

Northumberland Short Break Review Report

Version 1.1

February 2021

1. Introduction

Aiming High for Disabled Children showed the positive effects of short breaks for children, young people, and their families. Short breaks are recognised as an important service for families with disabled children, both in terms of a child's development by allowing them to meet friends, take part in activities, have fun, and develop independence, as well as identifying the benefits for the whole family's wellbeing.

Choice and flexibility should be more readily available, for those eligible, through the introduction of personal budgets and direct payments, so children and young people can access activities and services that meet their individual needs, and work towards the goals they want to achieve, reflecting their interests and wishes.

In Northumberland, 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SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) services, it was recognised that the current short breaks statement was out of date and unclear, in terms of how support is accessed and what is available for families. A request was made to review the short break arrangements, with two broad aims to consider:

1. To ensure families' needs are met by an equitable service offer, and
2. To promote flexible planning and commissioning options, within a clear and appropriate governance framework.

2. Review initial scope and purpose

The original purpose and scope of the review included:

- To map the available services, including their criteria, authorisation, and commissioning processes.
- To seek the views of professionals and families, including children and young people.
- To review the need for short breaks services, considering families that are and are not working with children's social care.
- To identify any areas of duplication or gaps in services.
- To report the key findings and make recommendations for improvement.

3. Methodology

To inform the findings within the review, information has been gathered from a range of sources, to triangulate and analyse, with the aim of strengthening the understanding of available short break services, the processes involved, the experiences of families, and the need for short breaks in Northumberland.

▪ Children, young people, and their family's perspective

Accessing the views of children, young people and their families has been a central focus. It was acknowledged that children and young people can access short break services with or without the involvement of children's social care, as a result, the aim was to seek the views and experiences of children and young people across both mainstream and special school settings.

Initially, it was expected that colleagues in the Youth Service participation team and SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice Support Service) would facilitate a range of face-to-face focused groups with children and young people and then separate sessions with parents and carers. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this has not been possible. Separate online surveys were considered the most effective method of collating these views, specifically, what is working well, areas that could be improved and suggestions to consider in the future short break arrangement.

A range of questions were prepared to generate both quantitative and qualitative data. To reach as wide an audience as possible, the surveys were promoted by several sources:

- The NCC communication team, Northumberland Parent and Carer Forum (PCF), and numerous services such as Calmer Therapies, the Tanga Club, ANDPA and Evergreen Teens promoted the links via their social media platforms and within their networks.
- During the live window, the survey links were displayed on the home page of the SEND Local Offer.
- Finally, the survey links were shared with colleagues within the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG), Disabled Children's Team (DCT), SEND champions and each Early Help Locality Team, to share within their networks and promote via their social media pages.

The intention was also to advertise the survey links within the Head Teachers briefings; however, this was not possible due to the ongoing pandemic demands.

As part of the survey, parents and carers were invited to attend a webinar discussion, to hear the key findings. The webinars were also an opportunity to hear parents' experiences directly, as well as discussing their suggestions to strengthen the future short break arrangements.

The full findings of parent and carers views and experiences can be found in [Appendix A](#).

A selection of views from children and young people have been gained through a separate online survey. In addition to the promotion of the survey outlined above, two special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) from Cleaswell Hill School and Collingwood School supported several children and young people to complete the survey. The full findings can be found in [Appendix B](#).

It is acknowledged that the sample size was limited, which is considered within the recommendations.

▪ **Professional perspective**

Based on their role, knowledge, or links to short breaks, professionals have been spoken to, to explore within the current short breaks offer what is working well, areas needing to be developed and suggestions for future arrangements. The following professionals have been consulted:

- Mary Connor, Head of Service, Early Help, Prevention and Support
- Adele Wright, Head of Service, Children's Safeguarding
- Representatives from the SEND Service; Sam Barron, Head of SEND strategies, Nicola Taylor, Head of Inclusive Education Provisions and Russell Pickering, Senior SEND Manager
- Representatives from the Commissioning Team; Lynn Bryden, Commissioning Senior Manager, Judith Keepin, Commissioning Manager, Terry Anderson, Accountancy Assistant and John Macron, Accountant
- Lisa Anderson, DCT (Disabled Children's Team) Team Manager and Kirstine Gagie, Social Work Support Assistant
- Susan Usher, Early Help Co-ordination Worker
- Christine Logan, Fostering Service Team Manager
- Representative from the Direct Payment Team; Louise Duff, Senior Direct Payment Support Worker and Karen Wallace, Finance and Monitoring Officer
- Representatives from SENDIASS; Alison Bravey, Information, Advice and Support Manager and Vicki Graham, Support Officer
- EHCP (Education Health Care Plan) Co-ordinators, now known as Social Care SEND Co-ordinators (SCSCs)
- Representative from the Performance and System Support Team
- Julia Simpson/Christine Hoggarth, co-ordinating the launch of the LIFT module¹
- Various safeguarding and early help locality team managers and senior managers within children's social care
- Neil Carney, Strategic Tourism Manager
- Members of Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership (NSSP) children and young people's disability group
- Members of the Parent and Carer Forum
- SEND champions across children's social care
- Representatives from Adult Social Care that have experience of completing assessments that result in an offer of a short break arrangement which involve direct payments and/or personal budgets
- Identified current short break providers that children and young people in Northumberland currently access

To reach a broader range of professionals, a short online survey was shared with members of the NSSP children and young people's disability group, with a request to share it widely within their

¹ A financial module sitting within the main children's services recording system.

professional networks. The full findings of the survey can be found in [Appendix C](#). It is recognised the response rate was extremely low, although the findings have been included.

