they were ill or went on holiday.

Training:

- The majority of survey respondents would like to develop their skills although training has not been a requirement for many PAs.
- Communication, patience, listening and counselling skills are seen as more important to PAs than more conventional training like moving and handling.

What works well and what doesn’t:

- Many PAs said that they get a lot of job satisfaction from helping people live independently.
The working arrangements are often flexible and allow for a more personal relationship to develop with their employer.

There were different opinions regarding pay but many said that they are not paid enough for the amount of responsibility they have.

Many said that they have no one to go to for support or to make a complaint. There is a clear lack of support network for PAs.

Some said that the lack of holiday and sickness cover, and training are main concerns.

3.3.4 Conclusions
As we stated in our February 2011 report “the overwhelming conclusion from the consultation with employers, carers and PAs is that, unlike traditional care arrangements having a PA is about buying a relationship not just a service. This makes it, if it works well, qualitatively different from a traditional care role. The need identified for training in listening and counselling skills reinforces the significance of the relationship aspects of the PA role. The value in the social and leisure role provided by PAs alongside the care role is also valued.

There are a range of issues raised by both PAs and employers about how the system could work better for them.

For employers this is around recruiting a suitable PA(s) that matches their needs and aspirations, and the responsibilities of employing a PA both in terms of employment tasks and in terms of the consequences if the relationship between employer and PAs break down.

For PAs there is a wish to be a visible part of the workforce with someone or an organisation there for them”.

3.4 Comparing the local and national picture

The development agenda for both PAs and employers appear to be broadly similar at both local and national levels, with the overwhelming message being the lack of awareness and understanding of the PA role, and the importance of making it a more visible part of the adult social care workforce.

There is growing understanding at both national and local levels of the wide range of tasks that can make up the PA role. However, our findings locally in the NE place more emphasis on buying a relationship rather than just a service.

There also appears to be a higher proportion of PAs in the NE than nationally who knew their employer before they were employed and who have formal contractual arrangements.
3.5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1
The underpinning recommendation to this report is the need for leadership and concerted action at both regional and local levels to make PAs a visible part of the adult social care workforce.
4. Creating a market: A model and options for growing the number of PAs in the workforce

4.1 Introduction

The forthcoming DH *Personal Assistants’ Strategic Framework* aims to address workforce barriers faced by PAs and employers and actively deals with recruitment challenges. In this section we consider barriers, challenges and approaches to improving workforce retention in the northeast. We also discuss and describe a model and various options available to local authorities in the northeast for taking such a model forward.

4.2 Barriers and challenges for PAs in the northeast

4.2.1 Growth and supply

We noted in February (Phase One report) that from the feedback we had received, growing the number of PAs is not a key driver for most local authorities in the northeast. Having considered the subject again we have not changed our view, although some local authorities are taking steps to address gaps in PA supply and to attract a younger workforce. We are also mindful of the knock on effects of restricted funds for social care budgets on the roll out and take up of Personal Budgets. Modest growth therefore seems highly likely in most authorities, unless DASS’s revise their view on the basis of the forthcoming DH *Personal Assistants Strategic Framework*.

In common with the DH *Personal Assistants’ Strategic Framework* findings our research underlines issues about insufficient supply of PAs, particularly the lack of younger PAs of both genders and insufficient PAs of all ages and genders from more diverse backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. However, the numbers of additional PAs actually required are unclear. There are no reliable estimates.

In our February report we estimated that the number of PAs across the 12 local authorities in the North East to be at least 5,000. This number will, in the main, exclude self-funders who pay for care from private sources. The target in the DH Vision for Adult Social Care of everyone with an on-going need for adult social care to have a personal budget by April 2013 will potentially open up a much bigger PA market. We concluded in our February report:

*Based on the information we have from the local authorities that were able to provide numbers of PAs or were able to estimate them we suggest that if the number of PAs doubled in the next 5 years this would be an additional 5000 PAs in the adult social care workforce.*
The key question for ASC authorities in the North-East is: whether they can afford to continue the present gradual approach with each of the 12 local authorities doing its own thing, or whether NOW is the right time to invest together and to proactively plan for a world where PAs represent a much larger proportion of the ASC workforce than at present.

Some local areas such as Middlesbrough and Redcar, through the Citizens Support Exchange scheme, have made particular efforts to target potential PAs and to grow the workforce. Targeted work includes seeking to recruit younger, male and BME recruits. Efforts have also been made to interest college students on social care and other courses in becoming PAs. Other local areas have made fewer efforts to target gaps in the PA workforce or to liaise with local colleges as part of a recruitment drive. In part this seems to be related to an unwillingness to influence the market and/or influence employers’ choices over which they want to employ. Yet, the Middlesbrough efforts have paid off since the area’s PA age profile is younger compared to other areas and more diverse. It has therefore addressed known gaps in supply. A key barrier to addressing gaps in supply, particularly known gaps, is the lack of commitment by local areas to establishing a clear plan for encouraging and recruiting PAs, as opposed to just recruiting to fill vacancies on a one-off reactive basis.

Our discussions with personalisation leads and workforce development leads indicate that there are close working relationships in most local areas. There are particular examples of training initiatives aimed at PAs and some training investment but the extent to which workforce development plans and economic regeneration plans are influenced by the demands of personalisation and the needs of potential employers, depends on the steer given by social care leaders. So far such a steer is lacking in most areas, perhaps because of a general belief that the market will only grow at a relatively slow pace. Lack of a steer at a strategic senior social care level to growing the PA market and ensuring it is actively embedded into regeneration and economic plans appears to be a key barrier to stimulating growth.

4.2.2 Understanding PA’s needs for information, support and training

The forthcoming Personal Assistants’ Strategic Framework report from DH and our own research in the northeast highlights the fact that PA’s needs and wishes are largely ignored. Failing to address PA needs can lead to them leaving the PA workforce. The needs that are mentioned in the DH report were echoed in our February report although our research went further in terms of asking about detailed improvements, kinds of training required by PAs and solutions.
Needs included:

**Training**
- Specific training in handling and lifting*
- Talking and mentoring to help build confidence of person being supported
- Understanding what PA role involves
- Coaching skills
- Learning how to resolve problems

**Support**
- Employment issues and problems
- Finding other work/employers
- Advice and information on other problems
- Being able to meet and network with other PAs

**Career development**
- Understanding how to progress – find out about career development opportunities

*The PA’s (including family members) who said they needed training in lifting and handling were talking about basic training in some cases but a proportion of non family members were referring to specialist and advanced training to assist people who were severely disabled including training to use equipment.

No northeast local authorities, support agencies or ULO’s have support services specifically aimed at PAs, since their role is to support employers, and even the recruitment role for PAs that they play is aimed to support the employer not the PA. As a result PAs needs for support, information and advice, peer networks and training are either poorly met or not met at all under existing arrangements. The Citizens Support Exchange CSE pilot scheme in Middlesbrough and Redcar is an exception since it does provide training and support for PAs and there are some good lessons to be learned from it, see section 5.

Career development and progression is also poorly understood – where it is mentioned at all it tends to be mentioned in relation to existing social care career development pathways rather than new career development pathways that would encompass PAs.

### 4.2.3 An evolving picture

In our February report we were cautious about some of our findings not least because the picture is still evolving and we were conscious that our research reflects differences of view and sometimes quite contested opinions.

It is worth remembering that most PAs are actually members of the family and we pointed out that this makes a difference in terms of speculating about growth and training and markets. There is no doubt that the situation will change and more PAs will be recruited as paid workers rather than as family carers who happen to be paid. It is this future that we are looking to but we still have to be cautious because it is quite a leap from the present. Not least
this is because of those PAs we talked to and surveyed who were not members of the family of micro employers, the majority knew their employers before they worked for them or they heard of likely PAs through networks of trusted people. Only 30% in our survey had not known employers beforehand. The fact that this happened exposed some of the gaps in the workforce, a good example being younger people seeking younger PAs. Younger micro employers will continue to emerge as, for example, more young adults with Learning Difficulties make the transition from school to college and training. The problem then is likely to grow. Both employers and potential younger PAs need to be targeted with information and potential solutions that will be meaningful and useful for them.

There has been some poaching of the former home care or domiciliary care workforce and we have noted this, as did the forthcoming DH report. However, it has not been extensive in the northeast. It is important to reiterate the fact that employers are often looking for people with additional skills or even very different one’s yet the dominant discourse seems to be associated with training approaches linked to social care.

At the same time there is a strong national and local rhetoric that the market will provide – yet it doesn’t, or at least not always. So the discourse is confused and needs to be clearer. We suggest that the focus for PAs should be on a mixed set of training competencies and skills rather than a set of skills primarily linked to social care.

4.3 Redressing invisibility – challenges and solutions

4.3.1 Challenges

Our report in February highlighted that PAs are a hidden and invisible workforce. Part of the solution then lies in making PAs visible and in making the pathways for them to information and advice and support transparent, helpful and affordable.

Some micro employers at the moment want to have a better matching service than they have now and the demand is likely to grow. They want:

- An employment agency approach that brings together the personal profile characteristics of the social network site and the prior job skills and experiences and qualifications that we are more used to seeing in job specifications
- Access to a bigger pool of potential PAs – not the usual or traditional pool of people and this requires some promotion and recruitment work as well to make it happen

As we said those local authorities that have invested time and resources targeting younger populations have had success (notably local authorities have benefited via the CSE pilot in Middlesbrough and Redcar). In other areas
it was clear that more could be done to provide better information to Job Centre Plus and local employment agencies on the role of a PA, what is entailed and the positive rewards. Northumberland is also seeking to address the needs of a diverse population in rural areas and this will take time. Building up a PA register, to match sparse and scattered communities in rural areas is challenging.

At the same time both paid PAs who are not family members and those who are family carers told us that they would be interested in having access to better information about potential jobs, potential training and they would really value opportunities to meet other PAs and form networks.

4.3.2 Exploring challenges and Solutions

In February we outlined the Support with Confidence Scheme, which runs successfully in East Sussex and comes close to redressing all the issues and challenges that we have reported on. We recommended further development work to test out the potential for a Support with Confidence model, adapted for the northeast. We envisaged that the work would take account of the learning from current local/sub regional initiatives, such as CSE (Citizen Support Exchange).

