

Bennachie Horizon CIC

Understanding Self-Directed Support

The information in this document is drawn from public sources, professional experience, and informal cost modelling. Some figures are estimated averages based on lived experience and are intended for general understanding, not for audit or financial planning. All efforts have been made to ensure transparency and accuracy.

Introduction

Bennachie Horizon CIC is a community interest company based in Scotland, offering a Training Service for Adults with Learning Disabilities. It was established in response to cuts in council-funded day services, with the goal of providing structured training, skill-building, and meaningful community engagement.

Following discussions with parents and carers affected by these changes, it became clear that there was significant confusion around Self-Directed Support (SDS), particularly in relation to payments for social care, day placements and activities.

With a strong focus on honesty and transparency, and drawing on decades of experience working alongside local authority social work teams, Bennachie Horizon has created a straightforward guide to understanding SDS. This guide is designed to help individuals and their representatives (including parents, guardians, and caregivers) better understand the options for managing SDS payments when it comes to accessing day services, support, and training centres.

Table of Contents	Page
What is Self-Directed Support?	2
Option 1	3-4
SDS Option 1 Representative Setup Checklist	5
Option 2	6
Option 3	7
Option 4	8
Useful Contacts	9
Example Employment Agreement – SDS Personal Assistant	10
Example SDS Direct Payment Log Sheet	11

What is Self-Directed Support?

Self-Directed Support (SDS) was introduced in Scotland to give people more choice, control, and independence in how their care and support are arranged. Before SDS, many individuals had limited say in what services they received or who provided them. Often, councils decided what support was available and when, which sometimes didn't fit well with people's lives, preferences, or goals. This traditional "one-size-fits-all" system could feel restrictive, leaving people feeling like passengers in their own lives. As well as the recurring issues of over-worked Care Managers needing to find quick solutions, with limited options, leading to social work relying on mainly well-known/established services. Although understandable to try and give all individuals a share of the Care Manager's time, it left the options for individuals limited and prevented new services from developing as the old established services gained a monopoly. This discouraged new services from starting and providing more choice for those who required it most.

SDS changed that by offering four different options, so individuals and families can shape support around what matters most to them. It allows people to choose their own support workers, attend local training centres or activities they enjoy, and even manage their own care budgets if they feel comfortable doing so. For many, it has opened the door to a more flexible, personal approach that supports independence, improves wellbeing, and allows for meaningful routines and connections within the community.

Now SDS is in place, individuals can have more choice in how they use their funding for support services that suits their needs more appropriately, that they find more beneficial for them. It also ensures that if a service does not meet their needs, they can change it to a more suitable service.

- ⦿ This means an individual can hire someone they know to help (like a personal assistant)
- ⦿ Try different services and choose one that fits them (like a training centre or day service)
- ⦿ Or combine multiple services to better suit their lifestyle

The individual or their representative will have a better idea of the type of service they require and they also have time to look for their ideal service. Unlike a care manager who has 40 or more people to make these decisions for. It ensures the right decisions are more likely to be made in the best interest of the individual.

SDS Option	Description	Who Manages the Money?	Control Level	Typical Use
Option 1	Direct Payment	The Individual or Representative	Maximum Control	Hire own staff, choose own provider, manage own budget
Option 2	Individual Service Fund (IFS)	A provider chosen by the individual or representative	High Control without financial admin	Choose the support provider (they manage the budget)
Option 3	Local Authority – Arranged Support	Local Authority (Council)	Minimal Control	Social work selects, arranges and pays for services
Option 4	Mix & Match	Combination of some or all of Options 1-3	Flexible	Different options for different aspects of care

Option 1

If you'd like to take full control over how support is arranged, including choosing your own staff or providers. Option 1 offers the most freedom. It does come with a bit of admin, but many families find it empowering once it's up and running.

While Option 1 does come with some responsibilities, it's very manageable, especially for a representative supporting the individual. You don't have to do it all alone. There are local support organisations, payroll services, and guidance from the council to help with things like contracts, timesheets, and records (*Bennachie Horizon has many helpful materials*). Many families and carers find that the extra flexibility and freedom are well worth the effort. It allows you to shape the support in a way that really suits the person, choosing who works with them, when, and how. For many, it becomes a natural and rewarding part of daily life.

