

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

3 OCTOBER 2016

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Families:

Short Breaks

Short Breaks for Disabled Children are a vital life-line for families in Reading caring for children with significant Special Educational Needs. Fellow Councillors will be very aware of the importance of ensuring that these families have the necessary support to ensure their children have a happy and fulfilling childhood. Short Breaks are often one of the only factors preventing some children having to be taken into the care of the Local Authority when parents just can't cope any more. This in turn prevents significant additional costs to Reading Borough Council's Children's Social Care.

Will the Lead Councillor provide the ACE Committee with a brief update on the progress of the recent Short Breaks for Disabled Children Consultation, and will they share the initial collated findings document, and the expected next steps, with all the parents, carers, and voluntary sector organisations who took the time to contribute to the consultation ?

REPLY by Councillor Gavin (Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Families):

Thank you Cllr Williams for your question.

We all agree with Cllr Williams's pre-amble to his question about the importance of Short Breaks to families with disabled children, and that is why we proposed developing a new model of working that would reach more eligible families in Reading than we currently do. As the report to ACE noted in 2015/16 we spent £102,000 on Short Breaks supporting around 200 families, whilst the number of young people in Reading 0-19 living with a disability or longstanding illness was estimated by Public Health back in 2011 to be 6,635. The report unanimously approved by committee concluded that better value for money through improved choice and control for service users will be achieved by delivering services through Direct Payments to those who are eligible

In February 2016 ACE committee approved the proposal for Reading Borough Council to evolve the current short break grants mechanism into specified contracts and to start providing short break services through Direct Payments and committed to working with key stakeholders to further develop a scheme to start in April 2017. The consultation was open

between the 20 of May and the 17 of August 2016. A range of communication methods were used to launch and inform families and relevant organisations about the consultation opportunities.

During the 90 days seven meetings were held at various locations, all at different times of the day. Key community groups including Reading Families' Forum, RCVYS and Reading Mencap worked jointly with RBC and invited RBC to attend their existing meetings with their members. We are confident that as far as possible, everyone affected by Short Breaks have been given a chance to have their say in a format that worked for them. Each consultation meeting saw attendances ranging from none to approximately 25 and discussion held at these meetings has been collected as part of the consultation process.

An online questionnaire was set up and completed by 53 people. A further 18 people filled in paper copies of the questionnaire. We also received detailed letters from Mencap and RCVYS on thoughts gathered at consultation meetings chaired by each group.

Consultation closed on 17 August. The data gathered is being analysed and considered in the light of the policy agreed by committee in February. A detailed report, including details of the responses received, the findings and proposals for the future delivery of our Short Breaks Service will be tabled for our meeting in December for this committee's decision.

Once ACE has agreed the way forward then a series of meetings/workshops with relevant organisations and stakeholders will be organised and I will ensure that there is a robust communication plan in place to make sure all parents and carers who are eligible are informed and empowered to get the support they need.