

Direct Payments for Adults – service users' views

November 2022



Direct Payments for Adult Social Care

Audit Wales recently published its report looking at how well councils in Wales were providing Direct Payments to those in need. This paper summarises the views of Direct Payments recipients and carers, who told us what they think of the way their council does this.

What are Direct Payments?

Direct Payments are monies paid specifically to buy services or equipment that help to meet people's social care or support needs. They can be used as an alternative to care or support services arranged directly by councils. Direct Payments give people more choice, greater flexibility and more control over the support they get.

Audit Wales review

During August and September 2021, we spoke to 1,028 people across Wales who were receiving Direct Payments. This represents around 1 in every 6 people who received Direct Payments in Wales at the time.

This ensured that service users' and carers views were at the heart of our research. Overall, our review found that Direct Payments support people's independence and are highly valued, but inconsistencies mean services are not always equitable and always delivering value for money.

[You can read the full report on our website.](#)

Overall, it is clear that Direct Payments users enjoy high levels of satisfaction with the services they receive:

91% of those who we surveyed said that Direct Payments has had a positive impact on their independence and well-being

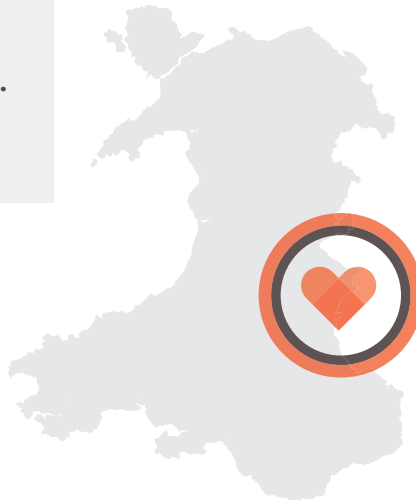
85% feel that Direct Payments are the right option for them

76% are satisfied with the quality of the services their council provides to meet their care and support needs.

Despite high levels of overall satisfaction, our report highlights that councils could improve how they promote access to and manage Direct Payments.

Key facts about Direct Payments

In 2018-19, social services supported **125,415 adults**. Of whom, **6,262** (5%) received Direct Payments.



Just over a third of adults receiving direct payments, **36.1%**, were older people (aged 65 or more), with **63.9%** aged 18-64. This is despite older people making up over **75%** of adults receiving social services.

Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, **14** of the 22 local authorities increased take up of Direct Payments.

The biggest percentage increase was in the Isle of Anglesey (**90.4%**). The biggest fall was in Newport (**-28.8%**).

Of this figure, **£79.5 million** (3.5%) was spent on Direct Payments for adults.

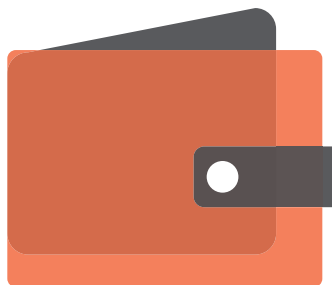
The average Direct Payment for adults in 2018-19 in real terms was **£12,344**, ranging from **£6,033** in Ceredigion to **£21,836** in Wrexham.



In 2018-19, the proportion of adults receiving social care services via Direct Payments ranged from **1.6%** in Gwynedd to **12.9%** in Ceredigion.



Local authority spending on Direct Payments rose by 117% in real terms from **£36.6 million** in 2010-11 to **£79.5 million** in 2020-21.



In 2020-21, social service authorities spent **£2.29** billion on all social services.

People are not consistently supported to take up Direct Payments

Finding out about Direct Payments

- According to our survey, very few people (2%) first found out about Direct Payments through published information.
- **Almost a third** of current recipient (63%) found out about Direct Payments when a social work professional told them when they were being assessed for their needs.
- **75%** rated the quality of the information provided to them about Direct Payments as either **good** or **very good**.
- And **70%** felt that the council staff they spoke to really understood Direct Payments and could explain things to them clearly.
- **66%** of current recipients felt encouraged by their council to take up a Direct Payment.

75% rated the quality of the information provided to them about Direct Payments as either good or very good

“ To be honest I don’t know how we would survive without Direct Payments ”



“ I think it is quite complex. I come from a background where I employ people, but I think it can be quite daunting for some people ”

Assessing people’s needs

The nature and outcome of the What Matters conversation and assessment of needs are important factors in determining whether people take up Direct Payments.

- Just **over three-quarters (76%)** of survey respondents felt encouraged to tell their council about the things that mattered to them and felt that their voice was listened to during their assessment of needs.
- **83%** felt that what was agreed during the assessment was right for them.

