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## Sheffield Town Hall



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## Why we came together

I'm delighted to introduce this report of the inaugural Personal Assistant Workforce Summit. It was an honour to spend time with such an inspiring and dedicated group of people who are so committed to promoting the opportunities of the Personal Assistant (PA) role.

The summit emerged as a beacon of transformation, from a groundswell of conversations across different local authorities, community groups, and Individual Employers. The consensus from these discussions was clear – a shared struggle to find Personal Assistants (PAs). Despite an eagerness to enable people to be in control of their own support arrangements and employ PAs of their own choosing, there is a critical mismatch with the workforce currently available to do this. This stems from a distinct lack of knowledge of the role nationwide. As an Individual Employer for over 20 years, this struggle to employ PAs remains all too familiar to me. Knowing that there is a potential workforce seeking new opportunities in work that offers job satisfaction, rewarding employment and flexibility, prompted us to tackle this conundrum.

The ask was simple yet profound: bring together a diverse cohort in a single room, fostering a space for real, lived experiences to be shared, heard, and translated into actionable strategies.

The summit brought together influencers and change-makers committed to addressing the challenges of promoting the PA role and improving the offer to this workforce. This report presents the wide variety of insights and ideas that emerged. Discussions around converting the challenges into asks, actively sharing best practice from across the region and talking about the PA role at every opportunity to raise awareness. Commitments included developing PA networks and creating real incentives and benefits for the role. It was recognised that collecting and using data intelligently to inform strategy and using technology innovatively to support us in our endeavours. We also made firm promises for the future, including hosting a second PA Workforce Summit in 2024 so we can assess the progress we have made. The conversations we had during the summit must now serve as a catalyst for change.

I extend gratitude and appreciation to all participants who contributed their time, expertise, voices, and passion, and continue to champion this cause. Your dedication to amplifying the voices of the workforce and addressing the barriers that they and Individual Employers encounter is not only commendable but also emblematic of a community united in purpose.

We hope that this report inspires continued collaboration, advocacy, and action, marking a turning point in the journey toward a more visible, promoted, and responsive PA workforce. It is abundantly clear that while improving access to Direct Payments is a vital step, of equal importance is the creation and promotion of a robust PA workforce.

Mary Gardner  
Commission Manager for Direct Payments and Unpaid Carers  
Sheffield City Council

## The agenda

Time	Topic
9.45 – 10.15	Arrival and Registration
10.15 – 10.45	Welcome and Opening Remarks Mary Gardner Strategic Commissioning Manager - Sheffield City Council
10.45 – 11.00	Karen McCormick - inCharge CEO and Individual Employer
11:00 - 11:45	Exercise 1: Best Practice and progress that has been made
11.45 – 12.00	Abby Hands - Y&H ADASS
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch / Interactive Exhibit and networking
13.00– 13.15	Chris Hamnett - Embrace Wigan and Leigh and Individual Employer
13.15 – 14.00	Exercise and breakout 2: Challenges and Barriers
14.00– 14.20	Break / Interactive Exhibit and Networking
14.20– 14.35	Martin Walker - Think Local, Act Personal and Individual Employer
14.35 – 15.35	Exercise and breakout 3: Offers and Commitments (both public & personal)
15.35 – 15.45	Closing Remarks - Alexis Chappell - Strategic Director for Adult Care and Wellbeing - Sheffield City Council

## Our guest speakers

Thanks again to our fantastic group of guest speakers. Let's take a moment to remind you of their brilliance....



Karen is the Founder of the fantastic inCharge Ltd in Ireland.

Karen has been a PA employer for 2 years, employing 3 Personal Assistants to support her daughter to live well at home with her family and be included in her own community. Karen believes that a strong relationship between her daughter and her Personal Assistants and Karen, as their employer, enables everyone to live a more fulfilled life. Open communication, trust and with shared values are critical to this. The self-direction journey has directly influenced Karen's career path. Karen works part-time as Lived Experience Engagement Lead with IMPACT, the UK centre for evidence in adult social care.



