

**Children and Young People  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
9 January 2025**

**Short Breaks Sufficiency Update**

Report from: James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning  
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(Workstream Lead for Short Breaks)

### Summary

This report highlights our extensive work towards the priorities set out in the short breaks sufficiency strategy which were developed to ensure compliance, efficiency and financial oversight of short breaks in medway.

1. Recommendations
  - 1.1. The Committee is asked to note compliance with short breaks legislation in production of a short break services statement, and significant improvements in how we interact and communicate with disabled children and their families.
  - 1.2. The Committee is asked to note the plans to increase availability of inclusive universal services through comprehensive training, workforce development and stakeholder engagement.
  - 1.3. The Committee is asked to note the external investment into developing and expanding short break provision at ROCC and in the community.
  - 1.4. The Committee is asked to note the commitment to ensuring our provisions are appropriately resourced by filling the local offer officer position, acquiring new staff for the children's short break team (1.4FTE) and 5 apprentices who will be being trained to work in children's residential settings.
  - 1.5. The Committee is asked to note the changes to the short break grant scheme and associated changes to internal process that will improve experiences and outcomes for our customers, as well as delivering savings up to £200,000.

## 2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. Our plan allows for potential cost reduction of up to £200,000 as new criteria are applied to Medway's short break grant scheme for 2025/26.
- 2.2. 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
- 2.3. The short breaks sufficiency strategy contributes to all 5 of the 2022-2025 ambitions identified in the SEND strategy.
- 2.4. 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

## 3. Background

- 3.1. The last review of all short breaks provision was previously carried out in 2016. An additional review in 2023 was necessary to ensure that we have enough support and services for families who need it, when they need. The review included a 12-week consultation with families and other stakeholders, as well as making comparisons with the local offer in other areas. The review found that:
  - Information on the Council's website about short break services was unreliable, compounded by absence of a short break services statement.
  - Universal/ community providers need advice and guidance on delivering inclusive services to expand the offer available to our families.
  - The number of families who need the short break grant (a targeted service) has increased by 85% since 2016, which has resulted in processing delays of 4-12 months for reviews and new applications respectively.
  - Advice and guidance on the eligibility and inclusion criteria for the short break grant was inadequate.
  - Specialist respite provisions are underutilised due to recruitment and retention challenges.
  - More provision is needed across the service.
  - More information is needed about how families access services.

3.2. The findings of the review were used to develop 7 recommendations that are set out in Medway's Short Break Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027, which was adopted by Cabinet on 29 October 2024. Our vision is to improve access to information and availability of all services, whilst promoting fair and proportionate access to targeted and specialist services. Specifically, we are committed 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. Advice and analysis

4.1. Children's services commissioning has made significant progress towards the seven priorities which were agreed by Cabinet on 29 October 2024.

4.1.1. An interim short break services statement is now available on the Council's website. This remains under review as the services continues to develop (Priority 1).

4.1.2. The local offer website remains under review and a local offer officer post is currently undergoing compliance checks, expected to start in 2025 (Priority 2).

- In the interim, the short breaks team have collaborated with digital to develop a 'things to do' page bringing together the activities for children and families with additional needs all in one place. Officers and families report finding this helpful.
- Regular engagement with parents and professionals is ongoing to raise awareness of the Council's universal offer, including services provided by the youth service and Medway Go.

4.1.3. Children's commissioning has partnered with Public Health and Rivermead Solutions to develop a comprehensive training programme for providers of universal services that will be delivered in March 2025 and June 2025 to improve and increase provision of inclusive services. An update on outcomes will be provided in due course (Priority 3).

4.1.4. Children's commissioning have undertaken a review of short breaks eligibility and inclusion criteria (Priority 3 [Appendix 1 and 2]).

- The revised criteria were consulted on in partnership with Medway Parent and Carer Forum in November 2024 and parent engagement remains ongoing since August 2023.
- The service is currently developing a short video to support parent and carers' understanding of the revised grant scheme for 2025/26.

- Our proposal allows for a potential cost reduction of up to £200,000 being reinvested back into the service.
- The team who are responsible for processing short break grant applications moved from Adult Social care into Children services commissioning on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to ensure efficient delivery of the revised scheme.
- An online self-assessment form has been published on Medway Councils website to enable more efficient processing of short break applications.
- The new criteria will be piloted in January 2025, before launching fully in April 2025.
- Corporate management team have approved our request to recruit 2 additional staff members (1.4 FTE) to address the backlog in processing short break grant applications. Recruitment is underway with staff expected to start in February/March 2025.
- Ongoing commitment to this priority will improve outcomes for children and increase customer satisfaction.

