

Monday, 12 June 2023

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND SHORT BREAKS

Purpose of report:

This report is to review the practice and performance, priorities, and improvement progress since the 2021 review of the Children with Disabilities Service. It will also include an update on the policy and budget for short breaks and briefly explain the Council's statutory responsibilities in this area. The report will initially focus on the children with disabilities social work and family support service and then the position regarding short breaks.

Overview of the Children with Disabilities Service

1. The Children with Disabilities Service works with approximately 800 children, all of whom have a complex and severe disability. The service is made up of qualified Social Workers and Family Support Workers. Children who are not severely disabled and require family support / social work services receive support from early help teams and mainstream social work services.
- 1.1 From April 2023 the service has been amalgamated with the Occupational Therapy services, Domiciliary Care services and the Crisis Intervention service (for children with ASD and at risk of family breakdown). This will allow greater alignment between services that work with disabled children all sitting under the Assistant Director for Children with a Disability. The service is also hosting the NHS/Surrey key working service which is focused on children and young people aged 14 plus with ASD and learning disabilities.
- 1.2 Responsibility for management and development of the majority of Short Breaks services sit outside the children with disabilities service, within the Commissioning Directorate. Many of the Short Breaks on offer within Surrey can be accessed directly by families but overnight Short Breaks are accessed via a social work assessment in the Children with Disabilities Service.
- 1.3 The service has an improvement plan and service business plan which are linked to the wider strategic objective of creating a more integrated approach across Health, Education and Social Care, working closely with the community

and voluntary sector. We have created a Children with Disabilities strategic forum to provide a multi-disciplinary platform to focus on the needs of this group of children. However, the priority currently is on creating sustained high quality social work / family support with a stable workforce that can build trusting relationships with children and families.

Summary of issues identified in review in 2021

2. Following an Ofsted monitoring visit in March 2021 the following areas of improvement were identified in respect of Children with Disabilities:

Management oversight and case planning, safeguarding practice specifically in relation to children experiencing neglect. Child in Need visits not consistently timely, plans not always reviewed regularly, leaving too many children experiencing drift and delay in their circumstances improving.

- 2.1 A number of actions were implemented to address the concerns identified by Ofsted. This included appointing an Interim AD position for CWD, leading an immediate review of the service and to provide both operational and strategic oversight. The context of this concern regarding safeguarding practice was that the Children with Disabilities Service had only recently taken on full safeguarding responsibility for all disabled children and their siblings. Prior to this any safeguarding concerns / investigations were passed to the area social work teams. This change in practice led to increasing instability within the service as some staff left and others lacked confidence in this area of practice.
- 2.2 Between June and October 2021 a review was undertaken of all children open to the Children with Disabilities Service: 777 children and young people's case files up to the age of 18 years were reviewed by Inspection Leads from the practice and audit team.
- 2.3 This review came to the conclusion that 25% of the children were rated as red, requiring attention to address drift and delay. It also identified that within this cohort approximately 66 children had safeguarding concerns that had not been well managed and or transparently addressed.
- 2.4 Following the review, a range of additional activities were undertaken which included launching detailed practice standards and identifying clear expectations of social work practice. A range of safeguarding training sessions were provided to staff within the Children with Disabilities Service to address and improve safeguarding practice. This also included a range of learning sets focusing on Safety Planning, Purposeful Visiting and SMART Planning.
- 2.5 It was agreed that the service needed to ensure that children were sitting in the right part of the service, as some children were being held by qualified social

workers who didn't necessarily need to be, as their needs were lower level and they could be well managed in the reviewing team. There was also a focus within the service on working directly with children using appropriate tool kits for disabled children.

