Short Break Activities Programme Consultation

Consultation on proposed changes to Hampshire County Council’s Short Break Activities Programme for children with disabilities

Monday 9 March to Sunday 31 May 2020

Information Pack
## Introduction

Hampshire County Council is seeking residents' and stakeholders' views on proposals for delivering its Short Break Activities Programme after 31 March 2021.

**The consultation opens at midday on 9 March 2020 and closes at 11.59pm on 31 May 2020.**

### Why your views are important

Hampshire’s Short Break Activities Programme provides support to parents or carers of children and young people with disabilities by enabling them to have a short break from their caring responsibilities.

This consultation is an opportunity for people to inform decisions about the future of Hampshire’s Short Break Activities Programme. It seeks your feedback on several proposals for providing the Short Break Activities Programme differently from 31 March 2021.

The proposals have been carefully developed to deliver a programme of Short Break Activities that, if agreed, would continue to provide short breaks for parents and carers; and fun, educational opportunities for the children and young people with disabilities that they care for. Some of the proposals could help Children’s Services to make anticipated annual savings of up to £696,000. Other proposals are intended to improve the effectiveness of the Short Break Activities Programme, thereby making the best use of available funding.

It is important to the County Council that the views of children, young people, families and carers, who may be affected by the proposals are carefully considered, as well as those of Hampshire Residents and wider stakeholders.

The findings from this consultation will be published and presented to the Executive Lead Member for Children’s Services and Young People later in 2020. Feedback will be considered by the Executive Lead Member when making a decision on the proposed approach to delivering the Short Break Activities Programme from April 2021.
Serving Hampshire
Balancing the Budget Consultation

Hampshire County Council anticipates that it will have to reduce its spending by at least an extra £80 million by 31 March 2021 to deliver a balanced budget. This is due to reductions in Government funding, increasing demand for services, rising costs and inflation. With less money available and growing demand for council services, especially statutory services, tough decisions will need to be made about what the County Council can and cannot do in the future.

The County Council is required by law to deliver a balanced budget, and therefore cannot plan to spend more than is available. A combination of measures will be needed to address the budget shortfall, including increases in Council Tax and delivering savings from services.

The public was consulted on the County Council’s financial strategy in the Serving Hampshire – Balancing the Budget Consultation in Summer 2019, details of which can be found at: hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/balancing-the-budget

Hampshire County Council’s Consultation Policy

The County Council is committed to five principles of consultation:

1. to consult on key issues and proposals;
2. to consult in good time;
3. to be inclusive but within clear and appropriate limits;
4. to consult using clear, simple information;
5. to ensure responses are taken into account when decisions are made.

How to have your say

You are invited to give your views on these proposals. There is a range of opportunities for everyone to contribute, in order for the County Council to hear the views of children, young people, parents and carers, short break activity provider organisations, schools and other interested stakeholders.

a. Open public consultation

This Pack contains important information about the proposals which you are advised to read carefully before completing the Response Form. You can share your views by using the online Response Form at: hants.gov.uk/shortbreakconsultation.

This consultation will run for 12 weeks from midday on 9 March 2020 to 11.59pm on 31 May 2020. Please note that responses received after this date will not be included in the findings report.

The Information Pack and Response Form, along with Easy Read versions of both documents, are available to download and print from the consultation webpage.

If you require a copy of the Information Pack or the Response Form in another language or alternative format (such as paper, large print, audio or Braille), or if you have any queries about the consultation, please contact short.break@hants.gov.uk, or call: 0300 555 13841

Please return paper Response Forms in the Business Reply envelope provided. If you do not have a Business Reply envelope, or wish to submit a written response, please post your response to: Freepost HAMPSHIRE and write I and EU on the back of the envelope.

You can also email your response directly to the County Council using the email address: short.break@hants.gov.uk

b. Consultation drop-in events for parents and carers

As an additional opportunity for people to take part in the consultation, drop-in events have been arranged across the county. Booking is not required to attend these events.