Chris Hamnett is a dedicated Executive Officer at Embrace Wigan and Leigh, an organisation which supports disabled people in the area.

With a first-hand understanding of the impact of Direct Payments, Chris's journey has been shaped

by personal experiences. Growing up, his family employed a team of Personal Assistants to support Chris's brother, fostering a deep appreciation for the significance of tailored care. From a young age, Chris stepped into the role of a Personal Assistant, starting his journey in the field at just 16. This hands-on experience has given them unique insights into the nuances and challenges of providing direct support. Fuelled by his belief in the power of self-directed support, Chris advocates passionately for this approach, recognising its capacity to yield the most favourable outcomes for individuals with health and social care needs. In his role at Embrace Wigan and Leigh, Chris combines personal experience with professional dedication, striving to create meaningful, empowering opportunities for those who use Direct Payments.



Martin is a policy advisor at Think Local Act Personal and lives in Doncaster.

Whilst working for the Council there between 2007 and 2016 he implemented the changes driven by the 'putting people first' agenda and subsequently continued this work as the Care Act came along. "It's great to wear two hats as Doncaster's Adults and Communities teams have made a commitment both to the social care future vision and to TLAP's Making It Real. Caring for my 90-year-old mum brings this to life as I get involved in co-producing with workers at the council from a different perspective, sharing our lived experience of health and social care and support in the city to help with making improvements".

## Best practice and progress

Although we all acknowledge that there is a lot still to do to progress this agenda, it's important to take time to celebrate the successes. We took some time to write these down on post its and the sheer number shared was truly astounding!

The full list of celebrations is available in [Appendix A](#).

And here are the fantastic posters that everyone created to celebrate one success per table...



## Challenges and Barriers

Identifying the challenges that were in the forefront of our minds of the day, and asking for help to overcome them, was an important part of the day.

The full set of challenges is available in [Appendix B](#). It's a great resource to look at, if you want to check whether others are experiencing the same issues as you – if so perhaps think about getting involved in the next meeting of this community; together we may be able to find a solution.

## Offers

Attendees then worked to convert their challenges into 'asks' – requests for support from each other.

These asks were added to a series of themed flipcharts - People, Process, Tech, Info/Data and Other – and took some time to respond to each other's asks by offering their contact details to take this forward.

Thanks to everyone who shared a response to an ask!

**And if you're reading this, it's not too late to take part!**



## Get involved!

The list of asks is shown below. We've removed people's contact details but the full list, including responses, has been collated into a table that has been emailed out to all attendees of the summit.

If you are reading this (whether you attended or not!) and you see an ask on the list below and think you could help, please email [EmployPAs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:EmployPAs@sheffield.gov.uk) to have your details added to the central list so someone can reach out to you.

## The Asks

### People:

- How do we attract PAs and deliver a consistent standard of PA
- Amplify the good news as a region
- Encouragement of the experience! (It's OK if it's not a long-term career)
- Be more vocal – talk about the role
- Describe “an average day in the life of....”
- Career development pathway
- Power – need an equal playing field
- People-led campaigns
- Using social media and promotion
- Understand how we can do this tailored locally (support)
- Please view Proud to Care North Lincs
- Meet/employ more PAs
- Sharing information
- Share best practice, good examples to change perceptions
- Coproduced campaign to rebrand/showcase
- Develop DP LA network/Community of practice
- Education and training offer
- ASK – how can we support practitioners to offer Direct Payments consistently?
- PA support Network? Barbara Booter (Active Independence)
- Rebrand what being a PA is
- Organised campaign – real words, real stories, real experience
- Embrace ILG offer

### Process:

- Open orientation/induction
- Outcome focus support planning
- Investigate roll out of variable rates
- Share good practice via TLAP



- Rates of pay to be looked at – Sheffield Council have Fair Wage – PAs advice
- Pay and conditions.
- Provide the right resource and priority to improve things correctly
- Consistency re benefits and incentives re PA access to blue light cards
- To support IEs to recruit overseas workers
- Generate/work on a skills programme for PA employers
- Clearly document the process simply
- Support PA employers to employ

