

Bury Short Breaks Service Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

Bury's Short Breaks service is a vital preventative offer that enables disabled children and young people to access enriching activities, build independence, and sustain family resilience. Demand for SEND support in Bury has increased significantly over the past decade, with EHCP prevalence rising from 3.5% to 6.4% of the pupil population. This growth has been driven primarily by increases in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, reflecting national trends but at a higher local prevalence.

Despite this changing profile of need, the current short breaks model has remained broadly static. Provision continues to be weighted towards traditional group-based clubs and daytime activities, which do not align with the needs of a growing proportion of the cohort who require smaller group environments, higher staffing ratios, specialist skills, or more flexible and personalised support.

Feedback from parents and carers is generally positive, with high levels of satisfaction for some providers. However, there is a consistent minority reporting dissatisfaction, and analysis shows variation in quality, accessibility, and suitability of provision across the borough. Unit costs vary substantially between providers and direct payments, suggesting that the current market is not operating in a consistent or sustainable way.

Geographical analysis shows demand concentrated in areas of higher deprivation and in Bury's main population centres, but also highlights inequities in access and travel burden for some families. Demand patterns show a mismatch between when families most need support (evenings, weekends, school holidays) and when provision is predominantly available.

The key issue identified is not a lack of providers, but that the current model of provision works well for a shrinking proportion of the SEND cohort. Recommissioning presents an opportunity to reshape the market so that it better reflects current and future needs, supports neighbourhood working, promotes inclusion in universal and community settings, and ensures financial sustainability.

Key messages

- EHCP prevalence in Bury has increased from 3.5% in 2015/16 to 6.4% in 2024/25 and is higher than the national average.

- The primary needs of children and young people with SEND in Bury are SEMH, ASD, Moderate LD and Specific LD, which together account for over 80% of need.
- The Short Breaks model in Bury is structured around a graduated approach from universal provision to complex specialist support and is delivered through commissioned services and Direct Payments.
- Parent and carer feedback is largely positive, with 87% recommending their provider, though satisfaction varies across providers and some families report dissatisfaction.
- There is substantial variation in unit cost between providers and Direct Payments.
- Demand for Short Breaks is concentrated in main population centres and correlates with areas of higher deprivation.
- The projected population change for children and young people in Bury over the next decade is minimal, and SEND demand growth is forecast at 1.4% over five years.
- The service operates within a clear statutory and policy framework which recognises short breaks as a preventative and supportive service for families.

Recommendations

1. Recommission the Short Breaks service in line with the graduated model set out in this assessment.
2. Ensure the recommissioned service continues to support delivery of statutory duties under the Children Act, Short Breaks Regulations, SEND Code of Practice and associated legislation.
3. Consider the variation in unit costs between providers and Direct Payments as part of the commissioning and pricing approach.
4. Take account of the geographical distribution of demand across the borough when designing future provision.
5. Use parent and carer feedback, including areas of dissatisfaction, to inform service improvement.
6. Ensure the recommissioned service is responsive to the current profile of SEND need in Bury.
7. Monitor financial performance to address the projected overspend position.