In fact our work encompassed much more than this and led to us having discussions with amongst others Tees Valley Alliance, North East Jobs and NEPO, Citizens Support Exchange and Northumberland County Council (see Appendix 1 for our case studies), but through it all we had to continuously reflect and focus on the essential nature of the task in hand.

4.3.3 Principles and ingredients

We consequently identified the key principles and ingredients that needed to be in a Support with Confidence model or its alternative for the Northeast.

Fig. 4-1: Principles

On the basis of the evidence we have produced, the principles underpinning the development of any model must include:

- Methods to make PAs visible
- Opportunities to build a market place for the growth of the PA workforce
- Offer different routes in – local and regional or sub regional
- Link the development and thinking about PAs to wider plans for jobs and economic development in the North East
- Provide a basis for a quality framework
- Set out the basis for learning and development
• Build on what exists
• Be pragmatic and cost effective
• Build a model that would support PAs as well as improve their recruitment and retention

Fig. 4-2: Key ingredients
A model suitable for the northeast needs to provide a place for:
• Consistent marketing information about the PA role to be stored, easily updated and retrieved by as many people as possible
• PAs to be able to advertise themselves – create a talent pool
• Employers to be able to advertise jobs
• PAs and employers to be able to match skills and job profiles to employers wishes and needs
• Be the place where PAs agree to sign up to a voluntary code of conduct (see Appendix 2 for example of Support with Confidence Code of Conduct – also in our February 2011 report as Appendix 6)
• Provide a mechanism to do cost effective CRB checks
• Be the main conduit for providing information on training including links to e-learning and blended learning nationally, regionally and locally
• Have links to the wider service market for users, which is beginning to grow.

4.3.4 Keeping it simple
A central attraction of the East Sussex Support with Confidence approach is its simplicity. It relies on PAs registering and advertising themselves and it encourages all PAs who want to register to sign up to a voluntary code of practice and a basic e-learning induction course. A basic quality assurance scheme in other words but it goes further than this.

PAs have so far been keen to register because it gives them access to more work, training and opportunities to meet colleagues. It also gives them credibility because the scheme checks out PAs details including their CRB status. There are parallels here with the Citizens Support Exchange pilot in Middlesbrough and Redcar. The pilot has led to an increase in the number of PAs and has considerably enriched the diversity of the workforce. PAs participating in the CSE training courses have been able to take advantage of a matching service. They also report favourably on the benefits to them from
being able to access the information they need easily and from developing informal networks to support each other (see Appendix 1 for a case study of CSE).

We wanted to devise a model that would retain the simplicity while also ensuring good connectivity between all the likely stakeholders and parties who wanted to communicate with each other. Stakeholders such as local authorities, ULO’s, carers, employers, trainers, Job centres and PAs.

We also wanted to make sure that costs were kept low. The biggest source of costs as far as we can see revolves around checking and verification so we looked at options that are purely voluntary and which rely on PAs uploading information themselves about their skills and experience including qualifications and references and so on. We are not underestimating the fact that people might need help to do this – but help is often available for example via the local authority, the Job Centre, local digital inclusion project or library, or the local support agency. Local authorities and ULO’s would similarly upload job adverts and other information that they want to share or use to attract potential PAs. Many already do this locally.

4.3.5 Local and regional or sub regional

A significant challenge was devising something that would give local authorities a natural inclination and reason for coming together to jointly commit to something at a North East level and produce savings by doing so. At the same time the solution had to have a local fit, be capable of encouraging all local organisations and local stakeholders including PAs and employers to want to use it. A web-based system was the obvious choice but should it be a new one – an existing adapted one, regional or sub-regional or entirely local?

We believe the solution lies in a simple approach which relies on the PA providing and uploading the personal profile (this is social network style information about themselves) together with more standard employment and experience history, together with references and any verification information including CRB certificates if obtained, to a regional and or local website that stores the data and subsequently makes it available to certified users. Local authorities, support agencies and ULO’s should be able to access the site and upload information as well, particularly about employers looking for PAs and local arrangements for training, CRB assistance and so on.

4.4 Options for developing a useable model

There are several options. They include:

1) Tees Valley Alliance (TVA) which brokers funds from Skills for care and the five local authorities within Tees Valley and raises the profile of
social care. TVA currently has plans to develop a brokerage service and is working on a tool that is based on an approach by Slivers-of-Time Ltd, a social enterprise that focuses on developing consumer tools for creating efficiencies and choices for booking time slots. At present the project has a working title of Tees Valley Enabling Service.

The aim is to create in the Tees Valley, a self sustaining ‘enabling’ service for the selection and training of Personal Assistants and enablers, who can then be reliably booked through a secure on line system to facilitate service users and carers obtaining some key personal support needed to better continue living independently in the community. It is at a fairly early stage and does not as far as we know plan to roll out beyond the Tees Valley although if and when it is operational it certainly could.

2) The North East Jobs Portal which is up and running and is already being paid for and used by local authorities and Job Centres to advertise a wide range of vacancies together (although not for PAs as a rule). There is also an opportunity to make links between the NE Jobs Portal and the North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO), which, is in the early stages of developing an online market place of providers and therefore at a good point in terms of developing synergies. We initiated a discussion between key actors from both organisations and established that there is an opportunity to apply our research proposals in such a way that they would usefully inform the design and functionality of the NEPO web based plans.

3) Using local authority and ULO or support organisations websites and knitting together a platform to enable people locally to navigate and use these which would entail getting the agreement of local authorities and agencies to some sort of framework agreement and would depend on local resources and funds. It is doubtful if this option is workable. Having examined the functionality of most local authority websites we decided that they were not suitable in most cases to provide accessible easy entrances for PAs and others. For a web-based system to work and produce savings it had to be at least sub regional.

4.5 Two options

We are essentially then left with two options.

4.5.1 Tees Valley Care Alliance (TVA)

A developing area for TVA is the design and implementation of a web based brokerage system for Personal Assistants and Employers. The scheme is still at the conceptual and design stage and is aimed primarily at Tees Valley although there may be potential to roll it out if successful to the rest of the
northeast. The costs for developing such a scheme compare pretty well with those set out in the second option. Taking the TVA option further would involve purchasing software from ‘slivers of time’, which amongst other things has focused on a volunteering exchange database.

For this to work, TVA would combine with CSE to produce a workable practical brokerage and data system. Joint work is feasible and practical for both parties.

4.5.2 North East Jobs Portal and NEPO

The North East Jobs Portal is already used by northeast local authorities and is well known to job hunters. People looking for a job can look at the vacancies available through the site, which are uploaded from all local authorities and other local sources. Job hunters can also provide information about them and provide their CVs and other details. They do this at the moment through using the talent pool pages of the site.

There is considerable capacity to use the existing ‘talent pool’ functions within the North East Jobs Portal website and set up a route for PAs to upload their information and details. The talent pool also prompts people to look at jobs they can do with their skills and experience – the PA role could be promoted here.

There is also scope with relatively modest investment to have a low cost verification method. This involves checking someone’s claim to have a CRB certificate against a database that the North East Jobs Portal has access to of existing CRB certificates or to do a new CRB check via its e-bulk arrangements. Also there is scope with fairly modest investment to match the attributes and skills being sought by micro employers against the Personal Assistant details; and promote and link the site to other local sites such as ULOS, Job Centres, local authorities and voluntary organisations. This site could also be linked to the virtual social care market place, which NEPO has been commissioned by ADASS northeast to scope and develop. The two key elements of the NEPO development are:

- Developing a pre-paid card that would hold the funds for individual service users with a personal budget, enabling the service user to purchase the services they want using the card, and saving administrative costs for local authorities
- Developing an online market place of service providers from which service users can purchase the services they want

Our discussions with NEPO and the North East Jobs Portal staff indicate that the PA dimensions can easily be linked in and the virtual market place could be accessed via the Northeast Jobs Portal or other routes. This means that there is potential to address all the challenges we have outlined and provide all the features required at a relatively low cost in a customer friendly way.
4.6 Mapping the proposed system – how the model works

How this would work is perhaps best seen in the system map produced for us by Andrew D’eath from North East Jobs Portal. The customer journeys maps also illustrate how the system would be developed for a range of customers including PAs, micro employers, families, local authorities, job centres and ULOs.

The first chart below shows a model and visual aid of how a system would work and the second shows 3 typical types of customer journeys.
Fig. 4-3: How the system would work

NorthEastJobs.Org

Would you like other employers to see your details? Would you like to find out about other job opportunities? etc.

Personal Assistance Pool

Local, regional or sub-regional Association / Agency Support/Function / Registered Body

NEJ Portal: Personal Assistants

Andrewe DeAlth
NERCO 1/4/11 1dd

PAList.org

Local Authority Website

Personal Budget Holders Website Service Marketplace

List of Suppliers / Services
Other Support

Employer Service

Property of North-East Regional Employers Organisation 2011
Fig. 4-4: Customer journeys

Customer Journeys: Personal Assistant

Andrew De’Ath 1/3/11 1da

Jean Smith Prospective PA

Jean applies to PA pool through NorthEastJobs. The application helps her provide simple structured information

Jean agrees for her information to be published publicly on PAlist.org

Jean receives an enquiry online from Sally, a personal budget holder

Jean uses NEJ for a new CRB check

Sally employs Jean as a PA

Sally Brown Personal Budget Holder

Sally visits PAlist.org to find a Personal Assistant

Sally searches for a PA near her with particular skills, interests and availability

Sally finds Jean and uses PAlist to contact her

Sally is happy that Jean has the right qualities, including a CRB certificate

Yusuf Etani Personal Budget Holder

Yusuf agrees with Alan, his support worker, that he should have a Personal Assistant

Alan works for an agency registered on NorthEastJobs. He can access the talent pool direct to find a PA

Alan works with Yusuf to identify his needs, finds a PA on NEJ and uses NEJ to communicate with them

Alan’s agency helps the PA through the CRB process online

Yusuf employs a PA
Appendix 1 provides more details of Tees Valley Alliance, the North East Jobs Portal and work being undertaken by NEPO. The appendix also provides details of the Citizen Support Exchange scheme and work going on in Northumberland to develop a PA register and local links.

