

Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting	Thursday 5 December 2024
Report Subject	Financial Assessments and Charging Team
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

The Social Services Portfolio comprises of numerous teams all working to deliver care and support services to the residents of Flintshire. Some teams are more prominent than others and many will understand the work of the Safeguarding Unit or our frontline social worker teams, but fewer will be familiar with some of the key back office functions delivered by our Financial Assessments and Charging Team, known as FACT.

The team sits within the Safeguarding and Commissioning Service and delivers a broad range of services linked to either paying providers for services delivered or invoicing individuals and families for services received.

The team work with both Adult and Children's Services and as well as offering information, advice and support for individuals, care providers and partners. They also offer expert financial process advice to the social care teams.

The legal framework supporting the work of the Financial Assessment and Charging Team is laid out in Parts 4 and 5 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015. Local authorities, when exercising their social services functions, must act in accordance with the requirements contained in this legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	That Members acknowledge and support the work being undertaken by the Financial Assessment and Charging Team in delivering services to the residents of Flintshire.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING FINANCIAL ASSESSMENTS AND CHARGING TEAM
1.01	<p>The Financial Assessments and Charging Team are based at Tŷ Dewi Sant in Ewloe, and delivery the financial services that support the operation of the Social Services Portfolio. Unlike health, social care is not free at the point of delivery and adults in receipt of care and support may be required to pay for or make a financial contribution towards the care and support they receive. This financial contribution is means tested and Welsh Government also have in place legislation regarding the maximum charge and individual can be charged for certain services.</p>
1.02	The Team
1.03	<p>The Financial Assessments and Charging Team are made up of the following teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Assessment Officers• Welfare Benefit Officers• Deputyship Officers• Business Support Assistants
1.04	Financial Assessment Officer
1.05	<p>The Financial Assessment Officers work either covering domiciliary care or residential care services. Whilst the work is different, there are similarities and when required Financial Assessment Officers are able to work between teams to cover holiday periods etc.</p> <p><u>Domiciliary Care</u></p> <p>Domiciliary care (sometimes referred to as Home Care) is provided by the Council's in-house Provider Services Team and by the Flintshire independent care sector.</p> <p>The Financial Assessment Officers are responsible for assessing how much an individual needs to contribute towards their care package, to check all domiciliary care invoices received from independent care providers. These invoices are checked to ensure the hours being delivered are correct and the hours are then inputted into our IT system which raises invoices for individuals to pay their assessed contribution towards the domiciliary care package they receive.</p> <p>Invoices for domiciliary home care are raised on a monthly basis and to give an understanding of scale, in August 2024; 1,162 individuals were receiving non-residential care services in Flintshire (this includes domiciliary care and day care services). On average invoices to the value of £0.484m are raised each month.</p>

1.06	<p><u>Residential Care and Nursing Care</u></p> <p>On receiving notification of an admission into a residential or nursing care setting the Financial Assessment Officers must identify the type of placement and category of care. This will determine how the service user is financially assessed and how much the authority must contribute towards the placement.</p> <p>The FACT Team will notify the service user of their assessed contribution. (At the time of writing, there were 577 individuals received residential care in Flintshire). The team will then arrange to pay the Council's contribution to the residential or nursing home provider.</p> <p>To ensure the payment schedule is accurate the team must ensure all confirmation invoices have been received and reconciled, notification of payment forms have been submitted for any new placements and change of circumstances forms have been updated on the system.</p> <p>When completing the financial assessment for any long term placements, the team must identify if the service user owns any properties of which the value must be taken into consideration. The team would then be responsible for ensuring land charges are registered, a valuation of property is completed and any legal documentation or contracts have been arranged and signed.</p> <p>For nursing care placements where the health board has agreed to pay the Free Nursing Care (FNC) contribution, the Council, as lead commissioner is responsible for paying this FNC contribution to the homes. The FACT team will then then reclaim the FNC amount back from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).</p> <p>During the month of August 2024 the Council payment for residential and nursing care was £1.083m.</p> <p>The team also process the payments for residential and fostering placements for children.</p>
1.07	<p>Welfare Benefit Officers</p>
1.08	<p>The Welfare Benefit Officers' role is to work with individuals to undertake a Financial Assistance Claim Form to establish the amount the individual will pay towards their cost of care. This includes those in receipt of domiciliary care, residential/nursing care and respite care.</p> <p>The Welfare Benefit Officers (WBO) will often go out and visit Service Users or their representatives in their own homes to verify income, expenditure and savings levels as well as confirming the details around property ownership.</p> <p>It is the WBO's responsibility to explain the complicated policies and procedures around charges, billing, direct payments, and the sometimes complex and contentious issues around property charges, deferred payments and deprivation of capital.</p>

