



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

How we calculate the rate of Direct Payment/Personal Budget for those people who employ Personal Assistants Consultation Analysis Report

May to June 2018

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1. Executive Summary

In January 2018, Northamptonshire Adult Social Services (NASS) completed a review into one aspect of Direct Payments. It reviewed how the Council works out the rates that it pays in Direct Payments (DP) for those people who employ Personal Assistants (PA) to meet their care support needs. As a result of this review, some proposals were devised which were subject to a consultation carried out between the 1st May 2018 and 30th June 2018. At the same time, a concurrent engagement process was undertaken with customers to understand their views on how the Council pays and monitors Direct Payments and the potential implications of introducing pre-payment cards.

This is a report on the findings of the DP rate calculation for people who employ a PA. The findings of the monitoring and pre-payment card engagement is subject to a separate report and is available on the Council's website www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/haveyoursay.

Direct Payments (DP) are types of funding which may be paid directly by local authorities to enable people to independently purchase the social care services and support which they have been assessed as needing. All care package details per adult service user are maintained on an operating system called CareFirst. Each care package, on CareFirst, contains details of the financial value of the DP amount. The Council records show that there are 1997 adults or young people in transition to adult social care services with at least one direct payment (Jan 2018). Of these it is estimated that approximately 684 adults use their DP to employ a PA.

A stakeholder analysis, to aid the consultation, was completed and it identified stakeholders which included: NASS customers, their family and unpaid carers, PAs, potential customers, NASS service users support organisations, and interested members of the public. Feedback on the proposals was sought via a mixture of methods including a questionnaire and public events. Consultation materials, including supporting explanatory documents, were made available in an accessible easy read format and a specific consultation event was held for those with a learning disability, as the Equality Impact Assessment identified a large proportion of customers accessing the service have a learning disability. The consultation was published on the Council's website and all potentially affected customers were written to and advised of the proposals and invited to participate in the consultation.

A total of 165 completed questionnaires were submitted, with 21 individuals attending a consultation event. There were 3 written submissions, including a submission from Healthwatch Northamptonshire, and an officer also attended Healthwatch's Task and Finish group, of which there were 5 attendees. Responses were mostly from employers of Personal Assistants, NASS customers, and their family/unpaid carers. Approximately 2 out of 3 of these respondents currently use their Direct Payment to employ a Personal Assistant.

The following is a brief overview of the consultation findings and it is recommended that the full consultation analysis report is read in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the consultation findings.

Feedback was received to this consultation from a variety of audiences with a similar number of responses being received from employers of Personal Assistants, NASS customers, and their family/unpaid carers. In addition to quantitative responses, respondents made an additional 583 qualitative comments within the questionnaire.

Proposal 1: The way we work out how much to give people in their Direct Payment

One of the key aims of the consultation was to gain an understanding as to how people feel about the use of a calculator. The calculator would work out how much the on-costs are going to be and therefore how much the hourly rate would need to be. Respondents' feedback was mixed towards the Council's proposals of how it could work out how much to give people in their Direct Payment.

The most favoured option was the Council's preferred option which was having a calculator that is used for all (or new) employers to work out how much their on-costs are going to be and therefore how much their hourly rate would need to be. 32.1% indicated being in favour of this approach (i.e. Option 1c).

Options	Response
Option 1a: Do nothing and carry on as we are and pay most (or new) employers the same hourly rate with occasional exceptions based on special circumstances.	27.0%
Option 1b: Have two different rates for most (or new) employers and these would be decided based on the complexity of someone's needs.	8.8%
Option 1c: Have a calculator that is used for all (or new) employers to work out how much their on-costs are going to be and therefore how much their hourly rate would need to be. (The Council's preferred option).	32.1%
Option 1d: Have a calculator that works out the exact circumstances for all (or new) employers and how much their on costs are going to be.	13.1%
Other, please specify	19.0%

Preference to this approach was mirrored when respondents were directly asked how much they agreed or disagreed with this proposal with respondents feeling it provided a transparent framework. Those that disliked the idea felt the calculator would negatively affect those with complex care needs and would not reflect the true nature of their needs.

Respondents were mostly in favour of the Council having a calculator that works out what the hourly rate should be, having taken into account the following:

- The number of hours of support a person needs each week.
- The number of individual people the employer is likely to have working for them.

With 48.7% in agreement and 31.4% disagreeing.

Respondents felt this would be a fair and reasonable system, although those that disagreed primarily did so as they felt the calculator would not be suitable for deciding an hourly rate and that it did not relate to the complex needs of customers. Respondents had very mixed views about the proposal to calculate the hourly rate based on the number of hours of support batched into 5 hours blocks, but were slightly in favour of the calculator being used as a fairer way to calculate how much money people need, as again they felt this was a fair, open and simple system. Those that were against the proposal felt it would be time-consuming and costly to administer, and that any system needed to be flexible in order to meet constantly changing daily and weekly care needs.

Proposal 2: The things that people with a Direct Payment pay for and the things that the County Council pays for

The second key element of the consultation was to understand how people would feel if the Personal Budget Support Service (PBSS) processed more of the on-costs aspects for customers. Respondents provided very mixed opinions as to what aspects of the Direct Payment people with a Direct Payment pay for and what the Council should pay for, with 41.6% preferring the Council's preferred option of changing things so that the Council, through PBSS, arrange and pay for some on-costs when they are needed by all (or new), rather than include these things in the hourly rate, with 43.4% preferring no change.

Options	Response
Option 2a: Do nothing and carry on as we are which would mean that from their Direct Payment, all (or new) employers would pay for all on-costs for their Personal Assistants (except Employers pensions contributions for those who use PBSS payroll).	43.4%
Option 2b: Change things so that the County Council, through PBSS, arrange and pay for some things when they are needed by all (or new), rather than include these things in the hourly rate. (The Council's preferred option).	41.6%
Other, please specify	15.0%

However, when respondents were directly asked how much they agreed or disagreed with this proposal 48.9% were in favour and 24.5% were against. It is unclear why people's preference changes between the 2 questions however, those that said they were in agreement felt this would provide better value for money for the Council. Those that

disagreed mostly did so because they felt it went against the concept of personalisation and being in control and that it would start to take away choice and control from the customer, ultimately making them less independent.

Proposal 3: The minimum amounts we hope Personal Assistants would be paid

The third element of consultation was to understand the minimum amount people thought Personal Assistants would be paid and how this could work alongside a possible implementation of a banded calculator.

On the whole, respondents were against the idea of introducing a banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.10 per hour, with only 20.0% preferring this option. The most preferred option of respondents (35.2%) is to do nothing and leave the rate that we pay to all (or new) employers at the current rate of £9.89.

Options	Response
Option 3a: Do nothing and leave the rate that we pay to all (or new) employers at the rate it is now (£9.89).	35.2%
Option 3b: Reduce the rate that we pay to all (or new) employers to £9.56 and this would mean all employers would be able to be paid at the National Living Wage. (this would only work if the Council through PBSS started to pay for those things we asked about in Question 16).	6.7%
Option 3c: Introduce the banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.10 per hour. (The Council’s preferred option).	20.0%
Option 3d: Introduce the banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.20 per hour.	4.8%
Option 3e: Introduce two rates, standard and complex, on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £7.83 per hour for standard rate and £8.20 per hour for complex rate.	10.5%
Other, please specify	22.9%

When respondents were directly asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the Council’s preferred option there was an even split between agree and disagree.

Respondents who agreed commented that it was fair to set a minimum rate, although they added the need to have in scope provision for a higher rate. They further added that the rate had not been increased for a number of years.

Those that disagreed were consistent in commenting about on-costs. They felt their level of Direct Payment would reduce as the Council paid for more of the on-costs. Despite the Council taking paying for more on-costs respondents felt their own on-costs would continue

to increase and subsequently face a new overall reduction in their Direct Payment balance, which effectively would leave them with less to pay their Personal Assistants from. There were concerns amongst some respondents that the Council was trying to cut pay and that the rates did not take account of holiday pay, pensions and sick absence/ coverage. They also felt the rate was low and inconsistent for what was needed with many currently paying their Personal Assistants above the proposed amount of £8.10 per hour.

How we may introduce any changes

A slight majority of respondents felt any new ways of calculating the Direct Payment rate should be introduced when existing people get a new Personal Assistant. They said that it would be fair for everyone to comply with the same process, although respondents felt it should not be applied to existing PAs because their current hourly rate should not be affected. However, some respondents commented that if someone had a team of employees they felt it would be unfair to pay some more than others for doing the same role.

There was also strong opinion that people who already have a Direct Payment for employing a Personal Assistant should be able to stay on their current rate if they could demonstrate that any new ways of calculating their rate would not be suitable for them. They wanted this evidenced by comprehensive individual health and social care need requirements.

The majority of respondents (62.5%) thought people who already have a Direct Payment for employing a Personal Assistant(s) should be able to move to any new ways of working from their next annual review, so long as it works for them.

2. Introduction

Direct Payments (DP) are types of funding which may be paid directly by local authorities to enable people to independently purchase the social care services and support which they have been assessed as needing. This could include homecare support for personal care needs, alternatives to day care or a wide range of other assessed needs. The Business Case for NASS, within its first year of operation, was to look at projects and programmes of work which:

- Enables NASS to operate within its budget by seeking to deliver savings;
- Helps NASS to become more operationally efficient through streamlining procedures and processes;
- Helps with the integration and operation with partners and with other Council services by ensuring the same processes and procedures are used by adults, children and families.

The DP programme, in order to meet all the requirements in the NASS Business case, seeks to make savings, update and streamline processes and procedures and integrate those processes and procedures across all Council departments.

