

Short Breaks Strategy 2024-27

Vision

We want our children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to be healthy, happy and safe, and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life. We want them to have, and to expect, the same opportunities in life as other children and young people. Our approach will be from birth to settled adulthood (0-25 years old). We want young people to feel prepared for adulthood, developing independent living skills, friendships and a sense of belonging in their communities.

Objectives

- A key part of this is supporting children and young people who are disabled to enjoy family life. Part of how we support families is by enabling parent carers who need it to have regular and substantial breaks from looking after their children. Children and young people can in turn have fun and constructive activity opportunities which meet their complex needs, help develop friendships and prepare for adult life.
- This is part of the SEND Pathway, one of our strategic priorities, and the vision is to ensure that children and young people with SEND, and their families can easily access the right support from services, at the right time. We want short break opportunities for children and young adults to be available and meet the needs of all families who require them.
- Short breaks are available as part of a graduated response to meet a variety of needs and prevent escalation of problems.

Background

A Short Break is when a child or young person who is disabled spends supported time apart from their main carer. Short Breaks help parents and carers to continue to provide the care their child needs.

Short Break activities take place outside of school (or equivalent) hours during daytime, evenings, weekends and school holidays. They can last from a few hours to full days, and even overnights. Short Breaks can include group activities, holiday play schemes, sports, arts or music activities, and one-to-one support.

Short Breaks give the young person the opportunity to take part in activities, form friendships, become more independent and enjoy themselves. Their family benefits from a break from caring for their child. This means carers can rest, spend time with each other and/or their other children.

- Following a government programme of research and expansion of short breaks for children who are disabled, the Children Act 1989 was amended by the Children and Young People's Act 2008 to require local authorities to provide short breaks for families with children who are disabled. This includes children who have learning disabilities, social and communication disabilities, physical disabilities and complex health needs.
- Each local authority must produce a Short Breaks Service Statement so that families know what services are available, the eligibility criteria for these services and how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of the families with disabled children in their area.
- The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 set out how local authorities must provide short breaks. This includes a recommendation that some short breaks, known as targeted short breaks, should be made available to families without having to have their needs assessed individually. This means that some help can be provided before an assessment by a Children's Services practitioner recommends specialist short breaks. All short breaks should be provided to support families proactively not just when there is a crisis.
- These regulations also set out what councils should provide including: daytime 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 carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.
- Any child or young person who is disabled and aged up to 25 years old who needs short breaks should be able to access them.

- There are a range of things that Local Authorities are required to do by law in respect of short breaks but there is flexibility in how Local Authorities deliver these requirements. In summary we must:
 - Consider all relevant legal requirements when we make decisions about how we provide and fund short breaks.
 - Assess the needs of any child or young person who is disabled whose family may want or need services above the level available locally without an assessment.
 - Provide short breaks to children or young people where an assessment shows that they are necessary to meet their needs, taking account of the family context and any support arrangements made with other agencies.

Our Approach to Commissioning Short Breaks

The Dorset Short Breaks offer has evolved over many years and offers multiple activities and types of support to meet the diverse range of needs of children and young people who are disabled.

The Dorset offer is good, but not sufficiently varied, or extensive, and access to this offer is not always consistent and equitable and needs are not always being met. There have been intermittent reviews of different elements of the short breaks offer but the needs and interests of children, young people and families have changed over time.

Having spoken in depth with families we know we need to look at the whole system of Short Breaks to ensure we are providing the right opportunities, at the right time, in the right place, for the right groups of children, young people and families.

There are a range of strategies and plans in place to support children and young people with SEND including the Council's SEND Strategy and the NHS All-Age Neuro-diversity Review. This Short Breaks Strategy sets out how we plan to commission Short Breaks over the coming five years and the improvements we expect as a result.

We will take forward this work in the context of other on-going work, taking care not to duplicate activity and to identify opportunities for join up and to make the best use of resources. We are committed to designing these changes and improvements with the people

who matter most: the children, young people, parents, carers, and siblings for whom Short Breaks should make a difference.

The Current Offer

All Local Authorities must share a statement about Short Breaks. This Statement tells families:

- The range of services available
- Who can use these services
- How these services are designed to meet the families' needs

The Statement has to:

- Be prepared with regard to the views of local families
- Be published on the Local Authority website
- Be kept under review and revised as appropriate

The Statement is available through the [Dorset Local Offer](#). A further updated Statement will be co-produced with Dorset Parent Carer Council. This Statement will be reviewed annually.

The graduated short breaks offer builds on locally available activities for children and young people. To start with, our partners provide group activities which can be accessed without a Children's Services needs assessment for those who have additional support requirements related to learning and physical disabilities. We call these 'targeted' short breaks. Children requiring more intensive support can access 'specialist' short breaks when their needs have been understood via an assessment completed by a social care practitioner with a children or young person and their carers and family.

Using Data to Make Decisions About Needs

Our short breaks offer will be informed by an up-to-date and accurate understanding of the numbers of children and young people with SEND, where they live, the types of disabilities they have and of any protected characteristics.

