

# Short Breaks Recommissioning

Report on Surveys of Parent Carers,  
Professionals, and Children and Young People

July 2024



# 1 Background and Methods

Shropshire Council works to fund a range of Short Breaks services for children and young people up to 18 years with disabilities or additional needs living in Shropshire. (Short Breaks provision was previously referred to as respite services). The aim of short breaks is to enable children to have fun and take part in activities and social opportunities whilst giving parents/carers some time away from their caring responsibilities. Short breaks can also support preparation for adulthood, help develop confidence and independence skills away from the family home or support.

Short breaks may be after school, at weekends, during school holidays or overnight. Activities could range from drama, sports, clubs and social activities to a stay in a residential home. Short breaks can also include support at home.

- Universal activities available to all children, such as sports clubs, after school clubs etc.
- Early Help and targeted short breaks are activities specially designed for children and young people with disabilities. They help children who are not able to take part in universal activities without additional support. They are currently provided through the All In Programme, delivered by Actio on behalf of Shropshire Council.
- Specialist short breaks are activities for children and young people with the most complex needs. They need to have a social work assessment to be able to take part in these activities and include overnight short breaks.

Shropshire's All In Programme provides a range of opportunities for children and young people with disabilities. All In short breaks are available for those up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday who cannot take part in the same activities as others their age without additional support.

Shropshire Council is recommissioning its short breaks service in 2025. In order to provide the best possible service going forward, three surveys were designed to find out more about the views and experiences of families who have a child with a disability and how they may benefit (or have benefitted in the past) from short breaks provision. Three different versions of the survey were created; one for parent carers, one for children and young people, and one for professionals. These surveys build on previous discussions with parents and carers of disabled children and young people about the Shropshire Short Breaks Offer.

The surveys were designed in close collaboration with the Parents and Carer Council Shropshire (PACC). PACC were also a key partner in getting the communication out about the consultation and encouraging stakeholders to have their say ahead in the recommissioning of short breaks via their newsletter, social media and other communications. The survey was also publicly available on the Shropshire Council Get Involved pages and publicised through the council's social media and newsroom. The surveys were open from 1<sup>st</sup> May through 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Respondents were also invited to provide additional feedback via the [TellUs@Shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:TellUs@Shropshire.gov.uk) email address, and feedback provided this way is also included in this report.

Quantitative survey data was analysed using MS Excel and results are presented visually where possible as Figures. Qualitative responses were read and analysed for themes. These are presented in Tables where appropriate and anonymised examples of comments representing common themes are provided. Where possible and appropriate, other sources of data are brought into the analysis in this report, including a previous Short Breaks consultation from early 2023, the 2023 Shropshire Youth Survey and some qualitative data provided by PACC.

This report proceeds in eight sections:

- **Section 1: Background and Methods** (this section) provides an overview of Shropshire Council's current short breaks offer, the need to recommission the service, and a brief description of the methods employed in analysing the results of the consultation.
- **Section 2: Respondents** presents the number and types of responses to the consultation received from the three separate surveys, as well as identifying demographic characteristics of respondents. This section is divided into three subsections pertaining to the three key groups of interest.
- **Section 3: Feedback from Those Using/Referring to Short Breaks** lays out the responses to questions from all three surveys designed to gather overall feedback on short breaks experience as well as more detailed feedback and comments from those who had used specific types of provision.
- **Section 4: Feedback from Those Who Haven't Used/Referred to Short Breaks** presents the findings of questions asked of all three stakeholder groups about the reasons they had not used or referred to short breaks.
- **Section 5: Health Needs, Direct Budgets and PAs** details responses to questions from all three surveys aimed at understanding how health needs are currently being met, or could be met better, using short breaks provision.
- **Section 6: Future Short Breaks Provision** looks closely at the responses from the three groups of respondents who gave feedback on the priorities and important factors to consider when commissioning short breaks for the future, including whether or not a navigator/coordinator role should be considered.
- **Section 7: Additional Insights** briefly explores some other data sources to fill in gaps in the survey data, particularly with respect to activities that children and young people may wish to take part in.
- **Section 8: Summary and Conclusion** provides a summary of the key findings from the overall analysis of the three surveys and offers some conclusions based on the evidence.

## 2 Respondents

Response rates were not as high as hoped, but it is expected that some of this may be due to there having been a few recent surveys with SEN families in recent months.<sup>1</sup> Overall, **70 parent carers, 22 professionals and 6 children and young people** responded to the three surveys. Additionally, four parent carers provided feedback on the booking processes; three via email and another's feedback was provided via telephone to a member of staff who communicated their feedback in an

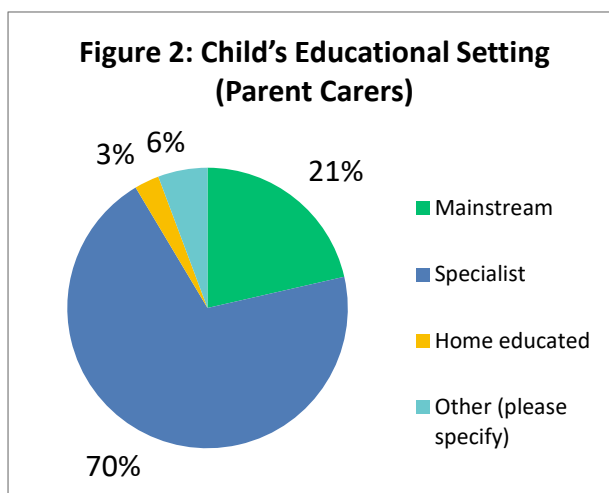
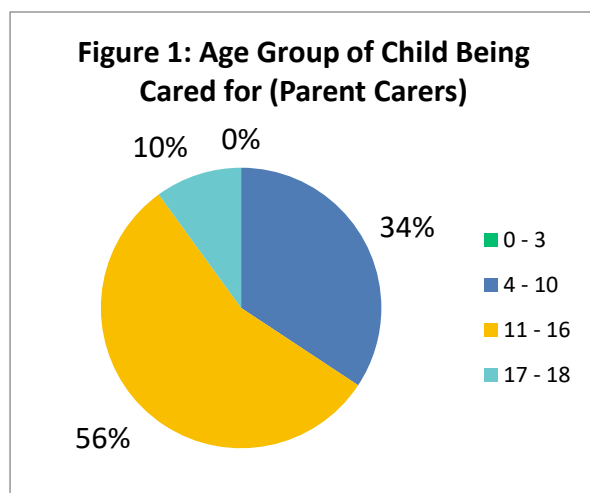
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<sup>1</sup> Recent surveys in 2024 include a PACC engagement survey, a SEND IASS Recommissioning consultation, and an Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy consultation.

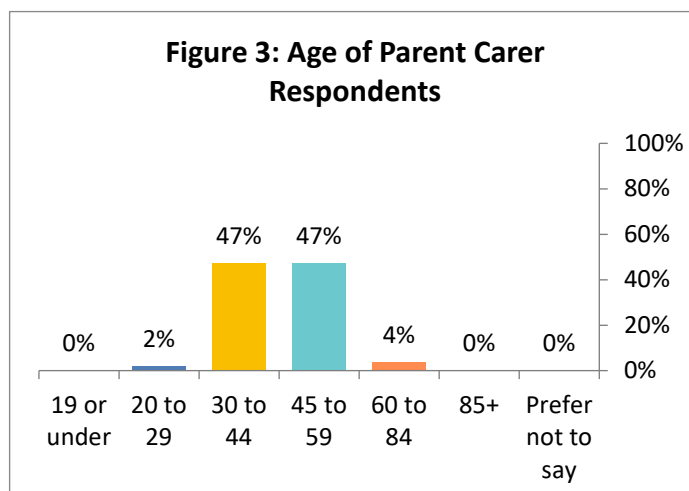
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## Parent Carers

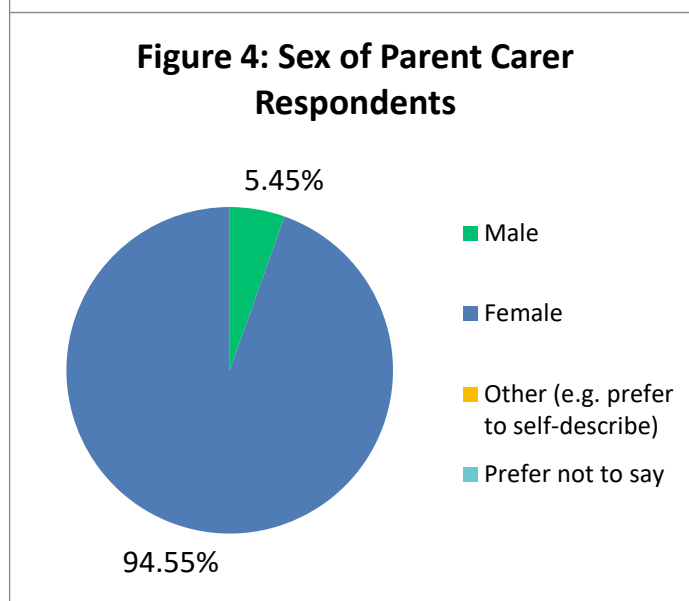
Parent carers were encouraged to complete one survey per child that they have with special educational needs and/or a disability. In total, 70% of the survey respondents reported that they only have one child with special educational needs and/or a disability.



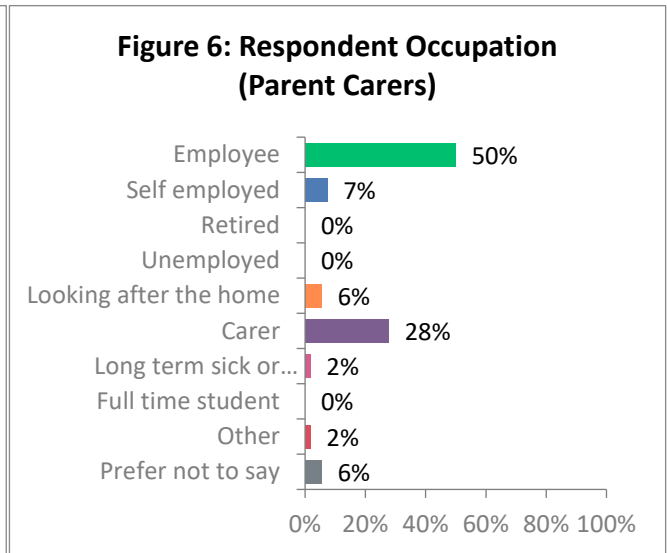
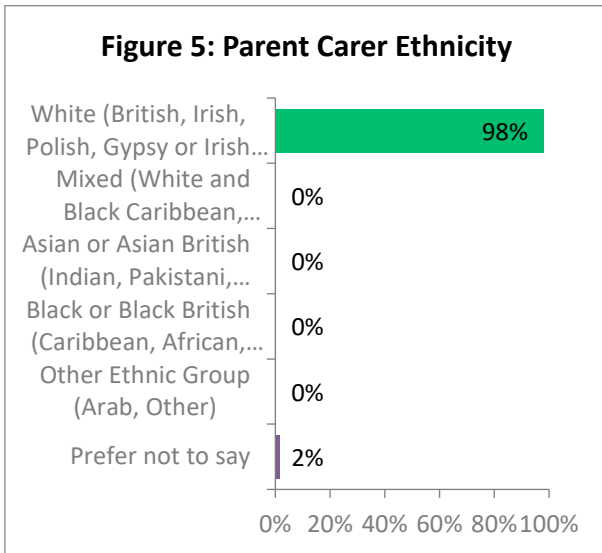
Most of the children and young people that parent carers were completing the survey in reference to fall between the ages of 11-16 years, with primary school aged children the next most represented group (**see Figure 1**). Only 7 respondents (10%) were answering the survey in relation to a young person between the ages of 17 and 18.



A majority of the children (70%) of those responding to the parent carer survey are in specialist educational settings (**see Figure 2**). Those four children in "other" settings include one child in alternative provision, one receiving education through a SEN hub, and two others who are registered in mainstream education but are in the process of switching to home education or specialist provision.



Most of the parent carers responding are between the ages of 30 and 59, are female and are

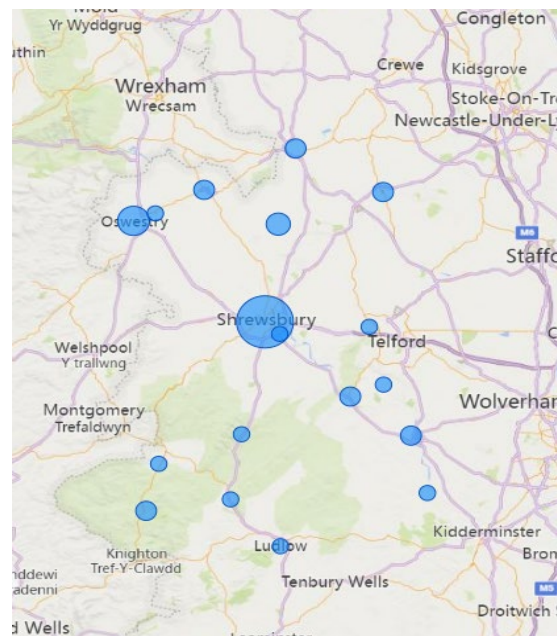


of White ethnicity (see Figures 3, 4 & 5).

50% parent carer respondents identified themselves as “employees” but a significant minority (28%, or 15 respondents) said that “carer” best describes their occupation (see Figure 6).

As might be expected, many of the parent carer respondents live in larger market towns such as Shrewsbury (23) and Oswestry (6). However, there is a very good geographical spread of respondents across the county (see Image 1).

**Image 1: Map of Parent Carer Nearest Town**



### Professionals

22 professionals responded to the specific survey designed to gather their feedback.

