



Newcastle Community Short Breaks Offer

Consultation on Proposed Commissioning Model

**Newcastle City Council
December 2024**



Introduction

Newcastle City Council's current contractual arrangements for our Community Short Breaks Offer are due to end in 2025.

The Community Short Breaks offer refers to opportunities for children and young people with additional needs to spend time relaxing and having fun with their friends, in their local community. The offer should ensure that children and young people with additional needs are able to access the same variety of activities within their local community as their non-disabled friends. Short breaks can also give families a rest from their caring responsibilities.

This proposal relates to Community Short Breaks as described above and does not include support within the home or overnight respite.

Following a review of the current Community Short Breaks offer, and a period of engagement with children, young people, and their families, as well as the provider market, we are now consulting with stakeholders on a proposal to put in place 4 contracts which will be supported by a wider universal and targeted offer available to families in the city. Universal services include those available to all children and families, and may be provided by children's centres, early years centres, and the voluntary and community sectors. Our intention is for this to be the next step towards our vision of ensuring that all children and young people are supported to access activities and opportunities that interest them, regardless of need.

The proposed contracts will be established through a competitive procurement process conducted in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. The contracts will be put in place for 36 months plus 2 x 12-month options to extend.

This document is our formal consultation with stakeholders including providers and parents/carers, and we anticipate it being the final consultation before going out to Tender. The Tender process involves providers outlining how they propose to deliver specified services, and the Council evaluating these submissions to determine which will best meet need for children and families. In producing this proposal, we aim to create a more transparent and cooperative approach to service design, prior to making a final determination on the commissioning model and commencing the procurement process.

We would like to hear your views on our proposal. You can do this in writing by contacting:

Louise Fitzgerald, Commissioning and Procurement Officer –
louise.fitzgerald@newcastle.gov.uk



Responses to this proposal should be submitted no later than **5pm on Friday 31 January 2025**. We will consider all feedback received prior to determining the final Commissioning Model.

Background and context

Newcastle City Council (NCC) and partners across Health and the Voluntary Sector have listened to feedback from providers, parents, carers, children, and young people to make sure that the Community Short Breaks offer benefits as many families as possible by supporting children and young people, regardless of need, to access activities and opportunities that interest them. The budget remains unchanged from previous years, however, we hope to be able to target funding to reflect what children, young people, parents and carers have told us in important to them.

In previous years delivery of activities for children with SEND was regarded as an area of specialism. Today however, all community activities and opportunities should be inclusive and accessible. Supporting providers to reach a substantial level of inclusivity as standard forms a key part of the offer. It is important to note that this does not detract from the need for targeted or specialist provision. This proposed offer follows a specialised, targeted, and inclusive universal model.

The Council's commissioned element (activities and services funded by the Community Short Breaks budget) of the wider short breaks offer has been designed taking into consideration the activities and support currently being delivered by both the voluntary sector and our partners in health. This is the first step towards creating a comprehensive systemwide offer accessible to all families across the city. A commitment, by all partners, has been made to deliver the vision within our SEND Strategy that the Community Short Break offer will be wide ranging and include improved access to mainstream activities. The Local Area SEND Strategy can be accessed at the link below:

[PowerPoint Presentation](#)

Reshaping the commissioned offer, raising the profile of inclusivity and accessibility and the strengthening of both formal and informal partnerships represents the first phase of us achieving what our families have told us they want. From Autumn 2024 we will be inviting wider partners, parents/carers, and young people to join the Community Short Breaks steering group to consider joint initiatives, integrated pathways, joint funding, and pooled budgets to create a holistic, system wide offer that maximises impact for families.



Reasons for Proposals

Consultation with children, young people, and families through the 2021 Short Break Survey and the 2022 Happiness Survey identified that children, young people, and families would like to have somewhere to meet friends and spend time with family; to be able to try new or different activities; to be able to do more things where they live, and to join in their community.

In May 2024, parents and carers told us that their main priorities for Community Shorts Breaks activities were one to one swimming, sporting activities and youth clubs. In drawing up the proposal to commission the services outlined below, the Council has taken into consideration other services currently available in the city, and feedback from parents/carers in relation to what they would like to see for their children.

Co-ordination of the Short Breaks Offer

The Council has previously commissioned co-ordination and brokerage services as part of the Community Short Breaks Offer. Going forward, this function will form part of the role of the Council's SEND Voice Lead. The SEND Voice Lead will take responsibility for co-ordinating and developing the offer across the city and administering the Central Resource budget. The lead will also work with families to identify available provision and signpost accordingly.