It is also important to understand how this is likely to change over time so that we can respond effectively to needs as they develop.

We know that the potential demand is for up to 6302 children who have a disability in Dorset.¹

Approximately 3760 children, young people and young adults aged 0 – 25 years have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Dorset Council has approximately 1480 children and young people registered on the voluntary disability register.

450-500 children access targeted short breaks, without having a needs assessment, and this has been the case for the past 5 years.

For specialist short breaks, at any one time around 500-550 children and young people who are disabled, and their families, are supported by the Children who are Disabled early help and social care service, and this has also remained at this level over time, albeit with a slightly increasing trend. Around two thirds of these children have assessed needs requiring short breaks. Other needs include physical and mobility needs requiring specialist equipment, aids and home adaptations, as well as for personal care.

Local population and school attendance data combined with ONS disability prevalence data suggests that we can expect the overall child population to decrease over the next five years, the proportion of children with SEND is increasing, so we can expect the current short breaks-eligible population to rise from just over 1000 currently to just under 1100 in five

¹ 2022 estimates from ONS data. Average of 11% of child population have a disability: Family Resources Survey March 2023 [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) and papworth trust disability facts 2018 <https://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/about-us/publications/papworth-trust-disability-facts-and-figures-2018.pdf>

years. However, demand may increase further due to other variables including improved information about short breaks, but the likely impact is unknown.

What families have told us

Families have been telling us that while some short breaks are working for some there are many areas where we need to improve, with:

- more short breaks, offering more spaces to attend,
- more information about Short Breaks across Dorset,
- better communication about the range of available short breaks,
- less travel to a Short Break as the travel itself is difficult, with up to 30 minutes being acceptable and an hour being too much for most families,
- more short breaks for children who have high and intensive support needs,
- more accessible activities and venues for children with physical needs, including complex health needs, who use wheelchairs to mobilise and require other specialist equipment and adaptations to meet their personal care needs,
- more flexibility about how direct payments can be used,
- more help to find Personal Assistants to provide short breaks,
- In the 2022 survey of families receiving Direct Payments, 75% of respondents who were struggling to find provision said they would like short weekend provision (up to 4 hours) with 15% wanting full day weekend cover, 85% would like school holiday cover and 60% of parents wanted after school and/or evening cover.

Developing and improving the Short Breaks Offer

Our commissioning principles

Our commissioning approach is underpinned by a set of shared values and principles set out in our children, young people and families plan, and described in our Commissioning Strategy ([Dorset Council Children's Commissioning Strategy - Dorset Council](#)). These include:

- Always putting children and families at the heart of everything we do.
- Focusing on outcomes.
- Empowering children and families to make decisions for themselves.
- Delivering best value for money; spending the Dorset £ in Dorset on the things that get the best outcomes for children and families.

Outcomes

The Short Break programme has outcome expectations at several levels:

- Strategic level
- Service Level
- Individual Level

Outcomes are the change we expect to occur because of this Commissioning Strategy.

For children and young people with SEND these are:

- Safe and stable relationships and home lives
- Improved emotional health and well-being
- The development of skills and abilities that help growth and transition into adulthood

For parents/carers and families of children and young people with SEND these are:

- Safe and stable family and home environments
- Improved health and well-being
- Opportunities to participate in leisure, work, and study

For both children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers these are:

- Increased choice and control over the services received
- Children and young people with SEND being looked after in their families without the need for higher level interventions such as unplanned placements in residential facilities

For the system - providers, partners, professionals, and communities:

- Resources targeted based on need and demand
- A shift in resource and focus across our system to earlier help
- Increased awareness of Short Breaks services
- Increased confidence from mainstream providers in supporting families of children and young people with SEND
- Improved disability awareness and friendliness across communities in Dorset
- Improved multi-agency working across the system resulting in improved alignment of systems and processes
- A strong, vibrant, and innovative provider market

Needs

The information we have tells us that we should:

1. Meet the needs of children and young people with autistic spectrum conditions and learning disabilities who have complex needs and behave in ways that often challenge parents and carers' capacity to care for them.
2. Meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people with physical and complex health needs, and that this latter group is more reliant on specialist adapted spaces and facilities particularly where needs are complex.
3. Make provision for children and young people who have disabilities who may have disturbed or disrupted sleep patterns that are not the same as those of their parents, carers and families meaning they are unable to sleep.

4. Recognise that some children and young people may benefit from group-based day-time short breaks settings while others require more individualised and/or bespoke support.
5. Work with providers to deliver local short breaks activities across Dorset. Significantly more provision is required in the Chesil locality as well as Dorchester and West, with services over-represented in East and Purbeck, indicating a redistribution of resources is required. There appears to be sufficient provision in the North locality.
6. Make sure that how we provide support is flexible enough to respond to needs.
7. Promote options for care and support so that families can have more choice and control, including finding Personal Assistants.
8. Develop the short breaks offer for young people and young adults, promoting short breaks which don't stop at 18, support the development of independent living skills and friendships, and ensure that transitions are positive experiences.
9. Develop our overnight short breaks offer for children, young people and young adults with complex and intensive support needs, identified from reviewing usage and unmet need. This includes enhancing both the family-link and residential offers.
10. Develop the market of short breaks providers for children to deliver additional daytime short breaks, informed by our review of service use. Develop our understanding of how day-time services for young adults can meet short breaks needs.