At the drop-in events you will be able to:

- find out more about the proposals;
- talk to County Council staff;
- pick up a paper copy of the consultation Information Pack and Response Form.

1 0300 calls are usually included in most landline and mobile call packages, and if not, are charged at no more than a local rate call.

hants.gov.uk
c. Consultation events for providers of Short Break Activities

Two events have been arranged to help providers of Short Break Activities find out more about the consultation proposals. Booking is required to attend these events. Please contact short.break@hants.gov.uk.

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<tr>
<th>Area of County</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winchester</td>
<td>Friday 20 March</td>
<td>Winchester Discovery Centre</td>
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<td>10:00am to 12:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winchester</td>
<td>Tuesday 26 May</td>
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<td>10:00am to 12:30pm</td>
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d. Young people’s focus groups

To help young people’s participation in the consultation process, we will be working with Special Schools and Short Break Activities providers to ensure that young people are able to contribute their views on the proposals.

e. Virtual Question and Answer sessions

As well as holding drop-in sessions, we will be running virtual sessions online in which the public can ask us questions about the proposed changes. These are planned to be run with Hampshire Parent Carer Network® as Facebook Live sessions on the following dates, and will be available to view at any time for the rest of the consultation period.

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<tr>
<th>Virtual Sessions</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Drop-in Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session One</td>
<td>Tuesday 24 March</td>
<td>12:00pm to 1:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session Two</td>
<td>Tuesday 28 April</td>
<td>1:00pm to 2:00pm</td>
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Details of this can be found on the consultation web page at: hants.gov.uk/shortbreakconsultation
Section One: Background and context

The County Council is committed to meeting its statutory duties in respect of children with disabilities, and their parents or carers. This consultation is solely focused on proposals for changes to the Children’s Services Short Break Activities Programme, within the parameters of the statutory duties which apply.\(^3\)

Services which are NOT included in this consultation:

- Specialist services provided for children with assessed social care needs.

In addition to the Short Break Activities Programme, Children’s Services provide a range of specialist support services such as care support and overnight respite to children and young people who have been assessed by a social worker as having unmet social care needs. At any one time, around 600 children and young people in Hampshire access these services, which are funded from the Children’s Services social care budgets. These specialist services form part of the overall range of Short Breaks services but are not included within the scope of this consultation.

About the Short Break Activities Programme

Children’s Services’ Short Break Activities Programme provides support to parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities.

It seeks to offer a range of fun and educational activities for children and young people with disabilities and additional needs, so that their parents or carers can have a short break from their caring responsibilities.

Through the respite offered by the Short Break Activities Programme, parents and carers can take part in education and training courses, leisure pursuits, day-to-day tasks, and other activities to meet the needs of other children in the family. Short Break Activities are provided in the evenings, as well as at weekends and during school holidays.

The activities are provided by:

- Voluntary Sector organisations and some special schools, funded by Hampshire County Council grants;
- other community-based services which can apply for ‘exceptions’ funding to meet an individual’s additional care and support needs.

How Short Break Activities are delivered in Hampshire

There are currently four strands to the Short Break Activities Programme:

- specialist playschemes or activities – run specifically for children and/or young people with moderate or complex needs and which are designed to meet the Short Break priorities of having a break at the weekend, during school holidays or in the evenings at youth clubs;
- support to attend mainstream activities, playschemes, clubs and groups;
- a Community Buddy Scheme to support children and young people to access mainstream activities in the community; and
- ‘exceptions’ funding for grant applications that may not fall into the Short Break priorities.

In addition to the Short Break Activities Programme, the Short Break Budget also supports parent carer participation via a grant to the Hampshire Parent Carer Network, and maintenance of supporting IT systems (for example the Gateway Card administration system).

Who is currently eligible to access the Short Break Activities Programme?

Children’s Services’ Short Break Activities Programme is currently available to children and young people who meet all of the following criteria:

- have a disability or additional needs;
- need support to take part in leisure activities;
- are under 18 years of age; and
- live in the Hampshire County Council authority area.

