

Transcript: interview with David Drayton-Green, Chair, WM ADASS Direct Payments Network

Prior to Covid, we had a West Midlands direct payments network meeting that met every other month, and we took it in turns to host at different local authorities.

And then Covid hit and we all became terribly busy. There was a small core group of us who kept the network going in an informal way. All of a sudden, there were local authorities that had never been to a direct payment network meeting before, on the Teams call.

Teams was allowing people who may find it difficult to physically get somewhere for a meeting to actually participate in the meeting online.

This is a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of interest. There's that inquisitiveness to see what other local authorities are doing, if there's a better way of doing things. There's lots of experience and lots of learning and lots of development work gone on.

Direct Payments are a sum of money that is paid to somebody who has been assessed by a social worker and has been identified as having eligible needs. Instead of the local authority providing the care and support that they need, they use the money that they have been given to source their own support which gives them control and choice over what they have, when they have it, who provides it for them, in line with what is detailed on the support plan.

Individual Service Funds, that is essentially a direct payment that is paid to a provider, and the provider manages the direct payment on behalf of the council, to provide care for the people who have been assessed and meeting their needs. What it does is it offers a little bit more flexibility and the opportunity for the provider to be innovative.

So the network is to provide for direct payment leads to go and voice their ideas, take learning away, maybe share some of their frustrations. Direct payment leads are trying to do development work, and trying to move things forward, and change things, and some local authorities are very open to it. Some local authorities are very traditional in how they want to provide services.

So linking in with ADASS, we were thinking that where there is resistance to some potentially really good practice, and good changes, to get to a higher management level where change can possibly be facilitated more effectively.

There's always a number of agenda items that people are really interested in. The resources, and how direct payments are set up in different local authorities. I have a dedicated team, and other local authorities don't. Their direct payments lead is a commissioner or somebody [in] finance, or there's even one where it's a HR person. So what's a model? What will get things working effectively.

General items that we talk about, fraud is a popular one, self-employed PAs is always a contentious area, how people are developing things. Individual Service Funds is another one a lot of local authorities are struggling with.

It's finding out what's going on and trying to develop things really, but not just doing it on an individual basis and the ethos of direct payments being about choice and control and flexibility and it's about kind of maximising that really and trying to develop things.