

Agenda Item	9
Report No	JMC-09-25

Committee:	Joint Monitoring Committee
Date:	12 June 2025
Report Title:	Self Directed Support / Carers Funding
Report By:	Chief Officer & Chief Social Work Officer– Health and Social Care

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the implementation and impact of **Self- Direct Support (SDS)**, particularly **Option 1 (Direct Payments)**, and the associated **Carers Funding** within NHS Highland and Highland Council services.

The report highlights:

Substantial Growth in Option 1 Usage:

- There has been a marked increase in the uptake of Option 1 in both Adult Services and Children's Disability Services over the past four years.
- In Adult Services, Option 1 users increased from 467 in March 2022 to 800 in March 2025.
- In Children Services, Option 1 recipients increase to 481 in 2024 with notable regional growth.

Investment in Personal Assistant (PA) Rates:

- NHS Highland increased PA hourly rates to ensure competitiveness (Urban: £19.09 / Rural: £19.69 / Remote: £20.27)
- Highland Council's Children's Services PA rate remains at £15.01, and does require to be reviewed

Challenges in Service Delivery:

- Despite investment, there are growing difficulties in accessing appropriate personal assistance, leading to unspent funds being returned and reinvested.
- The rise in Option 1 usage reflects a decline in traditional care models (Option3), indicating a shift in the adult social care market.

Support for unpaid carers:

- The NHS Highland Carer's Wellbeing Fund provides personalised supports - including Short Breaks – to unpaid carers to sustain their roles.
- The report emphasizes the importance of unpaid carers and their need for continued support.

National Alignment and Strategic Development:

- Both Adult and Children's Service's are aligning with the Self-Directed Support Framework of Standards (2024).
- Collaborative efforts with national and third-sector partners aim to transform SDS practice and commissioning strategies across Highland.

Children's Services Trends:

- A significant increase in children with additional support needs has been recorded.
- There is a growing reliance on SDS, particularly Option 2, as Option 1 usage has declined from 58% in 2022 to 40% in 2025.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the substantial growth in Option 1's in adult services during the last four years and to also note the significant financial investment of NHS Highland to increase the personal assistant rate to ensure those employing personal assistants could compete in a competitive local recruitment market.
- ii. Note the substantial growth in Option 1 and 2s during the last four years in Children's Disability Service within Highland Council.

3 Implications

3.1 Resource - There are no specific resource issues arising from this report.

3.2 Legal – There are no specific legal implications from this report.

3.3 Risk - There are no specific risks arising from this report.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no Health and Safety implications as a result of this report.

3.5 Gaelic - There are no Gaelic implications as a result of this report.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report for Committee which requested updates on the types of support people were receiving from an Option 1 and therefore an impact assessment is not required. There is an update on both Carers and Self-Directed Support (SDS) also included in the assurance report on this agenda.

5 Option 1's Adult Services, NHS Highland – Local Context

- 5.1 It is important to understand current commissioning trends (see trend graph in Section 6.1) when comparing the substantial growth of Option 1s with other commissioned service options as there are geographical service delivery pressures and a changing market context for NHS Highland.

This report focusses on Option 1's which is explained below for clarity:

Option 1's, commonly known as Direct Payments; refer to the monies paid to individuals, which they use to arrange their own care and support. They have full choice, control, and responsibility for arranging support to meet their assessed care needs.

- 5.2 As reported to Highland Health and Social Care Committee on 28 June 2023, NHS Highland has agreed a co-produced new reference hourly rate for Options 1's in partnership with Community Contacts and the SDS Peer Support Group by establishing a fair, transparent, and mutually understood personal assistant hourly rate.
- 5.3 As requested by committee, it is difficult to categorise in detail the type of support people is receiving from an Option 1, but these mainly consist of personal assistant support tasks and activities which include – but are not limited to - the provision of personal care and short breaks. There is not a prescribed list of tasks and activities for the 800 individual recipients of Option 1's.
- 5.4 Costing care and identifying budgets was identified as a key component of the agreed Self-Directed Support Strategy and it was the aim of NHS Highland in partnership with key stakeholders to describe a fair, equitable and sustainable framework for the calculation of individual budgets.

