

Disability North



**An introduction
to your Direct
Payment**

Our Mission

- Promote inclusion, independence, choice, and control for all disabled people.
- Enable all disabled people to lead the fulfilling life that they choose.
- Engage with policy makers and networks to get loud, make change, share lived experiences at local and national levels, and be a hub for everything connected with disability.
- Remove societal barriers hindering access to opportunities in employment, education, volunteering, and healthcare.

Our Values

- We celebrate Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Allowing everyone to come as they are and bring their uniqueness to the table.
- Independence, Choice, and Control shapes everything we do.
- We work with Passion, Determination, and Excellence.
- Our workplace is built on Teamwork and Empathy.
- We demonstrate Commitment and Integrity and work alongside any others who support and uphold our values.



Contents

1. What is a Direct Payment?
2. How Direct Payments work
3. How the money is paid
4. Managing the money yourself
5. Using a Managed Account
6. What you can use a Direct Payment for
7. What you cannot use a Direct Payment for
8. What Disability North can do for you
 - Getting started
 - Support with employing Personal Assistants (PAs)
 - Employer insurance
 - Payroll and managed account services
 - Ongoing advice and support
 - Independent and person-centred
9. Your rights and responsibilities
 - Your rights
 - Your responsibilities
10. Staying safe and getting the right support
 - Safe recruitment
 - Being a responsible employer
 - What to do if something goes wrong
 - Support that works for you
11. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



1. What is a Direct Payment?

A Direct Payment is money given to you by your local authority so you can arrange and manage your own care and support. Instead of the council organising services for you, the money is paid to you (or someone acting on your behalf), giving you more choice, flexibility, and control over how your care is delivered.

Direct Payments are available to disabled adults, older people, parents of disabled children, and carers who are eligible for social care support.

The money must be used to meet the needs and goals set out in your support plan, and there are some rules about how it can and can't be spent. But overall, Direct Payments offer you more independence and the freedom to make choices that suit your life.

Disability North is here to help you get the most from your Direct Payment - whether you manage it yourself or choose to use a managed account. Disability North is Commissioned by Newcastle City Council to deliver the direct Payment Support Service on their behalf.

2. How Direct Payments work

Once the person who requires support has had an assessment by the local authority and a Direct Payment has been chosen to meet the identified needs, a personal budget is given. This is the amount of money allocated to meet your eligible care and support needs.

You can use this money to arrange and pay for your own support, in a way that works for you - rather than having services arranged directly by the council.



3. How the money is paid

Your Direct Payment is paid into a dedicated account that must be used only for care and support outlined in your care plan. **There are different ways to manage this money, and you can choose the option that works best for you:**

This will be one of the following:

- Use a prepaid card account provided by the local council
- Set up a separate bank account to manage the funds yourself
- Ask a trusted organisation, such as Disability North, to manage the money for you in a managed account

Whichever option you choose, Direct Payments are usually made every four weeks in advance and must be used to meet the outcomes agreed in your support plan.

4. Managing the money yourself

If you manage the money yourself, you will receive the payment directly and take responsibility for arranging support and keeping records. This gives you full control over how the money is used.

You must:

- Keep receipts, invoices, and bank statements
- Pay personal assistants or care providers correctly and on time
- Submit monitoring information to the council as required
- Be proactive managing the account, ensuring sufficient funds are available and where appropriate your personal financial contribution is paid to avoid a deficit.



Example: Managing your own funds

Tony chooses to manage his Direct Payment himself. He opens a separate bank account just for his Direct Payment. Tony uses it to pay his personal assistant every month and keeps all his receipts and timesheets in a folder. Tony likes knowing exactly what's being spent and when. He's confident with money and enjoys doing things independently but he knows he can call Disability North if he has any questions.

5. Using a managed account

If you don't want to handle the financial side yourself, you can ask an organisation like Disability North to hold and manage your Direct Payment on your behalf.

You stay in control of your care decisions, while we:

- Make payments to your staff or providers
- Keep records and submit reports to the council
- Help you stay on track with your budget
- Inform you if there are any changes that you need to be aware of as soon as possible, so that we can act accordingly on your behalf and make changes if necessary.

Example: Using a managed account

Sophie prefers not to handle finances. Sophie's Direct Payment goes straight to Disability North, who manage a dedicated account for her. She tells Disability North how many hours her PA works, and they take care of paying them and reporting to the council. Sophie stays in charge of who supports her and when, but doesn't have to worry about bank accounts or paperwork. Sophie also has a Personal Financial Contribution to pay towards her care and support. Disability North provides the bank account details to Sophie, so a standing order can be set up to pay the contribution into the Disability North account that holds Sophie's Direct Payment funds.