### Technology:

- PA job mobile app – platform for PAs and employers
- Make sure LA staff understand the PA role
- DP employer FB Group – National – Leona
- More PAs, employers and service to take advantage of the PA register
- Person centred technology
- Digital infrastructure to manage DPs
- Can there be a central site for all training to increase choice with all agencies, authorities etc using this one site

### Information/Data

- Sheffield PA rate tool needs sharing – see [www.sheffield.gov.uk](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk)
- Marketing PA role
- Train social worker and DP teams
- Training and development offer for trust employers
- Better data and understanding
- Empower employers by providing better info
- Training for workers/employers – Skills for Care are good
- Promise to set up a LA network to develop best practice, learning and co-produced ideas
- DP Training team – SW Training – Leona
- Shared ownership of data
- Better understanding of delivery
- Using data to make decisions

### Other:

- Expand local community networks
- Ensuring we take a collaborative approach
- Rebrand “PA” as term causes confusion
- Utilise other areas of workforce e.g. working parents and put things in place to enable them to work, such as contribute to childcare costs etc
- I want Greater Manchester to adopt Sheffield PA pay structure
- More priority for PA and DP
- Share a list of attendees, job titles and role descriptor at the end of the session (with consent) to make it easier to collaborate
- Help pay for childcare (and transport) to enable people to work as PAs
- Identify areas of collaboration to develop workforce
- Have organised talks in schools/universities (Chris/Karen)

- Work together as a region/ engage in regional ADASS groups
- Look at how we can increase the PA workforce in a supported way across health and social care.
- Develop more realistic way to calculate DP budgets
- Tell it as it is to DHSC/LGA – Martin Walker

## Commitments

A unique difference in this event, compared with others, was the commitment to making commitments! We want to see long-lasting effects as a result of coming together. And so this was the focus of the final set of exercises.

The full list of commitments is available in [Appendix C](#).

And thanks to those of you who wrote your commitments out and posed for a photographs. Behold our gallery...



## Our Commitments supporting and underpinning ADASS Yorkshire and Humber priorities



### ADASS Vision Statement

Our vision is for a sustainable social care and health system that provides excellent care and support throughout the region, promotes wellbeing and social justice, strengthens local communities and economies, and equips them to face new challenges

**Look at PA rates** like Sheffield has already done to consider all information and use to propose initiatives for workforce in my region

**Promote how exciting the PA role** is to raise awareness and encourage people to become PA's  
To develop and promote ILG PAs  
Health and Well being platform  
[www.ILG-PA.com](http://www.ILG-PA.com)

**To review the learning and development offer** for PA's in Sheffield  
To find lots of good stories of success- feed into 'proud to care' campaign

**To champion direct payments and self-directed support** in all areas of my life personal and professional

**Strategic Workforce Planning**

**Work with relevant organisations** to address recruitment processes

**To champion PA's to have access to employment benefits**  
To make information available to PA's about training. **Peer support groups**, ILG PA community, local social groups, in a 'one stop shop' and incentives

**Sustaining, growing and developing the workforce** to meet future demand

**Grow the PA workforce** by working with organisations, support services and communities

**Discuss what best promotes happiness**

**Enhancing the wellbeing of the workforce**

**To develop a PA support network**, working out what is important to PA's that is reflected in the working conditions which we can improve and offer

**Promote positive risk taking within our teams**  
To share the market development C.O.O.P report that has been commissioned to support Personal Health Budgets

**Building and enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce**

**Fight for fair pay and conditions** for PA's

**Champion PAs**

**Create multi-language materials and information packs**

**Enhance and grow inclusive and compassionate leadership**

**Create realistic advertising** to show off the role

**Listen**

**#EmployPAs**

**Share ideas**

**Collaborate**



The commitments that we will make to you in this report, to take the agenda forward:

- Share this report and host a shared document that can be used to connect with like-minded people to collaborate on a solution.
- Host a 2<sup>nd</sup> PA Summit event in 2024 to assess progress and maintain focus.
- Engage in the conversation now to enable positive changes.