### 4.7 Potential for savings

In the process of modelling an approach that would facilitate a Support with Confidence type scheme to function in the North East we considered the likelihood that the scheme would produce cost savings for the local authority members concerned. We decided that there could be cost savings for those authorities that currently use other methods to advertise for PAs including local or national newspaper adverts and adverts in other media that incur costs. There could also be cost saving for those ULOs and support agencies that do similar advertising. Finally there could be savings in terms of staff time spent on chasing likely contacts that might be interested in providing PA support.

The savings would come from local authorities and other agencies including ULO’s and families using the NE Jobs Portal and talent pool facility to search for PA’s and from uploading the search criteria customers are seeking from PAs to the site. It struck us that although local authorities regularly use the North East Jobs Portal to advertise vacancies it is not routinely used by them to advertise all vacancies. It is worth noting that the placement of one ad with the NE Jobs Portal would also reach the Job Centres and be picked up by other online search engines used by job seekers. There are therefore additional options to maximise advertising coverage at reduced costs.

Finally, the impetus achieved through developing the model and portal would attract a wider range of applicant to the PA role who might be hard to attract through the present recruitment methods.

### 4.8 Conclusions

The model we propose comes closest to the ideal that we set out at the end of Phase One, which was to build a north east version of the Support with Confidence scheme. Ideally we wanted a scheme with the same functionality and the additional option of providing support for PAs in the simplest and least costly way. Both the TVA, and North East Jobs and NEPO options have much to recommend them.

Through entry via a social support style network a web-based system could provide PAs with additional support. This is relatively easily provided by giving PAs entry into a private zone where they can talk about issues that affect them and make contact with each other. Both options can do this. At the moment no local areas provides any actual or virtual space or opportunities for PAs to obtain support and no-one offers them any help to set up a self help
network. What we are proposing is therefore a new low cost method for doing these things.

The TVA/CSE and the North East Jobs/NEPO options correspond with the model ideal because they offer local based communication up and down and across the system. This means that local authorities, support agencies, ULO’s or Job centres to name a few potential customers could link for example, local information and guidelines to this regional site but there would be cost savings for each authority because it would not have to load the same data twice onto a site. For the North East Jobs website local support agencies and other users would become members and stakeholders in the development and use of the PA portal. Job Centre Plus data and job vacancies would in any case come to the site. Employers, support agencies and ULO’s could also upload information to the site including job vacancies and or put links to the regional site to signpost local people to places that could help them with more information.

It is possible to easily promote the role of PAs to local colleges and schools via links from the site and the site can easily carry e learning and training links for PAs. In this way we would address the need to make PAs visible and it would facilitate PAs registering their details and beginning the pathway to career development if they wish. There is scope within this approach for local initiatives such as the Northumberland PA register to link their information to the site as well.

The choice then is either a regional or sub regional ‘hub’ with local spokes.

In terms of choosing between the two regional options much depends on the desire of local authorities to join together. We can see that there are potential cost savings from joining together regionally and the North East Jobs Portal/NEPO model would be the quickest off the starting blocks since so much work has already been done. It is a also a much simpler project than the TVA/CSE one since the PA’s portal can be developed on its own with the wider social care market website from NEPO coming on at a later stage. For the TVA/CSE model the PA side is part of the wider market place development from the start. It also has the benefit of linking with other talent pools on the North East Jobs website and therefore opening up a wider work market place and thereby expanding the scope of the PA market. The investment choices appear to be broadly similar between the two options.

In terms of development capacity and costs:

- North East Jobs has confirmed that it can take on the development and project management and provide the capacity to work with a software developer to develop the website and build in the PA elements to the existing portal. Formal estimates have not yet been sought, but the development cost is likely to be around £20k if things are kept as simple as possible and no checks are required in terms of PA information because it is self regulated. In terms of transaction costs if data is entered directly, or via support agencies and others at...
a local level then the transaction costs of the website are very low. North East Jobs compare a print media recruitment advert of £600-£1500 with a processing cost for the talent pool of £40 (this is a labour cost – i.e. staff time to input - and not a new financial cost) and printing cost if no online application form of £4. The overall running costs could be incorporated into the general running costs by its local authority members of the North East Jobs portal

- The TVA project is more ambitious, especially in the short-term. Procuring software, building a subscription model and establishing the enterprise are elements that took North East Jobs at least 18 months to do. TVA is aiming for half this time without a software platform yet developed. The costs of electronic CRB checking also appear to be missing. TVA estimates its software platform to cost around £30,000 to set up, though no formal estimates have yet been done, and this does not include running costs.

4.9 Reflections on the need for greater co-ordination

We noted in the course of our work on this commission that much could be gained by greater communication between projects and initiatives. Indeed some of our work has focused on making the connections and finding synergies.

There is scope for much more co-ordination and shared learning than there has been so far and at a time of deep economic recession and cuts in public spending the case for co-ordination and sharing has never been greater. We can see potential for smarter learning and working across “silos” between local authorities, DH and NERIP and strongly advocate that this is part of future working to progress the future of important projects and investments.

4.10 Recommendations

Our research confirms the need to create a mechanism that will enable PAs to become visible and grow and develop as part of a modern workforce.

**Recommendation 2**

We recommend that individual local authorities and ADASS NE commit to a NE regional approach to build a workable electronic system using the model and all the ingredients we have supplied. The ingredients include a regional code of conduct (building from the Support with Confidence example), modern inclusive learning and training, good workforce development and consistent approaches to information supplied to PAs and employers.

**Recommendation 3**

We recommend that local authorities focus on the NE Jobs Portal as the preferred option to develop a workable system. It has the capacity to
move quickly. It also already goes beyond the social care market and links into wider workforce markets and trends. It also already links to all 12 local authorities.
5. Learning and Development, and Safeguarding

5.1 Introduction and context

As we noted at the start of this report, the regional adult social care (ASC) workforce strategy for the North East, *Developing an Adult Social Care Strategy for the North East: A Vision and First Steps Forward* (June 2009) included a recommendation to develop a regional framework for the support and quality assurance of PAs (*Recommendation 24*).

Section 4 of this report also noted indications from the forthcoming *DH Personal Assistants Strategic Framework* particularly the importance of learning and development opportunities for growing and retaining the PA workforce. Having local learning and development strategies that are linked to opportunities for PAs to develop and progress in their careers would also make a difference.

However, there are a number of barriers and the discourse is confusing. One of the most challenging areas to address is the fact that a variety of potential colleges and other learning providers are competing for potential customers but few are suitable, taking into account the roles that PAs do and their learning requirements. Neither do they link with any concept of PA’s pathways for development and career progression in future unless this is confined only to social care.

5.2 Training - Social care and or something else?

The forthcoming *DH Personal Assistants Strategic Framework* report echoes some of our research in that PAs and their employers are divided between those that want traditional social care skills plus more modern person centred approaches and those who do not want social care skills at all. This does not seem to be in keeping with employer and PA needs. In addition employers have particular ways of working that they want to explore and develop with their PAs and these are highly individual. On the job training and discussion are therefore very important. A key barrier then is the lack of attention paid to the shift necessary in traditional social care training as a result of personalisation and the need for dialogue between current micro employers and PAs and people devising official training courses including courses run by local colleges.

In the northeast, training courses and the direction of training is still generally oriented towards social care with some exceptions, such as the courses designed by CSE in Middlesbrough and Redcar. Incentives for PAs to participate in existing courses are virtually nil because PAs who are working as PAs rarely get paid to attend and/or they cannot easily get cover while they
are doing a training course. The situation is a bit different in some local areas where training is aimed at potential PAs e.g. the CSE scheme which offers free training to potential PAs in Middlesbrough and Redcar.

There are a number of opinions on the natural order of things including views on training gaps or needs. For example, it could be said that when employer and PA relationships break down that it is generally linked to a clash of personalities but we have heard from PAs that they would like to have training on how to deal with difficulties and confrontation. In other words some PAs are prepared to learn the people skills to overcome problems. We have also heard from some PAs about employers whose expectations are unreasonable and these PAs wanted to know how to deal with the situation. Ideally they wanted other PAs to talk to. Neither of these examples suggests that they are merely to do with a clash of personalities although we are sure that there are bound to be times when this happens. The fall out for PAs and employers is in any case something they want to avoid.

Employers and family carers said how difficult it could be to find help at short notice when things go wrong and they talked about their strategies for keeping things going well. Only the CSE course seems to address these issues. A pilot training course developed by the Tyne and Wear Care Alliance also touched on employment and other issues but the organisers acknowledged that some aspects were pitched at too advanced a level. The CSE courses have a longer developmental time frame and seem to be pitched more closely to participant needs. There is potential for all local areas, colleges and training providers to learn from it.

5.2.1 Access to training and development and where the new workforce will come from

Our research shows very clearly that most employers prefer on the job training. PAs acknowledge this but may also want to have access to other official training courses and opportunities to develop their skills and gain qualifications. The forthcoming DH report refers particularly to the need for a real understanding of career progression for PAs in order to improve retention. We agree. We also agree with the DH report that with better access to career development and training there are opportunities to attract people who had not thought of becoming a PA before. In the north east there are opportunities to attract people about to be made redundant, school leavers and college and university students seeking part time income to pay for their studies as well as people in their fifties and people who are retired but want to carry on working. However, our research also indicates it is both more complex and simple than the DH report suggests.

It is simpler in some respects because the situation would dramatically improve if PAs and people who might become PAs were able to access information about what the role might involve and understand the options available to them including how useful their prior learning and qualifications might be. Yet it is also complex because at the moment for many PAs access to training and career development comes via the employer. This is because
Information about courses tends to be targeted at employers. Information about PAs including how to become one is quite often hard to track down and is often found on the Adult Social Care or disability part of a local authority web site. This is hardly likely to be the first port of call for potential PAs; particularly people without a social care background, to look for information. A radical rethink is required then in order to route people looking for information to local sources and other places where information could be held. These routes have to be user friendly and follow natural customer inclinations. A lot of information is available and some of it is very good – but as we say, it is often hard to find.

As indicated already employers are often unwilling to give PAs time to attend training courses and neither the PAs nor the employers are able to pay in most cases for training. This tension is important because it highlights the fact that employer and PA interests are not necessarily the same. They have to be addressed separately.

