

Users' Best Value

**A guide to user involvement good practice in
Best Value Reviews**

**Clare Evans, Angie Carmichael and members
of the Direct Payments Best Value Project Group
of Wiltshire & Swindon Users' Network**

The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead
40 Water End
York YO30 6WP
Website: www.jrf.org.uk

This is a joint publication between the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Wiltshire & Swindon Users' Network and the University of Bath.

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First published 2002 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

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A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 84263 075 X (paperback)
ISBN 1 84263 140 3 (pdf: available at www.jrf.org.uk)

Prepared and printed by:
York Publishing Services Ltd
64 Hallfield Road
Layerthorpe
York YO31 7ZQ
Tel: 01904 430033; Fax: 01904 430868; Website: www.yps-publishing.co.uk

Further copies of this report, or any other JRF publication, can be obtained either from the JRF website (www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/) or from our distributor, York Publishing Services Ltd, at the above address.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their invaluable help in carrying out the Best Value Review which forms the basis of this guide to best practice: Louise Brown, Co-director of the Best Value Review Project; Kelly Doveton, who provided the administration support; and all of the service users who advised and participated in the Best Value Review Project Group: Brian Maslen, Marisa Wright, Vivian Cantrell, Keith Angell, Jenni Hurst, Dawn Steele, Michael Mitchell, Linda King, Ken Alexander, Charlie Turrell and Lee Watts.

Thanks also to all the service users, provider organisations and Social Services personnel who participated in the surveys and interviews.

We would also like to thank Wiltshire County Council, particularly Ray Jones, Director of Social Services; Graham White, Planning and Development Officer (Disabilities), Social Services Department; Sue Geary, Corporate Development Manager, Social Services Department; and Sharon Britton, Assistant Director, Performance and Review, Chief Executive's Office, for enabling us to carry out the Review. Thanks are also due to David Chalker, Director of Finance and Internal Challenger for the Best Value Review and Mike Pankeiwicz for their work on the costings exercise; to John Dunningcliff of WECIL for assistance as External Challenger and Mayur Bhatt, Wiltshire Race Equality Council representing members from the minority ethnic community on the Best Value Project Board.

We would like to thank the University of Bath and Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network for the financial management of the research project.

Thanks to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and, in particular, Alex O'Neil, Senior Social Care Research Manager for their funding and other support and to members of their Advisory Committee: Hazel Qureshi, SPRU, University of York; Frances Hasler, National Centre for Independent Living; Laurie A'Court, Social Service Department, Norfolk County Council; Colin Barnes, Disability Research Unit, University of Leeds; Gerry Zarb; Jim Kennedy, Local Government Association; Mike Fisher, National Institute of Social Work.

Finally, Clare Evans would like to pass on her personal thanks to David and Ruth and also her PA, Sue Wright, for their support in preparing this guide.

Foreword

Local authorities are now required to undertake Best Value Reviews of all their services within a five-year period. The Reviews need to cover the four 'C's of Best Value: to Compare, to Consult, to Challenge and to open up to Competition the services provided or purchased by local authorities. In Wiltshire, we have also introduced a fifth 'C', to Collaborate, in undertaking Best Value Reviews.

What usually happens with Best Value Reviews is that the local authority undertakes the Review, maybe with the assistance of consultants and in consultation with others, but the Review is essentially a local authority reviewing its own services and performance.

In Wiltshire, we were presented with another, slightly scary, opportunity. Disabled people, who have an established track record in Wiltshire of independent action and collective advocacy through the Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network, proposed that they undertook a Best Value Review of Direct Payments and the arrangements made by the County Council. They then successfully sought independent funding for the Review from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and planned and managed the Review process themselves, with disabled people also employed within the Review process.

It was the well-earned reputation for positive influence and achievement by the Users' Network during the past ten years that made politicians and managers within the County Council understand that here was an opportunity to draw on the experience and expertise of disabled people and to have a really searching, no holds barred, independent Review of the progress we were or were not making in promoting independent living through Direct Payments.

There were some requirements for all Best Value Reviews within which the Direct Payments Review had to be undertaken. Within Wiltshire, a process has been established for overseeing Best Value Reviews. This includes regular reports to a Best Value Project Board of senior managers, including the County Council's Chief Executive, and to the relevant Scrutiny Committee of councillors. They check that at each stage of the Review process the Review is giving proper attention to the five Wiltshire 'C's of Best Value. Only if the reports, written and through

attendance before the Board and Scrutiny Committee, can show that the five 'C's are being addressed, is the Review allowed to proceed to its next stage.

There is also a Wiltshire County Council required project management structure for all of its Best Value Reviews within which the Direct Payments Review had to be shaped.

The County Council itself is publicly scrutinised and scored by the national Best Value Inspectorate on how well it undertakes its Best Value Reviews, hence the requirements within the County Council to ensure that Reviews are undertaken to meet the nationally determined Best Value criteria.

All of this framework for reporting on the progress with the Direct Payments Review, and the project management structure for the Review, will have created its own demands on the disabled people leading and undertaking the Review, but it also allowed for regular checking out at key stages during the Review process that the Review was likely to meet the requirements of the national Best Value Inspectorate.

Indeed this Review, because of its independence from the local authority and because of the commitment, experience and expertise of the disabled people leading and undertaking the Review, probably more than most Reviews, opened up the local authority's policies and practices to searching scrutiny of its performance.

So, what was different as a consequence of this Review being undertaken independently of the local authority by disabled people?

First, the processes involved in undertaking the Review were undoubtedly different from the way in which the Review would have been undertaken if we had just done the Review ourselves within the County Council.

We would have consulted with disabled people, and indeed would have had disabled people on our project groups steering and undertaking the Review. But I doubt if we would have had a disabled person as a project manager for the Review, with a disabled person employed to lead the

Review day by day, and with other disabled people employed to interview existing and potential Direct Payments users and staff within the Social Services Department.

I also doubt that we would have had a disabled person from outside of Wiltshire as the 'External Challenger' within the Project Board for the Review, or a Project Steering Group with a membership which had a majority of disabled people.

It is also very unlikely that within the County Council we would have ourselves thought of asking a number of Direct Payments users to keep a diary of their experiences which then brought home very powerfully the experiences of disabled people, especially when Social Services got it wrong by, for example, not getting the correct payments made on time.

But the main difference in having the Review undertaken independently by disabled people is that there was nowhere for us to hide within the County Council! We were not in a position to put our spin or gloss on the Review. As such, the Review exposed the County Council to critical comment, as well as positive comment, which was not within the County Council's control and this comment is public.

This, though, is exactly what Best Value Reviews are supposed to be about. They are intended to be honest, open and up front. It takes a level of mutual trust based on experience over a period of time to get to the position where we can together value a shared commitment to improve policy and practice, and it also takes a willingness to sometimes experience some bruising within the relationships which have been established.

This is the position we have reached in Wiltshire and we are potentially benefiting from the real opportunities this gives to do things better. Disabled people will now be on our heels as we work to deliver the action plan which they are also shaping with us. There may be easier and less challenging ways of doing Best Value Reviews but it is unlikely that they will have as much positive influence and impact.

Ray Jones
Director of Social Services
Wiltshire County Council
October 2001

Introduction – using the guide

This guide is for all those interested in learning how to involve service users in the local authority Best Value Review process. It may also be of use to those interested in involving service users in other service evaluations. It is produced by disabled people to demonstrate good practice from their perspective.

There is no shortage of rhetoric directed at professionals exhorting them to involve service users but perhaps less emphasis on writing up examples of good practice from users' perspective. This guide attempts to combine the two. In each section about user involvement in Best Value Reviews, we have identified the principles applicable to all good practice followed by the particular practice used in our user-controlled demonstration research project. Quotations from members of the Project Group on the process are in italics throughout the Guide.

This project was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and developed in conjunction with Louise Brown, the Director for the Wiltshire Social Services and University of Bath Research Partnership. We recognise that this support gave us access to funding levels not normally available to those responsible for Best Value Reviews. However, it is important to recognise that involving users (in a meaningful and valid manner) in the Best Value Review process will incur added costs.

Best Value Review process

From April 2000, local authorities were required to introduce a framework of Best Value Reviews: this process aimed to establish a firm foundation of quality performance and accountability to local citizens for services for which local authorities are responsible. Each service that the local authority is responsible for commissioning or providing will be reviewed over a five-year period with full public reporting. These reviews are carried out under the headings known as the four 'C's': Challenge, Compare, Compete and Consult. The whole process is open to inspection by the regional Best Value Inspectorate and published in the Annual Performance Plan. Information about each local authority's Best Value process is provided locally.

User involvement in research and evaluation

Since the growth of user involvement in general, particularly from 1993, there has been a particular focus on user involvement in social care research among service users and researchers seeking to empower users in their work. In a separate but linked strand, the Disabled People's Movement has challenged the whole basis of the social relations of research in society and developed emancipatory research as an alternative. The increased emphasis on the 'quality agenda' has led to a growing understanding of how definitions of quality are made and the role that outcomes for users defined by users can play in those definitions.

2 First steps – building on previous participation

Principles

- Pre-existing user-controlled organisations are well placed to identify users' research and evaluation agendas.
- Allies have an important role to play in providing support and expertise in the development of user-controlled research and evaluation processes.
- A user-controlled organisation is a useful framework within which a user-controlled research proposal accountable to users in the organisation can be developed for funding applications.
- Previous expertise in developing good practice regarding user involvement assists in planning the costs and design of a user-controlled Best Value evaluation.
- The local authority may need to make some adjustment to processes within the Best Value framework to be sensitive to users' involvement. The design of such Reviews should recognise the overriding need for users to meet together on their own with skilled facilitation.

