

Changes to Short Break Provision in Wiltshire (Including information on the Local Offer) Your Questions Answered

During the months of March and April Wiltshire Parent Council (WPCC), the Aiming High for Disabled Children team (based at Wiltshire Council), and Barnardo's have been speaking to parents and carers about the planned changes in Saturday and Holiday Club provision. Many of these discussions have taken place at Barnardo's consultation meetings, some took place at the Aiming High for Disabled Children event held in Trowbridge on the 25th March, and the Information Event held by WPCC in Devizes on the 23rd April, others took place by telephone, or by e-mail.

This information guide aims to answer the questions we have been asked, and to respond to the concerns raised.

This guide will be sent to all families who are known to the Children's Disability Teams (CDTs), to everyone who attended the Aiming High or Information event, to all parents registered with WPCC, to all social workers in CDTs, to Ask (the Family Information Service) and to special schools for the attention of teachers and Parent Support Advisors

An apology in advance! This is a long guide that attempts to deal with the common questions and issues that have been raised. It is difficult to get the right balance, however I suppose that I would rather be accused of giving too much information, than not enough. I have tried to make it easier to read by listing below the issues and questions that have been raised with us so that you can go straight to any areas that may be of particular interest to you. Details of how you can comment on the information I have provided, or ask any questions that I haven't covered, can be found at the end. Please do use this opportunity to let me know what you think.

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What are Short Breaks?

Short breaks are opportunities for disabled children and young people to have positive, enjoyable experiences in their free time. Usually these breaks are away from their family, but they don't always have to be. Short breaks also benefit families and carers because they give them an opportunity to have a break from their caring responsibilities.

Why do Short Break Services in Wiltshire have to change?

'Aiming High for Disabled Children' sets out the Government's intention to transform short break services nationally. Local partnerships are required to increase the number of short breaks that are provided to disabled children, and to ensure that a much wider range of disabled children are able to access short breaks.

Not only does central Government require local partnerships to transform short break services, but parents and carers, children and young people in Wiltshire have also asked us to change the way that we provide short breaks. Parents and carers told us that;

- Too few disabled children were getting a short break service in Wiltshire.
- Sometimes, disabled children with the most complex and challenging needs were the ones least likely to be able to get appropriate short breaks.

- There were too few short break services to choose from.
- It wasn't fair that disabled children could only access specialist Saturday and Holiday Club provision through Children's Disability Teams (CDTs), since many children and families don't have - or need - a social worker. Many families felt that they needed a social worker in order to get a service that other children without disabilities were able to get easily.
- Saturday and Holiday Club provision provided by the CDTs didn't offer families any choice - if they wanted to use the service they had to do so on the days that it was provided, not when it might suit the children and their families.
- These services varied across the County and, because they were small, they weren't always able to offer children the range of age appropriate activities that they might have liked.

How were parents consulted about the changes?

The Aiming High for Disabled Children team, based at Wiltshire Council, is committed to listening to, and working with parents and carers. We contribute funding to and work very closely with Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC) to ensure that the voice of parents is heard so that their views and opinions can play a major part in the way services are developed.

Over the past year and a half we have undertaken many face-to-face consultation events with parents about changes to short break provision in the county. These events have been publicised through the special schools, the Children's Disability Teams, and through the membership of the WPCC. In addition, because we know that some parents find it difficult to attend consultation meetings, WPCC were funded by the Aiming High team to do an e-mail questionnaire and telephone interviews with registered parents. Overall, the views of in excess of 100 parents were listened to, which greatly influenced the design of new short break services in Wiltshire.

If you did not have an opportunity to contribute to our consultation on changes to short break provision, and would have liked to have done so, we apologise. As I said above, we really do want to work with and listen to parents to make sure that we provide the best possible services for disabled children in Wiltshire.

If you haven't already done so, it is really important that you register with WPCCC (www.wilshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk) so that your views can be sought on future changes or developments to services (it is also a great way to be kept up-to-date with information about, for example, new services!)