## Next steps

Without doubt, one of the stand-out commitments of the summit was that of Alexis Chappell, Director of Adult Social Care in Sheffield, that there will be another event like it in 2024!

And this takes us perfectly into a summary of the next steps.

Next steps were invited by attendees and the list of suggestions is as follows...

Ideas to take forward #EmployPAs:

- Minority community engagement – look towards developing diverse representation of PAs to support our diverse communities
- Areas of collaboration/research and funding to support next steps for PA workforce
- Enable employers to sponsor work visa – this will act as an incentive for more students to join the workforce
- Happy to have a conversation with anyone who needs around becoming a PA employer or impact coproduction or technology – Karen McCormick ([find Karen on LinkedIn](#))
- Meet again – track progress!
- PA rates tool – Sheffield
- Sheffield DP improvement programme
- Doncaster – support available for PAs
- Coproduction – both Sheffield and Doncaster
- PA Register launch in Sheffield
- Direct Payment Support Service - Sheffield

And there are also a few suggestions that were added to the day's 'parking bay' – things that people want to come back to at a future point:

- Details of Direct Payments - Leeds Council and North East Lincolnshire
- Raise awareness amongst the university students
- PR campaign to encourage more students to register to become part time PAs (Loretta)
  - Yes! (Jenny Hands) Also raises awareness in a more general way → healthcare students of all types. (Supernumerary cover for student/PA experience and to support (extra ambitions) activities too?)



## Get involved!

If you're reading this, you don't need to wait for anyone else to take action to move things forward!

If something on the list sounds good – or inspires you to take action to progress another idea you have – then please feel free to get it started!

If you'd like some help promoting this, please contact  
[EmployPAs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:EmployPAs@sheffield.gov.uk)

And remember, sharing this on LinkedIn and using #EmployPAs will help you get in touch with other people who may be interested!



## Appendix A – Best practice and progress

Table 1

- Proud to be part of direct payment vision in Sheffield! No longer facing challenges we used to.
- Enablement team when there was a shortage of PAs (during Covid but still get referrals now).
- Working in and been employing PAs for 30 years. Employing PAs is difficult, just because not enough awareness of the role and what it means – needs to have boundaries.
- Being a PA allows flexibility in my life. Able to do both roles and explore interests.
- Progression is achievable as a PA (not always about promotions).
- PA toolkit – decision making tool, decide rate of pay, where level of risk (5 different bandings), allowing role to be reflective.
- Toolkit really helpful to retaining more skilled PAs.
- PA Peer Group (Hertfordshire)
  - Online, providing
  - DP holders have funding for them to attend.

Table 2

- Person centred approach – every client and PA are different
- Rate of pay tool, took a long time, kudos, social care to do more
- Proud of progress
- Building relationships with clients and PAs
- Good production from DP Commissioning in creating the pay rate tool
- Happy of the standard of bespoke training our PAs deliver
- Wanting to improve choice for families
- Expanding direct payment support service
- I'm proud of our ethos!
- Proud of the monthly peer supervision our team have
- Proud of our in-house direct payment support service at the Council
- Interested in looking at different models of PA services
- Proud of encouraging more students to sign up to the PA Register
- This is a team that works with PA employers, helps them find PAs and support
- Happy to be part of any Local Authority coproduced discussions
- Wanting to avoid the cliff edge through an all age service.

Table 3

- ILG PA Membership with benefits
- Taking up opportunities like today
- Opportunities for PA to attain support
- Leadership endorsement – acknowledgement of work needed and commitment
- Never giving up!
- Inviting inexperience and ideas ↔ collaborative time spent with service users
  - Effort trying
  - Outcome focused
- Involvement in writing Ads

- Team – supportive and positive in the face of challenge
- Development of DP service – Investment, Training, shaping the offer around people

**Table 4**

- Proud 2 Care
  - All providers in area to improve recruitment and retention
  - PA database (North Lincs, Choices & Rights, Hull)
  - Capacity analysis
  - Market development
- Coproduction – working with PAs and employers to create the Sheffield Register
- PA Agencies – good relationships, voluntary sector, LA Housing (recruit carers)
- Abolish timescales in Social Care Assessments, to stop the cliff edge
- Development of coproduction for Direction Payments, people with lived experience working directly to shape the offer, develop person-centred care, accessibility, robust information and advice, development of market.

