



**Policy &  
Procedure**

**Children's Safeguarding  
and Prevention**

## **Short Breaks Project Policy and Procedures**

### **Policy Summary**

The 'Stockport Family' Short Breaks Project is a flexible, planned and responsive service to need. It is successful and proves cost effective for agencies and most importantly for children, young people and their families.

### **Statutory Basis for the Guidance**

Children Act 1989  
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000  
Fostering Service Regulations 2002 Care  
Planning, Placement and Case Review  
(England) 2010  
Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to  
safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled  
children using short breaks (2010)  
Children and Families Act 2014

### **Local Strategic Partnerships**

### **Supporting Documents**

Recording policy  
Complaints Policy

### **Approved by**

**Chris McLoughlin, Service Director,  
Children's Safeguarding and  
Prevention,  
Services to People**

### **Supporting Training**

Briefing sessions to employees within Social  
Care

**Implementation Date: 01.04.20**

**Review Date: 01.04.21**

### **Quality Assurance**

Policy to be reviewed annually  
Short Breaks referrals with a signed  
agreement form

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Issue Reason</b>	<b>Revision Date</b>
1.0	10.06.2003	Pat Bugajski, Short Term Breaks Co-ordinator, Rebecca Newland, Strategy and Performance		
1.1	16.11.2007	Pat Bugajski, Short Term Breaks Co-ordinator, Angela Daniel, Policy Officer	Reviewed and updated	16.11.2008
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1.3	22.7.10	Pat Bugajski, Short Breaks Manager	Reviewed and updated	22.7.11
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1.5	01.04.2017	Laura Hopkinson Stockport Family First Manager & Wendy Delag Short Breaks Senior.	Reviewed and updated	01.04.2018
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## 1. Policy

i. It is often the case that families who use Social Care are already socially excluded and/or isolated and have limited access to resources in their networks and communities. It is important that their needs as parents/carers are addressed and services are provided to prevent family breakdown and the need for children to be accommodated full-time.

ii. Stockport Family has endeavoured to make sure that the Short Breaks Project is a flexible, planned and responsive service to need. It is successful and proves cost effective for agencies and most importantly for children and their families. The Short Breaks Project is a service which provides short term placements for children with and without disabilities.

iii. Short Breaks placements provide a breathing space during a time of crisis and/or new opportunities for children and their families. These placements should not be viewed as a solution in themselves but as a tool which helps take the pressure off the family whilst other work is carried out to help to resolve the family's difficulties. The placement can be a significant part of the plan to help a child in need and their family but only where there is sufficient information to provide clear aims and objectives for the placement and where this is reviewed on a regular basis. It is recognised that children with disabilities may need longer term placements in view of the nature of their difficulties.

iv. The Short Breaks Project is committed to supporting children living at home with their families and to prevent family breakdown and the need for children to become accommodated full time. Short Breaks placements can be provided as day support or overnight placements as appropriate - depending on the child and family's wishes and feelings, circumstances and agreed plan of work. The Short Breaks Carer can provide support to a child and focus on addressing certain issues on placement as well as building up a working relationship with the parents/carers to share information and provide advice and support where appropriate.

## 2. Terminology

i. **'Support care'** – is the term often used by services which specifically provide 'short breaks' for children **without disabilities** (where the child was supported outside the family home by a Foster Carer or Child-minder).

ii. **'Respite care'** – **was** the term used when **children with disabilities** accessed a short break outside the home either in a foster carer's home or a residential unit. The term **'short**

**breaks**’ has **replaced ‘respite care’** for children with disabilities and these short breaks have grown significantly over the years to include care in the child’s own home or community.

iii. Please note that the **Short Breaks Project in Stockport** provides a service for children aged between 0 – 18 years **with and without disabilities**. Short Breaks placements may be day support or overnight during the week or at weekends.

iv. Day support placements usually involve one or two visits a week but may be as little as once fortnightly depending on what is required to meet the family’s needs. Overnight placements usually involve four overnights a month and may sometimes include some day support in addition to this.

v. This service is designed to support plans for Children In Need and does not provide full time placements. Referrals should be made to the Fostering team where full time placements are required.

### **3. Legislation and Regulations**

i. Key supporting legislation:

Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Fostering Service Regulations 2002

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010

Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks (2010)

The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011

Children and Families Act 2014

ii. The ‘Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks (2010)’ was brought out in response to the changing pattern of short breaks for children with disabilities. However, it was also recognised that some projects exist which provide this support for children without disabilities and so stated *‘this guidance applies to disabled children and other children in need’*.

iii. This guidance covers a wide variety of types of short breaks consisting of support and accommodation under section 17(6) and section 20(4) of the Children Act 1989. Within the Short Breaks Project in Stockport, placements are set up under section 17(6) of the Children Act 1989. Referrals for short breaks placements required under section 20 should be referred directly to the Fostering Team.

