Management of the council’s direct payments programme

A report of the Scrutiny Overview Committee
December 2008

Councillor Roger Roberts (Chair)
Councillor John Kennedy (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Bailey
Councillor Stuart Gordon-Bullock
Councillor Kirsty Jerome
Councillor Paddy Kane
Councillor Jayne McCoy
Councillor Paul Newman
Councillor Paul Scully
Councillor Myfanwy Wallace
The Scrutiny Overview Committee has conducted an investigation into the way that the direct payments programme functions. This gave opportunities for strengths and weaknesses to be identified, allowing the committee to make recommendations on performance and other areas that need further or more detailed investigation.

My committee took evidence from Ted Gates, Samantha Edwards and Nicola Davies from the Sutton Centre for Independent Living and Learning (SCILL), Andrew Clark, Head of Performance and Quality Adult Social Services, Toby Price, Head of Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People and Jane Stark, Short Break Manager, Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People.

Evidence was given at the second session by the parents of children who receive direct payments to access short breaks. This session was closed to the public.

At the third and final session, evidence was given by Samantha Edwards from the Sutton Centre for Independent Living and Learning (SCILL), Andrew Clark, Head of Performance and Quality Adult Social Services, and Toby Price, Head of Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People.

The committee found through use of the Care Services Improvement Partnership self-assessment, and the evidence gathering sessions, that there is a need to address several key areas of the direct payment services. These areas include communication and information, organisational governance and the commissioning of services, take-up of direct payments by long term users of social services and the overall support provided to parents and guardians.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. By Spring 2009, the self directed support service, Children’s Direct Payment Services and Adult Direct Payment Services should make available to direct payment recipients, informative, and easy to understand information packages in both electronic and paper formats. The information should include a simple guide to direct payments, the range of services provided, contact points and advice on the transitional phase from children’s to adults.

2. By Spring 2009 to review the governance structures and commissioning processes of the direct payments service. This is to include a review of policies and procedures, training of front line staff and for the users of direct payments. There also needs to be in place processes for dispute resolution when self directed support users experienced employee relations issues.

3. By Spring 2009, Adult Social Services and Housing should produce an information leaflet which provides advice on safeguarding vulnerable users of direct payments, and by Autumn 2009, this leaflet to be translated into the five most prevalent minority languages spoken in the Borough of Sutton.

4. The Personalisation Manager, in conjunction with the Executive Head of Older and Physical Disabilities, the Executive Head of Learning Disabilities and Mental Health and the Executive Head of Children’s Services should produce an action plan to increase the number of long term clients, including older people, using social services accessing direct payments and reporting on its progress and the relevant performance indicators on an exception basis to the Health & Well-Being Scrutiny Committee in the future.

5. That, by Autumn 2009, a self directed support (including direct payments) user group be established that gives users of the service an opportunity to contribute to influence direct payment policies and procedures. Also to set up a support group to provide direct payment users a forum where they can share their experiences.

6. That the Scrutiny Overview Committee revisit direct payments in nine months time to examine the progress on the above recommendations, in particular in relation to the transitional phase.
BACKGROUND

1. The aim of the investigation was to use the national Care Services Improvement Partnership self-assessment tool to look at the way the direct payment system functioned, thereby enabling the opportunity for both the strengths and weaknesses to be identified and informing the committee to make recommendations as to how good performance could be managed, how poorer could be managed, and any areas that needed further, more detailed investigation.

2. Three outcomes of the investigation were identified as:
   - Improving on communication and information flows for clients
   - Improve governance and commissioning procedures, and
   - Engaging with clients in order to continually improve services.

3. The committee took evidence from Ted Gates, Samantha Edwards and Nicola Davies from the Sutton Centre for Independent Living and Learning (SCILL), Andrew Clark, Head of Performance and Quality Adult Social Services, Toby Price, Head of Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People and Jane Stark, Short Break Manager, Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People. This was supplemented at a second meeting from parents that access direct payments for short breaks.

4. Direct payments are cash payments made to individuals who have been assessed as needing services, in lieu of social services. They can be made to disabled people aged 16 or over, or to people with parental responsibility for disabled children, and to carers aged 16 or over in respect of carer services. A person must be able to consent to have a direct payment and have the capacity to manage one, although they can have assistance to manage their payment on a day-to-day basis.

   The aim of direct payments is to give more flexibility in how service is provided. By giving individuals money in lieu of social care services, people have greater choice and control over their lives, and are able to make their own decisions about how their care is delivered.

   Direct payments should be discussed as a first point option at each assessment and each interview.
KEY FINDINGS

Improving the quality, consistency and availability of information

One of the key factors affecting user’s and parents and their ability to successfully and confidently access and use direct payments is the consistency and continuity of the available information. There was an expressed need for a range of information packages to be either up-dated or produced for direct payment users.

Plain English contract

The committee identified the need for a plain English contract, as there are problems with people understanding the legal terminology in the current contracts. However, after investigating the cost of developing plain English contracts, the committee was informed that such an endeavour was prohibitive due to costs.

Governance and commissioning of direct payments

The committee identified a need to strengthen the governance and commissioning structures throughout the direct payment process. It became apparent to the committee that there needs to be more cohesive policies developed for the delivery of direct payments.

The relationship between the children’s services, adult services and the self-directed support services needs to be further developed and the capacity of these services also needs to be fully developed so that increasing workloads can be met in a timely manner.

The committee found that more assistance could be given to parents or guardians concerning direct payment contracts and the services they purchase through contracts. Sound contractual advice for parents and guardians is required if the client is not satisfied with the support they have brought through direct payments.

Point of diagnosis

It is vital that each newly diagnosed disabled child is referred by the treating consultant and or paediatrician to the Disability Partnership for Children and Young People so that appropriate support and advice can be given to parents.

Establish a parental support network
The committee found that parents and guardians see establishing a parental/guardian support group as a positive step towards providing parents with a forum where they can share their experiences and provide a useful networking environment and also contribute the development of policies and procedures.

**Establishing a key worker position for over children aged over eight**

The committee found there was a need to have key workers in place to assist with direct payment issues and address concerns for the over eight group. There is currently a key worker service in place children aged under eight years of age, which has been a significant help to those that access under eight services. While the need for a key worker service for children over eight has been recognised, there has been no outcome to date. Parents and guardians have reiterated the need and value for this gap to be filled.

**Safe guarding direct payments against fraudulent claims**

Self directed support agencies continue to respond to allegations of fraudulent claims by employees of direct payments recipients. Clear reporting processes and advice on what do if a direct payment user suspects inappropriate behaviour by their employee needs to be established and included in information leaflets.

**After school and school holiday activities**

Parents were very positive about the provision made by schools during term time but brought to the committees’ attention their need for further support during the school holidays.

**EVIDENCE SOURCES**


**Further information**

Please contact the Policy & Partnerships Team, Civic Offices, Sutton 020 8770 5000