	<p>An important part of the WBO's role is to ensure that Service Users are receiving the correct benefits. The benefits system can be hard to navigate and it can also be a time of change for individuals as the circumstances change according to their care needs, so to do their eligibility for benefits.</p> <p>If the WBOs identify an individual is not in receipt of the correct benefits, they will assist with claims, these include Universal Credit, Personal Independent Payments, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. In the first 6 months of this current financial year the WBOs have supported individuals to claim just over £0.260m in previously unclaimed benefits.</p>
1.09	<p>The Welfare Benefit Officer also support families where a Special Guardianship Order made by the Family Court that places a child or young person to live with someone other than their parents until they reach the age of 18. The order is considered to be the closest order to adoption giving the named person(s) parental responsibility for the child alongside the parents although more control than the parents.</p> <p>When a child is placed with a Special Guardian they are entitled to an assessment for financial assistance from the Council to identify whether they are eligible for a Special Guardianship Allowance.</p> <p>Once the order is received a referral will come to the Financial Assessment and Charging Team and a Welfare Benefits Officer will visit the Special Guardian to complete the Financial Assistance Claim form. Once this has been completed the Financial Assessment Officer will calculate the amount they are entitled to. It is important to remember that this is a means tested assessment. If the Special Guardian is entitled to a payment they will receive it on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Adoption Allowance is also administered through the team and payable when the Court legally transfers all parental rights, responsibility and custody from a child's birth parents to the adoptive parent.</p> <p>The procedure is the same as for a Special Guardianship Allowance. Both of these are reviewed on an annual basis and financial support can change depending on the circumstances of the household.</p>
1.10	<p>Deputyship Officers</p>
1.11	<p>Flintshire County Council offers services through its Deputyship Team to help vulnerable individuals to manage their financial affairs. Support is offered by undertaking a role as either an Appointee of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) or a Deputy of the Court of Protection (COP).</p> <p>A DWP Appointee receives an individual's DWP benefit payments and is able to support them to budget and pay their rent and utility bills.</p>

	<p>A Deputy of the Court of Protection will be appointed by the court to manage the financial affairs of people who lack mental capacity.</p> <p>Once the Deputyship is granted by the Court, an order is issued to the local authority allowing them to deal with the finances and property of the client which includes transferring all funds held in the clients name to the local authority, drawing of DWP benefits, Occupational Pensions etc.</p> <p>A Deputyship Bank account will be set up by the local authority in the client's name and all transactions made are subject to strict financial controls.</p> <p>The Deputy is required to report to the Office of the Public Guardian annually and inform them of any significant financial decisions made during the year.</p>
1.12	<p>The Flintshire County Council Deputyship Team currently consists of four full time, permanent Officers, supported by one full time Business Support Assistant.</p> <p>The Deputyship Team will only support the management of an individual's financial affairs if there is no other suitable person to undertake this role (i.e., a family member or friend) and/or where there is evidence of conflicting interests, suspicions or accusations of abuse.</p> <p>Across the team, there are currently 231 Appointeeship and 104 Deputyship Cases. The number of cases supported has consistently increased year on year and shows no sign of slowing. Additionally, the complexity of these cases is growing, taking more time per case for Officers.</p>
1.13	Business Support Assistants
1.14	In order to ensure the whole Financial Assessment and Charging Team operate as efficiently as possible, a small team of Business Support Assistants deliver administration support to each of the service areas detailed above.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The FACT Team are integral to ensure the timely and accurate payment of Providers, the financial assessment and billing of adults who are assessed to contribute towards the cost of their care package and invoicing health for their contributions to packages paid by the local authority.
3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Any failure to carry out the Team functions who have a direct impact on the local authority's ability to maximise income generation and risk the financial stability of Providers.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	N/A
5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None
6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015 – Part 4 & 5 Code of Practice (Charging and Financial Assessment) - https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/social-services-and-well-being-wales-act-2014-part-4-and-5-code-of-practice-charging-and-financial-assessment.pdf
7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Jane Davies – Senior Manager Safeguarding and Commissioning Telephone: 01352 702503 E-mail: jane.m.davies@flintshire.gov.uk
8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	None