

DECISION NOTICE

Notice is given that the following decision has been taken under the Provisions set out in the Council's Constitution

Decision maker: Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care

Date: 24 February 2014

Decision in the matter of: Empower Card Exit Strategy

- Decision:**
1. That approval be given to withdraw the Empower Card option by the end of March 2014.
 2. That publicity material held on the Cheshire East Council Internet and Intranet sites in respect of the Empower Card be removed, and a review of public and departmental information be conducted, to support the development of personalisation through appropriate mechanisms.
 3. That closure audits be completed to recover unused Citi Bank funding account monies by the end of March 2014.
 4. That the relationship with the exiting Empower banking provider and software provider be explored to allow a mutually acceptable ending of the relationships.
 5. That in support of future arrangements the Council actively engage and promote money management services offered by agencies such as Cheshire Centre for Independent Living and Age UK Cheshire; such organisations provide customers who are not able to manage their own Direct Payment, access to money management services in order to operate a Direct Payment and remain independent.
 6. That a communication strategy and approach be agreed within Adult Services to brief on the closure of the Empower Card and on future arrangements; communication with elected Members, staff, customers, care providers, Healthwatch, Age UK Cheshire and Cheshire Centre for Independent Living being considered critical.
 7. That customers, their Personal Assistants and care agencies, be supported to transfer to new payment arrangements and where necessary have a clear route to escalate and resolve any concerns or issues.

Background:

This decision is to seek approval of a strategy to withdraw from the Empower Card by 31 March 2014. Empower is the Council's prepaid social care personal budget card product, launched in early 2010, to deliver direct payments to customers in order to enable them to have choice and control in meeting their care needs. The cards are held by either the customer, their representative or the care provider.

The card does not, however, provide a true Direct Payment or personalisation solution and as a result there are some risks in terms of resources held, payments and contractual liabilities. Since its introduction the ability to pay by way of a traditional direct payment via an individual bank account has been introduced and the numbers of users of the Empower Card have steadily reduced.

Withdrawing from the card will be a change in the payment mechanisms only, with a transition to a new and improved way of facilitating Direct Payments providing increased opportunities for choice and control. This together with the legal guidance around the definition of a true Direct Payment and the time imperative associated with a corporate change of Council banker, means that a decision needs to be made in order to safeguard Council and customer funds and support the 240 remaining users to alternatives by the end of March 2014.

Approval has been sought under the Constitution's General Exceptions to waive the 28 day notice period for key decisions being notified on the Forward Plan in order to enable the withdrawal to be managed by the end of March 2014.

Background Documents:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report author.

Approved:

Signed
Councillor J Clowes (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care)

Date:

24 February 2014

Advising Officer:

Signed
Alison Mccudden (Senior Manager Support to Social Work)