Discussions have also taken place with other Local Authorities namely North Tyneside, North Yorkshire, and Cumbria to understand their current short break arrangements.

Material and discussions from the short break's community practice event, hosted by the Council for Disabled Children on 1.12.2020, have also been considered.

- **Documentation**

Reports and documents that have been considered have included:

- Other Local Authority short break statements as existing examples, namely Cornwall and North Yorkshire
- Northumberland's past short break statements
- DoF Short Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children: Advice for Local Authorities
- 2019/2020 annual reports of many provisions that offer short breaks currently
- The results of the 2020 Northumberland SEND survey: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on children, young people, and their families

4. Cost and identification of short break services

Within this review, short break services have been considered across the spectrum of home care, home sitting, 1-1 support (enablement), holiday activities, out of school activities and overnight short breaks. These services are represented within a tiered system:

	Universal services- These will be services that are available to all children and young people, and their families. They can be accessed without needing any specialist resources or assessment.
	Targeted services- These are services for children and young people who may need additional support to access services or may need groups or services that are specifically designed to meet their needs. Some targeted provision can be accessed directly with or without an assessment.
	Specialist services- These are services for children and young people with severe and/or complex needs who are likely to require even more support than is available either through universal or targeted services. These services will require an assessment of need.

The understanding, and perception, of short breaks has been explored with families and professionals. They have been asked to provide information about the short break services that they access, or those that they are aware of. Services that are available and being accessed by families in Northumberland have been collated in [Appendix D](#).

Short breaks are broken down into three categories by the commissioning service: overnight stays, care in the home/community and holiday activities and playschemes.

Pupils attending Barndale school also have access to overnight stays Monday-Thursday. These short break requests from parents are managed at the discretion of the headteacher and funded through an education budget code. These pupils are not necessarily open to a social care practitioner; however, the details of the overnight stays should be recorded within the child's EHCP so there is an overview of the child's needs, how these are being met and by who. The effectiveness of this will need to be considered further, to ensure this information is considered when reviewing the need for short breaks in Northumberland, as well as being confident that consistent decision making is taking place regarding support.

There is also a significant amount of short break provision delivered through a direct payment which is overseen through the direct payments team who sit as part of adult's social care.

There needs to be further work with the family placement service to understand the resources available within it that could support a family based overnight short break if that is something identified as needed but it is clear that there is not a recognisable offer currently.

4.1 Findings

The key findings regarding the identification of short break services are recorded in Table A. The findings are listed under the two themes that have been identified: accessible information and service availability. These findings reflect observations as well as family and professional views and experiences. Consideration has also been given to the findings from understanding the cost of commissioned and in-house services.

