

# Direct Payments



child care  
services

A guide to Direct  
Payments for the parents  
and carers of children  
with disabilities

## **How this leaflet can help**

This is a question and answer guide to Direct Payments for parents of disabled children and young people who are interested in, or who have already applied for, a payment. It helps explain how it works, and it will help you decide whether it is for you.

## **In this booklet you will find**

### **A quick guide to direct payments Page 3**

This includes answers to questions like:

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Parents who intend to go ahead with a Direct Payment should also carefully read the Direct Payments Agreement.

## **A quick guide to Direct Payments**

### **What are Direct Payments?**

A Direct Payment is money which is paid on a regular basis by the Council to the parent of a disabled child or young person instead of providing them with a service which they have been assessed as needing. The idea is to give parents a choice about whether they have a service provided or whether they have the money instead so that they can directly purchase a service themselves.

### **What are the advantages of a Direct Payment?**

Basically, it gives you more say in how you want services to be provided. Most parents on Direct Payments say it gives them greater choice and flexibility, because they can choose who they want to provide the care for their disabled child, at the times they need it, rather than what suits the service provider. It hands back control to you, the parent.

### **Who can qualify for a Direct Payment?**

Anyone who has parental responsibility for a disabled child or young person aged 0-17, who meets the Council's eligibility criteria for help with care or support. This means in practice that if you have parental responsibility for a child with either severe learning or physical disabilities, or both, then you are likely to qualify.

## How does the payment have to be spent?

A Direct Payment is made because you and your child have been assessed as needing a certain level of support or needing particular things because of your child's disability. Instead of providing you with a service to meet these assessed needs, the Council makes a Direct Payment so that you can purchase these services or items directly yourself. The money must be spent on purchasing the care or support you have been assessed as needing. You can't spend it on other things, even if you feel you need them.

### Here is an example of what we mean:

Let's say that someone has been assessed as needing 5 hours a week support to help them get their disabled child up in the mornings and ready for school. They could choose to have this support provided by a care agency, but maybe they find the agency sends different people or is unreliable. They opt for a Direct Payment instead and get the money. They happen to know a neighbour who would come in and do the work if they were paid. They use the money to pay the neighbour to provide the 5 hours a week care support the child needs. This way the needs are still met, but it can be better for the child and better for the parent because it's an arrangement where the parent has much more control.

## What sort of things can Direct Payments be used for?

Direct Payments are most commonly used to purchase services such as personal care and support, for example to assist in getting a disabled child up and ready in the mornings, or ready for bed at night, or to support a disabled child to participate in a recreational or sports activity. Payments can however be used to purchase a whole range of services, including respite care and sitting, providing that the assessment has shown this to be a need for which a service would otherwise be provided.

## Are there things you can't spend Direct Payments on?

Under the present rules, you can't spend a Direct Payment to purchase any service directly provided by the Council. For example, this means you can't buy respite care from Bridgfold Lodge, because it is a service provided by the Council. There are a few other things you cannot buy with a Direct Payment.

## What are the drawbacks?

Having control of the money means that you as a parent are also responsible for arranging how the assessed needs are to be met. This may mean that you would have to employ someone to carry out the care, or you could pay an agency to do it. If you employ someone, you do have responsibilities towards them under employment law. You would also need to be able to show how you have spent the money and to keep records of this.

## How much money do you get?

The value of the Direct Payment varies from person to person. This is because everyone's needs are different. The amount of money paid is based on the amount required to purchase the level of service that has been assessed as being needed. Rochdale, like most Councils, pays a set rate per hour (see below). For example, if you have been assessed as needing 8 hours per week personal care, you would get the set amount which should be sufficient to purchase that level of care. If that was, say, 4 hours on a Thursday, and 2 hours each on Saturday and Sunday, making 8 hours in total, it would be £67.64 per week at current rates (see below).

## What are the rates of pay?

Rochdale Council currently has 3 rates:

- Standard rate, which is currently (May 06) £7.20 per hour
- Evening (after 10.00p.m.) and Weekend rate, currently £9.71 per hour
- Sleep-in rate, (midnight-8.00a.m.), currently £6.31 per hour

These rates are reviewed by the Council every year to ensure that they are sufficient to enable people getting payments to purchase the support and care they need.

## What does the money cover?

The money you would get as a Direct Payment will cover the number of hours of support or care you or your child have been assessed as needing, plus some additional money to cover such things as insurance, holiday and sickness cover for the person you employ, and an amount towards the cost of

advertising and recruiting someone. It may also cover the cost of essential equipment, or this may be provided directly by the Council. The money is paid monthly in advance, into a bank account which you would be required to open specially for this.

### **Are Direct Payments means-tested, and will they affect my benefits?**

No, Direct Payments are not means-tested, and they will have no effect on state benefits. They are entirely separate, because they are money which is being paid as an alternative to having a Council-provided service.

## **Getting started**

### **How are the assessments done?**

Whether or not someone wants a Direct Payment, the starting point is the same. They would make a referral to the Council's Team for Children and Young People with Disabilities, ~~based at Bowling St, Rochdale~~, and if they are eligible for a service (if they have either a severe learning or physical disability) they will then be offered an assessment by one of the Team's specialist social workers. The assessment will look at the needs of both the disabled child and those of his family and carers, and will suggest what needs to be in place for those needs to be met. This will form the Care Plan. The social worker will offer you a choice between a directly provided service or a Direct Payment. Whichever you choose, what you receive will be based on the needs assessment and the Care Plan summary.

