

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
 Date of meeting: **18th October 2023**
 Report Subject: **Audit Wales: Direct Payments for Adult Social Care**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Hadyn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and Social Services**
 Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	x		18.10.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Direct Payments for Adult Social Care*' (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Direct Payments for Adult Social Care*' in April 2022.
 - 2.2 The Audit Wales report looks at how local authorities provide Direct Payments services to adult, examining their impact and value for money.
 - 2.3 The report identified 10 recommendations:
 - 6 recommendations for local authorities to implement (**R1-R6**);
 - 3 for local authorities and Welsh Government to implement and will be led by Welsh Government (**R7, R9 and R10**), these are detailed below; and
 - 1 recommendation is for Welsh Government only to implement (**R8**) and detail of this recommendation can be found in Appendix 1.
 - 2.4 Audit Wales expect each local authority to consider the findings of the review and the recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives the report and monitors its response to the recommendations in a timely way.
 - 2.5 The identified recommendations for local authorities to implement are detailed below:

Recommendations:

Part 1 sets out how local authorities promote and raise awareness of Direct Payments. To ensure people know about Direct Payments, how to access these services and are encouraged to take them up, Audit Wales recommend that local authorities:

R1 Review public information in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments.

R2 Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments.

R3 Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers.

Part 1 also sets out the importance of the 'What Matters' conversation and the importance of social workers in helping people make informed choices on Direct Payments. To ensure Direct Payments are consistently offered Audit Wales recommend that local authorities:

R4 Ensure information about Direct Payments is available at the front door to social care and are included in the initial discussion on the available care options for service users and carers.

R5 Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers.

In **Part 2** Audit Wales highlight the central role of Personal Assistants in helping service users and carers to get the best positive outcomes from their use of Direct Payments. To ensure there is sufficient Personal Assistant capacity, Audit Wales recommend that local authorities through the All-Wales local authority Direct Payments Forum and with Social Care Wales:

R6 Work together to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants.

In **Part 2** Audit Wales also highlight that while local authorities recognise the value of Direct Payments in supporting independence and improving wellbeing, the differences in approach, standards and the amount paid out means that people with similar needs receive different levels of service. To ensure services are provided equitably and fairly we recommend that local authorities and the Welsh Government:

R7 Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out:

- what Direct Payments can pay for;
- how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work;
- how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work;
- how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked; and
- how to administer and manage pooled budgets.

Public information should be reviewed regularly (at least every two years) to ensure they are working effectively and remain relevant.

In **Part 3** Audit Wales note that having the right performance indicators and regularly reporting performance against these are important for local authorities to manage operational performance, identify areas of improvement and evaluate the positive impact of services. To effectively manage performance and be able to judge the impact and value for money of Direct Payments, Audit Wales recommend that local authorities and the Welsh Government:

R9 Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence.

R10 Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement.

- 2.6 Blaenau Gwent's response to the identified recommendations can be found in Appendix 2: Audit Wales Management Response.

Options for Recommendation

3.1 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Council's Management Response, identified in Appendix 2, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

3.2 **Option 2**

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Council's Management Response, identified in Appendix 2, to address the recommendations for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

4. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report – 'Direct Payments for Adult Social Care'
Appendix 2 – Blaenau Gwent Management Response