

Bristol Short Breaks

Statement 2026

Short breaks: fun activities for Disabled children and young people



Bristol’s short breaks statement is for families with a Disabled child or young person living in Bristol. Short breaks are just one element of the support available for Disabled children and young people in Bristol. For details of the full offer visit [Bristol's Local Offer](#)

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Introduction

The purpose of this document

The short breaks statement sets out how Bristol will provide short breaks for Disabled children and young people, and their families and will cover:

- how short breaks help Disabled children, young people, and their families
- the law
- the range of short breaks available
- who short breaks are for and how needs are assessed
- how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of the carers, Disabled children and young people and their families.

A short breaks definition

Short breaks: fun activities for Disabled children and young people

Short breaks are supportive, family services that allow parent carers to have time out from their caring responsibilities in the same way that parents and carers without Disabled children are able to do.

They also give Disabled children and young people the opportunity to go places, spend time with friends, take part in fun and enjoyable activities, become more independent and try new things. They can be at any time, ranging from an hour to a day, evening, overnight, weekend or a holiday, depending on the needs of the child and their family involved. The short break may take place in a community activity setting, a child/young person's home, or other residential setting.

Who is responsible

The lead professional responsible is Fiona Tudge, Director Children and Families Services, Bristol City Council.

Bristol City Council is responsible for commissioning short breaks jointly with Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire NHS Integrated Care Board.

How this statement was prepared

We have worked closely with parents and carers to co-produce this statement and the short breaks services it describes.

The targeted short breaks services (see page 8 for a definition of targeted services) were last re-commissioned in 2024/25. At this time, we listened to lots of Disabled children and parent carers to learn more about their experiences and what they want from short breaks services. This was to make sure we have the right support in place for children, young people, and their families when they need it.

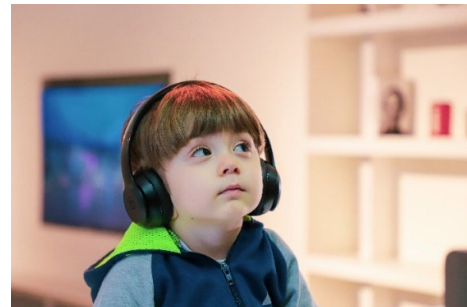
All the commissioned short breaks services are required to seek feedback from children and families to make sure people are happy with their services and so they can adapt what they offer if needed.

How short breaks services help children, young people, and their families

Short breaks services contribute to the following outcomes

Disabled children and young people:

- have safe and stable home lives
- improved physical health through physical activities
- improved emotional health and well-being
- enjoy their short breaks
- try doing new things
- less dependent on their parent or carer
- learn and develop skills and abilities
- young people develop skills that help towards independence in adulthood



Parents and carers and families of Disabled children:

- improved emotional well-being
- parent or carer has more time to do other things (such as leisure, study, spending time with other children)
- short breaks are not the same as childcare provision for working parents
- family is able to lead a more ordinary life
- family environment is less chaotic and more sustainable
- improved quality of life for parent or carer and family



Strategic outcomes:

- fewer Disabled children will leave their family home and come into the care of the local authority, either permanently or part-time because of their disability
- reduction in need for unplanned placements in residential schools or children’s homes
- Disabled children and young people have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of activities, not just short breaks services
- families have increased choice and greater control over the short breaks services they receive



The Law

Legal duty to provide short breaks

Local Authorities are required by law (Section 25 of the *Children’s and Families Act 2014*) to have a range of short breaks services for Disabled children and young people and to also have a short breaks statement so that families know about the support available.

The short breaks statement has been prepared in accordance with the following Acts (see appendix):

- Children’s Act 1989
- The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011
- Children and Families Act 2014

- The Equality Act 2010

You said...

