

COVID-19 - Advice for Direct Payment Recipients who employ Personal Assistants

The following advice is based on the latest government guidance at the end of April. It is a generic briefing intended to give broad guidance and is not a substitute for detailed legal advice on the specific circumstances employers are facing. Employers should consult all relevant Government guidance and take independent legal advice.

1. What you need to do if you want to change (or have already changed) your support

If you want to increase, reduce or alter the support you have previously agreed with your Social Worker (or have already done so) you should discuss this with a Social Worker at the earliest opportunity. Please contact Sefton Council's Contact Centre and request to be referred to a Social Worker.

2. What you need to do if you employ a personal assistant

If you employ a personal assistant, you should take the following steps:

a) Urgently review your care arrangements

You should review the arrangements you currently have in place when your personal assistant is unable to work due to sickness or annual leave. You should consider if these arrangements are robust enough, should there be a need to cover any period where the personal assistant may need to self-isolate because they are ill themselves, are in a vulnerable group or live in a household where someone has developed symptoms of COVID-19.

b) Consider alternative options

If the above plans are not robust enough to provide you with essential ongoing care and support, then other options should be considered. This may include linking with other personal assistant employers and considering mutually beneficial arrangements. If you receive other sources of paid support (other than your personal assistant) via direct payment you could consider increasing this to cover any reduced personal assistant support and vice-versa. It may also be an option to seek additional support from family members during this time.

c) Consider employing alternative Carers

This could be additional personal assistants and/or care providers such as agencies who may be able to offer care and support or a back-up option. You should contact Sefton Council's Contact Centre if you wish to discuss these options with a Social Worker.

d) Update your key information

Ensure that details about how you like your care and support to be delivered are up to date with key information that can be shared with care staff who may not be familiar to you, including what you deem to be essential. Where possible, if there are any regular or reoccurring needs that are time-and day-specific please make a note of these. Ensure that other details, such as critical telephone numbers, are up to date and available to all care staff who support you.

e) If you have no alternative arrangements

Should you find yourself in a position where your personal assistant is unable to support you due to self-isolation or contraction of COVID-19 and you have no alternative arrangements available to you, you should contact Sefton Council's Contact Centre and request to be referred to a Social Worker.

The government has produced a template for contingency planning that you may find useful, you can access this document via the link below

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-people-receiving-direct-payments>

3. What to do if your PA, or someone they live with, has symptoms of Coronavirus and is unable to work

If you employ a personal assistant and they are concerned that they have COVID-19 they should follow NHS advice. If your personal assistant is advised to self-isolate at home, they should not visit and care for you until it is safe to do so. They should notify you of their inability to work in the same way that they would inform you of any other sickness absence.

They should seek advice on entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay.

Your Direct Payments Insurance Company will be available to offer employment advice and support, please contact them directly for further information.

4. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As a direct payment recipient, you are the Employer and therefore responsible for the Personal Assistants you employ. Employers and Personal Assistants need to work together to establish what PPE is required.

Health organisations and government guidance in relation to PPE is changing regularly. You should always check the latest government guidance to check what the current advice is for the use of PPE. There is a link to the Governments PPE hub in section 10 of this guidance.

Most recent advice (as at 7 May 2020) is that all carers who come into households (where they do not normally live) to undertake a caring or support role, should wear PPE. There are various types of PPE, and the most generally used will be gloves, mask and apron, whilst remembering to thoroughly wash hands regularly, and by using hand sanitiser as per the national guidance.

Most homecare workers and Personal Assistants are not expected to be undertaking aerosol generating procedures (AGPs), although some who are working in complex care may do so. AGPs include open suctioning of airways when caring for clients with tracheostomies. AGP precautions are also required for clients who are receiving ventilatory support at home. If your Personal Assistant is undertaking AGPs they may require a higher specification of PPE.

Government guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for care Workers delivering homecare (domiciliary care) can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-domiciliary-care>

We would recommend that you purchase a supply of PPE at the earliest opportunity if you have not done so already. Up to £70 per week of your direct payment can be used to purchase this. Receipts must be kept for any purchases of PPE. If you do not have enough funds in your direct payment account for essential PPE, or if the cost of your PPE will exceed £70 per week then you should contact Sefton Council's Contact Centre.

In an emergency if you are unable to access PPE yourself then you should contact the Carers Centre.