How do eligible families access the Short Break Activities Programme?

Families currently access the Short Break Activities Programme through the use of a Gateway Card.

3 More information about the statutory duties which apply can be found at: gov.uk/government/publications/short-breaks-for-carers-of-disabled-children
In November 2019, a range of savings proposals were considered and approved by Full Council, subject to further consultation and executive decision-making where necessary. There is an anticipated under achievement against the Transformation to 2019 savings target leading to an increased Transformation to 2021 savings target. It is suggested that some of the proposals in the consultation could help Children’s Services to make anticipated annual savings of up to £696,000, which would be part of the proposed solution in respect of the increased savings target. This consultation seeks to understand the views of children and young people, parents, carers, providers and other stakeholders on proposals for as to how an annual £696,000 saving might be realised, the potential impacts and implications of the proposed options.

Section Two: Proposed changes to the Short Break Activities Programme

After several rounds of budget reductions since 2008, a number of far-reaching savings initiatives to all statutory children’s services provided by the County Council have already been made or are in progress. However, further reductions in Government funding, growing demand for services, rising costs and inflation mean that the County Council is looking again at potential savings from the Children’s Services Short Break Activities Programme and how it could be delivered more effectively.

The proposals have been carefully developed to deliver a programme of Short Break Activities that continues to provide short breaks for parents and carers, and fun, educational opportunities for the disabled children and young people that they care for.

The proposal to achieve further savings to Children’s Services means that options the County Council may have considered and rejected previously are being re-considered. It is likely that a combination of these proposals would be needed to deliver the future service within the anticipated available funding. If the proposed annual savings of £696,000 are agreed, the remaining indicative annual Short Break budget would be £737,000.

The proposals are grouped into those through which savings could be realised and others which would improve the effectiveness of the Short Break Activities Programme, thereby making the best use of available funding.

A group of representatives from Hampshire Parent Carer Network and Gateway Card holders provided feedback on the delivery of the Short Break Activities Programme and the Community Buddy Scheme. The County Council is grateful for their time and input to those sessions. The proposals in this consultation have been influenced by their contribution.

Anticipated savings for Children’s Services

Children’s Services (excluding schools) is proposing to deliver savings of £17.2 million, representing an overall budget reduction of 13%.

The 2020/21 budget for Children with Disabilities is £16.8 million. This comprises: £15.1 million of active social work case support for eligible families through the Children with Disabilities Teams, plus a Short Break budget of £1.7 million.

Children with Disabilities budgets 2020/21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Break Budget:</th>
<th>£1.4 million</th>
<th>Short Break Budget:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Direct Payments</td>
<td>£0.3 million</td>
<td>• Short Break Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Care Support</td>
<td>not in scope</td>
<td>• Community Buddy Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>£1.4 million Short Break Budget:</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Participation - Hampshire Parent Carer Network (HPCN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children with Disabilities Social Work Case Support</td>
<td>£15.1 million</td>
<td>• IT System</td>
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| £1.4 million of the Short Break budget is allocated to provide Short Break Activities (funded via an annual grant process), to run the Community Buddy Scheme and to support the work of Hampshire Parent Carer Network - the parent and carer forum for the Hampshire local authority area. Children’s Services is proposing to save £1.3 million from the Children with Disabilities budget by April 2021, representing a 7.5% budget reduction.

In November 2019, a range of savings proposals were considered and approved by Full Council, subject to further consultation and executive decision-making where necessary. There is an anticipated under achievement against the Transformation to 2019 savings target leading to an increased Transformation to 2021 savings target. It is suggested that some of the proposals in the consultation could help Children’s Services to make anticipated annual savings of up to £696,000, which would be part of the proposed solution in respect of the increased savings target. This consultation seeks to understand the views of children and young people, parents, carers, providers and other stakeholders on proposals for as to how an annual £696,000 saving might be realised, the potential impacts and implications of the proposed options.