### **What happens next?**

The social worker will send the assessment and Care Plan summary to the Resource Panel, which will consider all the assessments and will decide whether they are appropriate and which have the highest priority. If you are interested in or want a Direct Payment, you will be offered a visit by a specialist worker who will come to see you and who will discuss the Direct Payments scheme with you in depth and give you the opportunity to ask questions and decide if it's something you want to try. If you decide to go ahead, the specialist Direct Payments worker will set the payment up for you once the funding has been agreed. **You will then be required to read and sign a formal Direct Payments Agreement.**

## What if I am interested but I am going to need help?

The idea of Direct Payments sounds attractive but can also seem like a lot of hassle and responsibility to many people. The good news is that there is help available. ~~Reeddale have a contact with Manchester City Council,~~ <sup>from Reeddale</sup> who have a lot of experience with Direct Payments, to provide assistance through a specialist worker and also to administer all the actual payments. Assistance and advice can also be provided with the recruitment of Personal Assistants (P.A.s). In certain circumstances, the Council will also pay for an accountant to help people, although in practice this is rarely needed. Help and advice are usually available at the end of a phone, and the specialist worker will call out to help you if you get stuck.

## How do I actually find someone to do the caring for my child?

Most parents who have a Direct Payment have recruited someone they already know, or who their child already knows. These tend to be classroom assistants, friends, neighbours and relatives (though there are some restrictions on relatives). If no-one comes to mind, then you may need to advertise and recruit someone. There is advice available to help you with this.

## Who can you employ with a Direct Payment?

You can employ anyone who is suitable (see next section) except a close relative who lives in the same household as yourself and the disabled child. This is to prevent a situation arising where the Council is paying a parent to look after their own child. The only exception to this is where there is absolutely no other way of meeting the child's needs, and this would be an extremely rare circumstance. You can, however, employ a close relative who lives elsewhere.

## Who decides who is suitable?

You as parent you have the responsibility of deciding who you want to look after your disabled child. However, the Council can help you with this by running checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (C.R.B.). We do insist that anyone who is intending to work with children obtains an enhanced disclosure from the C.R.B. This is as much for your peace of

mind as ours. The C.R.B. check will show if anyone has a criminal conviction which may put children at risk. Even if the person you are considering is a relative or close friend, a C.R.B. check is still needed.

### **How do I know my child will be safe?**

It is of course vital that whatever arrangements are made, your child is kept safe. The Council has a legal duty to ensure that, whether they provide a service or a Direct Payment, the child's welfare is safeguarded. C.R.B. checks are part of that. The Council will also give you copies of any risk assessments they have relating to your child. These documents spell out how a child might be at risk of injury and what could be put in place to reduce or eliminate that risk. For example, a child who is unable to stand might be at risk of injury whilst being changed. The risk assessment might say that he needs a particular item of equipment, say a hoist, to help him and to avoid the risk of injury. If your child is under 8 yrs old and you pay someone to look after them in their home rather than yours, they will need to be registered with the Council as a registered childminder.

### **Who is responsible for health and safety?**

As an employer, you have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of anyone you employ. You would be expected to provide anyone you employ through a Direct Payment with copies of any risk assessments you have. You would also be expected to make sure that anyone you employ attends any specialised training the Council might arrange for personal assistants, such as training in moving and handling.

The Council would normally provide you as a parent with any specialist equipment your child needs at home.

Usually the Council will provide equipment where care is provided even if this is in the carer's home as well as the child's, for example a mobile hoist. Sometimes though it is not possible to provide duplicate or very specialist equipment.

## What about keeping records?

The specialist worker will help you with this, and will show you what records and accounts you need to keep. Some parents do find keeping track of the paperwork difficult and others find it's no big deal once they get the hang of it. The thing to remember is, if you get stuck, help is available! At the end of the financial year (April), you will need to send in your records, along with any money you haven't spent over the year.

## What if things change or I need more help?

The Council will review all the Direct Payments it makes. Normally the first review will take place after 6 months, and then annually after that. This will be your opportunity to discuss how you feel the payment is working for you and your child, to look at what's going well and what might need some more attention. If things have changed significantly, or you feel you need more help than the payment currently allows you to purchase, the review is an opportunity to discuss this.

## What if things don't work out and I want to change my mind?

If for one reason or another, things aren't working well and you would prefer to go back to having a service directly provided, you can always do that. You don't have to stick with the Direct Payment. The important thing is to let someone,

preferably your social worker or the specialist worker, know. They may be able to help you and sort out the problem, but if all else fails, they will arrange for a service to be provided instead. Sometimes, unforeseen events mean people change their minds. For example, if the person you are employing to care for your child can no longer do this for some reason, you may not want to go through having to find someone else.

## What happens when my child reaches 18?

Direct Payments can be paid to the parent, or person with parental responsibility, of a disabled young person only up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. After that, the young person him or herself is entitled to receive a payment in their own right. Disabled 16 and 17 year olds can also apply to receive a Direct Payment in their own right. Of course, they may need a lot of help to do this, to employ someone and to manage the money. But this help can often be provided, and parents would remain central to providing the help their son or daughter needs. As long as the young person can understand the idea of a Direct Payment, and express their wishes, then there should be no reason why they shouldn't be helped to manage a payment themselves. Direct Payments also continue to be provided by Rochdale Council's Adult Care Services beyond the age of 19.



## Where can I get more information from?

Apart from the Council's website, you can also get information from:

- The Department of Health; go to [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).
- You can contact the specialist worker, Debbie Stewart on Tel 01706 922930 or the Team for children and Young People with Disabilities on Tel 01706 925900
- Often the best thing is to talk directly to other parents who may be getting Direct Payments, such as the Parents' Forum. You can contact them by ringing 07901 854741 or writing to: The Parent's Forum, P.O. Box 412, Rochdale, OL11 5ZW.



We can also provide a copy of this leaflet in a larger print, on audio tape or in Braille. It can also be translated into Urdu or Bengali. For more details, contact the Team for Children and Young People with Disabilities.

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