Practice

Wiltshire has a strong tradition of user involvement. This grows out of the proactive challenges of Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network (WSUN) since its inception in 1991 and the synergy created by linking with professionals, including senior managers within Wiltshire County Council, who were concerned to develop user involvement. The 'Wiltshire Model' is characterised by the development of a strong, independent, service-user-controlled organisation which aimed to 'riddle the system' with user perspectives in all aspects of social care – planning, delivery and evaluation.

Interest in the development of a research project aimed at the Best Value Review process grew out of previous work carried out by WSUN in designing research and evaluation processes. In 1995–96, a group of

disabled people within the Network secured funding for and carried out research into the operation and success of the Wiltshire Independent Living Fund (WILF) and produced a report entitled 'I am in control' (Collaboratively Wiltshire Users' Network, 1996). The WILF scheme operated prior to the implementation of Direct Payments and was a third-party arrangement under which disabled people were able to purchase their own personal assistance support. Other Network members designed monitoring and evaluation processes for the Home Care Service and others carried out telephone interviewing about older people's experience of discharge from hospital. Two key objectives in WSUN's Mission Statement are:

... to provide user involvement and to disseminate examples of good practice in user involvement in Community Care purchasing, provision and evaluation and be proactive in facilitating learning amongst Community Care Professionals, voluntary, statutory and private bodies both countrywide and nationally.
(WSUN Mission Statement)

The Network's original proposal was to focus on user involvement in Best Value Reviews generally. However, both Social Services' interest in reviewing Direct Payments and disabled people's expertise in this area made it a manageable focus for the project.

Led by the Director of Social Services, who became the Best Value Project Sponsor of the Review, the County Council welcomed this external user-controlled Review. Officer time was committed to linking with the Project and there were adjustments to the role of the Best Value Project Board. Although this Board usually oversaw and managed the Best Value process, in this Review it took on a more facilitative role – receiving reports of progress and suggesting future ways forward. Thus, the user-controlled nature of the Review was recognised as far as possible within the Best Value framework. The co-directors of the research project became the Best Value Project Managers. At the Project's suggestion, the director of a neighbouring Centre for Independent Living (CIL) was invited to be the External Challenger on the Review Board, due to the CIL's experience and reputation for good practice within the Independent Living Movement.

A helpful way to succeed at participation.

3 Ensuring equal access to Review participation

Principles

- All relevant service users must have equal access to participation, including potential users and ex-users of the service being reviewed.
- Invitations to participate must be open and democratic.
- The Review Group Evaluators must be accountable to the wider community of service users.
- There must be a commitment to reach out and involve marginalised users.
- Clear information about participation in the evaluation must be given.

Practice

We found that employing a number of different approaches was the most effective means of engaging with a group of volunteers, for example:

- an invitation in the Network newsletter about the project and what it would involve
- personal contact by the Project Director with disabled people known to be interested in Direct Payments and/or experience of involvement
- a formal invitation to all those on Direct Payments sent through Social Services Adult Care Teams and the Support Service for Independent Living (SSIL). This invitation outlined two levels of possible involvement – either participating in the Review Project Group or completing a survey enabling users to give their views on Direct Payments with a promise to give them feedback at the end of the project.

These methods, which reached over 100 Direct Payments users and other disabled people, produced about 12 volunteers for the Review Group, consisting of older people and people with physical impairments; some on Direct Payments and some potential users of Direct Payments.

No mental health users either on Direct Payments or not chose to volunteer.

As the work began, it was recognised that the group of volunteers should not be termed or expected to be 'representative' but that there was value in encouraging more marginalised users from different perspectives to join the group. The Co-ordinator contacted two people with learning difficulties and two people with a dual sensory impairment, who were invited to join the group. Despite efforts to do so, it was not possible to reach an interested disabled person from a minority ethnic background: instead a representative from the Race Equality Council was invited to join the Project Board in order to reflect a wider diversity of disabled people and ensure their perspective was given. It was also recognised that there was potential for a much wider group of user perspectives to be involved in this Review because of the extension of the Direct Payment legislation to cover disabled children, carers, etc. but contact with these groups had not been made by the local authority by the start of the project.

4 Developing appropriate support mechanisms for participation

The Project was committed to the Social Model of Disability and therefore to tackling the physical, social, cultural and economic barriers hindering the participation of disabled people. In particular, this has implications for the following.

Facilitation

Principles

- An independent facilitator should be appointed to provide support to the Project Group to enable service users to meet without the presence of social services or other 'care professionals'.
- The facilitator may also provide the link back to other Review personnel and may need to be skilled in managing the tensions that can arise from the difference in the perspectives of evaluators and statutory agencies.
- The facilitator/co-ordinator needs to have appropriate levels of research experience and skills, and to be able to put them at the disposal of the service users.
- Ideally, the facilitator should be a disabled person, able to empathise fully with the service users she or he facilitates.
- There must be an awareness and commitment to meeting the specific needs of more marginalised participants.

Practice

The Project was resourced to employ a Research Co-ordinator for one year to ensure full facilitation was carried out and to link back to the Project Directors and others within the Best Value framework. There was little interest in a year-long appointment to a post in the Users' Network staff team but considerable interest when the work was revised and

advertised to be undertaken in a freelance capacity. At the start of the project, the Co-ordinator negotiated with the Project Group regarding their access issues: marginalised users, such as those people with sensory impairments and learning difficulties, were offered preparatory meetings in order to maximise their participation. The Co-ordinator gave initial priority to planning a timetable for the work to take account of the statutory agenda.

In another Best Value Review of services for people with learning difficulties, the Users' Network negotiated separate funding for the considerable independent support needed to enable people with learning difficulties to participate fully at all levels of the Review process, including the Project Board.

Administrative assistance

Principles

- The Project Group needs to be kept fully informed, with accurate records of previous decisions and actions.
- This information must be in formats accessible to all the group members.
- Evaluators should be able to approach the Administrative Assistant to meet their access needs, such as making the necessary travel arrangements.

Practice

An administrative assistant, employed by the Users' Network, provided assistance throughout this project. This allowed for continuity of contact for professionals and users. She found several Project Group members preferred their information to be sent by email. Room bookings, liaising about meeting dates and even purchasing the doughnuts for the coffee breaks during meetings were tasks that were carried out by the assistant, enabling the Co-ordinator to concentrate on research for the Review and working at a more strategic level.

Financial support

Principles

- All Evaluators' expenses should be met by the Best Value Review organisers.
- In addition, Evaluators should be paid a small hourly fee for their contribution to the work to demonstrate the value placed on their expertise.
- Evaluators should be paid more for some kinds of Review work that require particular skills, such as interviewing.

Practice

The Users' Network has had a policy from its inception of reimbursing participants for their involvement at £5 per hour, which has been recognised by Social Services as a valid use of core funding provided by the department. The Project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, used a similar pattern, claimed through the Users' Network procedures.

Funders are responsible to the Inland Revenue in relation to their requirements about revealing earnings and should ensure users are aware of possible implications in relation to Benefits (but should not control fee payments in relation to this!).

The Project followed guidelines already established by WSUN about the payment of users (see Appendix 3).

As the Project progressed, it was realised that some pieces of work such as the interviewing of Care Managers required particular skills, for which training was given and the hourly rate was increased. We found that, despite every effort to accommodate them, some participants were not always easily able to attend meetings because of travel constraints and child-care commitments, but nevertheless contributed very fully and regularly by email. Further fee payments therefore were arranged for this and for those making a diary of their experience of Direct Payments or other 'community care' services.

Accessibility of meetings

Principles

- All venues must be physically accessible to all participants.
- All meetings must be at times as convenient as possible to all Evaluators.
- All meetings must be of a suitable length that enables all Evaluators to participate.
- All participants' communication needs must be met, e.g. loop systems, interpreters for those with sensory impairments, pictorial language documents, support workers and other assistive technology.
- All relevant materials must be in formats accessible to meet participants' needs, e.g. Braille, audio tapes, video, large print, as computer documents, email.
- Participants' needs for personal assistance during meetings must be met by appropriate support workers of their choice.

Practice

The tradition of disabled people's involvement in Social Services has contributed to the County Council's provision of an accessible training suite in which it was possible to hold a significant number of Project Group meetings. Two interpreters who were skilled in working with people who are deaf-blind, a personal assistant and a note-taker were booked for each Project Group meeting. Because Wiltshire is a rural county with little accessible public transport, participants needed regular assistance with booking taxis, etc. The agreed time for meetings to commence was 10.30 a.m. to take account of getting up and travel times. Meetings were generally no longer than two hours in length, unless negotiated otherwise in advance with the participants.

In practice, however, it was agreed to hold a number of extended meetings in order to maintain the expected targets of the Best Value timetable, and breaks were built in to accommodate people's needs and energy levels.

5 Briefing Evaluators on Best Value Review issues

Principles

- Evaluators need adequate information to gain an understanding of the Best Value Review framework including the four 'C's: Challenge, Compare, Compete, Consult.
- Evaluators need adequate information to gain an understanding of the full range of the services under review.
- Presenters and accompanying documents must take account of the Group's support and access needs.

