



# Direct Payments and Personalisation Approach

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Adult Social Care

# Direct Payments and Personalisation Approach

## Introduction

This Direct Payments and Personalisation Approach confirms the Suffolk County Council Adult Social Care commitment to improving support, services, and outcomes and increasing the flexibility of support for people and their families who choose to self-manage and direct their care and support needs.

The approach considers the changes we need to make to *how* we provide Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds, and other personalisation options to better support people to have more choice and control over how their care and support needs are met. It has been created through co-design to identify the changes that would make people feel better supported and encourage a greater take-up of Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds, and other personalisation options in the future.

This approach was co-designed with people who use our services, their families and carers, as well as with Adult Social Care staff and providers. Partner organisations, including ACE Anglia and Suffolk User Forum, supported the process to ensure that everyone could take part in the co-design. Most of the feedback has been incorporated into this approach, including changing the name of the programme from 'Individual Budgets' to 'Direct Payments and Personalisation' to make the ambition as clear as possible for people and staff. Some feedback was about Adult Social Care more generally rather than being specific to direct payments and personalisation, and will be addressed elsewhere in our transformation plans.

*"Co-design: People who use services are involved in designing services, based on their experiences and ideas."*  
Think Local, Act Personal. [Ladder-of-coproduction.pdf](#)

## **What are personalised care options such as Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds?**

These are ways to enable a person to use their personal budget to pay for their own care and support, rather than the council organising this for them.

Your **Personal Budget** is the amount of funding agreed to cover your eligible care and support needs

You can choose to receive your care and support through either...

An option you manage for yourself, such as a **Direct Payment** or **Individual Service Fund**

The council **organising and paying for your care on your behalf**

There are various ways in which this could happen, including:

- Direct Payments that are managed by the person with care and support needs
- Direct Payments managed by an authorised person on behalf of the person with care and support needs – for example by a nominated or authorised person or a support organisation
- Individual Service Funds – the fund is held by a care provider who works with the person to agree a plan for how to provide care
- Integrated personal budgets (with health) – where funding from both health and social care can be pooled for use by the person to support their health and care needs

For further information: [Direct payments - Suffolk County Council](#)

### **The ambition**

Suffolk County Council's ambition for Adult Social Care is called [People at the heart of Care](#). People at the heart of Care will help us to better support people with increasingly complex needs to maintain their independence and live good lives, with the right support, in their community, and to do this in a sustainable way. In order for this to happen, people must be able to have more choice and control over the care and support they receive, and Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds are key ways in which this can be achieved. We believe people understand their own circumstances and goals best and that they are best placed to shape plans for their own support. New technologies and innovation provide opportunities to deliver services in simpler, more accessible ways, with more direct input from people into their care and support through self-service and self-assessment. We recognise that self-service and self-assessment will not be the easiest methods for everyone, and we will provide good alternative routes for those people to access advice and support.

### **The benefits of Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds:**

- They can enable you to have **more choice and control** over your care with a service **'built' by you, for you**. For example, they can allow you to employ a Personal Assistant, someone who you choose to spend time with, meeting your eligible care and support needs in ways that you choose and building a relationship with you as you get to know them and they get to know you. For example, someone can choose to meet their eligible care and support needs through community activities that fit their interests, such as going to the football where they meet up with friends before/during/after, maintaining social connections and reducing isolation.
- They can better enable you to be **more independent in your daily life** – by taking control over your own care and support. There may be skills you wish to learn, or equipment or adaptations which will increase your independence, and they could provide training or equipment to support that. Some people also find that by using their Direct Payment they increase their skills and confidence in managing money and time, and their ability to self-advocate.
- They can help to further **join up health and social care**, and how these can be funded if you need support from both. Our ambition is that in the future personal budgets for integrated care could allow you to combine health and social care services, ensuring a seamless and coordinated approach that promotes well-being

and meets all aspects of your care needs effectively. Part funded by health and social care, a single carer or personal assistant could deliver both care and health support with the right training.

- They help you access a **wider range of services and providers, beyond those who work with the council, as well as self-employed Personal Assistants**. As a result, Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds also **support the local economy**. They can also support you to maximise your budget more effectively to achieve the outcomes and aspirations you want, by increasing choice and flexibility.

Some people will not want or will not be able to manage a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund, and so the option to have services bought or commissioned by Adult Social Care (as mostly happens now) will always be available.

