

TALIADAU UNIONGYRCHOL DIRECT PAYMENTS



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TABLE OF CONTENT

<i>ITEM</i>	<i>CONTENT</i>	<i>PAGE NO</i>
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	BACKGROUND	1-2
3.	CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS	3 - 4
4.	DEVELOPMENTS	4 - 6
5.	CONCLUSION	6
APPENDIX 1	COMMUNITY SUPPORT MODEL	7

DIRECT PAYMENT SERVICE

1. INTRODUCTION

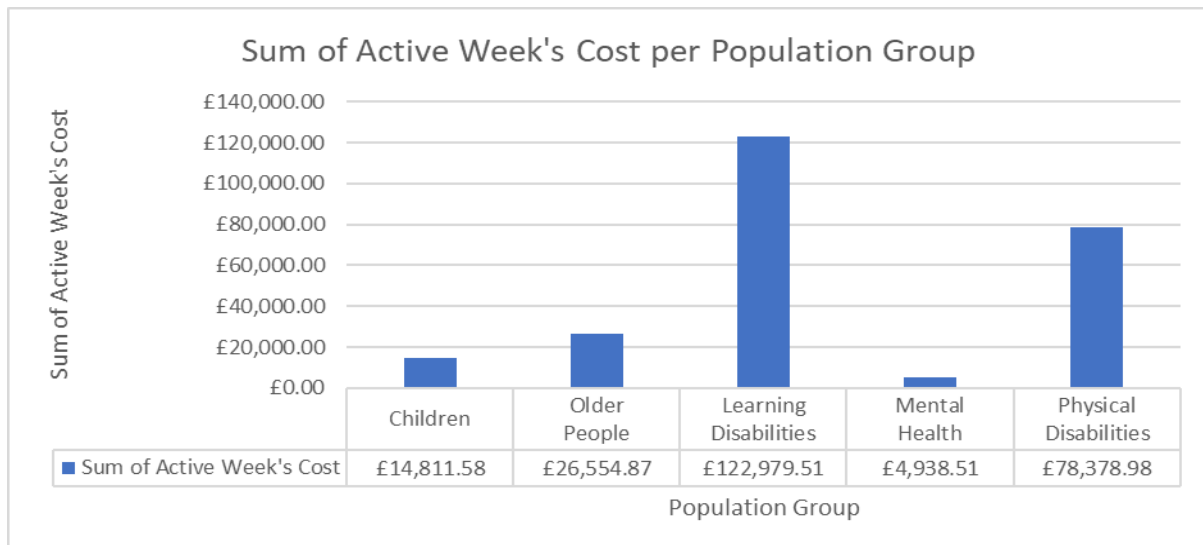
The purpose of this report is to provide an up-date on the Direct Payments service in Carmarthenshire. It sets out the progress that has been made since transferring the management and support function into the Council and highlights our intentions for further developments.

2. BACKGROUND

Direct payments are cash payments that local authorities can make to Individuals with a care and support plan so that they can organise their own services to meet their social care needs. The cash payment (monetary value) is based on the support hours within the individual's care and support plan.

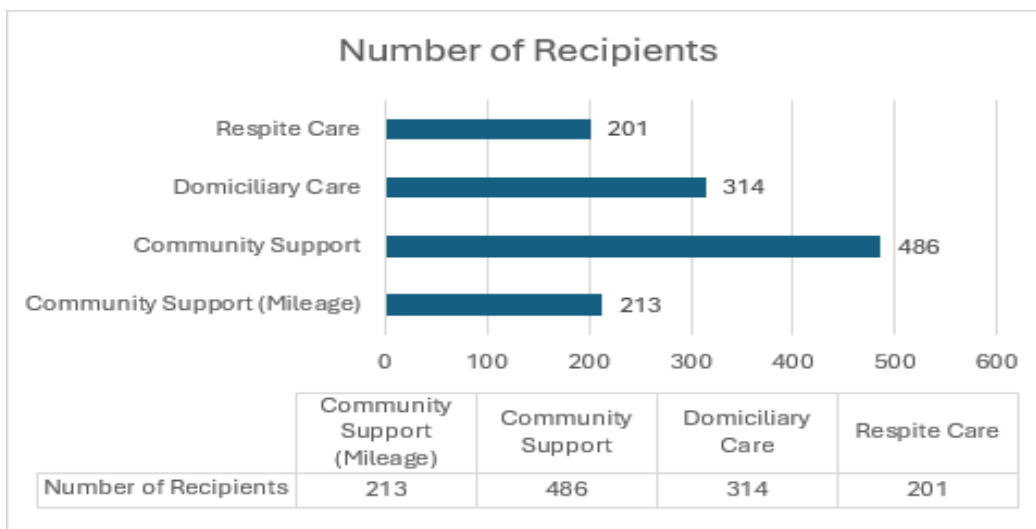
The **Care and Support (Direct Payments) (Wales) Regulations 2015** issued under the **Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014** contain the rules underpinning the operation of direct payments by local authorities in Wales. Direct payments can be made to adults with care and support needs, children with care and support needs, and carers with support needs.