Section Two: Proposed changes to the Short Break Activities Programme

After several rounds of budget reductions since 2008, a number of far-reaching savings initiatives to all statutory children’s services provided by the County Council have already been made or are in progress. However, further reductions in Government funding, growing demand for services, rising costs and inflation mean that the County Council is looking again at potential savings from the Children’s Services Short Break Activities Programme and how it could be delivered more effectively.

The proposals have been carefully developed to deliver a programme of Short Break Activities that continues to provide short breaks for parents and carers, and fun, educational opportunities for the disabled children and young people that they care for.

The proposal to achieve further savings to Children’s Services means that options the County Council may have considered and rejected previously are being re-considered. It is likely that a combination of these proposals would be needed to deliver the future service within the anticipated available funding. If the proposed annual savings of £696,000 are agreed, the remaining indicative annual Short Break budget would be £737,000.

The proposals are grouped into those through which savings could be realised and others which would improve the effectiveness of the Short Break Activities Programme, thereby making the best use of available funding.

A group of representatives from Hampshire Parent Carer Network and Gateway Card holders provided feedback on the delivery of the Short Break Activities Programme and the Community Buddy Scheme. The County Council is grateful for their time and input to those sessions. The proposals in this consultation have been influenced by their contribution.
Proposals to enable Children’s Services to deliver the Short Break Activities Programme within a reduced budget

Proposal One: To reduce the overall grant awarded to provide Short Break Activities

Currently, Short Break Activities funding is awarded to a variety of providers across the county through a system of grants. The grants budget totals £1.2 million of the available £1.4 million Short Break Budget in 2020/21.

Applications from prospective Short Break Activities providers are invited against a set of core priorities that have been agreed with parent representatives. These priorities are to provide weekend, school holiday or evening youth club activities, and to offer these activities in specific locations, spread across the county.

This proposal is to continue to commission Short Break Activities that are important to families, meeting specific priorities, but with a reduction in the total value of grant funding available. It is anticipated that this proposal could deliver between £512,000 - £696,000 of annual savings, depending upon the final combination of proposals approved.

This would be possible because the amount of activities the County Council currently commissions through grant funding has often exceeded the amount actually required, according to indication of local need. For example, the County Council identified that 51 one-to-one holiday activity places should be commissioned. However, in the current 2019/21 18-month grant round, the County Council has been able to fund 111 one-to-one places; and there are weekend sessions funded for 268 children and young people, instead of 118.

Only 20% of Gateway Card holders are accessing Short Breaks Activities (according to data from November 2019), and providers have informed the County Council that they rarely have a waiting list. Within this proposal, funding would continue to be allocated based on analysis of multiple factors including Special Educational Needs, Disability Living Allowance, and population and deprivation data, to help ensure that the allocation of resources across the County Council area is based on need. The County Council would work with providers to develop additional activities where needed if there are gaps in provision. This would enable the service to respond flexibly to changing priorities, and ensure that funded activities continue to meet the needs of local families.

For parents and carers, this proposal could mean that their preferred Short Break Activity is either no longer funded; is delivered by a different provider; is only available in a different location or is available less often. As a result, this proposal could impact on the services received by parents/carers. Each round of grant activity is treated as a new exercise, so providers may need to offer different activity schemes in order to be eligible to apply for funding, should priorities change, and there may be greater competition for grant funding.

Proposal Two: To only accept funding applications that meet the core Short Break Activity priorities

The main Short Break Activities grant round invites applications against the core Short Break priorities of weekend, holiday or evening youth club activities, as agreed with parent representatives.

Where activities do not fall within the identified Short Break Activity priorities, providers may currently apply for ad-hoc grant funding, by evidencing demand and explaining why the service/activity should be considered for funding outside the identified Short Break Activity priorities.

Until 2019 ad-hoc grants were accommodated within the overall Short Break Budget, at which point a specific ‘exceptions’ fund of £90,500 per financial year was created to manage ad-hoc requests. However, over the last three years the value of ad-hoc applications has fallen well short of the available funding, with almost £450,000 of the Short Break Budget remaining unallocated.