Table A: Identification of short break services and cost

Areas that are working well	Opportunities to develop
<p>Accessible information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and carers reported they were able to identify short breaks through their own research, word of mouth, via a service they were already accessing, through the child's school or through children's social care (Appendix A, p.5). There is some information, advice and support options listed on the NCC (Northumberland County Council) website about short breaks and services available, which families or professionals may find useful, either during initial searches for support or as an ongoing reference point. 	<p>Accessible information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The understanding of the term short breaks varies with many interpreting this as an overnight "respite" stay. The full spectrum of short breaks is not clearly understood by professionals or families. As a result, the perception of what constitutes a short break is confused as well as what its full purpose is, for example only identifying it as a break from a caring responsibility rather than the wellbeing of the whole family. Without fully understand what a short break is or it being explicit within the Local Offer, makes it difficult to put into context the information that is, or should be, available.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some information held on Tri.x regarding short breaks, which is accessible to families or professionals. • Some information on short breaks can be accessed via SENDIASS and prior to Covid-19 there was a quarterly newsletter circulated to their mailing list that included services and activities for disabled children. • SENDIASS has an enquiry function that families can access, however 95% of enquiries are regarding educational need; social care needs that are not resolved through advice are redirected to First Contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and professionals have consistently reported that they struggle to find or access up to date information about short break services and eligibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The most common barrier to accessing short break services was limited information (Appendix A, p.3). – 36.4% of parents and carers strongly disagreed that “information about short breaks and their eligibility is available and easy to find” (Appendix A, p.7). – When asked about the availability of information, professionals scored an average 4.5, on a scale of 0-10, where 10 is excellent and 0 is poor (Appendix C, p.1). • The Local Offer in relation short breaks is not fit for purpose. Information is vague and there is not an up-to-date short break statement available. Some families have accessed earlier statements, which are now outdated and do not reflect the current arrangements, leading to confusion. • A search for “short breaks” on the NCC staff intranet yielded no results and searches on related fields (for example “disability” “children’s services” “short breaks” etc) found no relevant matches. • A search of “short breaks” on the NCC website generates 2 results: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. short break care for disabled children This sits within looked after children/foster care which could cause families looking for initial support confusion and/or distress. This is offered as a service, but it does not exist in reality. 2. short break care service This sits within SEND Local Offer and “things to do” and does include a list of services.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information on the NCC website is not easily accessible, in terms of its content, location or how to navigate it. • Information about short breaks is held in silos of family members, professionals, or service providers rather than a centralised accessible point.
<p>Services available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are short break services present in Northumberland, which children, young people, parents and carers access and value (Appendix D/Appendix A p.9, Appendix B). • Some services are still operating at pre-Covid capacity, for example St Oswald's. • The most common categories of short breaks identified by parents and carers, were support in the home or community, a disability playscheme or youth club or a planned overnight stay. Some children or young people were accessing more than one short break (Appendix A, p.4). • Parents and carers have found services for their child, without the assistance of the Local Authority, which is encouraging. • Parents and carers placed value on the short breaks they access, recognising several benefits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – developing friendship networks – community participation and support networks – providing parents and carers with a break from their caring responsibility – an opportunity to spend quality time with other children in the family – the child or young person accessing leisure facilities and activities – helping the young person and their families to prepare for adulthood (Appendix A, p.7 and 10). • With an ability to travel, there are options available for families to access services, 	<p>Services available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families feel there is limited choice or flexibility in services they can access- 40.9% parents and carers strongly disagreed that there is a broad range of services in their area (Appendix A, p.7). • There is geographical disparity in the availability of universal, targeted and specialist services across the county (Appendix D): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The North was found to have very few services. – The West has one dominant provider, We Can. – Many of the remaining services are in the South-East and Central locality, or outside of the county. • Specialist services exist, but they are in Alnwick, Hexham, and Newcastle. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The option to access a foster placement as a short break arrangement is limited. Their availability is dependent on the timing of the referral and the capacity of the service, which requires a lot of planning and negotiation. • Limited universal services were identified by parents, carers, and professionals, stating an awareness of disabilities was often a barrier. This has resulted in the services that are available rarely offering an inclusive model. • Families who can, often travel considerable distances to another borough and in some instances outside of

<p>as no service identified had any eligibility restrictions on the place of residence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of services available are charity based, which have formed to 'fill' support gaps that have been identified by families. • During the Covid-19 pandemic, many charity-based services have been creative and have maintained contact with families through virtual support sessions and check ins for parents, carers, children, and young people. This has been positively received by families and has reduced previously identified geographical barriers. • There are positive examples of inclusive universal services in place which are extremely popular with families, such as Ability to Play, however they do not provide a countywide service. • The introduction of the community pop ups in 2020 are positive in terms of community integration and accessing co-ordinated and meaningful activities. This was particularly successful in the West for SEND, however the experience was different across different areas. • The offer of the parent plus programme, specific to SEND needs, will be an asset to the early help offer, alongside the inclusive offer of structured programmes and drop-in support pre and post diagnosis. • Children and young people's responses to activities they do away from their parents or home were positive in terms of their impact (Appendix B, p.1-2). • The max card is available through DCT, but not exclusive to families working with the service. This offers families free or discounted admissions to a range of activities in the local area and throughout the country. There are currently 173 families with an active card. Partner agencies promote this initiative, for 	<p>Northumberland, to access a service. Without access to transport or if the child is unable to travel long distances, this reduces choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions can change quickly, for example holiday clubs making it difficult to know what is available. • Due to the lack of competition, commissioned services hold a monopoly as the only provider in the area. • Despite attempts by the commissioning service to broaden the range of services available through tender, this has been largely unsuccessful in some areas, due to the geography of the county and services stating there are difficulties to recruit appropriate staff. • Although a direct payment arrangement is the recommendation of an assessment, there are instances where this cannot be progressed in a timely manner due to limited resources, either a service or activity, or the recruitment of a personal assistant. Place of residence or the child's needs are identified contributing factors. • Choice and flexibility are not common: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Families have reported they are offered a service because it is available in their area, not because it meets their child's needs (Appendix A/Appendix C, p.2). – In some instances, limited choice has contributed to families being concerned to raise an issue about a service. There is no obvious alternative available and 'a service' is better than no service. – The support arrangements that are offered, often reflect the individual involved and their knowledge or experience, for example social care practitioner/direct payment worker.
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<p>example health visitors, CYPS and education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are services that have considered the transition process for young people, which is built into their offer (for example Ability to Play, Border Links) but this is not representative across the county. • • Children’s Centre and early help services are inclusive, and families are encouraged to access the universal, preventative and targeted services on the pathway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and carers scored on average 4.88 on a scaling of 0-10, where 10 is excellent and 0 is poor, when asked how easy it was to find and access short break services. 43.5% of the responses scaled between 0-4 (Appendix A, p.5-6). <p>The themes identified from the low scaling included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Access to information – Application of knowledge by assessors – Access to and level of support – Service availability – Professional integrity and accountability – Process driven rather than needs led <p>These findings were also evident in the impact statement results, notably statements 3, 4 and 5 (Appendix A p.7 and 9), scaling questions (Appendix C p.1) and suggestions to increase their scaling (Appendix C p.2).</p>
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4.2 Summary

