

Questions and Answers

Re-commissioning Herefordshire's short breaks for disabled children from 2017

This document is intended to provide a summary of the questions and answers in relation to the provision of short breaks services for disabled children as they are re-commissioned for 2017. The document will be updated as the re-commissioning exercise progresses. If you'd like to ask a question, please email shortbreaks@herefordshire.gov.uk.

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1. Children, young people and families

1.1 How many disabled children in Herefordshire need a short break?

Around 200 children are known to the council's children with disabilities (CWD) team and approximately 150 of these children need some form of short break. Most needs can be met by daytime short breaks services, although around 25 children need an overnight break. The majority of these can be supported in a family-based short breaks setting while up to 10 children require a residential-based short break service.

Further work is being completed within the short breaks re-commissioning project to analyse and forecast the need for different types of short breaks services for 2017-2020.

1.2 Can short breaks that are funded by the council be accessed by siblings and/or friends of disabled children?

The council will only fund the service for the disabled child. Depending on the short break being accessed, places may have to be prioritised for disabled children first. However, some service providers may also be able to include siblings or friends, for which there may be an additional fee.

1.3 How do I ask for an assessment of my child's needs?

If parents feel that their child has an unmet need and require an assessment for short breaks provision, they can self-refer via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or ask a professional involved with their child to complete a referral on their behalf. If you'd like to know more about the children with disabilities assessment process, please contact the [Herefordshire MASH team](#) on 01432 260800 or alternatively please read the Herefordshire [short breaks statement](#) for further information about short breaks eligibility.

1.4 What age range will short breaks be available for?

Eligibility for short breaks will be 0-18 years of age; however age ranges may be different for each type of service or subject to a professional assessment. Most children aged 0-5, for example, can be supported by existing early years and childcare services. Where a child is supported by a short breaks service following an assessment, their short breaks plan will be regularly reviewed as they grow up.

1.5 What happens to a young person's short break service when they approach adulthood?

This will vary between young people depending upon their individual needs. Planning with the young person and family will start as early as possible, often around age 16. Should the young person require a service to continue post 18 years of age, they will be referred for assessment by the transition team at the age of 16. This allows sufficient time for the young person to transition to adult services in a planned way. Some young people may be able to transition to an adult service from their 16th year or by their 18th birthday.

1.6 Can assessments be done around the family as in adult social care?

The disabled child is at the centre of the assessment process. However, the assessment does take into account the whole family, for example the needs of siblings or parents who may have health problems themselves.

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1.7 What do we do if we want a break but don't meet the criteria for an assessment?

Information about short breaks services that can be accessed without an assessment is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks and on Herefordshire's [WISH website](#).

1.8 What happens when an assessment doesn't identify a need for a short break?

The children with disabilities team may also be able to support families in other ways. Sometimes, short breaks do not resolve the issues families' face, such as dealing with challenging behaviour or trying to deal with the numerous professionals involved. The children with disabilities team may offer a period with a social worker or family support worker who will work with parents to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to deal with the stresses of looking after a disabled child.

1.9 Are short breaks only for children with medical needs?

Short breaks provision can also be for children who have additional needs arising from a learning disability, with the aim to increase their social opportunities and increase their independence whilst parents have a break from their caring responsibilities. The re-commissioning of short breaks for 2017 will be looking for organisations that can offer a range of services to meet a wide variety of needs for children and young people.

1.10 How can choice and control of short break provision be improved for disabled children and their carers?

There are several opportunities for improving choice and control, such as:

For open-access services that don't require a professional assessment, a change to the council's contracting arrangements could mean that more providers could be approved to be a part of the open-access short breaks offer. There are systems elsewhere that provide eligible families with a basic short breaks 'allowance' which they can then use with approved providers of their choice.

For assessed short breaks families can already choose to control their support through a direct payment.

For overnight short breaks there has been a fairly rigid system of informing families when their nights will be scheduled. While balancing the needs of multiple children with provider's capabilities means that full flexibility is probably unachievable, families should have more opportunity for their choice of nights to be considered and met.

1.11 If we are assessed as needing an overnight short break, does it have to be regular or can it be an occasional weekend or week?

Every child and family is unique. Through the re-commissioning exercise, it is the council's intention to improve the level of choice and control that families have in being able to plan the service that they receive. Overnight breaks may be offered following an assessment of need. As far as possible, service providers will be required to consider family preferences for particular days or nights. However, this will need to be balanced with the needs and preferences of other children and families, within available resources and the provider's capabilities.

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1.12 How is the council keeping families informed about what is happening with re-commissioning short breaks?

The council is keen to engage with as many families of disabled children as possible throughout the re-commissioning process. We will be doing this by:

- Directly contacting families of disabled children known to the council to ask them about their experiences, needs and preferences
- Meeting with formal and informal parent carer forums, including parents supported by Herefordshire Carers Support and self-run parent groups operating in the Ross-on-Wye and North Herefordshire areas. Further information about these groups is available on the [Local Offer networks and support services webpage](#).
- Encouraging families across Herefordshire to sign up to a new voluntary disabled children's register that will help us communicate with them and better understand their needs
- Seeking a small group of 'family envoys', someone that might volunteer some time to work with commissioners to develop service ideas and/or be involved in evaluating funding proposals from potential service providers
- Formal consultation, as required
- Publishing questions and answers relating to the re-commissioning of short breaks

2. Services from 2017

2.1 Where can I find Herefordshire's short breaks statement?

The statement and additional information is published at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks.