Therefore, the County Council is proposing to either:

• remove the ‘exceptions’ fund to achieve an annual saving of £90,500; or
• reduce the value of the ‘exceptions’ fund by 78% in line with current demand to achieve an annual saving of £70,500. This would leave £20,000 each year for ‘exceptions’ but if applications are not made, could still result in an overall budget underspend.

This would mean:

• parents and carers could have greater certainty as to the full range of Short Break Activities that would be available within each grant round (currently an 18-month period);• providers may need to focus on the main grant round to apply for funding;• the administrative process would be simplified, as occasional applications would not need to be considered; and• the mechanism to respond to occasional requests for exceptional grant funding may no longer exist.
Proposal Three: To require Short Break Activity providers to secure a minimum level of funding from other sources

It is acknowledged that Short Break Activities for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can be more expensive to run than children’s activity clubs catering for non-disabled children - often requiring extra equipment, support or staff training. The County Council’s Short Break Activities Grant aims to help providers by meeting any ‘additional costs’ of running an activity that may arise due to a child’s disability and/or additional needs. It can also be requested to cover fees in hardship cases where parents and carers cannot afford to pay for standard activity costs.

As part of the grant application process providers are required to demonstrate how they would also contribute income to meet the ‘additional costs’, in order to prove that they are not entirely reliant on the County Council’s funding. The ‘match-funding’ contribution could be generated from a range of sources such as grant applications to other organisations and fundraising.

However, this is not a mandatory condition for receiving the grant and the amount of ‘match funding’ is not set. Some providers have been unable to demonstrate any contribution, and others have only demonstrated a token amount. For example, of 35 activity schemes funded in 2019/21, 20 providers did not make any ‘match-funding’ contribution and eight providers contributed less than 10% of the funding being sought from the County Council. Therefore, provider ‘match-funding’ contributions are currently inconsistent and disproportionate to the value of the grants requested from the County Council.

This proposal would seek to introduce a requirement for providers to contribute at least 10% of the value of the grant being requested towards the activity. This would help to make each scheme more sustainable, and to ensure that the County Council is making a contribution to the ‘additional cost’ of running Short Break Activities, rather than paying all of the ‘additional cost’.

If this proposal is agreed, providers would need to consider alternative sources of income and fund-raising and illustrate how these would ensure that the activity is sustainable when forming their bids for grant funding. The County Council would also like to understand if a change to the length of the grant period would support this requirement.

If agreed, some providers may decide that a 10% ‘match-funding’ contribution is not viable and could cease to run, or may change, their activities. This could impact on the services received by parents/carers. However, for activities that do run, there should be no direct financial impact for parents and carers. This is because the Short Breaks Activities Programme would continue to set out standard charges that should be applied by providers, with a concession rate offered to those who are eligible. Based on 2019/21 grant levels it is estimated that this proposal would help to generate around £65,000 each year to fund Short Break Activities, which would help to offset the savings required.

Proposal Four: To reduce the grant awarded to Hampshire Parent Carer Network

Parent carer forums across the country work with local authorities, health and other local partners to influence, design and develop the best possible services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Each parent carer forum receives an annual core funding grant of £15,000 from the Department for Education (DfE) to enable it to conduct these activities.

Hampshire Parent Carer Network (HPCN) is the parent carer forum for the Hampshire local authority area. It supports and trains parent carer representatives to influence service design and decision-making (based on their own circumstances). In Hampshire, national funding is insufficient to meet local levels of activity. This is because Department for Education funding is the same for all areas, irrespective of geography or population and only 50% of that core funding can be used on salaries. Consequently, Children’s Services has been providing additional ‘top-up’ grant funding to Hampshire Parent Carer Network each year of £35,000.

Around 56% of the Network’s current activities relate to Children’s Services (covering education and social care), with other activity also relating to health, public health, and education or social care support for 18-25 year-old adults.

