



## Direct Payments Factsheet – Using an Agency

You may want to use an agency, sometimes known as a domiciliary care agency, to provide your care. If you choose to use an agency the staff who will work with you will usually be employed by the agency. In this case you will not be the employer, and the agency will be responsible for managing the staff and paying their wages.

You will still maintain your choice and control as you will make arrangements directly with the agency and will be able to say how, when and where your support will be provided.

You will be responsible for paying the agency's invoice, when you receive it, from your direct payments card account. Some people prefer to set up a direct debit with the agency so that the payments are made on a regular basis. You will need to request a form from the agency to set up this payment method.

Always check that you have discussed all of your arrangements with the agency and have an agreement in writing.

Ensure that the agency has given you a breakdown of all their charges in writing. You do not want to have any unexpected costs, such as additional charges for mileage, bank holidays etc. that you have not previously agreed to pay. Sometimes an agency may charge an hourly rate which is more than the direct payment hourly rate paid to you. It is likely you will have to pay the difference from your own personal funds. The council advises you to discuss any additional costs with your social worker when your direct payments are arranged.

Before you decide to buy a service from a particular agency we recommend that you ask the agency:

- about their registration with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for a copy of their insurance policy.
- whether all their staff have had a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly called a CRB check).
- how they manage their staff and how often someone will come and check that you are happy with the service being provided.
- whether they employ the staff and meet all of their tax and national insurance payments.
- how they would deal with any complaint you may have with their service.
- what cover arrangements will be made to cover staff holiday, sickness, etc.
- what type of training they provide for their staff and the qualifications and training their staff are required to have.



- how you can tell them if you are not happy with their service. whether they carry out a risk assessment for you and the staff.
- whether you will be given copies of the hours the staff work so that you can pay the correct amount.
- how much it will cost you to use their service and to pay the money to them.

Once you have been working with individual members of staff for some time you may think you could employ them directly as Personal Assistants and not use the agency. We strongly recommend that you talk to us before you do this. Some agency agreements allow you to employ their staff directly but may charge you a fee as part of their conditions for providing the service for you.

We have only given you a few suggestions of the type of questions you may want to ask. Please think about the information you want and what questions you need to ask the agency to help you to choose the right agency for you.

If the agency tells you they will not be able to continue providing care for you, please contact the council's First Response Team 0208 489 1400 and ask to speak to a duty social worker or the Direct Payments Support Team as soon as possible.

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