

1st October 2012**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, JOINT COMMISSIONING, QUALITY
AND BUSINESS CHANGE****PROGRESS REPORT ON INFORMATION MANAGEMENT WITHIN ADULT
CARE FINANCIAL SERVICES****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on action taken to date to improve the information provided by the Adult Care Financial Service (ACFS) team to service users and their families in relation to their care and support services.

Information and Advice

2. Over the past 18 months a number of changes have been made in County Council processes which have had an impact on bills and invoices that are sent to service users and their carers regarding their financial contribution to the services they receive. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the quality of the information that is sent to service users and their families. The concerns range from the complexity of the financial information being sent out through to concerns about duplicate or inaccurate invoicing.
3. The various changes include:
 - Implementation of BMS and its interface with Abacus which is the accounting system used within Adult Care Financial Services
 - Implementation of a new national charging policy – Fairer Contributions Policy
 - Implementation of Personal Budgets.

BMS Implementation

4. The BMS system went live in November 2011 with the aim of delivering efficiencies through the improvement of processes such as automating the invoicing process. However, over the past 8 months of implementation a number of errors have been reported which have impacted on the invoices that are sent out to service users and carers. These errors include:
 - multiple page invoices being posted to service users in separate envelopes – An interim solution has been put in place to ensure that all multiple invoices generated through BMS are sent in a single envelope. A technical solution has also been

sought involving the purchase of software to bar code invoices to enable the system to identify if they are single invoices or multiple sheet invoices and to enable the IT system to batch and envelope them accordingly.

- The system has on one occasion 'cut out' during the processing of an invoice file resulting in a number of invoices not being generated. This error was identified at the time and the process was run again. The cause of the error is being investigated in to ensure it is not repeated.
- Invoices are generated by an operator, at scheduled dates. There have been a couple of instances when this process has not been carried out at the correct time, resulting in a delay in invoices being issued. This was as a result of human error and staff officers within ACFS are working with IT operators to put in place a robust process which ensures the invoices are generated correctly by BMS at the right time in the payment schedule.

Implementation of the new Fairer Contributions Policy

5. The implementation of the new national Fairer Contributions Policy has had a significant impact on the amount of money a service user is required to contribute towards the cost of their care, based on their financial circumstances. Once an individual has had a Self Directed Support Assessment (SDSA) to identify their social care needs, they are allocated a Personal Budget which will cover the cost of their care. At that time, a financial assessment is also completed by Finance Officers within ACFS. This financial assessment takes in to account an individual's income and determines the level of their contribution towards their Personal Budget.
6. The transition from the previous charging policy to the new Fairer Contributions Policy has generated complaints and concerns from a number of service users who have seen their financial contribution increase or where they have had to contribute towards services which they have not received.
7. The complaints have all been addressed and one of the actions arising from this has been to review the frequency with which the department issues service users and their carers with a Personal Budget Statements. These statements identify if a service user may have been charged when a service has not been provided, so that a credit adjustment can be made to the service user's charges account. Currently, the statements are issued by ACFS on an annual basis but consideration is being given to producing and issuing the statements on a quarterly basis to prevent large credit balances building up before refunds are made.

Implementation of Personal Budgets

8. During 2011 and the early part of 2012, the department has been transferring existing service users onto a Personal Budget as part of the assessment process (the SDSA). At the same time as determining the service user's Personal Budget, they were informed of the changes in charging arrangements with the introduction of the new Fairer Contributions Policy. Each service user was contacted by a staff member from ACFS to arrange an appointment to carry out a financial assessment. A number of service users complained that they had not been made aware of, or had not understood the financial implications arising

from the move to Personal Budgets. A number of actions have been implemented to ensure that clear information is provided to service users and carers at the point at which they are moved on to a Personal Budget. These include:

- A number of briefing sessions have been provided to social work staff regarding the assessment and support planning processes and staff guidance has been reviewed and amended to ensure that when undertaking the assessment staff explain to the service user and their carers what it means to have a Personal Budget and to ensure they are aware that they will have a separate financial assessment to determine their contribution towards the cost of their care and support.
- A factsheet, 'Paying towards your personal budget' has been re-designed, based on feedback from service users and the Plain Language Group to provide clear information on the financial assessment process and calculation of contributions for service users and their carers (see **Appendix 1**).
- All template letters issued by ACFS, notifying service users of the amount they have to contribute towards their care have been updated to provide more information on Personal Budgets and on the way in which their contribution is calculated.

Addressing Complaints

9. ACFS staff have now addressed all the complaints that were generated as a result of the above changes. The Team Manager within the Customer Service and Information team has been working directly with the ACFS Team Manager to ensure that the responses to the complaints are clear and comprehensive

ACFS Staff Training and Development

10. Information about service users' personal finances can often be complex particularly where they are in receipt of various welfare benefits. Nonetheless, there is a recognition that the quality of the information sent to service users and their carers needs to be improved so that it is clear and simple to understand. A number of actions have been improve communication and correspondence including:
 - Customer Care workshops for all ACFS staff who work with service users receiving a community based service. Workshops have also been scheduled to take place in October for those ACFS staff who cover financial assessments for people in residential and nursing care.
 - The ACFS Team Manager and Team Leaders have attended a training session provided by the Complaints and Information Team Manager on dealing with complex complaints.
 - Samples of correspondence drafted by ACFS staff have been scrutinised by the Complaints and Information Team prior to the letters being sent to service users and carers.

- The Group Manager responsible for ACFS has also put in place a system to check correspondence to ensure any information being forwarded to service users and carers is clear and easy to understand.

Other Options Considered

11. A number of measures have been put in place to ensure that service users and their carers receive clear, accurate and timely information about their financial contribution towards the cost of their care. The Group Manager has put in place a reviewing mechanism to ensure that the correspondence is checked routinely.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

12. Members are requested to note the progress that has been made in addressing the concerns that had been raised by service users and their carers as a consequence of the changes that have impacted on their financial contributions towards their care.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

14. The measures that have been put in place should mean that service users and their carers are provided with an improved service from Adult Care Financial Services so that they receive clear and timely information about how their financial contributions are calculated and about the Council's billing and invoicing processes.

Financial Implications

15. None.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

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For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Constitutional Comments

14. There are no constitutional comments as this report is for noting purposes only.

Financial Comments (RWK 19/09/2012)

15. There are no additional financial implications arising from the report.

Background Papers

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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