

West Berkshire Council SEND Short Breaks Statement 2025



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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1. Introduction

Short Breaks provide children and young people with disabilities with an opportunity to spend time away from their parents, socialising, gaining independence and having fun. They provide families with a 'break' from their caring responsibilities and allow parents a chance to relax or spend time with their other children.

West Berkshire benefits from a wide range of voluntary providers, offering a variety of short breaks to children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), including after school clubs, holiday schemes, youth clubs, weekend activities and support to access mainstream recreational activities. In addition, West Berkshire Council maintains its own residential short breaks service, Castle Gate, which is highly regarded by parents and has an Ofsted rating of "Outstanding" in all areas. In our 2023 SEND Young Person Survey, 66.8% of all respondents felt they had access to some or a wide range of activities outside of school and home.

However, there is pressure on local short breaks services due to rising demand. In common with other service areas, short breaks providers are trying to meet the needs of a greater number of children, a larger proportion of whom have more complex needs. The rising costs of accommodation, staffing and energy have made it hard for services to maintain their current offer, and harder still to expand to meet the needs of a greater number of families. In some cases, providers told us during our 2023 SEND Review that they have been forced to concentrate their staffing on the needs of more complex children. These issues are likely to have contributed to results from the 2023

SEND Young Person Survey, which suggest that children with EHCPs feel they have access to a smaller range of extracurricular activities compared to their peers at SEN Support level. This is a level of need identified by schools. These are the challenges which need to be addressed.

West Berkshire Council is keen to encourage all providers to ensure that the provision they make is accessible for the majority of children and young people. Examples might include leisure centres, parks and libraries.

West Berkshire Council is keen to make a distinction between a 'Short Break' and care/support interventions. Whilst eligible children and families should have access to a range of Short Breaks, these will differ from services provided as an intervention for care and support which would meet statutory need following an assessment. The two types of service can be defined as follows:

- A Short Break is designed to enable a break from caring and/or provide a social opportunity for the child/young person with a disability.
- A care/support provision is ongoing work and/or a service provided as a result of an assessment, which you will need to enable your family to function and/or meet the basis needs of the child/young person.

If the child/young person is being supported by a Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) Plan, any short breaks allocated will be determined according to the presenting needs, taking into account Short Break eligibility.



2. Legal Framework

Under the Children Act 1989 and the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011, every Local Authority shall provide services designed:-

- (a) To minimise the effect on disabled children within their area of their disabilities
- (b) To give such children the opportunity to lead lives which are as normal as possible ; and
- (c) To assist individuals who provide care for such children to continue to do so, or to do so more effectively by giving them breaks from caring.

In particular, the Local Authority must provide, as appropriate, a range of –

- a) Day time care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere
- b) Overnight care in the homes of disabled

children or elsewhere (however, it should be noted that Personal Assistants (PAs) are not permitted to undertake regulated activity as defined by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, therefore PAs may not provide overnight care unless appropriately registered or supervised). Overnight respite would need to be arranged through an assessment by health services

- c) Educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes, and
- d) Services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends, and during the school holidays

Short breaks form part of a continuum of services, which support children and young people with disabilities and their families. Short breaks are provided to give:

- Children and young people, with a disability, enjoyable experiences away from their primary carers, thereby contributing to their personal and social development and reducing social isolation;
- Parents, carers and families a necessary and valuable break from caring responsibilities.

These breaks can include day, evening, overnight (if those providing the overnight care are appropriately registered and supervised), and weekend activities and can take place in the child's own home, the home of an approved carer, a residential or community setting. They can last just a few hours to a few days, and occasionally longer, depending on the type of provision and the needs of the child and their family.

The Short Breaks Regulations and guidance issued by Government requires Local Authorities to publish and keep under review a Short Breaks Statement which sets out :-

- The range of short breaks services available;
- The criteria by which eligibility for services will be assessed; and
- How the range of services is designed to meet the needs of families with disabled children within our area.