Currently, there is no collective understanding of what a short break is, amongst families or professionals. Useful information about short breaks is held within silos but having access to up-to-date information has consistently been raised as an issue by families and practitioners. There is a clear need for meaningful information to be accessible, so expectations can be managed effectively. Having this information available within the Local Offer, the go to point for up-to-date information on opportunities and services families can access, is a clear objective. Without this, confusion about the scope of a short break, the available options, eligibility, and lines of responsibility and accountability will continue.

Short break services do exist however the key challenge is geographical disparity, which results in limited choice and flexibility for some families, meaning there is not an equitable offer. The pandemic has reduced access to some activities and services for some families, but it has equally been an opportunity for many families to access virtual support, which has been positively received and this has strengthened networks.

Understanding the figures relating to the cost of short breaks is extremely difficult. The budget processes need to be reviewed so information about costings is clearer.

4.3 What needs to happen

Several next steps are proposed, for consideration:

Accessible information

- The development of a short break statement is needed once there is agreement on what the scope of Northumberland's short break offer will be. This will provide clear and accessible information, which will explicitly outline the working definition of a short break, the activities or services that are available across the three tiers, including their eligibility and any processes involved. A positive example of a clear and informative statement, to replicate in format, is from [Cornwall Council](#).
- The short break statement needs to be launched and communicated effectively, across all networks; this will include all levels of children's social care, the parent and carer forum, partner agencies, SENCOs, and service providers for example. This statement will sit within the Local Offer.
- Information on the NCC website and intranet needs to be reviewed and updated, in terms of its content and accessibility, so information is meaningful and accurate. This work has started through the participation team and needs to be completed.
- A mailing list feature accessible through the Local Offer page would be encouraged, offering families the opportunity to receive planned updates, for example on a quarterly basis, and/or alerts when changes are made. Families would have the choice to sign up to this method of information sharing.
- There are plans to add a 'short break' section to the Local Offer page by the end of February 2021, which is positive. A mechanism needs to be agreed to review the information periodically, to ensure that details remain relevant and current. This section would benefit from having information of a suitable point of contact for any questions or queries. The Local Offer email could fulfil this purpose. This email could also service as a mechanism for families and professionals to share information that can be screened and considered within the planned reviews of the page content, promoting and encouraging a shared ownership for ensuring accurate local information.
- Celebratory examples need to be accessible to families and professionals, for example to highlight positive outcomes for children and young people, collaborative working or creative and/or flexible thinking. This will support breaking down barriers with families who may be apprehensive or reluctant to access services as well as reducing the number of families that encounter children's social care at a crisis point.

Service availability

- The universal offer needs to be strengthened:
 - There is promising work being undertaken through Northumberland Communities Together (NCT), for example in the HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme, which will strengthen the universal offer across the whole county and could provide early opportunities for families to access more activities and support, without intervention from social care. Initially this will be an offer for children aged 8 and over who access free school meals, but some flexibility could be included, for example

parents remaining on site for children under the age of 8. This is in its planning infancy, but consideration should be given to how the short break offer could link into this model.

- Linking the short break offer with the community pop up initiative, which is an inclusive offer, is encouraged. Further exploration, taking into consideration how feedback from families on what they may want, or need will be sought and used, would ensure the pop ups continue to be community focused and encourage positive network building for families within an inclusive offer.
- The virtual support sessions that have been offered by services during the pandemic have proven successful. This could be developed further as part of the universal offer. Discussions would need to take place with services to consider if this is a viable option, once face to face sessions resume and to establish if there are any implications.
- Training and awareness regarding disability needs to be developed, offered, and delivered across universal services. This would have the capacity to increase confidence in managing and supporting the needs of disabled children, which would provide opportunities for families to access a wider breadth of services as part of an inclusive universal offer.
- Wider exposure and use of the Max card scheme could form part of a signposting or universal offer. The criteria would need to be agreed due to the cost implications, but this should be included within the SEND early help offer.
- There is an offer of collaborative working, to explore the links between short breaks and accommodation, hospitality providers, experiences, and attractions, through an accessibility focus group within the visitor tourism sector. This would be set within the Destination Management Plan managed by Visit Northumberland. Accessibility is a theme that will be explored further in the development of the wider tourism offer. This is a creative way of linking families with their communities and if this were successful it could provide more information about the options available to families to access appropriate provisions, noticeably within the experiences and attraction workstreams.
- In response to the very limited response to commissioning tenders for care in the home/community resources, to establish equitable coverage across the county exploration of developing an in-house resource may be required.
- The range of provision available to provide overnight short break care needs to be looked at to identify if the current offer meets needs.
- Processes need to be put in place to ensure that overall costs for short break provision can be clearly identified.