The vision for Direct Payments is that at the end of the programme, Northamptonshire will have a joined-up, best value for money system of Direct Payments (DP) support for adults (18yrs+) and carers across social care. This system and support will be transparent, fair and equitable for service users, carers and residents, working with partners in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. This will be achieved by:

- Understanding the whole current DP landscape within Northamptonshire, on a case by case basis, through the delivery of a complete audit across all Self-Managed and Managed DP Accounts.
- Analysing audit results and data and being able to make informed decisions on matters such as; individual contingency fund level requirements, identifying where excess funds are being held that could fund other service users and need to be clawed back, separating truth from myth in terms of the number of accounts holding excess funding and identifying accounts that need to be closed due to misuse, fraud or simply as they are no longer needed.
- Reviewing and, where needed, updating of DP processes, procedures and rates for PA's and guidance to ensure a consistent and fair application of DPs across all Service Users.
- Potentially, delivering an optional Pre-Paid Card system for DPs to simplify administrative arrangements for both the Council and DP Service Users.

All care package details per adult service user are maintained on CareFirst. Each care package contains details on how much the DP is. There are 1997 adults or young people in transition with at least one direct payment (Jan 2018).

There are 2011 packages of care supported through a DP of which:

- 486 are for those over 65 years of age;
- 1614 are for those under 65
- 980 are for people with a primary support reason of learning disability
- 753 for people with a primary need for personal care support
- 146 for people to receive support with memory and cognition
- 73 for young people in transition
- 72 for people with a need to support social isolation
- 62 are for people with access/mobility needs including visual impairment
- 5 are for people with a mental health or substance misuse need
- 9 are for people whose primary need is not recorded

Of 1997 adults it is estimated that approximately 684 people use their DP to employ Personal Assistants.

Approval was given at NASS Senior Leadership Team on 9 March 2018 to hold a formal consultation on the review of DP standard rate paid to customers who employ Personal Assistants.

The consultation was on a range of options that were developed on the following:

- Potential introduction of banded calculator
- Recommended rate for DP personal assistants
- Centralisation of some costs associated with employment of personal assistants

The feedback from the consultations will be considered and inform the 11 September 2018 Cabinet decision on the options.

This report is an analysis of the information and data gathered during the consultation held between 1st May and 30th June 2018.

A concurrent engagement process was carried out with customers to understand their views on how we pay and monitor Direct Payments and the potential implications of introducing pre-payment cards. The below is a report on the DP rate calculation for people who employ a PA. The findings of the monitoring and pre-payment card engagement are not part of this report and can be found on the Council's website

www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/haveyoursay

The public consultation was conducted by the Consultation, Equalities & Accessibility Team based within Business Intelligence and Project Management (BIPM) within Northamptonshire County Council, who carried out the consultation in compliance with NCC's Consultation and Engagement Policy and Statement of Required Practice.

3. Consultation Methodology

The following outlines the public consultation methodology used to generate the material / data for analysis.

A stakeholder analysis was completed. It identified stakeholders which included: NASS customers, their family and unpaid carers, Personal Assistants, potential customers, NASS service users support organisations, and interested members of the public.

Due to the breadth of potential stakeholders, a base questionnaire was devised. The questionnaire was designed to:

- Inform customers and stakeholders of the consultation proposals and what may change.
- Gain an understanding of views on the banded calculator options.
- Gain an understanding of views on the Direct Payment Personal Assistant rates options.
- Gain an understanding of views on the centralisation of costs options.
- Gain an understanding of views on the implementation options.

Due to the nature of the audiences it was decided that two questionnaires should be available. The original questionnaire was supported by a easy read version. Both questionnaires were supported by a proposals explanatory document and a frequently asked questions (FAQs) document, which were also available in an easy read format. Copies of both the questionnaires, proposal documents, and FAQs are available in appendices 4 to 9.

A number of qualitative and quantitative questions were asked to gain an understanding of respondents' views. Respondents were asked to read the supporting documentation prior to answering the questionnaire.

Copies both of the questionnaires and supporting documentation were made available on a dedicated internet web page on NCC's website and promoted on NCC's consultation register, www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/consultationregister, which is where all of the Council's consultations are published. Paper copies of the consultation documents were made available on request. An offer was also made to translate the questionnaire into other accessible formats, including large print.

Due to the complex nature of the subject matter, public drop-in events were held, where possible, in Council-owned venues across the county. These events enabled attendees to discuss the consultation and engagement subject matters on an individual basis with a senior officer and enabled attendees to ask questions and provide their feedback, and/or to receive assistance in completing a questionnaire should they require support. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care was also in attendance at the events to enable attendees to speak to the political lead should they require.

A geographical mapping exercise was conducted to identify where the majority of DP customers lived within the county. Based on their location, four public drop-in events were held in the following locations within the county:

- Central - Northampton
- North - Corby
- East - Wellingborough
- South - Towcester

Using Council-held customer intelligence of those who have a Direct Payment, a specific customer event was held for those who have a learning disability. The format for this event differed to that of the public drop-in events, and it was delivered by way of a presentation and group discussion. The delivery of the learning disability specific event was supported and promoted by Get on Board (GOB), a new organisation which has been previously known as Northamptonshire Learning Disability Partnership Board, having previously been supported by the County Council.

All potentially affected customers were also written to. They were advised of the proposals and invited to participate in the Direct Payment consultation and also the concurrent engagement on monitoring Direct Payments.

Personal Assistants were also written to where the Council held their contact details. Employers were also asked to advise their Personal Assistants of the consultation and engagement opportunity. Key organisations, identified through the stakeholder analysis were also asked to help promote the consultation and engagement amongst their members and other distribution channels. A full list of stakeholders is available in Appendix 3.

As well as being promoted via the Council's partners' communication channels, this consultation was posted and publicised via the Council's Facebook, Twitter and other social media accounts. Respondents were given the opportunity to participate through these social media sites, although no direct responses were received or could be attributed via this method.

A telephone helpline was also set up to help respond to queries.

4. Summary of Feedback

This is a summary of the feedback received. It is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the full consultation results, which can be found in Appendix 1.

A total of 165 questionnaire responses were received, generating a wealth of feedback that included some 583 comments from the different groups of respondents. Nearly all of the responses were from individuals (as opposed to being on behalf of organisations), mostly being NASS customers and employers of Personal Assistants, their family and friends, and interested members of the public.

In addition to the questionnaire feedback, 21 people attended the consultation events, and 3 written submissions were made. Furthermore, Healthwatch officers or volunteers attended the 4 public consultation events and requested an NCC officer to attend a meeting of their Task and Finish group, which had 5 attendees.

There were no direct comments received via social media channels.

4.1 Questionnaire feedback

Respondents from the 165 questionnaires included 52 responses from family/friend/unpaid carer/Power of Attorney or Deputy for an individual; 50 employers of Personal Assistants; 47 NASS customers; 25 interested members of the public; and 14 Personal Assistants.

Respondents were asked if they currently have a Direct Payment or administer a Direct Payment on behalf of somebody. A total of 69.0% of respondents who answered this question stated that they do, and about 2 out of 3 of these respondents currently use their Direct Payment to employ a Personal Assistant.

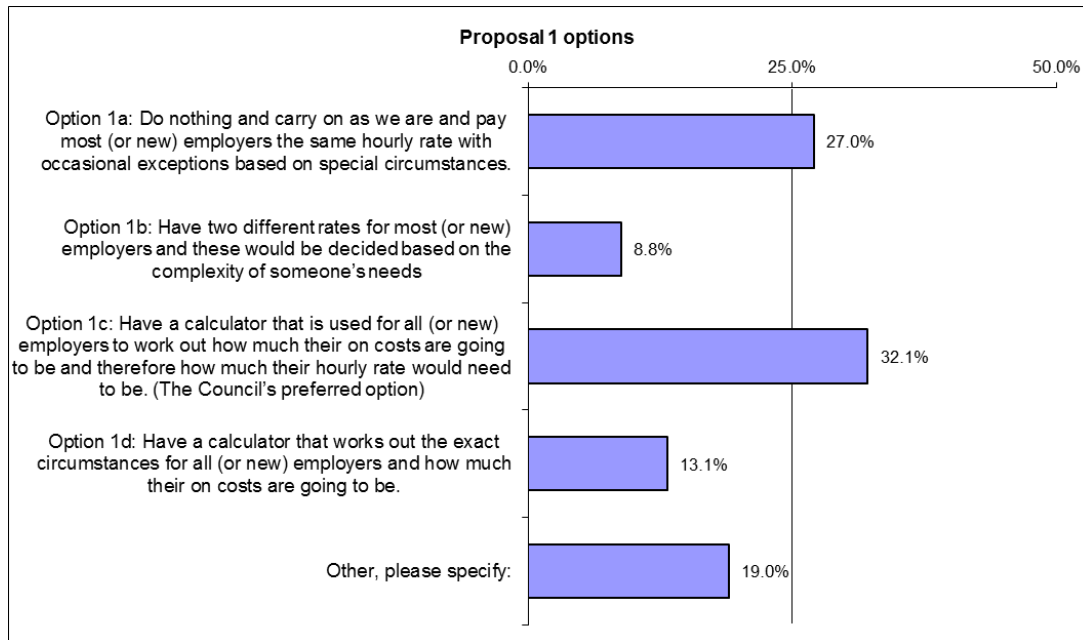
Proposal 1: The way we work out how much to give people in their Direct Payment

Respondents were asked to consider the following four options regarding how the Council work out how much to give people in their Direct Payment.