Hampshire Parent Carer Network Engagement Activities

This proposal seeks to reduce the annual amount awarded by 50% in order to bring the level of funding provided by Children’s Services more in line with the level of service that would be required in future from Hampshire Parent Carer Network for Children with Disabilities. This would amount to a funding reduction of £17,500.

This would mean that Children’s Services would request that Hampshire Parent Carer Network is involved in decision-making or evaluation of fewer service areas each year, due to potentially reduced capacity. It could also mean that Hampshire Parent Carer Network would need to apply for other funding that is more closely related to the breadth of activities it undertakes (e.g. from adult services, health, or charities) – should it wish to continue.
This proposal would have little impact on parents and carers using Short Break Activities as, where necessary, the County Council would seek to continue to engage via other means e.g. through direct contact via schools, providers of activities, Gateway Card holder networks and Hampshire’s Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).

This proposal should have little impact on parents and carers using Short Break Activities as the amended grant would continue to sufficiently support the current level of participation activity that Hampshire Parent Carer Network provides in respect of services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

Proposals to improve the effectiveness of the Short Break Activities programme

These proposals are intended to make services more effective rather than achieving specific savings.

Proposal Five: To commission Short Break Activities through an external grant-giving body

There are other organisations in Hampshire that support vulnerable people in local communities that might be willing to work in partnership with the County Council to direct grant resources to where they are most needed.

Instead of the County Council directly awarding grants to deliver Short Break Activities, it proposes to work with an external grant-giving body to conduct the process on its behalf or in collaboration.

This could mean that:

• funds targeted at the same people or communities could be combined to generate more public value overall. For example, different grants which share the aim of supporting services for disabled children and young people in a specific location could be pooled;
• an external organisation may be able to draw on other sources of funding that the County Council cannot. For example, external grant-awarding bodies may work with businesses and individuals who wish to donate funds to communities, increasing the total amount of funds available.

Should an external grant-giving body be commissioned to conduct the process on the County Council’s behalf, grant applications would be managed directly by the external body and within their own systems. Research indicates this is likely to incur a management fee, which would come from the Short Break Activities budget, with no guarantee that additional funding would be forthcoming.

An alternative option would be to work in collaboration. This would mean seeking to establish a joint application process, meeting the priorities of both Children’s Services and partner organisations. No management fees would be incurred.

If implemented, providers may need to apply to a joint panel which would make recommendations on funding applications. For providers, this could involve greater scrutiny, additional impact measures or a change to the ‘match-funding’ contribution that providers would need to make.

Parents and carers could experience a change of provider, or a variation in the activities that are local to them. For example, combining funding streams could:

• enable an increase in the choice of Short Break Activities as more could be purchased from a pooled grant; or
• lead to a decrease in the number of community activities separately funded by external grant-giving bodies should these funds be directed towards the Short Break Activities programme instead.

There is no intention to change the Gateway Card system as a result of this proposal.

The County Council acknowledges that a combination of Proposals Three (‘to require Short Break Activity providers to secure a minimum level of funding from other sources’) and Five (‘to commission Short Break Activities through an external grant-giving body’) may not be possible or might restrict the potential for match-funding to be achieved.

Proposal Six: To introduce a two-tier Gateway Card scheme

As of November 2019, there are 2,417 Gateway Card holders in Hampshire. Families can use their Gateway Cards to access Short Break Activities or as proof of disability when accessing concessions at local activities or attractions.

The current Gateway Card application process does not separate these two different types of use, making it difficult to understand the level of requirement for Short Break Activities and therefore to plan services. As of November 2019, 482 Gateway Card holders had used their card to access a Short Break Activity.

In light of this, the County Council proposes to create a two-tier Gateway Card system, to ensure that those families who solely use a Gateway Card to access concessions remain able to do so, and to provide the County Council with a better understanding of local need for Short Break Activities in order to plan services and further develop the Gateway Card scheme.

