

TITLE
Medway Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy (2024-2027)
DATE
22 August 2024
LEAD OFFICER.
Sarah Richards, Senior Commissioner for Education and SEND
1 Summary description of the proposed change
<p>What is the change to policy / service / new project that is being proposed? How does it compare with the current situation?</p> <p>Children’s services commissioning has undertaken a comprehensive review of short breaks (respite) sufficiency for children with disabilities in Medway. The 3-year strategy (2024-2027) identifies several challenges with the existing model, which has not been reviewed since its introduction in 2016.</p> <p>The number of children and families who receive targeted services in the form of a short break grant has increased by 68% since the 2016 arrangements were brought in, leading to increased expenditure and significant delays to initiation of vital support packages. Furthermore, the limited choice, understanding and availability of all short break provision over the years has resulted in an over reliance on costly floating support (specialist care in the community) and direct payment packages; when the needs of many children could be met in specialist group-based activities, such as Rivermead Outreach Community Challenge (ROCC) if there were more of them available.</p> <p>We aim to make changes so that targeted and specialist short breaks are available to those who need them most, and that children, young people (CYP) and their families have a clear choice of flexible and cost-effective services to meet their needs.</p> <p>The 2024-27 strategy identifies seven recommendations, which are aimed at improving efficiency, sufficiency and reducing costs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-produce a short break statement 2. Revamp 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 <p>Recommendations 1 and 2 are necessary to ensure that children and their families are aware of and therefore able to access the full range of services.</p> <p>Investing in training (recommendation 3) for local providers will equip our community with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver a truly inclusive</p>

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offer, broadening the choice and availability of universal services available to children and families in Medway.

Recommendation 4 to revise the short break grant criteria and processes, will result in more efficient and effective service delivery in the long term.

There are many children whose needs can and are met by a universal offer, ensuring that places on targeted and specialist schemes are available for those who truly need them.

There is a need to develop a co-ordinated approach to the ongoing delivery, review and scrutiny of short breaks (recommendation 5) to ensure services are targeted appropriately and to inform future commissioning decisions (recommendation 6).

A recruitment campaign (recommendation 7) will create extra capacity within the short breaks service so that it is fully operational, ensuring continuity of practice and skills, and greater choice and flexibility to our families.

Medway's short break offer was last updated in 2016. These changes are necessary to support an increasing level of need in Medway.

2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment

E.g. Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user.

E.g. Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile

A local review of need identified that the number of children in Medway with SEND (+17.5%), long term conditions (+5.3%) and EHCPs (+42%) has risen significantly.

The review identified a 68% growth in demand for short break grants since they were first introduced in 2016. This has had a significant impact on the Council's physical and financial resources, with reviews for existing grants taking up to 4months to process and new applicants are waiting around 12 months.

The review also recognised a range of inclusive services that have become available since the grant scheme was introduced. There are clear opportunities for utilising the universal offer more effectively to reduce the demand on targeted and specialist services, but work is needed to promote the offer more widely.

A 12-week engagement period was held between 24th July and 13th October 2023. The approach was to engage as many people as possible online. We had 193 responses from parents and carers to our online survey, this has meant that the response is statistically valid.

Face-to-face consultation events included visiting ROCC, Parklands and some of the Medway GO SEND sessions to observe the sessions and listen to the

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children and families' views on the local offer, in addition to our survey. We also sought feedback from partner organisations.

The review found that short breaks promote a sense of independence, offer the chance for children and families to try new things/ learn new skills, improve mental health and wellbeing, promote quality time and can improve social skills. The short break grant offers choice and flexibility, however many families had waited too long for their short break grant review and said that criteria was not clear enough. Families 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; and so, families were supportive of the review.

The short breaks grant is a preventative service and should be offered as one of the local offer options to prevent families coming into children and young people's disability service. Recommendations have been developed to ensure ongoing sustainability and sufficiency of all short breaks provision in Medway.