*If you would like to discuss having a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund, or a change to the option you currently use, then raise it at your next review.*

We want to support most people to be using a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund to meet their care and support needs. Our ambition is that 60% of people who need ongoing support will access this through a Direct Payment or an Individual Service Fund. For people for whom a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund is not suitable (i.e. the remaining 40%) they will still be able to have services arranged for them by adult social care staff as they do now, and through our strategy we want to ensure that these are also as personalised and flexible as possible.

### **Direct Payments in Suffolk now**

In 2023/24, the most recent year for which comparative data is available, the proportion of people receiving funded long term care who accessed this through a Direct Payment was 18.3%. By comparing Suffolk to the regional and national average use of Direct Payments and to our peer group within the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) (see below), we can see that there is scope to increase the use of Direct Payments to bring Suffolk more in line with other local authorities. There are also a small number of Individual Service Funds in place in Suffolk now – these are not counted in the data below but are not being used at scale.

Regional and national comparators	2023-24 (3D2a) Proportion of people using social care who receive Direct Payments
Suffolk	18.3
East of England	22.8
England	25.5

Comparators in Suffolk's peer group – local authorities with a similar population to Suffolk	2023-24 (3D2a) Proportion of people using social care who receive Direct Payments
Lincolnshire	43.6
Nottinghamshire	39.8
Somerset	37.7
Derbyshire	32.6
Kent	28.9

### *The Personal Assistant (PA) market in Suffolk*

Many people already use PAs in Suffolk, but there is no central PA Register from which people can source and contact a PA and no consistent evidence as to whether everyone who wants a PA now is able to find one. Suffolk Adult Social Care will need to work with the market, including self-employed PAs, to ensure there are enough PAs to meet the increased demand through the use of Direct Payments. To support this the council already works with Community Catalysts – our contracted provider who supports ‘microenterprises’, very small organisations, to set themselves up and work as PAs in their local areas. Through visiting [Small Good Stuff](#) you can find out more about local micro enterprises in your area.

### *Direct Payments Support Service in Suffolk*

Many organisations across the UK provide support to people using a Direct Payment – for example advice on setting up and finding care, or on employment law and money management. Suffolk County Council does not currently have a contracted provider for support services although several organisations have a local presence.

### *Prepaid card accounts*

Suffolk County Council provides these accounts to manage the financial element of having a Direct Payment, allowing the council to make payments into the account and the person using it to manage and organise payment for the services they receive. The advantage of these accounts is that they allow quicker and easier ways for the council to fulfil its statutory duties to monitor spend, for example without the person receiving the Direct Payment having to provide bank statements to evidence the use of funding. Increasing the use of these prepaid card accounts will ensure staff time is freed up to provide more direct support to people receiving a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund.

### *Personal health budgets (PHBs)*

We are working with both of Suffolk’s Integrated Care Boards to explore a Suffolk-wide approach to Direct Payments, Individual Service Fund and Personal Health Budgets – as an example of this, the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Commissioning Board (SNEE ICB) is committed to delivering the Universal Model of Personalised Care by offering opportunities for patients and health care professionals to work in partnership and increasing the availability of PHBs, providing people with greater choice and control over their care.

SNEE ICB provides PHBs to:

- Adults in receipt of NHS Continuing Healthcare,
- Children and young people receiving NHS Continuing Care
- People receiving aftercare services under section 117 of the Mental Health Act
- People eligible for NHS wheelchairs

The rollout of PHBs is not solely confined to these ‘right to have’ groups and PHBs **may** be available as one-off PHBs that support people to achieve specific health goals or outcomes. One-off PHBs enable supported self-management e.g. hospital discharge, mental health recovery or addressing health inequalities and are rapidly deployed one-off payments,

rather than a long-term source of funding, where the proposed spend clearly represents value for money.

### **Our objectives and action plan**

During the co-design workshops carried out to inform this approach, people talked about their experiences of Adult Social Care, of the Direct Payments process and of receiving care through a Direct Payment. From this the following objectives and commitments were agreed with people attending the workshops to capture what they would like to see from a future Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds, and other personalisation options offer:

Further information about the co-design findings is at Appendix 1.

