

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Short Breaks
Meeting date	14 September 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide a range of Short Breaks services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). These services offer opportunities for children and young people to participate in enjoyable activities, build independence, and develop social connections, while providing parents, carers, and siblings with valuable respite from caring responsibilities. Short Breaks can include daytime, evening, weekend, holiday, and overnight provision, ranging from universal community services to specialist support for more complex needs. Effective Short Breaks provision is an important part of the wider SEND support offer. It helps strengthen family resilience, prevents the escalation of needs, and contributes to better outcomes for children, young people, and their families. During the recent OFSTED Inspections, it was acknowledged by inspectors that short breaks are a valued and important source of support for children with disabilities and their families, helping to meet needs and prevent escalation. However, they concluded that there was a need for a greater variety of current short breaks provision offer, including overnight provision, and a better sufficiency to meet growing demand and increasingly complex levels of need. As a result, Ofsted identified in their reports that the expansion of short breaks capacity and improving the accessibility and usability of the offer for families should be key priorities for improvement across BCP. Current strengths within the Short Breaks offer include the Positive Activities Programme and commissioned provision for some complex and overnight needs. However, there is a need to expand capacity, increase the range of services available, and improve families' awareness of available support. Planned improvements include increasing opportunities for community participation, reviewing resources, enhancing accessibility through a user-friendly SEND Local Offer, and developing a single point of entry via the Front Door to ensure evidence-based responses to identified

	needs. Future developments will explore expanding commissioned services, introducing a Gateway Card, and increasing access to Direct Payments supported by practical brokerage, payroll, recruitment, and employment assistance. A key principle of this work will be co-production, ensuring that children, young people, families, and wider stakeholders are actively involved in shaping the design and delivery of services. This approach aligns with national SEND reforms by strengthening local support, promoting early intervention, and using data and evidence to inform decision-making.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: The Children's Oversight and Scrutiny Committee: • Note the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report (published January 2025) and the Ofsted and CQC Area SEND Inspection of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Local Area Partnership (published February 2026) (<i>see appendix</i>) • Note progress in establishing the Short Breaks Transformation Programme and its four interdependent workstreams. • Scrutinise the proposed tiered hybrid model comprising a commissioned provider framework, a Single Front Door, a BCP Gateway Card and expanded Direct Payments supported by brokerage. • Consider and comment on this report and scrutinise the proposed programme of work over the next 18 months. • Consider whether a further update would be helpful, with a recommendation that this is provided in 8 to 10 months when the design and mobilisation phase is complete.
Reason for recommendations	To enable the Committee to scrutinise the development of the Short Breaks Transformation Programme, consider the implications of the proposed service model, and ensure that planned improvements respond to identified local needs.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton - Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Skills
Corporate Director	Juliette Blake - Interim Director of Children's Services
Report Authors	Nigel Burton – Head of Service with responsibility for Children with Disabilities
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

1. Background

1.1 Purpose and role of Short Breaks

Short Breaks should achieve two connected outcomes: positive experiences for children and young people with disabilities, and sustainable support for families. A strong offer provides meaningful activity, friendship, inclusion, skills, and independence. It also gives carers confidence that support is safe, reliable and suited to individual needs, helping families continue caring and reducing the risk of crisis.

1.2 What Short Breaks Can Include

Short Breaks are not limited to respite care. Depending on individual needs and eligibility, Short Breaks may include:

- after-school, evening, and weekend clubs.
- holiday activity programmes and playschemes.
- sports, swimming, and physical activity sessions.
- arts, music, drama, and creative activities.
- youth groups and social opportunities.
- outdoor learning, adventure, and recreational activities.
- one-to-one community support to access local facilities and interests.
- mentoring, befriending, and social skills development.
- sitting services provided in the family home.
- support to develop independence, life skills, and preparation for adulthood.
- family-based or residential overnight short breaks; and
- personalised activities commissioned through Direct Payments, including support from Personal Assistants.

The purpose of these activities is not solely to provide respite but also to improve participation, wellbeing, friendships, independence, confidence, and inclusion within local communities.

1.3 Existing BCP offer.

BCP Children's Services provides a universal/plus Positive Activities Programme, including clubs and holiday activities, alongside externally commissioned targeted and overnight support. Registration, triage, booking, and subsidised charging arrangements apply. One-to-one support is not routinely guaranteed in universal sessions and depends on individual circumstances and staffing.

2. Proposed Service Model and Workstreams

The preferred model is a tiered hybrid arrangement. A tiered hybrid commissioning model organises services across different levels of need, ensuring that individuals and families receive the right support at the right time, from universal provision through to specialist interventions. Delivery is shared across a range of providers, including council services, voluntary organisations and independent providers, enabling a flexible, efficient and responsive approach to meeting local needs. It retains a visible universal offer while adding commissioned capacity, a clearer access route and greater personalisation.

Tiers would help match support intensity to need with movement between tiers being proportionate, transparent, and responsive.

3. Intended Outcomes and Performance Framework

Success will be judged by improved experiences and outcomes, not simply implementation of the new model.