Progress made against recommendations

3. The Children with Disabilities Service now has a stable senior leadership team with a permanent Assistant Director (in post since March 2022) and two permanent Service Managers all of whom have a wealth of experience in children with disabilities and safeguarding. The service also has stable team management which includes four quadrant team managers, a countywide team manager and a family review team manager. We have an improvement plan against all areas of performance and service development, both qualitative and quantitative, which we track regularly at management meetings.
 - 3.1 There has been a review of the staffing capacity within the service which has identified the need for an additional team manager post and advanced social work support to the reviewing team which has been agreed and is now operational.
 - 3.2 The service has recently been audited by the Quality Assurance team in February 2023. This was an overview of the whole service and the review identified no children whose needs were not being met appropriately and commented on the engagement of staff in the review and the child centered practice. The practice review commented on the passion that was demonstrated by social workers and family support workers for their children. Social workers and family support workers were described as having good, positive, appraisal skills.
 - 3.3 Alongside this Quality Assurance review at the request of the service, the QA service undertook a review of 30 social work assessments in February 2023 and identified that in all the assessments audited, the practice was safe and that where there was a safeguarding issue the response was proportionate. There were areas of development identified in terms of the qualitative nature of the assessments and the need to ensure that there was no drift and delay (see annex 1).
 - 3.3.1 In addition, a National Complex Abuse investigation was undertaken by Doncaster on children with disabilities and complex health needs who were placed in residential settings operated by a particular provider. Following the findings of the Doncaster Inquiry, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the DfE has requested a National Review into safeguarding children with disabilities. This required Surrey to review in detail the 26 children with disabilities we had placed in residential schools to examine the experiences of

children placed in specialist, independent residential settings to ensure their safety as well as consider the quality of care they receive.

- 3.3.2 Our internal audit identified that Children with disabilities and complex health needs who are looked after and are currently placed in specialist schools are safe and their wellbeing safeguarded. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that these children are living in safe and good quality placements. There is clear evidence their placements are being regularly monitored and reviewed according to statutory guidance and requirement. As part of our ongoing training for staff within Children with Disabilities, we have undertaken workshops to equip staff more effectively when they are visiting children to ensure maximum safeguarding oversight.
- 3.4 We have reviewed all children open to the service to identify which of them need to be allocated to a qualified social worker and have moved approximately 60 families into our reviewing team, which means they have a more proportionate intervention compatible with their needs. We have identified the need for an advanced social worker to sit within this team to ensure that there is robust safeguarding oversight.
- 3.5 Within the service we have undertaken significant staff training and development, we hold service days every 3 months which include a range of training areas and we hold 3 weekly learning events led by our two Service Managers with a focus on safeguarding. There is also safeguarding training addressing specific issues when working with disabled children that is mandatory for all staff to attend. We are working closely with the academy to identify clear training expectations and to identify bespoke training that meets the needs of the workforce in Children with Disabilities, and this has included Mental Capacity Act training, Autism Champion training, & Positive Behaviour Support. All of which is equipping our staff to work effectively and creating an environment where staff feel valued in their professional development.
- 3.6 We have prioritised permanent recruitment and have undertaken a range of measures to try to secure permanent social workers including bespoke recruitment targeting staff who are interested in working with Children with a Disability and currently 77% of our staff are now permanent social workers. This is a significant improvement, but we are striving to get to 100%. In March 2021 the figure was 50%.
- 3.7 In terms of performance against all practice standards, we are relentless in our focus on all areas and hold weekly performance meetings with all managers within the service to provide accountability for their performance. Our child in need visiting stands at 90% of all children being seen within timescale and our looked after child visits are at 92%. We do have areas for ongoing development, but the management of the service are creating a culture where performance against key practice standards is at the heart of good practice with clear

expectations. This data is not significantly different from the time of the Ofsted visit in march 21.

- 3.8 We have undertaken some significant work in relation to transition to adulthood following a pilot led by the Preparation for Adulthood Programme Board. We are currently developing plans with relevant stakeholders to operationalise a 16–18-year-old team within the service to ensure that we are appropriately addressing the needs of these young people as they transition to adulthood. This proposal is not finalised as we are currently in liaison with Human resources re the process of change and the final proposal will need to be shared with Adult services .
- 3.9 We are also holding monthly service briefings to all the children’s social care workforce so that they clearly understand the remit of the service. Within this we provide consultation to those social workers working with children and their families who have a disability but do not meet the criteria of the service. This has been very well received by staff outside of the Children with Disabilities Service who need to develop their confidence in working with disabled children.

We have reviewed and updated our direct payment policy to create greater flexibility for families who are not able to identify personal assistants. This issue was leading to persistent complaints. Now families can use their agreed funding allocation with agreement from the service to meet needs in a more flexible and creative way.

- 3.10 The service has been working very closely with Family Voice to strengthen the relationship. We contribute monthly to the Family Voice newsletter to provide updates on the service. We have an in-person event planned on the 27 June with Service Managers and the Assistant Director. We have reviewed the local offer content and produced a one-minute guide which is on the website and we are in the process of collating information into a leaflet for children and families. With the User Voice and Participation service we have had initial meetings and are looking to build in regular consultation to explore how we engage with those children and young people accessing the Children with Disabilities service.

