

SOCIAL SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	20 April 2023
Report Subject	Audit Wales Report Direct Payments for Adult Social Care
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
Report Author	Chief Officer: Social Services
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its audit programme, in April 2022, Audit Wales published its all-Wales report into how Direct Payments are helping adults in Wales live independently. The report looked at how Direct Payments helped to sustain people's wellbeing and whether the payments improved an individual's quality of life. Audit Wales also looked at how local authorities managed and encouraged the take up of Direct Payments and where these services presented value for money.

Direct Payments are an alternative to local authority arranged care or support and can help to meet an individual's needs or the needs of a carer.

Their aim is to give people more choice, greater flexibility and more control over the support they receive.

This report shared the findings of the Audit Wales report and the Flintshire response to it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members note the recommendations in the Audit Wales report on Direct Payments for Adult Social Care.
2	Members agreed the actions in the Flintshire Response to the national report.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE AUDIT WALES REPORT DIRECT PAYMENTS FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE
1.01	In April 2022 Audit Wales published their report into Direct Payments for Adult Social Care across Wales. The report looking at how local authorities provided Direct Payment services to adults, examined their impact and value for money.
1.02	Audit Wales's review assessed how Direct Payments are helping people to live independently and enable them to have more voice, choice and control over the care and support they receive. They also looked at how Direct Payments help sustain individual's wellbeing and whether they improve a person's quality of life.
1.03	The review also looked at how local authorities manage and encourage take up of Direct Payments and judged whether these services present value for money.
1.04	To undertake the work, Audit Wales met with Care Inspectorate Wales, the Welsh Government, the Older People's Commissioner, Age Cymru, Carers Wales and a small number of service users alongside local authority representatives. Flintshire staff were interviewed alongside staff from 8 other local authorities. Auditors also interviewed representatives from other national bodies such as ADSS Cymru.
1.05	The review work was undertaken between September 2020 and February 2022.
1.06	Report Detail
1.07	The overall conclusion of the review was that Direct Payments support people's independence and are highly valued by service users and carers, but inconsistencies in the way they are promoted and managed by local authorities mean services are not always equitable and it is difficult to assess overall value for money.
1.08	The review also found that people are not consistently encouraged to take up Direct Payments and that the managing and supporting people to use Direct Payments varies widely.
1.09	The review also identified that Personal Assistants are essential to people making the most of Direct Payments, but service users often struggle to recruit them.
1.10	The report also noted that the interface between use of NHS continuing healthcare and social care on access to Direct Payments remains a problem.
1.11	The report did note, that despite significant challenges, local authorities ensured service users and carers were supported in the main during the pandemic.

1.12

The report contains 10 recommendations (Appendix 1):
Under the category of how local authorities promote and raise awareness of Direct Payments, Audit Wales recommended that local authorities:

- **R1** Review public information in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments.
- **R2** Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments.
- **R3** Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers.

To ensure Direct Payments are consistently offered, Audit Wales recommended that local authorities:

- **R4** Ensure information about Direct Payments is available at the front door to social care and are included in the initial discussion on the available care options for service users and carers.
- **R5** Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers.

To ensure services are provided equitably, Audit Wales recommend that local authorities and the Welsh Government:

- **R6** Work together to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants.
- **R7** Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out:
 - what Direct Payments can pay for
 - how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work
 - how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work
 - how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked
 - how to administer and manage pooled budgets.

They also recommended that public information should be reviewed regularly (at least every two years) to ensure they are working effectively and remain relevant.

The next recommendation was for Welsh Government consideration:

- **R8** Ensure that people who receive both NHS continuing healthcare and Direct Payments have greater voice, choice and control in decision making.

The two final recommendations were to effectively manage performance and be able to judge value for money of Direct Payments and Audit Wales recommended that local authorities and Welsh Government:

- **R9** Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence.
- **R10** Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement.

