

DIRECT PAYMENTS

1.0 Background

This report has been produced to give additional historical information to the Audit Committee in relation to work undertaken concerning issues relating to Direct Payments.

The Social Work Service Management Team received a report relating to an audit of existing Direct Payments across the Social Work Service in January 2011 which detailed a range of anomalies in relation to current Direct Payment arrangement. The findings of the report were secured through the scrutiny of social work service user's confidential casefiles. The original audit of this work was undertaken by finance and commissioning staff.

2.0 Social Work Intervention

2.1 The vast majority of the anomalies related to administrative issues requiring updates from caseworkers and actions to be taken by the recipients of the Direct Payments. Many of these matters rely on the swift co-operation of service users and carers with the caseworker. For a variety of reasons this does not always happen as quickly as the caseworker would want or expect.

2.2 Our professional staff work in partnership with service users and carers under a welfare model and although the organisation are bound by Legislation, procedures and committee structures the dynamic relationship between caseworker and service user is not a statutory command and control model. The relationship between caseworker and service user is one of co-operation within a non-statutory framework. This partnership relies on a positive relationship between both parties. Unfortunately both parties do not

always agree on the priority of taking care of sound administrative functions and procedures within the assessment and care planning process and cycle. An example of this is described as follows;

Mrs M-Oban	Care Manager been in touch with family repeatedly attempting to organise annual review.	Mrs Mac unwell and has cancelled appointments and unable to attend reviews which have been organised. Has been asked to complete financial returns and these remain outstanding. New review set for 18 June 2012.
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2.3 It would also be fair to accept that professional social workers are more concerned with the protection and welfare of the service user and carer and developing care plans which meet agreed outcomes. The focus on administrative duties and responsibilities are not always viewed as important as protection and welfare considerations. It is therefore very important that procedures are clear, focused and readily available for assessment staff. This fact is evidenced in the original report which highlighted many of these administrative tasks had not been completed to the satisfaction of those who audited the casefiles.

2.4 The staff responsible for the DP's with anomalies went back to service users and carers and got involved in review activity in relation to care plans to find a resolution to outstanding issues. This was not always achieved in one single visit and involved on-going discussions and contact with service users and carers.

2.5 Timeline The key dates in relation to this work are noted below;

Original Audit of Direct Payments by Commissioning Team and Report of Findings to SWMT.	January 2011
Set up Direct Payment Working Group	March 2011
Completion of primary task of DP working group- New Procedures	September 2011
Follow up of outstanding issues by Area Managers/Service Managers- Reporting back to Head of Service	October 2011 to Present

A total of 137 cases were audited originally. There were issues identified in 90 of these cases. By the end of September 2011 only 57 cases remained outstanding. By 8/6/2012 this number has reduced to 4 cases. The total amount of money paid by the Council for these 4 cases annually is £ 71,647. The total amount paid out for all Direct Payments is currently £ 1.8 million.

The total amount of the original 90 DP cases with anomalies was £1,422,983.17

The total amount relating to the 57 DP cases was £591,000.00

It is expected the remaining 4 cases will be concluded by the end of June 2012.

3.0 Working Group

The Direct Payment working group was formed in March 2011 and had representation from operational staff, finance, and commissioning and internal audit staff. This group worked together to produce a new set of DP procedures which are now being used by managers and staff and service users. This work was intensive and involved

benchmarking activity to compare what other Councils had to offer before the group moved to produce a new set of clear procedures for use within Argyll and Bute. The group also worked at clearing anomalies from the existing report relating to the audit of case files. By the time the group concluded its primary role of producing new procedures over 50% of the anomalies had been resolved.

Outputs

4.1 The DP working group delivered two new updated guidance and procedural documents. These documents were designed for service users and carers and managers and staff. The quality of these documents has enhanced the quality of information available to both sets of stakeholders mentioned.

The group also cleared over 50% of the outstanding anomalies recorded in the original report by sending requests to managers to update and problem solve the anomalies captured in the original report

4.2 The DP group was disbanded and the on-going reporting was set up back to the Head of Service with regular updates expected back to the Admin Officer by Service Managers and Area Managers.

4.3 At this time it was agreed that all the cases would be reviewed both in terms of service provision and DP.

4.0 Outcomes Secured

- Clear concise procedures available for both service users and carers and managers and staff which have increased understanding of the procedures and structures concerning DP arrangements.
- Managers and staff have increased confidence in the standard of guidance available to improve their knowledge and understanding of DP procedures

- Feedback from community groups has also been more positive and satisfaction with guidance has improved.

5.0 Lessons Learned

There was a delay in commencing this work after the original report was produced. This delay has been acknowledged by the Head of Service (Adult Care).

The Social Work Service should have acted to secure better guidance for staff in relation to DP. This had an impact on staff following procedures in relation to administrative requirements relating to DP's. This has now been addressed by the production of new procedures. These procedures will be reviewed by the Service Development Manager.

Operational Managers could have placed more urgency on securing closure of administrative anomalies highlighted in the original report. The Head of Service has discussed this issue with Service Managers and this is clearly acknowledged.

The need to engage with the outside provider SPAEN to improve and enhance the quality of information available will be delivered by the new SLA with this user led provider organisation who has a very good track record of delivering quality outcomes for service users and carers. SPAEN will also become actively involved in on-going training with Council staff during 2012 and beyond. At the time of writing this report this issue is being explored with SPAEN.

- The DP working group delivered improved guidance and secured closure of over 50% of the anomalies identified in the original report. This was secured on top of the detailed process of writing new procedures for Direct Payments. This should be acknowledged as a productive piece of work which included benchmarking with other Councils.

6.0 All DP's are linked to appropriate care plans but the administration of these particular casefiles had a variety of issues that required improvement. There was no suggestion that Council monies were being used in an illegal/inappropriate way. The level of risk to the Council is best described as Low.

7.0 Conclusions

Argyll and Bute Council now have procedures in place to offer guidance to both service users and carers and managers and staff across the Social Work Service. This will improve the standard of information available to Council Officers and service users and carers. These new procedures will be updated annually to ensure they keep track of changes in social policy and financial and commissioning good practice. Lessons have been learned through this process which will inform the future effectiveness of project work. The Council also have a SLA with SPAEN and this partnership will enhance the standard of support to service users and carers, managers and staff.

8.0 Implications

Policy: New procedures now in place

Financial: Improved financial procedures contained within procedures

Legal: None

Personnel: None

Equal Opportunities: None

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