There is also a requirement on the Local Authority to provide a 'Local Offer' which provides in one place all information about services relating to disabled children. More information can be found here:

www.westberks.gov.uk/Local-Offer

3. Coproduction and consultation with families and stakeholders

When reviewing our Short Breaks Statement, we must take into consideration carers' views and those of disabled children and young people. The views of those organisations working within the voluntary sector must also be taken account of.

This year's Short Breaks Statement (2025) has been developed with Swings & Smiles and the Children with Disabilities Team (CWDT). It has also been informed through consultation with the West Berkshire SEND Parent Carer Forum (WBSPCF). The PCF worked with the local authority to jointly design the parent carer survey, analyse feedback and review the draft statement. This consultation has strengthened the statement by bringing parent carer insight into the process and will help shape future co-production work.

This statement integrates feedback from previous consultations and recent surveys, highlighting current priorities and actions being taken to improve Short Break provision in West Berkshire.

Feedback from children and young people

A survey conducted in Spring 2023 received 264 responses. Of the 235 who answered the question on activity access:

- 27% had access to a wide range of activities
- 39% attended some activities
- 34% felt very little was available

Among those with limited access to activities, 42 had EHCPs and 30 were identified as SEN Support, indicating challenges of access for children with more complex needs.

SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029

Short Breaks were previously identified as a priority during the initial SEND Strategy development back in 2023 with the following specific gaps noted:

- Provision in the East of West Berkshire
- Services for ages 16-25
- Support for children with complex health needs
- Autism/SEMH without learning difficulties
- Help accessing mainstream leisure/youth activities

When the SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029 was published, Short Breaks was no longer a standalone priority. However, given its importance to our community, a dedicated Short Breaks Task Group continues to meet at least 6 times per year.

Parent/Carer Survey (December 2024 – January 2025)

A 'You Said, We Did' following the parent/carers survey can be found on our Innovation in SEND Blog.

Key findings from 53 responses to the survey include:

- 64.71% were unaware of available services
- 74% didn't know how to access Short Breaks
- 38.3% had difficulty accessing information
- 29.8% cited limited options
- 27.7% noted a lack of availability
- 21.3% said support for specific needs was limited

Next Steps

We are currently undertaking visits to Short Break providers, to assess the offer, and identify gaps. This, along with previous survey feedback, will be handed to our new Children's Services Commissioning Team who will begin an 'open tender' process. This means we will open up the opportunity for different organisations and providers to apply to deliver Short Breaks. It is expected this will offer more choice, better value and a wider range of activities.

The Local Authority is also working with the West Berkshire Parent/Carer Forum to develop a 'one-page guide' which will explain what Short Breaks are, what support is available and how this support can be accessed.

4. Range of short breaks services available / Eligibility criteria / Assessment

Short breaks are available for all children and young people with disabilities regardless of whether they are assessed by the Children with Disabilities Team (Social Care) as requiring a service. Many mainstream and specialist short breaks services can be accessed by children who are not known to Social Care as part of the universal offer. Families do have to pay to access these services, but as most services are provided by the voluntary sector, fees are often subsidised by the charity and some providers can offer reduced fees for families in financial hardship.

Where children are assessed by the Early Response Hub or the Children with Disabilities Team, and consideration is being given to the need to provide access to short breaks, the following principles will be taken into consideration:

- Promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of disabled children and young people, ensuring they can participate in family and community life

- Preventing family crisis through the provision of the right level of support at the right time
- Ensuring the child can reach his/her potential and be cared for safely and appropriately

Not all children and families will need the same level of support and short breaks; some will need more than others because of the nature and severity of their child's disability. Some families may need more support because of their individual family circumstances.

The Short Break Services in West Berkshire and how these are provided and available to families are categorised in the tables below. We are also working on a Local Offer page and 'One Page Service Offer' that will set out the names, types and age ranges of provision available within each category.

Universal or mainstream Services

Community, or youth-based, activities that are open to all children and young people such as: youth clubs, sports & leisure groups, weekend & holiday activities etc. These take place outside of the school day and you do not need a social care assessment to join these.

