

SWAP audit – Direct Payments

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<p>Summary</p>	<p>As part of the 2017-18 audit plan, a review was undertaken by SWAP to assess the adequacy of the controls and procedures in place for the administering of direct payments by the Children with Disabilities team (CwD) at Somerset County Council (SCC).</p> <p>The audit objective was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide assurance that consistent advice and guidance is given to families, • an accurate needs assessment and an approved offer of care from the appropriate source of funding is provided and that • payments to direct payment service users are valid, timely and accurate. <p>The audit outcome gave partial assurance and identified 3 key areas of service where changes were required to be able to provide full assurance.</p> <p>This report sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the outcomes of service activity relating to the areas of concern raised by SWAP and • provides assurance to the Committee that the actions have been embedded into the ongoing functioning of the service, thus providing an improved service to families and better financial controls.
<p>Review activity</p>	<p>Finding 1 (low risk) <i>Initial assessments are not effective, timely and transparent, resulting in outcomes not being identified or achieved</i></p> <p><u>1.1 Approval of Direct Payment Packages</u></p> <p>All children whose new or reviewed assessment of need has identified a need for a Direct Payment are now presented to a panel, which meets twice a month, of senior managers who have oversight of all such package requests. To minimise the risk of a care package not being provided in a timely way in an emergency situation there is a process in place to seek immediate approval to provide the care package and the application will be brought to</p>

next available panel for ratification.

1.2 Payments from SAP do not always match the approved packages

Team Managers undertake monthly tracking of all current direct payment packages in their geographical area. These checks include ensuring that care packages being paid to families match the agreed care plan and the package is still required and meeting the identified need. Alternative supports are always considered and implemented where a more appropriate option is available.

Where any anomaly is seen the social worker / family intervention worker is alerted and appropriate action taken.

1.3 Access to LCS and storage of documentation

Direct Payment's team are able to see basic information on Direct Payment users through the snapshot facility on the children's social care electronic records system (LCS).

The financial schedules are now sent to the Children's Social Care teams via the Business Support mail boxes to ensure that the allocated worker and their team manager are alerted to any document that is raised by the Direct Payment Team. The document is added to the Child's LCS record and the allocated worker is made aware of the communication, reviewing any impact this may have on the package provided.

1.4 Guidance to Families

Guidance for families is available on Somerset Choices. On undertaking a search for Direct Payments users are directed to a page where Direct Payments are discussed whether searching for Personal Budgets and Direct Payments or Direct Payments as a Short Break provision. From these pages there are links to the Adult Social Care pages where the Direct Payments policy is found. Within these pages there are also links to Enham website where their contact details are to be found. Enham are currently commissioned to provide Direct Payment Information Advice and Guidance to Direct Payment users on Somerset.

Finding 2 (Low Risk)

The Council does not have sufficient resources to meet the needs of the child

2.1 Budgetary Management

Budget meetings are held monthly between Operation

Manager and Finance Support worker to monitor spend in all budgets.

Based on month 7 projections, and with the current knowledge about children in our area of work, within the rebased budget, it is expected that there will be a £23,500 underspend at 2018/19 year end.

Finding 3 (Low Risk)

Personal Budgets are not used for the purpose for which they were allocated resulting in the care needs of the child not being met.

3.1 Monitoring of Direct Payment Accounts: Account Surpluses.

The staffing levels in the Direct Payment governance team (managed within Adult Services) have been increased therefore they are able to provide greater scrutiny of direct payment returns. Any unusual spend is highlighted promptly to the social work team.

Any accounts with high surplus are suspended pending enquiries being undertaken as to why. In these situations, the need is reassessed to ensure that appropriate community support and/or Direct Payments are in place.

The greater scrutiny of Direct Payments and consideration of alternative support has seen in year to end October 2018, £48,930 being recovered from DP accounts with high surplus.

3.2 Monitoring of Direct Payment Account : Appropriate Spend

The increase in staffing in the Direct Payment Support Team has ensured that returned ledgers are subject to greater scrutiny and inappropriate spend is highlighted to the Social Work teams as detailed above in 1.3.

3.3 Periodic Reviews of Direct Payment Packages

The Social Work Teams are now undertaking greater scrutiny of Direct Payment packages in their child in need and Early Support reviews, minimum 6 monthly and whenever a child's situation changes.

The introduction of monthly tracking panels and has also provided accountability at the frontline for Direct Payment

	packages that require immediate attention.
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that the committee accepts the outcomes of the review activity, following the SWAP audit, and are assured that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• assessments now identify children and families' needs,• that Direct Payments are consistently used for the purposes set out in legislation and that• rigorous administrative and management oversight and review has ensured that needs can be met within the budget assigned for that purpose.