1.13	Flintshire County Council's Response
1.14	<p>The Council submitted a full response to Audit Wales (Appendix 2). In this response the authority highlighted its investment in the development and nurturing of a social care culture of choice and control and the integral part Direct Payments play in the achievement of that vision.</p> <p>The Council has also completed a self-assessment of its own performance against the Recommendations relevant to local authorities and details are provided in the Impact Assessment Risk Management section of this report.</p>
1.15	<p><u>Response to Recommendation 1 and 2:</u> Flintshire recognises the importance of timely accessible information. The Flintshire Direct Payments Support Service has co-produced with citizens, a range of information booklets, factsheets and other resources to help broader understanding of direct payments. Flintshire also recognises that regardless of the quality of written information it is often necessary to adopt flexible and bespoke approaches to enabling full understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities. We broadly agree that promotion of direct payments as a genuine option for people ties in with social work practice, social work understanding, team culture, Social Work training and leadership.</p> <p>To assist with the context of Recommendations 1 & 2 we suggested that it would be helpful to have examples of good quality resources such as available information, training approaches etc., details of what is currently available and what is missing in Wales would have been helpful and constructive in supporting progress in these areas.</p>

1.16

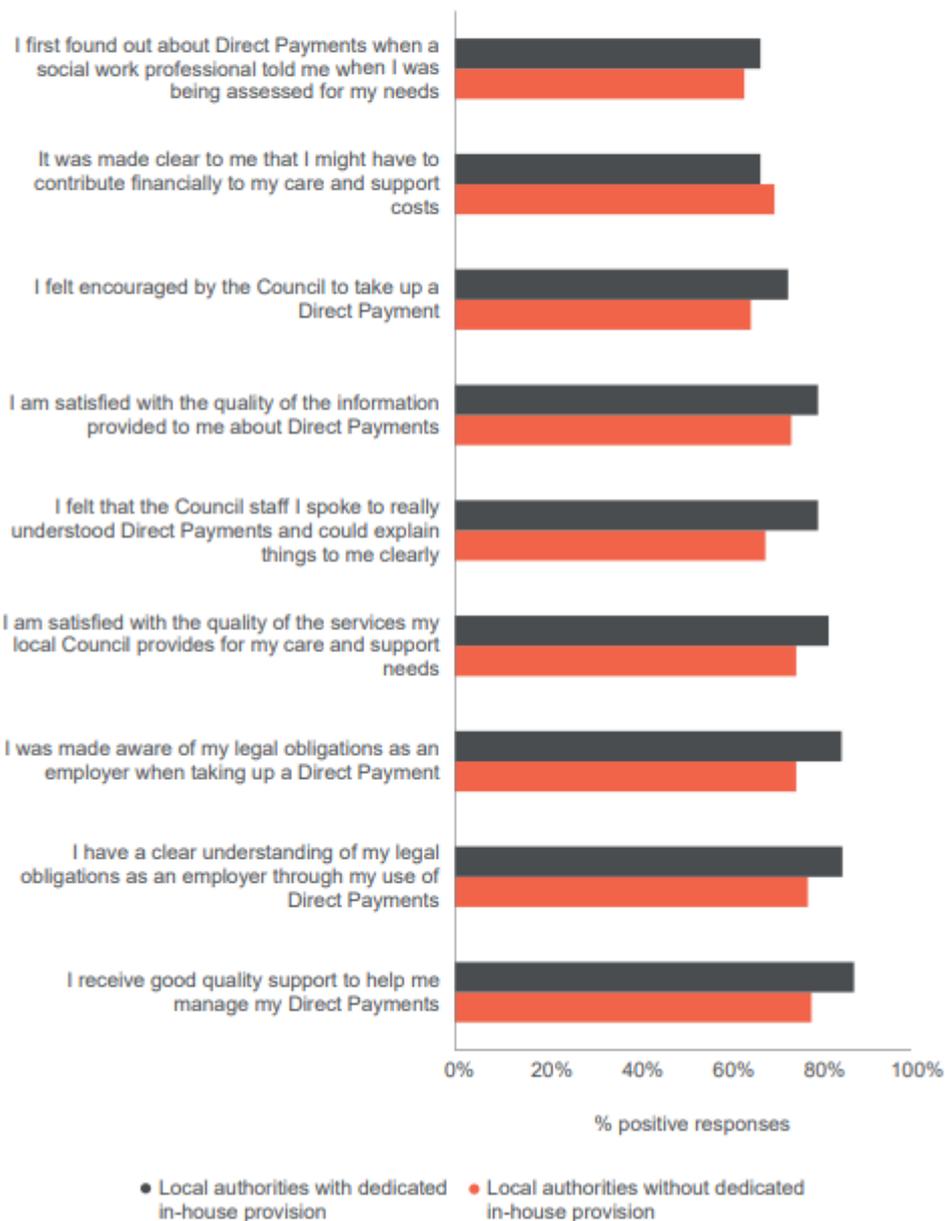
Response to Recommendation 3

We are slightly confused that the report suggests that independent advice about direct payments should be provided from first contact. This appears to be contradictory to the report’s findings detailed on page 26 *‘People in areas where support services to help manage Direct Payments are directly provided by local authorities have a more positive overall experience than those using a ‘commissioned’ service.’*

And information provided in Exhibit 3 (page 28 of the report)

Exhibit 3: Direct Payment recipients’ views about services, by type of administrative support service (in-house or commissioned)

Overall, people living in areas where support services are provided directly by local authorities are more positive about the service they receive than those provided by a third party.



