

# Consultation document

## SHORT BREAKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Consultation feedback from parents and carers, professionals and children and young people; our further learning; and proposed changes

### 1. Communication and Information

Families and / or professionals told us during the first consultation:

- They were unclear about what short breaks were available, how to get a place at a provision or a Direct Payment, and who could help with any questions they had. Some mentioned getting conflicting information from Council staff as well as delays in receiving answers to their queries.
- They were either unfamiliar with the SEND Local Offer website, or aware of it but found it difficult to locate information on short breaks and activities, or the information was out of date or missing.
- They wanted information on the short breaks offer to be clear and easy to understand, thorough, and up to date.
- They wanted regular communication from the Council on what short breaks and activities were running.
- They wanted a named person or team who would be able to help parents access a short break to meet their children's needs.

We also learnt:

- That there wasn't a co-ordinated approach or dedicated staff within the Council to do Outreach and promote the SEND Local Offer website and short breaks.
- That having designated staff with an in-depth knowledge of local SEND services and short breaks to support families of children and young people with disabilities and the professionals working with them was a successful working model in other Councils.

#### **Proposed change 1: Communication and Information**

*Create a new role so that we can improve how we communicate and promote short breaks to parents and carers, children and young people, professionals and providers. This would include:*

- *publicising the short breaks offer and producing regular communications such as social media posts and e-news flashes;*
- *signposting parents and professionals to short breaks services and other SEND services;*
- *building relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector so their SEND offers are publicised and on the SEND Local Offer website;*
- *highlighting additional support that could help families of children with disabilities i.e. Universal Credit and Disability Living Allowance;*
- *and work with local businesses and providers to improve the benefits for families of having a M-Card (ID and concession card).*

## 2. Access and Assessment

Families and / or professionals told us during the first consultation:

- They were unclear how to access different parts of the short breaks offer.
- Council staff understood the needs of their child and family during the short breaks assessment process at both a targeted and specialist level however, the wait time could be long, and the assessment did not always lead to a short break that met their families' needs.
- That targeted assessments for short breaks were unnecessary if a child had complex needs and was in a specialist education setting as this should be sufficient to recognise that a child or family needed extra support to access a short break.
- The time it took to complete the targeted assessment process for short breaks delayed children being able to access provision.

We also learnt:

- There was a lack of clarity within the Council about which families could access different parts of the short breaks offer.
- Short Breaks guidance clearly states that families should be able to access services without the need for additional assessments.
- Other Councils do not require families to go through an assessment process to access a short break at a targeted level. They use pre-existing assessments such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments, Education, Health and Care Plans or a medical diagnosis to show that a child needs extra support to access a short break.
- Other Councils have online booking systems where parents can contact commissioned short breaks providers directly and arrange for their children to attend sessions. *(Commissioned short break providers are those that Councils agree to fund to deliver places for children.)*

### Proposed Change 2: Access and Assessment

a) *Remove the current assessment process for short breaks at a targeted level.*

b) *Use the existing registration process of applying for a [M-Card](#) to decide which families can access a targeted short break. Families without a M-Card would need to apply and show:*

- *A letter confirming they currently have Disability Living Allowance at Middle or Upper level or Personal Independence Payment, or*
- *A letter from a medical or educational professional confirming there is a complex need that impacts significantly on getting about or accessing services, or*
- *Universal Credit with child element and additional disabled child element (lower and higher).*

c) *Families to use an online system to book activities with Merton's commissioned providers. At the beginning this would just be at the targeted level but could be developed and expanded to other parts of the short breaks offer. We would consider support for families to book places if help was needed. We are still working through how we would fairly allocate places. We would ensure that the allocation process was as simple and as clear as possible to parents and carers and commissioned providers.*

## 3. Delivery Model

Families and / or professionals told us during the first consultation:

- They valued having a one-to-one support for their child at the targeted level.

- Some valued being able to spend their Direct Payments on activities whilst others found it difficult due to a lack of suitable providers who could meet their child's needs.
- There was a lack of skill and confidence in some providers to work with children and young people with disabilities and therefore the Council needed to focus on offering training and support to expand the number of providers with skilled staff.
- There was a lot of paperwork associated with Direct Payments and this was difficult to prioritise and keep on top of with all the other things parents needed to do.
- They wanted the Council to commission more providers to deliver short breaks.

