

COP/07/12

Policy & Scrutiny Committee: Community and Older People

Date: 8 March 2012

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INTERIM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PERSONAL BUDGETS (DIRECT PAYMENTS) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Interim Recommendations to the Cabinet Member, Adults, Health and Community Wellbeing of the Task and Finish Group

1. The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there should be a positive move towards direct payments in line with current legislation
2. Staff training, which was raised as an issue in the audit, has now been addressed. The training was rolled-out to all staff and has been undertaken in small groups. It was **recommended** that AH&CW should ensure the workforce have the skills to give the right information on personal budgets and direct payments and be able to guide service users to obtain this information
3. The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there should be a small group of staff who have specialist knowledge in social care. In terms of financial advice and guidance ECC have employed a smaller group of staff undertaking financial monitoring.
4. In terms of staff guidance the Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there is a need to ensure the tools that are available for the workforce give the necessary information and are not confused by policy jargon and 'noise'. The Task and Finish Group **endorsed** the principle that the tools for the workforce are kept to a minimum and are always up-to-date
5. Prepayment-cards are available from February 2012 as a pilot and that 650 direct payment users will be transferred over to prepayment-cards as soon as possible. It was **recommended** that there should be a **policy** that

any new service users from February 2012 should have a default position of going immediately onto prepayment-cards. Service users can manage prepayment-cards themselves or, if approved, through a brokerage facility such as *Essex Assist or Essex Pass*

6. It was raised whether service users who receive health as well as social care funding should all be moved to personal budgets/direct payments? The Task and Finish Group **recommended** for **policy development** that personal budgets and direct payments need to be able to support other statutory funding. Direct payments should cover both health and social care, with prepayment cards used for all statutory funding, as well as supporting community budgets
7. The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that it should be **policy** that modern technology is used to undertake immediate financial assessment. Such a tool for financial assessment would enable the FABAs to focus attention on those people that require support.

Membership of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Bill Dick (Chairman)
Councillor Lyn Barton
Councillor Mike Garnett
Councillor Jillian Reeves
Peter Coleing, Older People's Planning Group

Introduction

An Internal Audit Report on the financial monitoring of personal budgets in the Adults Health and Community Wellbeing directorate (AHCW) was outlined identified unregistered risks relating to:

- (i) guidance and training of practitioners;
- (ii) the adequacy of financial monitoring (incorrect documentation used, lack of a formal escalation process and lack of re-assessment); and
- (iii) of quality assurance and management.

Personal Budgets had been identified by Internal Audit as high risk as it was expected to be a rapidly expanding service area and robust controls needed to be in place. Numbers were expected to increase from the 2,500 current cases to 5,000 over the next three years out of a total of in excess of 17,000 service users. Internal Audit had identified that the Personal Budgets did not seem to be monitored to ensure that they remained relevant to any changing needs under the support plan.

Different legacy IT systems were in place which did not always permit quick and accurate interrogation of data particularly from free text fields. In due course a new IT system would replace the various legacy IT systems.

Required actions to mitigate the risks identified had been developed by Internal Audit in consultation with local management and their implementation was being monitored by Internal Audit on an ongoing basis. Management actions are being progressed in stages in line with a risk assessment that had been undertaken by management to identify priorities and determine the order of changes.

Internal Audit flagged up the importance of Recommendation 7 in their Audit Report concerning the quality of the supervision and challenge at the confirmation and validation stage. It had been thought that some of the other issues identified in the Audit should have been identified and challenged at this early point in the process.

Management had now put in place a centralised evaluation and validation team to challenge quality and omissions.

The nomenclature for paying service users should be changed from personal budgets to direct payments. In line with this it was **agreed** to amend the name of the Group to the Personal Budgets (Direct Payments) Task and Finish Group

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group is content that management actions are being addressed and acknowledges that some work is still in progress.

Policy Development and Recommendations

- The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there should be a positive move towards direct payments in line with current legislation
- Staff training, which was raised as an issue in the audit, has now been addressed. The training was rolled-out to all staff and has been undertaken in small groups. It was **recommended** that AH&CW should ensure the workforce have the skills to give the right information on personal budgets and direct payments and be able to guide service users to obtain this information
- The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there should be a small group of staff who have specialist knowledge in social care. In terms of financial advice and guidance ECC have employed a smaller group of staff undertaking financial monitoring.
- In terms of staff guidance the Task and Finish Group **recommended** that there is a need to ensure the tools that are available for the workforce give the necessary information and are not confused by policy jargon and 'noise'. The Task and

Finish Group **endorsed** the principle that the tools for the workforce are kept to a minimum and are always up-to-date

- As part of the new Adult Social Care Information Systems mobile and offline working should be supported so that it can be accessed in areas where there is a lack of broadband
- Prepayment-cards are available from February 2012 as a pilot and that 650 direct payment users will be transferred over to prepayment-cards as soon as possible. It was **recommended** that there should be a **policy** that any new service users from February 2012 should have a default position of going immediately onto prepayment-cards. Service users can manage prepayment-cards themselves or, if approved, through a brokerage facility such as *Essex Assist or Essex Pass*
- The review process checks whether accruals are occurring. A risk matrix is used rather than an annual review to look at service users who regularly accrue. Only one months payments will be loaded onto prepayment-cards at any one time
- It was raised whether service users who receive health as well as social care funding should all be moved to personal budgets/direct payments? The Task and Finish Group **recommended** for **policy development** that personal budgets and direct payments need to be able to support other statutory funding. Direct payments should cover both health and social care, with prepayment cards used for all statutory funding, as well as supporting community budgets
- Individual Service Accounts will be accessible using pre-payment cards and subject to the same terms and conditions governing the pre-payment card offer
- There is evidence that direct payments have very little abuse attached to them. It was **agreed** that **policy** should state that it is encouraged, where appropriate, that carers are CRB checked
- It was **agreed** that it should be re-emphasised in **policy** that 10 working days should be the maximum for prepayment-card financial assessment. FABAs should undertake such financial assessments. There should be an amendment to the SLA so that financial assessment staff undertake earlier assessments and for ASC staff to make early referrals
- The Task and Finish Group **recommended** that it should be **policy** that modern technology is used to undertake immediate financial assessment. Such a tool for financial assessment would enable the FABAs to focus attention on those people that require support.

The final recommendations of the Task and Finish Group will be presented to the April or May meeting of the Committee.