5. Assessment, authorisation, set up and review processes

It has been important to understand how children and young people access short break services, either with or without involvement from children's social care. Through discussions practitioners' awareness, families' experience and application of the processes has been considered, and thought has been given to identifying any gaps or areas of duplication.

From reviewing the processes, consideration has been given to five key areas; the identification of need, assessment, authorisation, the set-up of support, case management and review. As well

as observations, the views and experiences of parents, carers, children, and young people have also been considered, to provide a more in-depth understanding of the processes as a real experience.

For universal services, once a family identifies an activity or service, the process to accessing this support is simple. To access a targeted or specialist services, which involves a social care assessment, the number of processes involved increases and are more complicated.

5.1 Findings

Table B: Social care processes

Areas that are working well	Opportunities to develop
<p>Identification of need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families can identify the needs of their child and contact universal services direct to make enquiries. • There are opportunities to identify unmet needs at varying point of the service, such as through the SCSCs (Social Care SEND Co-ordinators), within an early intervention and prevention model, as well as through Early Help Family Workers, First Contact and Social Work teams. • Children's Centres have a SEND champion who have received training to support families particularly with the EHCP process, and broader information, advice and guidance about disabilities. • There is a DCT duty worker linked to First Contact on a rota, to support with disability queries within new contacts. Due to the pandemic this is a virtual arrangement, which both First Contact and DCT appreciate is less effective. • The introduction of the Signs of Safety practice model has had a positive impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The EARS (elicit, amplify, reflect, and start over) questioning process and the use of best questions in 	<p>Identification of need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are SEND champions that are in place across the children's social care service to offer advice and guidance within their teams; their knowledge and understanding of short break services and what constitutes a short break needs to be improved. • Barriers to accessing short breaks identified by parents and carers included needing to have a social worker and service criteria (Appendix A, p.3-4)- 87% of respondents said they needed a social care assessment to access short break services. • Feedback from professionals and families indicates that the process of accessing an assessment of need varies (Appendix A, p.12-13/Appendix C p.2). Factors may include the nature and severity of the disability or the decision maker. • Social Workers described feeling pressured or overwhelmed by some families' knowledge about perceived entitlements or requests for support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – First Contact decision makers need to be upskilled in their knowledge and confidence to manage requests for disabled children. For example,

<p>First Contact, should help ERAs, as well as practitioners across the service, identify pertinent information during new contacts, assessments, and the ongoing review of a child's needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positive changes are being noted by DCT as a result, in that issues are being unpicked in relation to emotional support, considering non-disabled children in the family and practice support. • The DCT criteria is consulted at various stages of an episode, although potentially exposing families to numerous SWs within a single assessment. 	<p>whilst an assessment of need may be requested intervention across all thresholds needs to be considered. The main issue to be established is if there is an unmet need, rather than if the child has a disability. There should not be a perception of unmet need, because a child has a disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current DCT criteria is rigid, however, information is considered on a case-by-case basis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Locality teams have expressed concern that the criteria is restrictive to complex physical needs when most of assessments involve children with ASD/Autism (This was reflected in the parent and carer survey, with ASD, a learning disability and ADHD as the top three needs identified) (Appendix A, p2). This perception is not reflective of the current DCT criteria and may be a result of how the criteria has been communicated in the past or based on experience of individual cases. • Early help practitioners can identify unmet needs but are restricted in what they can offer outside of advice and guidance without referring a family for a social work assessment.
<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on information received from universal services, families can decide on whether the service is suitable for their child, or themselves. • There is a greater awareness of direct payments and the benefits that they can offer more flexibility to the family. • DCT staff are available to offer ongoing advice and guidance to colleagues about families open to social care, which 	<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers in locality teams do not always feel confident to complete assessments for children with SEND. • Practitioners need to explore family support and community networks before any recommendation of support from services is made. • There is limited evidence that specific tools are used to gather information from