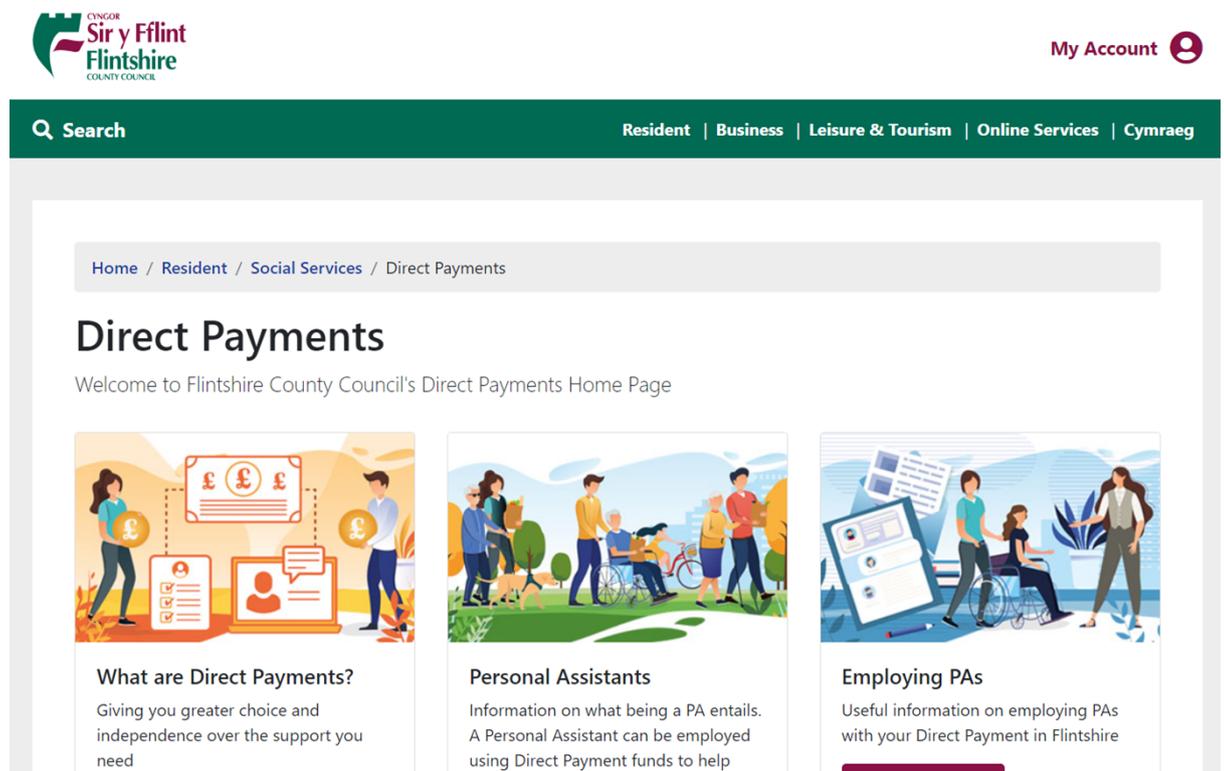
To date, we have not received any further clarification on the recommendation from Audit Wales.

1.17 Response to Recommendation 4 & 5

In Flintshire, we ensure information on Direct Payments is provided to our staff working within the Single Point of Access (SPoA). Our Direct Payment Team Manager and officers from within the in-house Direct Payment Team often attend Team Meetings for both SPoA and Older People's Social Worker Teams and share with them case studies and information on the flexibility, adaptability and creativity associated with Direct Payments.

A Direct Payment Practice Guide is also available for practitioners and provides more detailed information (Appendix 3).

We also have a dedicated Direct Payments Home Page which provides information to citizens even before they come to the Council's Front Door. The web pages are also a tool staff can use with Service Users and Carers to share information.