Most of the professionals **responding (59%, or 13 individuals) were employees of Shropshire council and 27% of respondents (6) said they work for voluntary organisations.** Of the 3 respondents that said they work for “other” organisations, two specified voluntary organisations as where they work, and another listed their organisation as a “child minder”.

Professionals were asked to volunteer their job title/role if they felt comfortable doing so, and most did. Roles represented included voluntary organisation chief executive officers (2), social workers (5), managers (3), and other roles such as project coordinators and specialist advisors.

### Children and Young People

Although six children and young people gave responses to the survey designed for them, only two provided demographic information. These respondents hailed from the Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury areas, and one was aged between 4-10 years, the other between 11-16 years. Both identified as White, and one as female, the other male.

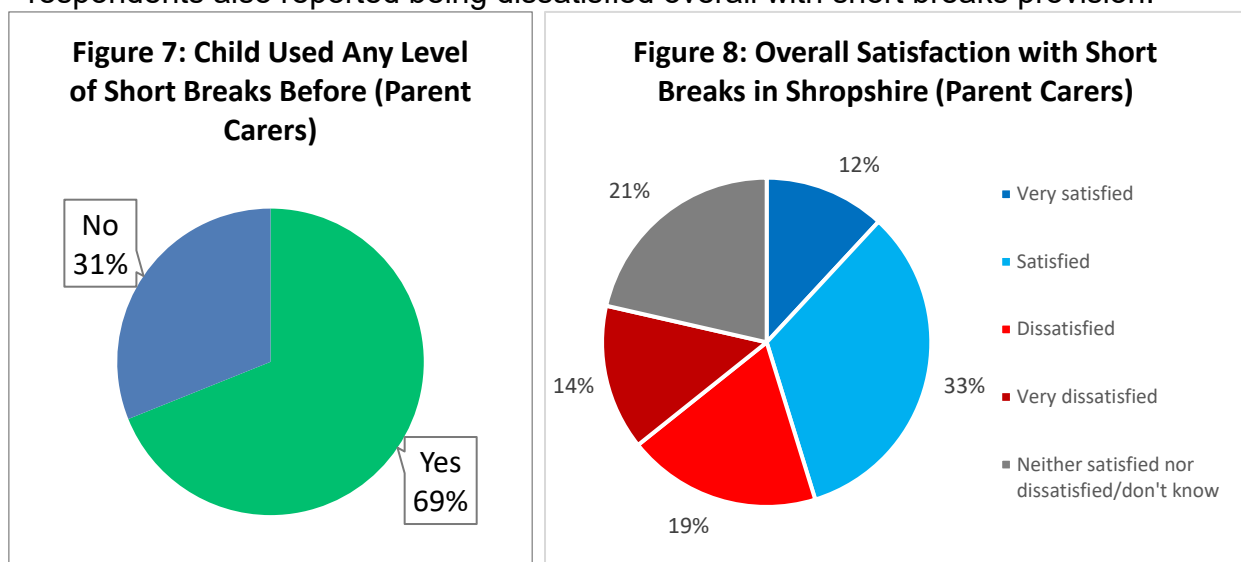
# 3 Feedback from Those Using/Referring to Short Breaks

## Overall Satisfaction

### Parent Carers

Most parent carers responding to the survey reported that their children had used short breaks in some way before (see **Figure 7**).

Those parent carers who reported they had used short breaks before (42) were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with short breaks provision in Shropshire. These results are displayed in **Figure 8**. A large minority of the parent carer respondents (45%) were satisfied with the provision overall, but a third of respondents also reported being dissatisfied overall with short breaks provision.



### Children and Young People

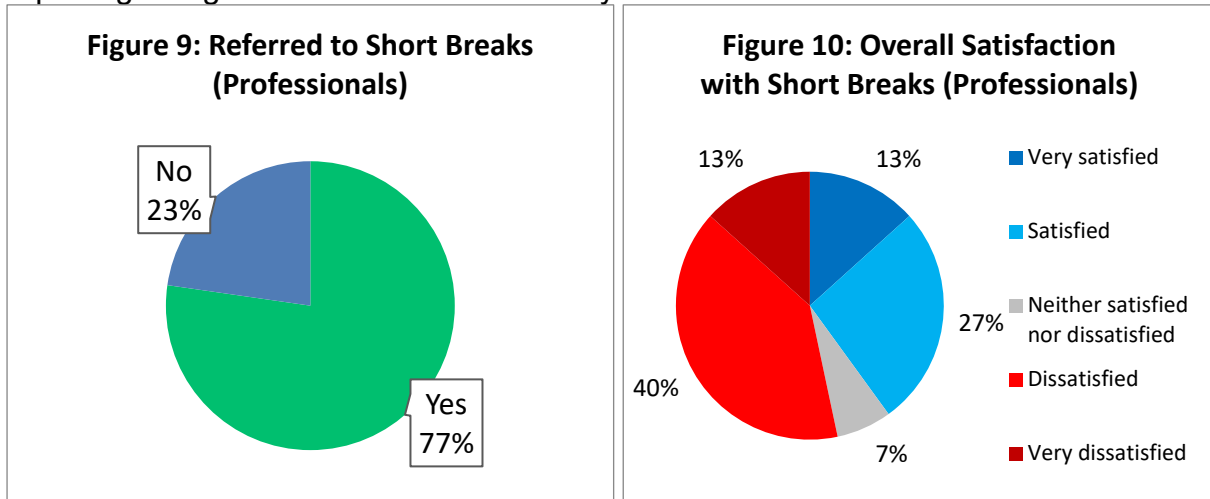
Only two children and young people responding to the survey said they had used short breaks provision before. One person responded to the question about their overall satisfaction with short breaks provision, for which they said they were “neither happy nor unhappy” with the provision.

### Professionals

Most of the respondents to the professionals’ survey (17, 77%) had referred to short breaks before (see **Figure 9**).

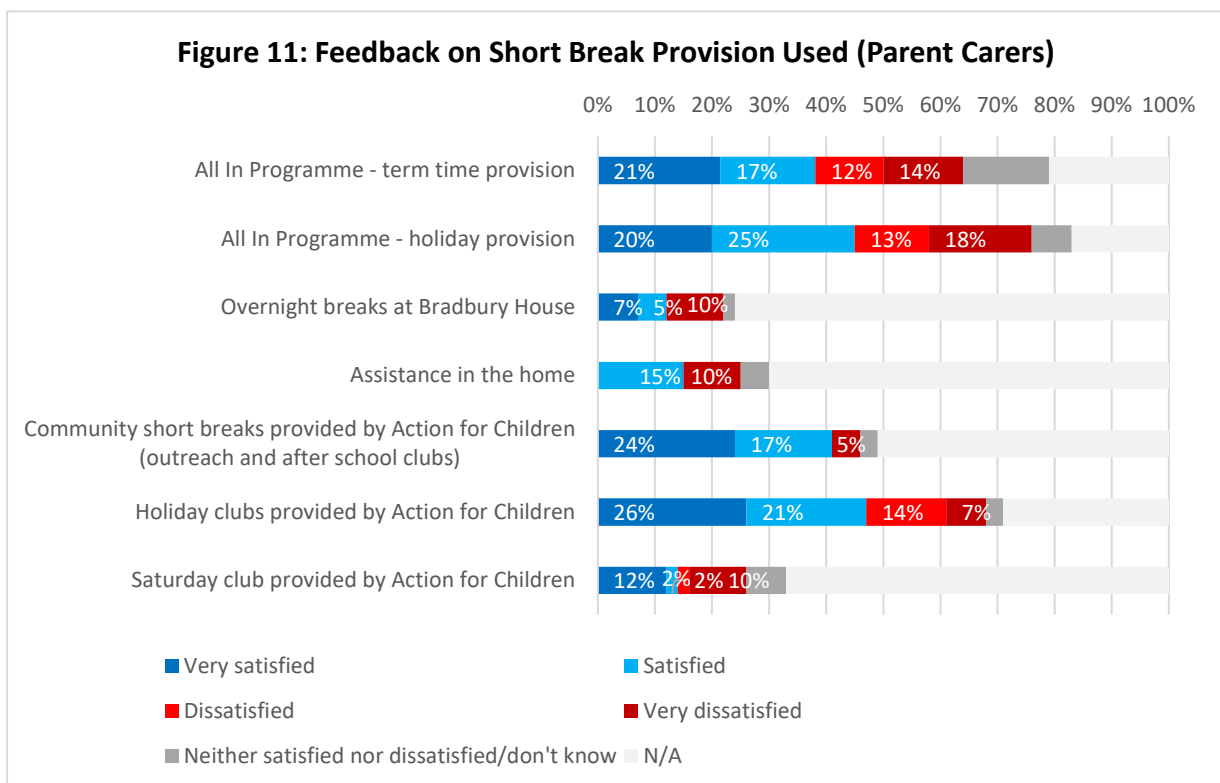
Professionals who had referred to short breaks before were asked about their overall satisfaction with short breaks in Shropshire, and the results are presented in **Figure 10**. The overall satisfaction of professionals with the provision was much lower than that of parent carers, with a majority of respondents to the professionals survey

reporting being either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” overall.



## Parent Carers – Rating Specific Provision

Parent carer respondents who had used short breaks were asked a series of questions designed to gather their feedback on specific programmes that had been used (see Figure 11).



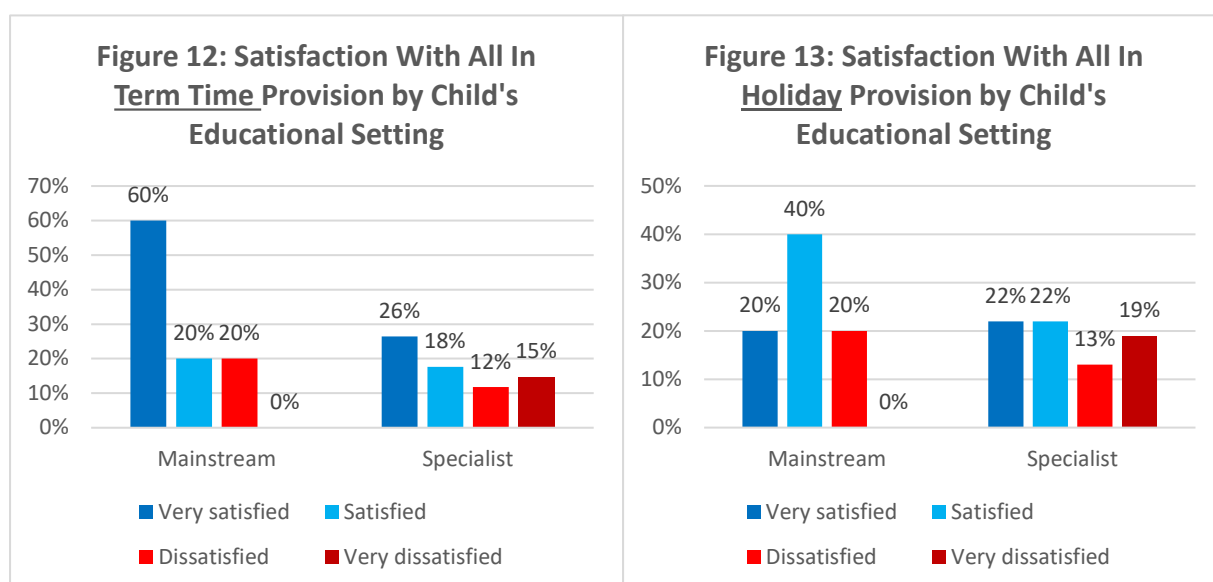
Those programmes with the most users were the All In Programme (both term time and holiday provision) and the holiday clubs provided by Action for Children.

Feedback on these three services was divided, with only a slightly higher percentage of respondents reporting that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the provision than those who reported that they were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Indeed, this mixed pattern of satisfaction was present across all types of provision, though there was a lot more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with the community short breaks provided by Action for Children.

As stated previously in this report, a smaller percentage of parent carers responding to the survey had children in mainstream education than parent carers whose children are in specialist education (21% versus 70% respectively). In addition to this, a smaller percentage of those parent carers with children in mainstream education reported using short breaks than those whose children are in specialist education (40% versus 80% respectively). It is therefore important to look at the experiences of these two groups of parents with All In separately as well.<sup>2</sup>

When separating those parent carers in the sample whose children are in specialist education from those who are in mainstream education, it is worth noting that those parents whose children are in mainstream education report more positive feedback with the All In programmes (both holiday and term time provision) than parents whose children are in specialist educational settings (see **Figures 12 & 13**). 20% of respondents reported dissatisfaction with the programmes, and none reported being “very dissatisfied.”



When parent carers were given the opportunity to **provide further comments** on their satisfaction with the short breaks programmes offered, 17 respondents did so. All of these comments are presented below, though some information has been redacted to retain anonymity. Those respondents' comments that reflected both themes were broken up so that their words are included under the appropriate theme, so more than 17 quotes appear below.

<sup>2</sup> Very low numbers for use of the other programmes prohibit usefully separating these respondents elsewhere.