6. What you can use a Direct Payment for

You can use your Direct Payment in flexible ways, as long as it meets your assessed needs and supports the outcomes in your care plan. **Examples include:**

- Employing personal assistants (PAs) to help with daily living
- Paying for a registered care agency or support worker
- Accessing day services, activities, or respite care
- Fund other services or support that meet the outcomes in your care and support plan

If you're unsure whether something is an approved use of your Direct Payment, speak with your social worker or a member of the Disability North team.

7. What you cannot use a Direct Payment for

Direct Payments cannot be used for:

- Services or purchases not related to your assessed care needs
- Permanent residential or nursing home care (short-term respite may be allowed)
- Household bills, food, personal items, or rent
- Employing a close family member who lives in the same household (unless this has been specifically agreed with the council in advance)



8. What Disability North can do for you

Disability North is here to support you to live independently and take control of your care. We offer clear, practical advice and hands-on help at every stage of your Direct Payment journey - whether you're new to Direct Payments or have been using them for years.

We understand that everyone's situation is different, and we'll work with you to find the right solutions for your needs.

Getting started, We can help you:

- Understand how Direct Payments work and what they can be used for
- Help you understand the Direct Payment process
- Set up your Direct Payment account or managed account

Support with Employing Personal Assistants(PAs)

If you choose to employ your own staff, we can guide you through each step. Our support includes:

- Help with writing job adverts and recruiting PAs
- Advice on safe recruitment, including references and DBS checks.
- Help arranging Employer's Liability Insurance, which is legally required if you hire a PA.
- Support with job descriptions, employment contracts, and setting up interviews
- Guidance on your legal responsibilities as an employer

We'll help make sure you feel confident about employing someone safely and fairly.

Once you've recruited your PA, there are a few legal things you must have in place before they start - including insurance.



Employer Insurance

If you use your Direct Payment to employ a Personal Assistant (PA), you become a legal employer - and this means you must take out **Employers' Liability Insurance**. This is not optional. It protects both you and your PA if something goes wrong.

What is Employers' Liability Insurance?

This type of insurance covers you if your PA is injured or becomes unwell because of their work. It also protects you financially if a claim is made against you as an employer.

A typical policy may include:

- Employers' liability - a legal requirement if you employ staff
- Public liability - covers accidental injury to others or property damage
- Legal expenses cover - support if you face an employment tribunal or dispute
- Redundancy cover - helps with costs if you need to end someone's employment

Advice helplines - for legal, HR, or health and safety questions

Many policies are designed specifically for people who employ staff through Direct Payments.

You must have insurance in place before your PA starts working.

The cost can usually be paid from your Direct Payment.

How to arrange it:

We can help you:

- Choose a specialist provider who understands Direct Payment employers
- Understand what the policy includes
- Set up or renew your cover
- Make the payment from your Direct Payment account



If you use a managed account, we can pay the insurer directly and store your documents safely.

Payroll and managed account services

We offer:

- A payroll service if you employ personal assistants - we calculate wages, tax, pensions, and produce payslips.
- A managed account service, where we receive and manage your Direct Payment on your behalf
- Timely payments to your PAs or care providers..

You stay in control of your care and support - we take care of the paperwork and payment processes. Your responsibilities as an employer are still applicable, therefore you must be contactable by Disability North's payroll as and when necessary.

Ongoing advice and support

Our team is here when you need us, offering:

- One-to-one advice from experienced advisers
- Help with problem-solving, disputes, or changes in your support
- Support during reviews or if your needs change
- Access to training, resources, and up-to-date guidance
- A friendly, knowledgeable service that understands disability and independent living

Independent and person-centred

Disability North is an independent organisation. That means our advice is impartial and focused on your best interests. We'll support you to make informed choices and feel confident in directing your own care.

You can contact us by phone, email, or visit us in person. We're here to help you get the most out of your Direct Payment and live the life you choose.



9. Your rights and responsibilities

You have the right to choose how your care and support is arranged, if you have chosen a Direct Payment, it gives you greater flexibility and control - but it also comes with some important responsibilities. Understanding both your rights and your responsibilities will help you manage your Direct Payment confidently and avoid any issues with your funding.