This significant cost investment by NHS Highland was required to ensure the sustainability of current Option 1 packages; which are still the most cost effective and efficient delivery models, and which have significantly grown, primarily due to the absence of any other traditional delivery and more expensive care models.

Before the agreed changes which were implemented in October 2023, the single agreed hourly rate was £15.52 per hour.

The **current** 2025-26 Personal Assistant hourly rates for Option 1s are:

- Urban Rate = £19.09 per hour
- Rural rate = £19.69 per hour
- Remote rate = £20.27 per hour

- 5.5 All Integrated Joint Boards and Local Authorities have a statutory duty to offer and provide all four options with the SDS Standards stating, "the overall care budget needs to be realistic in terms of meeting assessed care need".

NHS Highland will continue to promote all SDS approaches, including Option 1's, as a sustainable delivery model. As we see a reduction in traditional Option 3 provision the

take up of Option 1 is crucial to the sustainability of providing support, while continuing to promote choice, flexibility and control.

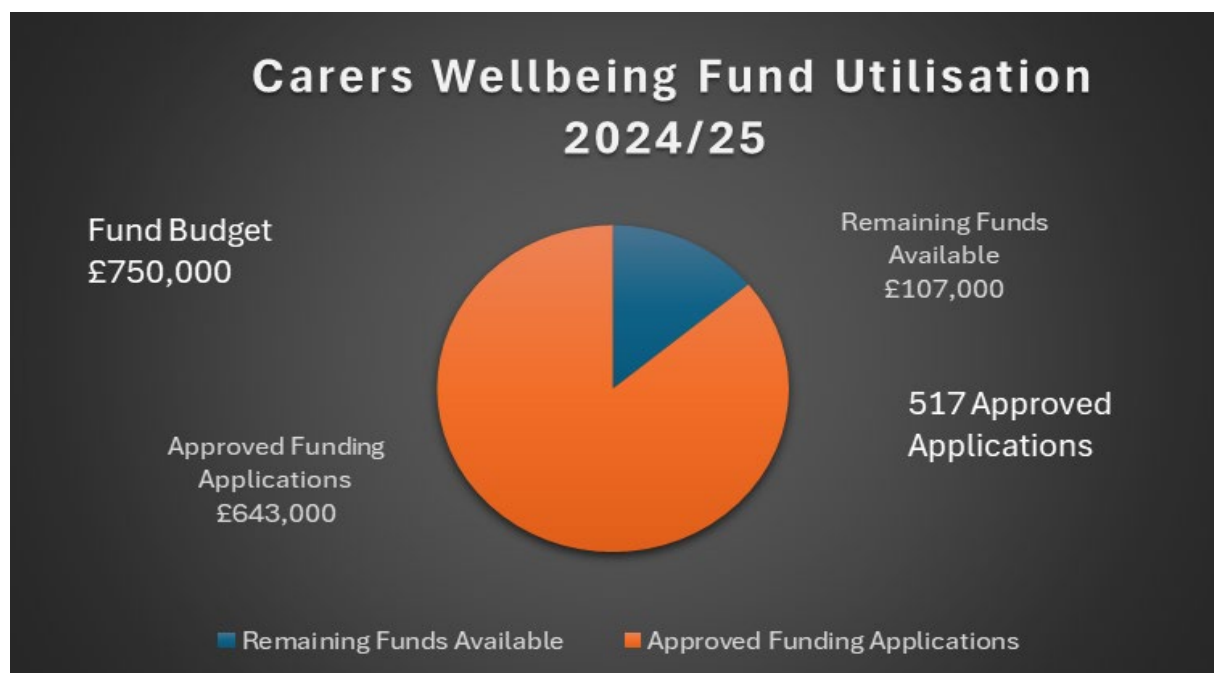
- 5.6 NHS Highland is aware that, despite their assessed care need, there are many users who are not able to access appropriate personal assistance: therefore, we are seeing regular accumulations which are returned to NHS Highland and reinvested in any new care packages. Despite the growth and investment in Personal Assistant hourly rates, the rate of accumulations is increasing so there is clearly pressure on this service delivery option for individuals to access the care that they require.