#### 4.1.5. Invest in data intelligence (priority 5)

- Work is underway to finalise a more sophisticated payment process for short break grants from February/March 2025. This process will reduce the likelihood of incorrect payments, expedite payments for parents and carers, and ensure strict budget management.
- The development of Mosaic elements will facilitate improved oversight of the review of comprehensive care packages and enhance transparency regarding the allocation of funds to meet the needs of young people. This will facilitate more productive discussions at panels and mitigate instances of duplicate funding from the local authority (e.g. different departments funding for similar support).
- We are currently in the process of reducing the quantity of information we request from parents and carers for January 2025, while also ensuring that we are capturing the value for money and outcomes of the grants for children and young people.
- Planned development for 2025/26 includes a live portal system that allows parents and carers to simply enter the website to track the status of their applications and provide information for grant reviews.
- Work is underway to establish reporting features with the goal of creating a Power BI dashboard that will assist the team in lowering and maintaining an application waitlist while also giving rich live data for sufficiency and budgetary planning.

#### 4.1.6. Children's services commissioning have secured £419,797 from the DfE to support the development and expansion of services provided by Rivermead Inclusive Trust, specifically ROCC on behalf of Medway Council. The funding has resulted in an SLA with the Trust allowing us to work collaboratively to deliver improvements in how ROCC is delivered for our families and ensures sustainability beyond the scope of the DfE grant (priority 6).

- The SLA stipulates that there will not be any price increases until 2027 meaning a positive impact on council finances.
- Through this partnership we have established a priority pathway from referral at Access to Resources Panel (ARP) for our most complex children into ROCC.
- Working with ROCC and ARP has allowed us utilise spaces funded by Medway Go to deliver c£15,091 in cost avoidance savings.
- We have co-produced a more efficient booking system that allows more time for families to plan their respite.
- ROCC have introduced an afterschool club and respite provision on alternate Saturdays.
- ROCC have introduced a work experience programme for 18–25-year-olds.
- ROCC will be launching a satellite provision in Hoo from February 2025.
- Between April 2024 and September 2024, ROCC have delivered 829 sessions against a target of 455. Individual children participated 312 times against a target of 150.
- Of those who completed wellbeing surveys, 89% of parents reported improvements in their child’s wellbeing and 83% in their own wellbeing, as well as 72% who reported improvement in their child’s behaviour.
- We are using DfE funding to develop video content that will increase awareness of ROCC and short breaks services overall to support with recruitment to allow the continued expansion of local services.
- Children’s commissioning is continuing to engage with community providers about the possibility of broadening their inclusive offer for our children.

4.1.7. The remainder of the DfE grant (£223,865) for 2024/25 has allowed us to address recruitment and retention challenges (priority 7).

- Two additional posts have been recruited to support the delivery of the short break sufficiency priorities.
- A successful recruitment campaign was delivered in partnership with The Centre for Outcomes of Care, which delivered 2932 vacancy views, 617 apply clicks, and 47 applications.

- We appointed five level 4 residential support worker apprentices who are undergoing comprehensive work experience and training that will equip them for successful careers in the children’s residential sector in the Council (Parklands/Eden House/Aut Even).
- The campaign produced assets which The Council can utilise to support future recruitment for the children’s services sector.

## 5. Consultation

- 5.1. Children’s services commissioning consulted with children, young people, parents, carers and professionals in summer/ autumn 2023 for the short break sufficiency strategy.
- 5.2. Engagement with children, families, and professionals has continued throughout 2024 via MPCF events, parent/carers coffee mornings, multi-agency events, and school briefings. This will continue in 2025.
- 5.3. Formal consultation for the short break grant scheme was conducted in November 2024.
- 5.4. MPCF remain engaged in ongoing delivery of the project, such as development of parent advice videos.

## 6. Risk management

| Risk  | Description   | Action to avoid or mitigate risk   | Risk rating |
|---|---|--|-------------|
| Inequity in offer                               | Some families currently maybe able to offer multiple offers and support allowing duplication and using up local resources | New strategies and processes have helped mitigate this   | CIII        |
| Delays in processing and assessing applications | Due challenges in capacity and lack of streamlined processes currently the is a backlog of applications and renewals      | Additional staffing capacity have been agreed and will be in place in early 2025 and new website and criteria will further streamline and speed up process times | BIII        |

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

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

## 7. Climate change implications

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

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1. The 2024/25 Round 2 monitoring forecast projects a short breaks overspend of c£259,000.
- 8.2. The children's services commissioning team has secured additional external grant funding of £643,662 from the DfE to support short break sufficiency in Medway in 2024/25.

## 9. Legal implications

- 9.1. 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.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. 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.

9.4. This report highlights the work undertaken by the Council to ensure ongoing compliance with the Short Breaks Legislation.

### Lead officer contact

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### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Short Breaks Future Model and Backlog Review Findings and Proposal

Appendix 2 – Short break grant criteria consultation document

Appendix 3 – ROCC case study

### Background Papers

Medway Short Breaks Sufficiency strategy 2024-2027

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=76334#:~:text=The%20vision%20of%20this%20strategy,to%20help%20keep%20families%20together.>