Summary of Short Breaks - Policy and budget and summary of current position

Local authorities’ statutory duties

4. Part 3 of the 1989 Childrens Act sets out the local authorities’ powers and duties to provide support services for children in need and their families. This should include a range of services which include practical support in the home, leisure facilities, social, cultural, or recreational facilities.

- 4.1 The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 require local authorities to provide a range of services to assist carers to continue to provide care or to do so more effectively. The range of services must include daytime and overnight care in the home and outside the home, overnight educational and recreational activities and emergency care, with and services available to assist carers during the day and night, at weekends and during the school holidays.
- 4.2 Each local authority must publish a statement about Short Breaks services in their area, so that families with disabled children have clear information to access services. The statement must be kept under review, and it should be revised when new services become available, or when there are changes to existing services.
- 4.3 In recommissioning Short Breaks for 2023/24 onwards, Surrey County Council took the decision not to reduce the £2.5 million budget for these valuable services at a time of real challenge for the Council's finances, but the overall pressure on resources meant that we were not able to increase funding for new contracts from 1 April 2023.
- 4.4 To mitigate the impact of this on children with the most complex needs and their families, we prioritised funding to maintain the same level of provision as currently for overnight respite services and fulfil commitments in children's statutory Care Plans.
- 4.5 Whilst our offer remains compliant with our statutory duties, inflationary pressures meant that we were able to fund two-thirds of the current capacity in community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities.
- 4.6 However, since the budget was set, Surrey County Council has been successful in securing a grant from the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund for the 2023/24 financial year. This represents an increase of 30% in the total budget for commissioned Short Breaks services compared with 2022/23 and has enabled us to significantly increase and develop our Short Breaks provision for the coming year, when compared to the capacity we previously identified.
- 4.7 In particular, we have been able to commission a significantly larger amount of community-based Play & Leisure provision, to support children and young people with a range of disabilities, and within this a higher volume of our new, dedicated Play & Leisure services for those with more complex needs who require 1 to 1 or 2 to 1 support to access services.
- 4.8 The funding from the DfE will also enable us to expand our pilots of new Family Breaks for children and young people with complex needs, and their families, and make a small increase in our overnight respite capacity.

- 4.9 Going forward, Commissioning will monitor and evaluate the delivery and impact of the Short Breaks service including the additional provision funded by DfE and has commissioned research to evaluate the impact of Short Breaks in terms of mitigating demand for more specialist provision (in particular residential care). We will also apply to the next round of the DfE Short Breaks Innovation Fund, for continuation funding.

Overview of current position

Commissioned Short Breaks services

5. A range of Short Breaks activities are commissioned from a number of local Voluntary and Community Frontline Sector (VCFS) providers, in some cases in partnership with schools. They include weekend and holiday play and youth activities, after school clubs and overnight respite, with the aim of providing children and young people with positive, enriching play and leisure experiences where they can make friends, increase their confidence, and improve their emotional and physical health, whilst also providing parents and carers with a break from their caring responsibilities to support their own wellbeing and spend time with other family members.
- 5.1 The commissioning approach aims to deliver diverse, quality, accessible provision to meet a range of needs across the county and includes specific provision for children and young people with complex health needs, autism, and visual impairment. While play and leisure provision is accessed directly by families, commissioners work with Surrey County Council (SCC) practitioners (particularly the Children with Disabilities (CWD) service), providers, Family Voice Surrey and local partners to help families to know about, understand and access the support they need.
- 5.2 Services were significantly disrupted during the pandemic as providers responded to COVID in accordance with legislation and Government guidance. To protect and support families, particularly the most vulnerable, SCC worked with providers to deliver a virtual offer and progressively reintroduce and expand face-to-face services as restrictions were eased.
- 5.3 Services have been recommissioned from April 2023 following a Strategic Review of the service in 2021 which highlighted a need for:
- **a refreshed approach to measuring outcomes**, including outcomes for parents/carers and families (see annexes 2 and 3),
 - **specific provision for whole families**, particularly where children and young people have more complex needs and there are higher risks to parent/carer health and wellbeing and family cohesion,
 - **targeted play and leisure provision** specifically to support participation by children and young people with more complex needs who typically require 1:1 or 2:1 support to access services.

The current Short Breaks Statement is available on the SCC website at: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/children-with-disabilities/surrey-short-breaks-for-disabled-children/surrey-short-breaks-statement>. This is being updated and a new Statement will be published to reflect the new Short Breaks services available from April 2023.

