**Thurrock Direct Payments Engagement Group**

**14th September 2017 – 1pm to 3pm**

**The Beehive, West Street, Grays RM17 6XP**

**Attendees:**

Patrick Long, Joel Eastaugh, Barry Carrett, Sandra Hynes, Yash Gupta, Fausto Coulmo, Roberta Coulmo, Lorraine Burns, Karmal Jit, Les Waite, Linda Richardson.

**Facilitated by:** Ian Evans (Thurrock Coalition) & Ian Kennard (Thurrock Council)

Ian K welcomed everyone to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.

Ian K. delivered a presentation (attached) on the background and purpose of people with lived experience of Direct Payments meeting as the Thurrock Direct Payments Engagement Group:

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| **Suggested purpose of the Direct Payments Engagement Group** |
| * To regularly engage with Direct Payment Users.
* To address key concerns and issues that impact Direct Payment Users and the Authority.
* To identify gaps in applied practice or in the marketplace as a whole that relate to the use of Direct Payments.
* To highlight external pressures or issues to Direct Payment users.
* Identify themes to be explored that would improve the Direct Payment experience.
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As a way of highlighting experiences of using Thurrock Council Adult Social Care to date, each individual was asked to write down a negative experience that they had gone through whilst using services. These are noted below, this exercise was carried out as a way of sharing previous negative experiences with a view to finding solutions and moving forward positively and looking at ways that services could be improved.

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| **Key negative experiences when using Direct Payments or other Local Authority Services** |
| * Situations where increased hours were agreed, but then not paid
* Direct Payments stopped/suspended
* I needed a P.A with specialist British Sign Language skills. But these skills were hard to find and cost a lot, once a P.A was found, I then realised that the P/A used the wrong dialect!
* Not being listened too
* No real support to the carers from the Council or Adult Social Care
* I asked for extra money to a London hospital for one day a month. Three months have gone by and there’s still no answer as to whether I’ve been allowed the extra time.
* A man of 26 years old was sent from Thurrock council to help me get dressed and washed.
* Many times I got my direct payments suspended with no valid reason
* No clear guidance for using direct payments
* I cannot find readily prepared P. As
* Payments stopped without notice or explanation
* Every time I am told that my Direct Payments are going to be stopped, this gives me anxiety because this is the first time my brother is having effective support.
* The Council needs to shake up its policies re: disabled people. I’ve made complaints regarding my neighbour and security concerns and these have not been handled well
* Purple (direct payments) are totally inept – There is no communication from them and no response to queries. Also, they give advice, but even following said advice, there is still no action.
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Attendees were then split into 2 groups for discussions around the following topics:

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| **What do you think of the current processes you have experienced?** |
| C:\Users\ikennard\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\GTAZWZV1\question-mark-u3s0fw[1].jpgIn terms of Assessment:* It takes too long
* Inaccurate/false information in the assessments
* The process is confusing, particularly for vulnerable people
* Unsure of whether it’s a care assessment or financial assessment
* Doesn’t feel like they listen to individual circumstances or changes to circumstances
* Lack of time, do not listen!
* Need to manage expectations
* The Panel process (or equivalent) takes a long time and we have to chase for an answer.
* There is no named Social Worker, which too often means repeating your situation or story to a different Social worker or professional each time.

**In terms of Choice:*** Insufficient explanation of what Direct Payments can be used for, depends on the Social Worker as to what information or details or answers you get
* Direct Payment only offered later
* There is a lack of Choice and Control in the administration of Direct Payments – feel pressured and bullied
* ECDP/Purple do not offer good value for money.
* Quoted £200 for Public Liability Insurance, when this is available for £80 online for exactly the same cover.

**In terms of the practicalities when using Direct Payments:*** Repeated suspensions for invalid reasons, leading to further stress, problems and delays
* The processes of ECDP/Purple are slow. We have experienced administrative issues with them, a lack of communication and no correspondence
* There are no follow ups to your queries and this can go on for months and months
* There needs to be much better communication and information sharing between ECDP/Puple, the Care Co-ordinator and the Council
* There needs to be better accountability between the Council and Purple so it is clear who is responsible for what, so that they can’t both pass the buck, leaving people stuck in the middle.
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| **What are the strengths and weaknesses?** |
| **Strengths:** * The ability to choose a P.A./Company – This provides a degree of flexibility, but there is a need to co-ordinate P.A. support.
* Having control over your money/budget
* Good to have choice and control

**Weaknesses:*** Not being kept informed
* Never given enough time (support hours)
* There needs to be better flexibility in the system in the Spirit of Direct Payments, and people should be told about this from the start versus doing “by the book” – being too stringent.
* Being told hospital appointments are not covered
* Carers going self-employed
* Ambiguity and uncertainty about what Direct Payments can/cannot be used for
* Lack of consistency
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| **Is there any additional help or support you require or anything the Authority could do better?** |
| * Each Direct Payments User should be offered 2 hours a month support with Direct Payments administration from a financial specialist of their own choice.
* Don’t change the interpretation of the system every 1-2 years
* Provide better information on who and what you can spend money on
* Provide better, consistent Guidance
* Respect!
* There is not much information on how much to pay P.As
* Need more information from ECDP/Purple on how money is being spent
* Honour agreed increases in hours
* Look for solutions and support where it looks like it is needed, for example where suspensions are occurring – look to minimise these and reinstate Direct Payments as soon as possible.
* Training of staff needs to be better
* Increase flexibility around accessing the community
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| **Has the idea of Direct Payments lived up to your expectations?** |
| **No*** Lack of communication, need consistency
* Provided with advice, but then not provided with any follow up
* “Too many chiefs, not enough Indians” – No one knows the answers, no clarity, no ultimate responsibility or accountability

**Yes*** I have choice and control over the way I get my care
* I use it the way it should be used, but the Council took away the flexibility
* Rate increase after no pay rise for 10 years
* It tailors the help to the individual
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| **How can we improve the experience?** |
| * Staff training
* Better understanding
* Need a user guidance “Manual” with indicative examples, e.g. flexibility, building up a pot for emergencies/cover etc.
* We are all in different situations (impairments) and the system doesn’t work really well for any of us
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| **What themes would you like to focus on in the future?** |
| **Staff Training*** Staff training, accountability – Outcomes not resources
* Job versus vocation – knowledge, skills, experience, understanding, actual life experience

**Practical Information and Guidance*** Don’t just push towards Purple – ask us what we actually want or need
* Direct Payments Guidance to provide Consistency – information availability and accessibility – ***“Engage before Change!”***
* Paperwork, processes – overhaul – make sure it is Co-produced!
* What/how do we use the money?
* Who can I ask? Will I get a consistent answer and reasons?/when circumstances change

**Assessments*** Assessment quality and accuracy – not always a true record – make it easier to ensure corrections are noted and made
* Continuity of social worker
* Carers need input/Advocates need input
* Assessments over several months/visits to ensure understanding
* Clear communication – English! Simple! Accommodate Vulnerable people. Reasonable Adjustments – e.g. British Sign Language (BSL).
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**Date of next meeting:** 17/11/17 at 1pm to 3pm @ The Beehive, West Street, Grays RM17 6XP.

Between now and November 2017 - After the feedback was gathered, Ian K. explained that this would allow time to:

* Take the feedback, process it and begin to address issues
* Invite relevant speakers and officers from the Council to take the lead on addressing issues and suggesting solutions alongside people with lived experiences of using Direct Payments in Thurrock.
* Attendees will be kept up to date by email/their preferred contact method stated on the Group sign in sheet.