When the services were recommissioned, parents and carers of Disabled children told us

- “We don’t want lengthy assessments in order to get a short break”
- “We don’t want to have a social worker in order to get a break”
- “A break from caring is the most important thing that helps me to cope”
- “Fun activities with our kids are great, but they don’t always give us a break from caring”



Children and young people told us

- “We want more things to do and more places to go”
- “We want to do the same fun things as our brothers, sisters and friends”
- “We want access to more ordinary activities that all other young people use, such as youth clubs and leisure activities”

Feedback from the children and young people who use short breaks services and their families

- “He looks forward to coming along so much and has a total blast; he's always full of fun and mischief when I come to collect him and this just shows he's been having a fantastic time! To be able to leave him where I know he is in safe hands and totally understood means so much. It helps him gain independence and he can explore all the creative things he loves so much.”
- “The break gave my child an opportunity to build up his social skills and interaction with other young people his own age without being with us all the time. He very much enjoyed his break.”
- “The staff are always lovely, friendly, patient and kind. Bags of enthusiasm.”



The types of short breaks available

Universal Services: fun activities open to all families with Disabled children

In Bristol we want families with Disabled children and young people to be able to use the services that are universally available to all children and young people such as:

- leisure and sports services
- youth and play services
- public spaces such as parks and adventure playgrounds
- early years services and children's centres
- after-school and holiday clubs
- voluntary and community facilities



These services and facilities have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments so that Disabled children and young people can use them.

How we're supporting universal services to be inclusive

In Bristol many mainstream services have a 'can do' attitude and they are removing barriers and supporting more Disabled children and young people in their settings. We are working in the following ways to support settings to be inclusive:

Family Support and Inclusion Team within the Disabled Children Service

The Inclusion Service works directly with children, young people, and families to help them to find suitable play, youth, and leisure opportunities in their local communities. When needed, the Inclusion Service can fund universal settings so that they can provide:

- short-term support for Disabled children and young people whilst they settle into a new setting and staff get to know about their needs
- ongoing one-to-one support for a small number of Disabled children and young people to meet their specific needs

The Inclusion Service can also provide access to training about complex health needs and/or complex disabilities for staff working in universal services.

Supporting Inclusion in Early Years Settings

Early Years Settings (nursery, pre-school, children's centres, childcare providers) offer places to Disabled children in accessible venues, with skilled staff responsible for inclusion, additional support for the child, and specialist resources. Bristol City Council's Children's Centres all offer inclusive practice.

Training

Staff working in children’s centres, childcare settings, after school clubs and in sports clubs have been trained so that they have the skills and confidence to include Disabled children in their activities.

Making Bristol more accessible

More places have been given equipment that allows Disabled children to access play settings for example, including an investment into creating four Adventure Playgrounds and public visitor attractions such as Bristol Beacon to make them accessible. Bristol has made this investment in the community and will continue to do so.



Targeted Services: for families of Disabled children and young people who need some help to access universal services or need activities that have been designed for Disabled children and young people

These services and the activities they offer have been designed to meet the specific needs of Disabled children and young people.

Families can apply directly to these services or they can get referred by a professional. Each service or activity may have specific eligibility criteria based on age, impairment, or other factors.

See the [Bristol Local Offer - Short Breaks page](#) for more details of these services and their contact details:

Provider	Service	Ages
WECIL Youth	Evening youth sessions	13 to 18
WECIL Youth	Independent living skills	19 to 25
WECIL Befriending	Befriending	5 to 18
FACE	Out of school clubs	8 to 18

KHAAS	Weekend sessions for children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds	5 to 18
KHAAS	School holiday day trips for children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds	8 to 18
WECIL Play	Stay and play sessions	5 to 18
WECIL Play	Closed play sessions	8 to 12
WECIL Play	Saturday trips	5 to 12
Various providers	Family fun days	5 to 18
FACE	Bristol Autism Project: Family holiday activities for autistic children and young people and/or those with social, sensory, communication interaction (SSCI) needs and their siblings	5 to 18
WECIL Complex Needs	Holiday Short Break sessions for Disabled children and young people	5 to 18
WECIL Sensory Impairments	Afterschool and Saturday sessions for children and young people with sensory impairments	5 to 18
Bristol City Council Family Support and Inclusion Team	Inclusion Services based in the Disabled Children’s team, who support access to community universal services and Family Support Workers	5 to 18

Specialist services: for families of Disabled children and young people where the identified need cannot be met by universal, targeted or inclusion services

These services are for Disabled children or young people with severe learning disability and children and young people who have been assessed as having complex health needs.