Many of these comments suggest that much of the dissatisfaction reported seems to be related to **difficulty accessing provision**. The comments reflecting this theme are as follows:

- “Not enough availability for action for children holiday club. Although their trips are excellent if you can get on one!... Not enough holiday clubs full stop. Bradbury house is amazing.”
- “AFC holiday club itself is great, however getting a space is rare.”
- “Bradbury at one point had staffing issues so did not get the allocation of nights.”
- “I live in Whitchurch and unless I travel to Shrewsbury for my daughter there is no activities within our local area so we haven't been unable to utilise the provision like we hoped, resulting in her missing out on valuable childhood experiences with people who would understand her needs.”
- “Not enough provision compared to offers mainstream children have.”
- “Not been made aware of a Saturday club so am dissatisfied to have not been told. Holiday clubs are always full so despite being really quick and responsive to the opening we rarely get a space.”
- “One day a week for holiday club is just not enough, this is the only time my [child] gets to socialise with others really and he would love to attend more.”
- “There is always not enough spaces and high demand.”
- “The race to get a measly 1 day on the holiday club is a disgrace. One day is not enough when your child is so very bored and all their routine has gone. I applied an hour late last time and missed out. I felt I let down my daughter and my family.”
- “Unable to access Bradbury house despite allowance 2 years ago.”
- “Very difficult to get a AfC session during the holidays. If lucky we might get 1 in a 6 week holiday.”
- “Booking option is very last minute. And waiting to hear on allocations means you can't book anything else.”
- “We used to be able to see what is available and book sessions that interest us, now we can't. Communication on short breaks isn't coming through email, instead it's on social media. Please, please let children with disabilities meet others with similar conditions and give support to connect families with similar need and interests. Inflation and a growing number of diagnosed children means the funding per child has significantly reduced.”

The other major theme to show up in these comments from parent carers about feedback on specific programmes was that there is a **lack of suitable activities and/or level of support**. Comments reflecting this theme are as follows:

- “All In provision not suitable for children needing 1-1 or with toileting needs.
- “A lot of the holiday clubs seem to require 1 to 1 care - so cannot be used unless I am there.”
- “Also concerned that we didn't get at half term as places were allocated mainly to 2-1, which reduces the 1-1 places.”

- “Dissatisfied with the allocation and only being able to have a maximum of 6 hours per school holiday. There are no other alternatives for a child that requires 2-1, full personal care, complex needs.”
- “I am very disappointed that the decision has been made [due to behavioural issues] to stop the overnight respite [for my child]. It has brought our family close to breakdown and exacerbated [my child’s] mental health deterioration. He is red on CETR and at imminent risk of hospitalisation. In terms of the provision for short breaks during the week – [my child] accesses SYA. This is the only group which does not request that I provide 1:1 support for him. He recently had Lifeshed involvement over the half term break. We were grateful for the family respite and the staff were great, but I didn’t find it as beneficial or enjoyable as it used to be when Forest School activities were involved.”
- “So many of the activities are beyond my daughter’s ability. She is 24 but has a learning age of 2 years...We desperately need more suitable activities to do as a family too.”
- “The activities are much poorer than they were.”
- “Nothing suitable that my child would attend. Nothing for more able who struggle due to anxiety to attend mainstream settings.”
- “Providers seem not to cater for children who are nonverbal, have SLD and challenging behaviour. These children need sensory and physical activities with lots of space, appropriately experienced and trained staff. Bradbury House is not suitable for these children and young people. Need respite in own home or smaller homes with less children staying. Ironically these children’s parent carers are most in need of a break. Lack of suitable respite available will put families in crisis leading to them having to put their child into care or residential schooling. If those families had access to adequate respite suitable for their child’s needs, this may be avoided in some cases.”

#### What is Working/What Isn’t – Parent Carers

Parent carers who had used short breaks were then asked to provide open-ended comments to two additional questions; “**is there anything you particularly like about short breaks provision or that works well?**” and “**is there anything you don’t like or that could be improved?**”

25 respondents provided comments on the first question, and 29 commented in response to the second question. These responses were grouped thematically and tagged, with some comments covering more than one theme. The themes are presented below in **Tables 1 & 2**, and anonymised examples of comments reflecting these themes are presented below.

<b>Table 1. Themes – What Works Well (Parent Carers)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Staff are friendly/professional/caring	8	22%
Praise for specific activities (e.g. cycling, swimming)	7	19%
Negative comments or criticism	7	19%
Praise for Action for Children	5	14%
Praise for residential options (Bradbury House, Havenbrook, Tickwood) <sup>3</sup>	5	14%
Praise for activities/provision more generally	3	8%
Praise for Autism West Midlands	1	3%

There were 36 instances of themes showing up in comments, as shown in **Table 1**. The majority of positive comments were in **praise of the staff** running the various programmes. Several respondents also had good things to say about **specific activities** and/or the **activities provided more generally**. **Action for Children**, specific **residential offers**, and **Autism West Midlands** were also specifically named and praised in comments. Examples of positive comments reflecting the themes above include:

- “Staff are friendly and welcoming.”
- “The staff at Havenbrook are fabulous.”
- “Bradbury house is phenomenal. They are our saviours.”
- “Swimming sessions. Cycling sessions.”
- “I like the AFC holiday club and Lifeshed woodland camp.”
- “The staff at Action for Children are outstanding.”

7 of the positive comments (19%) also **contained elements of criticism** or pointed to negative aspects of the provision alongside the good aspects. For example:

- “All the activities we used to enjoy no longer provided used to love staying at Tickwood and Empathy trips.”
- “Independence Workshops were great but have now stopped?”
- “The provision has been seriously reduced over the years. The overnight stays in the Llama cabin have gone. The animal activities have gone. The focus has been on neurodivergence, to the detriment of children with physical disabilities, learning disability and sensory impairment. There have been specific activities for neurodivergence, but not for other disability groups.”
- “Actio provision is responsive to the engagement of the community that engages with them - all the individual providers are great. They need more facilitated support to help families navigate the short breaks activities.”

There were 44 instances of themes being present in the 29 comments parent carer respondents provided to the question about what needs improvement in short breaks provision, as shown in **Table 2**. These themes were slightly less dispersed, in that larger percentages of the respondents agreed on the themes. 39% of respondents to this question said something about the **need for more availability** of provision and 30% said something about the **need for more options**.

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<sup>3</sup> Havenbrook and Tickwood (which includes the Llama Cabin) are short breaks that have been offered in the past, but are not currently commissioned.

Table 2. Themes – What Needs Improvement (Parent Carers)	Count	%
Need more availability	17	39%
Need more options	13	30%
Transport/travel difficult or location issues	6	14%
Struggle to find enough information/communication not good	4	9%
Booking difficult	2	5%
Provision not suitable for complex needs	2	5%

Examples of comments reflecting the themes around what needs to improve above include:

- “Have more short breaks available, a greater range of options and proper support.”
- “Booking is difficult and complicated. There is no central coordination. A dedicated short breaks line would be better.”
- “We have only used holiday club with AFC but really need more. Also we live an hour away from Shrewsbury so even though our young person can have an amazing time we are on the road for 4 hours to get her there and back. Transport to go with short breaks would be brilliant.”
- “So much is in Shrewsbury or further away so we have to travel. For the holidays what’s available isn’t known until it’s almost here which makes planning difficult. There’s a lot of very young children and less for young teens. Life Shed and AFC are/ were the only activities that I didn’t need to stay and be present but Life Shed has removed itself from the scheme.”
- “More days throughout the holidays! (although I know we’re lucky what we get at the moment) but one day a week doesn’t feel enough when that is the only break we get during summer hols & both working.”
- “Sadly there are not enough carers for short breaks during the holidays so some families do miss out on a much needed break.”
- “More provision of holiday clubs for children with toileting/ 1-1 care needs. Better all in provision for children with 1-1 needs. More available slots for AFC holiday clubs.”
- “The service is limited. My son is age 12 so does not fit all age thresholds for some offers. We are based in Oswestry and my son does not get home from school until 4.30. Meaning we cannot access the TNS offer in time or travel to Shrewsbury in time for other offers.”

#### What’s Working/What Isn’t - Professionals

Professionals cite a **broad range of provision, good care** and staff support, as well as **low cost** as some of the things that are working about short breaks. Many of the comments were about the range of activities available, which contrasts with the parent carer comments about their needing to be more options available. Some of these comments suggest concerns about the ability of families being able to access the provisions. Professionals’ comments in full are as follows:

- “Good range of activities throughout the county.”
- “Variety of activities available.”
- “Short breaks via organised children's charity Action for Children work as far as availability allows, in the service(s) they offer; these include residential overnight breaks, outreach (year round) or by attending after school club. As with any provision, once capacity is met, there is a waiting list for next

available space.”

- “Brilliant and broad offer of activities across Shropshire.”
- “There is a good variety on offer to young people.”
- “Staff willingness/commitment to seeking/sourcing short breaks for families we work with.”
- “For children that are able to access their outreach, overnight short breaks - they enjoy this time and promote the children's identified outcomes. Independence work shops when these were running.”
- “When children attend action for children overnight short breaks, outreach and play scheme they receive a good level of care.”
  
- “It is good that the offer is there and is across a large part of Shropshire.”
- “Low cost activities for parents”

**Difficulty of accessing provision** emerged as a top concern among professionals about what is “not working” currently.

- “More activities in the north of the county.”
- “There are many children waiting for an agreed short break service, due to lack of the resource (e.g. PA's via DP), access to mainstream clubs with 'able' children, due to acceptance and/or public perception of ability to include - such clubs often run by volunteers/parents. In addition, limited short break home based for foster carers.
- “The offer is affected by where SEND young people live. The funding hasn't increased with inflation.”
- “Ability to source staff to facilitate agreed provisions.”
- “Action for children have been running a reduced service in all areas for a significant amount of time, which has resulted in children and families receiving less of their awarded allocation across all 3 provisions. This has resulted in families going into crisis because of the lack of support. AFC have not responded in a creative way and have been led by myself in how to reach more children.”
- “There is a lack of provision in the market towns in the North, South and Oswestry, the provision is based heavily in Shrewsbury. There is a lack of provision for under 5's and those with more personal care needs or slightly more complex disabilities.”

Another theme that emerged among these comments also reflected the parent carer comments about the **need for activities to meet the needs of families** better.

Comments on this theme were:

- “Assessed short breaks do not meet needs - all in is not funded properly - the kids that don't meet section 17 cant access all in are not catered for.”
- “The All In offer isn't wide enough, both geographically and age range. There is also a lack of provision for children with complex needs. There is no provision suitable for school holidays.”
- “Families often advise us of the difficulties with travel, with short breaks for children in more rural areas, for short breaks for children who require 1:1 support in the community, for short breaks that are focused on preparing for adulthood and independence- like the workshops that were previously running by AFC. For short breaks for younger children 4 and under and provision of

these. Short breaks for children with more complex health needs and physical disabilities, for children with these specific needs to have more choice of activity. For more assessed short break provisions and staff to be able to provide this, as there are waiting lists and due to staffing children cannot access their full allocation of assessed supports. For the range of short break activities for children with sensory needs to be considered more. Seeking the children's wishes and feelings to inform their short break and input into this. Support for siblings - like a sibs group- that previously happened many years ago. Potential around support for holidays for children/ families - how is Llama Cabin at Tickwood being used/ utilised?"

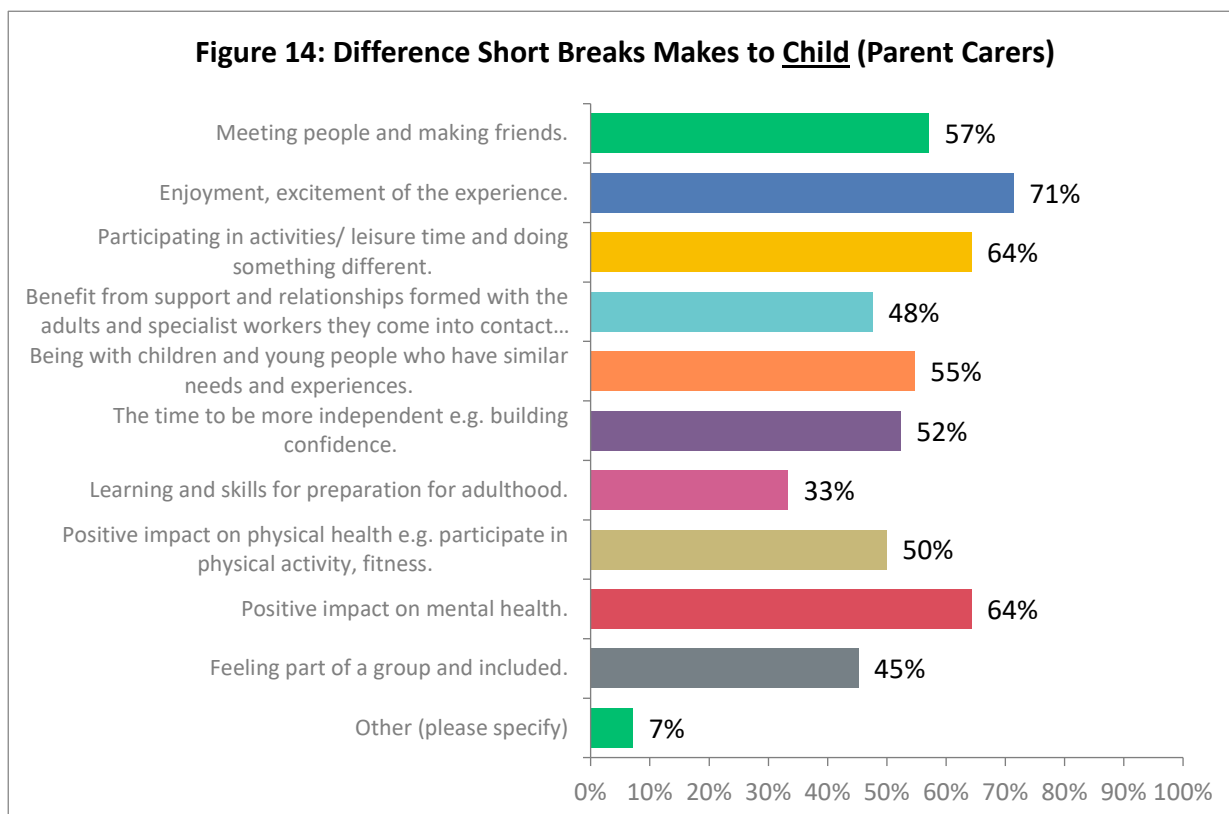
Finally, two of the professionals discussed **confusion** among families, and the difficulty of navigating the application process and activities on offer. These comments were:

- “Action for Children’s holiday club and Saturday club being described as All In as it’s not a targeted provision and it is very confusing for families.”
- “The application process doesn't feel too well explained to parents, causing them to feel they need to re-apply. Not a lot of provision for under 5's. Many places don't offer the level of need for the demand, such as 1-1 or hygiene support.”