Work is underway to promote the unique opportunities that becoming a Personal Assistant (PA) can offer to individuals who are considering entering the Social Care Workforce. We have seen some successes in this area, but recognise that there is still much to do to grow and support the PA workforce

6 Self-Directed Support and Support for Unpaid Carers

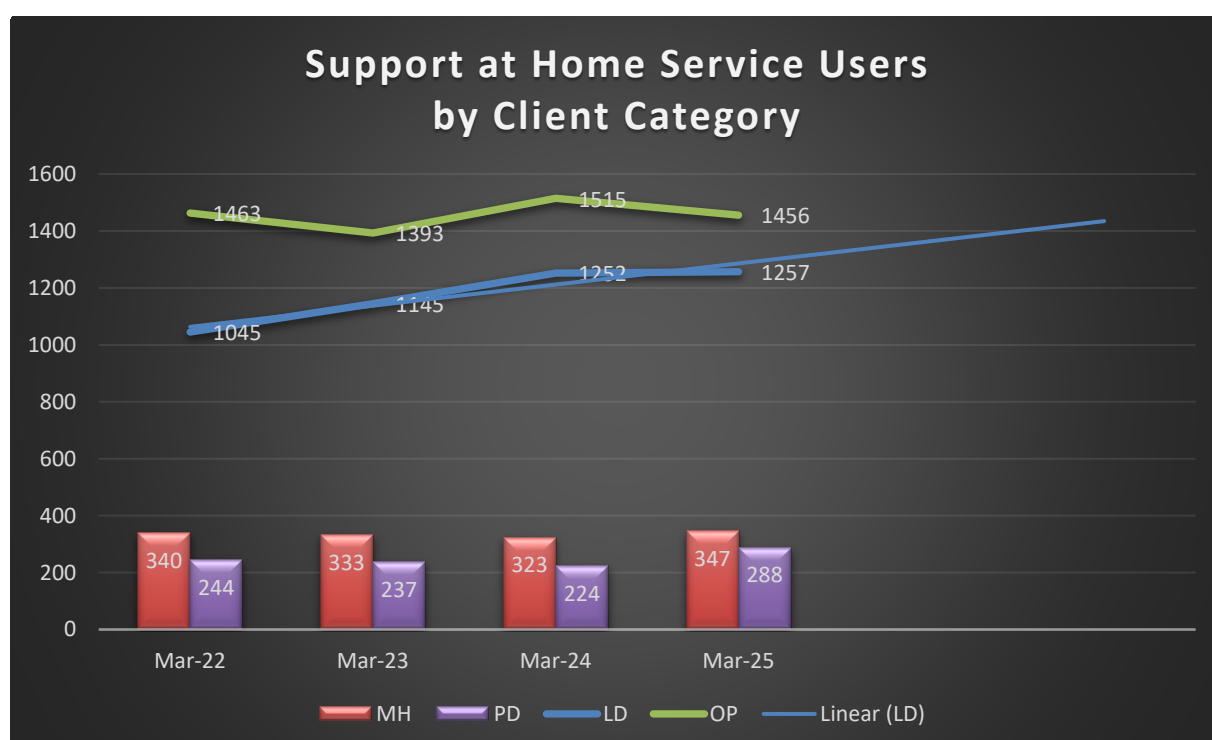
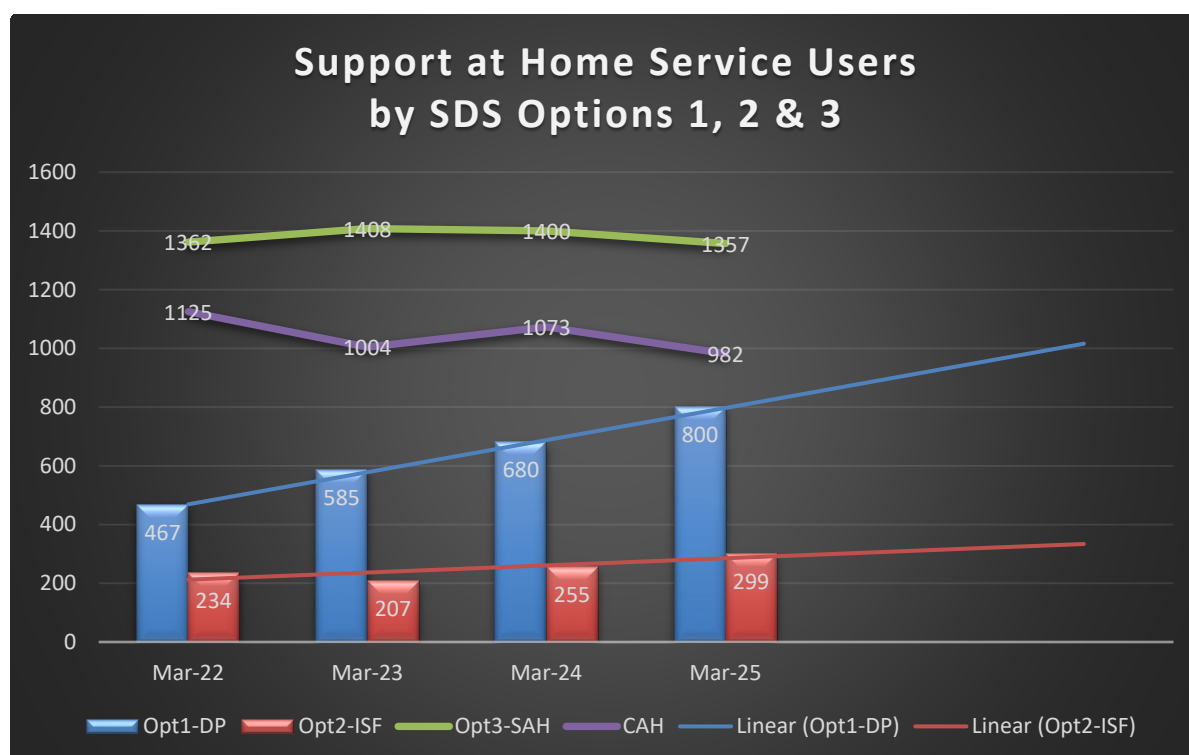
- 6.1 The Committee is aware of the importance of carers to sustainable service delivery in terms of unpaid carers and those carers who are formally employed as Personal Assistants as an Option 1 care service. In terms of unpaid carers both the Council and NHS Highland recognise their caring role and that is also recognised by the Scottish Government in terms of support which must be offered to that cohort, which is delivered, in part, using the NHS Highland Carer's Wellbeing Fund.