We are also making changes to the way that we contract with organisations that provide short break services on our behalf so that they must all now actively consult with parents and children and young people, both about how the service should be shaped and delivered, and how well that service is being provided. Service providers must share this information with us at their service reviews so that we can be sure that you are happy with services. These reviews are held at least annually, and often more frequently.

What is the Wiltshire Local Offer and how will it affect my child?

One of the things that parents said to us during consultation was that they felt it was too restrictive to limit access to short break services through the Children's Disability Teams (CDTs) since many children do not have, or need, a social worker. We agreed with them - we think that many more disabled children should be able to have a short break than has been the case in the past!

So, we have introduced the Wiltshire Local Offer for Targeted Services. Put simply, the Local Offer gives eligible children and their families a choice between one of three offers; these are

- 90 hours of Regular Activity or Holiday Club provision per year through Barnardo's, (for children aged 8 or above) or
- £600 local offer payment per year to enable families to access services of their choice for their child, (for children aged 3 or above) or
- £600 worth of Inclusion Support Funding per year which will be administered by the Council and used to fund access to services or support of families choosing (for children aged 3 or above).
- Children under the age of three will have access to short break provision at a District Specialist Centre (through a Common Assessment Framework - CAF).

By taking the Saturday and Holiday Club service out of the specialist teams (the CDTs) and implementing the Local Offer many more families

and children will have access to short break targeted services - approximately **1,100** children in Wiltshire are now eligible for the Local Offer, an increase of about 800 children and young people!

The Local Offer is accessible **without** assessment, because one of the other things that parents said to us was that they disliked having to do an assessment every time they wanted or needed to use a service, they wanted their children to be able to use services and have a fun, positive, enjoyable time - just like other children without disabilities do!

Specialist Short Break services (like Canons House, Hillcote and the Family Link Service) will continue to be accessible through CDT social workers, following assessment.

Am I eligible for the Wiltshire Local Offer and how do I access it?

Details about access criteria for the Local Offer are available on the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council website or telephone 01672-569300).

Broadly speaking;

- Children who live in Wiltshire, and who attend a special school, or who attend a mainstream school (in or out of County) and receive 25 or more hours a week support, or the equivalent, will be eligible.
- Children who live in Wiltshire, eligible for Free Entitlement funding and receive one-to-one support in their mainstream setting, and/or attend a District Specialist Centre will be eligible.

The Local Offer is being rolled out from May 2010. Because so many more children and families will be eligible we cannot make it available to everyone at the same time - we simply don't have the capacity to do it all at once! The first children to be included will be those 66 who are currently receiving a service from the Children's Disability Teams (CDTs), so that they do not experience any break in service. This will be closely followed by all the other children and families who have a social worker but who are not receiving a Saturday or Holiday Club service at present.

We will then roll the Local Offer out through each of the special schools in Wiltshire in turn - starting with St Nicholas, then Exeter House, Rowdeford, Larkrise, Downlands and Springfields. In between, and depending on demand, we will include children in out-of-county special schools and children at mainstream schools, both in and out-of-county,

and early years settings. We are aiming to have the roll out complete by July 2010.

Because we know that it would be unfair to penalise some children who are not involved in the early stage of the Local Offer roll-out, we have agreed that if families choose to take up the Local Offer payment or the Inclusion Support Funding elements of the Local Offer then they will still be eligible for the full amounts, regardless of when their child was involved in the roll-out. However, families who **do not apply before September will receive a proportional amount of the Local Offer**, provided that their roll-out took place by no later than July.

Apart from the children already receiving a Saturday or Holiday Club service from the CDTs, those that opt for the Barnardo's element of the Local Offer will be entitled to a proportional level of service, effective from the date of application. This is because there is a limited capacity at Barnardo's, and they must be able to provide a fair level of service to all children.

