
From: Christine Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services
Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 16 September 2025

Subject: Commissioning of Short Breaks Day Activities 2026 to 2028

Decision no: 25/00069

Key Decision: Overall service value exceeds £1m and affects more than two Electoral Divisions.

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: None

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report provides the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee with the background and rationale to the proposal to establish new Short Breaks Day Activities for disabled children. The proposed route is to establish a further open competitive grant process aimed at local grass roots organisations and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations in Kent from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2028, with a potential 12-month extension period.

Recommendation(s): The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **ENDORSE**, or **MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as detailed in the Proposed Record of Decision (attached as appendix 1):

1. Introduction

1.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989¹ and the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011² to ensure a

¹ HM Government (1989) Children Act 1989, Schedule 2, Paragraph 6(1)(c). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/schedule/2>

sufficiency of Short Breaks Services for parents/carers of disabled children. The regulations include that the local authority must provide, so far as reasonably practicable, a range of services which is sufficient to meet assist carers to continue to provide care or to do so more effectively. This includes a requirement to provide, as appropriate, a range of day-time care in homes of disabled children or elsewhere, overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere, educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes and services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays

- 1.2 Short Breaks Day Activities are preventative family support services aimed at families with a disabled child to allow them to have a break from their caring role. They also provide disabled children with the opportunity to have fun and learn while doing activities in a new environment outside of the home. They provide a chance to spend quality time within their community with other children who may have similar life experiences, helping to build friendships and connections beyond the family. For parents and carers, Short Breaks Day Activities provide regularly planned breaks from their caring responsibilities, allowing time to pursue other activities, education, chores, employment daily life activities and to spend time with other family members.
- 1.3 Some disabled children can join in with universal activities such as Beavers or Brownies, or summer fun days run by their local district council. Kent County Council commissions activities for those children who need extra support, including those with significant levels of support. These Short Breaks Day Activities are crucial services in supporting the resilience of families of disabled children in Kent.
- 1.4 The purpose of this decision is to meet the authority's statutory duty² to ensure sufficiency of Short Breaks Day Activities, and to allow time for the consultation on the implementation of the Short Breaks Strategy (including other services such as Overnight Short Breaks, Care and Support in the Home and Direct Payments) in 2026 which pending the outcome of the consultation will inform the development of a longer term model of Short Breaks.
- 1.5 Local authorities typically structure short breaks into three tiers:
 - Universal – Open to all disabled children without assessment. Open access activities like youth clubs or leisure centres.
 - Targeted – For children with moderate needs; include structured group day activities or day trips.
 - Specialist – For children with complex needs; requires full social care assessment. includes overnight care or 1:1 support.

The targeted tier is essential to ensure that families who don't meet the threshold for specialist services still receive meaningful support.

² HM Government (2011) The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011. Statutory Instrument No. 707. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/707/made>

2. Key Considerations

- 2.1 Historically, Short Breaks Day Activities have been commissioned using grants, rather than contracts. This reflects the types of organisations likely to apply for funding to run these local, flexible activities for their community. The lowest bid in the 2024 to 2026 programme was £1,092 and the highest £60,000. Kent County Council has seen a direction of travel of moving Grants to Contracts, and this was the intention when running the grants programme for 2024 by establishing a hybrid approach to the collection of personal data of children to inform the commissioning of new contracts. Whilst this has been successful for Year 1, there is limited data to evaluate without the full second year of delivery. Whilst commissioners apply a proportionate approach to contract procurement, it is likely that formally tendering for contractual opportunities could be considered a barrier to some organisations, particularly when requesting as little as £1,092 funding per annum. This has been the experience in a recent tender for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme³ where it was expected that high numbers of smaller grass roots organisations would tender, which was not seen.

3. Background

- 3.1 Current Short Breaks Day Activities were commissioned under competitive grant arrangements for a two-year period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026, with the intention to better understand demand, reach, performance and outcomes.
- 3.2 Prior to April 2024 these services did not provide data in a meaningful way which led to uncertainty on value for money and outcomes. There were reports of long waiting lists and service gaps that could affect statutory sufficiency duties.
- 3.3 The grant funded services were implemented alongside enhanced performance recording methods through Core+ (the Council's Early Help system solution), allowing comprehensive analysis of the services effectiveness. A full-year Service Review (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025) revealed positive outcomes for children and their families, including a reduction in missed appointments, maintenance of activity levels within the previous year's budget (demonstrating value for money), and clarification regarding misconceptions on extended waiting lists across the range of provision.
- 3.4 The Short Breaks Day Activities Programme for April 2024 to March 2025 delivered a total of 1,682 sessions, reaching 2,237 individual children across Kent. There were 13,738 attendances, with Swale (2,975) and Maidstone (2,565) recording the highest numbers. The overall no-show rate was 6.8%, with Gravesham (17.4%) and Dartford (15.2%) showing the highest percentages. Compared with 2023 to 2024, total attendances decreased by 13.5% (from 15,876 to 13,738), and no-shows decreased by 36.5% (from 1,584 to 1,005), indicating improved engagement and attendance reliability.