Practice

The Co-ordinator arranged and briefed the Assistant Director, Performance and Review, Chief Executive's Office, Wiltshire County Council to speak at the Project Group meeting on a later occasion. The Social Services Independent Living Adviser and the Manager of the Support Service for Independent Living (run by the Users' Network) briefed the Evaluators on the range of Direct Payments issues.

The Project Directors had also proposed to provide training on cost-effectiveness. However, for a number of reasons, including a lack of interest amongst group members in financial issues generally and cost analysis in particular, this training did not take place and thus the Evaluators had limited involvement in the costing exercises. Whilst there would have been some advantages for the Review Group to have had more control over the costing comparisons, it was important to recognise and respect the Group's decision not to undertake this section of the work themselves – it is well documented that many disabled people have been disadvantaged by the education system and subsequently lack confidence in their ability to tackle what they perceive as 'complex' issues, and this may have had a bearing on the situation.

After the Review Planning Process, when it was decided to focus on the Support Service for Independent Living as an area for comparison with that provided by other local authorities, a visitor from one Centre for

Independent Living was invited to speak to the Group and a visit to another Centre was arranged.

It was useful to have things added in like the visit from another CIL.

I thought it would be independent and easier without sticking to the five 'C's, but it was OK in the end.

6 Defining key issues for evaluation

Principles

- User Evaluators must be involved at the start of the Best Value Review Scoping document.
- It is important that the Scope of the Review is capable of being broken into bite-sized chunks for reviewing.
- The User Evaluators' Group brings valuable perspectives to identifying the important issues to review.

Practice

A first draft of the Best Value Review Scoping document was drawn up by the Social Services Planning and Development Officer (Disabilities). The first meeting of the User Evaluators' Group was then used to meet the newly appointed Co-ordinator and to identify issues the Group wished to review so these issues could be incorporated into the document before it went to the Best Value Scrutiny Sub-committee for approval. The list of issues the Group identified ranged from overarching issues related to quality of life to micro issues such as the monthly date on which Direct Payments were made. The document was thus a compromise between the Social Services agenda and that defined by users.

Because of the imperative of the Review programme timetable, it was important to bring the Group together on this issue at an early stage, despite them not yet having had the appropriate briefing sessions.

Planning the Review process and timetable

Principles

- There is a need to identify the time constraints of the Best Value Review Project plan and the requirements of submitting the Review Report.
- The approved Scope of the Review needs to be broken down into 'bite-sized' chunks for manageable evaluation.
- Evaluators need to negotiate an appropriate work pattern.

Practice

The Co-ordinator commenced work in July 2000. The Review was initially scheduled for completion by the end of the financial year (March 2001): however, because local elections were planned for that time and therefore councillors would be unavailable for meetings, the appropriate sub-committee meeting was rescheduled for February, a month earlier. The Project challenged this timetable, considering it gave insufficient time for the Evaluators' Group to carry out their work and so the Project's sponsor, the Director of Social Services, negotiated for the Review Report to be taken to the first Sub-committee meeting after the planned election in June 2001. This rescheduling allowed a period of a year for the work, as we had hoped. In the event, the delayed local elections gave us a further four weeks to prepare our Review Report.

The Co-ordinator, in discussion with the Group, divided the areas of work into four main sections which covered all the issues included in the Scoping document. These were:

- policy issues
- Support Service for Independent Living
- financial and administrative systems
- care management and assessment process.

The Group formed sub-groups around these areas according to their interests. This enabled them to cover more areas of work without disrupting their agreed pattern of monthly meetings. Some Evaluators felt this was all the time they could give because of their commitments to other areas of involvement whilst others offered to comment on work in hand by email, etc.

The Project Board asked the Group to develop a Gantt chart to show how the proposed timetable of the Project's work would fit in with the Best Value timetable. This was completed more to satisfy Social Service personnel than to be of use to the Project Group.

The Best Value Review of Direct Payments was carried out during the first year in which the Best Value Review process was in operation, which had benefits as well as disadvantages. On the positive side, systems and ways of working had not yet become set, so there was some flexibility within which to negotiate the Project Group's work. Less positively, but understandably, there was initially some anxiety about the Project Group achieving its Review task, but Social Services became increasingly confident in the Project Group as the Project Board met regularly to hear progress reports.

It was decided to work with sub-groups on two of the four issues for six months each to ensure all issues were covered. In reality, the areas the Evaluators knew most about from their user perspective (such as care management assessment and the Support Service for Independent Living) took up a larger part of their time than the two other identified areas of work, which the Co-ordinator led on. In addition, some general issues (e.g. exploring the possibility of directly funded packages of Direct Payments from the Health Authority, links with other benefits and police checks on PAs) were identified as beyond the Social Services remit. The Groups wished to bring these issues to the attention of the service providers in the Review Report.

Designing the research activities

Principles

- Evaluators need to choose research activities within the remit of the four 'C's – Challenge, Compare, Compete, Consult (see Appendix 1).
- User Evaluators need to be involved from the start of the design.
- There is particular value in perceiving such activities from a user perspective.

Surveys of recipients of Direct Payments

Principles

- A survey of recipients of Direct Payments provides a wider range of users' views than just those of the members of the Evaluation Group, and so adds credibility to the Review.
- The survey must be structured to enable easy data collection and analysis, and must offer the opportunity for open comment.
- The survey must be accessible and jargon free.
- Attention must be paid to the means of dissemination to obtain a high level of response.
- Users must be assured of confidentiality.

Practice

The Group, together with the Co-ordinator in her role as research facilitator, designed a number of survey questions and the Co-director of the research Project, who had broad experience of survey design, assisted with finalising the format. The resulting questionnaire, together with a stamped addressed envelope for its return, was circulated by post to all users of the Support Service for Independent Living. Care was taken to ensure the accompanying invitation to participate struck the balance between being official enough to convince users of the value of

their participation but accessible enough for them to feel confident about expressing their views. Approximately 50 per cent of those surveyed returned completed questionnaires. The results of this survey were used to challenge the effectiveness of the Support Service.

The survey results were challenging – we tried to be positive from the criticisms.

Surveys of other providers of Direct Payments support services

Principles

- The survey must take account of possible different patterns of service delivery and variations in statistical methods of monitoring.
- The survey must be easy and quick to complete, since the Evaluators are relying on the goodwill of other providers in completing the questionnaire.
- Costings should be a key part of the information collected to meet the four 'C's'.

Practice

The Project Group was in a good position to design the survey of other Direct Payments Support Services once it had been briefed by a visitor from another Direct Payments Support Service and had visited another. The Project Group sent out surveys to user-led support services in other local authority areas for comparison. Initially, no responses were received and it was necessary to follow this up by personal contact to request completion. Although an awareness of the differing structures and patterns of work of these services had been reflected in the design of the survey, it proved difficult to compare data from different service providers, as no support services were the same. However, it did provide some useful information about alternative ways of delivering services to those familiar to the Project Group from their own experiences in Wiltshire, and positive aspects of these differences informed a number of the Project

Group's Review Report Recommendations. A coincidental decision by the Social Services Department to put out to tender nationally the contract for the support service provided further opportunity for the Project Group to draw on their expertise and contribute to the tender specification.

We learnt the politics and variations in other local authority areas.

Surveys of Social Services staff

Principles

- A survey of Social Services staff provides a useful way of gaining information about in-house provision as well as staff attitudes to the service and the Review.
- The survey needs to be targeted at staff with appropriate knowledge and experience.

Practice

There was considerable resistance to the completion of the Social Services personnel surveys. This was partly because the survey requested factual information that required staff to collect data which was time consuming and partly because of a perceived lack of interest in user-led research. Eventually, some surveys were completed, and a small number of interviews were arranged with individual Care Management staff and conducted by the Project Group.

Interviewing

Principles

- User Evaluators expressing a need for training in interview skills before carrying out interviews should have this need met.

- Imbalances of power between interviewer and interviewee may need extra support mechanisms, such as Evaluators conducting interviews being accompanied by a facilitator.
- A semi-structured interview schedule is needed to ensure consistency of results by a group of interviewers.

Practice

The Project Group chose to interview Social Service Care Managers about their knowledge of Direct Payments. The anxiety and reluctance of the staff who were approached to participate reinforced the Group's previous experience of in-house staff's attitudes and resistance to informing and encouraging users to take up Direct Payments. The reversal of roles so that the users were in the position of control in the interview process was a difficult challenge for those interviewed. The user interviewers were supported by the Project Co-ordinator or Director. Although the number of staff interviewed was small, the results provided an in-depth focus on the attitudes of Care Management staff, which was useful for the Review Report in the section on Care Management and Assessment.

The interviews showed nothing about Direct Payments had sunk in and they admitted it.

Literature review

Principles

- Disabled people's organisations and their publications provide important background material which is often ignored in traditional literature reviews.
- The Internet provides a valuable source of accessible information for the literature review.

Practice

The Project Director representing the University of Bath was best positioned in terms of resources and experience to undertake the literature review, on behalf of the Project Group. However, some Project Group members were proactive in identifying information sources which would be relevant to the literature search.

Diaries of personal experience of Direct Payments

Principles

- Diaries are a useful source of qualitative data and enable professionals to gain more understanding of users' experiences.
- Users' diaries can be recorded in different formats and over different periods of time.
- Diaries are a useful alternative way of involving users without the inconvenience of travelling to meetings.

Practice

Some of the Evaluators kept diaries alongside carrying out the Review. These were a valuable source of individual insights, many of which were quoted in the Review itself. However, within the Best Value framework, the Report could not do justice to the amount of time and energy which went into the diaries.