## Difference Short Breaks Make

### Parent Carer Feedback

The next set of questions asked parent carers what difference short breaks provision makes to their child. Respondents were able to select all of the answers that applied to them, and three respondents chose “other”. The results of this question are displayed in **Figure 14**.

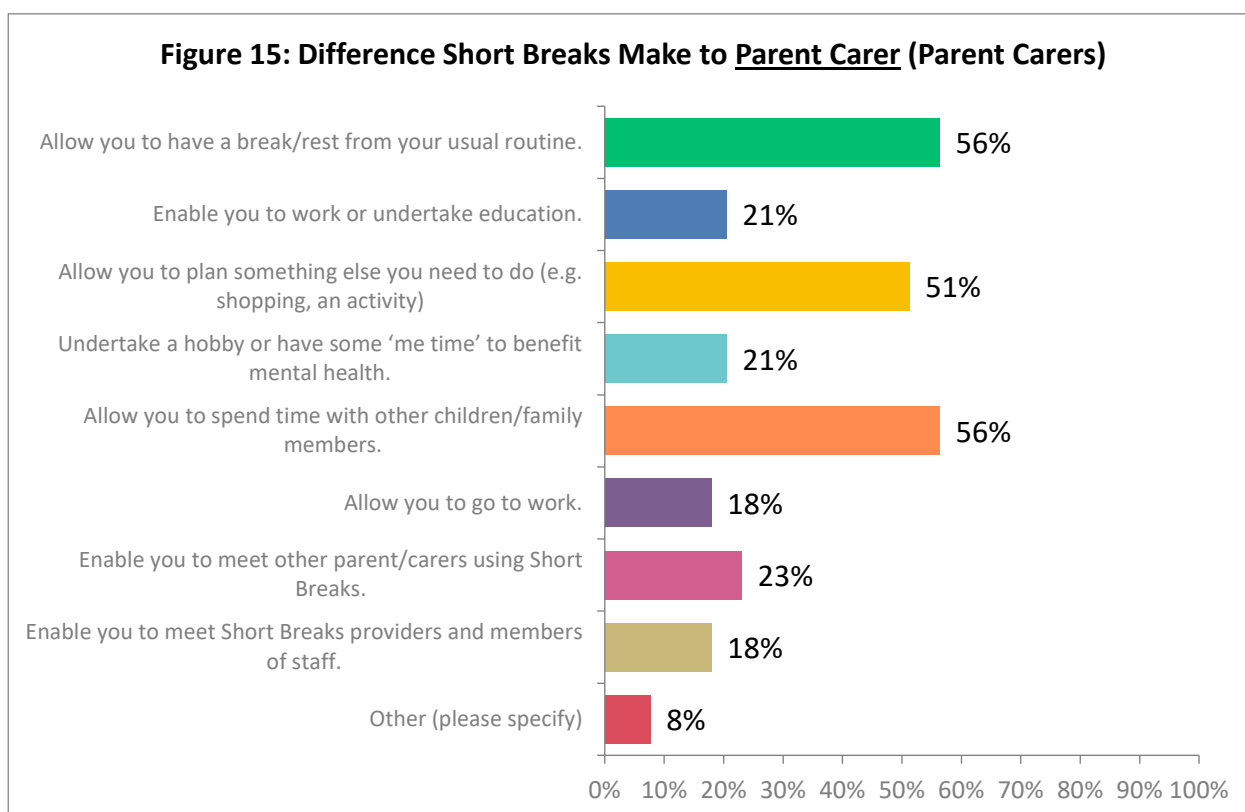


The most commonly cited impacts of short breaks provision on children among parent carer respondents was **the enjoyment and excitement of the experience** (71%), followed closely by **participating in activities/leisure time and doing something different** (64%), as well as **positive impact on mental health** (64%).

Respondents choosing “other” said:

- “Neuro typical children no longer communicate with [my child], so these social activities are crucial.”
- “Helps me get out and get the above [benefits] too joining in with them.”
- “Not enabled to attend.”

Parent carers were next asked about the difference short breaks make to them. Again, respondents could choose all answers that applied to them, and three respondents chose “other”. Results are shown in **Figure 15**.



The most commonly cited impacts that short breaks have on parent carers were that they **allow them to have a break/rest from their usual routine** (56%) and they **allow them to spend time with other children/family members** (56%).

- “Other” responses provided were as follows:
- “It should do much of the above, but it doesn't.”
- “I don't have a break i take them and supervise them.”
- “Made us feel excluded and not part of clique.”

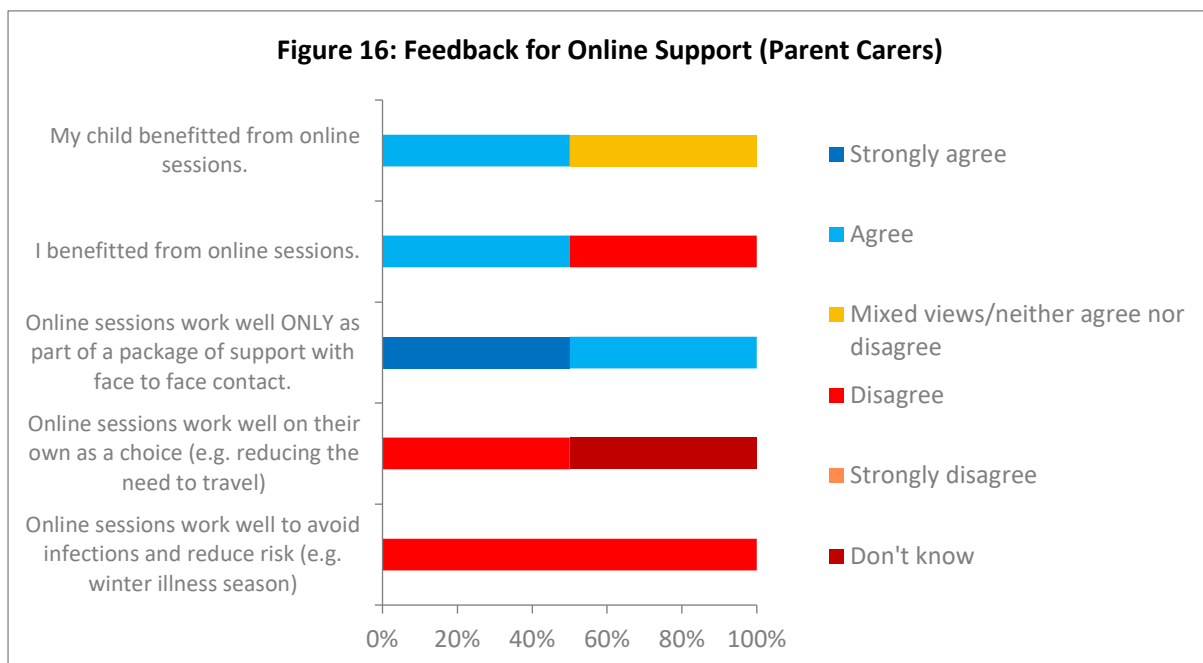
#### Children and Young People Feedback

Only one person responding to the children and young people survey gave feedback

on the question about what difference short breaks make to them. This young person said that short breaks were important to them for the enjoyment/excitement of the experience.

### Online Short Breaks Provision

Only two respondents to the parent carer survey said that they had received online short breaks provision. They were asked to provide feedback on their online support, and these results were mixed (see Figure 16).<sup>4</sup> While online support had some benefit, respondents using it felt that it was not a choice that worked well on its own, and it may not have been well used overall anyway (based on the small number of respondents using it in this sample). Future online support provisions, should therefore take this into account.



## 4 Feedback from Those Who Haven't Used/Referred to Short Breaks

### Parent Carers

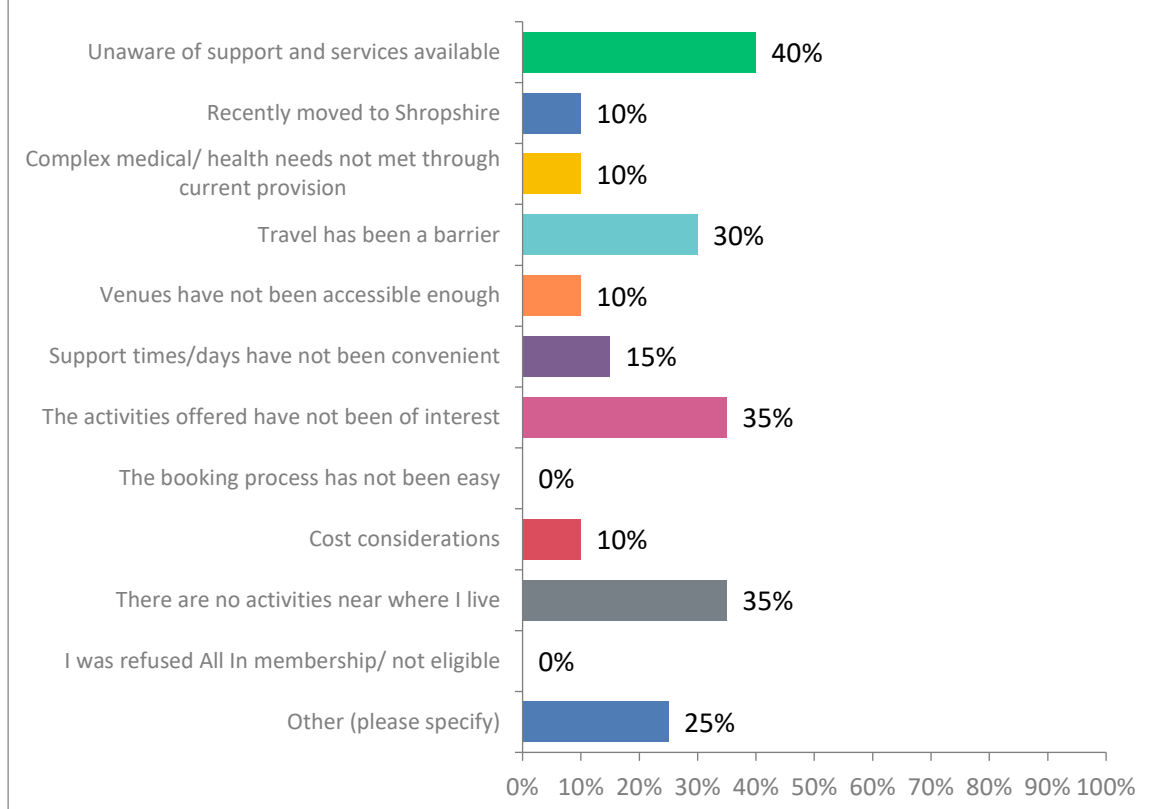
Respondents who said they had not used short breaks provision were asked about their reasons for not doing so. 20 respondents answered this question and were able to choose as many reasons in Figure 17 (below) as applied to them.

There is an interesting divide in the data here among children and young people in specialist education and those in mainstream schools. 80% of parent carers with children in specialist education said they had used some level of short breaks provision, while only 40% of parent carers with their children in mainstream education had done so. A majority (60%) of parent carers whose children are in

<sup>4</sup> Percentages are not provided in this table due to the small number of respondents.



**Figure 17: Why Short Breaks Not Used (Parent Carers)**



mainstream education had not used short breaks.

The most common reason that respondents reported not using short breaks was that they were **unaware of the support and services available** (8 respondents). A similar number said that the **activities offered were not of interest** (7) or that there are **no activities near where they live** (7). 6 respondents also said that **travel is a barrier** to them taking up the offer.

5 respondents selected “other” reasons, and these responses were as follows:

- “Does not include someone to either be my child's 121 or of the inclusion of siblings. What am I meant to do with 3 other children after I've driven over an hour for a 45 minute activity that they can't be present for.”
- “Unsure if we are eligible, child goes to a mainstream school and copes ok sometimes, but not others.”
- “My older children have previously attended Empathy & were treated appallingly, with the whole family experiencing bullying.”
- “We have only just been accepted onto the programme but activities are not widely advertised and we forget to check on the website.”
- “Anxiety prevents attendance also almost 17 years old and doesn't always want to be with much younger children.”

Some of these comments and the common responses in **Figure 17** overlap with themes identified by respondents whose children had also taken part in short breaks. For instance, **issues with access, travel and distance, and appropriateness/choice of activities available**. Additionally, **communication** and

ease of finding information about what is available and who is eligible are a theme both here and among respondents using the programme.

Location may be a factor in some of the responses around travel being a barrier, venues not being accessible enough, and location of activities. It appears that respondents not using short breaks for these reasons were more likely to be located in the north of the county than elsewhere, but three respondents who are near Shrewsbury said they found travel a barrier. However, very low numbers<sup>5</sup> means that this result is not as reliable as it would be had there been more respondents in the sample who had not used short breaks.

<b>Table 3. Travel/Location Barriers by Respondent Location</b>			
<b>Nearest Town</b>	<b>Venues have not been accessible enough</b>	<b>Travel has been a barrier</b>	<b>There are no activities near where I live</b>
Cleobury Mortimer			1
Ellesmere	1	1	1
Market Drayton		1	1
Shrewsbury		3	1
Wem		1	2

### **Children and Young People**

Only two children and young people answering the survey who stated that they had not used short breaks before, gave any further information about why they had not. One respondent said that they hadn't used short breaks because "there are no activities near where I live." The other said that they had only just been accepted to the programme.