³ Department for Education (2025) *Holiday activities and food programme 2024*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2024>

- 3.5 A costing framework⁴, developed by UCL (University College London) and Loughborough University for the Department for Education, provides national benchmarks for all Short Breaks provision and whilst published in 2010 remains a key reference point for assessing value for money in local commissioning.
- 3.6 Building on the attendance data outlined in paragraph 3.4, the programme delivered 47,583 hours of activity across all session types (see Paragraph 3.7) with a total spend of £1,052,069. This equates to:
- £22.11 per hour
 - £76.57 per attendance
 - £470.30 per child per annum
 - £625.49 per session
- 3.7 When benchmarked against national estimates (adjusted for inflation to 2025), which suggest costs of £360–£490 per session for after school clubs and £445–£486 for weekend clubs, KCC's costs are higher combined. However, when broken down by session type, KCC's costs are significantly lower:
- After school sessions: £226.98 per session
 - Weekend Activities: £287.14 per session.
 - School Holidays: £214.36 per session
 - Family Events: £684.50 per session
- 3.8 It is important to note that Family Events include not only the children but also their families, resulting in a higher number of attendees per session and a lower cost per attendee. This broader reach contributes to improved family wellbeing and community engagement, supporting the programme's preventative aims. When taking account of total attendees 3,457 (1,487 children 1,970 family members) the cost per attendee is £1.44. This confirms that Family Events offer exceptional value for money, especially considering their broader impact on family wellbeing and inclusion.
- 3.9 The analysis states some children are accessing Short Breaks Day Activities across multiple providers, and anecdotally from social workers we have been told that some families are unable to access Short Breaks Day Activities as they are fully booked. We aim to address this issue following the Public Consultation for the Short Breaks Strategy during the development of the longer-term model of Short Breaks Day Activities, however for this grant round providers will be instructed to ask families if they are accessing other Short Breaks Day Activities to ensure that available sessions maximise the number of families attending.
- 3.10 Through this reporting we can identify whether children accessing the Short Breaks Day Activity Services were known to KCC up to six months prior to accessing the activities, thereby demonstrating that the Short Breaks Day Activities are reaching the right cohort of children. Analysis of the data demonstrates that 88% of children reached had some involvement with one or more of the following: Children's Social Work Service, Early Help, Strengthening

⁴ UCL and Loughborough University (2010) Short Breaks Research: A Costing Framework. London: Department for Education <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/819/1/DCSF-RR224.pdf>

Independence Service, Family Hubs and/or had an Education, Health and Care Plan. This data shows that the Short Breaks Day Activities are reaching those children who are need of and will benefit from this activity.

- 3.11 Local authorities in England are required under the Children Act 1989⁵ to maintain a Disabled Children's Register, a voluntary and confidential database that helps councils plan and improve services for children and young people with disabilities or additional needs. The performance data was compared to the Register as the closest measure of population data for disabled children in Kent. After cleansing the data from the disabled children's register and removing any young people over 18, there are 5,504 children on the register and from April 2024 to March 2025, Short Breaks Day Activities reached 2,177 children. If all of those who attended are on the register, that would be a reach of approximately 40%. Taken together with the fact that registering is voluntary and therefore not all families are on the register, this demonstrates that it is not possible to offer a Short Breaks Day Activity Service to all families within the current budget.
- 3.12 Equity of access appears strong across age, language, and ethnicity, with no significant gaps identified. This shows that while there is insufficient funding to provide a Short Breaks Day Activity to every child on the register, the current grants are providing activities proportionately to the data we have on the children. A notable gap was identified for children with complex needs, indicating a need for more tailored services. Finally, while a lower proportion of attendees had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) compared to the register (39% of those attending Short Breaks Day Activities compared to 52% of those on the register), this may reflect the services' role in supporting children with lower-level needs, whereas those with EHCPs may require more specialised/intensive support such as Direct Payments or Care and Support in the Home (other services commissioned by KCC to support disabled children and their families).
- 3.13 In summary, the data suggests that the current provision, funded by grants, are reaching those children who most need the activities, as evidenced by the Involvements data, there are no significant gaps in delivery, shown by comparing protected characteristics to those on the register, and the providers are performing well, evidenced by the volume of positive feedback received by both young people and parents/carers.
- 3.14 The current arrangement, funded by grants for Short Breaks Day Activities end on 31 March 2026.
- 3.15 In March 2025, re-commissioning work began to develop further arrangements of Short Breaks Day Activities to be in place from April 2026. This involved speaking to other local authorities to understand their overall Short Breaks Day Activities Offer, looking into the legal obligation of eligibility criteria and sufficiency and setting up an internal steering group to discuss the offer.