- Option 1a: Do nothing and carry on as we are and pay most (or new) employers the same hourly rate with occasional exceptions based on special circumstances.
- Option 1b: Have two different rates for most (or new) employers and these would be decided based on the complexity of someone's needs.
- Option 1c: Have a calculator that is used for all (or new) employers to work out how much their on-costs are going to be and therefore how much their hourly rate would need to be. (The Council's preferred option).

- Option 1d: Have a calculator that works out the exact circumstances for all (or new) employers and how much their on-costs are going to be.

From the 137 respondents who answered this question the preferred option was Option 1c, with 32.1% of respondents preferring this option. This was followed by Option 1a (27.0%), which was to make no change.



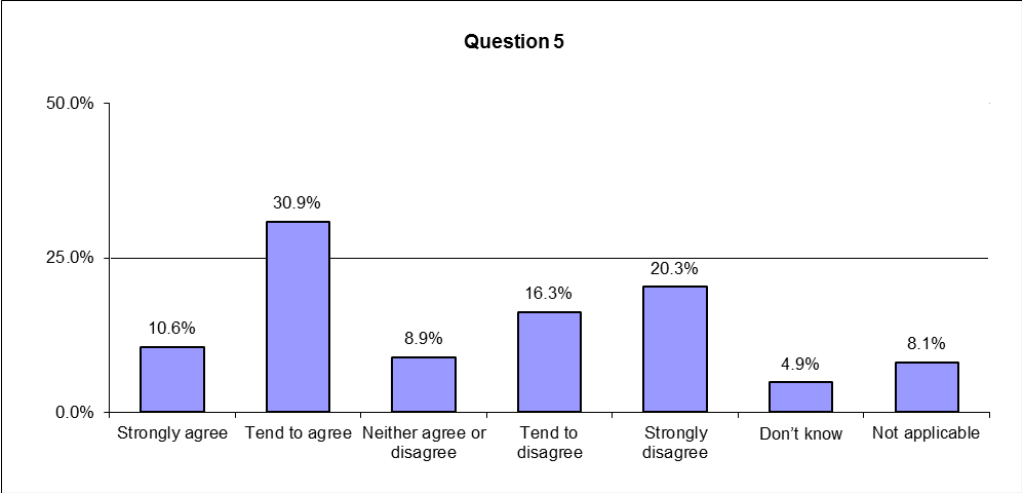
Comments made by the 26 respondents who said 'other' stated overall that they felt that the payment rates were too low. They were concerned that the difference between the rates was not reflective of the differing skills, qualifications and competences required from the job. They felt that a number of variables needed to be factored in from both time taken to do initial assessment by professionals to really understanding the caring needs, wishes and feelings of the customer; working patterns i.e. full days or limited hours, and the times of the day care was needed. Respondents made reference to having differing payment rates for the first initial period of care i.e. a higher rate for the first hours of care.

Respondents consistently commented on recruitment and retention of PAs, saying that the rate was not attractive. Respondents made suggestions about introducing a lump sum payment, improved support for managing police checks, holiday pay etc.

They stated that care needs should not be confused by the determination of the customer's health needs. Some felt that the rate was unsustainable and another stated that they felt the approach the Council was taking was potentially illegal.

Respondents highlighted their personal experiences of employing/ retaining PAs; the ways in which families were having to make up the payment i.e. shortfall in payment as the market rate was different to what the Council was paying them; others did not know what a PA was.

Respondents were then asked directly to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the Council’s preferred option of having a calculator that is used for all (or new) employers to work out how much their on-costs are going to be and therefore how much their hourly rate would need to be. This generated mixed feedback as 41.5% of respondents agreed to the proposal whilst 36.6% disagreed.



When asked to explain why, respondents who agreed to the proposal said that it seems like a fair, transparent and reasonable way to calculate the rate, creating a clear operating framework. Respondents wanted to ensure that the complexity of arranging different caring needs, including permanent and temporary care personnel requirements is built into the calculator.

Respondents also mentioned that the calculator needed to build in circumstances which took into account the need to recruit and retain staff; and that it needed to take account of the vulnerability and needs of the employer. Respondents stated that they did not have enough hours allocated to them and that they had to juggle this; a respondent also mentioned that often their PA relationship is so special that they will continue to work for free after allocated paid hours, especially in a medical emergency. Respondents mentioned again the need to think about the individual/ customer and to focus on the care and medical needs of the customer. They wanted to make sure that a sensible and practical approach was applied in situations which took into account location and number of hours worked. The process for the arrangement had to be practical and solution-focused. Some respondents liked the way things were now or did not employ a PA or had found no supporting information from which to make comments from. Some wanted to understand what on-costs were.

Many who indicated ‘strongly disagree or tend to disagree’ stated that the calculator is not suitable for people who have extremely complex care needs and/or a 24/7 care package. People with higher needs should get more care and the calculator did not reflect this aspect. Respondents also felt that complex cases should be looked on an individual basis as this

customer group could lose out overall compared with what they were now in receipt of. Respondents also said that due to differing skill sets, type of work and the qualification of the PAs, the calculator did not have the ability to have these variants and therefore it could not operate in a totally fair manner i.e. there would be too many factors.

Respondents commented that care costs change regularly and that the Council will not increase payments very quickly to cover the extra costs. This would leave a deficit. Respondent felt that it was better to work out an overall budget that could be flexible and that the formula applied needed to be dynamic in order to factor in changes.

Some respondents who did not agree saw the calculator and changes in payment rate as a cost-cutting exercise by the Council. Respondents said that unless the Council could regulate all care companies to offer one blanket payment rate for care, and also bring in better standards of care for those providers that operate at a cheaper rate, the vulnerable would be at risk. Respondents stated that they felt that the Council would get it all wrong and that it needed to learn from better performing councils. A respondent said they thought that the current system works. Others commented that they found it difficult to understand what the Council was doing; that they did not want the Council to take pay for more on-costs. They too, thought that on-costs could potentially double when a variety of other factors are added on such as, holiday pay, statutory sick pay etc. They stated that the onus needs to be on the employer to comply with the law.

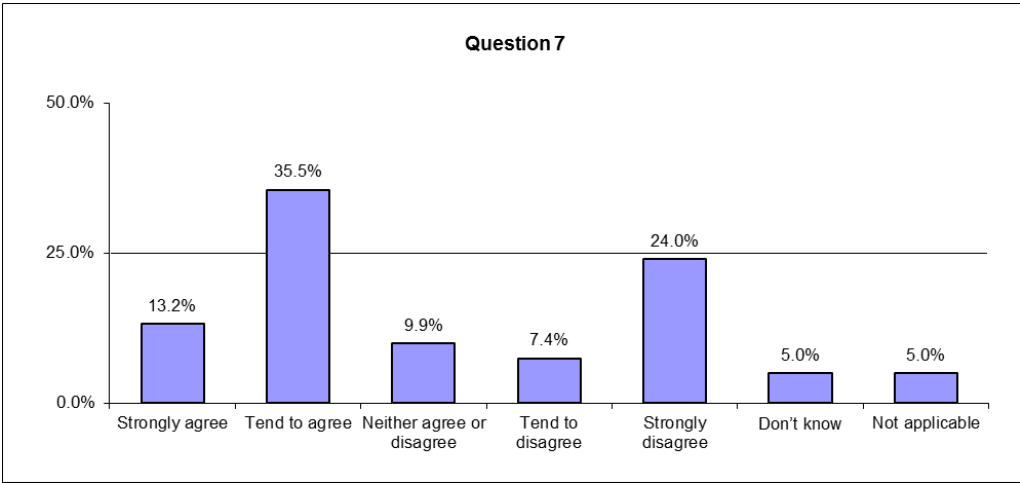
Those that 'neither agreed nor disagreed' commented that complex needs require more specialised carers and that they were dissatisfied with the current system. They said that the amount of time that is allocated for care is unfair; and that the proposal may seem acceptable on paper but that they felt in reality that there would be higher administration costs which may be passed onto service users. Respondents felt that the current system worked and the Council should leave it be.

A few respondents who indicated 'don't know/ not applicable' stated a realistic hourly rate needed to be applied and that private companies change their fees annually but the Council rate remained the same. Another respondent commented on the outcome of the results of the calculator and questioned whether it was really sufficient to meet what was required for the customer. Some stated that they could not access the consultation supporting information, or that they had never applied for a personal assistant, or that their care workers were self-employed.

Respondents were then asked to consider to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the Council should have a calculator that works out what the hourly rate should be, having taken into account the following:

- The number of hours of support a person needs each week.
- The number of individual people the employer is likely to have working for them.

A total of 121 respondents answered this question, of which 48.7% agreed and 31.4% disagreed.



Respondents who agreed commented that they thought that it seemed fair, reasonable and that in turn would create an operational system and mechanism which was fair for all. Respondents stated that this would give people the right money for the care they needed. However, respondents said that wage rate should not be set at the minimum wage level, rather that a realistic wage rate per hour needed to be applied. Other respondents agreed but stated the rate should be applied for 30 minutes, or that they needed all the hours of care they get and that the PA/ carer was essential part of their life and that each application for PA is different.

Respondents who stated that they disagreed primarily stated the calculator is not suitable for deciding an hourly rate, some said that the rate was also too low. They also said that it did not relate well working out the complex needs for those customers who had many components within their DP. A respondent said that the proposed rate was slightly over the national minimum wage rate but that it was unsustainable as over time and that this rate would be lower than the national minimum wage rate and hence the Council would need to enter into consultation on the payment rate almost yearly. Respondents suggested that the Council could save money, in the long run, if a DP rate could be funded at a sufficiently high enough rate so that it could be sustainable for many years ahead. Respondents said that the DP rate ought to be dependent upon both the number of hours of care required, and their employer expenses. They also said that support workers with specialism(s) are difficult to find and their hourly rate should match their experience and match the explicit requirement of the person they are supporting. Also respondents were not sure how the calculator would work with temporary or cover staff.