Children and young people may need some support to participate in these activities. Providers should have good inclusion practices, and make reasonable adjustments, to enable children and young people with disabilities to access their activities such as providing SEND training to staff, offering quieter sessions, giving clear information, or providing a bit of extra help to join in.

Example: A child or young person might need extra time to settle into a club, or staff who understand how to support sensory differences.

Child/Young Person's Development Needs	The child/young person has some additional needs linked to their disability, with the right support, they can participate in local activities and social opportunities.
Parent/Carers Caring Needs	The Parent/Carer(s) may sometimes need help, but they know where to go and use resources available to them e.g. grandparents, wider family, community etc.

Parent/Carers Personal Needs	The parent/carer(s) is/are managing the impact of their child/young person's needs on family, personal, and social life, often by drawing on their own strategies and informal support networks (e.g. extended family, friends, or community resources). However, this ongoing effort can still be demanding and may affect their wellbeing over time.
Siblings' Needs	The child/young person's brother(s)/sister(s) can access opportunities, but they are sometimes restricted.
Environment	The place where the child/young person lives and the places they go to are safe and generally meet their needs with reasonable adjustments.
Who Pays the Cost?	Families routinely pay the cost of these services.

Supported or Targeted Services

These are activities designed specifically for children and young people with disabilities. They are often run by voluntary, or community, organisations.

Families can usually access these activities directly, without the need for a social care assessment.

These activities are better suited to children and young people who need more tailored support to take part such as a smaller group size, staff with relevant training, or some additional help during an activity.

Example: A weekend youth club for autistic teenagers, or a holiday activity programme where support staff are already in place to help children and young people join in.

Child/Young Person's Development Needs	The child/young person has additional needs because of their disability. They need some help to participate in local activities and social opportunities. Sometimes, they might need specific activities designed for their needs. Other assessments will be taken into account to inform eligibility
Parent/Carers Caring Needs	The Parent/Carer(s) need additional help to meet the child/young person's needs.
Parent/Carers Personal Needs	The child/young person's needs are met, but at a significant cost to the parent/carer(s) physical and/or emotional health and leisure time.
Siblings' Needs	The child/young person's brother(s)/sister(s) personal and social lives are significantly restricted.
Environment	The place where the child/young person lives and the places they go may need some changes to ensure they are safe and can better meet their needs.
Who Pays the Cost?	Families routinely pay no more than they would for a child without a disability in a mainstream setting.

Specialist Services

These services are for families whose children have complex needs that require significant, ongoing support, to access activities safely and meaningfully.

To access these services, your family will need a social care assessment, completed by a social care practitioner, to understand your child, or young person's, specific support needs.

Example: Overnight short breaks, regular one-to-one support, or specialist clubs with high-staffing levels.

Child/Young Person's Development Needs	The child/young person has significant and/or multiple needs because of their disability which prevents them from participating in local activities and social opportunities without a high level of support. Children/young people will have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
Parent/Carers Caring Needs	The Parent/Carer(s) need significant and regular ongoing support to meet the child/young person's needs.
Parent/Carers Personal Needs	Neither the child/young person's needs, or the parent/carer(s) needs are being met and there is a serious risk of a family breakdown.
Siblings' Needs	The child/young person's brother(s)/sister(s) essential needs are not being met e.g. unable to access opportunities outside the home.
Environment	The place where the child/young person lives, and the places they go, are often unsafe or unsuitable and need adapting; this limits their choices.
Who Pays the Cost?	Costs of these services will vary depending on the child/young person's needs. West Berkshire Council would be responsible for the costs of these services and may do so by: • A Direct Payment to allow the family to employ a Personal Assistant to take their child/young person to appropriate activities. • Help with the cost to access Supported Services provided by the Voluntary Sector or day or overnight breaks (liaising with health services regarding support for overnight breaks). • Overnight stays at Castle Gate; West Berkshire Council's Residential Short Breaks service.

