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9th September 2011

Short Breaks Services in Bromley Parent Consultation

Introduction

Bromley Mencap is an independent registered charity working with and on behalf of disabled people. We are a member-led organisation and have over 1,500 members.

We run a wide range of services for disabled people of all ages, carers and families. We also campaign and provide support around representation to ensure the views of disabled people are heard and taken on board.

Bromley Mencap welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation exercise and we hope the following comments are useful. Our response has been informed using responses from our email consultation network, website and face to face discussions with parents/carers, children and young people and people providing respite services. However, it is worth noting that some families were unaware of services available under short break services, even though their child attended a special school.

Short break services

Members have acknowledged that the Borough has developed its short breaks services and welcome the fact that the new statutory duty may go some way to protect services. Bromley Mencap believes short breaks provide families with early help so they can cope better in times of stress and are less likely to need help from social services. Evidence from people using our own services shows that short breaks are vital to families and we are delighted the coalition government has agreed to continue investment in short breaks started under Labour's Aiming High for Disabled Children funding. However as the new Early Intervention Grant is not ring-fenced we would call on Bromley Council to take a local decision to ring-fence this money so it is targeted not only at families most in need but at all families of disabled children who need a short break.

For parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities, short breaks are an essential service that enables them to maintain their caring responsibilities and improve their quality of life. For children and young people it also provides them with opportunities to build relationships, grow as individuals and learn new things. Many parents see short breaks as preparation for independence.



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The introduction of the local offer was welcomed, particularly without the need for a further assessment. However, for some people it is difficult to understand the route they need to take.

For some families and individuals, specialist provision is seen as important, particularly when their child has complex needs. Equally some families also stressed the importance of being able to access mainstream provision as it aids integration of people with disabilities. Some families have fed back that they have experienced access problems with some universal services, thus adding to their dependence on specialist services. Examples include inappropriate changing facilities, poor equipment and the reluctance/inability of staff to offer support. This feedback was not limited to families with children with physical disabilities, but included those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. In short the feedback was that including universal services on the menu of options needs to be real.

With some 4000 families with children with disabilities in the Borough, we recognise that resources are limited and that on occasion; demand may exceed needs and aspirations. Having said that, parents wanted to stress the importance of the preventative benefits of short breaks and not simply be a crisis service. They also welcomed the proposed range of provision – daytime care, both in and outside their home, overnight care, both in and outside their home and access to educational and leisure services. Additionally some parents welcomed the proposal that breaks could be provided flexibly e.g. at evenings/weekends.

Eligibility Criteria

We support the use of the definition taken from the Equality Act 2010. However, some people reading the consultation documents and supporting information were unclear about their eligibility for different provision and how it is funded. This confusion may stem from the distinctions between universal, targeted and the local offer and the referral routes/assessment needed, as well as hourly allocations versus direct payments.

Parents also wanted reassurance that no changes would be made without a re-assessment

There was a suggestion that funding used for the local offer or additional specialist provision could be utilised flexibly to fund support staff, to enable parents to plan flexible breaks.



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Information

Information is a key issue for families. Getting clear, understandable information at the right time is key.

Feedback would indicate that some families are not getting information, whilst others receive it from more than once source. This did not seem to relate to the level of need of the child and this feedback from some families is obviously a concern in view of the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare Programme.

Therefore, developing some clear and simple information is important, possibly using easy read conventions.

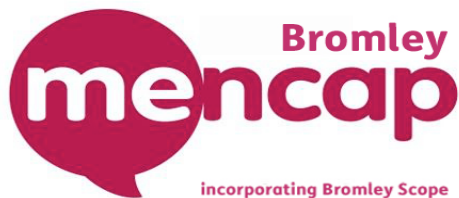
Given that we provide both information and services, we recognise that that we have a role in filling this need, both with the authority and other partners.

General

Bromley Mencap understands the financial context in which short break services now operates and acknowledges the Borough's investment in transforming these services. However, there are a number of areas that require ongoing work. These are:

- The development of a sitting service – when will it be available and how funded?
- Could childminding be formally developed to include an overnight provision? We believe that some childminders are approved by Ofsted for the provision of overnight care, but on an individual basis.
- Why can't parents accrue or bank hours that could be used for extended or even overnight stays?
- The transition from C&YP's services to A&C Services is a difficult time for parents, particularly if eligibility becomes an issue. Some parents felt that more flexibility with age cut off dates should be changed to match the end of education.
- Transport to and from respite is an issue for some families. This problem continues into Adults services.
- Clearly the transition period is a concern for many families. The current proposals to join ACS and CYP departments to become one should provide an excellent opportunity to address these concerns and ensure closer working leading to better outcomes for families.

The General section of the questionnaire asks if Bromley Council is doing enough to seek the views of parents and carers. Parent Voice is listed as a partner and is an excellent consultative group.



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Bromley Mencap is the largest member-led pan-disability organisation in the borough with 1,500 members. We have worked closely in partnership with Bromley Council for many years and our consultative responses are representative and well informed by families. More recently we have not had our responses acknowledged and have been unable to provide feedback to our members about the impact of our responses.

We would call on Bromley Council to ensure they consult as widely as possible and that the views of all representative groups are equally taken on board.

Conclusion

Timely and appropriate short breaks are key services that enable parents/carers to continue to fulfil their role as well as assisting children and young people to grow and learn.

We all need to raise awareness of the services available, the eligibility criteria and how families can access them. Getting information to families and empowering them to access services is a shared responsibility and welcome the opportunity to work with the Borough on this.

There are needs and issues e.g. services for families with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, who may not currently be eligible, but are clearly covered by the Equality Act definition and would benefit from a break. Families in these circumstances need clear information and if not eligible, signposted to organisations that may be able to help. This could include self funded services.

We recognise that universal services are available, but for many families, the stark reality is that the majority of individuals cannot access these services without support. With increasing numbers of children and young people with more complex needs, the Borough needs to ensure that universal and specialist services are accessible.

We hope the above information is useful. We look forward to acknowledgement of our submission and feedback on how the views of our members within this response have been taken on board.

Please feel free to contact me if you require further information or clarification.

Yours Sincerely

Malcolm Wood