What are Direct Payments?
Giving you greater choice and independence over the support you need

Personal Assistants
Information on what being a PA entails. A Personal Assistant can be employed using Direct Payment funds to help

Employing PAs
Useful information on employing PAs with your Direct Payment in Flintshire

<https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Social-Services/Direct-Payments/Home.aspx>

Finally, we have a Direct Payment General Information Booklet (Appendix 4)

In our response to Audit Wales we shared that our Direct Payment Team have worked with citizens and I.T. partners to completely reinvent our web based resources. This has resulted in an 800% increase in activity over the past 12 months. Additionally, we have facilitated forums, publish a quarterly newsletter, have an on-line news page, have developed Facebook and Twitter feeds, have written direct payments related articles, produced high quality promotional videos accessible via the Flintshire YouTube channel, addressed elected members, developed a catalogue of examples of innovative use of direct payments and have supported innovative solutions particularly during the pandemic to help people resolve personal challenges.

	<p>We also noted in our response that we strongly felt that sharing such practice would have helped balance the report and supported other local authorities to develop their resources and approaches.</p>
1.18	<p><u>Response to Recommendation 6</u> Personal Assistants are employed directly by recipients who are empowered and supported to become good employers, meet their responsibilities and retain workers. We have shared with Audit Wales that we are unsure how a joint recruitment and retention plan could be adopted and implemented without undermining the autonomy enjoyed by direct payments employers.</p> <p>Our suggestion is that we focus on providing high quality support services that helps direct payments recipients become high quality employers.</p> <p>Furthermore, we do not fully agree with the statement in the report that “Personal Assistants are essential to people making the most of Direct Payments, but service users struggle to recruit them”. As stated Personal Assistants can be the best solution for many people, particularly those in need of physical care and support, however we feel that this emphasis on Personal Assistants is unhelpful and demonstrates a very limited perspective. Certainly, the focus of direct payments in Flintshire is on helping people achieve their personal outcomes, so solutions should not be limited. Further to this we could have provided a range of creative examples.</p> <p>To date we have received no response for Audit Wales regarding this response.</p>
1.19	<p><u>Response to Recommendation 7</u> The Direct Payment web pages, set out the answers to the questions posed in Recommendation 7, including a detailed section on Information for Employers - https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Social-Services/Direct-Payments/Information-for-Employers.aspx</p> <p>As with all Flintshire Social Services policies and guidance documents we have a rolling 2-year review schedule to ensure information is regularly updated.</p>
1.20	<p><u>Response to Recommendations 9 &10</u> The Flintshire Direct Payments Support Service have developed core data sets and are using intelligent information to inform future priorities and practice. We are striving to align such data with the known impacts of direct payments solutions to provide a 360-degree evaluation process.</p> <p>We have also embedded citizen feedback into our work and are using this to shape and confirm the effectiveness’ of our services. Inclusion of such examples within the report and/or proactive suggestions to help local authorities build more robust systems would have been welcomed.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Officer time has been taken to ensure that the recommendations are responded to, and any learnings implemented.

3.00 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

3.01 A full self-assessment of the recommendations has been undertaken by the Planning and Development Team working alongside the Direct Payment Team.

A RAG Status has been applied to each recommendation and is detailed below:

- R1 Review public information in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments. – **Green**
- R2 Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments. – **Green**
- R3 Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers. – **Green**
- R4 Ensure information about Direct Payments is available at the front door to social care and are included in the initial discussion on the available care options for service users and carers - **Green**.
- R5 Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers. – **Green**
- R6 Work together to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants. – **Belongs to All-Wales local authority Direct Payments Forum and Social Care Wales**
- R7 Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out:
 - what Direct Payments can pay for;
 - how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work;
 - how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work;
 - how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked; and
 - how to administer and manage pooled budgets.Public information should be reviewed regularly (at least every two years) to ensure they are working effectively and remain relevant. – **FCC element is Green**
- R8 Ensure that people who receive both NHS continuing healthcare and Direct Payments have greater voice, choice and control in decision making. – **Belongs to the Welsh Government**
- R9 Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence. – **FCC element Green**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R10 Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement. – FCC element Green
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	Audit Wales consulted with a wide range of organisations, individuals, and national bodies, as detailed above.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 Audit Wales report Direct Payments for Adult Social Care
5.02	Appendix 2 Flintshire Response
5.03	Appendix 3 Direct Payment Practice Guide
5.04	Appendix 4 Direct Payment General Information Booklet

6.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
6.01	Contact Officer: Jane Davies Telephone: 01352 702503 E-mail: jane.m.davies@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Audit Wales – is the trademark of two legal entities, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office. Its role is to assure the people of Wales that public money is being managed well as well as explaining how public money is being used and how it meets people’s needs.