

# Short Breaks in Wokingham – An Update for Families

Over the past year, Wokingham Borough Council has carried out a detailed review of Short Breaks. Short Breaks help children and young people with additional needs to take part in activities, have fun, and build independence, while giving families a break from caring.

Children, families, practitioners and other partners told us that the current Short Breaks system needed:

- more choice of activities
- more flexibility

We have used this feedback to shape changes to the Short Breaks offer.

## How the Review Worked

The review took place in two phases.

### Phase One – Filling Immediate Gaps

Phase One focused on improving support straight away. This included:

- creating **Club Hub**, a council-run Short Breaks service delivered by the HAF team
- supporting existing Short Breaks providers so they could continue running their services

This helped make sure that support continued while longer-term plans were developed.

### Phase Two – Adding New Providers

Phase Two introduces **new commissioned Short Breaks providers**. These providers will work alongside:

- Council-run services
- Direct Payments, where families arrange their own support
- Spot purchasing of services (this is where the Council directly pays for a space or an agency worker)

This means families can choose from a wider range of Short Breaks options.

## New Short Breaks Providers

Earlier this year, we worked with organisations interested in running Short Breaks. After engagement sessions, presentations, and a formal selection process, we have identified a group of providers to offer:

- after-school clubs
- weekend activities
- school holiday clubs and activities

There will also be a training offer for universal providers to help make their activities more accessible for children with additional needs.

These new services will start **gradually over spring and summer**.

## What This Means for How Families Access Short Breaks

Changes will not be instant and **initially children and families will still need to come via the Short Break team** for access to provision whilst we transition from one model of short break delivery to another. This transition process will be gradual as we work with new providers to embed the new commissioned offer and work to identify ways to further increase capacity where there is demand for particular services or types of service.

However, once we have built sufficient capacity many families will be able to contact providers directly in line with a new short break offer that we are developing. We will provide further details of this in due course. It is intended that:

- this will reduce the amount of paperwork and assessments needed for many children
- Improve access and choice.

Some children with higher or more complex needs will still need an assessment for **more specialist support** and this will continue where necessary.

Overall, the aim is to:

- avoid unnecessary assessments and reduce delays
- free up time for the Short Breaks Team to provide more tailored support
- help children get the right support at the right time

## What Happens Next?

We are now in a mobilisation phase. This means we are:

- working closely with providers to plan activities
- looking at how children's needs match available services
- agreeing transition arrangements to make sure support continues smoothly

As we move through this process, we will contact families who currently receive Short Breaks, as well as families on the waiting list where we think a new option may be suitable for their child.

Our aim is to offer **more choice, clearer access, and better-timed support** for children and families in Wokingham, and to keep developing the Short Breaks offer in partnership with families, children, and providers.

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## What this means for my family

- Over time there will be **more Short Breaks activities to choose from**, including after-school, weekend and holiday options.
- Although to begin with children and families will need to come **via the Short Break Team** for access to provisions, in the future it is intended that some families will be able to contact Short Breaks providers directly, with less paperwork. This will be aligned with a new Short Break Offer, (details will follow in due course).
- New services will start **gradually**, so not everything will be available straight away.
- **Places will be limited at first** and will be offered via the Short Break Team based on how well an activity matches a child's needs.
- If your child is already in receipt of a short break and it is felt that there may be a suitable match with a new service this will be **talked through and agreed with you prior to any changes in service**.
- If a new provision doesn't work for your child **other short break options can still be explored**.
- **Direct Payments are not changing** – you can keep them if they work best for your family.
- Support options are being **added, not taken away**.
- **Providers may charge for services** (as many already do). We will ensure that any charges are comparable to the cost of similar activities or clubs for children without a disability, while also covering the cost of any additional support needed to meet children's needs.
- This is the **start of changing the way short breaks are delivered** and we will continue to identify ways to **build capacity** and **fill gaps in provision**

If you have any questions, concerns or positive feedback regarding this please email the Short Breaks Team [shortbreaksco-ordinator@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:shortbreaksco-ordinator@wokingham.gov.uk)

If you would like to find out more about short breaks or how to access them, please visit our website: [Short breaks explained](#)