Context and Background

a. Service overview

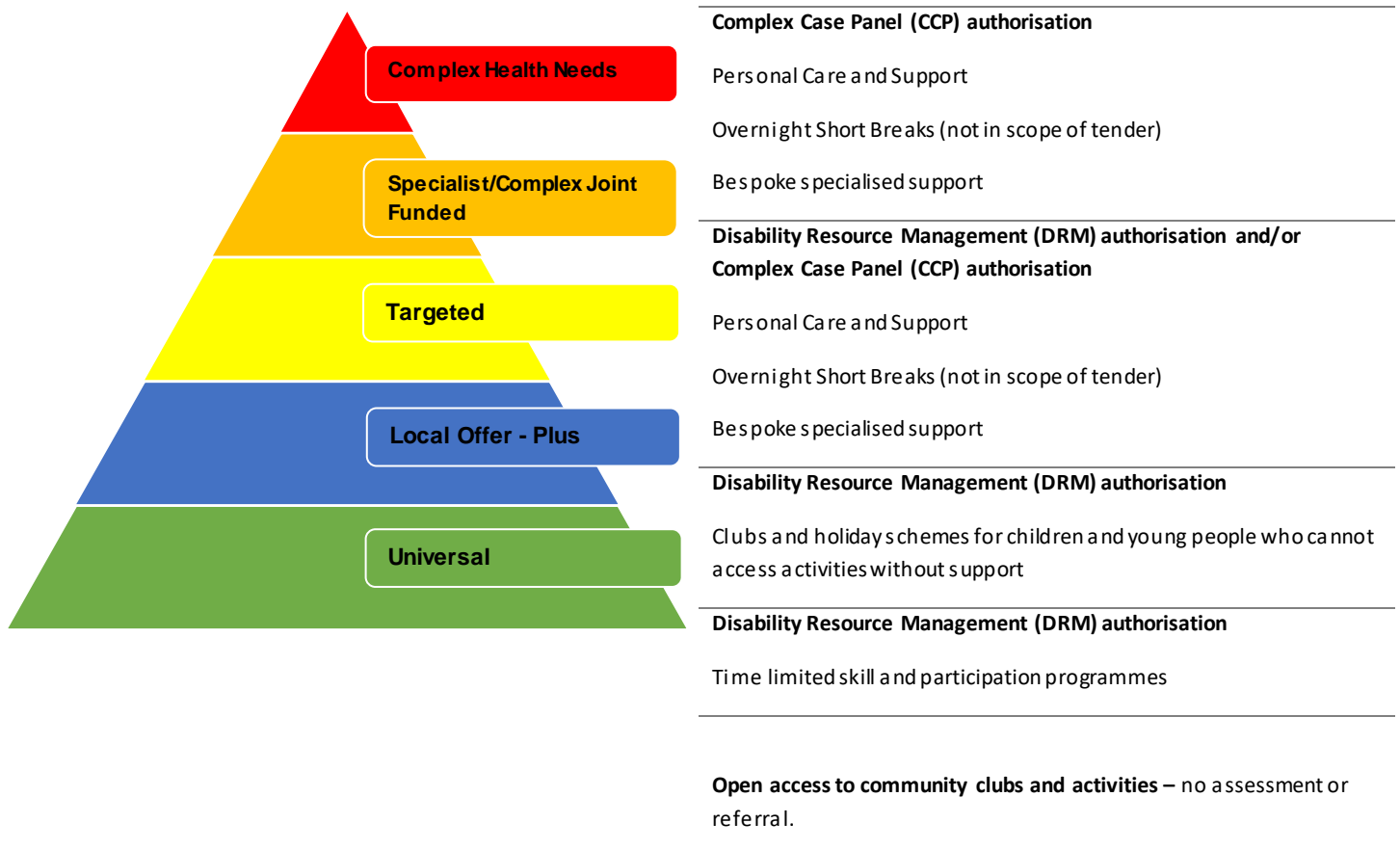
The Bury Short Breaks service supports children and young people up to 17 years old, residing in Bury, and have one or more of the following:

- A permanent and substantial disability, which may be physical, learning, sensory and communication
- A chronic life limiting illness, i.e. a child's physical health is serious and deteriorating
- A life threatening or terminal illness

The Short Breaks service enables children and young people to have the choice and opportunities to be included in doing things they enjoy, have fun, make friends and social connections, enhance their skills, provide learning opportunities and prepare them for adulthood.

The service aims to improve the range and choice and for community clubs and activities to be accessible for more children and young people with disabilities whilst recognising that a smaller number of children and young people will need access to good quality specialist and targeted services. The current Short Breaks model is defined as categories of need and demonstrates the aspiration to improve and enable access to the Local Offer and Universal services. To make this model a reality, the Council focuses on a combination of commissioned services and Direct Payments. The model is shown in Diagram 1 below:

Diagram 1 – the Model



The different types of Short Breaks services are graduated to meet the different needs of individual children and young people with the emphasis on enabling choice, community access and preparation for independence, and are summarised as below:

The services provided under this Contract assist the Council with their responsibilities under the following legislation and guidance:

- The Children Act 1989, section 17 (10) to provide services for children who are defined as being in need. A child is defined as being in need if:
 - He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority.
 - His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision for him/her of such services or