*Local authorities should always be clear about the legal basis on which services are provided. Their decision to provide a short break under section 17(6) or under section 20(4) should be informed by their assessment of the child's needs and should take account of parenting capacity and wider family and environmental factors, the wishes and feelings of the child and his/her parents and the nature of the service to be provided. (Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks 2010, p7)*

iv. The assessment to determine whether the placement should be carried out under sections 17(6) or 20(4) will need to give consideration to the following:

- *particular vulnerabilities of the child, including communication methods;*
- *parenting capacity of the parents/carer within their family and environmental context;*
- *wider family and environmental factors;*
- *the length of time away from home and the frequency of such stays –(the less time the child spends away from home the more likely it is to be appropriate to provide accommodation under section 17(6))*
- *whether short breaks are to be provided in more than one place*
- *where the child spends short breaks in different settings, including residential schools, hospices and social care placements, it is more likely to be appropriate to provide accommodation under section 20(4) (see paragraph 2.16 of 'Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks')*
- *potential impact on the child's place in the family and on primary attachments;*
- *observation of the child (especially children who do not communicate verbally) during or immediately after the break by a person familiar with the mood and behaviour of the child (for example the parent or school staff);*
- *views of the child and views of parents/carers – some children and parents may be reassured by, and in favour of, the status of a looked after child, while others may resent the implications and associations of looked after status;*
- *extent of contact between Short Break Carers and family and between the child and family during the placement;*
- *distance from home; and the need for an independent reviewing officer (IRO) to monitor the child's case and to chair reviews.*

*(Short Breaks - statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks 2010, p 8)*

v. Where a child is placed in an emergency under section 17 with short breaks carers a Care Planning Meeting must be held within 72 hours of the child being placed to

ascertain whether this is a short breaks placement under section 17 and the child can go home with or without ongoing short breaks support or whether the child needs to become looked after.

vi. Under the Short Breaks Statutory Guidance (2010) a child or young person living with their family and placed with short breaks carers under section 17 can only receive a maximum of 75 overnights per year. Under this same guidance children and young people can only have a maximum of 17 consecutive overnight short breaks placements. This part of the guidance is mainly aimed at children with disabilities but can be used in exceptional circumstances where the aim is to get the young person rehabilitated back home.

#### **4. Procedures**

i. Referrals to the Short Breaks Project can only be made by a Social Worker after an assessment has been completed which has given full consideration to the points raised above (3, iv). This will determine the suitability for a referral to the Short Breaks Project for a placement under section 17(6) as opposed to section 20(4).

ii. Social Workers referring children with or without disabilities will complete a Stockport Family First (SFF) referral form and send this to the Stockport Family First Manager. The social worker will then be offered a consultation slot where the referral will be discussed and questions asked about the appropriateness of the support requested and a final decision made.

iii. Referrals for Short Breaks placements should only be made where there is:

- Knowledge and consent of the parent/main carer and child (where possible)
- Agreement to review the placement on a regular basis within a Team Around the Child, Core Group or LAC meeting.
- An understanding that any Short Breaks placement can only continue as long as there is Social Worker involvement and it is part of a package of support.

iv. The Short Breaks Coordinator will contact the Social Worker to gather any further information and arrange to visit the family within 10 working days.

v. This visit will enable the Short Breaks Social Worker to discuss and explain the remit of the service, to ensure that the family is in agreement with the placement of their child with Short Breaks Carers and help to identify potential risks to contribute to the risk assessment. The Short Breaks Social Worker must obtain further details from the family about the child in order to offer an appropriate package of care that meets the child's needs.

vi. If more information is required from another source, e.g. school, to complete the risk assessment, the Short Breaks Social Worker will discuss this with the parent and seek their permission. The Short Breaks Social Worker must during this visit identify the reason for the referral and the objectives that need to be met and how these will be achieved. The family also need to be made aware of the expectations that will be placed upon them.

vii. After the risk assessment has been completed the Short Breaks Social Worker will endeavour to match with a suitable Short Breaks Carer with the relevant skills and experience to meet the child and family's needs. It is expected that most matches will be made within 5 working days from visiting the family. However, in more complex cases – usually involving children with disabilities or where there is a higher level of risk and the child may need to be supported by 2 Carers – it may take longer to match to a Short Breaks Carer with the right skill set and who has capacity to provide the placement. A small minority of referrals may have to be put on a waiting list.

viii. In the event a Short Breaks Carer cannot be identified within a reasonable time scale the Short Breaks Social Worker, after consultation and agreement with the Stockport Family First Manager, must inform the referrer in order for the situation to be reviewed. The referrer should identify with the family as to whether this service is still required and update the Short Breaks Social Worker accordingly.

ix. Once a Short Breaks Carer has been identified, the Short Breaks Social Worker will inform the referrer and will arrange for an introductory meeting to take place in the Carer's home. This meeting will involve:

- The introductions of the Short Breaks Carer to the family and child/young person
- The Short Breaks Carer offering information about him/herself and their family
- The family providing the Short Breaks Carer with the relevant information about the family circumstances and the child/young person's needs.

x. If all parties are happy to proceed, a placement agreement meeting will take place. The placement agreement meeting can take place on the same day as the introductory visit if all parties are in agreement.