Families will be advised of the Local Offer roll-out through a leaflet that will come home via their child's book bag from school. Families of eligible pre-school children will be informed via a letter from the Local Authority. You can also get information on the roll-out through the WPCC website.

Which element of the Wiltshire Local Offer is best for my child – how do I decide?

We understand that whilst some families will know straight away which element of the Local Offer will best suit their child and the needs of their families, others will need to think about it and perhaps discuss it with someone who can help them decide.

We have funded a number of Inclusion Support posts, and one of the responsibilities of these workers will be to discuss with families the options available under the Local Offer, and to help them decide. In most cases, this will simply involve a telephone conversation with the family, although in a few cases it may be appropriate for the worker to visit you at home to better understand your family's circumstances and needs. Information on how to contact an Inclusion Support Worker will be included in the Local Offer roll-out leaflet.

There is also some information about the different elements of the Local Offer in the final sections of this leaflet that you might find helpful.

My child isn't eligible for the Local Offer - can I appeal?

Yes. We have made our access criteria as wide as possible (to include some 1,100 children and young people) and we do not anticipate that there will be many children who should have been included, but are not. However, we know that some children will fall just outside of the access criteria - for example a child may get 24 hours a week one-to-one support, or be educated at home and so not be eligible, but their family consider that they still have a need to access targeted short break services.

Therefore, there is an appeal process in place to consider these cases. All appeals must be supported by a Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which can be completed by any professional working with the family. Children who successfully appeal may be awarded the Local Offer in full, or a proportion of the Local Offer, depending on the decision of the appeal panel.

Detail on the appeals process will be available on the WPCCC website and will also be made available on the Local Offer roll-out information leaflet.

Do the changes to the short break service mean my child will receive less Activity and Holiday Club service in future?

As described above, **many more** children (about 1,100 in total) will now be eligible for a Short Break Service. Across all Short Break Services, this represents an increase of about 800 children!

In the past, 66 children were able to use Saturday or Holiday Club services through the Children's Disability Teams (CDTs). Of these, 34 children will now receive **more service** hours than they did in the past, if these children's families choose the Barnardo's Local Offer (of 90 hours).

32 children will receive less of this service. However, we have agreed with Barnardo's that they will **continue to provide the levels** of this service previously assessed as required by the social worker for up to 6 months. During this 6 month period we will be working with specialist service providers to identify how additional assessed need can be met. To be clear, if your child has an assessed need, this need **will be** provided for - it may not be at the Barnardo's Activity and Holiday Clubs, it may be

at another specialist provision, for example the Family Link Service, if this is more appropriate. The important thing to note is that **assessed need** will continue to be met and provided for.

What other services, apart from the Local Offer, are available to my child?

Over the past year we have been working to ensure that disabled children in Wiltshire have access to a much wider range of targeted short break services than had previously been available. For example;

- We have contracted with the National Autistic Society (NAS) to provide youth clubs for children and young people (aged 8+) in four centres across the County.
- We have also funded the Youth Service at Wiltshire Council to provide a better range of Bridging Youth Projects, designed to meet the needs of young disabled people (aged 13 -19) and, where appropriate, to act as a bridge into mainstream youth clubs.
- We have also funded a range of music based activities to be held over the year and across the County, and
- Have funded a Sports Development Scheme aimed at providing more sporting opportunities for disabled children, and to ensure that we have coaches who are trained in providing these exciting opportunities.
- We have also funded the purchase of 10 special wheelchairs to enable Wiltshire's first ever Wheelchair Basketball team to be established in Tidworth.
- Money - about £100k - has been allocated to support the work that Wiltshire Council is doing under the 'Playbuilder' scheme to ensure the provision of some really terrific play equipment specifically suitable for disabled children in a number of play areas across the County.
- We have recently placed an order for two mobile sensory trailers designed, by parents, to meet the needs of children with profound disabilities. These trailers will be available for use by, amongst others, Barnardo's, special schools, voluntary organisations, parent groups, and individual families. We are really excited about these trailers since they will be the first of their kind in Europe, and we will be launching them at a Family Fun Day to be held in the summer.