Respondents regularly commented on the direct payments being flexible. They felt under this option the flexibility would be eradicated or minimised. Respondents commented that the calculator could be suitable for most employers but would not be suitable for those with

highly complex needs or those who require 24/7 care. It did not take into account the level of responsibility the PA carries which depends on ability and willingness of PA, many of whom work part-time. They said that a PA should not have their pay reduced as they are not paid enough for what they do already. Other respondents made comments that DP was more than just employing people for care, they covered other support needs such as doubling up on the use of specialist equipment.

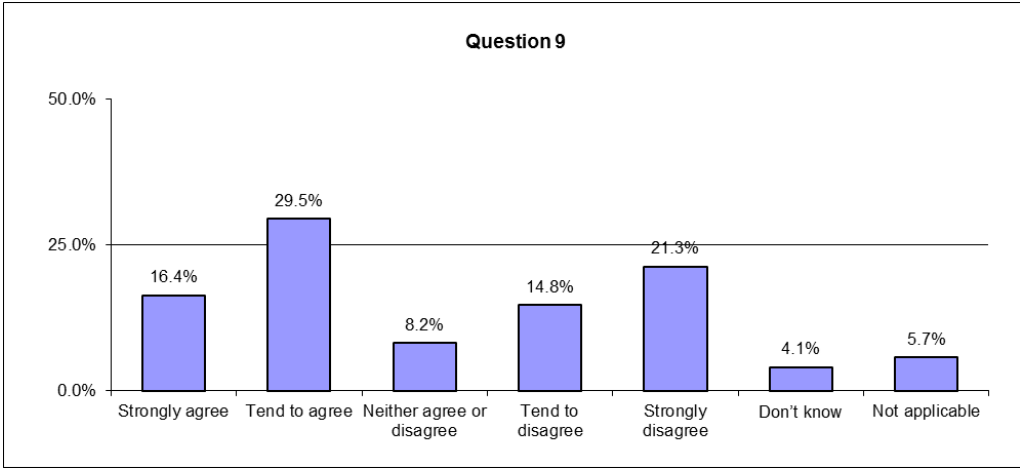
Respondents were concerned about the extra bureaucracy involved in setting up another system which they felt would negate any savings the Council was looking for. They expressed the view that the present system seemed fairly straightforward.

Respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed commented that the calculator needs to have a variance built in which would take into account the different skills, qualifications and experience of PAs. This then would reflect in the rates that PAs can be expected to be paid in line with meeting the need of the service user. Respondents stated that it was important to determine the hourly rate dependent on the individual care plan and still offer the flexibility that DP is designed to do. Another respondent commented that their PA was worth so much more than what they were paid and that no calculator would be able to do justice or show the true value of the support they received from their PA.

Respondents who stated don't know or not applicable commented that getting a PA was hard enough for the rate they are paid and that if this was to decrease then it would be even harder to get staff. A respondent commented that a small package of care requires fewer carers but that carers are filling this work around other employment patterns or family commitments. Recruiting carers is a hard task and often several carers are required in order to fill in the total caring rota required. It can mean that a small package may require a higher payment rate to maintain consistency and retention of the carers/PAs. Another said that they needed the information to be more accessible before they could give a comment.

On the whole, most respondents (45.9%) were in agreement with the Council's assumption that the following number of Personal Assistants would be employed based on the below total number of hours of support:

Number of hours of funded support per week	Number of Personal Assistants
Up to 30 hours	1
31 – 60 hours	2
61 – 90 hours	3
More than 90 hours	4



Respondents who agreed said that that proposal was fair and reasonable one. Respondents commented on their own circumstances such as the requirements to have more than one carer due to health and safety reasons i.e. operating equipment, or needing weekend cover. They mentioned that some personal assistants, due to their own personal circumstances, are unable to work full-time and hence they needed to employ more than one PA to help cover the care and support they needed. A respondent asked whether the Council would be paying/ taking into account annual leave/ holiday pay of the PAs. A respondent also commented that they were not sure what rate the Council was prepared to pay.

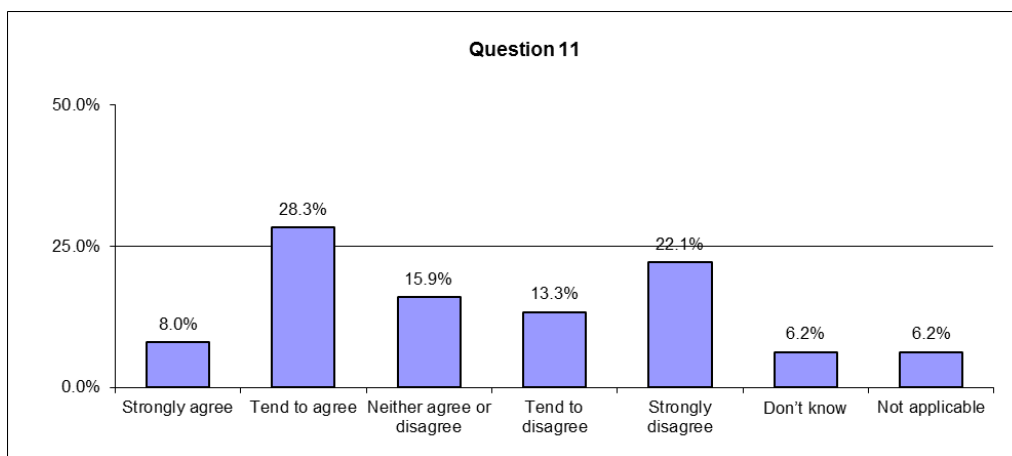
Those respondents who disagreed commented mainly that they were best to decide their own arrangement. They knew the number of personal assistants and the rotation they wanted, commenting further that they were the employer and knew what worked for them. Respondent said there needed to be mixed and flexible arrangements which provided them with cover for holidays, illness and other absence periods, as well personal assistants with specific skill sets. Respondents said that DP is about giving people autonomy and what was being proposed was too simplistic for often complex care packages. They added that it was wrong for the Council to make assumptions about number of hours and the number of PAs. Respondents questioned whether the Council’s assumptions were based on evidence. Respondents felt that the number of hours a person needs care for was not a good indicator to use, some gave examples indicating that to provide care for short periods across a whole day or a whole week is not directly related to the number of carers needed.

Respondents again questioned the hourly rate stating that it did not cover everything. They mentioned they needed provision for back-up care or for covering unsocial hours or for applying a cost variance linked to the time of day support was required. Some respondents said they were unsure of how their arrangement would be affected as they used a care provider to assist them as well as PA during the day i.e. they had multi-faceted care which was not easy to compartmentalise. Respondents consistently stated that each person’s care requirements should be seen individually and not as one size fits all. All circumstances were different and therefore the system needed to be flexible enough to cope with this, otherwise it would be unsustainable. Another respondent felt that the work involved in administering

Direct Payments was too high and that it would be better to bring back carers within the Council.

Only one respondent who answered neither agree or disagree to this question made a comment, they said that it may be hard to get one PA to do 30 hours of care a week, whilst respondents who commented 'don't know' said that they had many carers or that they did not know of any customer who got over 30 hours of care.

Respondents were then asked to consider to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the Council proposing to work out the hourly rate based on a number of hours of support in 5 hours blocks e.g. 0-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours etc, which were fully outlined within the supporting documentation. This question generated a mixed response from the 113 respondents who answered it, with a total of 36.3% agreeing and 35.4% disagreeing.



Respondents who agreed stated that they were fair and reasonable but that flexibility needed to be applied. They said that it was harder to recruit people for working shorter hours. Respondents commented on needing clarity of what on-costs were and if these were taken care of by the Council, then the proposal seemed agreeable. A respondent also said that they favoured leaving things the way they currently are, with others saying that no account or consideration has been made of different average wage rates that people earned across the county. One respondent suggested that the Council should directly employ carers.

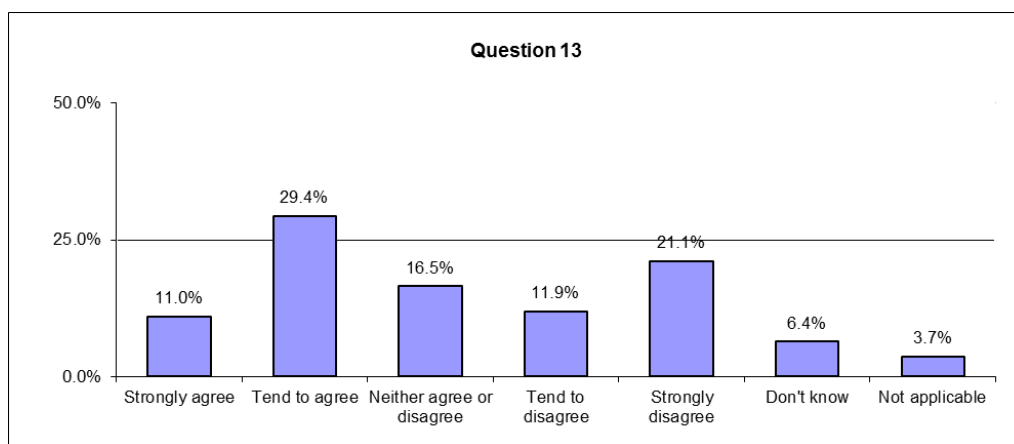
Respondents who indicated disagreement with this voiced their discontent with the reduction of the payment rate. In particular they drew attention to the 5 hour block rates, saying that the increases were very small. Respondents also noted that the Council wanted to take on more of the associated on-costs, however they did not feel that the Council should be taking on further responsibilities in this area.

