

Cabinet

29 October 2024

Medway Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Tracy Coombs, Portfolio holder for Education
Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio holder for Children's Services

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Summary

This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the short break sufficiency review undertaken by Children Services Commissioning in July – October 2023. The review found that the number of children with disabilities has risen significantly and the number of children and families who receive a short break grant has risen by 68% since 2016. This negatively impacts families who are experiencing longer wait times to have their needs assessed and met, as well as significant cost implications for the Council.

Subsequently, a strategy has been developed, outlining our plan which seeks to broaden the availability and uptake of inclusive universal services by those who can access them. We also aim to make changes so that places on targeted and specialist short break schemes are available to those who need them the most.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Cabinet is requested to note the limitations of the existing model for short breaks in Medway.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is requested to agree to adopt the Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 1.3. The Cabinet is requested to support the following priorities, which have been designed to ensure compliance with UK short breaks legislation and improve sufficiency, efficiency and financial oversight of short breaks in Medway:
 1. Co-produce a short break services statement
 2. Review and update the Local Offer website and signposting
 3. Invest in community training and improve communication with parents and carers
 4. Review short breaks eligibility and inclusion criteria

5. Invest in data intelligence
6. Develop more commissioned services
7. Address recruitment and retention challenges

2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. The number of children and families who require short breaks is increasing significantly. These recommendations are necessary to ensure the ongoing sufficiency and financial oversight of short breaks provision in Medway.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Our proposal allows for potential cost reduction of up to £200,000 if new criteria are applied.
- 3.2. This proposal contributes to our overarching values and priorities as outlined in the Council Strategy (2023-24):
 - Working together to empower
 - healthy and active communities
 - resilient families
 - Child friendly approaches and decisions
 - Creating a culture of creativity and innovation.
- 3.3. The short breaks sufficiency strategy contributes to all 5 of the 2022-2025 ambitions identified in the SEND strategy.
- 3.4. Our recommendations, contribute to many of the expected outcomes identified in the parenting support strategy (2021-2031), such as:
 - parents and professionals know where and how to get the support needed
 - parents can access services easily and value the services they are receiving.

4. Background

- 4.1. All local authorities must provide a range of services which are sufficient to assist the parents and carers of disabled children to continue caring for their children or to do so more effectively.
- 4.2. In addition, the Local Authority must publish a 'short breaks services statement' for parents/ carers in their area, setting out details of:
 - the range of services available,
 - any criteria by which eligibility for those services will be assessed, and
 - how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of carers in their area.

- 4.3. The short breaks services statement must be kept under review and incorporate the views of local stakeholders.
- 4.4. Children's services commissioning has undertaken a comprehensive review of short breaks (respite) sufficiency for children with disabilities in Medway. This is the first review since 2016 when the direct payment scheme for administering short break grants was introduced. The review identified:
- the short break services statement was not available on the Council's website and the local offer information requires updating.
 - the number of children in Medway with SEND (+17.5%), long term conditions (+5.3%) and EHCPs (+42%) has risen significantly.
 - a 68% growth in uptake of short break grants since they were introduced in 2016, which has had a significant impact on resources.
 - reviews for existing grants are taking up to 4 months to process and new applicants are waiting around 12 months to get the support they need.
 - The review also recognised a range of inclusive universal services that have become available since the grant scheme was introduced. Utilising the universal offer effectively will reduce the demand on targeted services, but work is needed to promote the universal offer more widely.
- 4.5. The short breaks grant is a preventative service and should be offered as one of the local offer options to prevent families coming into the children and young people's disability service. However, many families are receiving both services. A detailed analysis of packages currently in place and a review of the short break grant eligibility criteria is necessary to address this.
- 4.6. The review and subsequent 3-year strategy (2024-2027) identifies seven key areas for development, which seek to improve access to information and availability of all services, whilst promoting fair and proportionate access to targeted and specialist services. Specifically, we plan to:
1. Co-produce a short break services statement
 2. Review and update the Local Offer Website and signposting
 3. Invest in training and improved communication to parents and carers
 4. Review short breaks eligibility and inclusion criteria
 5. Invest in data intelligence
 6. Develop more commissioned services
 7. Address recruitment and retention challenges
- 4.7. Recommendations have been developed to ensure ongoing sustainability and sufficiency of all short breaks provision in Medway.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1 – Medway Council to only implement two of the recommendations outlined in this report; produce a short break services statement and update the local offer to ensure ongoing compliance with UK short break legislation.
- 5.2. Option 2 – Medway Council to support all seven recommendations outlined in this report.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. A review of short breaks has not been undertaken since 2016 when the short break grant payments were introduced. Since then, the uptake has increased by 68%, however the Council's resources have not. This strategy and the changes proposed are necessary to ensure ongoing sufficiency and effective administration of the short break offer in Medway.
- 6.2. Our Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) found that children and young people with disabilities and their parents will be impacted. As some families will be required to adjust the way that they access and utilise short breaks currently. These changes will ensure that families receive the intended benefits of a short break as set out in national guidelines. Consultation with children and their families has been ongoing since July 2023 to support them to understand the impact of the changes proposed and ensure their voice is reflected in our plans.
- 6.3. The changes proposed will not impact customers with other protected characteristics.
- 6.4. More efficient administration of the short break grant scheme has potential to generate up to £200,000 in savings