These services and activities are available to **all disabled children** in the County and are not linked to the Local Offer- so children who **do not**

meet the access criteria, as well as those **that do**, will be able to use them as they wish **without assessment**.

All disabled children are also able to use universal services - those services that are there for all children and young people - for example Leisure Centres, libraries, theatres, cinemas etc and many of these services are more than willing to do all they can to enable disabled children to take part in general activities.

Information on these services and activities can be found on the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council website or from Ask (the Family Information Service), telephone number 08457 585072, www.askwiltshire.org

Issues and Questions specifically about the Barnardo's Activity and Holiday Club Provision

Barnardo's Activity sessions won't run for as long as the CDT run clubs did - why?

Barnardo's holiday clubs will run for 6 hour days, the same as CDT sessions have done. This is to allow for day trips and extended activities and in recognition of families' needs for breaks in the holidays that mirror the provision in school term time, though for fewer days. This is also the same style of provision that mainstream children's holiday activities offer.

On Saturdays we think that it is better for children to have more, but shorter sessions because this gives them more opportunities to do regular fun-filled and positive activities, and is also less tiring and stressful. The shorter fortnightly format gives a better chance for children and young people to develop friendships and to feel they belong to a club as they meet more often. It is also more usual - when children and young people without disabilities go to clubs or activities it is usually for a couple of hours at a time. We feel there will still be time to enjoy activities such as swimming or dancing within a morning or afternoon session.

Whilst we think that shorter, more frequent, Saturday/ Activity sessions will be best for most disabled children we have also listened to the concerns of some families who say that they need a longer break - to, for example, enable them to spend good quality time with other children.

Many of these families will have an assessed need, and so will be able to access longer day care sessions at other specialist provision.

We have also asked Barnardo's to look at the possibility of running back-to-back activity sessions so that families who need or want a longer break can arrange for their child to attend a double session as required. This may not be available in some areas the first six months of this year as part of the change over to age structured groups whilst Barnardo's gets the new service up-and-running, and may, depending on parent demand, be something that Barnardo's can provide from October.

Together with WPC and Barnardo's, we will continue to monitor parents', and disabled children's, views on this.

How will Barnardo's know about my child's needs, wants, likes and dislikes?

We have recently written to all families whose child currently uses a CDT run Saturday or Holiday Club to ask for permission to share some information with Barnardo's so that the needs of the child can be met in the new provision. Families who would prefer not to give this permission have been asked to provide a contact number so that a Barnardo's Worker can contact them to arrange to do a home visit and assessment (using a standard Barnardo's form called 'All About Me') before their child can use the service.

Many of the staff who used to provide the CDT run services have transferred to Barnardo's so will be familiar with these children, and the children will know them, so their needs, wants, likes and dislikes will be well known to the staff.

Children who have not previously used this service, but would like to use the Barnardo's element of the Local Offer, will also be asked to have an 'All About Me' assessment completed for their child so that their best interests can be provided for.

Will my child be as safe at the Barnardo's run sessions as they were at the CDT run sessions?

Absolutely. One of the things we looked at before giving Barnardo's the contract to run Activity and Holiday Clubs was their commitment to, and record of, protecting the health, safety and well-being of children. Barnardo's have an exemplary record in this regard.

Some parents have expressed a concern that, if the sessions are to have a wider mix of children in them, their child might be vulnerable to harm or to harming others. Barnardo's are committed to ensuring that all children have the appropriate staffing levels to ensure their and others safety, and that children and young people are well supported so that all children are included and can participate. This will include doing certain activities in smaller groups where this best meets conflicting needs.

Barnardo's will also work with other professionals and families to ensure that there is consistency of approach toward challenging behaviour and that Barnardo's staff are trained and knowledgeable about any procedure or individual medical, behaviour, mobility or medical needs children may have.