Comparative costings

Principles

- In-house finance professionals carrying out detailed costings exercises need briefing by users on the key issues for them.
- Such exercises need to build on existing data collected elsewhere in order to maximise comparison.

- Users' understanding of cost-effectiveness in their lives is different from the position taken by Social Service Departments on cost-effectiveness.

Practice

Work on costings caused the most disagreements with Social Services because financial officers had different understandings of the meaning of 'cost-effectiveness' from users. This was partly because of the Project Group's general lack of interest and confidence in developing this aspect of the research and partly because County Council finance personnel lacked an understanding about Direct Payments and were unaware of disabled people's expertise nationally in researching its cost-effectiveness.

The costings seemed misleading and didn't reflect the true picture.

9 Analysing data to draw out findings, policy implications and recommendations

Principles

- User Evaluators should be involved in analysing data at different stages:
 - 1 initially to link specific findings with policy recommendations
 - 2 to be consulted about the collected findings and recommendations in the draft Review Report.
- Sufficient time should be set aside in the Review timetable for group discussion to develop policy implications and recommendations.
- The data needs to be divided up into manageable chunks for the Evaluators to develop recommendations most effectively.
- The Evaluators need to distinguish between general policy issues and those within the control of the local authority.

Practice

Despite setting aside time for Project Group discussion of policy recommendations before Report writing, the Project ran out of time for full group discussions on recommendations in all areas of the Review. The Evaluators felt most confident about developing the policy issues and recommendations in the areas in which they had most direct experience, such as the Support Service for Independent Living. These recommendations were useful in informing the content of the new specification for the Support Service for Independent Living in Wiltshire, which was being developed for a tendering exercise.

The Project developed recommendations under the four headings defined at the start of the Review process. The Project Group also identified more general Direct Payments policy issues which impacted on the lives of service users, for example the limitations of Independent Living Fund financial packages and the effects of charging.

Analysing data to draw out findings, policy implications and recommendations

It was evident that the Project Group members' direct experiences as users were particularly relevant and valuable in informing detailed recommendations: for example, a particular Evaluator experienced considerable stress because the local authority failed to pay her Direct Payments funding to her on a regular day in each month. This led to a recommendation in the Review Report which elected members were quick to support at a subsequent Scrutiny Sub-committee meeting.

10 Presentation of findings for Review Report within the framework of the Best Value four 'C's

Principles

- All user Evaluators must have the opportunity to comment on the draft Best Value Review Report.
- The Evaluators should have a choice about how much they contribute to the writing up of the Report.
- Representatives of the Evaluator Group should be present when the Report is presented to the Best Value Project Board.
- The final Report should be divided into the key areas identified by the Evaluators but clarifying the activities using the Best Value four 'C's framework.
- Even though Review activities start from user Evaluators' choices and interests, they can be fitted under the broad headings of the four 'C's at the draft report stage.
- Circulating the draft Report via email to those user Evaluators who are 'online' is an effective and efficient means of communication.

Practice

The Direct Payments Best Value Review was among the first few such Reviews Wiltshire County Council carried out and there was no formal pattern for the Report beyond the need to ensure activities were carried out within the four 'C's framework. The Project Group felt that Social Services had initial anxieties about the user-led nature of the Review. These anxieties, combined with the Project Group's own suspicions about a user-led Review lacking credibility with professionals, meant that particular attention was given to constructing the Report in sections relating to parts of the service (see Chapter 7), listing the research activities under the four 'C's headings in each section. In addition, the Report reviewed the general policy issues (see Chapter 9) relating to

Presentation of findings for Review Report within the framework of the Best Value four 'C's

Independent Living for disabled people in a separate section because the Project Group thought the County Council might wish to support our national campaigning on these issues relevant to Independent Living for disabled people, despite not having direct responsibility for these barriers.

The funding obtained from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to resource the Group and employ a research Co-ordinator gave more opportunities and time to review the service than an in-house Review would have done. However, much of the Review work was not discussed in detail in the final Report. In particular, we felt we did not do justice to the amount of effort the Project Group members as users of Direct Payments put into Review diaries. However, several excerpts from these were cited in the Report and, for many, these were the most powerful sections.

The Best Value Project Board gave advice about how to present the Review effectively. There was general concern that non-Social Services professionals receiving the Review might find it difficult to grasp the full implications of Direct Payments as distinct from traditional service delivery for disabled people. The Project Board's initial ideas about showing an introductory video on Independent Living at the presentation of the Report had to be dropped because of time constraints. In the end, an Introductory section on disabled people's understanding of Independent Living covered this issue. The Report included an Executive Summary and additional appendices giving full results of surveys.

It was refreshing – they seemed willing to learn.

11 Dissemination of findings to a range of audiences

Principles

- Findings need to be disseminated with a view to bringing about a change in the service under review for service users.
- Dissemination beyond the Best Value structured requirements will give more ownership of the Report to professionals.
- Findings should be disseminated to service users who have been consulted as part of the Review.
- The Report should be available in formats accessible to all users.
- Service users themselves should be involved in presentations about the Report.
- An Executive Summary of the Report facilitates the wider dissemination of its findings and is more accessible.
- Making the Report available to be downloaded from a website enables a greater number and diversity of people to access it.

Practice

After the draft Report had been presented to the Project Board, the Project Directors presented the Report to the Best Value Programme Management Group and the Scrutiny Sub-committee of elected members. The Executive Summary was distributed with a committee paper to the full Social Services Committee. A seminar was arranged in order to disseminate the findings to a wider group of professionals and disabled people, and to try to support Social Services staff in understanding the complexity of the Review Recommendations. Social Services staff and disabled people who had been invited to take part in the consultation exercise were invited to the seminar, where members of the Project Group presented their findings and the Director of Social Services, who had acted as Project sponsor, made a response.

Dissemination of findings to a range of audiences

The Project Group thought it important to disseminate the learning about good practice in user involvement. The Project Director wrote a short Good Practice Guide in consultation with the Project Group and members of the Project team planned to launch this publication.

Throughout the Review, there have been enquiries from other local authorities aware of the Project and anxious to learn lessons about user involvement. At the start of the Project, one of the Project Directors gave a presentation about it to senior managers from different departments within the County Council. The Assistant Director, Performance and Review, Chief Executive's Office, Wiltshire County Council supported the progress of the Project throughout. Following the publication of the Report, she suggested that the Review Report, accompanied by comments on the process from the Director of Social Services and the Project, should be placed on the Wiltshire County Council website: http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/performance/html/best_value_reports.html

12 Building an Action Plan based on Recommendations

Principles

- Service users should be consulted about the Action Plan developed within Social Services to implement the Review Recommendations and Social Services must meet their expenses and fees.
- The Action Plan should be fully owned and adopted by Social Services in order to ensure implementation.
- Users are well placed to monitor the implementation of Recommendations in a Best Value Review and this role must be recognised in the Action Plan.

Practice

It was important that a systematic Action Plan was put in place within Social Services following presentation of the Report, in order for the Review recommendations to bring about change. We were glad that the Director, the Project sponsor; was able to push for this to be developed and presented to elected members for approval. General resource constraints within Social Services meant that no commitment could be made for extra funding to meet the Recommendations. However, the Project Group had lived with Social Services' financial constraints for some years, so were used to distinguishing between what could be achieved within existing resources and the cost of implementing our dreams!

The Social Services Planning and Development Officer (Disabilities) linked with the Review developed an Action Plan from the Recommendations and the Project Co-ordinator convened a meeting of the Project Group to discuss the Action Plan. Comments from this meeting were fed back to the Officer, who adjusted the Action Plan accordingly.

One recommendation related to the importance of the Project Group being involved in monitoring the Review implementations. This was

Building an Action Plan based on Recommendations

accepted and the cost implications were recognised. The Action Plan was taken to the final meeting of the full Social Services Committee for approval before cabinet-style local authority government was introduced in Wiltshire. Elected Members discussed the Action Plan during Social Services Committee and remarked on the work of the users in carrying out the Best Value Review.

13 Getting monitoring processes in place

Principles

- Service users are well placed to monitor the effectiveness of the Best Value Review Action Plan.
- The full cost of monitoring should be met by the Social Services Department.
- The User Monitoring Group needs to negotiate the frequency of its meetings with Social Services.
- The Monitoring Group needs to be set in place quickly to ensure all developments are monitored.

Practice

After the Social Services Committee agreed in principle to the Project Group being asked to monitor the Review Recommendations, the Social Services Planning and Development Officer (Disabilities) asked for advice about the likely cost of the Group meeting with facilitation assistance and discussed how regularly the Group should meet. Initial negotiations suggest the User Monitoring Group will meet quarterly in the first year, subject to review.

Independently of the Review, the contract for a Support Service for Direct Payments was put out to tender. Although some Recommendations of the Review were incorporated in the services specification, others were dropped. The Monitoring Group was not in place to challenge this effectively two months after the Action Plan was approved, although individuals on the Project Group were involved in drawing up the specification.

It's been a gain for disabled people – Social Services take us more seriously for example, by setting up the monitoring group.

14 Conclusion

Principles

- Users involved in Best Value Reviews should find it an empowering experience.
- The expertise users gain by such involvement is a resource for the future.
- The involvement of users in Best Value Reviews enables them to link 'quality' definitions with the quality and aspirations of their lives and the support needed to achieve them.
- Substantial user involvement is an honest appraisal of services.
- Developments to combine services received in the Best Value Review Process should take account of the needs of users involved.