Carmarthenshire County Council currently commissions 13,784 hours per week in the form of a Direct Payment. This amounts to **£12,439,466.87 per annum** (based on financial year 2023 -2024). The graph below shows the weekly spend by population group.



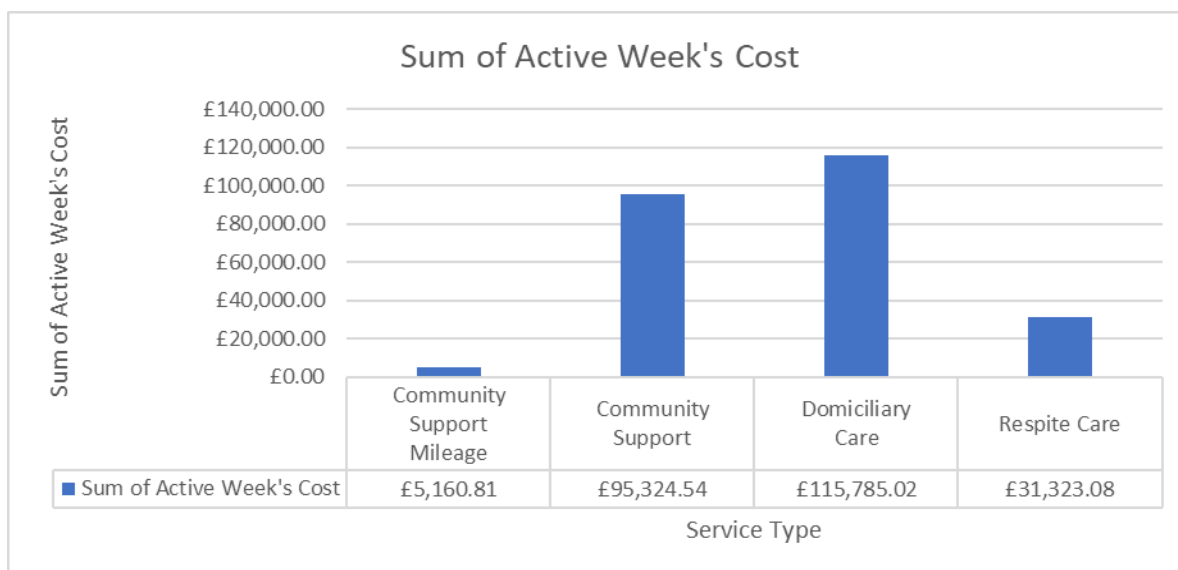
The highest spend in the above graph correlates with the highest number of people by population group that are currently in receipt of a Direct Payment. 44% of those who are in receipt of a Direct Payment are individuals with a Learning Disability.

The two main service types that Direct Payment is used for are: Community Support and Domiciliary Care. In addition to these, Direct Payments are also used for respite, which supports the carer to have a break. The graph below shows a breakdown of the type of support commissioned by individuals in receipt of a Direct Payment.



As shown in the above graph, Community Support has the highest number of people who are in receipt of a Direct Payment, however, the highest spend for Direct Payments is Domiciliary Care. This is due to Domiciliary Care being a service that has a higher number of hours and the frequency of visits tends to be more e.g. multiple visits daily.

The breakdown of the cost per service type is shown in the below graph:



The hourly rate paid to recipients is £15.50 per hour (April 2024). This takes into consideration the Real Living Wage. The Direct Payment nightly rate (10 pm – 7 am) is £110.80 (April 2024).