Proposed Commissioned Elements of the Community Short Breaks Offer

As part of the offer to children and young people, the Council is proposing to Tender the following services:

- Advice and Guidance for Parents/Carers
- Inclusive Youth Projects
- Sports Programme
- Access Fund

1. Advice and Guidance for Parents/Carers

This service will provide individual information, advice, and support to families of children with additional needs, through a range of forums including drop-in sessions, social groups, parent/carers groups in school and through social media. The successful provider will also be expected to offer support with funding applications and signposting to relevant services. There will not be a requirement to hold an individual caseload but to work with partner agencies such as the Family Partner team, the Council's wider Early Help Offer and the Preparation for Adulthood leads. The successful provider will work with the SEND Voice Lead to understand what is



available in the city and how we can grow the offer to best meet needs of children/young people and their families.

The proposed budget envelope for the contract for Advice and Guidance for Parents/Carers is £85,000.00 a year.

2. Inclusive Youth Projects

The successful provider will be expected to offer a range of peer support and inclusive youth groups across the city for children and young people with additional needs and their friends.

Young people have told us that the following are important to them and this will be taken into account when assessing the different Tender submissions:

- Gaming activities
- Sports activities
- Arts activities
- Groups specifically aimed at neurodiverse children and young people.
- Drop off groups

Providers will be asked to indicate the frequency and locality of proposed activities as part of their Tender submission. Our hope is that activities will be made available on a weekly basis and take into consideration existing provision and its locality to ensure an equitable offer across the city.

The expectation is that providers will take staffing levels, skills, knowledge, and experience into account to be able to deliver activities at a targeted level. This will be evidenced during the Tender process and monitored by the Council during quarterly contract performance meetings. There will also be a limited central budget available for providers to apply for additional ad hoc funding where additional support may be required for a child/young person to access a particular group or activity. This could include 1 to 1 staffing, training, or specialist equipment.

The Council would welcome bids made in partnership with other organisations who may be able to deliver certain elements of a proposed offer.

The proposed budget envelope for the contract for Inclusive Youth Projects is £40,000.00 a year.

3. Sports Programme

The successful provider will be expected to offer a range of inclusive sports programmes across the city for children and young people with additional needs and their friends. Providers will be asked as part of their Tender submission to



demonstrate how they propose to meet this need, with either a range of sport activities or regular sessions focussing on a smaller number of sports. Providers will also be expected to demonstrate the potential impact of their proposed programme.

Providers will also be asked to indicate the frequency and locality of proposed activities as part of their Tender submission. We would like to see activities made available on a weekly basis, taking into consideration existing provision and its locality to ensure an equitable offer across the city. The proposed programme should include options for drop off activities.

The expectation is that providers will take staffing levels, skills, knowledge and experience into account to be able to deliver activities at a targeted level. This will be evidenced during the Tender process and monitored by the Council during quarterly contract performance meetings. There will also be a limited central budget available for providers to apply for additional ad hoc funding where additional support may be required for a child/young person to access a particular group or activity. This could include 1 to 1 staffing, training, or specialist equipment.

The proposed budget envelope for Sports Programmes is £30,000.00 a year.

4. Access Fund

The Access Fund is a grant to help children and young people with additional needs to participate in activities in their local community. This can be any daytime, evening, or weekend activity that the child or young person enjoys whilst their parent/carer has a break from caring. The successful provider will be expected to manage the application process for the fund.

We are proposing a change to the current eligibility criteria to ensure that the fund can effectively reduce barriers for children and families accessing activities in their community.

It is proposed that the grant be available to families of children and young people who have an EHCP or are receiving DLA at any rate (currently only young people receiving mid or higher rate are eligible). As part of the application process, parents/carers will be asked what other activities their child/young person is currently accessing. This is to better understand the difference the Access Fund makes to families. If the number of applications significantly outweighs available funding the provider will be asked to prioritise applications from children/young people who are struggling to access activities without support. The provider may decide to have several openings of the fund throughout the year to be able to manage this fairly.

The maximum grant available will remain unchanged at £300. However, we are proposing greater flexibility in terms of what can be applied for. Up to 20% of the



grant value can be claimed for transport costs if this would allow children and young people to participate in activities that they would usually struggle to access because of travel. The fund may also be used to pay for specialist equipment where this is required to facilitate a break from caring for parents/carers, or where needed to enable a child/young person to participate in an activity in the local community. With this flexibility it is hoped that families will be able to apply for what best suits their child's interests and their circumstances.

The proposed budget does represent a reduction on previous years, with a proportion of the current budget being reallocated specifically to swimming. This is being proposed in response to feedback highlighting access to swimming as a key priority for children and young people. Over 40% of applications are currently for swimming lessons.