⁵ Children Act 1989, Schedule 2, Part I. *Maintenance of a register of disabled children*. Available at:

- 3.16 Shortly, KCC will be undertaking a Public Consultation on the draft Short Breaks Strategy. The Kent Short Breaks Strategy 2026 to 2031 sets out the Council's proposed approach to providing inclusive, community-based Short Breaks services for eligible disabled children. It aims to support their development and independence while offering families meaningful respite from caregiving. The strategy outlines seven key objectives focused on improving access, equity, and quality of services, and is shaped by extensive consultation with families and service providers. Public Consultation is in the planning phase and the Strategy is intended to be presented at CYPE Cabinet Committee for Key Decision on 20 January 2026.
- 3.17 Considering the forthcoming public consultation and the development of the Kent Short Breaks Strategy 2026 to 2031, it is recommended that the progression of the previously proposed longer-term Short Breaks Day Activities contracting model be paused. This will ensure that any future proposals are aligned with the final Strategy adopted, informed by the consultation feedback. Additionally, the anticipated Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) introduces uncertainty regarding the future operating landscape, further supporting the need to defer development until greater clarity is available. To mitigate the risk of service disruption during this transitional period, it is recommended that an optional 12-month extension be added to the grant arrangements. If required this would provide continuity of provision through to 31 March 2029, enabling sufficient time for any future commissioning activity to be undertaken in line with statutory duties, once the new Authorities are established and operational.
- 3.18 To support equitable access and future-proof the commissioning approach, the structure of the application process will be organised on a District basis. This will help ensure sufficient service coverage across Kent and allow for any future disaggregation of commissioning responsibilities, aligning with the anticipated changes brought about by LGR. This approach provides flexibility and resilience, enabling a smoother transition to new governance arrangements while maintaining consistency in service delivery.
- 3.19 Given the evidence of success of the current grant arrangements in relation to outcomes, value for money and reach, it is recommended to commission Short Break Day Activities through a competitive open grants process from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2028 with an optional 12 month extension (3.17 refers) and continue with the development of the longer term model of Short Break Day Activities once the Strategy has been through consultation, taken the outcome on board and been adopted.
- 3.20 The grant recipients will continue to report activity through Core+, which will provide meaningful data on effectiveness and outcomes; this data will inform evidence-based decisions in relation to Short Breaks Day Activities and sufficiency. A grant-based approach will continue to encourage flexibility in delivery models, furthering our evidence base for the longer-term commissioning approach, and support strategic partnerships with the Kent VCSE sector. In line with the treasury Managing Public Money (MPM)⁶, grants

⁶ **HM Treasury (2025)** *Managing Public Money*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money> (Accessed: 27 April 2024).

are suitable when the recipient is not delivering a service under contract but is contributing to a public policy objective. In addition, MPM states that even though grants are not contracts, they must be monitored to ensure outcomes are achieved.

4. Options considered and discounted, and associated risk

- 4.1 Option 1: Do nothing and allow the current grants to end in March 2026. This option is not recommended due to the risk that Kent County Council would fail in its statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of Short Breaks Services, as the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 specify the need to provide services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. In Kent, many families access targeted short breaks through self-referral, without a formal Child in Need assessment. Eligibility is determined via criteria such as disability status, EHCPs, or receipt of relevant benefits, and services are delivered by commissioned providers who screen for suitability. Without continued grant funding, these targeted services, particularly holiday and activity clubs, would be significantly reduced, undermining both the sufficiency and diversity of provision required by law.
- 4.2 Option 2: Recommission Short Break Day Activities through contracts. This option is not recommended at this stage in line with Principle 2 of the Commissioning Framework, to ensure that commissioning is underpinned by a strong policy and planning framework. As the Short Break Strategy 2026 to 2031 is due to be implemented from 2026, it is preferable for this to be in place prior to redesigning a longer-term Short Breaks Model. If the Short Breaks Day Activities were commissioned through contracts prior to the Strategy being in place, there is a risk the contracts would not align with the Strategy and would not present a consistent approach for families of disabled children.
- 4.3 Option 3: Recommission Short Break Day Activities through grants – this is the recommended option. As data suggests the current grants are reaching the right children and performing well, it is recommended to commission the Short Breaks Day Activities via another competitive open grant process until the Strategy is in place.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The annual revenue budget for Short Breaks Day Activity Services is £1.06m (there is no capital budget), the cost of the two-year programme is £2.12m and the total cost if the 12-month optional extension is taken is £3.18m. It is proposed the existing budget is used to continue to fund these costs. This budget is included within the revenue budget key service line “Children in Need (Disability) - Care and Support (payments and commissioned services)” and managed by the Strengthening Independence Service.
- 5.2 The current Short Breaks Day Activities offer, commissioned for two years (April 2024 to March 2026), maintains the same number of sessions per annum as the previous grant year (April 2023 to March 2024), demonstrating efficiency in delivery. The effectiveness of the grants has been evidenced through positive outcomes for disabled children and their parents/carers. As improved confidence and positive experiences cannot be measured quantitatively, the