#### **1. You will have clear, easy to understand, accessible, and timely information about Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds, and other personalisation options**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- update our information and advice about Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds
- ensure Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds (and financial contributions) are discussed early on when people first contact us, assuming that these are the main ways in which they will access care and support
- update our policy and guidance on Direct Payments, including what they can and can't be used for and the responsibilities of people, providers and the council
- use easy-read and other accessible versions as standard
- work with our Direct Payments and Personalisation Reference Group of volunteers to co-design any new information, documents etc so that these are easy to understand

#### **2. You will access Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds through a clear and simple process**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- redesign our Direct Payments process from start to finish, including financial assessments
- aim for the process to take 28 days or less once it has been agreed that a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund should be explored.
- use digital tools to make processes smoother and more user-friendly
- increase take-up of pre-paid card accounts and use the data collected to quickly identify and address any issues with people's care and support
- ensure a joined-up approach to care and financial reviews to assist with care planning and resolving issues as early as possible

- over the medium to long term, work with partners to create a seamless experience for people who receive funding from both health and social care

### **3. You will have [access to the right support](#) to help you use your Direct Payment / Individual Service Fund**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- work with people and organisations in Suffolk to design services to provide guidance, training and practical support to people using Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, including payroll services, employment services and care finding tools such as a Personal Assistants (PA) register
- provide training and development for our staff to ensure everyone has the skills and knowledge they need to support people using Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds
- develop our practice so that all care and support plans provide the flexibility for people to use a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund, while still being clear about what is and isn't covered through the support plan.

### **4. You will have [more options and more flexibility to meet your care and support needs](#) through your Direct Payment / Individual Service Fund**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- work to ensure a broader range of options is available to meet people's needs, including growing the numbers of Personal Assistants and 'microenterprises' in Suffolk and working to make existing care offers more flexible and personalised
- explore opportunities to use Individual Service Funds in Suffolk
- set clear rates to be used for Personal Assistants, taking into account people's needs and the need to stay within the budgets we have
- Provide examples of people using Direct Payments flexibly

### **Next steps**

While this approach sets out our action plan at a high level, a detailed plan is being developed to sit underneath these objectives and commitments.

This plan will also be co-designed through workshops which will shape further detail of the future Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds processes.

As a result of the co-design already undertaken, we will create a Reference Group with whom we will share template letters, documents and forms to ensure that the information we send out to people is clear and easy to understand.

If you would like to be part of future co-design workshops, the Reference Group, or both, please contact us at [heartofcare@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:heartofcare@suffolk.gov.uk)

This action plan will be monitored regularly by the Direct Payments and Personalisation Steering Group. If you would like to know more about a particular aspect of the action plan, please contact us at [heartofcare@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:heartofcare@suffolk.gov.uk)

### **Impact and evaluation**

In addition to monitoring progress delivering the action plan and commitments, we need to monitor the impact this work is having on people's lives. While the measurement of the numbers and proportion of people using care and support who do so through a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund is relatively straightforward, measuring the impact that they have is less so.

Our People at the heart of Care strategy sets out the following outcomes for the improvements we want to achieve through the changes we will make to the Direct Payments and Personalisation offer and by increasing the use of Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds.

<b>Our outcomes for ongoing care and support</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Most people – at least 60% - will access care and support through a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund	<i>Number and proportion of Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds</i>
People using Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, and staff, will have a quick, efficient experience	<i>Length of time taken from agreeing the need for and appropriateness of a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund to receiving care in this way Survey on people's experience of the process</i>
People will be supported to increase their independence over time	<i>Targeted practice audits of annual reviews for people using a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund, to look at how their care and support has changed over time</i>
People will have a more flexible, personalised care and support package tailored to their needs	<i>Adult Social Care survey measures – proportion of people reporting they have choice and control over their care and support. Targeted practice audits of people with a new Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund who previously had a commissioned service. Increased take-up of Personal Assistants and microenterprises</i>

### **Easy read**

*An Easy Read summary of this document was shared at a 'My Home' session facilitated by ACE Anglia on 5 March 2025, to enable feedback. A full Easy Read version will be produced once the final document has been agreed and signed off.*



## **Appendices**

1. *Report of co-design work: methodology and emerging themes*
2. *Summary of feedback on Draft Direct Payments and Personalisation Approach*

## **1. Appendix 1: Report of co-design work: methodology and emerging themes**

In July 2024, the Adult Social Care Transformation Board agreed the approach for co-design of a new end to end process for Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, working with staff and residents of Suffolk. The approach has included:

- Seventeen workshops running from October 2024 to January 2025, including four supported sessions for people with Learning Disabilities, Autism or Mental Health conditions, and four internal workshops for staff. Two sessions were held in each locality (in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft) alongside online sessions which were countywide. There have been approximately 90 attendances from staff and 100 attendances from residents to date (with some people choosing to attend more than one workshop).
- Online surveys for people receiving direct payments and/or those managing a Direct Payment on somebody's behalf. This survey asked questions about the Direct Payment service and support received with a targeted survey which also covered support received from Suffolk Independent Living. 90 people responded to the survey (out of approximately 650 contacted).
- Provider engagement through workshops to design the Care Market Strategy, through breakout discussions on Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds during these sessions.