Your rights

As someone receiving a Direct Payment, you have the right to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Make your own choices about how your care and support is delivered
- Receive clear information and advice to help you make decisions
- Choose who provides your support - whether that's a personal assistant, a care agency, or another service
- Ask for support if your circumstances change or if you're struggling to manage
- Complain or appeal if you feel your needs are not being met
- Access independent advice from Disability North or another support service.



Your responsibilities

When receiving a Direct Payment, you are expected to:

- Use the money only for the care and support set out in your support plan
- Keep records of how the money is spent - such as receipts, timesheets, or invoices
- Meet any employer responsibilities if you hire your own personal assistants (we can support you with this)
- Take out and maintain valid Employers' Liability Insurance to protect you and your staff
- Make sure your personal assistants are paid fairly and legally, including tax, pensions, and holiday pay
- Keep the Direct Payment in a separate bank account or prepaid card, if managing it yourself
- Notify the local authority if your circumstances change (e.g. hospital stays, changes in your support needs, or if you no longer wish to use a Direct Payment)
- Cooperate with any financial monitoring or reviews by the local authority
- If you are using a managed account, many of these financial tasks are taken care of for you - but you are still responsible for all employment matters.

10. Staying safe and getting the right support

When you take more control over your care - especially if you employ your own staff - it's important to know how to keep yourself and others safe. At Disability North, we're here to help you put the right things in place from the start.



Safe recruitment

If you choose to employ a personal assistant (PA), we can support you to:

- Carry out DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks
- Request and check references
- Use safe and fair recruitment practices
- Understand how to set clear expectations and boundaries

This helps ensure that the people you employ are suitable and trustworthy.

Being a responsible employer

As an employer, you must:

- Follow basic employment law
- Provide a written contract for your PA
- Meet your duties around health and safety, tax, national insurance, pensions, holiday pay, and insurance (we'll help you arrange Employers' Liability Insurance) Don't worry - we'll guide you through all of this. Our advisers and payroll team are here to help.

What to do if something goes wrong

If you're worried about someone's behaviour - whether it's a PA, care provider, or anyone else - it's important to speak up. **You can:**

- Talk to your social worker or care coordinator
- Contact Disability North for advice and support
- Report any safeguarding concerns to your local authority
- Call the police if there's an immediate risk of harm

We take safeguarding seriously and will always support you in taking concerns forward.



Support that works for you

Remember, you're not on your own. Whether you're dealing with a change in staff, a concern about your care and support, or just need some advice - we're here to help. Your Direct Payment should feel like a positive step towards independence, choice and control. If something doesn't feel right, speak to us.

11. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Here are some of the most common questions people ask when using Direct Payments. If you have a question that isn't listed here, please get in touch - we're always happy to help.

Do I have to manage the money myself?

No. You can choose to manage the money yourself, or you can use a managed account. A managed account means a trusted payroll service manages the Direct Payment on your behalf, following your instructions. You still have full control over your care decisions and if you are using PA support, you are still the employer.

What can I spend my Direct Payment on?

You can use your Direct Payment to pay for care and support that helps you meet the outcomes agreed in your support plan. This may include:

- Employing a personal assistant
- Using a care agency
- Paying for activities, respite care, or support in the community
- Equipment or transport, if agreed as part of your plan

You must not use the money for everyday living costs (like rent, bills, or food) or for anything not agreed in your support plan.



Can I employ a family member as my personal assistant?

In some cases, yes - but there are rules. You generally cannot employ a close family member who lives in the same household unless the local authority agrees it is necessary to meet your needs. Always check with your social worker or the local authority before making arrangements.

What happens if my needs change?

If your care needs change, you should contact your social worker or care coordinator to request a review of your support plan. You can also contact us at Disability North for advice. Your Direct Payment may need to be adjusted.

What if I no longer want to use a Direct Payment?

Direct Payments are optional. If at any point you feel they're no longer right for you, contact your social worker to discuss other options. The local authority can arrange care for you directly instead.

Who checks how I spend the money?

The local authority will ask for regular evidence that your Direct Payment is being used appropriately. This may include bank statements, invoices, and receipts. If you use a managed account, this information is provided by the organisation managing your funds.



I have an assessed Personal Financial Contribution (PFC) to pay towards my care and support. What does this mean?

If a person has been assessed to be able to financially contribute towards their care and support, the payments made from the local authority act as a top up to the PFC and not the other way around. It is important to remember that if less care and support hours are used, then any underspend will be returned to the local authority in the first instance.

Useful Contacts

Disability North – Direct Payments' Team

The Dene Centre, Castles Farm Road, Gosforth,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1PH

Tel: 0191 284 0480

www.disabilitynorth.org.uk