only way this data can be collected is via feedback from young people and parents/carers through end of year reports that include details of complaints, compliments on the services provided. This feedback, along with case studies from the providers and feedback during the regular Short Breaks Day Activity provider forums, highlights improvements in children's independence, a stronger sense of community, and parents reporting that the support has positively impacted their role as carers.

- 5.3 Grant values range from £1,092 for individual district-level services to £60,000 for countywide provision. Session costs vary depending on the complexity of needs. For example, Short Break Day Activities for children with more complex disabilities average £1,352 per session, compared to £304 for children with moderate needs. Costs are also influenced by session capacity; Family Events, while attributed a per-child cost, often serve entire families, reducing the actual cost per attendee. These factors collectively support the assessment that the grants represent good value for money, balancing cost with meaningful impact.
- 5.4 The competitive grants process is not expected to deliver any further savings against the value of the grants awarded. However, all bids received will be assessed for value for money prior to award. Financial modelling assumes no inflationary increase to the up-to three-year grant allocations.
- 5.5 The annual revenue budget of £1.06m is expected to continue to be funded from the General Fund however, the commissioning team and Supporting Independence Service will continue to seek other sources of funding to support Short Breaks Day Activities delivery in Kent using other eligible central government funding where appropriate. For example, funding from the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme has been secured to help support the grant funded Short Breaks Day Activities offer in the last two years (this has delivered an annual saving of £0.46m).

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The driver in the commissioning of Short Breaks Day Activity Services for disabled children is KCC's statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 and subsequently Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 to ensure a sufficiency of short breaks services for parents/carers of disabled children.
- 6.2 The Children's Act 1989 outlines that "it shall be the general duty of every local authority.
 - a) To safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
 - b) So far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

By providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs."

- 6.3 In addition, the 1989 Act specifically provides (Schedule 2, Para 6(1) (C)) that "Every local authority shall provide services designed - ...(c) to assist

individuals who provide such care for such children to continue to do so, or to do so more effectively by giving them breaks from caring.

6.4 Further, Regulation 3 of the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 [“2011 Regulations”] outlines that “in performing their duty under paragraph 6(1)(c) of Schedule 2 to the 1989 Act, a local authority must:

- a) “Have regard to the needs of those carers who would be unable to continue to provide care unless breaks from caring were given to them; and
- b) Have regard to the needs of those carers who would be able to provide care for their disabled child more effectively if breaks from caring were given to them to allow them to:
 - i) Undertake education, training or any regular leisure activity.
 - ii) Meet the needs of other children in the family more effectively, or
 - iii) Carry out day to day tasks which they must perform in order to run their household.”

6.5 Regulation 4 of the 2011 Regulations states, ““In performing their duty under paragraph 6(1)(c) of Schedule 2 to the 1989 Act, a local authority must provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, a range of services which is sufficient to assist carers to continue to provide care or to do so more effectively.

In particular, the local authority must provide, as appropriate, a range of:

- a) Day-time care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere,
- b) Overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere.
- c) Educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes, and
- d) Services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.”

6.6 Commissioners, having assessed the market provision in this area, are recommending the use of a grant process to secure the delivery of activities designed to ensure that it is discharging its statutory duties. This will need to be undertaken in accordance with the Council’s grant framework, as Strategic Grants. The risk of adopting a grant approach, rather than contracting for services, is that if a grant recipient fails to spend the grant in the fulfilment of the grant purpose that would impact upon KCC delivering its statutory duties. Under grant agreements generally, the main protection for the Council, is the ability to claw back the grant funds if not used for the grant purpose. However, if that arose it would then need to make sure it put alternative arrangements in place to discharge its statutory duties. However, commissioners are satisfied, from the data available from the current grant process, that there is a low risk of this arising. This risk will be mitigated, as far as possible, through the due diligence undertaken as part of the competitive grants process, and through the use of two year funding with the option to extend for a further year, which will provide funding certainty to the voluntary and community sectors organisations that it is envisaged would bid for the grant funding being made available.