5.3 Blended and modern learning approaches

Most modern learning and teaching aims to be inclusive and accessible and a particular concern is to develop portable approaches to development which value prior learning and enable people to obtain credits for the skills and experience they already have. Good examples are the Open College Network and the Workers Educational Association. We think it is essential that PAs have access to these approaches because they are enabling and inclusive. Durham County Council has also developed an e learning approach and has reorganised its website pages to make the sections for micro employers and carers and PAs much more accessible and user friendly. This paves the way for the blended inclusive approach.

We agree with the authors of the *DH Personal Assistants Strategic Framework* on the importance of using blended learning and e learning approaches. In the northeast context this would create opportunities for PAs to have their learning and development acquired through on the job training, acknowledged and possibly accredited. This is particularly important since as we point out in section four many PAs do not have formal training as such but are more likely to have on the job training which is what employers prefer. It also theoretically provides an opportunity for PAs who do non care tasks to consider how they can progress and develop and there may be several pathways they can consider. For example, life coaching and counselling, psychology or becoming a learning Personal Assistant in schools or colleges are all potential pathways for further learning and development. (Note: Personal Assistants in learning contexts are often supplied for children and adults who have a recognised communication problem such as dyslexia or a physical or mental disability which means they need support to enable them to learn.)

Much depends on the strategies put in place to facilitate and support learning and development and on the directions being developed for PAs. We think
they need to be broader than they are at the moment and partnerships
developed with colleges and learning providers to this end. A key gap we
were told of is the lack of training in existing college courses on person
centred planning and support.

5.3.1 Modules and learning approaches for PAs

We were not tasked with developing a learning approach or material for PAs
but it has become clear that there are gaps in existing learning approaches
and material.

Based on the research and consultations with PAs, employers and carers and
taking into account other published reports we suggest that there is a need for
some basic modules of information, training, resources and support for PAs.
The illustration on the next page indicates the content that would be useful
and links elements together so that they form a web of learning and
development for PAs that would enable them if they wish to develop their
careers and progress.
Note on Fig: 5-1

In our trawl of training information and material we found that local areas vary enormously. Some local areas have a lot of information and material that is useful for PAs and potential PA’s – provided the individuals concerned know where to look. Other areas have the bare minimum of information or it is only available via personal budget holders. To bring about improvements in terms of learning and development and to have a coherent approach it is necessary for local areas to provide a good range of material and access for PAs to the links and tools we illustrate above.

The best way to work towards the ideal in our view would entail setting up a regional project group, through the Workforce Forum, involving local Workforce Leads. The project’s purposes would be to:
a) Bring existing information together at a local level, and a regional level linked to the NEJobs PA portal

b) Use the information to map how close the local area is to encompassing each of the circle contents in Figure 5.1

c) Identify the steps required to meet and close any gaps and shortcomings

5.3.2 Self development and pathways into learning

We have reflected on how best to develop and attract a vibrant and diverse workforce including young people looking for opportunities to help pay their way through education and training and older workers seeking a second or third career change including the newly retired and people with small amounts of time.

A number of learning providers have developed learning pathways for people to accredit prior learning and understand and locate their learning in a framework, which helps them as individuals to think about their next steps. Good examples are the Gateway into Learning developed by the Workers Educational Association but there are many others which blend self-development and a greater awareness of self with opportunities to get access to information on self-improvement. Not everyone wants training per se and many people have been put off by bad experiences of school or college. Low educational attainment levels including poor literacy and numeracy skills are also barriers to training and development and are common amongst low paid workers. The Workers Educational Association learning approaches take this into account. Appendix 3 gives an example of a self-assessment approach for potential PAs, which could be developed much further. Another good example to consider is the Skills for Care PA Toolkit although it’s emphasis is more on recruitment and the legal requirements of employing and managing of the PA, including supervision, rather than training and development (see pages 20 and 21). The toolkit can be accessed on http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/entry_to_social_care/recruitment/PAtoolkit.aspx

The Skills for Care PA Toolkit also references the PA Net (Personal Assistants Network) website – www.panet.org.uk - which has a link to the Picking your Pathways website, which was designed to help PA employers think about training for their PAs.

The PA Toolkit also references the Skills for Care Common Induction Standard for care workers. However, its emphasis is more on care and it does not suit the range of circumstances of workers who may become PAs

There are links between learning pathways, self-development and career development – something that is increasingly acknowledged in the ‘menu’ approaches used to identify types of jobs and careers compared to the skills, experience and qualifications of potential recruits. Given that most people will
change careers several times this approach is not only modern but also practical.

We think there is scope to marry a self development approach for PAs with a skills profile and personal attributes approach which allows them to work out a career pathway that suits them. The illustration on the next page explains the thinking behind this. It would work very well as part of a learning zone for PAs as visualised in the model we explained in section 4.

**Career development pathways: Illustrative benefits for PAs from an agreed self development approach to registering as a PA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry level</strong> – for new PAs and people without approved experience or qualifications. This is for people who just want a bit of formal approval that they are who they say they are. Gives people the option of going further if they want to.</td>
<td>Criteria – join the scheme, give description about their skills and what they do, provide evidence about identity and trustworthiness, and agree to the code of conduct.</td>
<td>Benefits – they can advertise their skills and services to other potential employees, feel that they are not alone and can network with other PAs. Members will receive information on potential courses and discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong> – for new and existing PAs who want a basic qualification – this is aimed at people who are going to be doing a variety of tasks for their employers but very little or no personal care</td>
<td>Criteria as above but also need a CRB check and may be other checks such as evidence of a clean driving license if this is relevant e.g. Someone employed to drive. Level 2 members need to complete the induction course for new PAs – online E learning course (need permission from E Sussex to use theirs or similar)</td>
<td>Benefits - all the above but also they can more easily apply for other vacancies and start to make progress in terms of qualifications and experience. Members will receive information on next steps e.g. other training or development courses and useful networks. Local training providers will be asked to supply links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3 for current PAs with a variety of skills and competencies including care workers who have qualifications and experience and possibly a current CRB check</strong></td>
<td>Level 3 members need to fulfil all the above criteria. Also need to provide evidence of qualifications and references from employers</td>
<td>All the benefits that level 1 and 2 members have plus being able to join a professional local register. Members will be reminded about their CPD requirements and be informed about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Criteria</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>useful courses and other routes for keeping up to date and networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4 for specialist PAs including people with advanced care and nursing skills and people with other qualifications including additional vocational qualifications e.g. trained sports coaches</strong></td>
<td>Level 4 members will need to fulfil all the criteria for membership and in addition provide detailed descriptions of their skills and what they do together with evidence of their qualifications and experience</td>
<td>The benefits are as above but also will help employers to find experienced and highly skilled people. Members can ask for reminders about CPD timelines and requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.4 Developing smart strategies to support change

Clearly any discussion about learning and development strategies also has to be closely linked to a growth strategy and strategies to roll out personalisation. Otherwise there is no sense of direction. The CSE pilot in Middlesbrough and Redcar is the best example we could identify which is linked closely to local authority workforce development growth strategies and is developing a learning approach that is targeted at a wide and diverse pool of PAs. However, local authorities in the northeast are generally including the external social care workforce in their ASC workforce plans including PAs.

For example, Stockton Borough Council’s workforce development plan has three clauses on PAs under workforce re-modelling while Hartlepool Borough Council’s workforce development plan refers to developing introductory and ongoing training for PAs.

In common with the authors of the forthcoming DH *Personal Assistants Strategic Framework* we also think smart and affordable approaches for training and development are necessary in the present economic climate. The DH report we are given to understand, approaches the subject pragmatically since it takes into account several aspects. One is the need to bring together information and resources already available to PAs and micro employers including information from the Independent Living Movement and ULO’s. The second is the fact that the service users have often been left out of the training design continuum despite the existence of ULO’s and service user groups. The third is cost and the need to be creative in keeping costs low given that PAs may have to take paid time from work to do training.

Going back to the subject of information, we identified a great deal of information, much of it duplicated in different local areas although there are also local variations in approach that need to be taken into account. We discuss this subject in more detail elsewhere in the report but given that there
is so much information which is costly to produce and update it makes sense to collect together a suite of material regionally, which is updated from time to time to reflect any changes and link the information to national and local resources for more information and support. This approach would enable local areas to save on having to produce all the information and check its appropriateness themselves and could help them focus on what has to be and can only be produced locally.

5.5 Safeguarding – a simple self regulatory approach

All the indications are that the forthcoming DH Personal Assistants Strategic Framework puts the emphasis firmly on managed risk taking and away from traditional risk aversion practice and policies.

Our research established that north east local authorities have mixed views about the extent to which they are willing to embrace risk management. Local authorities have a duty of care and a number of people expressed genuine concerns about protecting people and protecting public money. There is therefore a wide variation in the willingness of local authorities and the support agencies they commission to encourage a culture and set of practices that actively enables risk taking. Some local authorities insist that PAs must have CRB clearance while others do not although they may suggest to micro employers that it is desirable to do so. Some local authorities or their agencies are closely involved in every aspect of hiring a PA and appointing the person or persons while other authorities have no interest in the selection process at all and leave this up to employers and support agencies although the support outcomes are monitored in all authorities.

Given such a difference in views it is difficult to see how an enabling risk management approach can be developed that is likely to suit everyone. Yet there are some core areas of agreement that may take us closer to modern personalisation practice. There is also a benefit in considering how neighbouring authorities can work together and maximise opportunities for PAs to work across geographical boundaries.

Lack of agreement can make it difficult for PAs when they work across different local areas. To some extent the ‘passported’ vetting and barring proposals will facilitate some PAs to work across different areas more easily but the fact that there are differences in approach between local areas is a barrier. We have considered the easiest and least expensive solution to this problem for both PAs and employers.

Firstly, it depends on people agreeing to a voluntary code of practice. Then being prepared to sign up to some basic e learning. Finally, to sharing information about themselves including references and their CRB clearance (if they have it). PAs would supply all the information themselves and would be asked to indicate that the information they are supplying is correct. By supplying information and by agreeing to some basic standards the PAs would effectively self regulate.
There is in the model we suggest in section 4, the opportunity to carry out basic checks on identity and on CRB clearance where people say they have this. Also to conduct new relatively low cost CRB checks on people who have not been through this process before.

