

# Leisure activities and short breaks for disabled children

Our Short breaks service statement  
2017 – 2019

v1.0

## For parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities

Dear Parents and Carers

This document sets out the leisure activities and short breaks offered by Solihull Council to children and young people with a disability. The term “short breaks” is explained in Section 1.

This document tells you about the range of services available, how to access them and how we consult with parents/carers and children and young people. It also gives you a bit of background about our legal requirements.

We have also included useful links and other information in this statement, as we know that families with children and young people with a disability want information about other services, activities and groups; not just council-funded “short breaks”.

We hope you find this document useful and easy to understand. We would welcome your feedback, comments and ideas in relation to “short breaks” and other services your family uses, please contact the Children’s Commissioning Team by email [childrenscommissioning@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:childrenscommissioning@solihull.gov.uk)

You can find further information about services across the borough for children and young people with disabilities through the council’s [Local Offer](#), on the Activities and Events page on the [Council’s website](#) or from the [Family Information Service](#).

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## Section 1 – About short breaks

### What is a short break?

In everyday-speak a “short break” means:

- “getting away from it all”,
- “a change of scene”,
- “a break from the norm”, and
- “a chance to recharge your batteries”.

When we talk about short breaks we hope that generally they will result in all of these things listed as bullet points.

We recognise that all families are different, but have heard from many parents and carers of children and young people with a disability that having a child with additional needs is often all-encompassing and means that they miss out on opportunities to pursue their own interests, time to themselves, or time to spend time with other family members.

And for children and young people with disabilities, they are often unable to access mainstream leisure and social activities because of their disability, despite vast improvements to accessibility. This means that they miss out on the opportunities to have fun, develop friendships and spend time away from their parents/carers.

**Short breaks are therefore leisure opportunities for disabled children which gives their parent/carer a break from their caring responsibility.**

Short breaks are intended to have positive benefits for both children and young people with a disability and their parents/carers.

### What are the benefits of short breaks for children and young people with disabilities?

Short breaks provide fun, leisure and social activities for children and young people with disabilities outside of the school day. Short breaks enable them to:

- Spend time away from their parents/carers and other family members
- Relax and have fun with their friends

- Develop new friendships
- Develop their independence and try new experiences; giving them opportunities to increase their confidence and learn new skills, within an environment where they can enjoy themselves.

## **What are the benefits of short breaks for parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities?**

Short breaks allow parents to:

- Have a break from their caring responsibilities
- Rest and unwind
- Spend time with other members of their family (including meeting the individual needs of other children in the family)
- Undertake education, training or a regular leisure activity
- Carry out day to day tasks which they need to perform in order to run their household

We recognise that having a break from caring responsibilities reinforces the long-term resilience of families to continue to care for disabled children.

Most of our funded short breaks services involve the child or young person taking part in an activity without their parent or carer present. We recognise however, that for some families that type of short break isn't feasible and isn't the most effective form of short break; instead a short break for the family away from the home and the general routine of family life may be more desirable. We still have some work to do to improve what's available to meet families' needs for this kind of short break.

## **Who can access short breaks?**

Children and young people will be eligible for a funded short breaks service when they are:

Aged 0-19, (and up to 25 years in some circumstances) with a disability or disabilities **and**

Are resident or attending school in Solihull with:

- A current Statement of SEN
- A current Learning Disabilities Assessment
- A current Education, Health and Care Plan or being assessed for an Education, Health and Care Plan

**Or are:**

- receiving Disability Living Allowance

- Looked after by and the responsibility of Solihull Council (regardless of where they are placed)

Eligibility for services related to a health need is dependent on registration with a Solihull GP surgery.

### **How much does a short break cost?**

The cost of a short break should be either equivalent to or less than the cost of a similar activity available for young people without a disability. Parents/carers have told us that this is important. In the main the vast majority of parents/carers were happy to contribute towards the cost of an activity, rather than expecting it all to be paid for by the Council.

Specific costs of activities are detailed in Section 2 – some of these within the websites linked to.

### **What if the main short breaks services don't meet your family's needs?**

If families want to have a short break that is not provided for under the Council's contracts they may be able to choose to have a personal budget which can be taken as a direct payment instead of social care arranging the short break. They can then choose what service to buy from community or specialist providers directly. Children and young people will need to be in receipt of a service from social care or have an Education Health and Care Plan to be able to have a personal budget. A personal budget ensures that you have choice and control over the best way to meet the needs of your child and your family. This can include employing a personal assistant to help you have an overnight short break or to be used to pay for your child to take part in activities that aren't included as part of our main short breaks contracts.

More information about personal budgets (including how to request one) is available through our [Personal Budgets factsheet](#).

### **How do short breaks help to develop established friendships?**

Within Solihull we support The Children Society's "Friendship for All" concept of friendship-inclusive short breaks and have built this into our main short breaks activities arrangements. This enables children and young people with a disability to access short breaks alongside a chosen friend<sup>1</sup> where this is feasible. Unfortunately due to the limitations of some

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<sup>1</sup> regardless of whether that chosen friend is entitled to short break funded services in their own right

of the projects this is not practical or possible in every instance but every case will be considered and incorporated where possible.