6.7 Depending on which organisations are successful in bidding for grant funding, TUPE may operate to transfer staff from currently grant funded organisations to

any newly successful organisations. This will need to be factored into the grant process undertaken, and appropriate advice sought.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been completed, and no high negative impacts have been identified. The EQIA will continue to be developed and reviewed as this project progresses.
- 7.2 The EQIA identified the following positive impacts:
- For parents and carers to receive a break from caring
 - Focussing on opportunities for children and young people who are neurodivergent.
 - Focussing on opportunities for children and young people who have complex needs.
 - Enabling disabled children and young people to be included within their communities.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) was completed for the Short Breaks Day Activities grant process April 2024 to March 2026. In discussion with the CYPE Information Governance Lead, this DPIA was updated to explain that the same processing of data will take place for another two years under the newly proposed grant process from April 2026 to March 2028, and this was considered sufficient.

9. Other corporate implications

- 9.1 Principle 2 of KCC's Commissioning Framework outlines that our commissioning intention is well defined in policy and plans and should be underpinned by a strong policy and planning framework. It further adds "there must be a clear link between the strategy or vision set within the service and the translation of this into commissioning strategies and service design". By having a strong underpinning policy in place through the future Short Breaks Strategy, subject to consultation on the same next year, this will better inform how we proceed with a potential new design for longer term commissioning of Short Break Day Activities rather than attempting to work on the new design simultaneously with the Strategy being developed and taken through consultation.
- 9.2 This supports Framing Kent's Future⁷ Priority 4 New Models of Care and Support by enabling cost-effective, community-based services that promote early intervention and family resilience.
- 9.3 It also supports the opportunity area of 'service transformation opportunities' within Securing Kent's Future Objective 2 which states "KCC exists to provide services that meet the needs of Kent residents whilst meeting our Best Value duty. Consequently, the council can only deliver budget sustainability through a

⁷ [Framing Kent's Future - Our Council Strategy 2022-2026](#)

significant focus on the services it provides and transforming them accordingly to continue to meet needs whilst bringing the budget back into sustainability". Through the current grant arrangements, we have transformed the way data is collected to be able to ensure that the service is reaching the right children in the right areas of the county and allows the identification of any gaps in delivery to be able to target these accordingly through the proposed grants process for April 2026.

- 9.4 Access to Short Breaks Day Activities can play a preventative role by reducing the likelihood of families requiring more intensive higher-cost interventions such as Overnight Short Breaks, Care and Support in the Home, or Direct Payments. This preventative approach helps to mitigate financial pressures and manage demand across these other services.

10. Governance

- 10.1 Accountability for the Short Breaks Day Activities provision is with the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education. The responsibility to ensure delivery of Short Break Day Activities is with the Director of Children's Countywide Services.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 This report provides the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee with the background and rationale for commissioning Short Breaks Day Activities via a competitive open grant process for two years from April 2026 to March 2028, including detailing the Council's statutory duties. This is intended to allow the recommissioning of this provision align with the future implementation of the Short Breaks Strategy in 2026 which will inform the development of a longer-term commissioning model of Short Breaks Day Activities.
- 11.2 Data from the current Short Breaks Day Activities outlines the success of this model by demonstrating that the activities are reaching the right young people and are delivering value for money by matching the number of sessions delivered in the previous financial year, despite no increase in the budget.
- 11.3 A grant-based approach will continue to encourage flexibility in delivery models, furthering our evidence base for longer term commissioning approach, and support strategic partnerships with the Kent VCSE sector. In line with the treasury Managing Public Money (MPM), grants are suitable when the recipient is not delivering a service under contract but is contributing to a public policy objective. In addition, MPM states that even though grants are not contracts, they must be monitored to ensure outcomes are achieved. This monitoring generates valuable data that will then inform future commissioning decisions, including the identification of any gaps in service provision.

Recommendation(s):

Recommendation(s): The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **ENDORSE**, or **MAKE**

RECOMMENDATIONS to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as detailed in the Proposed Record of Decision (attached as appendix 1)

12. Background Documents

- Equality Impact Assessment
- Data Protection Impact Assessment

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: PROD

13. Contact details.

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