<p>practitioners report is beneficial and supportive, however this can be very time consuming for DCT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas to develop are not seen when the assessment is completed in DCT. 	<p>disabled children, within locality teams, without direction from DCT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments often recommend a direct payment but are limited in detail for example not identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the unmet need – how an unmet need will be met/the type of service or support required – how the calculation of hours or frequency of support was made – the rationale for the decision – the goal for the intervention <p>This makes it difficult for the direct payment team to match the support to the set objective, and often involves further questions for the family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment recommendations often reflect what activity or service is available rather than the needs of the child, either because of not knowing what available or limited resource. • The involvement of families and professionals in decision making about short breaks has been raised as an issue that could be strengthened: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Professionals scaled this at 5 on a scale of 0-10, where 0 is poor and 10 is excellent (Appendix C, p.1) however during the impact statements 41% of parents stated the strong agreed they were involved (Appendix A, p.7 statement 2).
<p>Authorisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high-level resource panel (HLRP) provides a single route for funding requests for children with complex needs or specialist overnight stays, which involve a high-cost package of care. • There is evidence of positive collaborative working in complex cases between health and social care, for 	<p>Authorisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is duplication in the request of authorisation at the point of the assessment and when the case is received by the direct payment team, which can cause delay. • Further work needs to be done to ensure a simple consistent process of authorisation across social care regardless of which service area, particularly in relation direct payments

<p>example the joint assessment processes.</p>	
<p>Set up of support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For universal services, the set-up of support is immediate subject to the service having capacity. This is not delayed by assessment, financial agreement etc. • For complex or high-cost packages, once the social worker has completed the assessment, identifying the number of overnight stays a child needs and this has been approved, there is flexibility between the family and the identified provider to plan and agree how these arrangements will be used. • Families are consulted and part of the decision-making process when services are being considered, for example by the Early Help worker, direct payment worker etc. • During Covid-19, the direct payment team have a spreadsheet of all personal assistants that are available to work but due to the child's circumstances (parent choice, shielding etc) they are not actively working. The DP team have been using this as a contingency to maintain support to families during the pandemic. 	<p>Set up of support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early help teams have access to a small budget that is used to the locality's discretion for one off activity payments. This limits the options of support that can be offered when support can be maintained at an early level. • There is often a delay in starting support through a direct payment, this increases if the assessment is over 25 or 45 days, as the paperwork is not started until the assessment has been authorised. • There are possible further delays if the direct payment team do not have the necessary information for the personal assistant job advert, or if a service cannot be identified or an advert has no response. Factors may include assessments with unclear objectives or complicating factors of the child's needs or place of residence. • There have been examples of children being offered something different to what the direct payment was originally intended for.. This is likely to have been the result of unclear objectives being set for the child. A direct payment needs to be used to meet the identified needs of the child.
<p>Case management and review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For universal services, the review of support is managed between the family and service. • The HLRP (High Level Resource Panel) acts as a governance structure, but this is only in place for complex children or high-cost packages. The benefits of this arrangement include: 	<p>Case management and review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of reviewing a short break, via home visits or CiN (Child in Need) reviews, was described as of limited benefit by some practitioners, for children where the identified need is being met but the child remains open because of the direct payment. • The frequency of visiting, supervisions etc, for short break cases open to a

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Oversight of financial commitment requests and approvals. – Scrutiny, considering exiting plans, reviews, or transition arrangements when children are brought to the panel. – Regular information sharing with commissioning, including alerts for high-costing arrangements. • Social Work Support Assistants (SWSA) in locality teams support most families where there is a short break in place. They are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. • SWSA and DCT social workers have positive professional links within their areas, noticeably in the North and West, with school Teaching Assistants who are often recruited as personal assistants. • In some areas, the child's plan is being reviewed in line with the EHCP review, minimising the number of meetings that family members and practitioners are attending. 	<p>social worker/support assistant varies across teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements put in place for children often remain the same for significant periods of time. For example, children attending provisions years later when more age appropriate and inclusive provisions may be available or considered. • Reviews take place at different times, for example Team Around the Family/CiN, EHCP, Direct Payment financial review- ideally there should be a single review process that considers the holistic needs of the child. • There are long periods between financial reviews of a direct payment- annual or quarterly- there are no checks made on attendance, impact etc in-between. • Communication and collaboration need to be improved between teams, for example between the direct payment team and locality teams. This is more established with DCT. • There is no routine involvement of the direct payment worker or service at a child's review to share information about the support or service that is being provided or its impact. Information is only shared if there is a concern. • Mechanisms are in place to review high-costing packages by senior managers, but this isn't replicated for direct payments. • Commissioned services do not provide evidence of outcomes; this is sometimes due to a lack of clarity around what the intended outcome should be when the support is agreed, and information shared when it is requested. Lines of accountability and responsibility are not clear as a result.
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5.3 What needs to happen

Several next steps are proposed, for consideration:

Identification of need

- Consideration needs to be given to increasing the awareness and knowledge of short breaks, this could initially be achieved through a 7-minute briefing guide and shared as widely as possible, including within the short break page of the Local Offer. If a further need is identified, an e-learning module could be considered. This is particularly important if some of the case management support for disabled children is to remain within locality teams.
- Embracing the Signs of Safety practice model, the EARS approach specifically, needs to be utilised at all points in the service where information is gathered, to support a culture of analysis. Key areas that need to be explored within these discussions include carer stress and the impact of the child's disability on the whole family.
- Upskilling the SEND champions and managers across the service in their knowledge of short breaks both in terms of support that can be offered but also the early identification of possible unmet needs. This can be achieved through the updated information within the Local Offer and the ongoing monthly SEND support sessions that take place.
- The criteria for accessing different levels of short break provision needs to be made explicit in the short break statement as part of the next steps of development.