This payment is not a DWP Benefit and will not affect the individual's entitlement to such benefits. However, it should be noted that if a person becomes a personal assistant, then any benefits that they receive may be affected.

Direct Payments are also a chargeable service. This means that the authority will assess recipients' financial contribution towards this direct payment in accordance with the Care and Support (Financial Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2015 and Care and Support (Charging) (Wales) Regulations 2015.

3. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

The key principle of a Direct Payment is that the individual, or the suitable person controls how the money is spent. The local authority must therefore ensure that the correct level of support is offered to support the individual or the suitable person to manage the direct payment. Historically, the Direct Payment support service was provided by an external organisation called Diverse Cymru, this arrangement was part of a tri-partite contract between Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion Councils. However, following a commissioning review in 2020, a decision was made by each of the three Councils to bring the support service into their respective Council. The transfer was completed in April 2021.

3.1 Direct Payment Support Service

Carmarthenshire County Council currently provide a Direct Payment support service that offers advice, guidance and support to individuals who are new to a Direct Payment or who are already in receipt of a Direct Payment. There is a Lead Officer responsible for the day to day running of the service and a team of Direct Payment Advisors who arrange a Direct Payment for Service Users, they are also the main contact for ongoing support. There is also a finance team who oversee the payment process.

Below is the type of support that the Council provides:

- Explain what a Direct Payment is and how it works.
- Support with documentation.
- Help with recruitment of a Personal Assistant (PA)
- Signposting for employment advice
- Assistance to complete applications to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
- Responding to problems and queries as and when they arise
- Payroll services
- Managed accounts (which includes setting up a bank account, making sure the direct payments are received into that account, making sure that the personal assistant is paid etc; everyone who is eligible for a direct payment is entitled to a managed account if they want)
- Budget Plans

A Direct Payment can provide greater autonomy for the individual as they can either commission an organisation or employ an individual(s) to provide the care and or support that they need. The Direct Payment must however be used to provide the equivalent of the support identified in the care and support plan.

3.2 Individual with care and support needs

Direct Payments allow individuals greater flexibility, choice and control as individuals are able to purchase their own services to support them to achieve their personal outcomes. However, Direct Payments are not regulated like other commissioned services i.e. personal assistants are not registered with Social Care Wales, and Direct Payments itself are not regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales.

Before considering whether a Direct Payment is an appropriate way of meeting the individual's needs the local authority will consult with the individual (including taking into account any previous wishes of an individual who lacks mental capacity), anyone named by the individual to be consulted with, persons with parental responsibility, and any suitable person and any person authorised to act on the individual's behalf under the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Where an individual is entitled to a direct payment the local authority will provide the individual with the following information:

- How it will meet the individuals needs if those needs are not met by a Direct Payment
- Confirmation that Direct Payments are an appropriate way to meet the individual's needs.
- Information about the nature of direct payments
- Information about the different ways of managing a direct payment.
- The amount of any direct payment and how it has been calculated.
- Information about the support available to assist people in managing a direct payment.
- Information about the financial assessment process.

3.3 Carers

A Direct Payment can also be issued to unpaid Carers as a lump sum, this is called a Carers Exceptional Circumstance Direct Payment. This form of payment aims to provide a response to urgent need so that unpaid Carers can continue their vital role in supporting individuals in the community. The payment is ordinarily capped at £200 over a two-year period.

There are many ways that the Carers Exceptional Circumstance Direct Payment can be used to support unpaid Carers. Below are just some examples.

- Replacement of broken / faulty white goods, such as washing machines or tumble dryers, to enable the carer to continue their caring role ensuring clean clothing, bedding and towels are available for the cared for person.
- Contribution towards short breaks or holidays at a time when the carer feels that being a carer is overwhelming at that time and a break from their role is needed.
- Contribution towards decorating costs due to the caring role preventing the carer from being able to maintain the decoration of the property.
- To fund the cost of purchasing a mobile phone, to enable the carer to leave the home environment (e.g., to go to appointments, shopping etc) and maintain contact with the cared for person who may be anxious when left alone and to enable contact to be made in an emergency.

Carers Exceptional Circumstance Direct Payments are not financially assessed and do not affect any benefits that the carer may be receiving.

