

Direct Payment: a response to Parent Carers (May 2021)

In March 2021 the Family Support and Inclusion Team contacted families about the support they had during the last year, as things had changed a lot for some families due to COVID-19. We sent a letter to every family in receipt of direct payment by email and post. We made phone calls following the letter and it was published on the Local Offer website in the [guide to personal budgets](#).

How many families were contacted?

- Total of **178 families**
- **We sent 178 letters** to all families in receipt of a Direct Payment
- **We attempted 178 phone calls**
- We collected feedback from **138 families**
- We were unable to speak to **40 families**. We called twice and left a voicemail when there was an option to do so

Aim of calls

We called families to make sure they had the support they needed.

On each call we asked the family:

- How were they managing at the time?
- Were the family currently using their Direct Payment?
- How was the Direct Payment was being used?
- Had the family used their Direct Payment flexibly during the pandemic?
- Did they have any concerns or requests regarding flexible spends or support?

Positives

- 109 families said they felt supported by their Direct payment at that time.
- In 2020 we contacted each family to complete a contingency plan if a member of the household became sick. Social Care Practitioners followed this up at agreed times with parents. Families said they had been able to build a rapport with a member of the Direct Payment team.
- Around 30 families commented that they'd had more contact from the team during the last year than they'd had since having a Direct Payment and now knew who they would call if they needed any additional support.

- 73 families used their direct payment in a flexible way. They were happy with the flexibility of the Direct Payment during the pandemic and felt this made it easier to manage having their children at home during the lockdowns.
- Families were happy with the flexibility to be able to pay family members during lockdowns. This enabled them to limit the Covid risk whilst still receiving the support they needed.

What could we have done better?

- **Communication.** At the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020 we wrote to all families explaining who they could contact if they had any questions about Direct Payments. We also called to find out what support they had and to explore flexible options during the lockdown. Unfortunately, some families said they didn't get the letter. Some families who got the letter felt information about how they could spend funds during lockdown should have been clearer. More information about how funds could be used in a more flexible way would have been helpful.
- **Guidance.** The guidance was not on the Local Offer website and not sent directly to parent carers. We've now sent a letter with the guidance to all families in receipt of Direct Payment in response to this request. See our [guidance on using direct payments \(pdf, 128KB\)](#).
- **Local Offer.** The information about social care direct payments wasn't up to date. The information regarding direct payments was limited and families didn't feel they knew the processes and contingencies that were in place.
- **Flexibility.** A few parents stated they'd been asked too many questions when asking for flexibility. In two cases families didn't feel that provision was flexible enough.

What we're doing now:

- We now have a person in the team who keeps Direct Payment information updated on the Local Offer.
- We've sent guidance to all parents who receive a Direct Payment.
- We're creating a pack of information about Direct Payments which will be given to parents when the Direct Payment is set up. The pack will contain information about the Direct Payment, the uses, and who to contact for support and information with issues such as employment or payroll.
- Individual Support Plans. Each child will have a short break support plan written with the family. It will detail how the Direct Payment will be used and the outcomes it will achieve for the child. This will be reviewed each year.
- A Direct Payment feedback group will be created. Parents will work alongside us to develop how the service is run and how we communicate information clearly to parents in receipt of Direct Payments.

If you're a parent in receipt of a Direct Payment, who is interested in working with us, email Childrens.Direct.Payment.Service@bristol.gov.uk