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Savings may be smaller than forecast as more families may apply for a short breaks grant	We must accept that the communication and engagement necessary to make this project a success will improve availability of information that may lead to more families being aware of their right to respite and this may result in more applications.	Through a review of inclusion and eligibility criteria we can ensure that short breaks grants are awarded to families with the greatest of needs and that grants achieve the desired outcome therefore reducing the number of children and families	BIII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		referred to the CYP disability team.	
Incomplete data sets	To be able to undertake a comprehensive review we need access to consistent data in one format. Inconsistent processes and variability in systems that we have in place currently may make it difficult to make definite conclusions.	A comprehensive analysis of all datasets will allow us to identify shortcomings with the existing systems and processes and make recommendations for a system upgrade and identify new processes that will reduce data variability in 2024/25.	All
Data security and privacy concerns	The needs assessment may cause some concerns about data security and privacy.	The justification for a detailed needs assessment will be clearly outlined to all stakeholders. A DPIA will be carried out and a data sharing agreement will be co-produced to ensure that stakeholders are able to share data confidently.	CIV
Children, young people and their families will be resistant to change as they may view this as a cost saving exercise	Families have been used to a great deal of choice and flexibility over how they utilise the short break grant and may be concerned about losing this when the new criteria are implemented. Some families may also be concerned	Co-produce the new criteria. Undertake regular and comprehensive stakeholder engagement at each stage. Ensure that information is shared about the benefits of the new approach and that families are aware	All

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	<p>about losing the grant altogether.</p> <p>These concerns could affect the relationship with our customers.</p>	<p>of the breadth of short break services available as the scheme develops.</p>	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table (please **retain** table in final report):

Likelihood	Impact:
<p>A Very likely</p> <p>B Likely</p> <p>C Unlikely</p> <p>D Rare</p>	<p>I Catastrophic</p> <p>II Major</p> <p>III Moderate</p> <p>IV Minor</p>

8. Consultation

- 8.1. A 12-week consultation exercise with children and their carers found that short breaks promote a sense of independence, offer the chance for children and families to try new things, improve mental health and wellbeing, protect quality time and can improve social skills.
- 8.2. Families felt the short break grant offers choice and flexibility; however, many families had waited too long for their short break grant review and stakeholders identified that criteria were not clear enough.
- 8.3. Families and stakeholders were not aware of everything on offer or how to access due to unreliable and out of date information or were not able to book onto specialist activities due to insufficient places.
- 8.4. Children, families and stakeholders were supportive of the review and its findings. However, families were concerned that the focus of the review was to make savings.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. There is potential to positively influence climate change by increasing the availability and distribution of short break services which are closer to home.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. The limited choice, understanding and availability of all short breaks provision over the years has resulted in an over reliance on floating support (specialist care in the community) and direct payment packages; when needs could be met in specialist group-based activities which are most cost effective.

- 10.2. The strategy forecasts that short breaks expenditure will increase by 30% for the short break grants scheme and 52% for floating support, whilst direct payments will remain similar when compared with expenditure for 2021/22.
- 10.3. This trajectory is unsustainable for the Council and our customers. The decision to revise short break grant inclusion and eligibility criteria is necessary to stabilise the current situation. It also presents an opportunity to deliver up to £200,000 in savings.
- 10.4. Children's services commissioning has secured grant funding of £643,662 from the DfE to support short break sufficiency in Medway in 2024/25. The grant has been used as follows:
- To address recruitment and retention issues by recruiting up to 12 apprentices who will be working towards the level 4 residential support worker apprenticeship at Parklands.
 - To offer free and comprehensive training to local partners and providers to develop an inclusive universal offer.
 - To work in partnership with Rivermead Inclusive Trust to increase the availability of safe group-based provision for Children and Young People (CYP) with SEND at Rivermead Outreach Community Challenge (ROCC). This partnership will also allow Medway to have more influence over how families access ROCC.
 - Undertaking a detailed needs analysis of client access to short breaks and short breaks expenditure, with recommendations for and delivery of a system upgrade.
- 10.5. The Round 1 2024/25 forecast for short breaks provision is an overspend of £255,000. The proposals in this report/strategy would see additional expenditure on short breaks provision that ultimately reduces expenditure on placements, and budgets will be realigned to reflect this pattern of expenditure to manage this budget pressure over the coming year.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. In performing their duty under schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989, The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011, and The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 all local authorities must provide a range of services which are sufficient to assist parents/ carers to continue to provide care, or to do so more effectively. Specifically, the local authority must provide, as appropriate, a range of:
- day-time care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere,
 - overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere,
 - educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes, and
 - services available to assist parents/carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.

- 11.2. In addition, local authorities must prepare a 'short breaks services statement' for parents/ carers in their area, setting out details of:
- the range of services available,
 - any criteria by which eligibility for those services will be assessed and,
 - how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of carers in their area.
- 11.3. The short breaks services statement must be published on the local authority website outlining the local offer; it must be kept under review and incorporate the views of local stakeholders such as parents and carers.
- 11.4. At the time of the review, a short breaks services statement was not available on The Council's website and local offer required updating. The Council should address these issues as matter of urgency.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27

Appendix 2 – Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy DIA

Background Papers

None