Choosing SDS Option 1 (Direct Payment) gives the most flexibility, but it also comes with significant responsibilities. If an individual's representative (often a family member, guardian, or legal proxy) is managing the support on their behalf, here's what they need to have in place:

Legal Authority to Act on the Individual's Behalf

- Must have formal status if the person lacks capacity (e.g. learning disability):
 - Power of Attorney (PoA) – if granted while the individual had capacity.
 - Guardianship Order – if capacity is lacking and PoA wasn't set up.
 - Appointeeship – for managing benefits if needed (through DWP).
- If the person has capacity, they can simply appoint someone to manage the budget on their behalf with consent.

Separate Bank Account for SDS Funds

- You must open a dedicated SDS payment card account or a separate bank account, depending on your local council's arrangement.
- This ensures full transparency and is often required by the local authority for audit purposes.

Robust Record-Keeping

- Keep invoices, receipts, timesheets, and bank statements related to the SDS funds.
- Some councils (like Aberdeenshire) will request regular financial reports or spot checks.

Employment Setup (If Hiring Personal Assistants)

If hiring your own staff (PAs), the representative must:

- Register as an employer with HMRC.
- Provide a contract of employment, job description, and hours, whilst handling:
 - Payroll (or outsource it to a payroll service)
 - Pension contributions (auto-enrolment)
 - Employer's liability insurance
 - Sick pay, holidays, and other employment rights

Note: Aberdeenshire Council can often help with these via independent SDS support organisations.

Compliance with Employment and Health & Safety Law

- Must follow relevant legislation when employing staff:
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
 - Disclosure Scotland checks for staff if required

Use Funds Only for Agreed Support Plan

- Spending must align with the **agreed support outcomes** in the care plan.
- For example:
 - Paying for a training centre placement
 - Activities that promote independence, confidence, or social inclusion
- Unspent or misused funds may have to be returned or may result in switching to another SDS option.

Insurance

- If employing staff or providing activities, employer’s liability insurance is essential.
- Public liability insurance may also be advised, depending on the setting.

Support Available

You don’t need to do all of this alone. There are SDS support organisations across Scotland (e.g. Cornerstone SDS, SDS Scotland, SDSS) that provide:

- Help with setting up the bank account,
- Payroll and recruitment support
- Help understanding your legal duties
- Templates for contracts, timesheets, etc.

Organisation	What They Do for Option 1
Aberdeenshire Council	Authorise and fund Option 1; issue payment cards
Cornerstone SDS	Setup/paperwork helper, payroll/contracts support
SDSS	Guidance, toolkits, national standards
Carers & SDS (Facebook)	Peer advice, local experience sharing
VSA	Local SDS advice, access to community services

SDS Option 1 Representative Setup Checklist

Legal Authority to Act on Behalf of the Individual

Power of Attorney, Guardianship Order, or written consent if the individual has capacity

SDS-Dedicated Bank Account

Open a separate bank account exclusively for SDS payments.

Record-Keeping System

Maintain invoices, receipts, timesheets, and bank statements.

Be prepared for local authority audits.

Employment Setup (if hiring Personal Assistants)

Register as an employer with HMRC.

Provide staff with employment contracts and job descriptions.

Handle payroll, pensions, and insurance.

Health & Safety and Legal Compliance

Ensure compliance with employment and H&S laws.

Conduct necessary risk assessments.

Use of Funds Aligned with Support Plan

Ensure all expenditures meet agreed outcomes in the SDS plan.

Insurance

Obtain Employer's Liability Insurance (mandatory if employing staff).

Consider Public Liability Insurance if applicable.

Option 2

Option 2 is ideal if you want to choose your support provider, but you'd rather not deal with the financial side. The council pays your chosen service directly, and they deliver the support in line with your agreed plan.

SDS Option 2 is designed for people who want to choose their own support but don't want the responsibility of managing the money. With this option, the local council pays the SDS budget directly to a provider or third-party organisation that the individual (or their representative) has chosen. That provider then uses the money to deliver support as agreed in the care plan.

The key benefit of Option 2 is that it offers a good balance of choice and ease. You still get to decide what kind of support is right, who provides it, and how it's delivered, but you don't have to deal with bank accounts, payroll, or receipts. This makes it ideal for families and carers who want flexibility but prefer someone else to handle the financial side.

Many providers in Scotland are happy to manage an Individual Service Fund on your behalf and will work closely with you to make sure the support is tailored to the individual's needs. It's a great option if you want personalisation without the paperwork. And if circumstances change, you can always switch to another SDS option later on. Some providers in Scotland are willing to manage an Individual Service Fund on your behalf, but not all services offer this.

What Needs to be in Place for Option 2?