Some respondents said that there was no entirely fair way to undertake this due to the complexities surrounding organising and paying for care. They preferred a well-trained individual or team to work with, especially for difficult and complex cases. Respondents

were concerned that there was limited flexibility in the proposal presented, they said it was too rigid and may not meet statutory duties. They felt that the rate was a universal flat rate, and there was no clarity or transparency in the calculator for end users, making an already complex system worse.

Respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed commented that they did not understand the calculator, or supporting information presented.

Respondents were then asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the calculator may be a fairer way to work out how much money people need. As before this generated mixed feelings with 40.4% agreeing that it may be fairer, whilst 33.0% disagreed.



Respondents who agreed stated that it would be a fair, open and simple system. A respondent commented that they felt it was a fair system except for the 5 hours calculation, others commented that different needs, some complex with differing expertise required, needed different costs.

Respondents who disagreed commented on the different local charges for care, for the same care needs, which are in operation across the county. They asked for local variances to be taken into account. They said that the calculator has very little to do with fairness but that it is about bringing in reductions in care costs. Respondents expressed that carers/ personal assistants would end up on minimum rate of pay with very little chance of progression. They felt that the system would be inflexible and could not meet complex needs or requirements. Respondents said that the calculator would work for a “simple” package; they also commented that information needed to be considered on an individual basis with appropriate and timely care assessments of needs taking place.

Respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed commented that they understood the concept of proposal being fair; although it could be time consuming and costly to administer; however, the system needed to be flexible in order to meet changing daily and weekly care needs. The system also needed to be protected from those that could abuse the system. Another respondent commented that the pay is basic and needs to improve.

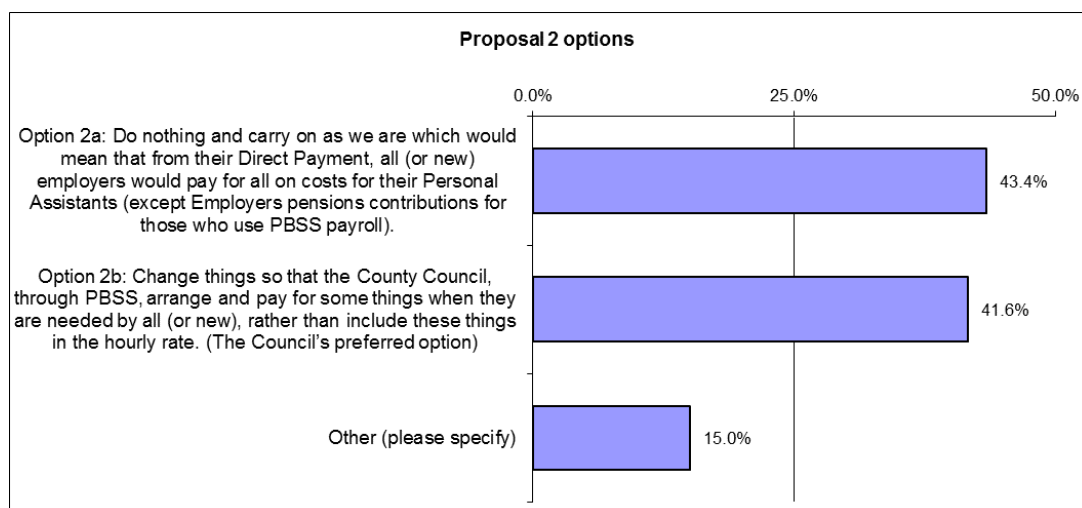
Respondents who said don't know or not applicable commented that the way in which the calculator is constructed would affect the outcome. They wanted adaptability in the system to cope with those customers such as a disabled person living in a rural area who would have difficulty recruiting PAs. They wanted the Council to try the proposal but if it did not work then the system should be flexible to revert back. Respondents wanted parity in the payment rate for all levels of employees – whoever they worked for. They did not see the relevance in the calculator if all workers did not have parity.

Proposal 2: The things that people with a Direct Payment pay for and the things that the County Council pay for

Respondents were asked to consider the following 2 options regarding the things that people with a Direct Payment pay for and the things that the Council pay for, and to tell us which was their preferred option.

- Option 2a: Do nothing and carry on as we are which would mean that from their Direct Payment, all (or new) employers would pay for all on-costs for their Personal Assistants (except Employers pensions contributions for those who use PBSS payroll).
- Option 2b: Change things so that the County Council, through PBSS, arrange and pay for some things when they are needed by all (or new), rather than include these things in the hourly rate. (The Council's preferred option)

From the 113 respondents who answered this question there was a fairly balanced mix of opinion, with a very slight margin preferring there was no change, with 43.4% preferring option 2a and 41.6% preferring Option 2b.



The 17 respondents that stated 'Other' made a variety of comments, although some used the opportunity to justify answers to the previous questions, with some stating they want to the system to stay the same.

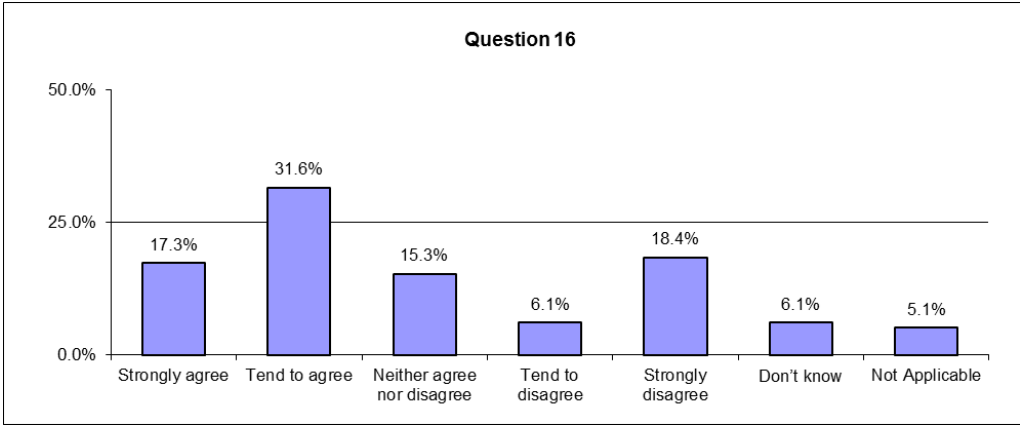
Others felt the Council’s proposal would make matters too complicated, with some not wanting the Personal Budget Support Service (PBSS) to take on any more responsibility or on-costs.

Some respondents said they want a personalised approach, and one that allowed them to be in control and not have to consult the Council over everything as this enables them to be more responsive to their own needs.

A small number of respondents took the opportunity to request there was an increased payment to them or that the allowable percentage for employer expenses was increased, especially for those with complex needs as this would allow greater flexibility and easier management of their PAs including assisting with covering annual leave.

A similar number of respondents said they felt this was being used as an attempt to reduce the budget paid to disabled people.

Respondents were reminded that the Council’s preferred option is to change things so that the Council, through PBSS, arrange and pay for some things when they are needed by all (or new) employers, rather than include these things in the hourly rate. When asked directly what extent respondents agreed or disagreed with this option, 48.9% of the 98 respondents who answered this question agreed and 24.5% disagreed.



When asked to explain why, respondents who agreed to the proposal said they felt this would provide better value for money for the Council. A similar number of respondents simply stated their general support and thought the proposal sounded reasonable, as long as employers would not incur unexpected costs or the hourly rate for PAs was not reduced as a result.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal said they felt it went against the personalisation agenda and would start to take away choice and control from the customer and would make them less independent, such as no longer being able to decide where to

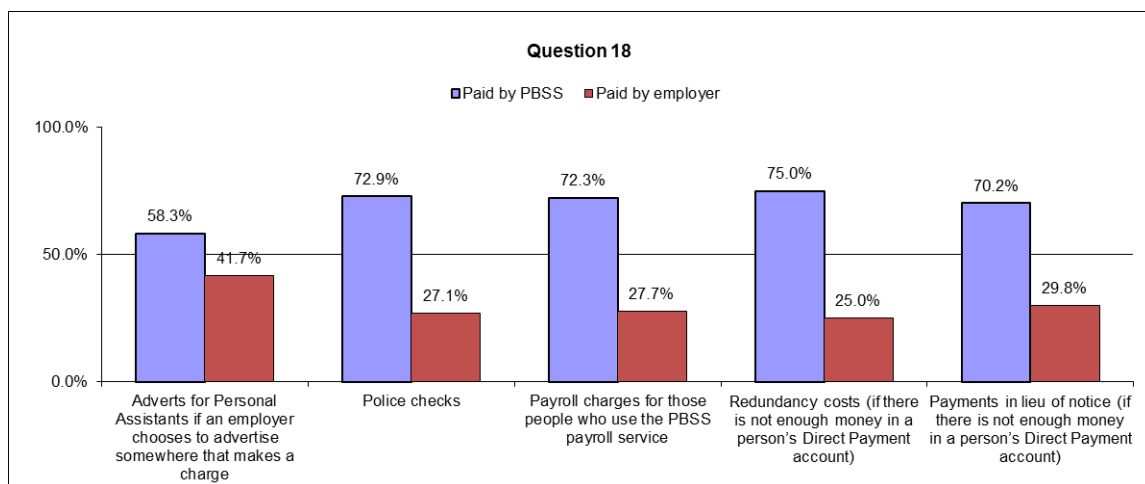
advertise job vacancies. Others felt it would be too confusing knowing who pays for what and that this would end up making matters too complicated.

A couple of respondents said they disagreed as they felt the Council’s calculations were based on too many assumptions, for example that statutory sick pay (SSP) will only be required for one week a year. Doubts were also raised over what the Council would ultimately pay for, especially with regards to advertising for new PAs for those customers with a larger than average number of PAs and/or a higher turnover of staff.