Practice

The Review provided disabled people with a unique opportunity to be involved, particularly since it covered the subject of Direct Payments. This was about their lives and the assistance they required to have the quality of life to which they aspire. Although there were tensions between Wiltshire County Council and the Project Group, particularly about costing, the Review was well managed at all levels and the Project Group team dynamics also worked well. Drawing on the skills and strengths within the Group, users gained new skills, confidence and enthusiasm to do more research and to have a better understanding of issues and constraints. Their work also acts as a role model for other disabled people wishing to be involved. Project Directors, Co-ordinator and Group and also statutory officials had sharp learning curves and there were lessons for everyone, such as for users needing to keep to County Council timescales and for statutory personnel being realistic about what users could do in the time allotted. We can never plan for the unexpected; such a Review needs to be willing for everyone involved to put their skills at the disposal of the group so that they are equipped to undertake it, with support as needed. Ultimately, the real test will be

seeing tangible improvements in the take-up and delivery of Direct Payments in Wiltshire.

Perhaps the best indication of immediate tangible success came from the Best Value Programme Board when they reported that it was a well structured Review – 'among the best we have seen so far!'

Confidence grows as users participate.

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Appendix 1: Project Group's Review activities under the Best Value five 'C's in Wiltshire

Challenge

- Challenged how Wiltshire County Council's Direct Payments scheme assists towards Independent Living – users' issues and a literature review.
- Challenged Support Service for Independent Living versus other centres for Independent Living and how it met needs of Direct Payments users.
- Challenged Care Managers regarding the service to Direct Payments users versus other users.
- Challenged effectiveness of Social Services systems in enabling service users.
- Challenged policy against best practice in delivering the service.

Consult

- Surveyed users of the Support Service for Independent Living.
- Surveyed Care Management team views.
- Consulted Direct Payments users regarding systems and practice.
- Consulted users and Care Managers about policy issues.

Compare

- Compared with other Local Authority Direct Payments schemes.
- Compared cost of Care Management support to Direct Payments users with support for users of direct services.
- Compared Support Service for Independent Living with other Centres for Independent Living.

- Compared Care Management within Wiltshire County Council with Care Managers in other studies.
- Compared Direct Payments systems with good practice.
- Compared costings exercise with costings information from previous research.
- Compared cost-effectiveness of Wiltshire County Council's Direct Payments scheme and in-house services as far as possible with other authorities.

Compete

- Competed the Support Service for Independent Living against other Centres for Independent Living.

Collaborate

- Urged collaboration between Social Services Department and Health regarding Direct Payments.
- Collaborated with Social Services officer investigating cost of Centres for Independent Living.
- Investigated how Care Managers collaborate with other organisations.
- Collaborated with Social Services officers to obtain information required for review.

Appendix 2: Further contact details

Best Value Review of Direct Payments Project Co-directors

Clare Evans
c/o Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network
7 Prince Maurice Court
Hambleton Avenue
Devizes SN10 2RT
Email: clareevansuser@yahooo.co.uk
Or Louise Brown
University of Bath
Claverton Down
Bath BA2 7AY
Email: L.Brown@ac.uk

Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network

Chair or Manager, c/o WSUN – see above
Email: information@wsun.org.uk

Wiltshire County Council

Director of Social Services
Or Sharon Britton, Assistant Director, Performance and Review, Chief Executive's Office
Or Graham White, Planning and Development Officer (Disabilities), Social Services Department
Or Sue Geary, Corporate Development Manager, Social Services Department
Wiltshire County Council
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge Wilts
Tel.: 01225 713000

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Alex O'Neil
Senior Social Care Research Manager
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead
40 Water End
York YO30 6WP

Appendix 3: WSUN guidance on payments to users

Principles

The Users' Network is committed to valuing all service users' expertise and to involving as many users as possible and empowering them to participate.

Expenses

We would expect that expenses would be paid in all occasions where users have been invited to a 'meeting'.

Expenses would include:

- 1 travel costs:
 - mileage at current Network rate
 - public transport costs
 - use of link schemes
 - taxi fares.

We try to use the most cost-effective means of transport, while meeting the needs of service users. We now have accounts with a variety of taxi firms and encourage the sharing of transport wherever possible. We arrange transport centrally, rather than individual service users arranging their own, to try to co-ordinate the use of transport to meetings.

We would also arrange as appropriate and bear the cost of:

- 2 enabler/s
- 3 interpreters.

Fees

Because of the inequalities between service users and professionals, and the previous undervaluing of service users' expertise, it is an important principle that such expertise should be valued, at least in some token way, financially.

Fees of £5 per hour are offered where:

- service users are representing a wider group of service users at a planning meeting (e.g. Joint Planning Groups)
- service users are taking part in a working group or sub-group for a time-limited piece of involvement (e.g. Charging Policy working group)
- service users are involved in the recruitment/interview process.

Fees would not be paid on occasions where service users were invited to a meeting to make their views known. These have sometimes been described as 'public' meetings. We would not be happy with this term as it implies a more open meeting and there are many occasions where it is important for service users to come together without others present to express their views (an example might be meetings held during the consultation period of the Charging Policy document).

Fees and expenses are only paid to service users, not paid workers or representatives of voluntary organisations.

The Users' Network recognises the implications in relation to Inland Revenue and Benefits' entitlement of the payment of fees and makes this known to service users.

User involvement

In addition to requests for user involvement from Social Services and Health, the Users' Network, as an independent organisation, also wishes to have the flexibility to call its own meetings on issues identified as important by service users.

Appendix 4: Part of survey of Direct Payments recipients

As part of the Best Value Review of Direct Payments, we would be grateful if you could complete this survey about the *Support Service for Independent Living* in Wiltshire. It is important that we receive feedback from people who have used the service. Please be assured that all of the information you share with us will be treated as confidential. If you would like this survey in another format (tape, Braille), or some help to fill it in, please contact Angie on Tel. 01380 725213, who will be happy to help you.

(Please tick ✓ the appropriate boxes or write in the spaces provided for comments.)

Section A: About you

1. Do you receive a Direct Payment from Social Services to employ your own support staff?

Yes No

2. Do you receive other sources of funding to employ a Personal Assistant (PA)?

Yes No

If you say yes please say what:

.....

3. It would be useful for us to know what type of services you receive. Please tick the boxes most relevant to you.

I use services for:

people with learning difficulties Yes No

older people Yes No

people with physical and sensory impairments Yes No

mental health services Yes No

Other

4. Age. Please tick which age group you are in.

18–25 25–35 35–45 45–55 55–65

65 and over

5. **To ensure everyone is consulted and has equal access to services, we would be grateful if you could say which nationality and culture you feel best describes you.**

Please state:

6. **Which area of Wiltshire do you live in?**

North West Kennet Salisbury

Section B: Your experiences of using the SSIL

7. **Have you used the SSIL during the last**

12 months 18 months Never

If you tick Never please go on to Section F.

a) **If you have used the SSIL, approximately how much contact did (do) you have with it?**

Continuing support Now and again
One off Please say what it was

b) **When did you start to use the SSIL?**

Before an assessment for a Direct Payment
During an assessment for a Direct Payment
After an assessment for a Direct Payment

c) **Upon reflection, would it have been helpful to have had contact earlier?**
Yes No

8. **What did you use the SSIL for? Please see a–e below.** You may tick more than one.

a) **Advice and guidance (for example on options, how much to pay PA etc).**
Yes No

b) **Information (for example about services, other sources of support, rights etc).**
Yes No

c) **For emotional support.** Yes No

d) **Other practical support (e.g. recruiting PA)** Yes No

e) **Other**

9. Was the information provided

- a) Clear? Yes No
- b) In the right format (tape, Braille)? Yes No
- c) The right information for you? Yes No

10. Did you find the service helpful with recruiting PAs?

Yes No Not relevant

11. Did you find the service helped develop your skills and confidence to:

- a) employ PAs Yes No
- b) use a Direct Payment Yes No

12. How did you find out about the SSIL?

From a social worker/OT other service users
SSIL publicity

Other: please state

Appendix 5: Part of survey of other Centres of Independent Living

2. Do you provide an *Advocacy* role as part of your service? Yes No

If Yes, please give details:
.....

3. What times are you open/available from? (e.g. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day)
.....
.....

Who used the service?

4. Over last 12 months, how many people have used your services?

5. Over the last 18 months how many used your service?

6. Approx. percentage of disabled people using your service? %

7. How many people who receive a DP use your services? %

a) How do you know this, are people referred to you from SSD?

Please say
.....

b) Do you have an evaluation and monitoring system, which collects such data?

Please say
.....

c) Other:
.....

8. Social Services/other professionals? %

9. Other people who used the service?

Please state:

.....

Characteristics of Service users

10. What was the average age of the disabled people who used your service ?

18–25 25–35 35–45 45–55 55–65

65 and over

Appendix 6: Part of survey of Care Managers

9. What is the most expensive 'care' package funded by you?

Does this include ILF funding?

.....

10. What is the least expensive 'care' package funded by you?

.....

11. What is the average cost of a 'care' package funded by you?

.....

12. Is any provision made for paying a higher rate to staff with specific skills, for example communicating with a sensory impaired person?

Yes No

If yes, how is this determined?

Details:

13. What provision is made within a 'care' package for working unsociable hours? (Please state how this is calculated, if the same across county, please say 'as policy guidance')

.....

.....

14. What provision is made for sick pay, holiday, training, travel, and emergency cover?

.....