SDS Option 2 is quite straightforward. You don't need to open a bank account or manage money directly; that's the main benefit. However, the individual or their representative should:

- ⦿ Be clear on the type of support they want (e.g. a training centre, support worker, or activity-based service).
- ⦿ Be willing to communicate and work with the chosen provider to agree on how the support will be delivered.
- ⦿ Help with or approve the support plan, which outlines how the budget will be used.
- ⦿ Be prepared to check-in regularly to make sure the service is still suitable and the individual's needs are being met.

The council usually handles the financial checks with the provider, but you may be asked to give feedback or attend review meetings.

Are There Any Disadvantages to Option 2?

While Option 2 gives you more flexibility than Option 3, it does come with some limitations:

- ⦿ You can only choose from providers who are willing and able to manage an Individual Service Fund, not all services offer this.
- ⦿ You don't have as much control as Option 1, for example, you can't directly employ a personal assistant or use the money for informal carers.
- ⦿ If the relationship with the provider breaks down, it can take time to move to a new one.
- ⦿ Option 2 most often cost money, normally a percentage of the budget being managed, which can lead to having less money available for services/activities than with Option 1.

That said, many organisations are very open and helpful when it comes to managing SDS Option 2.

How to Make Sure You Get the Service You Want

- **Start with a clear support plan:** during your assessment with social work, explain exactly what kind of service or routine the individual would benefit from (e.g. attending a specific training centre or structured weekly activities).
- **Ask about Option 2 early:** let your social worker know you want to use Option 2 and already have a preferred provider in mind (if you do).
- **Speak directly with the provider:** once your budget is approved, you can contact the chosen provider, discuss your needs, and agree on a plan.
- **Get everything in writing:** the provider should give you a written plan outlining what they'll deliver and when.
- **Stay involved:** attend review meetings, give feedback, and don't hesitate to request changes if something isn't working.

Option 3

This is the most hands-off option. The local authority handles everything, from choosing the service to making payments. It's straightforward, but it offers less flexibility and personal choice.

SDS Option 3 is the most traditional approach. With this option, the local council is fully in charge of arranging and managing the support. They choose the provider from an approved provider list, set the schedule, and handle all payments and contracts. The individual or their representative simply attends or receives the agreed service, such as day centre sessions, outreach, or other activities.

This option is best for people who either don't want the responsibility of choosing services themselves or are happy to go along with what the council recommends. It's often used when support needs are more complex or when someone isn't ready to take on the decisions involved in Options 1 or 2.

What Needs to be in Place for Option 3?

Very little. You don't need to manage money, find providers, or deal with paperwork. However, you should:

- Be ready to work with the social worker to complete an assessment and agree on a support plan.
- Ask questions and speak up about what kind of support is wanted, even if the council is arranging it.
- Keep in touch with social work to make sure the service stays relevant and effective over time.

Disadvantages of Option 3

While Option 3 is simple and low-effort, it does have some downsides:

- Limited choice: You only get what the council has available, even if it doesn't suit your preferences or routine.
- Less flexibility: You can't usually change the service times, location, or provider.
- Harder to personalise: The support may be more generic and less tailored to the individual's goals or interests.

How to Make Sure You Still Get the Right Service

Even under Option 3, you have a voice. Here's how to make the most of it:

- Be clear in the social work assessment about what's important, e.g. specific activities, location (Inverurie), or preferred types of support.
- Ask the social worker for examples of what services are available in your area.
- Attend review meetings regularly to share feedback and ask for changes if needed.
- If Option 3 services don't meet your needs, ask to discuss a move to Option 1 or 2.

Option 4

Not everything fits neatly into one box and that's where Option 4 comes in. You can combine elements from Options 1, 2 and 3 to create a flexible plan that reflects real life. Great if some support needs more control while other parts are easier left to the council.

SDS Option 4 gives you the best of all worlds by allowing you to mix and match parts of the other three options (Option 1, 2, and 3). For example, you might choose:

Option 1 to manage part of your budget directly (e.g. to hire a personal assistant),

Option 2 for a day service provider to manage some of the funds,

Option 3 for the council to arrange transport or respite.

This option is great for people who want some control over their support but also want help managing other parts. It's flexible and can be adapted as needs change over time.

What Needs to be in Place for Option 4?

To use Option 4, you'll need:

- ⦿ A clear understanding of what support you want to manage vs. what you'd like others to arrange.
- ⦿ A care plan that splits the budget across the chosen options.
- ⦿ Willingness to work with more than one provider (or a mix of council and private services).