Complex Health Needs
Individual packages of care for children and young people with significant health and care needs which are funded via Continuing Care (CC). They will very likely need high levels of adult support to keep them safe and specially trained staff to meet their needs.
Specialist / Complex Joint Funded
Individual packages of care for those children and young people who have significant levels of need but may not meet the threshold for CC funding and/or are joint funded with health and/or education. It is very likely they will need high levels of adult staff support to keep them safe.
Targeted
These are aimed at children and young people who need additional support access provision or who may need groups and services specifically designed to meet their needs. Staff may need specific training to meet individual needs and respond in cases of emergency.
Local Offer – plus
Increase the access to short breaks in the community with an enhanced Local Offer which improves the skills and confidence of children and young people and increases participation.
Universal
Clubs, groups and leisure activities that are routinely available and can be accessed by children/young people and their families such as scouts, brownies, sports, dance, drama, places of special interest.

- He/she is disabled.

- The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011.
- The Care Act 2014.
- The Children and Families Act 2014.
- The NHS and Community Care Act 1990.
- The Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, section 8.
- The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000.
- Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019.
- NICE standards as they relate to the identified needs of the child.
- SEND Code of Practice 2015.

- Continuing Care national framework for children and young people (2016).

Any label does not paint the full picture of a child or family and individual circumstances must always be taken into account. The Services within this specification will be commissioned for disabled children and young people who will typically include the following groups:

- a. Children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Condition
 - b. Children and young people with complex Social Communication disorders
 - c. Children and young people with a severe or profound Learning Disability
 - d. Children and young people with a severe Physical Disability
 - e. Children and young people with a substantial degree of Sensory Impairment
 - f. Children and young people with other complex medical health conditions
 - g. Children with learning disabilities unable to access mainstream activities
 - h. Children and young people who do not fall into Categories above (a-g), but are nevertheless disabled under the Children Act 1989 (which the Short Breaks Regulations state should be used with the context of the short breaks duty).
- Policy and strategic context

A strong SEND short-breaks offer is nationally recognised as a vital component of effective children's services, helping local authorities meet statutory duties and support better outcomes for disabled children and their families.

The [Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011](#) require councils to provide a range of short breaks that are responsive to local needs and promote family resilience. The guidance for short breaks underscores that such provision helps carers to continue (or more effectively) care for disabled children ([DCSF, 2010](#)). Under the [SEND Code of Practice \(2015\)](#), short breaks contribute to inclusion, positive experiences, and improved wellbeing for children and young people with disabilities; they also help reduce parental stress and prevent family breakdown.

Within the Area SEND Inspection Framework used by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC), inspectors assess the sufficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness of support for disabled children, including short breaks, as part of evaluating local authorities' SEND arrangements ([Ofsted, CQC, 2025](#)). Taken together, these national expectations position short breaks as an essential preventative and supportive service that underpins stability, promotes independence, and ensures families receive timely and equitable support.

In Bury, the need for a robust Short Breaks service is especially pressing given local data on demand for SEND support and the rapidly increasing demand. With a SEND population comprising a mix of needs, including speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCN), autism/ASD, moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) issues, many families face significant ongoing caring responsibilities ([Bury Council, GM ICP, 2023](#)). Moreover, Bury Council's strategic commitment to inclusive provision via its Graduated Approach means ensuring that disabled children and young people access the right support in the right place and at the right time, across education, health, and social care ([Bury Council, 2025](#)).

Short Breaks play a critical role not only in offering disabled children opportunities for social inclusion, autonomy, development and enjoyment — supporting a sense of belonging outside school — but also relieve pressure on families, helping carers to sustain support at

home. This aligns directly with Bury Council’s ambition of enabling equitable access to support for all young people, regardless of disability or need.