Access to these services requires a Child in Need Assessment completed by a social worker under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to understand; how the child’s needs are being met and what the additional need is, the parent carer capacity and support required to meet the child's needs and the support system around the child and family from extended family and the professionals involved. More details about accessing these services are available on the [Bristol Local Offer – Short Breaks specialist services page](#)

Provider	Service	Ages
Bristol City Council	Residential overnight breaks	8 to 18*
Bristol City Council	Overnight breaks in another family’s home	8 to 18*

Bristol City Council	Direct payments that a family can use to employ a personal assistant/buy short breaks services that meet their child's needs that is not part of the commissioned targeted short break offer	5 to 18*
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*Young people are no longer eligible for children's specialist short breaks services once they turn 18 years old.

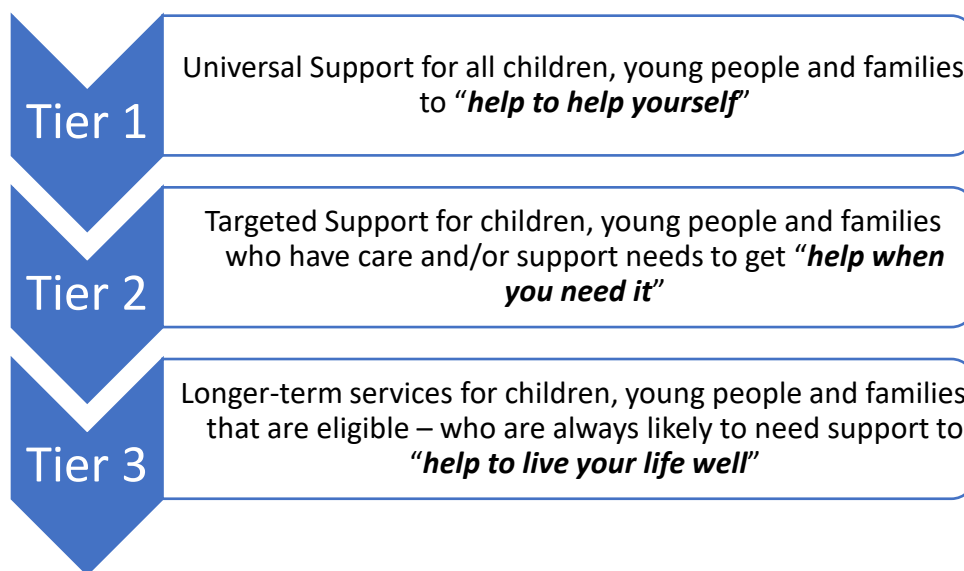
Bristol City Council cannot fund costly interventions in short breaks settings, such as Applied Behaviour Analysis therapy, that are not evidence-based and are not recommended by bodies like the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Who can access short breaks and how needs are assessed

The targeted and specialist short breaks services available are for children and families where the child:

- is aged 0 to 18 years old, with the exception of WECIL's transitions sessions for 19 to 25 year olds
- lives in the Bristol City Council local authority area or is a child in care placed by Bristol City Council
- has a life-limiting or long-term health condition or disability.

Bristol City Council has implemented a **Three Tier Model** of support:



This means that Disabled children, young people, and their families are encouraged and supported to use tier 1 and 2 services before accessing any support within the third tier.

This may not be possible or appropriate for everyone. However, many Disabled children and young people with complex needs have been successfully supported to attend universal and/or targeted short breaks services in their local communities and this has provided the right level of support for them and their family. It is important that Disabled children can access activities in their community so they can make friends with other children who live close by, as all children do.

The assessment process

- **Universal services**

Some universal services have no assessment process and any child or young person can use them. Others may have assessment procedures and/or eligibility criteria which could be based on a child’s age or postcode.

- **Targeted services**

Parents and carers can apply for support for their Disabled child by contacting these services directly. Each service or activity may have specific eligibility criteria based on age, impairment, or other factors.

- **Specialist services**

Access to these services requires a Child In Need Assessment completed by a social worker under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to establish the level of support required. The assessment will look at whether the child/young person’s needs can be met by universal services, targeted services or if specialist services are required. Access to specialist services is

based on the family environment, parenting capacity and the child's development. This will include consideration of the child's and family's needs and their strengths.

- **Direct Payments:**

In Bristol, children's needs are assessed by a Child In Need Assessment completed by a social worker under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, to establish the level of support required.