Assessment

- Considerations could be given to providing early help with a larger budget, that is ring fenced for supporting children with SEND, that can be accessed for short term support.
 - The budget could also be used to explore the use of bespoke passes to child led activities, which would offer some flexibility and choice to families, strengthening the offer.
 - These cases would be assessed and reviewed through the EHA processes with an expectation that the TAF would work with the family to encourage them to self-manage the service through the benefits they receive.
 - If parents are not able to self-manage the service, then a social work assessment, considering a direct payment would need to be considered.
 - The amount allocated would be based on the budget that is currently used for cases that are deemed as not requiring a statutory lead professional, but low-level support is identified.
 - This would need to have strategic oversight and link into an overarching governance arrangement that monitors and reviews all short break support across the service.
- Where short break services are recommended following an assessment, there must be a clear plan setting out who is going to do what, where and when to help the child. Objectives need to be clear.
- Family and community networks should be explored thoroughly as part of any assessment undertaken.
- An assessment should not be a barrier to accessing support and appropriate responses should be actioned as the assessment is progressing, rather than at the end.

Authorisation

- Expectations needs to be explicit that any support provided as part of an active CiN, CP or CLA plan where a short break is agreed, is met via a single budgetary process to support a better understanding of demand and costs.
- Consideration should be given to a mechanism whereby senior managers have an opportunity to scrutinise requests for direct payments in a similar way to the HLRP. This should be done in a proportionate way.

Set up of support

- The role of the 18.5 WTE support planner needs to be fully utilised in the planning and set up support; there will be links to the community hubs at a universal level, but this knowledge needs to be accessible across all levels.
- The function to progress playscheme and holiday requests on open early help cases currently sits with an early help support worker within First Contact, which was initially a holding position. This needs to be reviewed again to consider if this function is required and if so where the responsibility sits to support a stronger oversight of requests, ongoing need, barriers in availability and promoting a consistent response.

Case management and review

- Direct payment workers, social care practitioners and service providers need to work in partnership, they all hold valuable information that needs to be considered in any review of a child's arrangements.
- Consider a designated Independent Reviewing Officer taking the lead on reviewing all short break cases where children become Looked After due to accessing more than 75 days overnight stays per year. This would give consistency to the review but also support the role having specific knowledge about short break arrangements which can then be shared across the safeguarding service.
- Clarification is required on the review arrangements of holiday playschemes and holiday activities for children with an EHA and EHCP in place, to avoid confusion. The allocated EHFWS will be reviewing the child/family progress during TAF meetings, which should include the impact of the short break and if an ongoing need is identified and agreed, this needs to be conveyed at the earliest opportunity to prevent a delay in the support continuing, if there is an ongoing unmet need identified. There should not be an assumption the support is required.
- The CiN review process and quality of plans need to be strengthened. Clear objectives need to be set at the point of a plan being agreed, which then need to be reviewed at regular intervals to understand the impact for the child.
- The alignment of reviews needs to be better, for example CiN, direct payment audits and EHCP.

6. Understanding the need for short break services

Data has been collated from several sources to try and understand the need for short break services in Northumberland, through the current demand.

6.1 Universal services

Although universal services monitor the number of children and young people that access their services to ensure health and safety regulations are adhered to, they have reported they do not report these figures, as they do not have a statutory obligation to. However, some services were able to provide the number of children, young people and families that accessed their services, as an indicator of demand pre/post Covid-19.

6.2 Early intervention and prevention

In the last 12 months there have been **292** children with a recorded disability that have had contact with an early help family worker or a children's centre:

- **39** children with a disability attended children's centre groups.
- There have been **215** early help cases, where an EHCP was also in place.
- The number of early help cases, with a recorded disability was **136**.

Currently data on active EHCPs is drawn from the education recording system, so all EHCPs may not be recorded within the Early Help system. Although the child has an identified disability, this may not be the reason for the contact with the children's centre or for the early help assessment, or if this could be considered as a short break.

6.3 Social work assessments

Table C below looks at the completed new assessments within the last 6 months, where the identified factors at the end of the assessment is either a physical or learning disability. These are the two factors most likely linked to a possible need for a short break but relies on the social worker interpreting and identifying the categories correctly.

Table C: Assessments completed

New assessments in the last 6 months	Number completed
Where the assessment identifies a child learning disability (code 5a)	9
Where the assessment identifies a child physical disability as a factor (code 6a)	11
Where a combination of both 5a and 6a were identified	29
Where codes 5a and 6a are identified alongside other factors	130

The number of children with a current overnight short break in place is **32**. This includes St Oswald's and Monksfield.