However, it is important to keep things simple and the main way to do this is to avoid too much system administration and vetting. These elements will add to costs. Taking a different approach to safeguarding may be too much for some authorities but the approach we advocate is very much in keeping with risk enabling and it is a logical development in our view.

5.6 A PA register: A place to start

No local authority currently has an up to date register of PAs. There is no incentive for PAs working outside the social care framework for self-payers to communicate their presence at all and as a result we have no idea of the size or nature of the private PA workforce. Encouraging PAs to register is a place to start.

By having a register PAs become more visible and by being visible they can be communicated with. Communication is at least a two way thing so by having a register there is an opportunity for local authorities and support agencies as well as micro employers and PAs themselves to communicate with each other in a way they cannot now – provided they agree to share some details with each other.

By registering PAs would have the opportunity to obtain more work and or find out about training and other opportunities including good practice on safeguarding and risk taking.

5.7 Conclusions

Section 5 has covered a lot of ground. We wanted to make sure that we covered all the angles.

In our February report we noted that we did not find extensive evidence of training strategies for PAs. There is very little training available for PAs in some areas and training does not always reflect the kind of work PAs actually do. We said in February that the relationship with their PA or PAs is absolutely fundamental for employers but most of the training that seemed to be on offer was not related to the kinds of tasks and activities and relationship nurturing that PAs and employers wanted.

There is some good practice emerging and there is a wealth of information available including for example the Skills for Care PA toolkit but overall the approach to training and growth, career development and learning are fragmented. This is perhaps not surprising since personalisation is still evolving but enough is known to say that current approaches are not sufficient
and resources are not being used as well as they should be. There is a lack of a coherent direction and an over reliance on training and training approaches which are suitable for social care workers, but only partially cover the needs and wants of the more diverse Personal Assistant workforce. There is a need to join together in order to make better use of shared resources and make savings where possible, which could actually make it possible to devise some new courses and material, aimed at PAs.

The forthcoming DH *Personal Assistants Strategic Framework* report makes some points about induction standards and Common Induction Standards for residential and domiciliary care workers and indicates that Personal Assistants should follow similar standards. We think that this is not appropriate for everyone and there is no way that any standard of this kind can be monitored without considerable investment. Yet it is necessary to start somewhere. We have already suggested that perhaps the best way to start is to enable PAs to become visible and encourage them to register and sign up to some basic standards and give people options to progress depending on their experience and skills and choices.

We still believe that this is the best option.

We also think that bringing information and resources as well as learning materials together in one place will vastly improve matters and will enable local areas to really concentrate on the strategic directions they want to take. Most importantly having one place to store and update materials will ensure greater consistency for learners and will enable more people to find out about becoming a PA and to download and print out useful material that makes sense to them and which is useful.

We have reflected on the ideal learning and development framework for PAs (figure 5.1) that should be available in local areas. We carefully established that much of the material and information necessary already exists in local areas although the quality and amount of material varies. We suggest that the best way to progress towards making the ideal a reality is by establishing a project to make progress through the Workforce Forum.

Finally we acknowledge that the DH *Strategic Framework*’s enabling approach to risk management is not whole-heartedly embraced in the northeast. Yet we think that north eastern local authorities may be disposed to use a self regulated approach to enable PAs to become more visible because there are spin offs and benefits for everyone as a result and it helps keep costs low. Our central proposal, in this report which is to create a web based model, also incorporates a facility available to North East Jobs enabling them to check potential PA’s information with simple checks including verifying the existence of CRBs and (possibly) instituting a relatively cheap process to do first time or renewed CRB clearances. However, the model that we described in section 4 does not have to have a single approach to safeguarding to make things work. Local authorities could still if they wish have their own local arrangements while also agreeing one key common core standards and arrangements. This means that local authorities would not be constrained but
of course it also means that they would have to meet those additional safeguarding mechanisms themselves.

The outcome from having a largely self regulated approach would mean that PA’s are for the first time visible and their details are available for checking. They would also be easier to identify and communicate with which would create in turn more options for communication, and more options for employers and PAs to find people. Taking a largely self regulatory approach is also an important way of keeping costs down.

5.8 Recommendations

5.8.1 Learning and development

We believe it is vital that the web based model we propose to improve the visibility of PAs particularly the talent pool, is backed up with a modern inclusive approach to learning and development which encourages a wide and diverse range of potential PAs:

Recommendation 4

Our overarching recommendation is that a project is initiated through the Workforce Forum and undertaken by Workforce Leads to establish a consistent PA Framework for Learning and Development for use at both regional and local levels.

Subsumed under recommendation 4 is the need to encourage all local authorities to:

- Agree to provide consistent foundation information for PAs and ensure they share good practice and learning
- Link learning and development for PAs to wider workforce development strategies to encourage and support a flexible workforce including older workers and young people in training
- Ensure there is greater access to basic training for PAs that is wider than social care and gives equal weight to alternative skills, qualifications and experience
- Encourage and promote career pathways for PAs that enable them to make use of their experience and skills and prior learning
- Adopt a training and development approach based on modern self assessment, self development and blended learning approaches
- Ensure that local colleges and learning providers are given a clear steer on the requirements they should meet for personalisation including models that fit PA and employer requirements
• Seriously consider as part of the talent pool available to PAs, methods for PAs to build skills and attributes profiles (social networking style) consistent with modern inclusive styles of working and learning.

5.8.2 Safeguarding

While acknowledging that North East Local Authorities have mixed views on safeguarding and they are likely to give a mixed response to the forthcoming DH proposals about managed risk taking we strongly advocate an enabling approach to risk management.

Recommendation 5

We recommend a simple largely voluntary self regulation based on PAs providing information about themselves including references and qualifications. This recommendation is dependent on PA’s themselves uploading information via the web based North East Jobs talent pool facility which is already available. Local authorities can also direct and signpost potential PAs to Job Centres, libraries and community centres who can offer practical computing help for people to provide and upload their information.

Under recommendation 5 we note the following sub recommendations for all local authorities to:

• Agree a simple self-regulatory approach

• Agree to share some core principles to facilitate growth of PAs and greater movement across geographical boundaries

• Agree to have the freedom – at extra cost to each authority – to continue with own CRB and safeguarding procedures outwith this core approach.
6. **Supporting PAs and Employers**

6.1 **National Context**

The government’s forthcoming *PA Strategy* is likely to recognise the positive effects on the individual from employing their own staff. Key challenges involved include:

- Understanding what it means to be an employer
- How to carry out statutory obligations
- Associated financial issues and advice
- Being prepared to learn and develop as an employer
- Ensuring that employers enable PAs to have learning and development opportunities and career frameworks.

The key issues are likely to include the need for independent advice and information for PAs including access to PA networks and peer groups.

It has become clear as personalisation has progressed that people’s needs for advice and information and support are not one-offs since needs might arise at any time. The process of becoming an employer is also increasingly recognised so it is likely that the PA Strategy will focus on helping employers to build their confidence so that they feel comfortable in this role.

At the same time it is probable that the Strategy will consider the need to devise methods to measure the success of inputs that enable employers and PAs to achieve good support relationships. Enough experience is now being amassed to start to do this. Bottom up standards or user led standards might then emerge which are important to employers and PAs.

6.2 **What is Good Practice Support?**

Currently information, advice and support services are provided by support agencies/UJO’s and / or local authorities to support people to employ a PA. Most of the information and advice begins from the point of view that if employers have adequate advice and support there will be positive effects on the experiences of PAs in terms of better working conditions and relationship with their employer. However, there is no actual evidence that this is the case.

It appears that each local authority and support agency follows broadly similar procedures in terms of the information and documentation they provide to employers, although there are slight variations in style, formatting and templates used. The material can be categorised into four groups: employment; recruitment; payroll and managed accounts services.
Current guidance on practice includes reference to the 2009 Department of Health Guidance on Direct Payments: For Community Care, Services for Carers and Children’s Services which states that User Led Organisations and peer networks could provide an independent source of information and support for people on direct payments. This document goes on to say that “support services might include training and practical assistance in addition to providing information, advice and support” (page 16).

It is suggested in this Guidance that good practice could include:

- “A list of local provider agencies or available personal assistants
- Support and advice in setting up and maintaining a direct payment scheme, including financial management
- Help for people to draft advertisements, job descriptions and contracts
- Help in explaining the safeguards needed in the employment of people to work with children or adults
- Providing rooms for interviews and assistance with interviewing
- Providing a mail address for responses to advertisements
- Support and advice about the legal responsibilities of being an employer
- Support and advice about being a good manager of staff
- Support and advice about issues of religion and ethnicity
- Information about income tax and national insurance
- A payroll service
- Advice on health and safety issues, including moving and handling
- Regular training, for example on assertiveness or budgeting skills
- Some help with obtaining emergency cover
- Signposting to other services such as welfare benefits and advocacy
- Advice about user-controlled trusts” (page 16)

Reflecting back on the practice recommended in the 2009 Guide we compared and contrasted this with the information provided to employers and PAs in the northeast. As a result we have teased out some issues and identified some good practice.

For each potential employer, information is provided in face-to-face meetings with a support adviser/ worker and also ongoing support is provided via the telephone, face-to-face contact, or through written correspondence.
6.3 What Do PAs and Employers Need and Want from A Support Agency?

In this section we look more closely at how the findings from our research could better inform the qualities and service delivery requirements of a support service.

6.3.1 Being an Employer

Interviews conducted with employers in four authorities (all of whom have support agencies) during the second phase of our work highlighted a variety of attitudes about the level and quality of support they receive from their support agency. Some employers identified a number of things that do not work well. They are:

- **Information and contact:** Several employers said that they do not have enough regular contact with their support agency and rarely hear anything from them. Employers would like to have: more one-to-one and more regular sessions with advisors; and more training to be an employer. Some employers said that they are very much on their own and feel isolated. This partly stems from a lack of understanding about sources of advice and information – where to go and what’s on offer - and partly from a failure to take responsibility and act on the advice and information received.

- **Bureaucracy and boundaries of support agency role:** Some employers were irritated with what they saw as unhelpful bureaucracy, that for example prevented them getting help from support agencies and advisers when there were problems with PAs. Problems included legal ones. Employers told us it is commonplace for support agencies to ask employers to use the insurance agency for advice instead of the support agency itself. Some employers also said that they have issues with PA payslips never arriving on time.