2.2 What short breaks will be available from April 2017?

This is the main question that the re-commissioning exercise will answer. Work is being completed to describe the type and number of short breaks opportunities needed in Herefordshire, which is being informed by the voices of children and families. At the end of the re-commissioning exercise, Herefordshire's [short breaks statement](#) will be updated with details of the service, which will be available from April 2017.

Further information will be published at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks throughout the re-commissioning period.

Information about [current short breaks provision](#) is also available on the council's short breaks webpage. Information about these and other similar services is available on Herefordshire's [WISH website](#). This new website was launched in early 2016, with additional information being added as it develops. Any provider that offers short breaks or other services that can support disabled children can register their details on the [WISH website](#).

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2.3 How is the council proposing to develop the universal short breaks market?

The re-commissioning activity will be considering this question. For example, it may be possible to invest in a service that could support a network of organisations with disability training and awareness or provide a local quality assurance mark or encourage providers to promote their service via the [WISH website](#).

2.4 Can more breaks be offered during the summer holidays?

Yes, in principle. However, this needs to be considered within available resources.

Firstly, for example, funded daytime short breaks are currently spread over weekends and holidays throughout the year. It would be possible to focus more activities on summer holidays by reducing or ceasing weekend provision at other times of the year.

Secondly, reducing reliance on high cost specialist short breaks services could mean that a greater proportion of the short breaks budget could be invested in daytime services in the summer holidays or at other times.

2.5 What will happen if an existing service provider either doesn't submit a proposal or is unsuccessful in submitting a proposal for 2017?

This will depend on the circumstances relating to the specific provider and the reasons why the provider does not become an approved provider of services from 2017. However, in general, it is likely that the needs of children previously using that service will have to be met in different ways. In such cases, the council will work with the family to carefully plan their transfer to a new provision that meets their needs, which could be an alternative service or a direct payment.

2.6 What short breaks can I access without an assessment?

There are a range of universal and targeted activities available that can provide a short break. Further information is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks and on Herefordshire's [WISH website](#).

2.7 How long does the social care assessment take to complete and how often are needs reviewed?

An assessment can take up to nine weeks from the date of the referral. A social worker will meet with you and your child and liaise with any other professionals and agencies that may be involved.

The needs of the child are reviewed through child in need meetings, the frequency of which is decided by the social worker in consultation with the family and other professionals.

2.8 How will my child's assessed needs be translated into an offer of a service?

The core assessment completed by your child's social worker will assess the needs of the child and their carers and how these can best be met. Following the assessment, the social worker will arrange a multi-agency meeting with other professionals involved with the child to formulate a plan.

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2.9 Is transport available to take my child to overnight short breaks after school?

There is no entitlement to free transport for short breaks services. However, where a funded short break is to be provided directly before or after school, the children with disabilities team will work closely with the school transport service to determine whether the child's school transport service can be adapted around their short break.

2.10 What is the 'family-based' overnight short breaks service?

The [family-based overnight short breaks service](#) is being established in 2016. The service will offer specially assessed and trained host families that can provide short breaks in the community. This specialist service will only be available to disabled children following a professional assessment of their needs.

Host families are carefully matched with the needs of a disabled child and their family, who are fully involved in planning the service provided to their child.

Depending on the child's assessed needs, host families might provide regular breaks during the week or weekends, a few nights per month or short blocks of breaks at different times during the year.

This is a new service that will help to improve the range and choice of short breaks for families in Herefordshire. Similar services have been established for several years in other areas, where disabled children and their families have been able to develop long term, positive and stable relationships with short breaks host families.

2.11 If my child is assessed as needing a family-based overnight short break, but we want a different service, what can we do?

The council has a duty to meet the needs of disabled children. If the professional assessment identifies that a child's needs can be met by a family-based short break, the council's duty will be to offer such a service. Should a family want a different type of service, there will be two factors that need to be considered.

Firstly, the council would need to be assured that the proposed alternative service does meet the assessed need and is appropriate for the child.

Secondly, if the cost of the proposed alternative service is more than the cost the service recommended by the assessment, the cost difference would not be met by the council.

2.12 If my child is assessed as needing an overnight short break, how many nights can they have?

A professional assessment will establish the number of required nights and the length and frequency of stays. This is done by discussing the child and their family's usual routines and balancing the needs of the child with those of parents and siblings. There is no minimum entitlement and for most children, needs can be met by an allocation of 13 to 36 nights a year.

In exceptional cases, some children may need up to or more than 75 nights a year. Care regulations require that if a child is away from home for more than 75 days a year, they should be looked after by the local council with the agreement of their parents.