Domain	Illustrative measures	Purpose
Access	Time to first activity/decision; completed and abandoned applications; non-digital use.	Tests whether access is simpler and equitable.
Sufficiency	Demand, waits, unmet requests, geography, one-to-one hours, and overnight bed-nights.	Identifies where capacity must grow.
Utilisation	Bookings, attendance, cancellations, and unused capacity.	Improves value and identifies barriers.
Outcomes	Participation, friendships, skills, independence, carer wellbeing, and family	Keeps focus on lived experience and prevention.

	resilience.	
Choice	Direct Payment uptake, brokerage use, Personal Assistant continuity and provider range.	Tests whether choice is practical.
Quality and safety	Compliance, incidents, complaints, quality reviews, and workforce competence.	Ensures expansion is safe and effective.
Equity	Take-up and outcomes by age, need, geography and protected characteristics.	Identifies inequality and directs action.

4. Governance and Accountability

The Senior Responsible Owner is the Director of Children's Social Care.

Governance will need to include Social Care, SEND, Commissioning, Finance, Legal, Procurement, Information Governance, Digital and Data, Human Resources, Communications, Parent Carers Together and NHS partners.

Each workstream should report milestones, dependencies, risks, and decisions to the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team and the SEND Partnership Board. Strategic oversight will be provided through existing transformation governance arrangements.

NHS representation is an important dependency, particularly for complex health needs and joint funding.

Commissioning capacity and potential workforce implications for existing provision also require active oversight.

5. Proposed Implementation Timetable

The timetable is indicative and must be reviewed against procurement, technology, workforce, legal and market-readiness dependencies. Transition must avoid detriment to existing users.

Phase	Period	Principal activity	Outputs / decisions
Design and mobilisation	Months 0-6	Governance, coproduction, demand baseline, market engagement, Front Door, Gateway, and DP design.	Agreed scope, engagement plan, draft Statement, market findings, initial financial model, EIA/DPIA

			commenced.
Procurement and build	Months 5-10	Specifications, procurement, digital processes, dashboards, workforce, and transition planning.	Tender/evaluation, providers, system testing, onboarding plan, and readiness review.
Mobilisation and transition	Months 11-18	Phased cards, provider and brokerage mobilisation, training, guidance, and transition.	Framework, Front Door, and card live; refreshed Statement; baseline reporting.
Review and improvement	From month 18	Review access, sufficiency, outcomes, equality, and finance; address gaps.	Quarterly assurance, annual sufficiency and Statement reviews, member/family reporting.

6. Conclusion

The inspection findings provide an independent account of pressures experienced by children, families, and practitioners. They validate the programme's central direction: to provide a broader and more sufficient offer, clearer access, stronger specialist and overnight capacity, meaningful choice, and an evidence-based, needs-led response.

The tiered hybrid model is a credible basis for reform, but procurement alone will not resolve the issues. BCP Children's Services must shape the market, support Direct Payments, design accessible routes, use data proportionately and maintain robust quality and safeguarding. Coproduction with Parent Carers Together and children and young people is essential if the model is to reflect lived experience and earn confidence.

7. Summary of financial implications

No final financial envelope is presented at this stage.

The approach is to review and rebalance existing spending across universal, targeted/specialist and Direct Payment routes.

8. Summary of legal implications

The Council has statutory duties under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 and SEND legislation.

Any future commissioning arrangements will need to comply with procurement legislation, information governance requirements, and data protection obligations.

Data sharing arrangements with commissioned providers and partner agencies will be subject to appropriate agreements, privacy notices, and Data Protection Impact Assessments.

9. Summary of human resources implications

At this stage no staffing decisions have been made; however, workforce planning will be required to assess the impact of the proposed Single Front Door, brokerage arrangements, commissioned provider framework and expanded Direct Payments offer. Human Resources will support organisational design, recruitment, training, consultation and change management activities as the programme develops. Any future staffing changes arising from service redesign or commissioning arrangements will be subject to appropriate consultation.

10. Summary of sustainability impact

At this early stage it is thought that the proposals may support reduced travel through increased local provision and improved digital access arrangements. Future commissioning activity will take account of sustainability considerations where appropriate

11. Summary of public health implications

The proposals are expected to have a positive public health impact by improving the wellbeing, inclusion and independence of children and young people with SEND, whilst supporting the mental wellbeing and resilience of parents and carers. The preventative nature of Short Breaks provision may also help reduce the risk of family crisis and the escalation of need

12. Summary of equality implications

An Equality Impact Assessment will be developed alongside service design and will be completed once the working group has agreed to the draft model of delivery.

13. Summary of risk assessment

The principal risks of implementation relate to service transition, market capacity, workforce impacts and ensuring effective quality assurance arrangements. These risks can be mitigated through strong governance, phased implementation, stakeholder engagement and robust contract management.

The risks of not proceeding are considered greater and include increasing unmet demand, reduced family resilience, insufficient service capacity and choice, failure to respond to inspection findings, and missed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Background papers

Short Breaks for Children & Young People with SEND (0–25) Future Delivery Model for BCP Council – Options Report [Short Breaks Option Paper - Final Draft.docx](#)

Appendices

- OfSTED Area SEND Inspection Report [10364968 24-Nov-2025 08-16-21 - 083526](#)
[Final clean-182018.docx](#)
- OfSTED ILACS Report [50267804](#)