## **Section 2 – Leisure and short breaks services**

### **Mainstream and universal services**

These are services provided to all children and young people and their families, like youth clubs and leisure centre activities.

The Council has used short breaks funding to improve the accessibility of mainstream leisure provision to enable families to enjoy activities together. This has included part-funding the Changing Places accessible toilets at Chelmsley Wood shopping centre, Touchwood shopping centre in Solihull town centre and The Core (Theatre, Arts, Library complex) in Solihull town centre (further information about Changing Places toilets is available from <http://changing-places.org/>)

Extra support is also available from SoLO to enable children and young people with more complex needs to access mainstream services, for example performing arts groups, or uniformed groups (e.g. Scouts). The extra support will sometimes only be required on a temporary basis, as one of the aims of is to support the activity provider to be skilled and confident to continue to support the child/young person to attend without on-going extra support (unless this is still necessary).

### **Targeted leisure services**

These are services set up for children and young people who need additional support or who may need activities or groups tailored. There are lots of activities, facilities and clubs available for people with disabilities in Solihull.

Information about groups and activities that are aimed at children and young people with disabilities are included on the [Family Information Service Directory](#), available on the Local Offer.

Many sports/physical activities are supported by the Council's Solihull Active team. Usually no booking is required to take part. See <http://www.solihullactive.co.uk/solihull-active-team/disabilitysport> for up-to-date information. The latest Disability Activities leaflet available on that website outlines access information for both of the leisure centres in the borough.

The Council subsidises family swimming sessions on Sundays (during term time) at Reynalds Cross School. These are for families with a disabled child who are unable to use the public swimming pools at Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull Sports Centre. If you'd like to attend these sessions contact Anna Roe (email [s503aroe@reynalds-cross.solihull.sch.uk](mailto:s503aroe@reynalds-cross.solihull.sch.uk) or phone 0121 706 7279. There is no set charge to attend although families can make a voluntary contribution for the sessions - the suggested amount has been £5 for a family with 1 child or £7 for a family with 2+children.

Wheels for All is available for families who want to experience cycling together in a safe environment, see <http://www.solihullactive.co.uk/solihull-active-team/Solihullwheelsforall> for more information, including how to access the service.

### **Specialist short breaks activity services**

The majority of our short breaks activities are delivered by SoLO (SoLO Life Opportunities). The opportunities currently available are on their website (<http://www.solihullsolo.org/childrens-services/>). There are a range of activities available after school, at weekends and during the school holidays. Individual support to access mainstream and universal activities/venues, as mentioned above, is also available. SoLO support children (from Year 1 - age 5 upwards), young people and adults through the provision of a range of different projects.

All Solihull resident children who meet the eligibility criteria in Section 1 can access the subsidised provision, along with children who attend a Solihull school. Providing your child meets the criteria you can contact SoLO directly by email [info@solihullsolo.org](mailto:info@solihullsolo.org) or phone 0121 779 3865.

The Council contributes towards the cost of many SoLO activities which means that those activities can then be offered to families at a fair and subsidised rate. The family contribution rate set by those service providers is agreed with parents, carers and the Council.

The costs of SoLO activities vary depending on the activity, e.g. £5 for Musical Youth, £2.50 for Forest Oak after school club, £16.50 for holiday sessions (£19.50 if it involves a trip out).

Where space is available children from outside the Solihull area can access the activities at a reasonable unsubsidised rate. Adults (including young people aged over 18) are able to access SoLO adults' activities using a personal budget.

## Overnight breaks

Overnight breaks are for families that need a longer break where the child or young person spends the night away from home, or in some cases receives overnight care in their own home. Families may choose a personal budget and use this to employ a personal assistant who could support them to take their child away on a family break. To access this service a social work or health assessment is required.

Overnight short breaks are provided in a number of ways:

- Residential short breaks – overnight breaks with other disabled children and young people in a residential unit. A range of providers are available, depending on what families choose to meet the needs of their child or young person.
  - Lyndon House caters for children aged 0-18 years that have a learning disability or mental health condition or challenging behaviours with additional physical health needs who are registered with a Solihull GP.
  - Shirley House caters for adults from 18 years old with a learning disability and complex health needs or challenging behaviour.
  - The Norman Laud Association provides overnight and daytime short breaks for children up to 18 with profound learning difficulties and complex physical and health care needs.
  - Acorns Hospice provides overnight and daytime breaks for children with life limiting conditions.
  - Zoe's Place Hospice provides palliative, respite and end-of-life care to babies and infants aged from birth to five years suffering from life-limiting or life-threatening conditions.
  