## **5. Placement Agreement Meeting**

i. The Placement Agreement Meeting will normally take place at the Short Breaks Carer's home. In the event this cannot take place at this venue another suitable venue will be found by the Short Breaks Social Worker.

ii. The following people will be invited to attend the meeting:

Parent/s or carer of the child/young person

The child/young person

The Short Breaks worker

iii. The meeting will not take place if one or more of the above cannot attend, except in exceptional circumstances where a child/young person is placed in an emergency or by the Out of Hours Team under section 17 where the plan is for the child to be returned home soon.

iv. At the meeting a Placement Agreement Form will be completed outlining responsibilities and tasks to be undertaken by the family, Carer, Short Breaks Social Worker and Social Worker. This will be given to all parties attending the meeting and

should be signed off by all parties. The referrer will then notify all relevant agencies of the support being offered by the Short Breaks Project to the child(ren) and family.

v. Short Breaks placements involving overnights will only be made with Short Breaks Carers who are approved as Foster Carers. Children under the age of 8 years can only be placed with a registered child-minder if day support is required. Children aged 8 and over can be placed with registered child-minders or approved foster carers for day support placements.

vi. A discussion will take place to agree how the child(ren) will be introduced to the placement and a 'Placement Specific Safer Caring Assessment' will be completed. Introductory visits may promote the safety and consistency of care for the child. This is especially important for children with disabilities where it may be appropriate for the Short Breaks Carer to spend time with the child and the family in their home in order to see how the family usually meets the child's specific needs. The Social Worker, as an independent person to Short Breaks, should visit the child in placement to ensure that the child is happy and settled.

vii. Short Breaks Carers are required to complete a Placement Monitoring Form every time a child visits. This is scanned onto the child's electronic file.

viii. The Short Breaks Social Worker is responsible for supporting the placement, the Short Breaks Carer and to meet Fostering National Minimum Standards with regard to regular supervision, relevant training and annual appraisals. The Short Breaks Social Worker will liaise with all concerned as required and either them all the Short breaks carer will attend TAC or Core Group meetings to provide relevant information to review the placement to complement the package of support required.

## **6. Service Review**

i. The package of care must be regularly reviewed. These reviews will take place at TAC or Core Group meetings to promote the multi-agency approach and to ensure that the package of care provided remains appropriate to the needs of the particular child/family and the agreed tasks are being undertaken by all the relevant parties.

ii. If any changes in the provision of the package of care are requested either by the child/young person, family, carers or professionals this may be agreed by the Short Breaks Social Worker, SFF Senior Practitioner or SFF Manager if a decision is needed before the TAC or Core Group meeting

iii. If the change in the package is an increase in the provision and long term support is required over a 9 month period for children without disabilities, careful consideration needs to be made to consider the appropriateness of the Short Breaks placement continuing or whether another service would be deemed more suitable.

## **7. Case Closure**

i. If the family/carer no longer wishes to have involvement from the Short Breaks Project, the Short Breaks Social Worker along with the referrer should recommend that the case be closed to the project. This should be discussed with the parent/ carer and if agreed all agencies involved with the family are to be notified by the Social Worker.

## 8. Complaints

i. In the event that the parent/carer is not satisfied with the type or level of service, they have a right to make a complaint. The parent/carer should be encouraged to first discuss any difficulties with the Short Breaks Social Worker in the first instance and if unresolved to contact the SFF manager.

## 9 Child Protection Issues

i. If the Short Breaks Carer:

- receives a disclosure from a child/young person
- notices any bruising, cut or any other injury
- has concerns about parental presentation

or any other concerns regarding the child's safety and well-being the Short Breaks Carer must immediately share this with the Social Worker/Short Breaks Social Worker /Manager or contact the Out of Hours team. In these instances the child protection procedures must be consulted.

ii. In the event the child makes a disclosure against the Short Breaks Carer, the Child Protection procedures, with particular reference to the section 'allegations against professionals' must be followed straight away. Appropriate steps must be taken to protect the child.

iii. Depending on the nature and circumstances of the allegation, a decision will be made as to whether the placement will be suspended. It will be the responsibility of the Short Breaks Social Worker or another named person as agreed at the strategy meeting to maintain contact with the Short Breaks Carer(s) during the investigation process.

iv. Following the outcome of the investigation, even if the allegation is not substantiated, the placement may cease due to the placement being inappropriate for the child(ren).

v. In the event the allegation of abuse is substantiated, a recommendation will be made by the strategy meeting as to whether the placement must come to an end. This will then be referred to the Fostering Panel in order to review the Short Breaks Carer's approval and registration.

vi. Short Breaks Carers will report any injuries or disclosures straightaway or as soon as practicable to a Short Breaks Social Worker, Social Worker or Manager. The Short Breaks Carer will complete and a Specific Incident Sheet which will be put on the child's file.