How are these costs met?

.....

15. What are the costs of recruitment, payroll, training, bookkeeping and insurance allowed *for* in a DP care package? (*if the same across county, please say 'as policy guidance'*)

.....

How are these costs met?

.....

16. Is there a set monthly date when all DP recipients receive their payment?

Yes No

a) If Yes, when is this?

b) How is this date decided?

Appendix 7: Diary extract of a Direct Payments user

My Independent Living diary

October 2000

Second week

My older daughter has amateur dramatics ... As I do not have a power chair I can use outdoors I cannot take her or pick her up. PAs are a huge help to do all the stuff I cannot do myself but it takes so much time, energy and personal resources to manage them that I find there are times I am just too exhausted to do anything other than ensure my daughters have what they need and are safe. Sometimes I have to prioritise and my family comes first, not all PAs can understand that and often want to talk about their personal issues, it's almost as if they want me to resolve their problems for them. I have always believed that 'work' should be a supportive environment to enhance good working relations and promote the retaining of quality staff so it has taken a lot of adjustment and re-evaluation of employment issues on my part to make DP work ...

Trouble is that requires a lot of energy, time and commitment on my part and means that I have to take away from other things in my life. I would love to be out earning a wage and helping to support my family financially yet I would have to take time out from managing my PAs to be able to commit myself to a job/career. Swings and roundabouts again ...

December

Second week

Sometimes now I spill my tea and then I have to decide, do I change my top (yet more washing) or do I sit and feel absolutely miserable wearing a tea stained top? The whole point of employing my own PAs is to have this sort of choice and the question I always ask myself is whether I would feel comfortable wearing a stained top and the answer is always the same my PA helps me to change my top ...

I am in the process of rebudgeting and organising hours to suit my partner's job. I have learnt a lot over the past few years, a lot of it by trial and error and I often wish that I could have gone on a comprehensive

training course right at the beginning with an update every one or two years that would have given me the skills I needed to become an employer. I try to sort it all out effectively but that is not always as efficient or as good as it could be and I am constantly refining and streamlining the way I manage my PAs. Trouble is that this all takes time and energy, something that is in short supply for me just now. There are months when I just manage to do all the wages, tax/NI and day to day management of the PAs and nothing else. My partner ... helped for a while by taking over and doing my returns for me but this has become impossible since his return to work. There are also times when I just put my head in my hands and wonder why on earth I am putting myself through all the hassle of employing people when I could theoretically receive an equivalent service, it is a lot of extra work and a lot of extra stress and strain. Yet I then remember starting out on a service and know that I could never go back to that, although at the time I thought the service was good and the quality and flexibility I now have because I have individually designed a package to suit not just myself but also my family and lifestyle is worth every second of any stress.

January 2001

First week

I have tried different ways of managing hours and the best one for me is to have lots of part-time PAs which inevitably means that if one is ill or unable to work for some other reason then I generally have someone who can fill in. It also means if everything goes pearshaped (which is inevitable in life) then I can usually cover the hours that matter most such as meals, things that children need, showers at times to suit me etc.

February

PA's days off, arrange cover for those, often helps to employ someone for cleaning first or as temporary cover to find out how reliable they are. Biggest problem often that people do not look on PA work as 'proper' work and tend to be a little unreliable for timekeeping, unfortunately for them I need reliability in arrival times so I always try to emphasise that when employing.

Appendix 8: Social Services costing exercise

Methodology

- 1 The methodology used in this review was based on that suggested by the County Treasurer; this was to:
 - i) Prepare flow charts, or activity analyses, showing the process for both Direct Payments (DP) and Provided Services (PS) starting from the first contact with the potential client, through to the delivery of PS or DP.
 - ii) Highlight the points of difference in the process and attribute costs to these activities only, based on total cost. This was not done. Care Managers and team managers were requested to identify costs relating to all activities, enabling the total cost of each type of provision to be calculated.
 - iii) Calculate total cost of providing PS and value of DP, with both including appropriate processing costs, for a sample of clients with varying dependencies. After discussion with managers it was decided that there was no point in attempting to recost a DP package as if it was provided directly. Since DP rates are based on the market rates paid to Domicillary Care providers, it was felt that they represented a good proxy for what the cost of the provided service package would be.
 - iv) Identify and cost likely interventions or care management support, for both schemes.
 - v) Attribute cost of Support Service for Independent Living (SSIL), to take account of grant from Social Services.
 - vi) Produce a summary table, showing, for the sample of clients, the areas and value of cost difference, both for set-up and for annual 'maintenance'.
- 2 The final approach adopted was to classify i) above as processes and to cost them; this includes all of the other points listed above, with the exception of v). The next stage was then to include these process costings in a schedule that shows all the major oncost (i.e. cost in addition to the direct cost of the package) elements such as the Independent Living Co-ordinator, the Support Service and any other directly attributable costs.

- 3 The final stage was to compare the Support Service costs with a sample of support service costs from other authorities.

Overall conclusions

- 1 The process costs of new DP clients (based on 2000/01 costs) are around £600, compared to just over £200 for directly provided services. Most of the additional DP costs relate to the time (mostly Care Manager time) spent providing initial information and advice given to users (around 20 per cent) and to ongoing financial administration and support (around 60 per cent).
- 2 Examination of the total oncosts relating to the Direct Payments service shows that the most significant cost element is that of the support service; excluding development grants of £40k given in 1999/2000 and 2000/01, the Service Level Agreement accounts for over 50 per cent of the total oncost.
- 3 Finally, comparison of the support service costs within Wiltshire to those of a small sample of those of other authorities shows that the Wiltshire support costs are significantly higher; we are also the only authority which employs a DP/Independent Living Co-ordinator or Adviser in addition to an independent support service.

Stage one – process costings

- 1 The Kennet and Salisbury area produced an analysis of 12 DP clients; eight of these were former WILF users and four were new DP clients. From the North and West area three clients were sampled and all three were new DP clients.
- 2 In discussions with managers it was felt that the initial assessment and planning processes should be the same for both DP and PS clients. However, analysis of the results from Kennet and Salisbury showed that this was not the case.
- 3 It was found that Care Managers had included estimates of their time spent reassessing ex-WILF clients; this had caused the average figures for the initial assessment and planning process for all clients to be significantly higher for DP clients than PS clients.

- 4 Therefore it was decided to exclude these clients from the final analysis.
- 5 The initial flowcharts identified 27 different sub-tasks for both types of service. It was decided to condense these tasks into six main headings:
 - i) *Assessment and planning process*: this includes referral, assessment, statement of needs, the care planning process and the user being informed of options.
 - ii) *User set up – finance*: this includes costings, budgetary authorisation, commitments entered into spreadsheets, setting up payments and user contributions, and for PS contracts to be drawn up and signed.
 - iii) *User set up – other*: this includes advice and information to users, independent living or care plans drawn up and letters of agreement signed.
 - iv) *User maintenance – finance*: checking and processing of monthly invoices and ongoing financial support to DP clients.
 - v) *User maintenance – other*: monitoring and review and the normal care plan review process.
 - vi) *Emergency intervention costs*: this is an estimate to cover the intervention time required of social workers and managers when emergencies arise.
- 6 Table A8.1 shows the breakdown of these costs. Hourly rates are derived from the hourly pay rates of Care Managers, team managers and finance or DP clerks. For some categories of cost these will be amalgams of different staff rates.
- 7 Table A8.1 shows that the total oncost for provided services (PS) is £211 per year, whilst that of Direct Payments (DP) is £599 or nearly three times as much. The total variance in cost is £388.
- 8 The table also shows that around 20 per cent of this variance relates to user set up – other costs; since this stage includes providing advice and information to users and drawing up letters of agreement this is understandable.
- 9 The main reason for the variance (approximately 60 per cent) relates to user maintenance – finance costs. Until recently, the Kennet and Salisbury area employed a Direct Payments clerk from an Agency;

Table A8.1 Process pathway costings

Process	Directly provided services		Direct Payments		Variance (£)	% Total
	Hours	Hourly rate (£)	Hours	Hourly rate (£)		
Assessment and planning process	5.00	8.75	43.73	9.78	78.21	8.89
User set up – finance	4.69	8.88	41.65	9.74	63.63	5.67
User set up – other	2.25	9.32	20.97	9.31	98.13	19.89
User maintenance – finance	13.50	6.04	81.58	6.62	307.91	58.33
User maintenance – other	2.50	9.24	23.09	9.89	45.21	5.70
Emergency intervention costs	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.36	5.92	1.53
	27.94	7.55	211.01	7.81	599.01	100.00

he worked 18.5 hours per week on Direct Payments at a cost of £11.04 per hour. However, for this exercise, his hours were costed out at the equivalent internal pay rate of £6.32 per hour.

- 10 For the Kennet and Salisbury clients he estimated that he spent around 1.25 hours per week on financial support to clients; this equates to 15 hours per week in total and is in line with the total hours worked per week.
- 11 In contrast, the North and West area finance clerk only spends 2.5 hours per month per client or approximately half the time of the Kennet and Salisbury DP clerk. Since she is not dedicated to DP work, she spends what she believes to be the minimum amount of time necessary on it.
- 12 Her hourly rate is £7.41, or around 17 per cent higher than the Kennet and Salisbury DP clerk. This means that the summary figure shown in Table A8.1 is probably understated; for Kennet and Salisbury DP clients the total cost was £619 and the variance £408, of which 70 per cent was accounted for by user maintenance – finance costs.
- 13 Overall this means that, whilst the process costs for DP clients are around three times as high as those of PS clients, between 80 and 90 per cent of the increase in cost relates to the need to provide initial information and advice to clients and to the need to provide ongoing financial support and advice.