Overall, we have received 300 responses from people and organisations through these various routes.

### **Feedback from people with care and support needs, staff and providers – summary and findings**

The workshops sought feedback to inform 'what good would look like', framed around the overall objectives of the programme and the commitments which sit under them. These had been drafted following general engagement on the People at the heart of Care strategy over the summer.

In subsequent workshops feedback was then sought to design the stages of the new Direct Payments process.

The workshops were supported by a survey of people currently using Direct Payments, which asked focused questions about their experience of the current process as well as how they would like us to work with and communicate with them in the future.

The draft objectives were broadly supported in the feedback and were further refined as a result of the comments received, as below.

1. **You will have clear, easy to understand, accessible, and timely information about Direct Payments, Individual Service Funds, and other personalisation options**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- update our information and advice about Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds

- ensure Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds (and financial contributions) are discussed early on when people first contact us, assuming that these are the main ways in which they will access care and support
- update our policy and guidance on Direct Payments, including what they can and can't be used for and the responsibilities of people, providers and the council
- use easy-read and other accessible versions as standard
- work with our Direct Payments and Personalisation Reference Group of volunteers to co-design any new information, documents etc so that these are easy to understand

**Summary of feedback:** Current information, advice and guidance wasn't seen as adequate to make the process for setup of a Direct Payment clear. This was raised in both the workshops and the survey (in addition to general concerns about the clarity of information, advice and guidance). One attendee who had never used services before highlighted the stress of navigating the early stages of needing care and support without knowing what type of 'help' she needed – whoever she spoke to 'had the presumption that she would/should know'. The financial assessment form was viewed as particularly confusing and anxiety-inducing. The need for much clearer and simpler communication and not all online, came through strongly from the Suffolk User Forum group. There is still a need for good old fashioned leaflets and posters, and for example using the screens in GP surgeries. The term 'Individual Budgets' was raised in one staff and one public workshop as being potentially unclear although other members of staff and the public used it confidently. From the LDA sessions it was clear that explaining the difference between the terms would be essential for people to fully take advantage of these options. Overall attendees felt the need for a holistic communications piece of work to include how Adult Social Care advertises and promotes Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, and the myths, misconceptions and misunderstandings of them. A number of people volunteered to join a reference group to review communications and ensure these are easy to understand.

## **2. You will access Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds through a clear and [simple process](#)**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- redesign our Direct Payments process from start to finish, including financial assessments
- aim for the process to take 28 days or less once it has been agreed that an that Direct Payment and Individual Service Fund options should be explored.
- use digital tools to make processes smoother and more user-friendly
- increase take-up of pre-paid card accounts and use the data collected to quickly identify and address any issues with people's care and support
- ensure a joined-up approach to care and financial reviews to assist with care planning and resolving issues as early as possible

- over the medium to long term, work with partners to create a seamless experience for people who receive funding from both health and social care

**Summary of feedback:** Timeliness, particularly when a Direct Payment is set up, was a consistent theme when people were asked what wasn't working well now. People responding to the survey were much more positive about the experience of ongoing management than about setup. One workshop attendee's experience of setting up a Direct Payment for his father had taken nearly 12 months – he and other attendees, many of whom were carers, highlighted the additional stress and concern the lengthy process caused, over and above the situation which they needed the Direct Payment in order to manage. Through the survey people reported difficulties with navigating banking systems and inconsistent payment dates. Linked to this, prepaid card accounts were difficult for some workshop attendees to get to grips with but once explained, were strongly supported with comments such as 'great, I won't need to switch my printer on to print off all those statements each year!'. Financial documents were again highlighted as a source of confusion by staff and people using services, including payslips and remittances. People made other specific suggestions through the survey, such as an app to manage access and highlighted other challenges e.g. the process for returning excess funds.