You don't need to handle everything yourself, only the parts you've chosen to manage.

Limitations of Option 4

While Option 4 offers flexibility, there are a few things to consider:

- ⦿ It can be a bit more complex to set up, as you're working with more than one approach.
- ⦿ It requires good communication between the council, providers, and possibly payroll or fund managers.
- ⦿ Not all councils or providers may promote Option 4 actively, so you may need to ask for it specifically.

However, once in place, it can be very effective, especially if the individual's needs or preferences don't fit neatly into one style of support.

How to Make Sure Option 4 Works for You

- ⦿ Be clear during the assessment about your preferences, what you want to be involved in managing, and what you'd like the council or providers to handle.
- ⦿ Ask your social worker for a breakdown of your SDS budget, so you know what can be divided.
- ⦿ Request a written plan that shows how your budget is being used across each option.
- ⦿ Review your plan regularly; if one part isn't working, it can be changed.

Useful Contacts

Aberdeenshire Council - SDS Team

Tel: 03456 081 206

Website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/financial-support/self-directed-support/>

Email: selfdirectedsupport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

How they help:

- Option 1:** Provide information, open SDS payment card accounts, advise on all SDS options, and process direct payment setup.
- Option 2:** Explain Option 2 and include ISF costs in your support plan - Set up SDS payment card in your (or ISF provider's) name - Arrange assessments and review contributions/payment structures
- Option 3:** Complete assessments and arrange support services - Match individuals with available council-commissioned providers - Conduct reviews and offer changes when possible
- Option 4:** Explain and plan Option 4 arrangements - Allocate budget across Options 1, 2, and/or 3 - Support you in managing a personalised, mixed approach

Cornerstone SDS - Aberdeenshire Office

Tel: 01467 530 520

Website: <https://www.cornerstonesds.org.uk/>

Email: sds@cornerstone.org.uk

How they help:

- Option 1:** Impartial advice and practical support to set up Option 1 - including recruitment, payroll setup, contracts, training guidance.
- Option 2:** Set up and manage your Individual Service Fund (ISF) - Handle invoices, payment card logistics, and budget tracking - Support you in planning outcomes, engaging with providers, and organising activities without you needing to manage money

Self-Directed Support Scotland (SDSS)

Tel: 0131 475 2623

Website: <https://www.sdsscotland.org.uk/>

Email: info@sdsscotland.org.uk

How they help:

Oversee national guidance, publish factsheets & tools, and maintain support networks - useful for understanding broader obligations.

VSA (Voluntary Service Aberdeen)

Tel: (switchboard) 01224 213 900 (ask for SDS team)

Website: <https://www.vsa.org.uk/our-services/self-directed-support-sds>

Email: info@vsa.org.uk (or use website contact form)

How they help:

Offer SDS support and adult community day services, including guidance on SDS options and practical help.

Aberdeenshire Carers & SDS (Facebook Page)

Contact: via Facebook at "Aberdeenshire Carers & Self Directed Support"

How they help:

Peer support, community updates, shared experiences relevant to carers managing SDS budgets.

Example Employment Agreement – SDS Personal Assistant

(Treat this template as a guide to creating an employment agreement that is customized specifically for your or the individual you're representing's requirements)

This Employment Agreement is made between:

[Employer Name], acting on behalf of [Client Name], hereinafter referred to as 'Employer'

and

[Employee Full Name], hereinafter referred to as 'Employee'.

1. Job Title: Personal Assistant
2. Place of Work: [Insert Location(s)]
3. Hours of Work: [Insert weekly schedule, e.g., Mon–Fri 10am–3pm]
4. Rate of Pay: £[XX.XX] per hour (paid monthly via payroll)
5. Duties Include:
 - a. Supporting [Client Name] to attend [Name of location/service] sessions.
 - b. Assisting with transportation and engagement in daily activities.
 - c. Encouraging independence and social participation.
6. Holiday Entitlement: [XX] days per year (pro-rata)
7. Sickness and Absence: Notify employer as soon as possible. SSP applies after 3 consecutive days of absence.
8. Supervision: The employer will oversee duties and offer regular feedback.
9. Termination: One week's notice by either party (unless gross misconduct applies).

Signed:

Employer: _____ Date: _____

Employee: _____ Date: _____

Example SDS Direct Payment Log Sheet

Use this sheet to track spending against your SDS budget.

Date	Provider/Vendor	Service/Item (Day service/personal support, etc)	Purpose (Support plan outcome achieved)	Amount (£)
Page Total:				