Transferring the Direct Payments service into the Council has enabled us to focus on key developments that promote the use of a Direct Payment for those who want to direct their own care and support. The development work undertaken to date has positively impacted on the number of individuals accessing a Direct Payment, which has increased by 51% in the last 4 years.

Fast Track Direct Payments (FTDP) were introduced during the Covid 19 pandemic as a response to the limited availability of care. This process enables personal care support to be funded and delivered until a commissioned service is found.

There must be a person in readiness to support i.e. Daughter, Neighbour, Friend, Son, Granddaughter etc. Types of tasks may include:

- Personal Care
- Meal Preparation
- Medication
- Replacing the main carer

This route can only be used whereby full personal care elements are being delivered until a commissioned service is found. Due to the exceptional circumstances through the fast-track direct payment there are elements of the standard process that we have revised to be able to meet the nature of the 'fast-track' for example: -

- Due to the exceptional circumstance – a DBS is not required.
- Employers Liability Insurance are set up and paid by the Local Authority directly with the insurer – we will offer choice to the Service User to source a company themselves, however for the process to be "fast tracked" we have a designated Insurance company to process these requests.
- The forms that are usually required to be completed will be completed within 1 working day, this includes the signing of the Direct Payment Agreement/Contract and visiting the Service User / family to provide information on the service.
- There must be a PA ready to commence support.
- The Service User/ Suitable Person will not have to submit hours to the Direct Payments Team as per normal process – this will be paid on block for a maximum of 12 weeks.

Family Wellbeing Payments were also introduced during the Covid 19 pandemic as a response to the limited availability of care and support. A Family wellbeing payment is not a chargeable service, therefore there is no financially assessed charge associated with receiving it. This route can only be used for non-personal care elements. It is used to reduce the overall demand on the family unit. Some examples include:

- Laundrette Service
- Domestic Service (Cleaning etc.)
- Dog Walking Service (i.e. if the family member is now completing care and support for Service User and unable to complete this task)
- Childcare (i.e. if a family member is needing to provide support around school pick up time, this payment will allow the family member to pay for after school club)

- Meal Services (Local Restaurant delivery etc.)
- Equipment (i.e. Television for Bedroom)

Personal Assistants – Similarly to the care sector, one of the main challenges for individuals is the availability of Personal Assistants, particularly where specific skills are required. To support the recruitment of Personal Assistants, we have worked with our recruitment team to develop a rolling advert on the Council's recruitment web page. The support team are also linked to recruitment opportunities and events across the County.

Data & Information - in March 2023, the management of information for individuals receiving a Direct Payment was moved on to Carmarthenshire County Council's Social Care management system Eclipse. This has been a significant milestone for the management of Direct Payments as previously the information was held on a separate system. The individual's care management record now includes information about their Direct Payment and the work that the Direct Payment support team has undertaken to enable that person to receive it.

Payroll System - during 2024 there were also changes to the system which issued payments to Direct Payment recipients. An external organisation Staffology were commissioned to undertake the payroll function for Direct Payments. This new system is now fully functioning and operated by our finance team.

A Direct Payments operational group has also been set up to review practices and to update the Direct Payment policy. The revised policy is currently in draft form.

A commissioning review of all community-based services has also been carried out, a new model for community care and support has been developed which provides a range of support options for individuals with interlinked pathways that enable individuals to access support. Direct Payments forms part of this model. (The community care and support model can be referred to in Appendix 1)

Our plan for 2024 -2025 includes developing a portfolio of local care and support micro enterprise providers which will enable Direct Payment recipients to commission directly from, we see great benefit in this, especially in local communities. We are also looking at opportunities where pooled Direct Payments can benefit groups of individuals who share the same interests, our plan is to also further explore user led initiatives.

5 CONCLUSION

The management of the Direct Payments service in Carmarthenshire has progressed well since it was brought 'in-house' in April 2021. Whilst much work has been done to ensure that the Direct Payments service is effective, there is further work to be done on developing the use of a Direct Payment.

There are opportunities for Direct Payments which could provide even greater autonomy to individuals and, which can potentially increase the availability of care and support provision within local communities. Our priority in the coming months is to establish a User network and forum where individuals can be part of our ongoing developments and our intentions are to explore every opportunity that can support individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations.