### **Professionals**

Only three of the five professionals saying they had not referred to short breaks answered questions about why they had not done so. Respondents could choose more than one reason why they had not referred.

Two of these respondents said that one of the reasons they had not referred was that they are **unaware of the support and services available**. One of these respondents also selected "other" and said that referring to short breaks provision is not normally within their remit. A third respondent said that they had not referred because **complex medical/ health needs not met through current provision**.

## **5 Health Needs, Direct Budgets and PAs**

### **Health Needs**

#### Parent Carers

<sup>5</sup> Only 6 using short breaks who gave reasons around venue, location and travel also provided their nearest town.

Parent carers were next asked an open-ended question about how their child's health needs might be better met through short breaks provision. These questions were asked of all parent carers responding to the survey, regardless of whether or not they had used short breaks provision. 25 respondents provided detailed comments in response to this question. Their comments were again analysed for common themes, and these are presented in **Table 4**, with anonymised examples included below.

<b>Table 4. How Short Breaks Can Meet Health Needs (Parent Carers)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Children need a chance to socialise in settings that meet their needs	7	28%
Complex needs need to be met for short breaks to be effective	7	28%
Can't access/not enough provision, or provision is inappropriate	5	20%
Generally beneficial	2	8%
Mental health of child improves when it works well	1	4%
Mental health of carer improves when it works well	1	4%
Supports independence for children	1	4%
Good communication/administration of support	1	4%

Comments in response to this question varied widely. These comments included:

- “By allowing my child to be part of a group for his developmental age, not his physical age.”
- “Supports independence.”
- “Personal emotional support.”
- “More activities for children with severe and complex learning disabilities.”
- “Greater provision. There’s simply not enough.”
- “For their medical needs to be recorded once and sent to the event organisers, rather than having to be completed each time.”
- “Mental health through school holidays would improve thoroughly if there was more to access for complex needs children.”

### Children and Young People

Only one respondent to the children and young people survey commented on how their health needs might best be met with short breaks provision. This respondent said this could be done with “more outdoor activities and sport.”

### **Direct Budgets and PAs**

Only parent carers were asked about the receipt of direct budgets and the use of Personal Assistants (PAs).

When asked whether their child receives a direct budget, 15 respondents (24%) said that they do. Of those 15 respondents, 12 use the direct budget to engage the service of a PA.

Respondents were then asked whether they wished to provide any further comments about the use of a direct budget and/or engagement of a PA. Nine respondents provided comments, and there are some clear themes around the **difficulty of recruiting PAs** (which can be due to costs as well as a shortage of available staff) as well as **PA assistance having a big positive impact** when it is in place. Comments provided in full as follows:

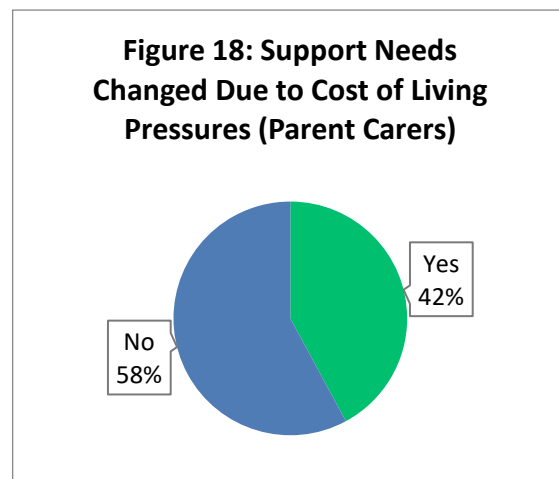
- “I would like more hours, 5 hours is not enough.”
- “More flexibility in having a spending budget for activities. For example, going to a trampoline session or a cafe. It’s expensive and we can’t afford to pay the PA for this.”
- “Our PA has taken our son to the cycling activities.”
- “PAs are very difficult to recruit!”
- “The hourly rate set by the local authority is too low and we have been unable to recruit anyone. The DCT claim it’s my responsibility to find someone and have given no support but acknowledged there’s a recruitment crisis and they’ve frozen the pay rates for 24/25 due to the finance crisis at Shropshire Council.”
- “This is a life saver and has the most impact on my son’s enrichment outside of school.”
- “We found it impossible to get a PA due to where we live. Instead, our young person has been allocated sessions at Aspirations. However it’s difficult as we live an hour away so spend 4 hours on the road for our young person to be there 6 hours - not really a break for the family.”
- “We have a wonderful PA and I am very grateful for the budget so we can have her. We only get 5 hours a week and I would like more.”
- “Yes but no response.”

## 6 Future Short Breaks Provision

### Parent Carers

#### Cost of Living Pressures

While the future of short breaks provision must take into account the budget constraints currently facing Shropshire Council, it is also important to consider the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on families in need of short breaks provision. To this end, parent carer respondents were asked whether their support needs have changed due to cost of living pressures. 42% of respondents (24) said that their needs had changed as a result of these pressures (see **Figure 18**), and 21 respondents provided comments detailing how things have changed for them.



The majority of these comments touched on the cost of activities or support that make a difference to their children being too high to afford as often as they would like. Additionally, some respondents talked about the difficulty of incorporating travel costs into support activities for their children, who cannot benefit from more local offers in the way that other children might. Examples of comments include:

- “Activities such as bowling, trampolining are now very expensive but these are

the type of things my son does with his outreach worker.”

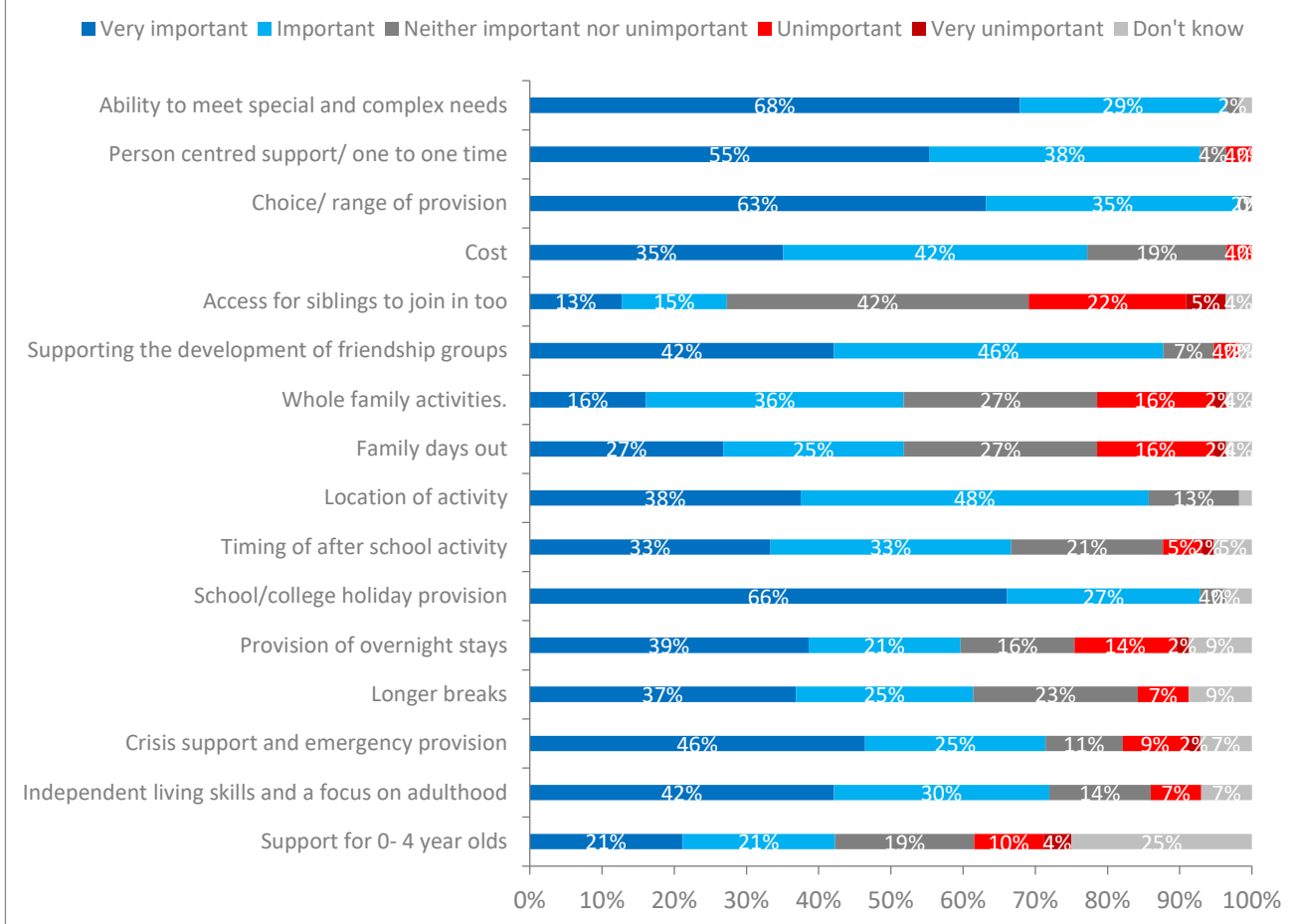
- “Difficult to recruit a PA who will travel to us in a rural area. Lots of short breaks activities are Shrewsbury or Oswestry based.”
- “Family finances have been challenged. Less ability to participate in leisure activities.”
- “Food needs due to ASD and SPD and EDS. Funding certain medication not available on prescription.”
- “I have had to cancel my daughter’s home tutors, due to not being able to afford it. School have not supplied us with a teacher.”
- “It is more difficult to meet costs. For example our child does better with 1:1 tuition for things like swimming, which works out way more expensive than standard group lessons.”
- “Money is tight, I pay a small fortune for childcare as I am held to ransom by the only childminder who will take him.”
- “They’ve increased, we really need accessible activities with friends locally. Instead we are travelling across the country to access suitable activities for children with physical disabilities and it is exhausting.”
- “Unable to support the cost of leisure activities due to the cost of energy bills and food and my health has got worse despite telling social worker hardly any contact.”
- “Unable to take my son to things he would really benefit from, swimming, sensory places etc. Plus the travel to these places is horrendous. It is not an all on offer, nor a local offer unless you live in Shrewsbury or Oswestry. We live I Highley... We have had to join a Wolverhampton charity to get access to activities. It’s been a lifesaver.”
- “We need to drive more to get her there so use much more diesel than not going on the short break AFC.”
- “Yes I have to subsidise our personal budget.”

#### Important Factors for Designing Future Short Breaks – Parent Carers

Respondents were also asked a series of questions about what would be important to them in designing short breaks in the future. The results of these are displayed in **Figure 19** (below). Based on the percentage of respondents rating factors “very important” or “important”, choice and a good range of provision (98%), the ability to meet complex needs (97%), 1 to 1 support (93%), and holiday provision (93%) were the biggest priorities emerging from these responses, followed closely by supporting the development of friendship groups (88%), and the location of the activity (86%). In many ways, these priorities echo some of the things that respondents have been voicing frustrations within the comments above, such as the importance of access to provision and the importance of having more choice and a range of provision that meets needs appropriately.

Respondents were invited to provide comments to further explain their answers to the questions in **Figure 19**. 10 respondents provided some thoughtful clarifying points and suggestions. Comments included points about provision being age or ability appropriate (and available), as well as difficulty with accessing the offers due to location and other factors. Comments are as follows:

**Figure 19: Important Factors for Designing Future Short Breaks (Parent Carers)**

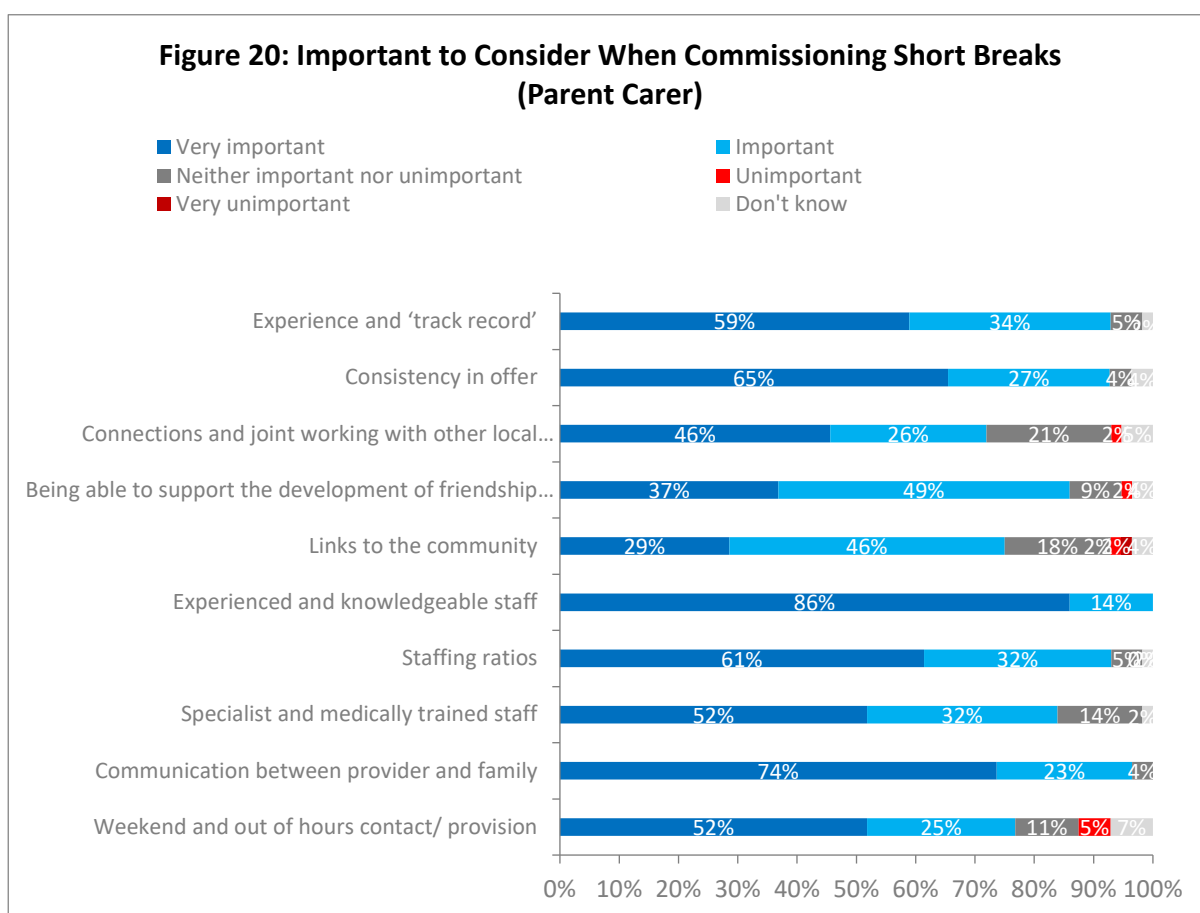


- “Under 10s as serious shortfall. Actio consortium is a joke and why is part of the consortium running discussions on future of short breaks.”
- “Crisis support is none-existent. Our family has been at breaking point but support is not there.”
- “This depends also on developmental age. Just because someone is 9 doesn’t mean their ability is.”
- “Variety choice and control are vital - overnight provision for those with less complex needs who cannot access extracurricular in school etc would be valuable - being mindful of creating a safe environment for children who need more considerate environments - need better provision in the holidays that provide a childcare facility as there is none.”
- “We haven’t accessed short breaks because the activities aren’t in our area - they aren’t equally distributed across Shropshire, and the activities don’t cater for all ages.”
- “Groups need to support those whose parent/carers experience violence from the child & therefore PEGS should be invited to be involved
- There never seems to be activities in North Shropshire and children that access Sevendale school often don’t get home till 4.30pm.”
- “I didn’t know there were any after school activities other than a Girls group. It’s hard as working parents to find after school clubs when accessing specialist schools and this is needed.”
- “Seems a huge gap in holiday provision for working send parents very little

available or suitable.”

- “Break needs to be at least 5 hours, preferably community / activity based.”

### Factors to Consider When Commissioning Short Breaks – Parent Carers



**Figure 20** displays the answers from respondents about the factors that are most important to them to consider when commissioning short breaks in the future.

Based on those factors that respondents deemed “very important” or “important”, the biggest priorities for parent carers in the survey are experienced and knowledgeable staff (100%), communication between provider and family (97%), experience and ‘track record’ (93%), staffing ratios (93%) and consistency in offer (92%). These were followed closely by being able to support the development of friendship groups (86%) and specialist and medically trained staff (84%). It is noteworthy that very few respondents rated any of these factors as “unimportant” so it is likely that parent carers see many of them as fundamental to the service being commissioned.

Once again, respondents were invited to offer further comments to explain or provide more context for their answers to the questions in **Figure 20**. Eight respondents provided further comments. Most of these touch on the importance of providers understanding the complexity and diversity of need among those using short breaks. Comments are as follows:

- “Ask families what groups they would like and would suit their lifestyles.”
- “And that these providers understand that not all disabled children are physically disabled but have developmental delay.”

- “Medical training is only needed where appropriate - this may only be applicable where access to a short break will be available and the provider is expected to meet this need, currently all in for example will not require this to the level that action for children will.”
- “Also need to consider the size of the groups, nothing too large.”
- “Empathy staff had very little understanding of complex neurological needs & blamed the parents.”
- “We as parent carers need to know that our children are safe and cared for.”
- “For me it's just the facility I will do the caring and activity with my children.”
- “Understanding of differing needs.”

Finally, parent carer respondents were asked whether they had any other comments they would like to make about the future provision of short breaks. 24 respondents provided thoughtful and varied comments in response to this question. These responses were grouped thematically and presented in **Table 5**, with examples of anonymised comments below.

<b>Table 5. Themes – Any Other Comments (Parent Carers)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Need more availability/access generally	7	18%
Need more options generally	6	15%
Need more holiday and weekend availability specifically	5	13%
Need more options for different age groups/sibling inclusion	4	10%
Transport/travel difficult or location not enough outside Shrewsbury/Oswestry	4	10%
Listen to parent carers/children about what they need	4	10%
Need more options for different needs (e.g. sensory, complex disability, etc.)	3	8%
Offer needs to meet very individual needs	3	8%
Improved information availability	1	3%
Other	3	8%

Several themes overlapped, with the two biggest themes identified having to do in some way with needing **more availability/access**, as well as needing **more options** for short breaks.

Seven of the comments touched generally upon the need for **more availability** generally and five discussing the need for more availability during holidays and weekends specifically. Four respondents also discussed the difficulty of accessing short breaks due to travel or transport restrictions. Comments included, for example:

- “Make short breaks more accessible when booking. I have contacted several providers who have not returned the call or were unaware of the short break. Don't turn young people away because they are the wrong age.”
- “Offering in more areas we live in North Shropshire and both work full time accessing activities is limited on where this is.”
- “Bridgnorth area as there are a lot of children with SEN who would benefit and less travelling to Shrewsbury.”
- “Availability during school holidays is our biggest need.”

Six respondents discussed the general need for **more options** to be available, with four respondents discussing the need for more options that are age appropriate or



appropriate for families with siblings, and three respondents specifically discussing needing options that cater to children with different types of needs, such as complex disabilities or sensory issues. Comments included, for example:

- “The provision should be available to meet the needs of each individual child - AFC holiday club provision should only be accessible for children with complex needs. There are many other holiday clubs for children that are ‘more able’ this will allow families with children with complex needs to have more than a max of 6 hours per school holiday.”
- “Broader range and much more is needed.”
- “Include physical disabilities, sensory impairment and learning disabilities - they’ve really been overlooked as the focus has been on SEMH. These families have disconnected from Actio.”
- “More family experiences. We simply can't attend without including his siblings. It excludes a lot of ppl who are also extremely isolated. We haven't had any time out without our children since 2017. not one afternoon. It would be nice to at least share these activities with other grown ups as a family experience.”

It is also worth noting that three respondents specifically pointed out the need for future short breaks provision to **really listen to the needs of children and parent carers**, while one respondent said that **information availability and communication** are important and need to be improved.

- “Maybe ask parents of all ages groups what they would like directly... Under 10s are poorly supported.”

Other responses included references to things like the need for affordability, as well as happiness with the short breaks they have received.

#### Other Forms of Feedback from Parent Carers

Three parent carers reached out to provide more detailed feedback – two via email, and one via telephone call, which was summarised in an email to the TellUs inbox. It is unclear from their messages whether these parent carers also responded to the survey. All of these parent carers wanted to make a point about the **difficulty of accessing short breaks provision** – specifically, frustrations with booking short breaks.

An excerpt from one of these parent carer’s anonymised comments summarises the concerns of two parent carers who complained about the difficulty of booking a place for holiday clubs. The comment is as follows:

“As a family we have been an active member of All in, [our daughter] accesses these services and they have proved very beneficial. However, I would like to give some feedback regarding my recent experience....I submitted my form at 11:03, the form went live at 11am. [My daughter] has not been allocated a place. All the places for (the one allowed day) I picked had been filled in 3 minutes. Now I have spoken to action for children, they said demand is unprecedented.”

The respondent also explains that their daughter also missed out on a space allocation for the previous holiday club spots, because the form had been emailed out with no prior warning, and spaces filled before they even saw the form. The respondent concludes:

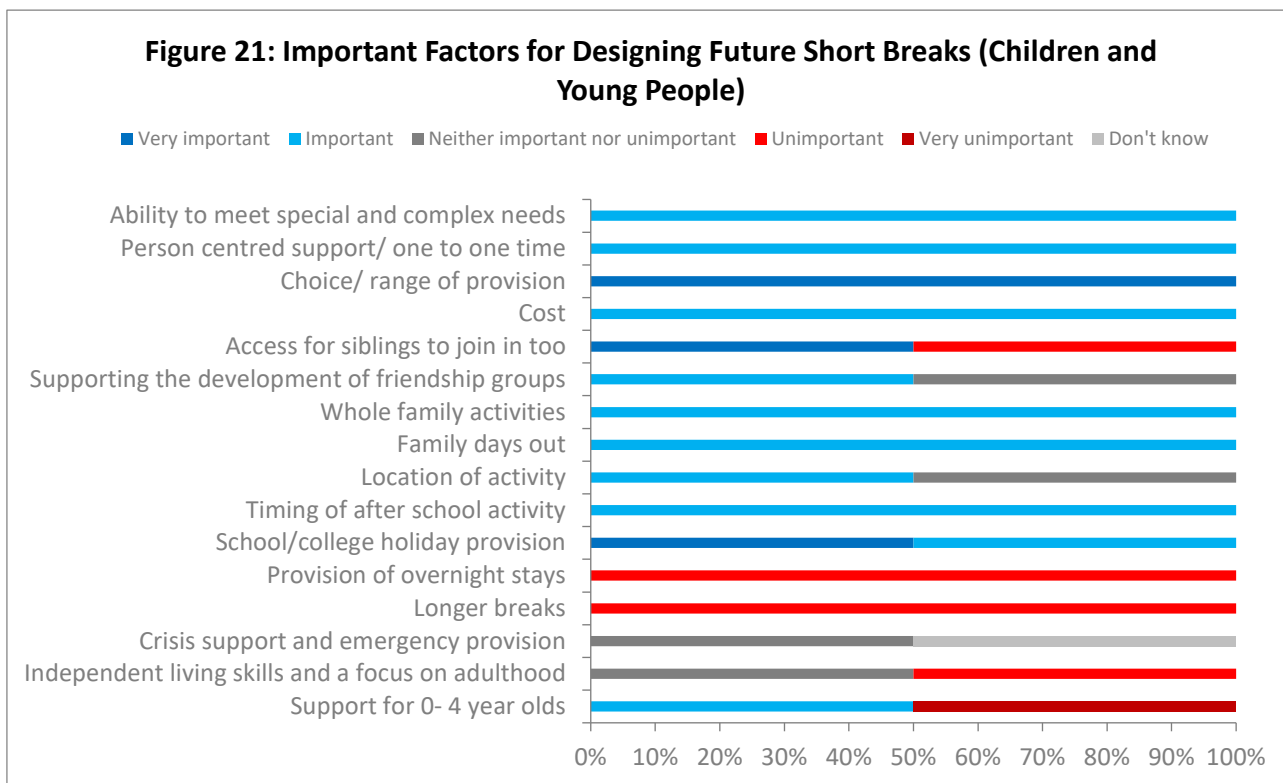
“I do think there is something very wrong with either the process or perhaps the service that in 3 minutes of booking (based on first come first serve) we cannot get a place.”

Another parent said that they had been allowed to book onto a place through a “live” booking form without being told that there was actually not a place available. The parent carer called this a “cruel system”.

## Children and Young People

Two respondents answered questions about the future of short breaks in the survey for children and young people. These respondents provided feedback on what they thought were the more important and less important factors for future short breaks provision, and these responses are summarised in **Figure 21**.<sup>6</sup>

The choice and range of provision, as well as holiday provision, seem to be the most important factors for these respondents among the several they might choose from.



## Professionals

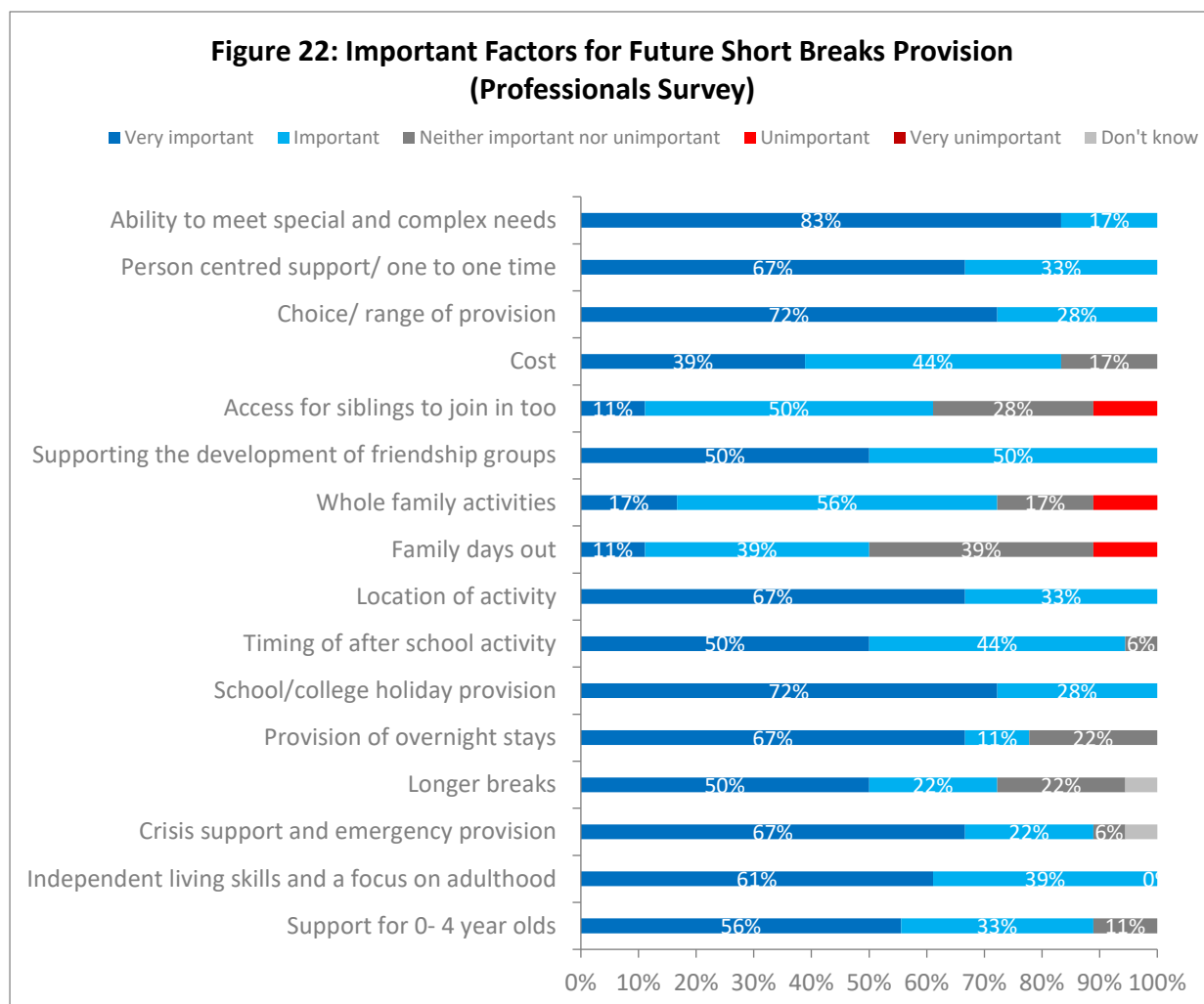
### Important Factors for Designing Future Short Breaks

18 respondents to the survey of professionals answered the questions about future short breaks provision. Their responses are summarised in **Figures 22 & 23** (below).