If your child/young person is not eligible for specialist Short Break services, we will ensure that our decision is clearly explained to you. In most cases, there will be services available at a universal level (see above table) which your child/young person can engage with.

Decisions regarding eligibility are not applied mechanistically and will take into account individual family's needs.

When assessing the level of need, the assessment will consider:

- Your child's needs and abilities, including focusing on what your child can do and what they enjoy doing.
- The severity of your child's disability, and how it affects your child, you, and your family.
- If you have more than one child with a disability.
- The number of other children or caring responsibilities you may have.
- If you or a partner have a disability.
- The level of support within your social and wider family and friends' network.
- If your child is in care or looked after by West Berkshire Council.
- If your child has been adopted by you. You do not have to tell us this information, however, if you do choose to tell us we can ensure that you know about other services and activities that could support your child.
- If there are concerns about a child's safety.
- Your personal financial circumstances.

The outcome of this assessment will be shared with you and will identify an appropriate level of support in line with our eligibility criteria.

Further information can be found on the SEND Local Offer here:

www.westberks.gov.uk/Local-Offer

5. Short breaks services commissioned by West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council provides a residential short breaks service at Castle Gate, a 6 bedded unit offering a homely environment for children with disabilities aged between 8 and 18. Children will need to be known by the Children with Disabilities Team and be referred by their social worker in order to access the service. Children usually start with one overnight per month and then build up to a suitable package of care which is usually 2 overnights per month.

In addition, West Berkshire Council supports the provision of specialist short breaks in the area. Over the last few years, annual grants have been made available for service providers to bid for. Whilst we work on our data collection, and complete the open tender process, West Berkshire Mencap, Swings & Smiles, Partners in Active Leisure (PALS) and Thrive have received a one-year extension to their grant which supports the provision of after school clubs, holiday play schemes and access to other activities during the school holidays.



6. Applying for Short Breaks

All families can access **universal short break services** without the need for **an assessment** from the Children with Disabilities Team (CWDT). There would be a cost associated with accessing these services.

If families feel they require further support to meet the needs of their child/young person, they can self-refer to our Contact Advice and Assessment Service (CAAS). More information on CAAS and how to make referrals can be accessed via the link. CAAS will respond to all contacts within 24 hours:

www.westberks.gov.uk/caas

Following a referral, if the child, young person, or family is assessed as meeting the threshold for support, a Social Worker will complete a single assessment to identify their needs. This may also include a parent/carer needs assessment where appropriate. Support can be provided in a variety of ways, depending on assessed needs:

- **Commissioned services** such as Mencap or Swings & Smiles, with providers invoicing the council directly.
- **Direct Payments**, which are usually used to employ a Personal Assistant (PA) to support social inclusion activities or provide support at home—provided the support does not involve regulated activity such as overnight care.

Parents and carers can request a Parent Carer Needs Assessment (PCNA) through CAAS (see link above). If a family is already working with an allocated Social Worker or Occupational Therapist within the CWDT, their support needs will be assessed through that professional, and a separate PCNA would not be required. Families should not need to go through the CAAS 'front door' in these cases.

It is important to note, that receiving a PCNA **does not** mean the family has met the threshold

for a package of support from CWDT. A PCNA is a separate assessment focussed on the needs of the parent/carer and **does not** automatically lead to additional services or support from CWDT.

Families should be aware that it is **not possible** to receive both a **PCNA** and a **package of support from CWDT**.

Once a PCNA is requested, an application form is sent to the parent or carer to complete. After the completed form is returned, it is reviewed by a Family Help Support Worker. The outcome will either be that the **criteria are met with a recommendation for a set number of support hours**, or that the **criteria are not met, and the application is closed**. All recommendations are subject to manager approval before any support is confirmed and allocated.

7. How services are designed to meet the needs of families with disabled children in our area

Castle Gate is a long-established provision in West Berkshire which supports children with the most complex disabilities, whose families require overnight short breaks in order to be able to continue caring for their children at home. In recent years Castle Gate has adapted its offer to take children with more complex physical and health needs, working closely with the specialist nursing team from the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, who offer training for the workforce.