Respondents also said there were other circumstances that need to be considered such as shift rates including overtime in order to cover the shift of a PA on sick leave, or large redundancy costs.

Respondents were then given a list of on-costs and asked which they thought should, in future, be arranged and paid for by PBSS or included within the hourly rate and paid for by the employer.

As the graph below demonstrates, respondents strongly felt the majority of the activities that incur on-costs should be arranged and paid for by PBSS, with the only exception to this being placing adverts for Personal Assistants if an employer chooses to advertise somewhere that makes a charge. Although the majority of respondents felt this would be best managed and funded by PBSS, 41.1% felt this should sit with the employer.



Comments made by the 14 respondents who said ‘Other’ included:

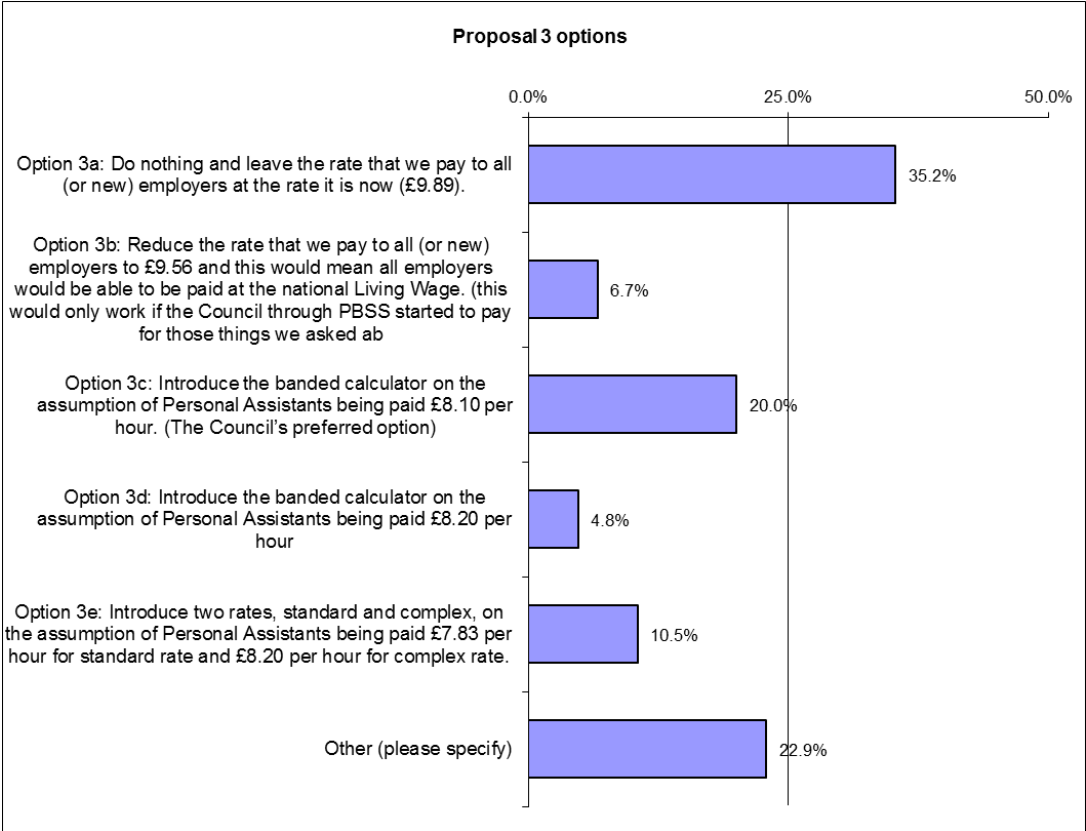
- Statutory sick pay
- Employer insurance
- The need to make it simplistic
- A lack of understanding of PBSS
- The need for any new system to sit within the personalisation agenda

Proposal 3: The minimum amounts we hope Personal Assistants would be paid

Respondents were asked to consider the following five options regarding the minimum amounts the Council expect PAs to be paid, and to tell us which was their preferred option.

- Option 3a: Do nothing and leave the rate that we pay to all (or new) employers at the rate it is now (£9.89).
- Option 3b: Reduce the rate that we pay to all (or new) employers to £9.56 and this would mean all employers would be able to be paid at the National Living Wage. (this would only work if the Council through PBSS started to pay for those things we asked about in Question 16)
- Option 3c: Introduce the banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.10 per hour. (The Council’s preferred option)
- Option 3d: Introduce the banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.20 per hour.
- Option 3e: Introduce two rates, standard and complex, on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £7.83 per hour for standard rate and £8.20 per hour for complex rate.

A total of 105 respondents answered this question and the most frequent response was option 3a, with 35.2% of respondents choosing this option. A total of 20.0% chose the Council’s preferred Option 3c.



Respondents who stated 'Other' gave a variety of comments ranging from their views on the disinvestment in the social care sector over the years to the need to reinvest in the sector and from the current rates proposed as being too low for both standard and complex care. They referred to the specialist skills sets required along with the continuing need to provide good independent quality of care.

Many commented on the special relationships and bonds that existed between PAs and the cared for.

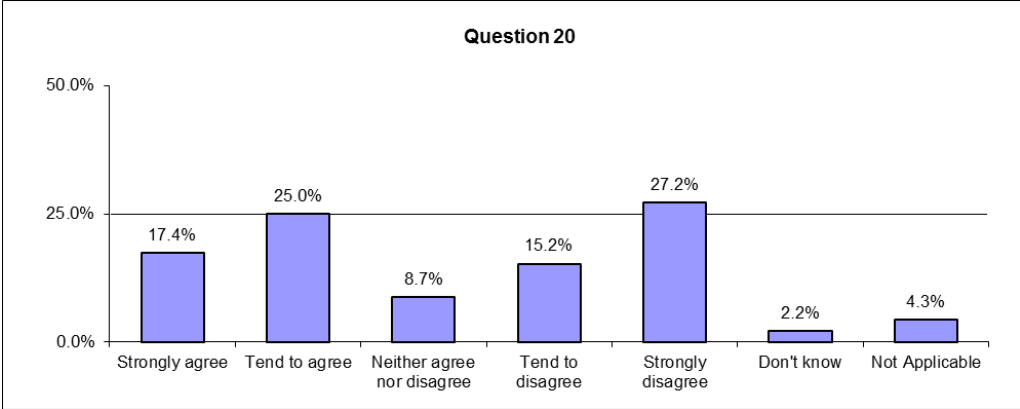
Respondents were concerned about recruitment and retention within the sector if the rate was lowered or kept at an unsustainable level. They made references to value for money, saying that care through agency staff is generally more expensive.

Respondents said that all PAs should be better remunerated and that this remuneration should recognise the vital services they provide and the conditions they work in e.g. in difficult situations at irregular and/or inconvenient times. They went on to state that the current proposals were effectively introducing a pay cut and it was difficult for them to select an option that effectively in the end would be them making a choice to reduce services to disabled people or their loved ones.

Respondents wanted flexibility and sustainability with direct payment rates; with the choice to pay more or less. Some wanted to leave it as it is as the system was working for them. They felt the Council was complicating matters when it did not need to do so. Respondents recognised that within the social care sector and in particular within the direct payment arena, pay needs to be competitive as well as sustainable.

Respondents also were sceptical about the Council's ability to manage these financial arrangements at a time when it, the Council, is not considered to be managing its overall functions well.

Respondents were then asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the Council's preferred option to introduce the banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid a minimum of £8.10 per hour. This question created a split from the 92 respondents who answered the question, with a total of 42.4% each agreeing and disagreeing.



Respondents who said that they agreed commented that it was fair to set a minimum rate but that there should be scope for a higher rate. They commented too on the rate not being increased for a of number years which made it hard to recruit and retain the workforce. Other respondents stated that the changed rate should only be applicable to new employees/ contracts.

Respondents consistently stated that personal assistants are highly valued and need to be paid a fair and comparable rate to other professions. They also said that having personal assistants enabled many to live independently and that their value was more than the monetary rate that they are paid.

Respondents who said that they disagreed made consistent comments about on-costs. They felt that as the Council took more of the on-costs, the level of direct payment would reduce. They felt their own on-costs expenses would still increase and that this would subsequently mean a reduction in their DP balance for them to pay their PAs. Respondents also felt that the Council was trying to cut pay and that the rates did not take account of holiday pay, pensions and sick absence/ coverage.

They felt that the rate was low and inconsistent for what was needed. Some suggested rates of £10 an hour whilst another suggested a rate of £14 an hour, saying that the rate needed to reflect the “real cost of care”. A respondent said that Northamptonshire operated one of the lowest rates within the country. Respondents commented about the specialist care and the specialism that PAs have and that the “worth” of the care is best valued by the person receiving it and hence the provision of a higher rate could be justified where there were complex care arrangements. Where care arrangement are well established, with PAs matched to the individual, respondents did not want that to be jeopardised, and suggested that new rates should only be applied to new employees/ personal assistants.