This tiered approach has already been adopted in several other local authority areas, including by Southampton and Portsmouth Councils.
Currently, to support the application for a Gateway Card, one piece of the following evidence (List A) is required:

- a letter from family’s general practitioner (GP), paediatrician or health visitor;
- a letter from child’s teacher/Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo);
- evidence of being in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP);
- confirmation of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP); or
- a letter from a social worker or professional from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) working with the family.

In future, one piece of evidence from List A would be sufficient to support an application for concessions.

It is proposed that those who wish to access Short Break Activities provide evidence as follows (List B):

- evidence of receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP); or
- an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP); or
- a referral from a social worker.

These pieces of evidence are being proposed because, since the introduction of the new Gateway Card scheme in April 2019, most card holders accessing Short Break Activities have provided evidence of being in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) as part of their Gateway Card application.

Existing Gateway Card holders who wish to access a Short Break Activity would need to submit evidence from List B when they next reconfirm their eligibility for a Gateway Card (annually). If they are not able to provide this, they would no longer be able to access Short Break Activities but could request a social care assessment if they feel that their needs are not able to be met through mainstream activities.

New Gateway Card applicants who wish to access a Short Break Activity would be required to provide one of the pieces of evidence in List B in order to do so.

Proposal Seven: To place a limit of 30 sessions per child, per year on Short Break Activities

Currently Gateway Card holders can book on as many or as few Short Break Activity sessions as they wish (subject to availability). This can create discrepancy in the system, which may lead to some families having less opportunity to book a Short Break Activity. As the chart below illustrates, since April 2019 the number of activity sessions accessed by card holders varies, with the most common number being one session and the maximum being 67. A session is either a full day at a holiday club or one attendance at a weekend or youth club. The County Council would prefer families to be able to access the Short Break Activities Programme more equitably.

If this proposal is agreed, there would be no change for families who only wish to use their Gateway Card to access concessions.

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Should the Short Break Activities grant budget be reduced, there are likely to be fewer grant-funded sessions available. Therefore this proposal seeks to ensure that there is greater opportunity for all those seeking to use the programme to be able to do so, by limiting the number of activities that any one card holder can attend. Based on attendance figures for the financial year to date, the County Council is proposing to place a limit of 30 sessions per child, per year on Short Break Activities. At this level, a child or young person would be able to attend a range of activities at different times during the year.
If this proposal is agreed some parents and carers might find they can still access Short Break Activities but not as many as before. Other parents might be able to book where they had been unsuccessful previously. The proposal would not impact card holders who have been assessed by a social worker as having a statutory need for a specific type of short break. If families are concerned that their needs would not be met through mainstream activities, they could request a social care assessment. There would be some administrative changes resulting from this proposal, to ensure that card holders, providers and the County Council can monitor use.

Proposal to redesign the Community Buddy Scheme

Proposal Eight: to redesign the Community Buddy Scheme

This proposal is primarily intended to make the Community Buddy Scheme more effective as well as targeting specific savings.

As part of the overall Short Breaks offer for Hampshire families, the Buddy Scheme currently exists to provide Gateway Card holders with one-to-one support in the form of a community buddy. Community buddies are for children and young people from 7 to 19 years old who:

- have a disability or additional needs and need support to take part in leisure and recreation activities; and
- live in Hampshire or attend a school in Hampshire (i.e. excluding Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight).

A community buddy is a volunteer or a paid member of staff who may:

- go with a young person to their chosen activity, giving them time away from home;
- help the young person to do things they want to do; or
- provide support for all leisure activities.

As of November 2019, 55 children and young people have been successfully allocated a buddy. However, 27 of the 33 new applicants since April 2019 have not been successful because it is difficult to retain or attract new buddies to the scheme to meet demand.

Discussions with parent representatives, and the provider who manages the scheme, identified three key issues:

- firstly, providers are experiencing increasing costs but the parental contributions towards hourly rate or mileage have not risen since the scheme was introduced in 2012/13.