In-house Short Breaks

6. Surrey has two Children's Homes for children with disabilities and have introduced a Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) approach with a review of staffing structure and recruitment processes this was completed in 2021.

6.1 **Ruth House:** 11 bed Children's Home for children with disabilities aged 11-18 with diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) and Learning Disabilities (LD). Children are either cared for full time by Ruth House with some family contact or on shared care arrangements where they spend 4 days at Ruth House and 3 days with their families. The children tend to be vulnerable, often non-verbal with behaviours of concern, some learnt, and others because of their disability, trauma, or attachment difficulties. There is currently the development of 2 x crisis beds for children with ASC and or LD linked to our Children's Crisis Intensive Support Service (CCISS).

6.2 **Applewood:** 6 bedded short breaks home offering short breaks to over 35 children up to the age of 18 with disabilities. Children access a range of overnight stays, day visits in school holidays and weekends, after school teatime visits and occasionally longer stays whilst families take a holiday or are unwell. The home helps children prepare for transitions to other services post-18 and is currently awaiting the addition of a self-contained bed for children with disabilities needing an urgent residential assessment.

6.3 ***Surrey Domiciliary Care Service (SDCS)***

Offers a countywide in-house service which provides quality assured home and community-based support for children aged 0-18 with disabilities. The support offered is based on assessed need from the CWD team, and forms part of the child's care plan. Children's needs range from complex health needs, those requiring support with personal care to those needing some behavioural support.

The aim is to provide a responsive service delivering quality, home based personal short breaks for children with disabilities, in line with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) guidelines. Workers are chosen for their skills, empathy, qualification, and experience and are placed with families ensuring continuity for the child where possible. The service benefits the whole family by supporting

the child and allowing other members of the family to spend time together. SDCS works with the Children with Disabilities social care team to improve outcomes for each child.

Personal Support

7. Outsourced domiciliary care service providing support to children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years old who require support packages to be delivered within the family home or taking children out from the home into the community. Support packages are awarded through a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) under 3 lots: Personal Support, Challenging Behaviour and Complex Needs. Support is also provided to children and families in crisis or emergency situations, usually through spot purchase.

Current position

8. Following the recommissioning process in August-November 2022, and a second round of mini-competitions in March-April 2023, most of the Short Breaks Budget for 2023/24 has been allocated. Award letters were issued in November (first round) and in April (second round). Delivery plans for the first round are finalised and the service is now live; Other services will come online April-July.
 - 8.1 As noted above, we were successful in bidding for £907,400 of funding under round 2 of the DfE Short Breaks Innovation Fund and nearly all of this funding has now been committed.

Conclusions:

- 9 In relation to the Children with Disabilities Service, we can evidence some significant improvement in relation to the concerns identified in March 2021 by the Ofsted monitoring visit and the full ILAC inspection did not reiterate these concerns in February 2022. It is an improved overall picture, and the department can have more confidence in the services ability to respond to the key areas of concern originally identified in March 2021.
 - 9.1 This is in part supported by performance data and there has been external scrutiny provided by the Quality Assurance service via the practice review and audit of 30 child and family assessments which has provided reassurance. There are still areas of concern within the disability service and some areas of performance need continued focus, for example timeliness of assessments, and we have in some areas an inexperienced workforce with more turnover than we would like which has implications of the quality of the work.

- 9.2 The alignment of all key services that relate to disabled children under the Assistant Director for Disabled Children has created the conditions for sustained improvements. Services working collaboratively and communicating with each other effectively is critical for improved outcomes for disabled children.
- 9.3 The Short Break shortfall in terms of reduction in community provision has in part been offset by the award from the DfE of £907,400.

Recommendations:

- 10 For the Committee to note the changes and improvements in the CWD service since the Ofsted Monitoring Visit in March 2021.
- 10.1 For the Committee to note the budget and service position on Short Breaks and our plans for research into and evaluation of the service, on which we will report at a later date.
- 10.2 Ongoing reporting regarding performance within the Children with Disabilities Service to be part of business as usual reporting processes.

Report contact.

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Sources/background papers

Front end review

Ofsted position statement Short Breaks

Annex 1 – Children with Disabilities C&F Assessment Dip Sample Audit Report

Annex 2 – Children and Young People Outcomes Framework

Annex 3 – Surrey Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People Quality Report Template – Q1 2023/24