

Education Health & Care Plan Payments

Outcomes of Audit report and LGO outcome
October 2024



Somerset
Council

Education Health & Care Plan Payments

Purpose of item

- Comply with the LGO remedy action through sharing a SWAP Audit report which considers the delays in making direct payments for children with Education Health and Care Plans and the impact of current staff shortages and vacancies.
- Share the key conclusions, recommendations and action plan resulting from the EHCP Payment SWAP Audit published in August 2024.
- To highlight the LGO focus report -Parent power: learning from complaints about personal budgets (November 2024) and clarify compliance [FOCUS REPORT - EHCP Special budgets - Nov 23 \(lgo.org.uk\)](#)

Audit Scope

The processes reviewed were those in place from April 2023 – June 2024.

The audit included a review of the following:

- Process for EHCP decisions and assessment against whole financial picture, including financial considerations for where children should be placed.
- The effectiveness and efficiency of internal systems.
- The timeliness of decision making, and actions undertaken by relevant departments.
- Interfaces between systems and sharing of information across teams.
- Governance of financial decision making and monitoring of spend and performance.

Key Conclusions

- **Vacancies within the SEND team means existing officers are unable to keep up with the workload, and there has been little available time to deliver staff training.** The complexity of the EHCP process means it is prone to errors and delays, which again adds to the workload of the team. Cases cannot be tracked throughout the process beyond the EHCP Plan being issued and cases may be lost as information is shared back and forth between teams.
- **The quality and completeness of work and records is not consistent. Capita, the primary system currently in use, does not support the SEND team in carrying out their roles, and records are stored across multiple other systems.** This can add to delays as the council cannot easily track progress and ensure all cases are being followed up. Additionally, there are no reconciliations between different systems where data is held. As a result, the progress of individual cases cannot easily be tracked, and this creates the risk of further delays.
- **Due to the high workload and lack of time for officers and managers to complete other duties, extensive performance monitoring is not carried out at a team or individual level.** A robust performance monitoring process would assist the team in identifying gaps or bottlenecks in the EHCP process.

Action Plan

Finding	Action	Priority	Qtr. 1 (Sep – Nov)	Qtr. 2 (Dec- Feb)	Qtr.3 (Mar-May)	Qtr. 4 (Jun- Aug)
The EHCP process post approval requires enhancement to improve its operational effectiveness.	Acquire a new information management system	1			31/03/25	
	Streamline the funding processes to improve efficiency	1		31/12/24		
Data was not always up to date, complete and accurate	Develop training and resources for officers in relation to record keeping	1	31/08/24			
	Reconciliation processes should be developed for checking once funding is agreed.	2			31/03/25	
There are outstanding vacancies and limited training for new staff.	Standardise induction process.	1	31/08/24			
	Use the restructure to review roles and responsibilities and redefine scope of individual skills and expertise.	1	30/11/24			
Lack of performance information available for monitoring team and individual performance	Use CAPITA data to identify performance monitoring opportunities and implement more robust performance management.	2	30/09/24			
Agreed provisions do not always have appropriate oversight from the Council	Create capacity to carry out timely EHC Annual Reviews for those children with EOTAS packages and Direct payments.	3		31/01/25		

Parent power- learning from complaints about personal budgets

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Focus report

Local Scrutiny- Suggested questions for Councillors

Does the council have a personal budget and direct payment policy?

Yes, the council does have a policy which is available on the Local Offer.

What is the process for parents, carers and young people to ask for a review of the council's direct payment decision?

This process is outlined within the policy as above.

What are the council's timescales for making direct payment decisions and reviewing them?

This process is outlined within the policy as above.

What information is available from the council to parents, carers and young people about personal budgets and direct payments?

Information about Personal Budgets and Direct Payments is available on the Local Offer

Does the council have an agreement specifying terms and conditions for invoicing and paying for personal budgets?

All direct payments are overseen by ENHAM via a managed account meaning that they oversee the invoicing and payments.

How does the council monitor direct payments?

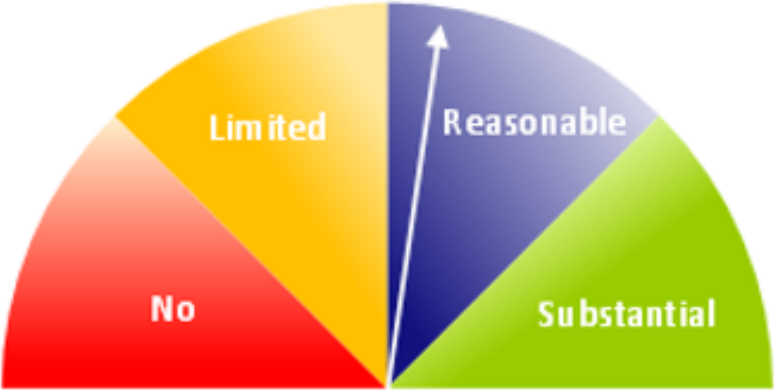
The financial spend in relation to DP's is currently monitored through routine budget monitoring. The audit and action plan recognises the need to monitor and review DP's more robustly.

For further information please see:

[Education health and care plans – Choosing your Own Support \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/education-health-and-care-plans-choosing-your-own-support)

Inclusion Financial Management and Control

Draft Report headlines: work to be done but no acute concerns

Executive Summary	
	Assurance Opinion
	The review highlighted a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. We identified some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement which may put at risk the achievement of objectives.
Management Actions	
Priority 1	0
Priority 2	7
Priority 3	3
Total	10