How will Barnardo's staff these sessions?

Many of the staff who used to work on the CDT run Saturday and Holiday Clubs have transferred to Barnardo's, so your children will still see the same staff at many sessions.

Barnardo's also has a good record of training and using volunteers to support staff at sessions. This is really important because it encourages younger people (and especially young men) to work with disabled children. One of the things that disabled young people tell us is that they would like the people who support them to be closer in age; disabled teenage boys, in particular, are very keen to have male peers supporting them to access positive, fun activities, and teenage girls often like to have the opportunity to mix with, and be supported to do 'fun things' with other teenage girls.

Although they will be using volunteers, Barnardo's **will always** have the right level of qualified and trained staff present to meet the needs of the children attending their sessions.

Why is Barnardo's providing different groups for different children - age is irrelevant to my child.

We think that all children and young people, regardless of whether or not they are disabled, should have opportunities to play and mix with others broadly the same age. All play opportunities can, and should, be made age-appropriate so the new groups will be divided into sessions for 8-14 year olds and sessions for 13-17 year olds. Barnardo's have a particularly

good understanding of how important play and leisure is to the healthy development of all children, and have very good experience and skills in developing activities that meet the needs of disabled children and young people.

Part of the value of the proposed groups to disabled children and young people is to strengthen their social skills and networks and this is best done with peers of broadly the same age. Moving on and into mainstream groups with or without further support is made much easier for children and young people who have had previous experience in age appropriate settings.

Will I be able to decide how and when to use my child's 90 hours allocation if I decide to take the Barnardo's element of the Local Offer?

Yes you will. One of the things that families didn't like about the CDT run service was that they could not store up their hours of service to use when it suited them (perhaps by not using sessions during the Easter break when the family went on holiday, but being able to have extra sessions during the summer holidays instead).

However, whilst we do want to give families as much choice as is possible, Barnardo's will have to ensure that the system of allocating sessions is equitable and that popular sessions are available fairly. This may mean having to compromise occasionally. When the service is up and running Barnardo's will be introducing an advance booking system so that families can plan for sessions in advance.

We have asked Barnardo's to closely monitor requests for bookings so that together we can ensure that services are provided at times that families most want them. This information will be part of our regular reviews with Barnardo's, and parents' views will also be monitored by Wiltshire Parent Carer Council.

How much will it cost and why is there a charge?

There will be a small charge of £1/hour made for each session booked at Barnardo's so a holiday session would be £6 and an evening club £2. We may also ask for additional money eg for entry fees to particular activities, but these will be bookable in advance. Families who choose to use the other elements of the Local offer will also be contributing toward the costs of providing short break opportunities for their children.

We thought very hard about whether or not to allow a charge to be made for Activity and Holiday Club services, and we discussed it with parents and carers at the consultation meetings. Most parents thought that it was reasonable to pay a small contribution of the costs (generally it was agreed that as much as £10 for a full session was acceptable).

We also noticed that when we did not charge at all for some services, during last summer, many children did not turn up for their booked sessions. Places at the Barnardo's scheme will be popular, and at times there will be competition for places on particular sessions, and it would not be fair if there were many avoidable instances of children not turning up. The charge is a minimal one, and is set at a level that we expect that most families will be able to meet, however there will be a very small fund that can be used to help those that are unable to meet the fee.

Issues and Questions specifically about the Local Offer Payment Element

What can the Local Offer Payment be used for?

The local offer payment of £600 is to be used to enable families to provide short break opportunities of their choosing for their child. So, it can be used to contribute towards the costs of going to Brownies or Cubs, or to pay for support to enable a young person to go to football matches, or to go shopping in town on a Saturday afternoon. It can be used to provide support for a disabled child to go on holiday with their family, so that the whole family has a break. [Someone to support your child can be an agency support worker, or someone you know (like a teaching assistant, friend, or relative) who would be willing to be with them and help them have a good time.] Perhaps your child would like to go to drama lessons, or to learn to swim? Maybe there is a holiday activity scheme in your area that your child would like to go to? Local Offer payments offer families more flexibility to decide what best meets their and their child's needs - and so long as it is used to provide an opportunity for your child then it is okay with us!