**Table 5**

- Developing directory of PAs – linking /connecting people who need support to them
- Proud of my relationship with my 3 regular PAs and 3 ad-hoc – respect is mutual
- PA going the extra mile when needed
- Coproduction agenda
- Willing to learn from other councils and people
- Willingness/acknowledgement to put infrastructure in place to support people
- The intention to work at regional level to improve SDS and personalisation
- Good practice at Sheffield

**Table 6**

- Gathering and promoting news stories (LA)
- Allocating resource to support growing the market
- Working with service users to define the job title – personalised to each individual
- Using external tools (Skills for Care) to improve templates and recruitment experience
- Attending events – outward looking – want to improve and promote the role of PA at job fairs/events
- Interactions and relationships with PAs
- Offerings S4C training for IEs and PAs
- EAP created for PAs giving recognition, advice, support
- Streamlined MAR and notes/obs for lightweight effective team communication and “belonging”
- Online rota, timesheets, leave records (with privacy) working smoothly with payroll company
- PA rates tool – coproduced on website
- How people ARE using PAs for Personal Health Budgets
- Pleased that Health colleagues are learning from how social care promote and spread personalisation
- Good access to support for employer and also PAs
- Peer support to both employers and PAs
- LA commissioned recruitment service.

- PA database
- Payroll advice and support services
- Banking services
- PAs access LA benefits

**Table 7**

- Direct Payments support service in-house, connection between adult, children and health (North Yorkshire Council)
- Values of the team – great lived experience examples → empowering
- Introduction of central data resource / database, website, good filter services - link data to health (Hull City Council)
- ILG promoting and adding value for PAs
- Proud of how have mobilised PA for people where some complexities (and sustained them in role)
- Attracting people from wider workforce into PA roles
- Promote importance/status of workforce (PAs)
- L&D WF offer for people employed as PAs



## Appendix B – Our challenges and barriers

**Table 1**

- Lack of trust – DP and LA
- Flexibility in the consideration of budget e.g., hospital
- Retainers e.g., hospital stay
- Benefits support e.g., pension, National Insurance
- Costing packages correctly
- PA rate – inflexible
- Social worker understanding and guidance
- Misunderstanding of job role
- “Culturally” appropriate support
- Language and communication
- Flexibility in budget to support e.g., releasing staff for training

**Table 2**

- PA rate
- Joint funding – difficult to co-ordinate assessments, e.g. plans across health and social care if joint funded.
- Agency standard is not the same as PAs – it will be minimum standard
- Social work practice – needs a stronger focus on Direct Payments
- Social workers to understand how professional the role is
- Resource allocation system to increase potential range of PA pay to ensure retention
- Lack of consistency between health and social care approach e.g., training budget
- Equal to any other professional role
- Assistance needed for people who have a significant impairment to also employ others
- Adapting to your home becoming a workplace – links to PA retention
- Understanding what PA work is – important for recruitment, training, communication needs, retention
- Understanding role
- PAs becoming desensitised to the needs of the person due to the paperwork required of PAs
- PA job mobile app – platform for PAs and employers
- Assessment and review process is unfair – the person can feel done to and not fully able to contribute

**Table 3**

- Clear/appealing recognition
- Speaking to the right people
- PA support for education programme
- Terms and conditions
- Accessible information/advice for support
- Poor understanding of role remit
- Lack of one-stop shop (online?)
- Poor training.....where to access training
- Sending clear message of role