### **3. You will have [access to the right support](#) to help you use your Direct Payment / Individual Service Fund**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- work with people and organisations in Suffolk to design services to provide guidance, training and practical support to people using Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, including payroll services, employment services and care finding tools such as a Personal Assistants (PA) register
- provide training and development for our staff to ensure everyone has the skills and knowledge they need to support people using Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds
- develop our practice so that all care and support plans provide the flexibility for people to use a Direct Payment or Individual Service Fund, while still being clear about what is and isn't covered through the support plan.

**Summary of feedback:** Social care staff are clearly key to the customer experience and both staff and people using care and support recognised the need for additional training and knowledge for staff to confidently support people using Direct Payments. Some staff were keen to restart the Direct Payment 'champions' model to increase the profile and expertise within teams. The need for 'empathy' and 'sensitivity' was highlighted in workshops and in the survey. One young adult spoke powerfully about the 'courage and pride' needed for someone to come to Suffolk County Council for help and that the service should be 'upfront and honest' about what is available to encourage and support a user led approach. As well as expertise in the technical aspects of Direct Payments there were specific issues raised around forward planning and contingency planning,

especially for parents of working age adults who were currently managing a Direct Payment for their child and were concerned about what would happen when they could no longer do this because of their own age or health.

There was a clear case for ongoing **support services** to help people manage the technicalities of Direct Payments. One couple had struggled to setup and manage a Direct Payment for their daughter and had difficulty keeping PAs due to this and were now using a paid for support service which was making their situation more sustainable. We know that the top performing local authorities for Direct Payments nationally all commission an external support service, and some people (survey and workshops) clearly valued having access to a support service independent of the council. We also heard from people who had tried support services but decided to revert to managing their Direct Payment themselves to give them more control and choice.

**Peer support** was also valued – for example a suggestion was made in one Learning Disabilities and Autism workshop to have face to face workshops mixing people with experience of Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds and those who are interested in exploring this, to help understand their options without obligation. This will be considered as part of the ongoing support needed for Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds in Suffolk.

#### **4. You will have **more options and more flexibility to meet your care and support needs** through your Direct Payment / Individual Service Fund**

To enable this to happen, Suffolk Adult Social Care will

- work to ensure a broader range of options is available to meet people's needs, including growing the numbers of Personal Assistants and 'microenterprises' in Suffolk and working to make existing care offers more flexible and personalised
- explore opportunities to use Individual Service Funds in Suffolk
- set clear rates to be used for Personal Assistants, taking into account people's needs and the need to stay within the budgets we have
- Provide examples of people using Direct Payments flexibly

**Summary of feedback:** The objective to have more diverse care options available was supported. We heard examples where Direct Payments were making different care options more feasible, e.g. someone who was able to support their parent's wish to stay out of residential care by finding alternative provision, alternatives to commissioned care in rural areas.

We could see consistent support from staff and people using services for clarity around rates for Personal Assistants (PA) and ensuring that for e.g. homecare, Direct Payment users are not charged private payer rates. A number of people told us that there was a lack of clarity about whether/how their Direct Payment was expected to increase to reflect inflation over time – for example the equivalent of an annual 'uplift' for PAs – and

that this was a 'battle' they had to negotiate individually. As a result, as part of the next stage of our process design, we will explore the best way to approach this.

A number of people who had not previously been aware of Individual Service Funds were interested in the opportunity to have these and in whether they would be available from all providers.

Suffolk User Forum workshop discussed being 'a person, not a number' and that from the start the conversations should be person centred, leading to bespoke and tailor-made services.

### **Feedback on the general experience of receiving a Direct Payment**

Some people spoke about the benefits of their Direct Payment – one person told us a powerful story about the transferable skills this had taught them including employment skills (organising payment runs and timesheets for their carers) and self-advocacy. Linked to this people who had Direct Payments that work well now were keen to ensure that any transition planning did not disrupt a good relationship with their Personal Assistant or provider.

## ***Appendix 2: Summary of feedback on Draft Approach***

In February 2025, the draft approach document was distributed to 24 individuals and 53 staff members, with a one-month period allocated for feedback. Although we received only a few responses, they encompassed a wide range of topics. Additionally, in March 2025, two in-person sessions were conducted: one facilitated by ACE Anglia with approximately 15 participants, including providers, and another by the Suffolk User Forum with six attendees. This feedback, if not already amended in this Approach document, will be reflected in our action plan to take this work forward.