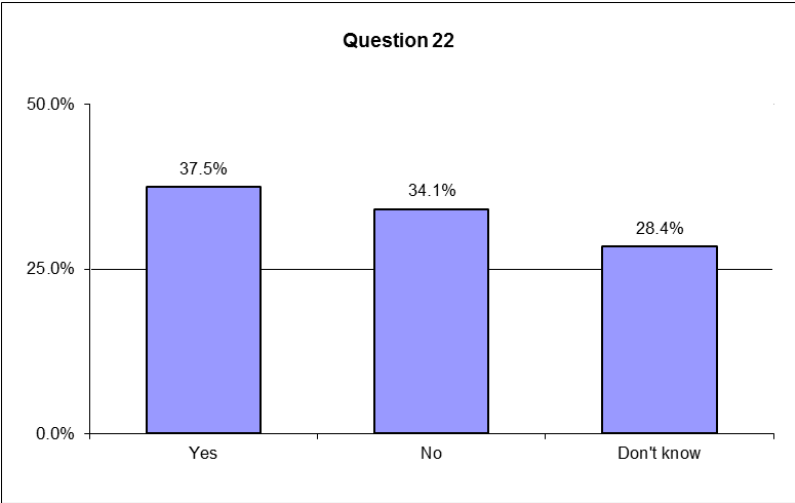
Respondents also felt that the proposal was taking away their choice. They felt that the proposal was too rigid and not person centred and that trying to find a PA rate that suited everyone would have an negative impact resulting in diminishing a scarce workforce as well as a reduction in quality and skills.

A couple of comments were provided given by those respondents who said ‘Neither agree nor disagree’. They said that different levels of skills required different pay rates, whilst another respondent agreed with the banding proposed but the requirement should have flexibility so that more carers could be on the employer’s payroll.

Of the comments made by respondents who stated ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Not applicable’. One said the current payment is lower than suggested, another said that other professions such as cleaners get paid more for an hour’s work.

How we may introduce any changes

Respondents were then asked to consider how any proposed changes should be implemented. They were asked if any new ways of calculating the DP rate should be introduced when an existing customer gets a new Personal Assistant. There was a mixed response from the 88 respondents who answered this question, with 37.5% of respondents saying ‘Yes’, 34.1% saying ‘No’, and 28.4% of respondents saying ‘Don’t know’.

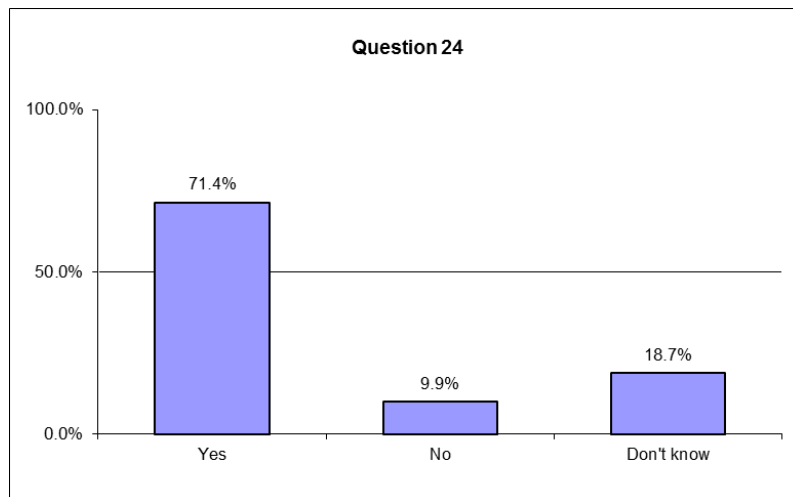


When asked why, those respondents who said ‘Yes’ stated they did so because they felt it would be fair for everyone to have the same process, and that it should only be applied to new PAs and not existing PAs so as to not affect their current hourly rate. Respondents said the rates should be aligned with new staff as that appeared to be an appropriate time to implement changes.

The most frequent reason respondents answered ‘No’ was because if someone had a team of employees they felt it would be unfair to pay some more than others for doing the same role, and this would create inequity. Some respondents felt it would be too complicated to have two different systems. A similar number expressed their lack of trust of the Council, and felt these proposals would be at the disadvantage of customers.

The majority of the small number of respondents who said ‘Don’t know’ stated it was because they wanted to see more information and that they wanted to know the final outcome of the calculation.

Respondents were then asked should people who already have a Direct Payment for employing a Personal Assistant(s) be able to stay on their current rate if they can demonstrate that any new ways of calculating their rate would not be suitable for them. The vast majority of respondents (71.4%) said that people should be allowed to do so.



A variety of responses were provided by the 46 respondents who told us what they thought customers would need in order to demonstrate that none of the new ways of calculating their rate would be suitable for them as shown in the below ‘Wordcloud’:



The most common evidence respondents thought customers would need in order to demonstrate that none of the new ways of calculating their rate would be suitable for them was that it should be personalised and based on their own needs and health requirements

and that it should take into account any additional support that is being provided to them by family and friends, and evidence of their needs held within their medical records.

Many respondents felt their Direct Payment financial account statement should be sufficient, as this provides spending details.

Others said it should be based on the type of care provided by the PA along with their skills, qualifications, and experience.

A small number of respondents said having more than one PA should be sufficient evidence. A similar number said it should be a little as possible information or that it should be without question.

Some took this opportunity to state the rate is not high enough, especially for special needs carers, and that it should be increased in order for PAs to be paid a higher amount and to cover the on-costs. Others stated the system is not fair or that they needed to know the outcome before being able to provide feedback.

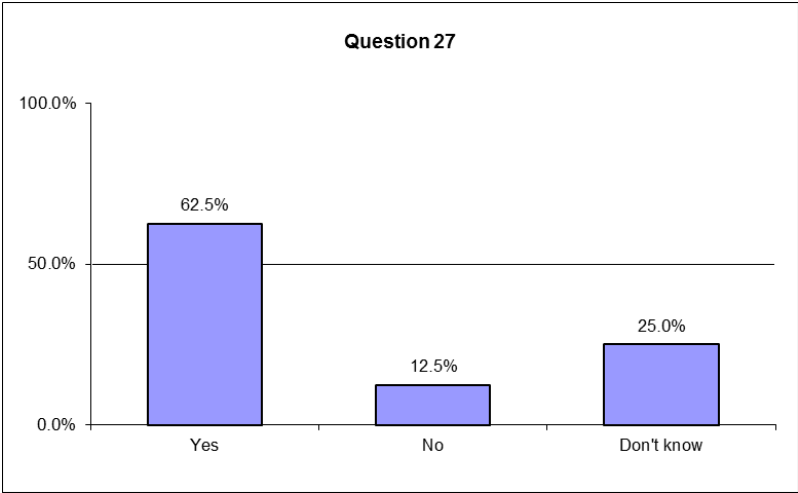
A total of 45 respondents took the opportunity to provide comments when asked if they had any alternative suggestions about how the Council could calculate the Direct Payment rate to make sure that people get what they need but don't get more than they need. Some took the opportunity to repeat or make reference to their previous comments, whilst others stated they did not have any alternative suggestions.

The other most frequent comments made were requests to keep the system the same and that customers liked the system and should be allowed to accrue budgets during 6-12 months because this accrual may be needed i.e. with a gap between carers during recruitment or required at a later stage for additional emergency extra. However respondents felt that it was reasonable for the Council to claim any agreed underspend back within an agreed timeframe.

Many respondents want the system to take a personalised approach and that the 'whole picture' of a customer's circumstances should be taken into account when considering their budget and that customers should be engaged with this process, and communicated with better. A similar number of respondents felt accounts should be reviewed regularly and at least during the customer's annual review.

A small number of respondents felt there should be more scope to pay a higher rate and that the rate should take into account the varying costs of PAs, including a higher rate for those with more complex needs.

The majority of respondents (62.5%) think people who already have a Direct Payment for employing a Personal Assistant(s) should be able to move to any new ways of working (if this works for them) from their next annual review.



Those respondents who said 'No' were asked when they thought people who already have a DP for employing a PA should be able to move to any new ways of working. The most frequent reason given was only when it was requested or is suitable for the customer, and that customers should not be made to change to a new system if the current one is working well. A small number of respondents felt the proposal was being used by the Council in order to implement budget cuts. Another suggestion was when there was a significant change in circumstances or on new employment of an assistant.

Any other comments

Respondents were invited to provide any further comments and a total of 54 comments were made.

Respondents gave accounts of their own experience of direct payments and made suggestions and statements about direct payments.

A few comments were made about leaving things the way they were, accepting that the few cases where there were discrepancies should be looked at. They felt that the proposals would entail unnecessary expense.

Respondents expressed their desire for the Council to be proactive in helping carers and customers. They suggested using a recruitment drive similar to the ones the Council deploys for the recruitment of foster carers.

Respondents passionately expressed the value of PAs in helping their personal wellbeing and contributing to safeguarding vulnerable members of the community. A respondent further

added that due to the existing system, they are able to contribute to the community and feel valued as well as safe.

Respondents reiterated comments they had made in other areas of the questionnaire. They said that a higher rate e.g. £10.00 per hour, would be more appropriate for complex needs. They said that staff/ employees are lost when they moved to agencies who provide a better pay rate. They wanted more help with recruitment and retention of staff. Some felt that people with disabilities were being impacted by the financial problems the Council faces. Respondents did not want their personal contributions to increase.

Some respondents felt that the proposals were not clear enough. They need a clearer set of conditions for people to evaluate and see how they would spend the money.

Others said they did not understand the role of PAs or the differing arrangement and entitlements.

4.2 Feedback received at public events

A total of 18 people attended the 4 public drop-in events that were held across the county. The events were delivered to enable attendees to discuss the consultation and engagement subject matters on an individual basis with officers. This arrangement allowed attendees to ask questions and provide their feedback, and to receive assistance, if required, in completing a questionnaire. No attendees needed assistance in completing the questionnaire at the events. Many of those that attended the drop-in events indicated that they had not completed the questionnaire but it was their intention to do so.