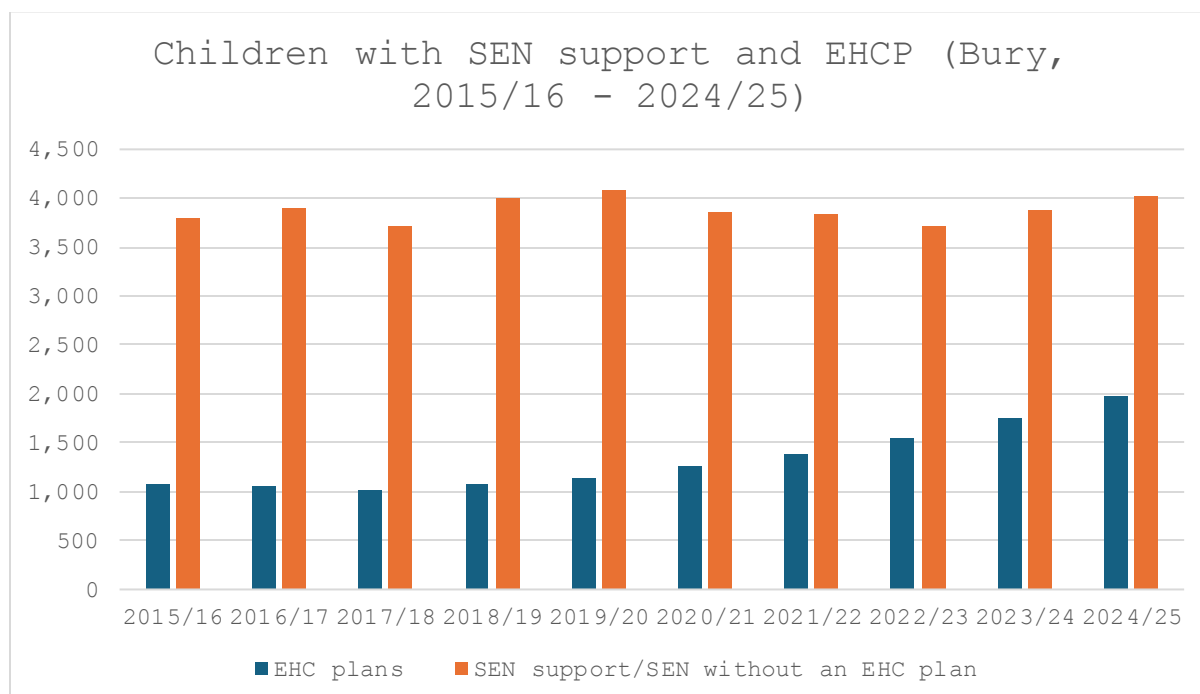
- Purpose of recommissioning

Bury Council is looking to recommission the Short Breaks service as its contract with the current provider of the service is coming to an end. In a landscape of increasing demand and complexity of needs, Bury Council is looking to commission a Short Breaks service that is flexible in meeting the needs of families and takes a strengths-based approach in enabling children and young people to have the choice and opportunities to be included in doing things they enjoy, have fun, make friends and social connections, enhance their skills, provide learning opportunities and prepare them for adulthood. Furthermore, Bury Council is aiming to embed the neighbourhood working approach within the newly commissioned service, ensuring that the Short Breaks service is linking in and working closely with wider support service for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