Stage two – overall costs

- 14 The next stage was to bring together all the costs relating to the DP scheme and use this to calculate the total oncost (total cost in addition to the direct cost of the package) per client (based on new clients rather than ex-WILF users). In 2000/01 there were 65 DP clients and a provisional end of year figure of £604,814 making an average annual payment of £9,305.
- 15 In doing this calculation it has been assumed that costs (other than the process costs analysed above) are apportioned equally across

clients; however, as with the process costings, there may be distortions as a result of ex-WILF users. For example, the Independent Living Adviser might spend more of her time on average dealing with ex-WILF users' problems than with new clients. However, it was not possible at this stage to estimate what the split might be, hence the assumption of equal apportionment.

- 16 Table A8.2 shows these total costs. In summary, for a total average cost per package of £9,305 in 2000/01 there was a total oncost of £3,374 or around 36 per cent. Of this total, £2,334 or 69 per cent relates to payments made to Wiltshire and Swindon Users' Network (WSUN). It should be noted that 18 per cent of this relates to development work payments (£40,000) made in 1999/2000 and 2000/01; no such payment has been made for 2001/02.
- 17 The next most significant item is the process pathway costings, which account for around 18 per cent of the oncost and then the Independent Living Adviser accounts for 11 per cent of the total.
- 18 If the WSUN development work cost is excluded, the total oncost falls to £2,759 or around 30 per cent and the WSUN Service Level Agreement (SLA) payment accounts for 62 per cent of this.
- 19 Whichever base figure is taken, the end result is that the single most significant item of oncost relates to support service costs.

Table A8.2 Total Direct Payments costs

	Total cost 2000/2001 (£)	Cost per new client (£)	% of total oncost
Direct package costs	603,814	9,305	
Process pathway costs	N/A	599	17.75
Pauline Bishop (Independent Living Adviser)	23,384	360	10.67
Employers' costs (FISH Insurance)	2,308	35	1.04
Advertising	3,000	46	1.36
WCCUIN Service Level Agreement	111,725	1,719	50.95
WCCUIN development work	40,000	615	18.23
Total	180,417	3,374	100.00
Total oncost %			36.26

Stage three – comparison of support service costs

- 20 The final element of this study was to seek information about support services provided by other local authorities. A small sample of authorities provided information and the results are shown in Table A8.3.
- 21 It is acknowledged that authorities may have different support service structures; we have attempted to take this into account by requesting that authorities provide details of their service. This is shown by the legend used, which identifies the different elements of the service.
- 22 There are two caveats to be made; first, the details relating to Devon relate to a Direct Payments Development Co-ordinator employed by Devon County Council and not to an independent support service. Second, the figures relating to Bedford reflect the fact that the Disability Resource Centre was given the task of setting up the DP scheme.
- 23 Of the remaining three support services, Gloucester most closely approximates the Wiltshire service. It provides a free payroll service to users. In requesting additional funds from Gloucestershire County Council for 2001/02, the service used a figure of £1,000 per client per year as a benchmark.

Table A8.3 Comparison of support services costs

	Type	Budget (£)	No. of clients	Cost per client (£)	Notes
Oxford	1,2,3,4	62,000	76	816	
Bedford	1,2,3	30,000	23	1304	1
Gloucester	1,2,3,5	68,000	70	971	
Devon	1,2,3	37,000	45	822	2
Dorset	1,2	10,000	22	455	

Type:

1, Information; 2, Advice; 3, Support; 4, Advocacy; 5, Other (including payroll)

Notes

1 The Disability Resource Centre was given the responsibility of setting up the DP scheme in Bedford, hence the high level of grant relative to the number of clients.

2 Devon's figures do not relate to an independent support service, but to an in-house DP Development Co-ordinator.

- 24 Using the basic Service Level Agreement figure for WSUN, the Wiltshire service cost is over 70 per cent higher than its Gloucester equivalent, Living Independently in Gloucestershire.
- 25 It should also be noted that none of the authorities that employ an independent support service also employs an in-house DP or Independent Living Co-ordinator.

Appendix 9: Gerry Zarb's response notes to costings

To: Project Team Best Value Review of Direct Payments in Wiltshire

From: Gerry Zarb

Date: 26 June 2001

Comments on cost comparison exercise

I have been particularly interested in the question of cost-effectiveness and cost comparisons, as this is an area I have worked on quite a bit over the past few years. I realise that the substantive work is now complete and that any further reworking of the cost analysis would have to wait for another project. There are nevertheless a few additional comments I would make about the interpretation of this part of the project findings.

In particular, while I have no reason to doubt that the figures are accurate – based on the data available – I am less sure that they are likely to be completely representative of the underlying costs as the variance between services and Direct Payments is so much greater than indicated by other research which has examined this issue in detail. Some of the possible reasons for this are briefly outlined below but I would be happy to discuss them further if that would be helpful.

1 Overhead and capital costs

There is no specific mention in the report on the SSD costings exercise of how overheads for direct service provision were calculated, nor whether this included any element for capital costs.

This is a difficult issue to deal with in practice as a large proportion of the overheads (especially capital and administrative costs) for directly provided services are typically subsumed within a local authority's 'central finance' costs. It is therefore both difficult and time consuming to identify the appropriate overhead element for individual services. As a

stand alone service, on the other hand, the overheads for a Direct Payments scheme are usually fairly 'transparent'. This obviously has the potential for biasing the costs comparisons.

The problem is not insurmountable but the resources needed to deal with it would probably not have been practical in the context of this particular project. For example, the 1994 research on cost benefits of Direct Payments which we did for BCODP involved collecting costs and usage data for *all* relevant services in the case study authorities so that the central costs could be allocated proportionately. Even then there were gaps in some of the capital elements which had to be filled using proxy data from the annual Dept of Health unit cost data compiled by the University of Kent.

Nevertheless, it might be worth at least mentioning this as a caveat in the final report.

2 Economies of scale

It is noticeable that the number of people supported on the Wiltshire scheme are fairly low by comparison with other areas. Not surprisingly this is reflected in the 'cost per user' being proportionately quite a bit higher than elsewhere. Again, this issue has been noted in previous research which showed that, once an optimum number of users has been reached, the costs per user start to fall quite significantly.

The fact that there was a large proportion of new users is also a relevant factor here as previous research (e.g. the evaluation of the Greenwich Personal Assistance Scheme) has shown that the level of individual support Direct Payments users require starts to tail off markedly after between three and six months.

Both of the above would suggest that the costs in Wiltshire would be likely to fall over time – although the precise scope for costs reductions is hard to predict without a more detailed examination of the figures.

3 Inappropriate use of resources

In her comments on the cost comparison exercise, Clare Evans makes the point that it might have been expected that the care management element of Direct Payments would be lower than that for directly provided services, rather than higher as indicated in the report. This would certainly have been more consistent with previous research.

A large part of the problem here is likely to be related to the use of generic care managers in providing the support role rather than a specialist support service with appropriate expertise (of the kind, for example, provided by a CIL). Apart from having higher costs, this is clearly not the most efficient use of resources. A similar situation was found in a recent evaluation of the Camden Independent Living Scheme and was found to be unsatisfactory to both the SSD and users. (A decision was subsequently taken to contract the support service out to a local disability organisation.)

4 Unit vs. aggregate costs

My own view (for what it's worth) is that process costing is not the most appropriate method for comparing Direct Payments and services on a cross-sectional basis (i.e. at a fixed point in time). It would have been useful if the costs were being compared over time but this would obviously have been beyond the scope for this particular project.

Having examined a variety of cost benefit models for the various pieces of work we have carried out previously, it seemed fairly clear to me that by far the most reliable method for comparisons of this type was that based on hourly unit costs for individual support packages. This ensures that exactly the same cost bases are used throughout and therefore enables direct comparisons to be made – whether on an individual or aggregate basis.

It is also important, however, that service users and Direct Payments users are closely matched for factors such as age, household composition and weekly hours of support, etc. in order to try and smooth out any extraneous variables which might have a bearing on costs.

Again, while it might not have been feasible to collect this level of data for this particular project, it is worth emphasising in the report that hourly unit costs have not been used as this adds yet another qualification to the cost comparisons produced.

5 Hidden costs

Finally, by way of illustrating the drawbacks to not using individual unit costs, it is also worth noting that previous research (from at least two reliable sources) has shown that packages based on direct services include a much larger 'subsidy' from unpaid/informal help than packages based on Direct Payments. Attaching a monetary value to this subsidy on a proxy basis increases the costs of service provision quite markedly.

Appendix 10: Executive Summary of Best Value Review Report on Direct Payments

Introduction

In 1997, legislation gave local authorities (LAs) powers to make Direct Payments (DPs) direct to people assessed as needing social services support, to enable them to purchase services themselves. This was seen as an important step towards Independent Living (IL), a concept which asserts disabled people's right to full citizenship and to have their needs met, not just with personal support and domestic matters, but also in other areas, such as accessing social, education and employment activities.

