

Overnight respite for children with disabilities: response to Scrutiny Committee recommendations

Background

This briefing sets out responses to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee in July 2019, following a session to discuss the options available for families assessed as needing overnight short breaks and to discuss the petition presented by Save our Respite.

Recommendation 1: Undertake a review of the respite care assessment process to address issues raised in the meeting specifically around the transparency of the process and the eligibility criteria thresholds and to consider service user representation on the assessment panel;

Essex County Council is developing a 3-year strategy around overnight respite. The parents of children using our facilities will be involved in that process alongside the professionals and we will seek to broaden the respite offer across Essex.

Initial ideas include improvements to transparency, as part of this we are in the process of developing a Respite Hub which will be launched shortly. This will create virtual hubs where respite requests/recommendations will be made to two experts who are independent of panel decisions and who will help social workers and families identify the best support solutions.

The lead member and responsible senior officers have met with the Essex Family Forum and 'Save our Respite' campaigners and agreed to include in assessments a profile of the child drawn up by parents, if they wish to add this, so that panel decision makers have parents' view of the child and situation, in the parents words.

Thresholds for social care specialist services are published on the ECC website: <http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Eligibility-for-Childrens-Social-Care.pdf>, in line with the windscreen of effective support.

A new CYPWD policy and guidance is currently in development and will be published soon. Our approach is not to state what the specific offer will be for a particular type/level of need, as all children are individuals, and each family situation is unique. A social work assessment looks at each child/family situation individually, and families' views are sought.

Recommendation 2: Review procedures to improve communications with families and carers particularly around the assessment process, appeals process.

The lead Cabinet Member and responsible officers have met with the Essex Family Forum and 'Save our Respite' campaigners. We have offered regular meetings to parents and are recruiting to a CWD development post who will set these up. A joint workshop will be held with parents early in the new year to better involve families in

service design. There will be an automatic offer of a meeting with the responsible manager in all cases where a family disagrees with the service offer.

Recommendation 3: Investigate and check that social workers are providing all necessary advice on options and processes to escalate dissatisfaction with assessment outcomes, including the formal complaints procedure.

The Respite Hub is being developed to ensure the best possible consideration is given to all support options. Social workers are instructed to provide all families with a copy of the ECC complaints procedure at the outset of any assessment. In future there will be an automatic offer of a meeting with the responsible manager in all cases where a family disagrees with the service offer.

Recommendation 4: To report back on the review being undertaken to investigate further empowering some families through the Direct Payments Scheme.

As mentioned ECC is undertaking a 3 years strategy around overnight respite which will be co-produced with the parents that use our services. We will develop a wider range of options for overnight short breaks, including use of direct payments where parents choose to do this will start from January 2020 onwards and parents will be involved in this review. In the meantime direct payments guidance has been refreshed as part of ongoing service development and social workers in each quadrant have been encouraged to be more flexible in supporting families to personalise direct payments, where this will achieve the outcomes in the child's plan and within the limits of statutory guidance. A small number of families have now been supported to use direct payments/ agency carers to source overnight care in their own home and we are working to expand this further.

Recommendation 5: Provide further information on historical trends for overnight respite care demand with particular reference to the type of service provided at Lavender and Maples.

An analysis of historical trends for overnight respite care is attached in Appendix A. Historically data on referrals to all types of overnight short breaks was not kept consistently, so this analysis is based on the data that is available on usage over time. Historically, almost all referrals to Maples and Lavender were accepted, unless there were specific reasons why the home could not accommodate a child's individual needs. Use will change as we seek to develop a wider offer for families in the respite field.