Attendees commented on the design of the DP systems and questioned why they could not decide their own pay rates. They were concerned about the way in which PAs rate were set, the levels of funding provided and the future of funding. Some attendees wanted to understand what was being proposed and wanted help with receiving the consultation in an accessible format so that they could complete the questionnaire at home. Volunteers or officers from Healthwatch Northamptonshire came to all events, and the proposals were discussed with officers on a one to one basis.

Attendees at the events gave a range of feedback. Some said they felt the consultation was confusing in that it related to PA payment rate and not overall direct payments; and that they felt threatened that the direct payment/personal budget would be changed. They commented that the current system works for them and that having a 'stricter' process would comprise flexibility that was required and is important with DP. An attendee said that they used less hours in order that they could pay their employee more and that the current proposed rates needed to be higher in order to get good carers. Another said that all

payment rates for care should be brought in line with each other i.e. children's service rates and adult social rates; matched along with private and public i.e. agency rates.

Some attendees expressed a desire to see DP reviews being undertaken at a more regular pace with the customer being able to instigate reviews themselves, when they, the customer, decide on changes to packages. Another attendee said that DP should be a holistic payment with all decisions about support being made by the customer.

Feedback was received stating employers should have flexibility around support but should receive expert advice when required. An attendee suggested that information and training should be available for customers in order for them to understand, comply with and submit all correct paperwork/ administrative functions that the Council required.

Comments were also received on the payment rate with an attendee suggesting an increased rate for self employed PAs. Attendees mentioned that a £9.89 (or similar) PA rate does not balance out against expensive agency rates. They said that the Council would risk increased costs from losing PAs. Some attendees voiced concern about national government policy on adult social care, saying that carers and personal assistants should not sit at the bottom of the pay spectrum.

Attendees who agreed with the proposal for the DP rate made observations that it made financial accounting sense on paper but they were not sure how it would work in practice. Others were concerned that NCC were not regularly monitoring and invoicing customers in time, especially when things changed for the customer.

Observations were also made about difficulties with PA recruitment and retention; the sustainability and quality of care, especially when parents/carers passed away or family members became too old to provide care. Others commented on how they, as family and friends, topped up rates in order to get the best care. They also mentioned that if a private arrangement for a top up was in place, this should reflect in deductions being applied.

In addition to the 4 public drop-in events, 2 attendees (one with their PA) attended an event specifically arranged by Get on Board (formerly known as Northamptonshire Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB)) for customers with a learning disability. Due to the low number of attendees the event structure was adapted to suit the specific attendee requirements. Officers talked through a presentation and ensured the customers understood the content by using accessible activities and giving opportunities for questions and answers. Although no direct feedback was given back on the consultation proposals one customer took away a paper copy of the easy read questionnaire for completion and the other stated they had already completed the questionnaire online.

4.3 Written and telephone feedback received

The consultation generated various telephone queries and some email correspondence, most of which were from people requesting paper copies of the consultation materials or seeking clarification on specific queries they had regarding the consultation proposals.

There were three direct written submissions that contained feedback which has been considered as part of the consultation findings.

One respondent wrote in after attending one of the public drop-in events to raise their concerns over the lack of public attendees considering how the proposals may impact on an individual with a Direct Payment, and requested that the Council hold more public events considering the rural nature of the county and difficulties some carers may have in accessing transport.

The second written submission stated providers of care services ordinarily increase charges annually and that there is no formal process to notify the Council of these increases, and that there is poor communication within the system.

The third response was from Healthwatch Northamptonshire who provided feedback upon each option, which is summarised below:

- Proposal 1 – Healthwatch felt it was important that disability related expenditure is calculated by taking a person-centred approach to individual needs and circumstances and that this should apply at all stages of the process including initial assessment and any review following a change of circumstances, and that this is more prevalent in light of potential stress caused by the changes and reassessments in benefits. Healthwatch felt that the Council does not currently appear to have effective processes in place to deal promptly with any changes in circumstances. Healthwatch felt a differential rate of payment would be detrimental to those who find it difficult to fully convey their own needs, and they felt this approach would be divisive. Healthwatch stated that the consensus view of people who submitted comments to them was a preference for Option 1a - to retain the present system of paying the same hourly rate with occasional exceptions based on special circumstances. They felt the majority of situations where people are receiving care packages were complex, and the higher level of pay is necessary to attract staff with the required level of knowledge, experience and skills.
- Proposal 2 – again Healthwatch mentioned the need for having a person-centred approach which gives individual service users choice in deciding on the appropriate level of independence and/or support they feel they need to enable them to manage their personal budgets. Healthwatch want a system which encourages and supports customers to turn to the local authority for help and support, i.e. payroll issues, without this jeopardising their assessment and independence. Healthwatch asked the

Council to provide regular updates on any changes and developments which would affect service users and for strong signposting to further information and/or support.

- Proposal 3 – Healthwatch stated that there is a unanimous view within its canvassed members that the minimum rate of pay should be Option 3d (£8.20 per hour) in order to attract the quality of staff required, and feel there is a need for an annual pay rise to help retain staff who had gained in experience and expertise, as this would improve staff retention and will help reduce costs in the long term. Healthwatch stated they have received feedback from employers of PAs advising them of difficulties they have experienced in recruiting and retaining personal assistants who have the required skills and personality.
- Proposal 4 – Healthwatch’s consensus view about the timing of the implementation of changes is in favour of having it take place at the point of review for each individual, and that there should be a prompt review if there was a sudden change or deterioration in a person’s situation.

In addition to the above Healthwatch also mentioned the importance of having a publicised policy regarding the timescale for the clawback of excess funds in a service user’s account, as well as advice and information for customers who require support in managing their accounts. Healthwatch also suggested it would be beneficial to have a users’ support network/forum, to enable customers to share information and expertise, with each other and the Council.

4.4 Feedback received during presentation to Healthwatch Northamptonshire Task and Finish Group

At the request of Healthwatch Northamptonshire, an officer attended their Task and Finish Group. The group were given an overview of the proposals and were invited to provide feedback and ask questions. The session was attended by 5 members of Healthwatch and consisted of Healthwatch staff and volunteers, some of which identified that they either have a Direct Payment or administer one on behalf of somebody. They also said they use their Direct Payment to employ Personal Assistant(s).

There was general agreement between the attendees that the Council’s preferred options were workable and well-thought out, although one attendee believed maintaining the status quo was preferable.

Specific concerns were raised over:

- Using an exact calculator as this was considered to be too ‘long winded’.
- That the Council’s review systems are too complex and too irregular and would make introducing the proposals difficult.

- The criteria for a separate 'complex rate' would be difficult to design and that a single PA rate applied to all would be fairer.
- Any uplift in a PA's hourly rate needs to be much more significant in order to attract good staff, especially compared with agency pay rates.
- The proposals must allow proper communication to all DP recipients, and not just those that use PBSS for payroll, pensions, etc.
- It was suggested that peer support sessions, user/carer panels, and best practice employer training would be advantageous.

5. Conclusion

Feedback was received to this consultation mostly from employers of Personal Assistants, NASS customers, their family/unpaid carers, which when combining questionnaire responses with attendance at events and letters and emails, totalled 189 responses.

Focusing on the consultation responses there is some support for having a calculator that is used for all (or new) employers to calculate how much on-costs are going to be and therefore how much the hourly rate would need to be.

The proposal for PBSS to arrange and pay for some things when they are needed by all (or new) customers, rather than include these things in the hourly rate, generated mixed views, with many feeling that it is taking choice and control away from the customer and goes against the principles of personalisation.

Respondents were against the idea of introducing a banded calculator on the assumption of Personal Assistants being paid £8.10 per hour, and would prefer for the system to remain unchanged as they feared they would ultimately face a reduction in their overall Direct Payment balance, leaving them with less to pay their Personal Assistants.

There was strong opinion that people who already have a Direct Payment for employing a Personal Assistant should be able to stay on their current rate if they can demonstrate that any new ways of calculating their rate would not be suitable for them, and that any changes should not be forced upon them.

Respondents in favour of the proposals generally felt they provided a fair and transparent framework for which calculations and payments are made.

Throughout the feedback many respondents gave their account of their own experience of Direct Payments with some requests to leave things as they are. Some took the opportunity to criticise the Council's own financial management and said they were fearful that the

proposals would be used in a way that will ultimately reduce people's budgets and leave them with less Direct Payment than they currently have.

Some felt the proposals would negatively affect those with complex care needs and/or more than one Personal Assistant. Others made reference as to the rate being too low and the need for this to be increased to enable better pay for their Personal Assistants or to aid recruitment and retention of staff.

Some respondents said they found the consultation materials too confusing including some of language or jargon used, with some seeking clarity from officers on the proposals, including attending one of the public events for assistance and clarification. Some people did not understand that the consultation was about the Direct Payment rate for Personal Assistants and not about stopping or reducing their own Direct Payment rate. Others raised how complicated they felt Direct Payments were, including the organising of their care, especially for those with complex care needs.

6. Equalities Statistics Summary

Equalities monitoring questions were asked of each questionnaire respondent who completed the publicly facing questionnaire, although not all respondents chose to complete this section of the questionnaire.

From the available completed responses, just over half of the individual responses were female (53.4%). The majority of the respondents were aged between 30 to 64 years (68.2%).

There were a reasonably balanced number of respondents from residents living across the county for all respondents, with unsurprisingly the highest number of respondents living in Northampton (26.1%), although there were also a large number of responses from people living in East Northamptonshire (22.7%).

Other identified equality monitoring information provided by respondents demonstrated that 51.9% were disabled, with physical disability being highlighted as the most frequent disability, followed by learning disability and mental health. The most common religion identified was Christian at 58.3% with 25.0% of respondents choosing 'None'. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White 85.9%, with 5.9% from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The majority of respondents were heterosexual (74.7%).

Full statistics of the responses is in Appendix 2.