Respondents to the survey of professionals had very similar priorities to respondents in the parent carer survey about what factors should receive the highest priority in

<sup>6</sup> Percentages are not displayed in this figure due to the low response rate.

designing future short breaks provision (see Figure 22). Several factors received 100% support as “very important” or “important” from professionals – ability to meet special and complex needs, person centred support/one to one time, choice/range of provision, supporting the development of friendship groups, location of activity, holiday provision, and independent living skills/focus on adulthood all received 100% support as important by these respondents.



When asked whether they wished to add comments to explain their answers, seven respondents provided more detailed responses, which were as follows:

- “Crisis Support - With more provisions and support from earlier in child's pathway, and direct to families, one would hope the need for crisis support would reduce. Emergencies cannot always be avoided. Health Teams / Early Years support, appear to have less resources/funding or for supporting family networks; particularly for including disabled children/siblings under 5, within families, e.g., access to mother/baby groups/baby massage/baby sensory/music groups etc.”
- “I feel it is very important to offer as much as possible for all. Short breaks are a lifeline to many families.”
- “In my experience carers/parents/families require respite care where they are able to leave their child in a safe and stimulating environment. Being cancelled at short notice is a massive issue for families, especially when they

have made plans. It is frustrating. There is a lack of provision for complex needs children who require specialist support, e.g., peg fed etc Families complain that most services are in Shrewsbury and not localised to their home. To get a place on holiday play scheme is currently, 'first come first serve'. This is not equitable or fair. Allocation should be offered in a different way. Often the same young people are offered a place each holiday leaving the same children to miss out. AFC are supposed to offer 20 places per day, most young people are 2:1 staffing therefore they can only accommodate 10 places per day. This is a breach in the contract in my view.”

- “Complex needs must be considered however this may not be applicable to some aspects of the short breaks offer, e.g. targeted and non-assessed opportunities. It has been really hard to answer these as we need to answer them based on the different short breaks aspect.”
- “There needs to be more thought for those that don't have access to transport that live in Whitchurch, Market Drayton, Oswestry and the South to include a range of activities.”
- “People with additional associated complex health needs are left out - there is a need for personal health budgets.”
- “This was a little difficult to answer. The important thing is about ensuring those in greatest need are prioritised and that the funding available is not spread too thinly trying to be everything to everyone. Crisis support and emergency provision is important when designing specialist support otherwise not. Longer breaks - not sure what that means - longer than what? Some activities are currently much longer than others which seems right as there needs to be a variety some children can't cope with long sessions others can.”

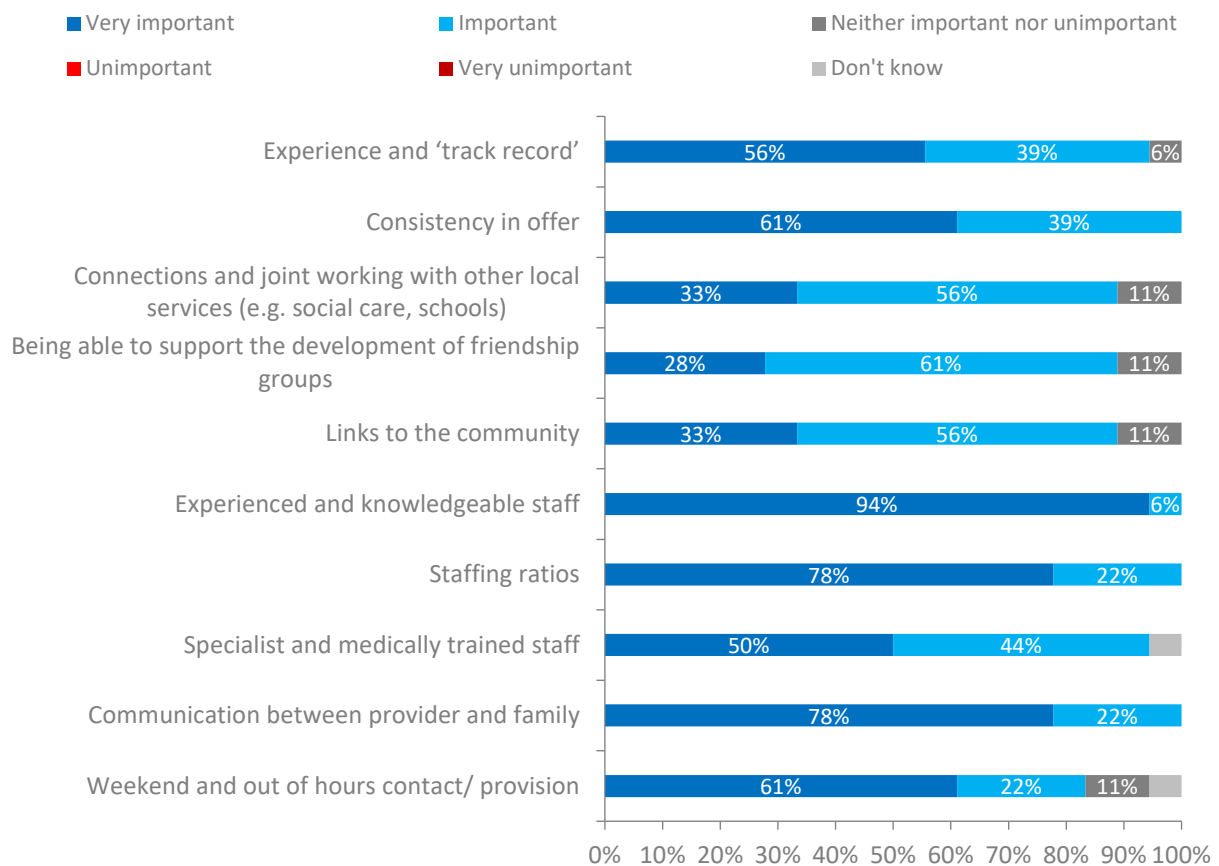
### Factors to Consider When Commissioning Short Breaks – Professionals

Respondents to the survey of professionals were also in line with parent carer respondents in their priorities for commissioning of short breaks (see **Figure 23, below**). Four factors were areas that 100% of professional respondents thought deserved “important” or “very important” consideration, those were: consistency in offer, experienced and knowledgeable staff, staffing ratios, and communication between provider and family.

Again, professionals were asked to provide any further comments on their responses to the questions presented in **Figure 23**. Six respondents did so. Their comments once again reflect some of the concerns and priorities raised by parent carers, such as communication being important, staffing and accessibility issues needing to be addressed, and having activities and provision that is appropriate to needs. Comments in full were as follows:

- “Multi Agency support, communication and planning will be crucial. Understanding family life and dynamic is essential. Families rely on consistent, organised activities and / or breaks. This further supports parents, child, and other children's development within the family; and can ultimately hold a family together.”
- “Having a service that is fulfilling and safe for service users is very important, staff that are experienced and qualified is equally important to keep service users safe, and be able to offer a broad range of exciting opportunities for all

**Figure 23: Important to Consider When Commissioning Short Breaks (Professionals)**



to access.”

- “There needs to be a cohort of experienced and specialised workers to accommodate all children with special needs. There should be a clear process for receipt of a service and families need to be told if there is a waiting list.”
- “Most of the provision is term time, when it comes to SEN holiday activities there is very little and when there is you can only book one day for a 6 week period.”
- “Personal budgets mean families can commission bespoke support NOT rely on provider services.”
- “You are requesting feedback in relation to both specialist and non specialist services. the importance of the options will depend on the service being delivered and the duty of care of the LA should inform that accordingly. e.g. an activity for an individual that has very complex needs including medical needs will require appropriate staff that are medically trained. it wouldn't be reasonable to expect medically trained staff at every activity offered. A provider should be a charity/voluntary sector or not for profit. They should be able to demonstrate how they raise funds as a charity and will contribute towards the overall cost They should understand and have worked within Shropshire and understand its challenges around rurality They have flexibility and be innovative in their approach to activities - make them exciting and have a varied and interesting offer that appeals to a wide age range and that

reflects what children and young people have told them.”

Finally, professionals were asked whether they have any other feedback they would like to provide about the future of short breaks, and whether they had anything else to add about short breaks. Respondents’ answers to these two questions were combined for analysis purposes, so themes were identified across the responses to both questions from professionals. These themes are presented with their frequency of occurrence across both questions in **Table 6**.

<b>Table 6. Themes – Any Other Comments (Professionals)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Need more options generally	5	17%
Review what is needed/working practices	5	17%
Listen to parent carers/children about what they need	4	13%
Need more availability/access generally	4	13%
Need more options for different needs (e.g. sensory, complex disability, etc.)	3	10%
Transport/travel difficult or location not enough outside Shrewsbury	3	10%
Offer needs to meet very individual needs	3	10%
Communication needs to be better	2	7%
Other	1	3%

Significantly, the themes highlighted by professionals echo those in the parent carer survey, and some go even further in their emphasis on some of the points, such as there needing to be more options for those with complex needs and disabilities. One respondent really comprehensively summarised all of the themes raised by both professionals and parent carers in one place:

- “There needs to be more range of activities and accessibility for children and families - location is important due to rural nature of Shropshire. There is a need to consider children with complex health/ physical needs and how health colleagues will contribute to this to ensure their needs are met/ supported in environments. Training for staff to provide the services and outreach. 1:1 support within groups in the community to support children to be able to access these without the need of a PA (if possible) - staff at those groups would need specific training to be able to do this. Groups/ overnights for young people in transition to prepare them for adulthood- trips away with a focus on this/ or within local community to promote inclusion and links with employment/ volunteering opportunities. Outreach services for young people with clear focused plans on aims/ outcomes to be achieved - where this can be time limited. Domiciliary care for children and families to assist with care in the home and access to local community. Overnight short breaks for children/ young people - ensuring their views are sought/ gathered and inform this provision. Support for siblings.”

Another comment includes several themes, but really emphasises the importance of **listening to parent carers/children** in some helpful ways:

- “Diversity of provision commissioned on EXPECTED needs and responding to the experiences, wishes, and needs of the community that uses the offers available. Coproduction is vital, collaboration with community providers is also vital. Being able to respond to the needs of families on an ad hoc basis, such

as in response to DSR and CETR needs, is essential. Ensuring that a variety of provision to cater for short term specialist care is important, allowing support offers to fluctuate to meet need, and allowing services to support responsive care. Families need a way to provide their needs in the context of the opportunities they are trying to access - families are frustrated that provision is commissioned but they cannot find anything that groups children based on needs and interest etc (such as the healthy lives offer from PACC/Actio).

A third comment worth repeating here in full calls for a thorough **review of what is needed**, as well as how provision currently works.

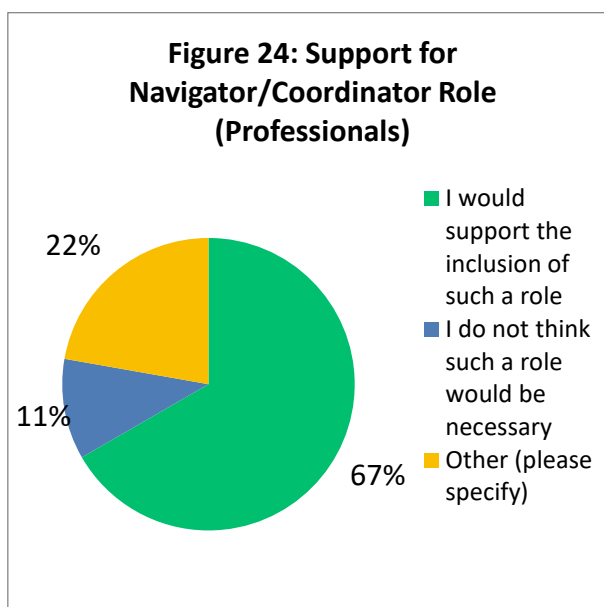
- “Services need to make sure they reach those in the greatest need as the priority. There should be some review and consistency of approach in relation to parental contribution to activities based on ability to pay. More collaboration with schools/colleges and potential partners to maximise the range of opportunities and also the potential for getting better value for money if reductions in venue costs could be negotiated. Possible collaboration with other local authorities for those children on county borders that could be reciprocal. could offer reduction in transport costs, and could avoid a situation where a child isn't able to participate due to their home location. Explore opportunities for additional external funding that could be attracted.”