In terms of day Short Break activities, feedback from parents has shown that the services which families need the most are after school clubs and holiday schemes. Annual grants to short breaks providers given by the Council therefore continue to prioritise these types of short breaks.

Grant applications for 2024-25 required providers to state how they would offer a service in the East of West Berkshire, given that this has been identified during the SEND Review and feedback surveys, as a gap in provision.

As mentioned previously in this statement, we are using data and feedback to inform an open tender for Short Break provision which is expected offer more choice, better value and a wider range of activities which meet the needs of our community.

In addition, a SEND Providers Forum was established in 2016 with the aim of ensuring that providers are working closely together to sustain and improve services within our area and that they are providing a co-ordinated offer which meets local needs and avoids duplication. The Local Authority is a member of the SEND Providers Forum. Additionally, to make the transition from Children's to Adult services (outside of the Local Authority and Health) smoother, some adult providers are also part of the SEND Providers Forum.

The SEND Providers Forum is working collaboratively with families to develop a signposting document highlighting charities and support which families may not otherwise be aware of. This work will align closely with ongoing improvements being made to the West Berkshire Local Offer.

Short breaks providers gather their own data on need and share data within the forum, allowing a collective response to meeting need. Areas where shortages have been identified are starting to be met by providers, for example, Swings and Smiles is extending its offer in the east of West Berkshire and Mencap has increased its overnight short breaks provision for young adults.

The Local Authority will continue to work with Short Breaks providers and families through the Short Breaks Task Group meetings to address other shortage areas identified in the SEND & Inclusion Strategy

8. Transition from Children's to Adult's services

Not all young people will be eligible for support from Adult Services once they become an adult. This is because there are differences between the legislative frameworks for children's and adult's social care.

If the young person is likely to be eligible for support from Adults Services once they are 18 years old, the Social Worker will discuss this transition process with the family and young person. These discussions will usually start when the young person is 14 years old so families know in advance whether support from adult services will be provided.

The Care Act 2014 sets out the national eligibility criteria for adults who have care and support needs. Typically, an adult may be eligible for Adult Services if he, or she, has needs:

- Arising from a physical, mental health impairment or illness and the adult is unable to achieve two, or more, outcomes which will have a significant impact on the adult's wellbeing such as (this is not an exhaustive list):
 - Managing and maintaining nutrition
 - Managing and maintaining personal hygiene and clothing
 - Developing or maintaining family or other personal relationships
 - Managing and maintaining engagement in work

If it appears that the young person is unlikely to receive support from Adult Social Care, the practitioner supporting the family, whether a Social Worker or another professional, should have a conversation with the young person and their family to explore how everyone can work together to promote the young person's independence. This discussion should include consideration of how the young person might access support from other community resources. It is also important to note that some families may be able to self-refer to Adult Social Care without the need for involvement from a Social Worker.

9. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

FAQ	Response
What can I spend Direct Payments on?	Direct Payments allow families to arrange and manage support for their child or young person themselves, rather than receiving services directly from the Local Authority. They can be used flexibly to meet assessed needs and agreed outcomes, as outlined in the child or young person's care and support plan. Examples of how Direct Payments can be used include: • Paying for a support worker to help the child or young person access community activities, such as sports, clubs, or social groups. • Covering the cost of a support worker to accompany the child or young person on day trips or other activities. • Employing a Personal Assistant (PA) directly to provide care or support. This option requires the family to take on the responsibilities of being an employer, including following employment law and managing payroll. Please note: At present, care services arranged by the Local Authority are typically provided through commissioned services.
Are there any items a Direct Payment cannot be used for?	Direct Payments must be used to meet the assessed needs of the child or young person. They cannot be used for: • Supplementing household income e.g. paying towards rent, mortgage, utility bills, or everyday household items • Paying for childcare to enable parents/carers to work • Paying family members to undertake the role of a Personal Assistant The funding cannot be used to supplement income e.g. it cannot be used to put payments towards mortgage or rent and cannot be used to pay for day-to-day household items. If help is needed to pay for childcare costs you can find more information here: www.westberks.gov.uk/article/40501/Financial-help-for-childcare
How can I choose a Short Breaks Provider?	The Local Offer lists a number of organisations and services that you might choose. It is your choice about which type of provision you use in order to meet your child/young person's needs.
What are Personal Assistants?	Personal Assistants are workers who are employed directly, or through an agency. They routinely work both within the family home and/or by taking children/young people to community-based activities.
What are Overnight Short Breaks?	Some parents/carers of children with complex needs will be offered overnight short breaks support. In most cases, residential short breaks are provided through West Berkshire Council's facility at Castle Gate. Overnight respite in the home, supported by a Personal Assistant (PA), is not provided by the Local Authority and would need to be arranged through an assessment by health services. If eligible, families may may have Continuing Healthcare (CHC) Funding provided.