- secondly, there is no clear responsibility or strategy for buddy recruitment across the county. Instead, multiple providers support the scheme reactively, often as an add-on to their core services. They are under no obligation to actively recruit buddies and therefore, there is insufficient capacity to meet demand;

- thirdly, a one-to-one buddy might not always be the best solution to meet children and young people’s needs and alternatives could be explored. When asked what they wanted to achieve from the Buddy Scheme, 87% of applicants sought greater independence, but 7% wanted to have more fun and 6% wanted to develop better social skills and confidence.

As a result, the following changes to the service are being proposed:

- to increase the parental contribution to take into account inflation since the scheme was introduced and review it in line with inflation in each financial year. This would raise the hourly parental contribution from £5.00 to £6.50 per hour in April 2021.

- to increase parental contributions to mileage from April 2021, either:
  - from 25p per mile to 30p per mile (in line with inflation since 2012/13), with the difference between the parental rate and the HM Revenue and Customs mileage rate of 45p to be paid by the Council, or
  - for parents to cover the full HM Revenue and Customs mileage rate of 45p unless agreed otherwise by their social worker, which is the same as the requirements for care support for community activities.

These changes could together contribute around £8,000 each year towards running the Buddy Scheme;

- to have one organisation responsible for recruiting and co-ordinating buddies;

- that the County Council designs a buddy ‘offer’ that provides alternative options for providing support, recognising that particular groups of children and young people have different needs. These alternatives might include:
  - an element of one to one support, where this is required to promote independence;
  - the possibility of group mentoring sessions; or
  - joint buddy support, where a child or young person would benefit from opportunities to socialise with their peers, but this is not available through other existing Short Break Activities.

In addition, in order to align the Buddy Scheme to the rest of the Short Breaks offer and ensure that the service remains within the statutory remit of Children’s Services, it is proposed that, in future:

- the age limit of up to age 18 will be applied;
- children and young people, and their parents and carers, who live outside the County Council authority area will not be able to access the Buddy Scheme.

These proposals could save up to £11,000 per year, based on use and cost of the scheme in 2018/19.
Other options that have been considered and rejected

The County Council also looked at a range of other options to deliver the Short Break Activities Programme, which were rejected.

- **To only make Short Break Activities available for families who are not eligible for social care**
  Rejected: This would increase the financial pressure on social care budgets and could mean that: assessed needs would not be met.

- **To reduce the number of providers the County Council funds to deliver Short Break Activities**
  Rejected: No significant benefits of this approach were identified.

- **To enable families to access Short Break Activities via an allocation of hours or sessions within a virtual wallet**
  Rejected: This would be complex to administer and would need new processes to be created to assess needs in order to calculate the allocation for each family.

- **To reduce the amount of rent charged by schools to providers**
  Rejected: This was not considered to be feasible in the light of the pressures on school budgets.

- **To stipulate that Direct Payments be used for families to purchase Short Break Activities themselves**
  Rejected: This would increase the administrative burden on parents and carers and would only shift the financial pressure from one area of funding in Children’s Services to another.

Have your say

Thank you for reading through this Information Pack.

You are invited to give your views on these proposals.

You can do this by using the online Response Form, available in standard and Easy Read versions at: [hants.gov.uk/shortbreakconsultation](http://hants.gov.uk/shortbreakconsultation)

Alternatively, if you require a copy of the Information Pack or the Response Form in another language or alternative format (such as paper, large print, audio or Braille), or if you have any queries about the consultation, please contact short.break@hants.gov.uk or call: 0300 555 1384.

This consultation is open for 12 weeks from midday on 9 March 2020 to 11.59pm on 31 May 2020. Please note that responses received after the closing date will not be included in the findings report.

The findings from this consultation will be published and presented to the Executive Lead Member for Children’s Services and Young People later in 2020. Feedback will be considered by the Executive Lead Member when making a decision on the proposed approach to delivering the Short Break Activities programme from April 2021.
If you have any queries about this consultation or the information provided, please email short.break@hants.gov.uk or call 0300 555 1384 (local rate call).

When you have finished with this document, please give it to someone else so they too can have their say.

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