#### Navigator/Coordinator Role Feedback

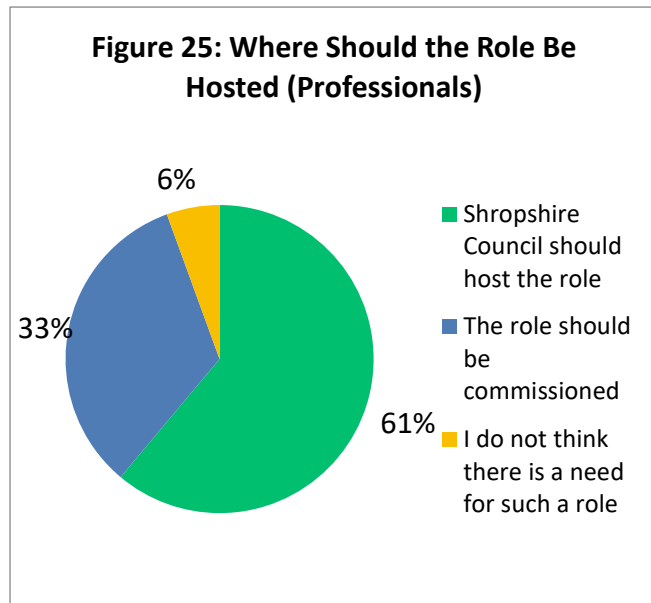
Professionals were the only group of respondents whose survey asked about whether adding a navigator, coordinator role to help people understand the various options on offer.

A majority of respondents (12) said that they would support such a role (see Figure 24). Four respondents chose “other” and their responses are helpful in considering the benefits and limitations of such a role:

- “PACC, parents and professionals already know what is available; the difficulty is having access, and the process.”
- “Social workers should be doing this but the system is disjointed and unclear currently.”
- “These people need to work with people with complex needs and understand person centred planning and personal budgets.”
- “This could be a good option to explore further. Wouldn't the local authority already be providing information and advice services so could be an extension of this with training. additional roles shouldn't mean additional costs that mean less activities/services for disabled children.”



Professionals were also asked for their feedback on where the best place would be to host a navigator/coordinator role, should it be introduced (see Figure 25). A majority of respondents (11) thought that Shropshire Council should host the role, though it should be noted that a majority of those respondents who selected this option (8) currently work for Shropshire Council. Two of the respondents who work for voluntary organisations said that the council should host the role, and three respondents who work for voluntary organisations and one council employee said the role should be commissioned. The remaining respondents had classed themselves as representatives of “other” organisations.



Six respondents provided further constructive comments on the prospect of adding a coordinator role. These are as follows:

- “Person would need to know and understand Shropshire area, resources, dynamic to access and have time to co-ordinate and plan with individual child(ren) and families.”
- “If Shropshire council have the contract for commissioning the short breaks, then it would be helpful if they hosted the role. I would like to understand more about the purpose of the role to give a fuller answer.”
- “This needs to sit in the community independent from the LA as they can then signpost more broadly and won’t be at risk of becoming absorbed into other LA activities. Families, and providers, will trust an independent role and this could be facilitated more cost efficiently through the community.”
- “I have Selected Shropshire Council but think it could fall into either.”
- “Shropshire Council need to commission this IN HOUSE otherwise there is a loss of oversight, accountability, quality and cost.”
- “The local authority should already be able to meet at least some level of this role within existing infrastructure via customer services/early help/family information. A role within the local authority will provide greater opportunity to flex according to changes without being tied up in contracts etc. It is likely to be more cost effective as the management costs and infrastructure costs will be absorbed. There is less risk - if it were part of a team of people, issues such as sickness... leave, etc. would have less impact.”

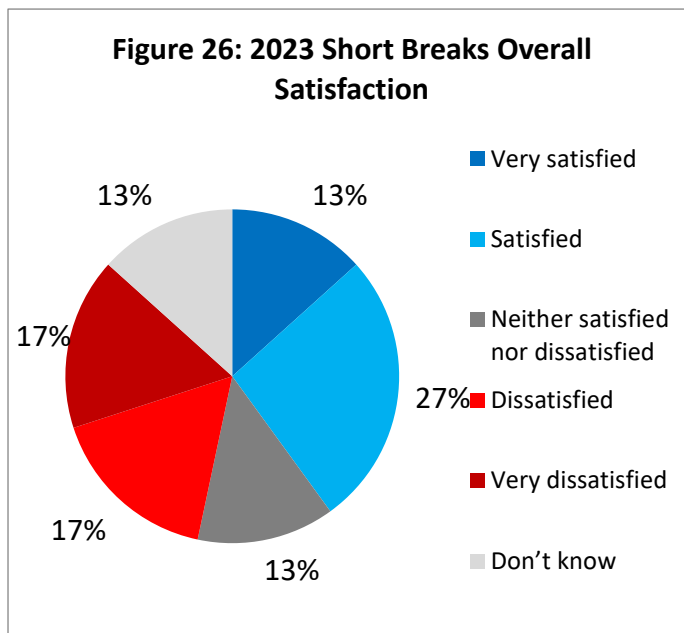
## 7 Additional Insights

### Overall Satisfaction with Short Breaks

One gap in the data provided by these surveys in a sense of whether satisfaction around short breaks has improved, or whether parent carers are highlighting similar key messages over time. A 2023 survey of 34 parent carers by Shropshire Council



indicates that satisfaction with short breaks may be about the same now that it was in that year. In 2023, around 40% of respondents reported being satisfied with short breaks, while 34% were dissatisfied (see Figure 26). While comparisons of such “overall” measures should be done cautiously, it is worth saying that this compares with slightly higher overall satisfaction (45%) and slightly lower dissatisfaction (33%) in an identical question asked of parent carers in the 2024 survey.



### Key Messages from Parent Carers

Another important comparison is made possible by a PACC summary of research they conducted with parent carers in three separate reports produced in 2013, 2015 and 2017. In a 2022 presentation, PACC summarised the key messages showing up across these three reports as follows:

- “Both residential and community based Short Breaks are valued by parent carers supporting a child with complex needs and are seen as important in improving the quality of family life.
- Residential and community based Short Breaks should offer quality outcomes for children and young people with complex needs in addition to providing a break from caring for parent carers, with a particular focus on preparation for adulthood
- The experience of requesting support should be transparent, positive and without judgment, recognising the impact on family life of caring for a child with complex needs and understanding how this results in a need for support
- Support should be person centred and able to respond to individual needs and connect individuals within their own community
- Staff should be well trained and consistent
- Regular, effective and timely communication between providers, commissioners and families is essential
- The residential and community based Short Breaks offer should be able to respond to local demand levels, including being able to respond to periods of increased demand such as school / college holiday periods.”

Several of these key messages have overlaps with the themes and key messages emerging from this report. For example, the fact that short breaks are highly valued by parent carers, the need for the approach to provision to be person-centred, and the importance of communication and highly trained and experienced staff.

This present report’s findings particularly emphasise the need to address issues around availability and access of short breaks, as well as to provide more options and choice. These messages are also supported by PACC’s previous reports. PACC’s 2022 consultation, for example, highlighted the following themes:

“Transport and location of service is an issue. This impacts families and the quality of the break. Need to join up services and join up families. ‘If you have to travel a long way to get a break of a couple of hours its not worth it.’ Services need to move out of Shrewsbury and closer to where families live.

Capacity – ‘there doesn’t feel like there are enough beds’ ‘there needs to be an understanding of need / demand and sufficient provision to meet it’ Need beds for emergencies – it is so disruptive for families when stays are cancelled – ‘we are all vulnerable families.’ Explore using other places to increase capacity and choice – Wingate Centre / Clwyd RDA.

Communication – ‘Contact only seems to happen if we initiate it’ Families need a single point of access and to know what is available ‘It took me ages to figure out what was suitable for us from the HAF programme.’ ‘It would be nice if somebody contacted us just to see how things are going’ – Better and more accessible information is needed and somebody to provide guidance and information for parent carers. ‘The thing that frustrates me is that I have no idea how long we will have to wait - I kinda cope – I feel misled, I just want a realistic timeframe.’”

Additional feedback on All In provided by Actio and made available by PACC provided similar support for the messages around the need for more options. For example:

- “Limited options in south of Shropshire for 4 years olds.”
- “More in North Shropshire, everything is really south of Shrewsbury.”
- “More notice and longer activities during school holidays where parents aren’t required.
- To have more activities around animals would be super helpful. A lot of the All in activities are centred around sport of some kind, which my son finds very difficult.”

### **Voices of Children and Young People**

The primary limitation in this report is the dearth of children and young people responding to the survey intended to gain their feedback on short breaks and what they would like to see provided. Thankfully, there are two sources of information that can help to fill this gap.

The first is a workshop that PACC recently conducted with their “Buddies” social group of young people aged 12 and above. This group of around 15-20 young people discussed activities that they would most like to participate in, and then voted on which they would most enjoy. Those activities receiving the most votes were theatre trips (12), basketball (16), and swimming (14).

A large youth survey of over 1,800 young people in Shropshire also provides some insights, as survey participants from specialist schools, TMBSS, Woodlands School, and Keystone Academy. For these students, going to friends’ houses (53%), going to parks (39%), attending clubs (17%), and using sports and leisure facilities (14%) were all popular activities they currently participate in.

## 8 Summary and Conclusion

This report presents the findings of a consultation in advance of recommissioning dedicated services to provide short breaks for children and young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs and their families in Shropshire. The consultation aimed to gather feedback from various stakeholders, such as parent carers, professionals, and young people themselves, on the current challenges and gaps in the existing provision, as well as the preferred model and outcomes for the new service.

### Summary

The key findings that emerged from the consultation were:

#### Respondents

- 70 parent carers, 22 professionals and 6 children and young people responded to surveys.
- Most children of parent carers responding to the survey (70%) are in specialist education.
- Parent carer respondents cover a good range of Shropshire in terms of their geographical location.
- 59% of professionals responding work for Shropshire Shropshire Council, and 27% work for voluntary organisations.

#### Feedback from Those Using Short Breaks

- Overall satisfaction among parent carers with short breaks was 45%, and among professionals was 40%.
- All In (term time and holiday provision) and holiday clubs provided by Action for Children were the programmes most used by parent carers in the sample. A slightly higher percentage of respondents for these three programmes reported being satisfied than reported being dissatisfied.
- Satisfaction for All In was higher among parents with children in mainstream education than among parents with children in specialist education.
- Top themes in comments among parent carers using short breaks were difficulty accessing provision and the lack of suitable activities and/or level of support.
- What is working well for parent carers: praise for staff and the quality of provision.
- What needs improvement for parent carers: more availability/accessibility, more options, and ensuring clear communication and ease of booking.

#### Feedback from Those Not Using Short Breaks

- Parent carers whose children are in mainstream education were more likely than other respondents to not have used short breaks.
- Top reasons for not using short breaks among parent carers were being unaware of support and services available, activities not being of interest, activities not being local, and travel being a barrier.

#### Health Needs/Direct Budgets/PAs

- Short breaks are important for meeting the health needs of parent carers and children and young people.
- 15 respondents in the survey receive a direct budget, and 12 use this to employ a PA.
- Key themes of comments on direct budgets are that PAs make a huge difference and that they are difficult to recruit.

#### Future of Short Breaks

- Cost of living pressures are impacting over 40% of parent carers in the survey, including difficulties with paying for transport and activities.
- Most important factors for parent carers in designing future short breaks are choice and a good range of provision (98%), the ability to meet complex needs (97%), 1 to 1 support (93%), and holiday provision (93%) were the biggest priorities emerging from these responses, followed closely by supporting the development of friendship groups (88%), and the location of the activity (86%).
- Most important factors for parent carers in commissioning short breaks are experienced and knowledgeable staff (100%), communication between provider and family (97%), experience and 'track record' (93%), staffing ratios (93%) and consistency in offer (92%). These were followed closely by being able to support the development of friendship groups (86%) and specialist and medically trained staff (84%).

#### Additional Insights

- Overall experiences of short breaks appear to have improved slightly since 2023.
- Key messages from parent carers about what is important in short breaks are similar to previous years, with more emphasis in this report on the need for more availability as well as choice/range of activities.
- Children and young people enjoy all kinds of activities, but a preference for activities such as basketball, swimming, theatre, and spending time with friends emerged as top interests in other data sources.

### **Conclusion**

Some conclusions can be drawn from the evidence gathered in this consultation, along with supporting information from PACC and a previous survey of parent carers. This report suggests that:

- Short breaks are highly valued by parent carers and provide vital support for families and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- There is extremely high demand for short breaks in Shropshire that is not fully being met by the number of short breaks available.
- Short breaks that are available are not meeting the range of need in the county, in particular for children and young people with more complex needs.
- While parent carers in particular who have accessed short breaks praise the current provision for their caring staff and the quality of activities provided, it is also clear from feedback that the current provision is fragmented, inconsistent, and difficult to access, resulting in frustration, stress, and unmet needs for many families.

- Future short breaks should be co-produced with service users and families, and in collaboration with professionals, and should adopt a person-centred approach that takes into account the range of needs and interests among children and young people eligible for the offer.

Many thanks are extended to the parent carers, children and young people, and professionals who took the time to participate in this consultation. Thanks to PACC for assisting with promoting the surveys, providing additional data that was useful for this analysis, and for arranging a workshop to speak with parent carers about the preliminary results of this report. This report will inform the work of the Children's and Young People Commissioning team and the future Shropshire Short Breaks offer.

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