Table D shows the number of direct payments in place. An employment direct payment is used for activities and enablers, and the non-employment direct payment covers playschemes, home care providers, nurseries, self-employed child minders etc. To note, some children/young people have both an employment and non-employment direct payments in place to reflect their assessed needs.

Table D: Short break through a direct payment

Direct payment in place	Number (as 23.12.2020)
Total number of Direct Payment recipients:	252
• Employment Direct Payments	170
• Non-employment Direct Payments	116

Data on the number of max cards issued is a possible indicator of the wider need for short break activities and resources, shown in table E, however some families who are working with social care practitioners are unaware of the max card scheme, so the true demand could be greater than the figures suggest in table E.

Table E: Max card scheme

Period	Number issued
2020	355
2019	182
2018	105
Currently active	173

6.4 Summary

There is no central point where data is collated, and the understanding and labelling of a short break differs across the sources, which complicates its interpretation. The only way of understanding if involvement or an assessment is linked to a need for short break is for a manual audit to be completed to capture this level of detail. From the data available it is clear there is a need for short breaks across all three tiers, but it highlights that this need remains unclear. Families that are accessing short break services, often access multiple services. Currently there is no simple system to collate data that can be triangulated. Without understanding the need for short breaks, it is difficult to identify the capacity required to meet the demand. The introduction of a new method of recording financial arrangements should be a partial remedy to understanding the short break need for cases open to children's social care and a means to monitor the financial commitment, but the quality of the data output will be reliant on the input of accurate information and its consistency.

6.5 What needs to happen

Several next steps are proposed, for consideration:

- By having a clear scope of the short break offer in Northumberland, set within an updated short break statement, consideration can then be given to the data that will identify the need to meet this offer, so the capacity required can be recognised.
- Developments are underway to establish a new disability performance dashboard in early help, however before this is progressed consideration will need to be given to what data is required and for what reason, so the data has a clear purpose and meaning.
- Consider how data is translated and ensure that a strength-based approach is utilised in every forum it is discussed. This will identify and acknowledge service areas meeting targets as well as areas to be developed. Data needs to be triangulated with audit findings, to give a holistic and informed opinion on performance.
- There needs to be an overarching governance framework in place, this needs to provide a high-level overview that monitors all short breaks but has the capacity to review the services arrangements in response to the identified demand. As a proposal, information will be shared from the various tiers, which would determine the level of detail and scrutiny required. For example, the expectation maybe for universal services to provide quarterly figures on the capacity and demand of their sessions, early help provide a monthly summary that reflects their ongoing support and budget spend, and the current arrangement within the HLRP continues for specialist provisions.
- There needs to be an individual or service identified that collates the relevant information and has a clear understanding of the short break arrangements, in terms of the support offer and any associated cost.

7. Conclusion

This review has been a positive step in recognising the current short break arrangements have vast opportunity to be strengthened. What is most apparent is the lack of collective understanding amongst families and professionals regarding short breaks; what their purpose is and what they are used for. Short breaks are used to provide a service to the child, but at the same time they provide parents and carers with a break from their caring responsibilities. It is accepted that the current arrangements in Northumberland are confusing and inconsistent.

There is a genuine determination to improve the current short break arrangements for children, young people, and their families. Whilst there is a lot of activity, there needs to be strategic co-ordination as to how changes within the short break arrangements fit within the bigger plan of transformation across SEND, and how changes within SEND services may impact on short break arrangements. This co-ordination will ensure that developments are carefully managed, and any changes that are progressed have the full intended impact for children and young people's outcomes.

Three key themes have been identified throughout the review, which need to be considered in any future developments within the short break arrangements.

1. **Support:** Families and professionals want and need a better understanding of short breaks. They need to be able to access up to date information and guidance to have a greater awareness of activities and services available in their area or specific to their child's needs. Having clearer information available, allows the ability to manage expectations more effectively.
2. **Co-production:** The offer of a short breaks service should be needs led not process driven. It is recognised that there needs to be improved communication between professionals and families, with families being actively involved in the planning and decision making for their child. The views of children and young people need to be actively sought, this needs to include their views on activities and services that can meet their aspirations and interests, through a person-centred approach. The PCF are enthusiastic to be part of developments and provide the link to the parent network.
3. **Availability:** There needs to be increased flexibility and choice in the response to an identified unmet, whether this is through universal targeted or specialist services.

Whilst all the next steps should be considered, the recommended starting position would be to:

- Confirm what the short break scope will be (low, medium or high need).
- Once the scope is clear, consideration can be given to establishing the need for short breaks to reflect this. This will identify any gaps in the current service offer that will be considered within future commissioning and planning, either through additional provision, the development of an in-house resource, or a mixture of both.
- Review and update the short break statement so expectations are clearer and more effectively managed.

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