

Practice guide

Family Help & Children's Social Care

Children with disabilities - Complex Needs Service, Trafford

Background, purpose & rationale

There was, historically, a lack of confidence amongst partners, in particular special schools, and parents and carers, that the service was difficult to access, there were too many delays and when support was accessed, it did not always meet the needs of disabled children and their families.

The Short Breaks Team operated a telephone assessment and review function, leading to children in receipt of support they did not need, often where they might better access universal or targeted services. The Short Breaks Commissioned Service was limited to two providers offering holiday and weekend clubs, unable to meet the needs of children who required 1:1 support or personal care. The functions of the Social Work Team and the Short Breaks Team were not clear and there was no Eligibility Criteria for the service. This caused further confusion for parents and carers, professionals and internal teams, contributing to a lack of trust and confidence in the service.

What we did to improve children's outcomes and provide support at the right time

We simplified access to Short Breaks for families, bypassing screening at the Front Door. Short Break Enquiries are now completed via the Local Offer by parents, carers or professionals and reviewed by the Short Breaks Team, usually within 48 hours. Strengthened Short Break Assessment and Review Forms were built into the case management system, with in-person visits introduced as part of all new Short Break Assessments and Reviews.

A new, co-produced Eligibility Criteria for the Children with Complex Needs Service clarified roles of Social Workers and Social Care Reviewing Officers, and established a clear pathway to Short Breaks Assessments that do not require a Social Worker. All assessments for personal budgets or other care packages are now undertaken by Social Care Reviewing Officers with Social Workers undertaking Child & Family Assessments only where there is a clear safeguarding risk. We also established a new social worker post within the Short Breaks Team to drive quality and develop more of a Team around the Child approach.

A Short Breaks Working Group co-produced a new offer around Short Breaks, using parental knowledge to reach out to local providers and develop more flexible commissioning - purchasing small group trials over half term/holiday periods. There are now 7 or 8 providers offering weekend and holiday clubs meeting a wider range of needs including children who may need 1:1 support.

The Short Breaks criteria are more flexible, recognising some children – including those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs - can fall through gaps. Despite growing demand for allocations have remained stable because of children whose packages have ended or have not

progressed to a package following a Short Breaks Assessment. All Short Break Reviews take place alongside EHCP Reviews to ensure holistic planning and avoid families repeating their stories.

A SEN-specific Edge of Care Pilot trialled in the Short Breaks Team, works alongside Early Help and Children in Care CAMHS Clinical Lead, targeting children and young people at risk of coming into care who historically may not have met criteria for a Complex Needs / Short Breaks Service, including children at risk of adoption breakdown. This is showing early signs of success in maintaining children at home with their parents and carers. The service is looking ahead to social care reforms and implementation of Family Help, learning from the Social Worker role within the Short Breaks Team. A business case has been approved to convert a vacant Social Worker role into a Social Care Reviewing Officer for a 12-month trial so that this can be developed further.

What was the impact?

Many children and young people have been signposted to universal or other services on the Local Offer following robust and evidence-based reviews yet leading to few complaints. Several children with expensive care packages are now appropriately accessing commissioned services. More are being targeted for 'step down' as the commissioned offer expands and savings are used to develop new services. Our Parent Carer Forum Director described the Short Breaks Re-Commissioning work as *"an excellent example of genuine co-production"*.

Scaffolding families in crisis and seeing the value in short breaks has enabled children on the edge of care to remain with their families - only two children have become cared for since June 2023 within the service. Feedback from families through audits is consistently positive about the support they receive. In the Edge of Care Pilot, families' feedback is powerful in how they feel listened to, not judged - with the disability lens being applied and not just locating the problems with parenting.

The Social Work Team is held to the same standards as all social work teams with consistent management in place for over 2 years, with relentless drive to maintain high performance across all indicators. The more robust Quality Assurance Framework ensures monthly audits and moderation take place consistently - with most rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

The service is now more outward facing - co-working with teams across Children's Social Care and Early Help; offering consultations; and attending Special School network meetings - building trust, confidence and partnership working. Half termly meetings with Special Schools continue to be prioritised as valuable ways to maintain relationships and identify early families in need of support.

Resources

[Outline of Edge of Care Pilot](#)

[Outline of eligibility](#)

Find out more

Justin Colman, Head of Service, Children with Complex Needs & Designated Social Care Officer
E: Justin.colman@trafford.gov.uk