**Direct Payments Briefing for Practitioners and Team Managers**

The Local Authority is committed to improving the consistency of its short break offer and has started the journey of reviewing the nature of short break arrangements within Northumberland. Direct payments, allow parents/carers to arrange care and services instead of receiving them directly from their local Authority and can only be used to pay for services that will meet the assessed needs of the disabled child or young person which can’t be met through community services which are ordinarily available to all children.

A review of some direct payments has taken place and work has been undertaken in seeking the views of families around their ability/experiences of accessing universal services within their communities and the barriers they may face when accessing them. This leads us onto the development of the Direct Payment Panel which will start in September 2021. The Direct Payment panel will review ALL Direct Payments within the current system over the next 12-18 months as well as consider ALL requests for new direct payments. This panel will provide a governance framework and consistent management oversight to Northumberland short breaks provided through a direct payment to ensure that needs are being addressed and outcomes are being delivered for our children and young people. Alongside the panel the financial audit process will aligning with the review processes within the teams in order that all information can be triangulated and the keyworker has a full understanding of how the direct payment is progressing. When arranging reviews it is important that workers seek the views of the Personal Assistant/provision (and request any journals that have been completed). Once the review has taken place the keyworker will complete a workflow within ICS to refer to the Direct Payment panel-see separate guidance for this.

When contacts are being made for a Direct Payment consideration needs to be given by triage in First Contact around whether the child’s needs could be met through community and universal services available which families can access directly themselves. If this is not the case and a child and family assessment is carried out identifying a need which can’t be met without additional support then it is important that the outcome to be supported is identified and an initial timeframe for the support agreed as part of the initial plan. Practitioners need to ensure that they inform parents/carers and children that the support will need to be agreed by a panel who are considering all Direct Payments. Social workers also need to make an assessment of whether the parents/carers can manage the financial element themselves and only if they assess there is a need for a chequebook account should this be requested.