

Appendix 2b: Audit Assurances and Themes

Assurance



Direct Payment Support Services Contract Management (July 2019)

Objective

To assess whether the contract is being effectively managed to ensure the Council's key outcomes for the service and service users are delivered, whilst also ensuring sound financial arrangements are in place.

Summary

The specification of the Direct Payment (DP) Support Service Contract (the contract), effective from May 2018, makes clear the outcomes to be achieved through its delivery, examples include:

- a DP service which contributes to delaying and reducing the need for long-term care and support
- an increase in the number of individuals employing their own staff to meet their needs
- individuals having the information they need to make decisions about the use of DP to meet their assessed needs.

This outcome based approach is positive as it allows the contractor flexibility in how to deliver the service. Performance measures now need to be formally agreed with the contractor to ensure:

- expectations of what a positive outcome looks like is consistent and clear
- lack of progress towards outcomes is quantifiable, can be identified quickly and the contractor supported (where appropriate) to improve.

The contract outlines various ways in which the Council will oversee and monitor the delivery of the contract, including monthly operational and quarterly contract meetings, regular activity returns and an annual satisfaction survey. These arrangements were not implemented until late Q3 of 2018/19, but are beginning to take place as expected. Work is underway to extend the current scope of these arrangements to give as much assurance over the effectiveness of the contract as possible, for example, by using the Satisfaction Survey to get more feedback on the qualitative outcomes detailed in the contract.

As the contractor holds large sums of DP money on behalf of service users, it would be beneficial for the Council to get ongoing assurance that these monies are being properly accounted for. In addition, ensuring service user account statements are received 4 weekly, in line with the contract requirement, and using these to review the balances will allow the Council to:

- claw back any unspent funds, minimising surpluses held by the contractor
- identify any over / under spends and refer these cases to Social Workers to ensure service user needs are still being met, reassessing where necessary.

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Further work is needed to get assurance the contractor is providing service users with paper statements on a six-monthly basis which includes supplying sufficient guidance on:

- the responsibility for the service user to check the statements to ensure expenditure is accurate
- action to be taken should they have any queries over the statements contents.

The Council is now working proactively with the contractor to encourage service users to sign up for online access to their accounts where possible.

Number of actions agreed: 12