Families will still be able to apply to the Access Fund for lessons. In addition, we are proposing to allocate £20,000 to continue to work with providers to improve access to swimming both as a taught lesson and as a leisure activity. Work has already begun with discounted entry for MAX card holders, additional accessible / quiet times and small group swimming lessons. The SEND Voice Lead will continue to work with partners to build on this progress and target the budget where it will make the most difference.

The proposed budget envelope for the Access Fund is £40,000.00 a year.

Inclusive Arts Programme

We are proposing to continue to directly fund specific arts activities in partnership with the Council's Culture and Tourism team.

The proposed budget represents a reduction in comparison to previous years, however, we do not anticipate a reduction in the activities available for children and young people. Our priority for the budget is to support as many children and young people as possible to access creative opportunities. We have also taken into consideration feedback on the frequency of activities. Currently most arts activities are monthly. We are proposing to increase this to fortnightly where possible.

We are proposing to meet the shortfall by no longer commissioning arts brokerage services. The SEND Voice Lead will take on the signposting element of the brokerage role, ensuring that children and young people are connected to suitable activities.

The proposed budget envelope for Inclusive Arts Projects is £30,000.00.



Swimming

During our engagement with parents/carers, swimming was consistently named as a priority for children/young people with additional needs and we are looking at how the budget can make the biggest impact in this area. A proportion of the Community Short Breaks budget has been ringfenced to support 1 to 1 or small group swimming lessons, and we are working with the local pools to understand how we can make swimming more accessible throughout the city. This includes specific lessons for children and young people with additional needs, as well as making family swim sessions more inclusive.

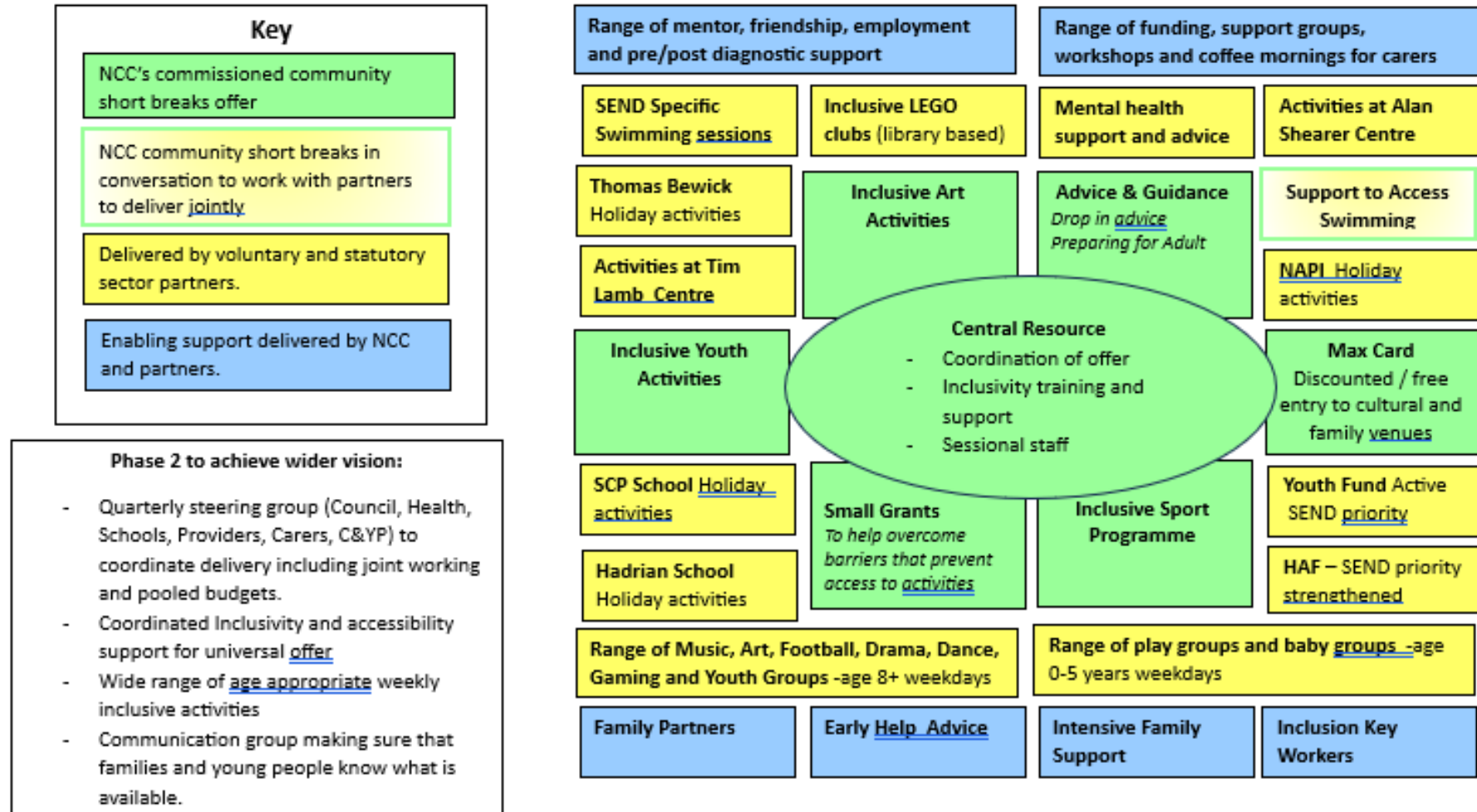
We are exploring with our local pools how the number of SEND specific swimming sessions available can be increased, as well as an offer of discounted sessions for MAX card holders. Funding for swimming lessons can also be applied for through the Access Fund where a child's additional needs prevent access to standard swimming lessons.

