

Norfolk Care Association Subgroup Meeting (Individual Employers who Receive Direct Payments)

23rd July 2026, 10:00am – 11:30am

Co-Chair: Martin Simons

Facilitated by: Norfolk Care Association

Speakers:

- Rob Smith – Programme Lead, Skills for Care
- Shaun Copeman – Manager, Direct Payment Support Service, Norfolk County Council

Summary of discussion

The meeting focused on current developments affecting individual employers who receive Direct Payments, including changes to Skills for Care's training funding arrangements, updates from Norfolk County Council on the Direct Payments refresh programme, recruitment challenges for Personal Assistants (PAs), and opportunities to strengthen co-production with people who draw on care and support. Members also shared positive experiences of Direct Payments and discussed ways to improve engagement with individual employers across Norfolk.

Discussion topics

Skills for Care Training Funding

Rob Smith provided an overview of changes to the national funding arrangements for training available to Individual Employers and Personal Assistants.

Discussion included:

- The introduction of the new User-Led Organisation (ULO) funding model.
- How local organisations can apply for funding to deliver training.
- Support and resources available through Skills for Care, including the Individual Employer and Personal Assistant toolkits.
- Opportunities to strengthen local awareness of available training and networking opportunities for Personal Assistants.

Direct Payments Refresh

Shaun Copeman shared an update on Norfolk County Council's work to review and strengthen the Direct Payments offer.

Key themes included:

- Improving access to Direct Payments and increasing choice for people drawing on care and support.
- Exploring ways to simplify processes and improve practitioner understanding.
- Benchmarking against other local authorities to identify good practice.
- Gathering feedback from people with lived experience to inform future improvements through co-production.

Co-production and Human Learning

Members discussed the importance of ensuring the voices of Individual Employers remain central to future service development.

Discussion explored:

- Creating more opportunities for lived experience to shape decision-making.
- The value of relationship-based working and collaborative learning.
- Involving Individual Employers directly in workforce training and service improvement.
- Building stronger networks to improve engagement and share learning across the sector.

Recruitment of Personal Assistants

Recruitment challenges remained a significant topic of discussion.

Members highlighted:

- Ongoing difficulties recruiting Personal Assistants across Norfolk.
- The benefits and challenges of recruiting students and self-employed Personal Assistants.
- The importance of peer recommendations and local networks when recruiting.
- Opportunities to promote PA vacancies through wider employment and community networks.

Moments that Matter

Members shared positive experiences of using Direct Payments to achieve personalised outcomes.

Examples included:

- Flexible support enabling people to access hobbies, community activities and employment opportunities.
- Long-standing relationships between Individual Employers and Personal Assistants supporting continuity of care.
- Direct Payments enabling personalised support that reflects changing individual needs and aspirations.

General feedback

- Members welcomed the opportunity to hear updates from Skills for Care and Norfolk County Council.
- There was strong support for increasing co-production and ensuring lived experience informs future developments.
- Recruitment of Personal Assistants continues to be a significant challenge for Individual Employers.
- Attendees welcomed continued opportunities to collaborate, share experiences and influence the future development of Direct Payments in Norfolk.