- Regional approach/campaign
- Pay rates
- Marketing of the role
- Hard to navigate process
- Sharing the risk of becoming an employer
- Lack of peer support for PAs and also employers
- Growing understanding of what a PA is
- Who helps in the event of package breakdown?
- High attrition rates
- Additional support in being an employer
- Anxiety about risk taking institutionally
- How we calculate personal budgets consistently
- Review approach to rates of pay
- Employer culture – union promotion
- Under-unionised sector
- Ineffective comms and promotion in terms of recruitment
- More innovative recruitment campaigns
- How does sponsorship work for PA recruitment

**Table 4**

- Stop care management → values ↑
- Increase rate well beyond minimum wage
- PA rate!!
- Reduce employer's NI obligations specific for DPs
- LA cuts from central government – paying PAs more increases NI burden as well as cuts to core services
- Lack of understanding of the benefits of Direct Payments
- Training provided for social care staff on Direct Payments
- Senior council staff myopic views
- Developing skills – standards, training – consistency and access
- Training
- Attract more people to be a PA
- Lack of awareness
- More funding for advertising
- PA Summit
- Funding from central government
- Cuts to funding
- More money
- Value vs Cheapest
- Realistic advertising and PA ambassadors to promote the role
- Recruitment campaigns – matching, raising awareness
- PA framework created that also allows for individuality
- PA support group
- Set up PA support group – have commitment from councils to support
- Not seen as a viable career
- Info package provided to career guidance, Councillors and Job Centres
- TV adverts

- Lack of process viability
- Low profile
- Lack of visibility and clarity around role and advertising
- Lack of direct payment advertising
- Awareness – campaign of PA role and process

**Table 5**

- Getting the message out about what the PA role is actually about
- Peer to peer support networks needed and share knowledge
- Individuals and families need to have their voices heard
- Forums for PAs, recipients and families
- People having to fight for their needs
- Relationship between families and LA broken
- Lack of funding
- Same benefits and recognition for PAs as other carers get
- Use of technology
- Make sure the good stories of having a PA are shared
- Improve terms and conditions for PAs
- Funding to allow peer to support/get the PA role out there
- Long term commitment and prioritising
- Strategic regional approach
- Consistent trust and understanding from social workers

**Table 6**

- Training/awareness for social care teams
- Wider society perceptions of disabled people
- Perception that DPs are not cost effective
- Risk averse can limit creativity
- Budgets – preventing flexibility, DPs with PAs may be lower value
- Training for Individual Employers

## Appendix C – Our commitments

**Table 1:**

- Review Learning & Development offer
- Review employment offer for PAs
- Community engagement exercise – in communities
- Marketing of PA role
- Communication and engagement of PA workforce
- Skills audit for social workers

**Table 3:**

- Coproduce our commitment to personalisation and how we will operationalise this
- Ensure our data and recording is able to breakdown use of DPs to support strategy and decision making

**Table 4:**

- #PA Pay – Work to convince the local authority to raise the rate of pay for PAs – increase the rate of pay by at least £4 an hour
- #Grow the PA workforce – Work to promote the role of a PA to people and communities who may not have considered being a PA before. Create advertising, information packs, multi-language materials.

**Table 5:**

- To get clarity around the lead for this work
- To move today's new connections to start a conversation and build relationships.
- More co-production and listening to hear the voices of lived experience.
- Review how support plans are written (changing the culture → who knows best)
- Framing the PA offer more creatively and more clearly – what it is and what it's not
- Equip staff to offer this as an option
- Get more involved in peer-to-peer support
- Reviewing how I value our PAs

**Table 6:**

- Sharing the COOP report – developed for growing the PA market for PHBs
- Liaise with recruitment colleagues to inform/discuss recruitment issues
- Ensure that info/issues discussed today are fed into service development and develop workforce development initiatives for our region/LA
- Share our own PA contract. Also, rota templates, leave chart etc.
- Participate in discussions for IE/PHB best practice



You'll notice we've used extracts from the event illustration throughout this document. This illustration is designed to be a tool for you all!

### Boo Yeah Illustration.