How often will my child/ young person's short break be reviewed?	Every package of support (for those accessing specialist services) will be reviewed at least once per year at the Resource Panel. Single Assessments are also updated annually.
Who provides transport for accessing short breaks?	Parent/Carers are routinely expected to transport their child to and from short break activities. It may be the case that some providers offer transport as part of the activity, but this would need to be checked with providers directly. We are unable to fund transport for short break activities.
What if I have a problem with a short break activity?	If you experience problems in accessing a short break activity, or problems while your child is attending, please discuss this with the activity provider in the first instance and ask for a copy of their complaints policy if needed. If it is a safeguarding concern, then contact: • Contact Advice Assessment Service (CASS) on 01635 503090 during office hours (08:30-17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:30-16:30 on Fridays) • Emergency Duty Service on 01344 35199 outside of office hours.
What other benefits might be available to me and my family?	• Disability Living Allowance (DLA) – you may be eligible for DLA to help with the extra costs of looking after your child if they are under 16 years of age and have difficulties with walking or need much more looking after than a child of the same age who does not have a disability. The eligibility criteria for DLA can be found here. • Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – if your child receives DLA, they will need to apply for PIP when they reach the age of 16. PIP can help with some of the extra costs if your child has long term ill-health or a disability. If you make an application on behalf of your child, your child will be assessed by a health professional to determine if they are eligible. More information can be found here.

Glossary

Abbreviation	Word(s)	Meaning
CAAS	Contact, Advice and Assessment Service	The Council's main contact point for families to ask for help, or make referrals for support – including for short breaks
CHC	Continuing Healthcare	NHS funding for children and adults with long-term health needs, which may include support for complex disabilities
CIN	Child in Need	A child who needs extra help from social services to stay safe and healthy, but is not at immediate risk of harm
CP	Child Protection	Services and plans to keep children safe when there are concerns regarding neglect or abuse
CWD or CWDT	Children with Disabilities Team	A specialist team in the Council that supports children with disabilities, and their families, through assessments and care planning
DLA	Disability Living Allowance	A benefit for children under 16 who need extra help due to a disability
EHCP	Education, Health & Care Plan	A plan which details the Education, Health and Social Care support provided to a child or young person with SEND.
ERH	Early Response Hub	A team that may carry out assessments for children with disabilities
OT	Occupational Therapist	A health professional who helps children and families with practical support to manage everyday tasks and needs
PA	Personal Assistant	A person employed to support a child or young person with disabilities, either at home or in the community
PCNA	Parent Carer Needs Assessment	An assessment that looks at the needs of the parent/ carer(s), especially how their caring responsibilities are affecting their own health and wellbeing
PIP	Personal Independence Payment	A benefit for people aged 16 and over who need help with daily living or mobility, due to a disability or health condition
SEND	Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities	A learning difficulty or disability which requires special educational provision to be made for a child or young person.



We are committed to being accessible to everyone. If you require this document in an alternative format or translation, please call the SEN and Disabled Children's Team on Telephone 01635 551111.

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