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3. Money, funding and costs

3.1 Is my child entitled to a funded short break service?

There is no 'entitlement' as such but a professional assessment can identify if a child has any unmet needs arising from their disability, which require specialist support and the impact on the family as a whole. The assessment will take into account the parents caring responsibility that is above and beyond what a child of the same age ordinarily needs, such as a disabled teenager that requires supervision in the community to keep them safe.

Where an assessment identifies unmet need, the council has a duty to offer appropriate support. The Herefordshire [short breaks statement](#) explains more about this duty and the different levels of universal, targeted and specialist short breaks services that are available.

3.2 Do I have to pay for anything?

The cost of some activities and transport will remain the parents' responsibility when accessing targeted or specialist short breaks services. The service provider will be able to provide any information regarding the additional costs.

3.3 Who pays for short breaks?

Many activities are fully or part funded by families themselves, in the same way that other families fund youth club activities for their children.

Community groups and organisations are able to attract charitable funding or resources to be able to offer activities that can be accessed by disabled children.

Some schools offer out of school activities, for which there may be a charge.

Herefordshire Council and Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) pool funding into the 'short breaks budget', which pays for a range of contracted short breaks services. The family would normally cover the cost of transporting their child to and from their short break and the cost of entrance to any activities during the short break, such as the cinema. The Herefordshire [short breaks statement](#) describes the council's duty to provide short breaks to meet need.

3.4 Is the re-commissioning exercise about saving money?

No. For planning purposes, it has been assumed that annual budget levels will remain similar to previous years, subject to governance within the council's and CCG's medium and long term strategies.

However, better use of a range of short breaks services could allow Herefordshire to free up money within the budget that could be invested in activities that families have asked for, such as more daytime opportunities in the summer holidays.

3.5 Could a group of parents receiving a direct payment, pool their money to buy services for their children?

In theory it is possible, but has not yet been tested in Herefordshire. Pooling a budget that supports a group of young people could be a creative way that could meet that group's needs.

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4. The re-commissioning process

4.1 My organisation already supports disabled children. How can we share information about what we do?

Information about [current short breaks provision](#) is available on the council's short breaks webpage. Information about these and other similar services is also available on Herefordshire's [WISH website](#). This new website was launched in early 2016, with additional information being added as it develops. Any provider that offers short breaks or other services that can support disabled children can register their details on the [WISH website](#) now.

4.2 Why are short breaks being re-commissioned?

Current contracts for short breaks services come to an end in March 2017. The council has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient short break opportunities in place to meet local need and is leading a process to understand this need, the views of children and families and work with service providers to improve Herefordshire's short breaks provision.

4.3 How long will new contracts be for?

There are a number of options to be explored and a commissioning plan will be prepared that will set out the preferred option for approval by the council's Cabinet in autumn 2016. The plan will be informed by the views of families and potential service providers.

4.4 Will families be involved in designing the short breaks offer for 2017?

Yes. The voices of children and families will help inform what the short breaks offer will look like and how it will work. The council has been engaging with families in different ways over recent years and is able to refer to what they have told other organisations, such as Herefordshire Carers Support. This means that there is already a picture of a range of views that can inform the re-commissioning project.

In addition, the council is:

- Contacting families of disabled children known to use short breaks to ask them about their experiences, needs and preferences
- Inviting families of disabled children to sign up to a new voluntary disabled children's register that will help us communicate with them and better understand their needs
- Meeting with formal and informal parent carer forums and further information about these groups is available on the [Local Offer networks and support services webpage](#)
- Seeking a small group of 'family envoys' to work with commissioners to develop service ideas and/or be involved in evaluating funding proposals from potential service providers
- Formally consulting, as required

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4.5 How will the council decide which services to deliver itself and which services to contract externally?

In 2016, the council's health and social care overview and scrutiny committee task and finish group recommended that the option to provide an in-house 1:1 buddying service might be more suitable than the present arrangements.

The council will weigh up the pros and cons of delivering services in-house, including considering its own experience or capability in a service area, the views of service users and any potential cost or legal implications.

4.6 How will you make sure that services are of a good quality?

The council will check and monitor the quality of providers' services through a number of mechanisms.

At the tender stage, the council will evaluate suppliers' bids with a view to ensuring the quality of the service being offered.

During the contract period, once a provider has been successful in securing a council contract we will undertake regular monitoring appraisals of the service. This will include checking that the service provider has the necessary policies and procedures in place and they're up to date, as well as checking service satisfaction via feedback from professionals, service users and their families and carers.

4.7 Where can I find more information?

Further general information about short breaks and the re-commissioning process is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks. Additional information will be published there throughout the re-commissioning period.

Any questions about the process can be emailed to shortbreaks@herefordshire.gov.uk and where appropriate, questions and answers will be shared online for other interested parties to see.

4.8 Where can potential providers find more information about the procurement process?

Information about the procurement process and timetable will be published on the council's procurement portal at www.supplyingthesouthwest.org.uk and potential providers are encouraged to register on the portal now. Provider engagement events will take place over the summer and a tender process is planned for the autumn, with the intention to award contracts by Christmas 2016, for services to commence from April 2017.

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