- **Lack of understanding of the particular needs of individual employers:** Some employers said that on occasions support agencies are unaware of their support needs (e.g. one employer has no face-to-face or verbal contact with his support agency. They only contact him via letters but he is visually impaired so has to get his PA to read them to him).

In contrast other employers said that they are happy with the support that they get. Some people said that they are more in control of their support, have more flexibility, increased independence, and know that there is help there if needed. Overall, the picture we received was a mixed one from employers in the four authorities we talked to, and the issue appears to be about consistency of service and expectations and boundaries of the support agency role by employers. Appendix 4 provides two examples of the role of support agencies.
Employers are in no doubt about the positive aspects of relationships between the employer and the PA. This includes a considerable number of practical ‘hands on’ tasks that PAs help with (personal care, domestic tasks) but also many wider life enhancing aspects that PAs support people with (social life, taking a person places, listening and talking). The latter goes beyond traditional home care services and denotes a personal relationship. The flexibility employers now experience relies on their decision making often on a daily basis, or as and when the employer sees fit. It is clear that the employer is very much ‘in charge’ and being in charge is regarded by employers as a very positive step indeed.

Our research suggests that provided the PA/Employer relationship is going well and people are being respected and supported on both sides of the relationship then employers are broadly happy with the services provided by the support agency – as long as the administration works consistently and well - and say they have received the right amount of recruitment and payroll support. The reverse is the case when there is a breakdown in the employer/PA relationship and this leads to employers being more likely to say that the recruitment agency has the responsibility to provide effective employment support.

However, different attitudes towards the support agency’s role and performance highlight inconsistencies in the level and quality of support provided. As we said this is perhaps due to a lack of understanding by a support agency of particular individual’s support needs. Perhaps a person-centred approach, that underpins a support agency’s philosophy, should be included in their contract as part of a commitment to good practice. For example, one authority includes as part of its contract the expectation that the support agency facilitates a “Peer Support Group to enable service users to network with other users of the service”. This highlights a potential issue of the interface and boundaries in roles between the support agency and the social worker responsible for self directed support assessment and review.

There are certain differences between local authorities in the types of support they offer to employers in terms of recruitment and the supply of PAs. Some support agencies use their website to advertise PA vacancies on behalf of the employer. This gives support agencies the opportunity to hold information on a small pool of PAs by keeping PA application forms. In contrast, other support agencies rely on advertising for PA vacancies as they arise through jobcentre plus or via their office notice board.

The latter approach has two limitations:

- Firstly, it means that the process of finding and recruiting a PA can take longer for the employer if there is no existing list or database of potential PAs to choose from
- Secondly, having no pool or register of potential PAs can also cause difficulties for some employers needing to arrange holiday or sickness cover at short notice, forcing them to use agency staff that they have no choice over and may have to pay a higher hourly rate for.
Having a pool or register of PAs that employers could draw on when needed would address many employer needs both for initial recruitment and for holiday and sickness cover.

Although the information that is provided is fairly similar between local authorities and support providers, models of support differ, depending on the type of contract each local authority and support service has. In our view this could affect the quality of support provided and is discussed below.

6.3.2 Being a PA

At present the only service a support agency offers is as a vehicle for PA recruitment. None of them provide a support or training and development role for PAs, though we have identified in section 4 and Appendix 1 other models such as the Citizens Support Exchange, which does provide a fuller role around PA learning and development, as well as the recruitment and matching function.

6.4 Direction of Travel of Local Authority Contracts

The discussions we had with local authorities indicate that there are three types of contract operating with support agencies:

- A block contract
- A pay as you go style contract
- Something in between a block and pay as you go contract.

With the ‘block’ type contract the local authority pays a set amount to the support agency to cover the full costs of delivering information, advice and guidance services to all individuals on direct payments that need support to become an employer. Therefore, all services are free to the service user and do not come out of their direct payment.

Alternatively, a ‘pay as you go’ type contract provides employers with a menu of costed services from which they choose. As a result support can be tailored to meet individual needs. However, we note that each support service has a different costing system charging for services at different levels of support and/or over different periods of time. Support agencies that have entered into this type of contract provide start up packages offering support over extended periods. Additionally, services are available at hourly rates for individuals who need only limited amounts of support. For an example of a support service menu for the two support agencies in Hartlepool, see Appendix 4 of our February report.
Other contracts sit in between these two types, where the local authority pays a set amount for each individual to access the majority of information, advice and guidance services available. The support agency also charges for certain types of service; often payroll and managed accounts services. However, this type of contract has most of the characteristics of a block contract, especially when support agencies only charge for the managed accounts service. Individuals can only access the managed account service if it has been specifically identified in their care plan and approved by a social worker/care manager. Therefore the uptake of this service is limited.

The trend amongst North East local authorities appears to be away from block contracts and towards the pay as you go type model. Some have already instigated the change, while others are in the process of discussion. The general view is that a costed service will provide greater choice for service users at a more cost effective price for the local authority. Hartlepool is an example of a local authority that is offering more choice to employers. It currently has a contract with two support agencies which both offer a menu of costed services. Employers can therefore choose which provider they wish to buy services from. South Tyneside does not have a contract with any particular support agency, and offers limited support in-house. Rather, it advises individuals to use the HR element of their employer’s liability insurance for advice on issues relating to being an employer, such as sickness, PA disputes etc. For payroll and managed accounts services South Tyneside supports individuals in finding private providers that meet their needs. This type of arrangement appears to offer greater freedom of choice. However, it is unclear whether this is accompanied by sufficient support to manage a direct payment.

There is also a sense that having a menu of services is more flexible for individuals, allowing them to become more independent and less reliant on support, building confidence in being an employer. It is likely that national guidance for becoming an employer will recognise the need to support employers in order to help develop this confidence.

Two Tees Valley authorities, Hartlepool and Stockton, have recently come together to advertise for a range of organisations (including SMEs, voluntary or charitable organisations, or social enterprises) to tender for a joint contract to provide a Direct Payments Service to children and adults wishing to use a direct payment, across both local authorities. The emphasis is on empowerment, flexibility, control and opportunities. The successful applicant must demonstrate that the outcomes meet the expectations and care needs identified within each individual’s personalised care plan. In terms of the type of contract, Hartlepool and Stockton have issues the following requirements,

“The contract price will consist of two elements. The first element will be the core support service costs which will be paid by the Local Authorities and the second element will be the provision of advice, information and support through a “Menu of Services” which will be paid directly by the people receiving the service, to the Provider, from their Personal Budget.”
A further issue is incentivising support agencies to reduce individual’s support packages if they are operating on a pay as you go type contract. Should authorities offer some form of financial incentive, or bonus, if the agency is able to introduce a staged reduction of individual’s support services, as the service user becomes more confident in operating as a micro employer? There are benefits in promoting greater independence for service users, and in reducing the costs of the support contract. The balance in the equation is in making sure one does not reduce the level of support provided until the service user is ready. The alternative is to incentivise the service user themselves so that they can hold on to some of their savings if they no longer need or only need a lower level of support from a support agency.

Overall, the pay as you go type of contract does appear at least on the surface to offer greater freedom of choice and independence but it carries a greater risk for providers.

We determined that the quality of support and good practice that is offered is driven by a support agency’s philosophy and by the contract. As the processes of providing information and support are fairly uniform for all agencies this brings us back to the expectations in the contract and the consistency and quality of service provided.

The key issue for both local authorities and support agencies is how to balance:

- In a ‘pay as you go’ contract, particularly if it has incentives for support agencies to wean micro employers off the services it provides, whether agencies are in a position to continue to provide the level of support needed for people with more complex support needs
- In a block contract, how to get a value for money service and cost for micro employers who only need little support (i.e. how not to overpay in the contract)

Appendix 4 illustrates the support agency model in two authorities - Hartlepool, which has a ‘pay as you go’ approach for micro employers with its two support agencies Go Direct and Wilf Ward; and Darlington, which has a block contract with DAD.

### 6.5 Conclusions: The ‘Good Practice’ Support Agency

After considering a range of examples and after reviewing the views of employers and PAs we concluded that having support for PAs and employers are equally important. PA needs should feature as prominently as those of employers in the minds of policy makers and those who deliver services. There are also good grounds for saying that by increasing the quality of support provided to employers and evolving good practice there will be positive benefits for PAs.
What is clear is that successful support relies just as much on the quality of advice given by the support advisor/worker, as on the quality of the information and documentation given to the employer.

### 6.6. Support for PA’s and Employers?

The need to have some form of formal support for PA’s stood out in the research for Phase One of the report and was highlighted again in our latest research for this report. We looked at the case for support agencies providing support for PA’s and employers and we looked at various methods for supporting PA’s outside of support agencies. We came to the conclusion that support agencies are not tasked with giving anything more than support to PA’s, and even when they do they see their prime customer as the budget holder/micro employer. Loyalties are therefore split and PA’s reported to us that they received very little support from agencies overall and had nowhere to go for anything other than very basic support in all areas. A few PA’s had some informal links with other PAs but most were isolated.

Having the same support agency for employers and PAs is therefore unrealistic. One other consideration is that support agencies were not asked to support Employers in some of the ways they wanted to be supported which included more informal methods to enable them to share experiences, compare notes and ask each other about the best way to recruit and retain PAs. A peer support network seemed to be more appropriate in these cases and we note this in our recommendations. In many cases this could be an additional activity that a user led organisation might take on or that a support agency could facilitate for employers.

The situation is different for PAs where there is nothing or very little in place. In an ideal world it would be good for PAs to have some sort of local support agency with a paid worker to communicate with them, bring them together and arrange training and other activities. Perhaps in the future such a support agency for PAs can grow but it is an expensive and unnecessary option at the moment. Instead we are suggesting that local areas encourage PAs to get to know each other through virtual networks and chat rooms in the private zone of the web based approach we have proposed. Through this option PAs can arrange to meet each other and as a result they may organically for example, decide to establish a voluntary network that is more formal.