- Overnight short breaks in the child or young person's own home (this would generally be through a personal budget)
  
- Family Links Service provides family based care through short-term foster carers who look after disabled children and young people in the carer's own home. This is usually for one weekend a month, but the amount of support depends on the needs of each individual child or young person and their family circumstances. We currently have a contract with one contract carer and a number of ad hoc carers to provide this service.
  
- For those who are assessed as requiring overnight short breaks, this is usually fully funded.

## **Section 3 – How do we consult with families regarding short breaks?**

When reviewing our provision of short breaks activities we designed a survey in conjunction with parents, this ran for two weeks in December 2014. We had a good response with 73 parents replying to the online questionnaire.

Parent representatives were also involved in developing the service specification and evaluating the tenders submitted by potential service providers.

We amended the way that we deliver short breaks activities as a result of this questionnaire – for example making more activities available during schools holidays and weekends. Parents also told us that they would like a mix between specialist subsidised activities and the ability to have some funding for more individualised activities.

As part of our contract with SoLO to provide short breaks activities the Council will undertake a satisfaction survey for parents and carers every 6 months. This is so we can ensure that needs are being met and work with SoLO to review service provision if this is not the case. The first of these satisfaction surveys took place in September 2016, and the results were overwhelmingly positive, with almost all of the respondents saying that overall they were satisfied with the service. The next parent/carer satisfaction survey will take place in March 2017.

## **Section 4 – How do we consult with children and young people with disabilities?**

Short breaks providers are tasked with obtaining feedback from children and young people about the service they receive. They must ensure feedback can be given in confidence and anonymously. A range of communication methods are used to ensure that all children and young people can express their views, however complex their needs.

To inform our review of short breaks activities consultation took place with children and young people from our four special schools. This showed that young people take part in a range of activities and identified some issues around which activities young people would like (more) support for and appropriate transport to access them. This included wanting more people to help, more after school activities, more arts and drama activities, workshops to help understand difficult topics, more

youth clubs; as well as specific activities to increase independence. We took these comments on board when rewriting the service specification for the short breaks activities service.

## Section 5 - Legal context

The [Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011](#) and accompanying [Department for Education Advice for Local Authorities](#) provide details of how local authorities must provide breaks from caring for carers of disabled children.

In summary, the regulations require local authorities to:

- ensure that, when making short break provision, they have regard to the needs of different types of carers, not just those who would be unable to continue to provide care without a break;
- provide a range of breaks, as appropriate, during the day, overnight, at weekends and during the school holidays; and
- provide parents with a short breaks services statement detailing the range of available breaks and any eligibility criteria attached to them.

The Department for Education summarises its advice as follows.

Local authorities **must**:

- provide a range of short breaks services;
- give families the choice to access short breaks services using a direct payment
- publish a statement of their short breaks services on their website
- keep their short breaks statement under review;
- state in their short breaks service statement 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 in their area;
- consult parents as part of the review of the statement;
- consider the legal implications of the eligibility criteria they apply to short breaks services; and
- not apply any eligibility criteria mechanistically without consideration of a particular family's needs.

Local authorities **should** ensure that:

- short breaks are reliable and regular to best meet families' needs;

- local authorities should try to reach groups of parents who may be more difficult to engage;
- parents are engaged in the design of local short breaks services;
- short breaks can build on and be offered by universal service providers;
- they are working in partnership with health services to understand the range of short breaks services in their area and to train the workforce;
- short breaks promote greater levels of confidence and competence for young people moving towards adult life;
- local authorities should ensure that those who use short breaks services have the chance to shape the development of those services; and
- they continue to develop their workforce in relation to short breaks services.

It is **good practice** for local authorities to ensure that:

- a "local offer" is considered in order to provide families with access to some short breaks services without any assessment;
- formal assessment of families' needs leads to a tailored package of services for them;
- in preparing the short breaks services they have thought about how best to share information about disabled children between agencies within existing data protection requirements;
- they have considered working together with partners to ensure strategic sign-off and shared accountability locally for the statement and the services it refers to; and
- commissioning is leading to more responsive short breaks services.

## **Section 6 - About this short breaks service statement**

This document is Solihull Council's Short Breaks Statement. It is intended to provide parents and carers with information about the short breaks services available in the borough, and outline how we are meeting our legal requirements.

We initially published a Short Breaks Statement in October 2011, which has had a number of updates. This version was updated during late-2016/early 2017, and published in February 2017 following engagement with parents and carers to ensure that it was easy to understand and meets their needs.

This version will be kept under review to ensure it reflects the current position, and be formally updated again in 2019 at the latest.

### **How was this statement updated?**

The review of this statement was facilitated by the Council's Children's Commissioning Team.

A working group of professionals was established to ensure that the review of this statement reflected current practice. A draft revised statement was then shared with parents and carers at a focus group.

We then re-wrote our revised version to make it more parent-friendly and to reflect the comments of the focus group. This was then circulated to the focus group members to ensure it reflected the discussions, and further minor amendments were made before being presented to the multi-agency Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Board.