### **Feedback received as written comments**

#### **Personal Assistant Rates**

There is a concern that the rates for Personal Assistants must be appropriate. If set too low, it could hinder the recruitment of high-quality staff, which is already a challenge. The current Direct Payment system's advantage lies in building rapport and trust with Personal Assistants. Inadequate rates could negatively impact staff retention.

#### **Training**

Training and development needs to be a higher priority going forwards. Additional training is needed, particularly in health-related areas such as physiotherapy, speech therapy (for both speech and swallowing difficulties), occupational therapy, and from specialist organizations like RNID, Parkinson's Society, and the Royal Osteoporosis Society.

#### **Communication and terminology**

One respondent questioned the use of the term "independence" and whether it sets unrealistic expectations, especially considering factors like significant age, progressive conditions, or information processing difficulties. There is a call for clearer communication on joint work with health services, including specific timescales. While we strive to be as transparent as possible, this remains a work in progress.

Two respondents inquired about options for those who do not engage digitally. The document mentions that alternative options are available. A suggestion was made to include graphics or pictures to help explain terms like "personal budget" and "Direct Payment." This is a valuable idea, and we have included a graphic in this final draft.

### **Feedback from ACE Anglia and Suffolk User Forum**

Both workshop sessions with ACE Anglia and the Suffolk User Forum were broadly supportive of the key themes, providing substantial feedback on how Adult Social Care can effectively deliver on this work.

**ACE Anglia feedback:**

There is a need for clear explanations of terms such as "Individual Budgets" and "Direct Payments." Some groups expressed confusion or dissatisfaction with the concept of Individual Budgets, suggesting alternative terms like "Money for Support." Staff and some groups preferred the term "Direct Payments," though not everyone understood what it entailed. It is essential to explain these options during annual reviews. Following this feedback, the collective name is being reconsidered and now changed to 'Direct Payment and Personalisation' for the programme, but in most public communications we will refer to Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, and where appropriate Personal Health Budgets.

Support services should include budgeting and financial assistance, as well as quality support with tax and pensions. Direct Payments should offer flexibility and choice, allowing individuals the freedom to change their plans. For example, if visiting Framlingham Castle is included in a care plan, there should be the option to choose a different activity.

It is crucial to provide accurate information to parents and carers, as they often have their own support needs and challenges. Currently, individuals are seeking assistance from the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) and educational organizations, which are expected to possess comprehensive knowledge of the information held by social workers, and Independence and Well-being practitioners.

There is a need for sessions to explain Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds, including how to access them and their potential uses. These sessions should be available to all, including the VCFSE and educational organizations. Additionally, support is needed to complete forms, and it would be beneficial to offer this assistance during the information sessions.

**Suffolk User Forum feedback:**

Citizens Advice raised the potential for partner agencies and voluntary sector organisations to play a greater role in signposting individuals to Direct Payments. They noted that they frequently assist adults with benefits and care-related forms and, with appropriate training and resources, could effectively advocate for Direct Payments.

Participants highlighted the importance of using real-life experiences, YouTube content, and animations to enhance the accessibility and impact of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) materials. These formats were seen as particularly effective in helping individuals understand their options.

Suggestions for creating regular opportunities for engagement included hosting quarterly meetings facilitated by the Suffolk User Forum (SUF), as well as establishing regular drop-in sessions in accessible community spaces such as libraries. These sessions could provide advice and support on Direct Payments and feature guest contributors, such as technology partners, to assist with digital tools and prepaid card accounts.



### **Feedback from staff:**

A staff member recently inquired about the availability of Individual Service Funds (ISFs) and which options might be most appropriate for the individuals she supports. The Direct Payments Review Team Manager responded directly to provide guidance. However, this highlights a broader need to improve communication with staff regarding the outcomes of the ISF pilot, which we will address.

Another staff member recommended replacing the term “diversify” with “more choice” to ensure the language used is clearer and more accessible. This was amended under point 4 to “work to ensure *a broader range of* options is available to meet people’s needs.....”

Additionally, feedback from an Adult Social Care Manager in Mental Health Services highlighted positive examples of flexibility in provider arrangements. In one case, an individual receiving 20 nights of support per month was able to agree daily with the provider whether support was needed that evening. If not required, the service was not delivered or charged—demonstrating a person-centred and cost-effective approach.