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to:

Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups

Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups

Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

(insert Yes when there is an impact or No when there isn't)

Protected characteristic groups (Equality Act 2010)	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age	No	No	No
Disability	No	Yes	Yes
Gender reassignment	No	No	No
Marriage/civil partnership	No	No	No
Pregnancy/maternity	No	No	No
Race	No	No	No
Religion/belief	No	No	No
Sex	No	No	No

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Protected characteristic groups (Equality Act 2010)	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Sexual orientation	No	No	No
Care experience	No	No	No
Other (e.g. low income groups)	No	No	No

4 Summary of the likely impacts

Who will be affected?

How will they be affected?

Our plan seeks to increase the availability and choice of short break services in Medway through increased collaboration with local providers and utilisation of a grant from the DfE. Children and young people with SEND, and their families will benefit from reliable information about the offer that is available to them.

Covid-19 and limited resources has resulted in considerable variation in how families spend their short break grant. Robust eligibility and inclusion criteria in line with the legal definition of a short break should be published to increase transparency and accountability. Subsequently promoting efficient and effective administration of the service long term.

Some families will be required to adjust the way that they access and utilise short breaks currently to ensure compliance with national guidelines. These changes will ensure that families receive the intended benefits of a short break. 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.

More efficient administration of the short break grant scheme has potential to generate savings that will be re-invested into commissioned services for children with SEND and their families.

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5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?

Are there alternative providers?

Can demand for services be managed differently?

A review of short breaks has not been undertaken since 2016 when the short break grant payments were introduced. The uptake has increased by 68%, however the Council's resources have not. This review and the changes proposed are necessary to ensure ongoing sufficiency of short breaks provision in Medway.

Ongoing consultation with children, young people, parents, carers and local stakeholder is necessary to ensure this is a collaborative process.

6 Action plan

Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence

Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
Co-produce a short break services statement	Sarah Richards / Mandy Lawson/ MPCF	31/01/2024
Review and update the local offer and signposting	Emma Block/ Sarah Richards	31/03/2024
Invest in training and improved communication to parents and carers	Sarah Richards	31/03/2024
Evaluate the resource needed to effectively administer Short Breaks and consider pros and cons for the budget and infrastructure for short break grants from adults to children's social care.	Sam Robinson/ Sarah Richards	31/07/2024
Co-producing a draft new comprehensive short break inclusion and eligibility criteria, and payment structures that could deliver up to £200,000 in savings.	Sarah Richards / Mandy Lawson/ MPCF	30/09/2024
Undertake analysis of Short Breaks/ Direct Payments/ HAF/ Parklands access to ensure that families are not receiving multiple or duplicate offers and consider health inequalities and equity on who is and isn't currently receiving and offer.	Sarah Richards / Samuel Robinson/	31/03/2025

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Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
Undertaking a detailed needs analysis of client access to short breaks and short breaks expenditure, with recommendations for and delivery of a system upgrade. Implement system changes to mosaic that could reduce variability and improve quality and accuracy of support plans and reporting capabilities.	Michael Hood/ Maria Beany/ Sajid Ikram	
Address recruitment and retention issues with a workforce development campaign to introduce up to 12 new staff to a residential support worker apprenticeship that will promote increased availability in short break schemes such as Parklands.	Sarah Richards	31/12/2024
Work collaboratively with Rivermead Inclusive Trust to deliver 150 additional places at ROCC specialist play scheme by 31/03/2024 utilising grant funding from the DfE short breaks innovation fund.	Sarah Richards	31/03/2024

7 Recommendation

The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be: to proceed with the change, implementing the Action Plan if appropriate, consider alternatives, gather further evidence

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

We recommend adopting the short breaks sufficiency strategy and implementing the action plan as soon as possible.

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that the recommendation can be implemented, sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned, the Action Plan will be incorporated into the relevant Service Plan and monitored

Assistant Director

Date of authorisation