The point is that independent people have control over their lives, not that they perform every task themselves: Independence is created by having assistance when and how one requires it.
(Brisendon, 1989)

Within the Best Value framework, this Review aims to advise on options for improvement in the future delivery and management of DPs in Wiltshire. Departments within local authorities (who consult with service users to differing degrees) usually carry out Best Value Reviews. It is important to note how different and innovative this review is – it has been designed and undertaken by a Project Group consisting of disabled people working independently of the local authority but with the support and agreement of the County Council who have opened themselves up to external scrutiny and all its implications.

The Project Group undertook:

- a survey of users of the Support Service for Independent Living
- a survey of five support services in other areas
- a survey of and interviews with social service practitioners
- a cost comparison with DP schemes operated by other LAs

- a project involving DP users keeping diaries to record their daily experiences
- a literature review
- in addition, SSD carried out an exercise comparing the costs of direct services and Direct Payments, which was commented upon by the Project Group.

Findings

In Wiltshire there are currently (July 2001) 71 service users in receipt of Direct Payments. There are 30 in Kennet and Salisbury and 41 in North and West Wiltshire. The majority of these DP recipients (50) are people with a physical impairment (which may include sensory impairments). Fifteen recipients are categorised as having learning difficulties, four recipients are mental health service users and there are two people over 65 who receive DP. The overwhelming majority of DP recipients in Wiltshire are 'white British' people. Whilst the numbers of people with learning difficulties and mental health service users in receipt of a DP may not appear to be very high in Wiltshire, this does in fact compare favourably when looking at the national picture for these two care groups. However much more work still needs to be done to expand the take up of DPs further; this includes: developing appropriate support mechanisms, improving information, support, internal management and financial processes. Despite poor support the Review has demonstrated that the number of people returning to directly provided services, from DPs have been minimal.

This Review clearly shows that care managers lack the knowledge and confidence required to encourage service users to take up this option rather than traditional service delivery. A comparison of the role and function of SSIL with other support services was also illuminating, showing that it is currently not catering for the needs of as wide a group of service users as was originally intended. This is partly because care managers do not consider all Direct Payments users can benefit from contact and partly because some users consider the service does not meet their needs. The work of the Management Action Group and the

subsequent training days have begun to address some of these issues and the recommendations made by the Project Group in this Review show how the Direct Payments scheme can be improved.

The results of the exercise to compare the costs of DPs with providing direct services in Wiltshire found DPs to be more costly. This costing exercise was carried out internally within the County Council. However the conclusions drawn from this exercise are that these findings do not reflect the findings of other studies and that the process used to calculate the costs was not satisfactory and requires much more work.

This Review consulted with service users using various techniques. Their feedback describes not only the time and effort required to administer DPs but the advantages to be gained. A small group of service users (both users of traditional services and DPs) kept diaries and the quality, depth and richness of feedback provided through these was invaluable. The following extract offers a powerful illustration of the benefits of being able to choose and control how your personal support needs are met, despite it not always being an easy process:

There are also times when I just put my head in my hands and wonder why on earth I am putting myself through all the hassle of employing people when I could theoretically receive an equivalent service – it is a lot of extra work and a lot of extra stress and strain. Yet I then remember starting out on a service and know that I could never go back to that, although at the time I thought the service was good and the quality and flexibility I now have because I have individually designed a package to suit not just myself but also my family and lifestyle is worth every second of any stress.

(A DP recipient)

Recommendations

Section 1 General issues related to all Direct Payment users

- 1 On a national level, Wiltshire County Council should continue to inform central Government of the inadequacy of its Social Care

funding, which results in the Authority being unable to provide disabled people with packages capable of supporting full independent living.

- 2 Direct Payments should continue to recognise the importance of enabling disabled people to fulfil their parenting role and fund them to employ assistants to do so.
- 3 In Wiltshire, Social Services should increase dialogue with Primary Care trusts and groups, in order to develop plans for jointly funded Direct Payments packages, ensuring that the Direct Payments users are fully involved in these discussions.
- 4 More training is needed for SSD staff on benefits and entitlements for disabled people in order to maximise take-up.
- 5 Care agencies should be encouraged by SSD (Commissioners and Contracts Dept) to provide a more flexible service that works around users' lifestyles, rather than the user fitting in with the service providers.
- 6 SSD assessments should recognise the value of providing support to enable disabled people to access social activities at evenings and weekends, to improve quality of life and prevent social exclusion and depression.
- 7 In order to develop more effective models of costing and systems to collect information for this, we recommend SSD relates more fully to the complexities of the issues as outlined by G. Zarb (Appendix 12) and the national debate on this subject.

Section 2 The Support Service for Independent Living

- 1 More continuity of staff should be arranged to reduce the shortages and delays experienced by users when staff only work limited hours.
- 2 More attention should be given to the manner of dealing with telephone enquiries.
- 3 Publicity about the service should be improved, provided in accessible formats, and widely circulated/displayed in the community.

- 4 A drop in facility, perhaps locally based, should be offered to users where information and general advice can be provided.
- 5 A peer support/discussion group should be resourced and recognised in its own right by the SSIL and meetings should be held in a number of locations around the county and not always in the SSIL premises. In this way a wider group of people can benefit from peer support. This could also link with the drop in facility, so that PA users are more involved throughout and have increased control over the service as a whole.
- 6 CD ROMs and an internet website should provide information and sample documents on employment issues.
- 7 Disability Equality and other training should be provided for SSIL staff. Due to the low numbers of disabled workers operating the service, it is important that staff increase their understanding of the social model of disability and the philosophy of Independent Living from disabled people's perspective. This was felt to be particularly important with regard to interpreting Manual Handling and Health & Safety guidelines. Further attention should be given to staff in the service being disabled people who have the relevant personal expertise to deliver a high standard of service.
- 8 Funding should be made available either via the SSIL or from SSD to enable appropriate training to be provided to PA users in small groups or one to one, as appropriate.
- 9 While much work has been done to clarify the role of the SSIL and Social Services by the Management Action Group and the Department, further work still needs to be done in addressing this challenging issue – particularly in relation to the provision (or not) of advocacy services.
- 10 Working relationships between SSD and the SSIL are unclear and under pressure. The situation needs to be resolved without delay because of the adverse effect this has on the experiences of using either service in connection with DPs. The PG therefore recommends that this be addressed as a priority.
- 11 The SSIL should begin to support a group of DP users to meet and train in order to share their learning with new potential DP users.

- 12 SSD should refer to the recommendations made by the Project Group for any future service specification for SSIL and where possible consult DP service users when establishing a new contract.

Section 3 The Care Management process

- 1 A centralised team dedicated to tasks related to DPs (including financial administration) should be established, led by a newly created senior DP Officer within Social Services, or via a small number of specialist teams designed to deliver this service, placed within Primary Care Teams as they come on stream.
- 2 The Independent Living Plan recording form should be revised to provide users with more flexibility.
- 3 The working group set up by SSD to follow up the 'willing and able' interpretation should be fully supported and the work accelerated. Particular attention also needs to be given to the Care Management assessment of people with learning disabilities previously on WILF.
- 4 The lack of knowledge and confidence of some Care Managers requires further work and training following that done by the Management Action Group. See Section 4.
- 5 District and area managers must support and encourage their teams to become more familiar with DPs and make better use of existing resources
- 6 Care Managers/practitioners should continue to carry out assessments in the usual way and inform service users about DPs. Once the Care Management processes involved in arranging a service have been completed, the financial and administrative aspects of setting up a new DP or a revised package should be taken over by the specialist-centralised team dedicated to this work. The CM would continue their involvement with the service user, covering any other aspects of the DP as needed, in the usual manner.
- 7 Information systems are put in place to gather information over time to collate evidence of the range and cost of individual packages and profile of users, as identified in Section 3.10 and Appendix 12.

Section 4 Finance and administrative issues

- 1 There should be a set monthly date for paying DP into user bank/building society accounts. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency late payments may endanger and undermine support arrangements upon which the disabled person depends.
- 2 Greater flexibility is required in meeting the stipulated dates for the return of paperwork by DP recipients.
- 3 Training in Independent Living, disability equality and Direct Payments should be provided for all administration and finance officers, as well as social work practitioners.
- 4 The effects of the county's charging policy should be examined to remove disincentives to work and having access to better quality of life.
- 5 As recommended under Section 3 a centralised DP team of specialist administration workers should be established who are trained by disabled people on the philosophy of Independent Living and Disability Equality issues, to increase and improve their understanding and practice of the purposes of DPs.

Section 5 Policy issues and the Management Action Group process

- 1 It is recommended that SSD and other agencies work to raise the awareness of disabled people's rights; how DP operates and the mutual opportunities and benefits DP can have within communities.
- 2 The advocacy role of the SSIL should be clarified and include collective and individual crisis support.
- 3 A joint short term working group on meeting advocacy needs be formed to cover all care groups.
- 4 Wiltshire Social Services should work towards a more flexible approach to equipment purchase.

- 5 Information about Direct Payments, using a variety of formats, should be used to promote Direct Payments to a wider group of service users.
- 6 Wiltshire Social Services and SSIL should consider what variations in practice are needed to reach the service users in the new care groups eligible to receive Direct Payments. SSIL should seek external funding to enable development work in this area.
- 7 Wiltshire Social Services Managers and teams need to make better use of the Direct Payments Manuals and guidance available to increase their confidence and understanding of how DP processes work.
- 8 Wiltshire Social Services Managers need to ensure that clear unambiguous messages are given out about the Department's commitment to DP and the priority level it should be given amongst the teams.
- 9 We recommend that the Project Group who have expertise in this area, continue to meet to act in a monitoring role for the action plan developed as a result of this report.