Some PAs told us that they did not want to work on their own and some did not want to be self employed. For these reasons we think that the web model we have described could provide links for PA’s to local options that go beyond self employment including links to co-ops or establishing social enterprises. Some people in Sunderland for example might want to explore the option of joining the Sunderland Home Care Associates Co-op not least because it offers PAs the opportunity for the kinds of support they are seeking.
Overall though in order to keep costs down we think it is best to establish initially a virtual model that would encourage PAs to establish a voluntary network.

6.7. Recommendations

Recommendation 6
We recommend that local authorities in the northeast use the good practice they have amassed and establish a base standard for support organisations. Local authorities could incorporate this into their commissioning frameworks with support agencies in future.

Recommendation 7
We recommend that local authorities incorporate in their contracts with support agencies requirements to facilitate peer group support for employers.

Recommendation 8
We recommend that local authorities support the proposal to use the North East Jobs Portal and the private zones that would be available through it to encourage PAs to establish a virtual support network.
7. Taking a different perspective: Using ULOs and mutuals to provide support and development services

7.1 Introduction

In our original brief (see section 1.1 on Phase 2) we were tasked with developing a business case focusing on ULOs and their ability to provide support services for PAs and micro employers. In our February 2011 report we concluded that there was no appetite from northeast authorities for a regional ULO model.

However, as part of the final phase of our work to look at good models of support we have undertaken further work to look at the potential of using ULOs and mutuals to provide support and development services.

7.2 Context

7.2.1 Evolving national policy and regional context

As we have said nationally, significant growth is forecast in the volume of direct payments/personal budgets, and in the number of personal assistants employed. The need for some kind of support network for personal assistants is widely recognised. The Government’s intention is clear – to extend and reinforce the concept of personalisation, and to give ULOs and mutual social enterprises a greater role in supporting this.

However, in the north east most local authorities do not expect growth of PAs to be as high as it has been predicted nationally and ULO’s do not seem to be the preferred vehicle of choice for support by most local authorities. In fact if ULOs are to play a significant role, they will require continued support from the local authorities. In our view in the current climate if social enterprises are to contribute, they will need robust business plans with assured income streams. In this section we provide an analysis of the present situation and examine the options realistically. It is no good talking about involving mutuals and ULOs and expecting them to deliver in the same way as commercial organisations and it doesn’t make sense to ignore the very qualities that they do have. To a certain extent then our discussion asks people to go back to some fundamental ideas.
7.2.2 Towards a specification of support requirements

The Table below demonstrates the support requirements of employers on the one hand, and personal assistants on the other. There are clear areas of overlap as well as areas that are quite distinct.

**Fig. 7-1: Support requirements of employers and PAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A support agency for employers might be expected to do some or all of these:</th>
<th>A support agency for personal assistants might be expected to do some or all of these:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Helping to assess individual needs – challenging these where necessary</td>
<td>• Providing information and advice – might include face-to-face, web and/or telephone support line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping to agree a suitable package of care and budget</td>
<td>• Representing personal assistants’ interests more generally, e.g. lobbying for improved employment conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping to choose the best way to receive care, i.e. whether to employ a personal assistant</td>
<td>• Organising training/CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping to set terms and conditions for personal assistants</td>
<td>• Setting standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representing employer interests more generally - advocacy</td>
<td>• Detailing rights and obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing information and advice – might include face-to-face, web and/or telephone support line</td>
<td>• Detailing entitlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping with the recruitment process</td>
<td>• Detailing terms and conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing training for employers</td>
<td>• Arbitration and conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing standard contracts and other documentation</td>
<td>• Accounting and other support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk assessment</td>
<td>• Legal support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping with management and budgeting</td>
<td>• Marketing their services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Running payroll and related services</td>
<td>• Ensuring the quality, consistency and continuity of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict resolution</td>
<td>• Providing information about available posts, and possibly supporting a matching service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legal and financial support</td>
<td>• Quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring the quality, consistency and continuity of care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing information about available personal assistants, and possibly providing a matching service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring the quality of personal assistants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these support functions could be carried out in one area by one agency. However, it is more likely, for the reasons set out in the section below, that there may be a need for separate agencies for employers and personal
assistants. In addition to the view that ULOs will be best placed at a local authority level allowing for a local interface, whilst being back up by a regional hub that provides common standards such as back office functions such as contracts of employment, PAYE forms, health & safety, grievance procedures etc.

It is also possible that more than one agency would be involved in supporting the employer. For example, the information and guidance role might be performed by a ULO, while the hands-on service was delivered by a personal assistant employed by a private contractor or social enterprise.

7.2.3 Regional pointers

Most local authorities contract with support organisations to help meet the needs of employers, but there is no consistency of approach. As we have identified in the previous section, some organisations have a block contract to deliver a fully funded set of services; others receive a core contract just covering the cost of initial services with micro employers then paying for the services they need from their direct payment.

Northumberland County Council is establishing a registration system for personal assistants (see Appendix 1).

The Tees Valley Alliance has undertaken to develop a version of the Slivers of Time model, working with Teesside University. This would provide a low cost online registration and quality assurance scheme for personal assistants.

Most effort has gone into designing systems that give potential employers information and choice, and provide quality assurance. They are not fundamentally focused on addressing personal assistants’ own employment, developmental and other concerns.

Personal assistants have a distinct set of concerns, including:

- Terms and conditions
- Learning and progression – with recognised qualifications and a clear career path
- Risk reduction
- Dispute resolution
- Financial planning – dealing with tax and benefits issues
- Support networks

This leaves open the question of where carers and/or volunteers fit in?

Both parties – the employers and the personal assistants – have support needs that are not always being adequately met at the present time. But, there could be potential conflicts of interest, for example, where an employer
was unhappy about the quality of care received. Earlier work on ULOs by SES highlighted the potential problem arising when one organisation tries to mix practical support and advocacy. There could well be a case for keeping the support for the two parties separate.

It is also important to remember that we are dealing with the provision of very personal services. Personal ‘chemistry’ may be an important ingredient, and many employers are looking to buy a relationship, not just a service.

### 7.2.4 Models of the relationship between employer and personal assistant

There are a number of ways in which the relationship between employer and personal assistant might be managed, for example:

- The employer might employ a personal assistant direct – in this case they would be taking on all the responsibilities of being an employer.
- Someone else, e.g. a partner or sibling, might employ a personal assistant on behalf of an employer – in this case there might be third party issues and liabilities.
- The employer might contract with an agency which employed personal assistants – in this case they would have minimal responsibility as an employer, but the service would need to conform to the underlying principles of personalisation, i.e. giving the employer a choice of personal assistant and service.
- The local authority might contract with a private company or social enterprise to provide the service, following an individual assessment of needs and an agreed package of care. The service would need to conform to the underlying principles of personalisation.

The circumstances in each local authority are different. Some have already developed arrangements with local organisations. In a limited number of cases these are local ULOs (albeit self-assessed ones). Local authorities have different policies and practical arrangements for Direct Payments and involvement with personal assistants and their employers.

It is possible to see the organisation representing personal assistants as a brokerage service, operating like an employment agency. Or, it could act as an employer, proving care on an agency basis – perhaps an extension of one or more existing domiciliary care organisations.

### 7.3 The role and capacity of ULOs

SES recently prepared a report on the capabilities of the Region's User-led Organisations (ULO) for the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, under the title of *User-led organisations (ULOs) in the North East* (April 2010).
There is a set of nationally agreed principles for identifying whether an organisation can be called a ULO. The work by SES established a set of ULO criteria for the Region\(^1\) (see also Appendix 7 of our February 2011 report). Many organisations that call themselves ULOs do not actually meet all these criteria, and there is no system of quality assurance.

The fundamental criterion for a ULO is that the organisation must be run by and for the users of the service. ULOs have a strong representative role – informing, arguing and lobbying on behalf of their members. They may also provide advocacy services on behalf of individual members. This holds the potential for conflicts of interest. It is also the case that some ULOs do not encourage participation by carers. Finally, many ULOs have a fairly narrow focus, i.e. they are intended to meet the needs of people with specific challenges, and are championed by people with specific interests and motivations.

On the other hand, ULOs can be robust, long-standing organisations that meet the needs of their members and enable people to influence the nature and quality of the service on offer. They can play a valuable role in learning and development, quality assurance and risk management.

This work carried out by SES showed how ULOs in the North East have strengths, but also weaknesses. They provide a powerful voice for service users, and adhere to principles of equality and equity; they deliver some vital services. Where they may be less effective is in how they conduct their business and in working effectively together. Coverage of ULOs in the Region is still patchy and of variable quality, and some continue to need support with management, funding and staff development.

There does not appear to be much appetite among existing ULOs for a single regional interface supporting employers and personal assistants. Rather, the main support is for 12 separate organisations, one per local authority area.

If this is, indeed, the case, it will be important to ensure that they all operate to agreed standards and work in a way that minimises duplication. There is therefore a strong argument for a set of agreed regional operating standards and a shared database of resources.

There is already a range of guidance and resource tools that support services in the region provide that could be shared, and if appropriate consolidated. In addition other material is emerging nationally, such as the Skills for Care PA Toolkit, which we have already referred to in section 5. The toolkit (see list on p.31 of the toolkit) includes templates of useful paperwork for employers on many aspects of recruiting PAs, such as job descriptions and person specifications, application forms and adverts, and contracts of employment. [http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/entry_to_social_care/recruitment/PAtoolkit.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/entry_to_social_care/recruitment/PAtoolkit.aspx)

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\(^1\)User-led Organisations (ULO) in the North East, April 2010.
**ULO strengths and weaknesses**

The Table below sets out some of the principle strengths and weaknesses of ULOs working to support employers and personal assistants.

**Fig. 7-2: Strengths and weaknesses of ULOs working to support Employers and PAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting employers</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One in each local authority area</td>
<td>Sustainability – ability to survive over time, obtaining funding and delivering the required service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent understanding of the issues</td>
<td>Do not always meet all the ULO criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good at advocacy</td>
<td>May have problems with thematic or geographical coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on sound ethical principles</td>
<td>Not always good at business planning and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competent in designing care packages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approachable and sympathetic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting personal assistants</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional coverage</td>
<td>Possible conflict of interest given their advocacy role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on sound ethical principles</td>
<td>Questionable independence as they are run by and for service users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not much experience or track record in this role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to handle cross-border issues – some functions may be better performed at a regional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ULOs are facing severe challenges. This is a period of transition owing to public sector reform and public expenditure cuts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Region’s ULOs are still on a sharp learning curve. It will take time to develop a consensus on which ULOs might take a regional role. At the same time, there is limited consensus among local authorities in the Region on the structure and role of ULOs.