Central Resource

We are proposing to make available a central resource budget to support children and young people with additional needs to access the universal Community Short Breaks offer. This will be informed by the ongoing Accessibility and Inclusivity Audit but is primarily expected to be used for training and advice on inclusivity in the community, and to fund additional 1 to 1 support which would allow children and young people to access activities that they wouldn't otherwise be able to take part in, or to enable providers to increase staffing ratios to facilitate drop off sessions. This process will be supported by the SEND Voice Lead.



How does Newcastle City Council's (NCC) commissioned community short breaks offer fit into the wider system?





Indicative Procurement Timeline

Proposed Commissioning Model published for 5-week consultation	13 December 2024
Consultation period proposed Commissioning Model closes	31 January 2025
Review of consultation feedback and final model	3 to 10 February 2025
Tender process commences	February 2025
Tender closes	March 2025
Award notices sent to successful providers	April 2025
Pre-start activity	May to June 2025
Contract commences	1 July 2025

Please note that all dates are indicative and may be subject to change.

All Tender documentation will be published on the Open Electronic Tendering portal at website – <mailto:https://www.open-uk.org>

To be considered for the above opportunities, please register your details free of charge on the above Open Electronic Tendering Portal.

Next Steps

The current budget for Community Short Breaks is £280,000.00 a year. It is acknowledged that this is limited, and therefore it is important that it is seen and developed within the context of the wider universal offer. Phase 1 of the Community Short Breaks review has considered current provision and what can be done better going forward. In Phase 2 of the review, the steering group will continue to look at the system wide offer and how this can be developed to better meet the needs of children, young people, and families in the city.

Phase 2 of the process to achieve the vision for community short breaks will focus on what can be done differently by partners system wide to maximise the impact of



the offer for children, young people, and their families. This will include looking at how best to integrate and coordinate:

- the range of activities on offer ensuring that the right activities are on offer in the right places
- support for the universal offer to make sure that all activities offer a significant level of accessibility and inclusivity as standard
- joint initiatives with partners, where it makes sense to do so, including consideration of the impact Mental Health and Early Help support has in enabling children and young people to access activities.

We will also be continuing to look at and improve marketing and communication with families and young people to make sure that everyone is able to easily find out what is on offer. A key requirement to getting phase 2 right will be the involvement of providers, parents, carers, children, and young people. There will be a variety of ways that you can become involved. If you are interested or would like to find out more, please get in touch.

Responding to the Consultation

We would like to hear your views on our proposal. We acknowledge that, in the current financial climate, funding in this area is limited and that, as well as maximising the existing resource, phase 2 will also explore avenues to secure additional funding.

When submitting your feedback, we ask that you consider the following questions:

Parents/Carers

1. Do you agree that this proposed commissioning model, as part of a wider universal offer for Community Short Breaks, will better meet the needs of children, young people with additional needs and their families in Newcastle?
2. Do you see any gaps/challenges in the proposed model that need to be addressed?

Providers

1. Do you agree that this proposed commissioning model, as part of a wider universal offer for Community Short Breaks, will better meet the needs of children, young people with additional needs and their families in Newcastle?
2. Can you foresee any challenges for providers in the delivery of the contracts outlined?
3. How might your organisation be able to support us in delivering the offer outlined above?



Comments can be provided through the Open platform or via email to:

Louise Fitzgerald, Commissioning and Procurement Officer –
louise.fitzgerald@newcastle.gov.uk

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January 2025.

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