Delivering the Strategy

1. Birth to Settled Adulthood

Birth to Settled Adulthood is a whole council project designed to improve the lives of children and young people who are disabled by developing a whole life planning and commissioning approach. A 0-25 multi-disciplinary team will be established in 2024, along with a 0-25 commissioning strategy. Short breaks development will continue to develop and be informed by this work stream.

2. A Framework of Short Breaks Services

We will develop a framework of short breaks providers which will enable both Children's Services and young people and parents using Direct Payments (DP) to purchase services. This framework, for children, young people and young adults who are disabled, will be re-focused on delivering and developing services across the 0 – 25 year-old age range. Providers will be required to meet children and young people's needs and outcomes. These include achieving one of Dorset Council's aspirations to ensure that there are short break opportunities in each locality.

Commissioned activities fall within two categories:

Targeted Services – Services intended for children and young people who are disabled and who need groups and services specifically designed to meet their needs, with additional support over and above that reasonably expected to be provided by universal services' inclusion offer. Access is usually for children and young people who meet the criteria set by the provider to meet the Dorset Council specification but without the need for a social care assessment and Direct Payments will not be available.

Specialist Services – Services intended for children and young people who are disabled with more complex needs which families will have helped Children's Services to understand through the process of completing a needs assessment and plan. The plan may identify needs that can be met by services purchased by Children's Services or families using DPs, or a combination, and these can include individual community-based support from a Personal Assistant, group-based day-time short breaks, or overnight short breaks. Direct Payments may be taken up by families to purchase any services not provided directly by the Council; families may also opt to employ Personal Assistants directly, rather than purchase their services from a provider organisation. We will commission services which help families do this.

3. The Lighthouse Model

Drawing on the positive impact of our Harbour service, we are already developing a new flexible and preventative approach called the Lighthouse model. This combines an outreach

offer to support families to meet their children's special needs at home with a care offer to look after children overnight away from home. Our first Lighthouse hub will be in east Dorset offering outreach and overnight short breaks. As well as getting alongside families to offer support, this will add to existing residential short breaks provision based in Chesil locality to in total offer between 6-8 places across the county, or 2000-2300 nights per year, depending on the level of support required. We are also exploring the potential for short breaks at our Centre of Excellence in north Dorset and other sites.

4. Overnight Short Breaks Development

a) Family Link Short Breaks Development

Work is taking place to develop daytime and overnight short breaks provided by approved families as part of Dorset Council's Fostering Service. This will enable family-to-family links which may also facilitate support from wider family, or 'kinship', networks, and we are considering the role our Lighthouse model may play in this as well. We are also working with Adults Services colleagues to develop the short breaks offer from the Shared Lives Service. Delivering services through family links across Dorset will also help distribute services over our localities to improve access.

b) 16-25 residential short breaks

Children's and Adults Services will work in partnership to commission CQC-registered residential provision from 2024. We are aiming for this to be for young people aged 16-25 to provide an option that minimises disruption in the transition to adulthood. Providers will offer support which prepares young people for living as independently as they want to.

5. Co-production

Co-production is central to our commissioning approach. In 2023, Local Offer Live enabled parents and carers to test and inform the development of our local offer. Dorset Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Impact Survey 2023 ended in July 2023 and was aimed at parents or carers of children or young people aged 0 to 25 years who have special educational needs or disabilities. The output of the survey will be used to inform future commissioning activity.

6. Children with Complex Health Needs

We will work with NHS colleagues to commission services which can meet the needs of children who have disabilities and complex health needs. We will explore how short breaks and individual support pathways can integrate with NHS pathways such as Children and Young People's Continuing Care and developments such as social prescribing. We are developing joint commissioning arrangements to help this including a pan-Dorset multi-agency funding process.

7. Our Digital Family Offer

Dorset Council is creating a digital family offer as part of our drive to transform:

- Putting our customers first – “Working together to design and deliver modern, accessible services to our customers.”
- Implementing a digital, intelligent, data led approach – “Using our data to help us predict demand and improve our prevention agenda.”

Work has taken place to improve the SEND Local Offer and improve the ability of parents and carers to identify local short breaks providers. Further digital work as part of our Family Hubs offer will make a range of other services available to parents and carers online.

8. Data review

A power BI dashboard is being developed as part of the B2SA and this will be used alongside service user insights to refresh the local Short Breaks Statement in April 2024. This in turn will update and inform this commissioning strategy and provide insights into the reach and impact of our offer.