How will you monitor that it is being spent on the right things?

We believe that all families want the very best for their children and will make sure that the money is spent wisely. However, we do have a duty (both to the Government and in the best interests of the children) to make sure that this is the case, and before any payment is made families will be asked to sign and return a declaration setting out what the money can be used for. We will also be making the payment in two lots - the first payment will be for £400, and the second for £200. Once a family has received the first payment they will be sent a simple monitoring form to fill in detailing what activities the money has been used to support. When this form has been completed and returned it will trigger the second payment.

We are not expecting that there will be many cases when families do not use the payment appropriately, but we do reserve the right to withdraw future payments in any such cases. Should this happen, families will be offered another element of the Local Offer to ensure that their children have access to short break opportunities.

There aren't enough of the right opportunities in my area - what use is the money to my family?

We know that many families just want their child to be able to access opportunities that already exist in their community, and the money will help them to do so.

However, we also know that sometimes disabled children want to do things with other disabled children, or have particular interests that are not readily available in their area. We have listened to what parents had to say about this, and - in response - have come up with an idea to support parents who may want to get together, each with their Local Offer Payments, and arrange for services to come to them, or for new services to be developed. At the moment we are calling this idea 'Parent Led Commissioning Groups', but I hope that we'll come up with a better name soon - suggestions welcome!

The idea is that we will fund Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC) to facilitate groups of parents who want a similar service getting together to find someone to provide this service to their requirements - put simply

10 families with £600 each will have a lot more clout, than a single family with only £600 when it comes to attracting new services!

- So for example, 20 families register an interest in arranging for their child to have Music and Dance classes that are specially designed for disabled children. WPCC would facilitate that group of parents to come together (either actually or virtually) to discuss what they want, and how they might get it, and from whom. WPCC, with support from our Inclusion Worker, will help families design a project and support them in finding potential providers for the business.
- Or there might be families who all live in the same area and want to get a holiday group started using their Local Offer payment - again WPCC would be there to support and facilitate.

The opportunities are limitless, and we believe that Parent Led Commissioning Groups will result in more of the right services being provided in the right place at the right time. This is a really new idea, and I am not aware of any other similar schemes in England, but we all think it could really work well for those families interested in trying it out! If you have an idea, do get in touch with WPCC who will find out if there are other parents who might have a similar interest in a particular project.

Issues and Questions specifically about the Inclusion Support Fund element of the Local Offer

What is the Inclusion Support Fund and what can it be used for?

The Inclusion Support Fund (ISF) is very similar to the Local Offer Payment, the difference is that instead of giving the families the money directly the Council will hold on to it and administer it on families' behalf. The ISF can be used to pay for services, and/ or for support to access services of the family's choosing. For example, it may be of particular interest for those children who need support to go to activities, but whose families don't have anyone else to pay to provide this support, or who would rather employ an agency worker to support their child (it should be noted that this is usually more expensive than paying someone directly). It may also be of interest to those families who would prefer not to have lump sums paid to them, but to have services or support paid for on their behalf.

Thank you for reading through this guide, I hope that it has answered your queries, and addressed any concerns that you might have had. If you'd like to make any comments or suggestions (positive ones, as well as constructive criticisms, also welcome) please contact;

If you are a **parent or carer** - go to the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council website www.wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk or tel 01672-569300.

If you are a professional - Susan Tanner, Aiming High Strategy Manager, Wiltshire Council susan.tanner@wiltshire.gov.uk

We will do our best to get back to you as soon as possible with a response.

Susan Tanner
Aiming High Strategy Manager
Wiltshire Council
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