We also learnt:

- The usual staffing level for a targeted short break is 1:3 or 1:4 and not 1:1. This more enhanced level of support is usually provided at the specialist level following a Child and Family Assessment.
- Many parents were using their Direct Payments to cover the cost of attending universal activities such as going to the cinema, bowling and gym membership, rather than any additional support cost due to their child having a disability.
- The Council's quality assurance on providers accessed through Direct Payments was not as thorough as for providers who had been through a competitive process resulting in a contract award, or for short break services delivered by Council officers.
- Contracting with short break providers brings many benefits such as having clear expectations around what needs to be delivered, and the standard of delivery. They also bring reliability, cost stability and management and better value for money.

### **Proposed change 3: Delivery Model**

*We will change the delivery model at the targeted level by commissioning more short breaks providers through either contracting arrangements or Council delivered services. This would be achieved through:*

- *making better use of funding currently used in contracting arrangements or Council delivered short break services;*
- *removing the option of Personal Assistants at the targeted level;*
- *removing the option of Direct Payments for activities at the targeted level.*

This proposed change would ensure better quality assurance through bringing the additional providers into the Council's quarterly monitoring processes, cost-effectiveness, and would also refocus the targeted offer on just providing the expected additional support needed by children with disabilities to access a short break.

It would mean that in the future Direct Payments and Personal Assistants would only be part of the specialist short breaks offer. Many of the families whose children currently have Personal Assistants at a targeted level meet the criteria for the Children with Disabilities Team and therefore would be able to continue accessing a Personal Assistant as part of the specialist short breaks offer following a Child and Family Assessment. Once final decisions have been made about the future offer there would be communication with families impacted by any changes around next steps.

To note that families who currently have a short breaks package through the Children with Disabilities Team would not be impacted by this proposed change to the targeted offer.

## 4. Charging

- Some parents have fed back that they would be happy to pay for a short break if they could find providers who could meet their children's needs.

We also learnt:

- Other Councils charge for short breaks. Their expectation is that families can use the funding they get through either Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments to cover the short breaks charge; and families on lower incomes can get some of their childcare costs covered at registered provision.

### Proposed change 4: Charging

- a) We will introduce an entry charge for the short break providers we commission.*
- b) It will be approximately £5.00 for an after school or half day session and £10.00 for a full day.*
- c) There will be no charge for families in receipt of income related benefits.*

This proposed charge would introduce income that would be used to increase and improve the short breaks offer, provide more of a guarantee of attendance at activities, as well as introduce equity with those families with children without disabilities who have to pay for their children's activities. We would work with commissioned providers to ensure that families' financial circumstances did not prevent access to a short break.

## 5. Volume and range of provision

Families and / or professionals and / or children and young people told us during the first consultation:

- There weren't enough short breaks to meet families' needs.
- There were gaps in the current offer: overnights, youth provision, provision for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Condition and anxiety, complex needs, and siblings.
- They wanted a mix of short breaks opportunities so children could have a break away from their families, to have a break as a family and with other families.
- They wanted opportunities for children to attend universal short breaks as well as short breaks in more specialist settings.
- They wanted to feel confident that providers could meet children's needs.
- The current mainstream Holiday and Activities Food Programme was not able to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The new SEND HAF pilot model, introduced over the summer was welcomed.

We also learnt:

- Currently some Council services were not working as collaboratively as they could be to deliver short breaks and activities for children with disabilities.
- Other Councils were also experiencing difficulties in securing overnight provision and were keen to work collaboratively to find a solution.

### Proposed change 5: volume and range of provision

*We aim to increase the amount of group short break settings, whole family activities and community provision through:*

- *Better co-ordination and commissioning across the range of short break providers i.e. youth disability offer, Merton leisure and sport and after school and holiday activity schemes.*
- *Using money that is currently spent on the targeted assessment process to commission new short break provision.*
- *Reviewing our delivery models within the Council direct services to ensure that we are maximising the offer to children and young people with disabilities and their families.*
- *Achieving better value for money through improved commissioning arrangements for short breaks provision, which would include stopping the option of Direct Payments for both Personal Assistants and activities at the targeted short breaks level.*
- *Ongoing consultation with families and providers to ensure a quality offer that is meeting needs.*

We would welcome knowing your views on the proposals in this consultation paper and would appreciate if you could take some time to complete the response form.