



# Northumberland Short Break Review Executive Summary

April 2021

## Introduction

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As part of a wider review of SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) services, it was recognised that the current short breaks statement was out of date and unclear, in terms of how support is accessed and what is available for families.

The objectives of the review were to:

1. To identify and map the current short break services available to families.
2. To better understand the need for short break services in Northumberland.

## What we did

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We tried to reach out to as many people as possible to understand views and experiences of what is working well, areas needing to be developed and possible suggestions for future short break arrangements. This also involved families and professionals being asked to provide information about the short break services that they access, or those that they are aware of. We did this through online surveys, webinars, and direct discussions.

## Review structure

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The review was broken down into 3 focused areas:

1. The cost and identification of short break services.
2. The assessment, authorisation, set up and review processes currently in place.
3. Understanding the need for short break services in Northumberland.

## Key Findings

### 1. The cost and identification of short break services

#### *Accessible information*

- No collective understanding of what a short break is amongst families or professionals.
- Useful information is held in silos; there is a need for accessible and meaningful information, a 'go to' point for up-to-date information to manage expectations effectively.

#### *Identification of services*



- Short break services do exist and are being accessed.
- The pandemic has reduced options for some families but has also provided alternative opportunities for support.
- The geographical disparity in Northumberland can limit choice and flexibility for some families.

### *Costings*

- There are numerous budgets, processes and individuals involved, all with different interpretations.

## **2. The assessment, authorisation, set up and review processes currently in place**

### *Identification of need*

- Families identify need and contact universal services directly.
- There are a range of practitioners within children's social care that can identify unmet needs, although work is required to ensure these practitioners fully understand the purpose of short breaks, so the approach is consistent.
- The process to accessing an assessment varies, factors may include the nature of the disability or practitioner's confidence.

### *Assessment*

- There is an increased awareness of direct payments and their benefits for families.
- Assessment recommendations often lack specific detail (what the unmet need is, how it will be met, the rationale for the recommendation and the objective of the support).
- The offer of support often reflects service availability rather than the needs of the child/family.

### *Authorisation*

- There is some evidence of duplication in processes, which can create delay for a family accessing support.
- There is no consistent approach to authorising short breaks currently in children's social care.

### *The set-up of support*

- The time to set-up support varies; for universal services this is immediate once contact has been made subject to availability, if a social care assessment is required delays can occur as a result of an assessment being extended, services not being available, onward paperwork, service availability, or time/processes involved in the authorisation of the resource.
- There is some evidence that families are consulted in the decision-making process, for example discussing services that are available or how allocated overnights will be used.



### *Case management and review*

- Governance arrangements are in place for complex cases, but this needs to extend to all cases where there is a short break for a child.
- Reviews often take place at different times, which is a duplication of time and information, although there are improvements in some areas to aligning reviews, such as EHCP and care team meetings.
- There are varying degrees of communication between professionals and families, and within professional networks, for example not having all the necessary people present for a review or communication being process driven.
- The evidence of outcomes from service providers could be strengthened through being clearer about the intended outcome when the support is agreed, and when information is requested and shared.

### **3. Understanding the need for short break services in Northumberland.**

- From the data available it is clear there is a need for short breaks across all levels of need, but the true need remains unclear.
- Families that are accessing short break services, often access multiple services, and currently there is no simple system to collate this.
- Without fully understanding the true demand for short breaks, it is difficult to identify the required capacity.

## **Conclusions**

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- The current arrangements are confusing and inconsistent.
- There is a lack of collective understanding for the purpose of a short break, amongst families and professionals, which results in expectations being chaotic.
- There is determination to improve the current short break arrangements for children, young people, and their families.
- Strategic co-ordination is required to oversee the changes within the short break arrangements, so they fit within the bigger plan of transformation across SEND.
- The three broad themes of **support, co-production and availability** must be considered in the planning and implementation of any future developments of the short break arrangements.

## **Next Steps**

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## April 2021

- Confirm the short break scope.

## May 2021

- Establish a steering group for the short break redesign including interested professionals and parents/carers.
- Gather further information from parents/carers and providers around barriers and challenges to inclusion in community services

## June 2021

- Scope the current demand for targeted services, including those resourced through direct payments

## Summer 2021

- Establish working groups that include children, young people, parents, carers and professionals to co-produce the details of the future offer.

The full report and recommendations can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

If there are any questions or feedback about the review, please contact, [shortbreakfeedback@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:shortbreakfeedback@northumberland.gov.uk)