At a sub-regional level there is even less consensus. Durham and
Northumberland, and South Tyneside for example, have taken things in-house. In Tyne & Wear there has been no real agreement to work together, though there is cross-boarder activity involving individual ULOs. In Tees Valley there is some history of local authorities and ULOs working together, but it is early days, and the ULOs still need support.

There is limited experience of ULOs coming together in consortia to seize local contracts. They lack the knowledge, capacity or understanding to do so, and much work still needs to be done in this regard.

The back office functions or supporting business services could be handled centrally, e.g. job descriptions, contracts, etc. could be held on a regional website, to be accessed locally by the individual ULO, personal assistant or employer.

This approach would be a pragmatic one, which accords with the existing capacity of most of the Region’s ULOs. It also reflects the localism and personalisation agendas, and the local approaches that are already in place (see the case studies). Over time this will enable a virtual market place to develop.

7.4 The role of mutual social enterprise

Government policy currently favours an expanded role for mutual and social enterprises, and this is the subject of a recent paper produced by SES\(^2\). Further context information on Mutual Social Enterprises is provided in Appendix 5.

Private companies may be contracted by the local authority to deliver services. However, there may be clear benefits in contracting with local mutual social enterprises.

The arguments in favour of this model are well rehearsed, and include independence, flexibility, value for money, innovation, successful trading histories. For example: (see Appendix 5 attached SHCA case study – a £5.2m turnover social enterprise)

- Money will be recycled within the local/regional economy, thereby benefiting local people and their communities rather than ‘leaking out’. Research shows that a vibrant local economy has huge benefits in terms of health and well-being.
- The employment of local people to deliver the services. The example of Sunderland Home Care Associates shows how local people can be trained up to carry out a variety of valuable roles

\(^2\)Enterprise in a New Era, December 2010.
The creation of employment opportunities for personal assistants can contribute to the economic wellbeing of an area. Many local authorities identify self-employment and jobs in the health and social care sector as important components of their overall economic strategy. These can be potential areas of growth – creating jobs and encouraging local expenditure. As such, it may be that some support might be forthcoming from economic development budgets.

Mutual and employee-owned enterprises have other favourable characteristics, including:

- Independent research suggests that a combination of shared ownership and employee participation delivers superior business performance.
- Because they are ‘co-investors’, staff in mutual social enterprises tend to be more entrepreneurial and committed to the company and its success.
- Because they are run in an open way, mutuals tend to have a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility and involvement with the communities they operate in.
- The mutual, social enterprise business sector improves the diversity and resilience of the local economy –by offering a different, vibrant model for achieving business success.
- Because they have high employment standards, involve staff and give everyone a stake, employee owned social enterprises are good at recruiting and retaining talented, committed staff.
- Mutual (particularly employee owned) companies are good at innovation because managers go out of their way to consult, share information about the company, and give staff responsibility.

An independent and impartial summary of the evidence about mutuals has been prepared by Matrix Evidence in a landmark study on the performance of mutual and employee-owned businesses over economic cycles for Cass Business School.\(^3\)

A mutual social enterprise could operate as an employer of personal assistants, a broker (e.g. of self-employed personal assistants) or an agency, or some combination of these. Or, it could simply provide information and support. Using the example of SHCA (a Employee Based Share Company similar structure to that of John Lewis) SHCA could develop a Limited Liability Partnership of PAs, an employee based company that has the ‘support’ of larger employee based company, SHCA could create a PA Unit within the

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existing trading structure, SHCA could replicate / franchise either model to other areas.

A large number of co-operatives provide home care services. In some of these the domiciliary care workers are self-employed members of a co-operative consortium that provides administration, organisation and negotiation with contractors. Examples include including Wrekin Care Co-operative. Medical practitioner’s co-operatives, these are able to provide out of hours services and in some cases a range of other GP and nurses services. SELDOC is a co-operative of over 400 GPs in South London. Appendix 6 provides a guide to Co-operative Consortia produced by Co-operatives UK.

Mutual trading status may mean that organisations operating on a mutual basis can be exempt from paying corporation tax. The general principle is that the only people / organisations entitled to a return of any surplus made by the co-operative are the members, and that any surpluses made are returned to the contributors based on throughput.

Whichever approach is chosen, sustainable funding is likely to be a problem – dictating a light-touch, low cost approach. Some start-up funding may be available, but other income will probably have to be generated through management charges or membership fees. Even then, the amount of funding that can be raised may be insufficient. A critical success factor will be the need to demonstrate value-added to both employers and personal assistants.

7.5 Conclusions and recommendations

We believe that there are benefits in using ULOs as local support vehicles for employers and PAs. However, we have identified the current strengths and weaknesses of promoting a ULO model, and are clear that ULOs will continue to need support to evolve their role.

We also believe that ULOS in the region are not generally mature enough to be able to offer services across a number of local authority areas, without a stronger infrastructure to pick up in particular a lot of the back office functions. We also think that there is potential to develop the role of mutual social enterprises to act as an umbrella employer of PAs in the future.

Recommendation 9
We recommend the development of an agreed set of operating standards, and a shared database of resources, which would enable ULOs (and other support providers) to offer a more consistent approach.

Recommendation 10
We recommend that local authorities continue to promote ULOs as local providers of support services.
8. Summary of Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

In this final section of the report we bring together the recommendations from sections 3-7.

Theme 1: Making PAs more visible (section 3)

Recommendation 1
The underpinning recommendation to this report is the need for leadership and concerted action at both regional and local levels to make PAs a visible part of the adult social care workforce.

Theme 2: Creating a market: a model and options for growing the number of PAs in the workforce – recruitment and retention (section 4)

Our research confirms the need to create a mechanism that will enable PAs to become visible and grow and develop as part of a modern workforce. At the present time local or sub regional initiatives are emerging in isolation from each other with the danger that actions will be duplicated, and resources wasted in a very difficult financial climate.

Recommendation 2
We recommend that individual local authorities and ADASS NE commit to a NE regional approach to build a workable electronic system using the model and all the ingredients we have supplied. The ingredients include a regional code of conduct (building from the Support with Confidence example), modern inclusive learning and training, good workforce development and consistent approaches to information supplied to PAs and employers.

Recommendation 3
We recommend that local authorities focus on the NE Jobs Portal as the preferred option to develop a workable system. It has the capacity to move quickly. It also already goes beyond the social care market and links into wider workforce markets and trends. It also already links to all 12 local authorities.
Theme 3: Learning and development and safeguarding (section 5)

Learning and development
We believe it is vital that the web based model we propose to improve the visibility of PAs particularly the talent pool, is backed up with a modern inclusive approach to learning and development which encourages a wide and diverse range of potential PAs:

Recommendation 4
Our overarching recommendation is that a project is initiated through the Workforce Forum and undertaken by Workforce Leads to establish a consistent PA Framework for Learning and Development for use at both regional and local levels.

Subsumed under recommendation 4 is the need to encourage all local authorities to:

- Agree to provide consistent foundation information for PAs and ensure they share good practice and learning
- Link learning and development for PAs to wider workforce development strategies to encourage and support a flexible workforce including older workers and young people in training
- Ensure there is greater access to basic training for PAs that is wider than social care and gives equal weight to alternative skills, qualifications and experience
- Encourage and promote career pathways for PAs that enable them to make use of their experience and skills and prior learning
- Adopt a training and development approach based on modern self assessment, self development and blended learning approaches
- Ensure that local colleges and learning providers are given a clear steer on the requirements they should meet for personalisation including models that fit PA and employer requirements
- Seriously consider as part of the talent pool available to PAs, methods for PAs to build skills and attributes profiles (social networking style) consistent with modern inclusive styles of working and learning.
Safeguarding

While acknowledging that North East Local Authorities have mixed views on safeguarding and they are likely to give a mixed response to the forthcoming DH proposals about managed risk taking we strongly advocate an enabling approach to risk management.

Recommendation 5

We recommend a simple largely voluntary self regulation based on PAs providing information about themselves including references and qualifications. This recommendation is dependent on PA’s themselves uploading information via the web based North East Jobs talent pool facility which is already available. Local authorities can also direct and signpost potential PAs to Job Centres, libraries and community centres who can offer practical computing help for people to provide and upload their information.

Under recommendation 5 we note the following sub recommendations for all local authorities to:

- Agree a simple self-regulatory approach
- Agree to share some core principles to facilitate growth of PAs and greater movement across geographical boundaries
- Agree to have the freedom – at extra cost to each authority – to continue with own CRB and safeguarding procedures outwith this core approach.

Theme 4: Supporting PAs and employers (Section 6)

Recommendation 6

We recommend that local authorities in the northeast use the good practice they have amassed and establish a base standard for support organisations. Local authorities could incorporate this into their commissioning frameworks with support agencies in future.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that local authorities incorporate in their contracts with support agencies requirements to facilitate peer group support for employers.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that local authorities support the proposal to use the North East Jobs Portal and the private zones that would be available through it to encourage PAs to establish a virtual support network.
Theme 5: Using ULOs and mutuals to provide support and development services

The national policy direction is supporting the use of ULOs and mutuals as vehicles to provide support and development services for employers and PAs.

We believe that there are benefits in using ULOs as local support vehicles for employers and PAs. However, we have identified the current strengths and weaknesses of promoting a ULO model, and are clear that ULOs will continue to need support to evolve their role.

We also believe that ULOS in the region are not generally mature enough to be able to offer services across a number of local authority areas, without a stronger infrastructure to pick up in particular a lot of the back office functions. We also think that there is potential to develop the role of mutual social enterprises to act as an umbrella employer of PAs in the future.

Recommendation 9
We recommend the development of an agreed set of operating standards, and a shared database of resources, which would enable ULOs (and other support providers) to offer a more consistent approach.

Recommendation 10
We recommend that local authorities continue to promote ULOs as local providers of support services.