Direct Payments are one way of families receiving money by a pre-paid card, which they then use to organise support for their child, giving them choice and control, as they opt out of Bristol City Council's funded short breaks services.

All children with a Direct Payment will have a support plan to monitor the impact of the support they are receiving and to be linked to their EHCP, and this will set out the arrangements in relation to Direct Payments.

The Direct Payment can be used to employ a personal assistant or buy independent short break services that meet their child's needs (these services are not organised or funded by Bristol City Council).

When the parent opts to receive a Direct Payment, they become responsible as an employer of the personal assistant and they must keep detailed financial accounts, which are checked every 6 months. If recruiting a personal assistant becomes problematic, a parent carer can choose to stop the Direct Payment and choose to opt-back into using Bristol City Council's funded short breaks services. The Direct Payment will stop as soon as the child starts a Bristol City Council's funded short breaks service.

A young person aged 16 and over may receive a Direct Payment and opt out of council-run services. If the young person does not have capacity to organise the support they are assessed as needing, the organising of such activities would be delegated to others, and this could be a parent carer or Local Authority officer. The Court of Protection may be involved to ensure the rights and needs of the young person is being met.

Children and young people can only access one short breaks service at a time to ensure equity of access and to keep any waiting times short. Bristol City Council has a finite short breaks budget and therefore a duty to allocate public funds fairly and proportionately to meet the individual needs of Disabled children.

Preparing for adulthood

More information about preparing for adulthood, including the transition into adult social care is available on the Local Offer: [Adulthood - Bristol's SEND Local Offer - bristol.gov.uk](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/adulthood).

Information about local clubs and activities for Disabled young people over the age of 18 can also be found on the Local Offer: [Things to do - Bristol's SEND Local Offer - bristol.gov.uk](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/things-to-do)

Publication

Bristol will publish this Short Breaks Services Statement on the [Bristol Local Offer website](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/local-offer)

In accordance with Regulation 5 of the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 this statement is kept under constant review and will be updated in partnership with Parent Carer groups when new services become available, or when there are changes to existing services.

We welcome your feedback on this document and the services it describes. If you're unhappy with something, please let us know. You can send us [your complaints or feedback via the Bristol City Council website](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/your-complaints-or-feedback)

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Law

Children Act 1989

Short breaks can be provided by local authorities through the use of their powers under:

- Section 17(6) of the 1989 Act which gives local authorities the power to provide a range of services, including accommodation, in order to discharge their general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need;
- Section 20(4) of the 1989 Act which gives local authorities the power to provide accommodation “for any child within their area (even though a person who has parental responsibility for him is able to provide him with accommodation) if they consider that to do so would safeguard or promote the child’s welfare.”

Paragraph 6 of Schedule 2 to the 1989 Act (amended by s.25 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) provides that local authorities must provide services designed –

- To minimise the effect on Disabled children within their area of their disabilities; and
- To give such children the opportunity to lead lives which are as normal as possible; and

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

The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011

These Regulations describe how local authorities must perform the Schedule 2 duty above. Regulation 3 says local authorities must:

- 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
- 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:
 - Undertake education, training or regular leisure activity,
 - Meet the needs of other children in the family more effectively, or
 - Carry out day to day tasks which they must perform in order to run their household.

Regulation 4 provides that local authorities must provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, a range of services which is sufficient to help carers to continue to provide care or to do so more effectively. In particular the local authority must provide, as appropriate, a range of:

- Day-time care in the 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 help carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.

Regulation 5 requires that local authorities prepare a short breaks statement for carers in their area setting out:

- Details of the range of services provided,
- Eligibility criteria for those services, and
- How the services are designed to meet the needs of carers.

Children and Families Act 2014, Section 26

Local authorities are also required to jointly commission services with partner commissioning bodies for Disabled children and young people and those with SEN.

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: ‘a physical or mental impairment’, which has a ‘substantial and long-term adverse effect’ on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The law requires local authorities to ‘safeguard and promote the welfare’ of children in need, and as far as is consistent with this, to ‘promote the upbringing of these children by their families’.

This duty is to be met through the provision of a range and level of services that are appropriate to those children's needs (Children Act 1989, Section 17 (1)).