Details are set out in the following table and the assistance is targeted to support unpaid carers to be willing and able to maintain their caring role: this is most often in the form of providing personalised supports which allow unpaid carers a short break from their usual caring patterns and routines.



Option 1 provision of direct payments (to support the employment of a Personal Assistant) has seen sustained levels of growth for both younger and older adults in all areas.

Option 1's now account for 11% of all commissioned spend for this flexible and popular personalised care option. The following table(s) show the growth of Option 1 vs the reduction in available care at home and statis support at home commissioned care client numbers.



These increases do however highlight the unavailability of other care options and increasing difficulties in the ability to commission a range of other care services which suggest a market shift in Adult Social Care service provision.

- 7.1 We need to ensure the work we do to develop SDS in Highland conforms to the practice principles laid out in the Self-Directed Support Framework of Standards (2024)

Self-Directed Support Framework of Standards (2024) | Care Inspectorate Hub

We have been working closely with our partners in Social Work Scotland, Community Contacts, Health Improvement Scotland's iHub; SDS Scotland and In Control Scotland to shape the culture and practice of SDS in Highland: creating spaces to listen and to learn. This work is aligned to the development of an Adult Social Care Programme aimed at transforming our practice model across Highland.

8 Children's Services

8.1 Option 1 Children's Services, Highland Council – Local Context

The Children's Disability Service (CDS) provides professionals, parent/carers and children with access to an additional level of specialist health and social care service where the priority is supporting children with the greatest and/or most complex needs/situations as a result of disability.

- 8.2 Getting it Right for Every Child recognises that children and their families are often best placed to know what kind of additional help would make the most difference. Self-Directed Support Option 1 is an opportunity for families to have full choice, control, and responsibility for arranging support to meet their assessed care needs and to deliver better outcomes for their child.

- 8.3 Highland has a significant remote and rural geography and a high proportion of areas in the most access deprived in Scotland. One in three children and young people under 18 reside in remote rural areas.

- 8.4 In 2021, 43 percent of pupils in Highland schools were recorded with additional support for learning needs. The number of pupils recorded with additional learning support needs has increased since 2015, likely reflecting continued improvements in recording and increases in child-specific needs.
Data from August 2023 shows within this population that children with diagnosed or with a suspected disability in Highland make up 55 % of this group.

- 8.5 In March 2023 Highland Council agreed an hourly rate for Options 1's of £15.01 across Highland. This hourly rate does not take into account the additional costs incurred within rural and remote areas of Highland.

- 8.6 Option 1 PA hourly rate within Children's Disability Service is between 27% and 34% lower than the hourly PA rate of NHSH Adult Services.

- 8.7 Current trends identify a significant growth in the number of children and young people requiring Self Directed Support in Highland.

Support to families through Self Directed Support (SDS)

YEAR	SOUTH	MID	WEST	NORTH	TRANSITION	TOTAL/ option 1
2016	90	35	21	37	N/A	183
2017	139	38	32	42	N/A	251
2018	126	46	19	31	2	224
2019	142	41	21	24	27	255

2020	86	46	8	16	30	156
2021	91	82	27	10	32	242
2022	100	82	16	17	39	254 /149
2023	142	128	14	28	79	391/ 148
2024	162	162	18	31	108	481/ 192

- 8.8 Option 1 support mainly consist of personal assistant support tasks and activities which include – but are not limited to - the provision of personal assistants to support activities and to provide short breaks. There is not a prescribed list of tasks and activities for the 481 individual recipients of Option 1's.

9 Self Directed support

- 9.1 In terms of Personal (paid) Assistants who are referred to generally as Option 1 provision of direct payments (to support the employment of a Personal Assistant) there has been increased numbers of Personal Assistants from 17 in 2023 to 46 in 2025 however there has been a significant decline in Option 1 use within this time, from 58% in 2022 to 40% at present.
- 9.2 Within this period Children's Disability Service has seen a significant increase in Option 2 provision.

10 Option One Children's Disability Services, Highland – National Context

- 10.1 We will ensure the work we do to develop SDS in Highland conforms to the practice principles laid out in the Self-Directed Support Framework of Standards (2024)
- 10.2 In Children's services, we have been working closely with our partners in Adult Social Work (NHS), Social Work Scotland, Community Contacts, SDS Scotland and In Control Scotland to shape the culture and practice of SDS in Highland: This work is aligned to developing and transforming our practice model across Highland.
- 10.3 We are working with our 3rd sector partners within a procurement and commissioning strategy to support pan Highland SDS support.
- 10.4 Highland Council Children's Service short break service has received additional investment, March 2025, to support the reopening of short break services in the Caithness, Inverness and Skye & Lochalsh areas.

Designation: Chief Officer and Chief Social Work Officer

Date: 29th May 2025

Authors: Ian Kyle; Ian Thomson; James Bain

Background Papers: None