5. Paying your PA if their support has been paused

If you have made the decision to temporarily stop the care from your Personal Assistant e.g. if you are shielding or self-isolating, you should use the funds from your Direct Payment account to continue to pay them at their normal rate of pay. The Council will continue to pay your direct payment on the understanding that you will continue to pay your personal assistant and they should not be furloughed. This is in line with government guidance which states that:

“Where employers receive public funding for staff costs, and that funding is continuing, we therefore expect employers to use that money to continue to pay staff in the usual fashion – and correspondingly not furlough them. This also applies to non-public sector employers who receive public funding for staff costs.”

“This is because the majority of public sector employees are continuing to provide essential public services or contribute to the response to the coronavirus outbreak. The government considers PAs to be an essential worker, and as such, furloughing of this cohort should be minimal”

In a small number of cases it may be appropriate to furlough your Personal Assistant. You are advised to contact your Direct Payments Insurance Company if you are considering this, as they will be available to offer employment advice and support specific to your circumstances. If you do furlough your Personal Assistant, you must advise the Council by contacting Sefton Council's Contact Centre.

6. If you attend a day centre

If your day centre has closed due to the COVID-19 virus, you should check the agreement that you made with your provider to see if you must pay for non-attendance.

If you need additional support at home whilst you are not attending the day centre, then we recommend that you should contact your day centre provider to ask if they are able to provide you with any other support. You should also speak to family members to see if they can help you.

If you are needing to pay for additional support, then please ring Sefton Council's Contact Centre for assistance and request to be referred to a social worker.

7. Telecare

Telecare is a service that provides care and reassurance to the elderly and vulnerable, allowing them to live independently in their own home for longer. Sefton Arc's technology can provide wireless motion sensors, personal alarm pendants and movement monitoring sensors – ensuring safety in the home, medical dispensers (with consent of pharmacist), and bed and chair occupancy sensors.

Telecare equipment can also detect environmental changes such as floor, fire or carbon monoxide. Sensors will automatically raise an alarm at a monitoring centre where trained personnel will determine the appropriate course of action.

You can email Telecare Services at Lifeline.Service@sefton.gov.uk or call them on 0800 622 610. Sefton Arc Trusted Assessors will contact you to discuss appropriate equipment options and equipment is then ordered.

Falls Pendants and Arc Angels can be arranged within 24 hours of ordering. Other items of equipment can take between 3 and -7 working days depending upon supplier availability, from the day the order is submitted.

8. Education and Supporting Resources

The council has developed a document to highlight key areas where there are free education and supporting resources available for you and your Personal Assistants

both at a national level and what's available locally here in Sefton. The document can be accessed via the following link:

[https://www.sefton.gov.uk/social-care/social-care-provider-information/community-support-provision-information-\(including-domiciliary-care-and-day-care\).aspx](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/social-care/social-care-provider-information/community-support-provision-information-(including-domiciliary-care-and-day-care).aspx)

9. Useful local contacts:

Direct Payments Team - Sefton Carers Centre

E-mail: direct.payments@sefton.gov.uk

Website: www.sefton-carers.org.uk/index.php/direct-payments

Telephone: 0151 288 6060

Sefton Council Contact Centre

Email: AdultSocialCare@sefton.gov.uk

Website: www.sefton.gov.uk

Telephone 0345 140 0845

Sefton Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)

Email: mail@seftoncv.org.uk

Website: www.seftoncv.org.uk

Tel: 0151 920 0726

Sefton ARC

E-mail: Lifeline.Service@sefton.gov.uk

Website: www.seftonarc.com

Tel: 0800 622 610

10. Other Useful Information

GOV.UK – Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for people receiving Direct Payments)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-people-receiving-direct-payments>

Skills for Care: COVID-19: latest guidance to support individual employers (PHB holders and direct payment recipients) and PAs.

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Main-Menu-Items/COVID-19-IE-and-PA-updates.aspx>

GOV.UK – Coronavirus (COVID-19): What you need to do

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

NHS website – latest information on COVID-19

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

GOV.UK - Statutory Sick Pay

www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay

GOV.UK - Coronavirus (COVID-19): personal protective equipment (PPE) hub

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe?utm_source=c42b0a02-e40c-497c-9683-9106e2e1b3ca&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily

If you require this information in any other format, then please let us know by contacting SelfDirectedSupport@sefton.gov.uk