Managing and supporting people to use Direct Payments varies widely with service users and carers receiving different standards of service

People's ability to manage Direct Payments

- Our survey found that **76% of people** were made aware of their potential legal obligations as an employer in taking up a Direct Payment.
- And **75% of current recipients** discussed their ability to manage Direct Payments with their council before taking them up.
- **70% of people** were made aware that they may have to contribute financially to their care and support costs.

Of the **638 survey respondents** who confirmed that they contribute financially towards their care and support costs, **80% agreed** that their contribution was affordable, and **20%** said it was not. (Note – this was at the time of our survey, prior to the cost-of-living crisis).

“ Direct Payment is a much better option than agencies ”



“ No support or network to assist with recruitment ”

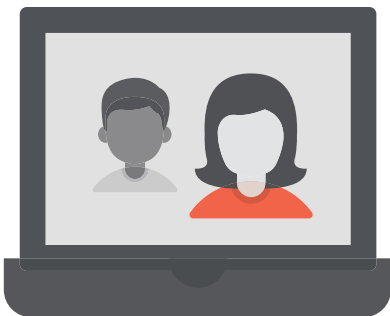


Purchasing care and support services using Direct Payments

- **Just 49%** of survey respondents told us that they found the process of finding and appointing a suitable care and support provider to be easy or very easy. Over a third (34%) described the process as either difficult or very difficult.
- **Over a quarter (27%)** of recipients were given a list of 'approved providers' from which to choose their care and support provider.
- **An overwhelming majority (90%)** felt they were able to employ who they wanted to, and a similar proportion (**89%**) were satisfied with their current care and support provider.

Direct Payments are helping people live independently and improving their wellbeing, but it is difficult to assess overall value for money because of limitations in data and evaluation

“ I cannot get hold of anybody really. My other son helps me with all the paperwork as I don't have emails or a computer ”



Follow up and on-going support from councils

- **78% of survey respondents** told us they receive good quality support to help them manage their Direct Payments.
- We asked people what happens to the money if Direct Payments build up in their account over time:
 - **32%** said their council takes the money back but tells them beforehand
 - **10%** said that it builds up over time and they can spend it as they wish, as long as the money contributes to meeting their needs
 - **5%** said the council takes the money back with little or no warning
 - At **24%**, a significant proportion said they don't know what happens in this eventuality.
 - **28%** said that payments do not build up.
- Before the pandemic started in March 2020, around **half of current recipients (54%)** felt that the level of follow up contact from their council regarding their Direct Payments felt about right. **Over a quarter (27%)** felt it was not enough.

Support during the pandemic

- During the pandemic, only **44%** said their council contacted them specifically to check if they had any problems resulting from the lockdown and restrictions.
- Similarly, **35%** said that their council sourced personal protective equipment (PPE) for their care and support provider on their behalf during the pandemic – **57%** said their council did not provide PPE.

“ It has allowed me to be in control of my own care package ”



The characteristics of a local authority that effectively encourages, manages and supports people to use Direct Payments



Local authorities who are good at **promoting** Direct Payments

Have simple and concise public information that is made available in a wide range of mediums and has been tested to ensure it is effective and tells people what they need to know

Offers and encourages people to use independent advocacy to help people make informed choices

Uses the 'What Matters' conversation in the assessment process to explain Direct Payments

Direct Payments are promoted as an option at least equally with other choices



Local authorities who are **managing** Direct Payments effectively

Help people to access and use Personal Assistants

'Demystify' what Direct Payments are and provide sufficient support to assure people on employment requirements, liabilities and fallback processes. Bureaucracy is kept to a minimum

Clearly set out what Direct Payments can be used for giving examples of the type of support that is available and, wherever possible, encourage innovation

Have regular and ongoing contact and provide support and information to adults using Direct Payments to clarify responsibilities and ensure people remain safe

Work to shape the 'market' and by improving access to Personal Assistants, encouraging more providers, managing costs and encouraging the pooling of budgets

Jointly agree with NHS bodies on how best to address the needs of clients who use Direct Payments and Continuing Healthcare so they are not disadvantaged



Local authorities who are **delivering** positive outcomes for people using Direct Payments

Evidencing that people's wellbeing is maintained or improving as a result of Direct Payments

Have a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of Direct Payments

Involve and value input from all stakeholders/partners in evaluating the impact of services

Compare and benchmark individual and collective performance with others and use the findings of evaluation to shape current plans and future approaches

Know what works and whether the approach of the authority is delivering the aspirations of the Act



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