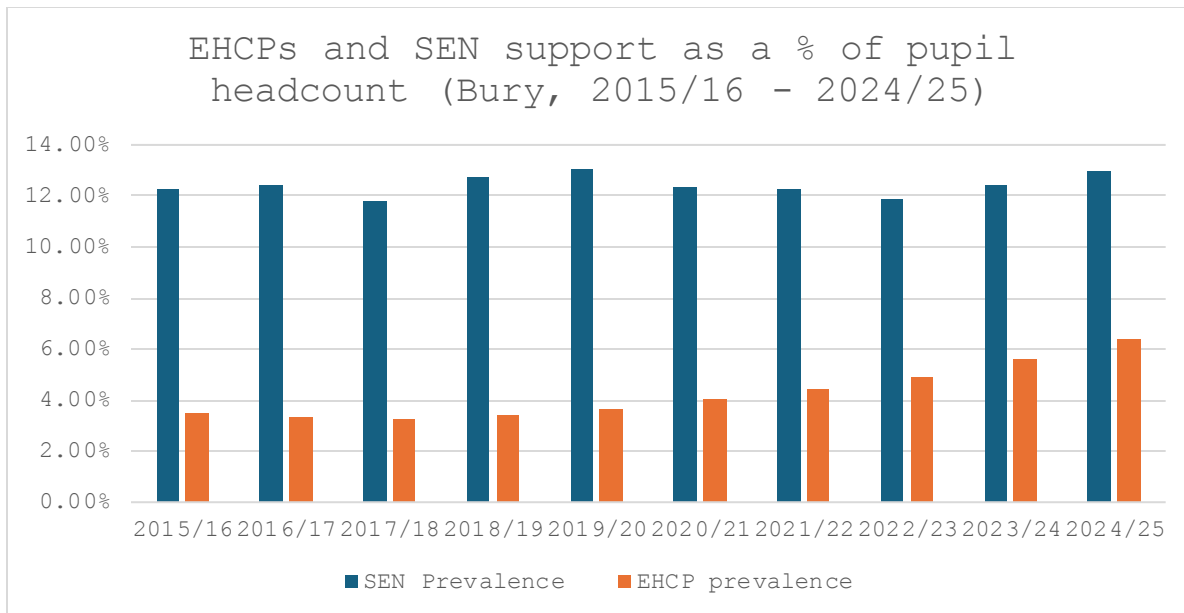
Demographic and Needs Analysis

a. Demand

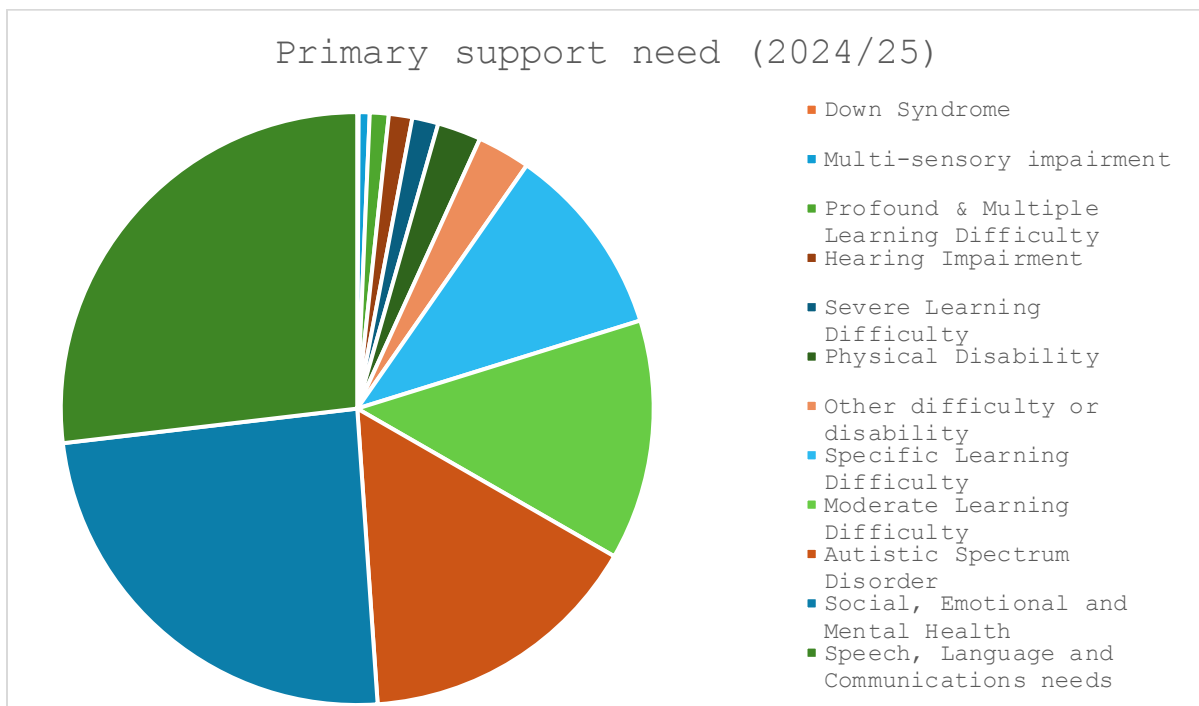
In 2024/25 there were 5,989 children and young people in Bury with either an SEN support need or an EHCP in place. The chart below shows the change in number of EHCPs and SEN support needs over recent years. The number of EHCPs in place has almost doubled since 2016, while the number of SEN support places has remained constant ([DfE 2025](#)). Our own data shows there are now substantially more EHCPs in place across the borough.



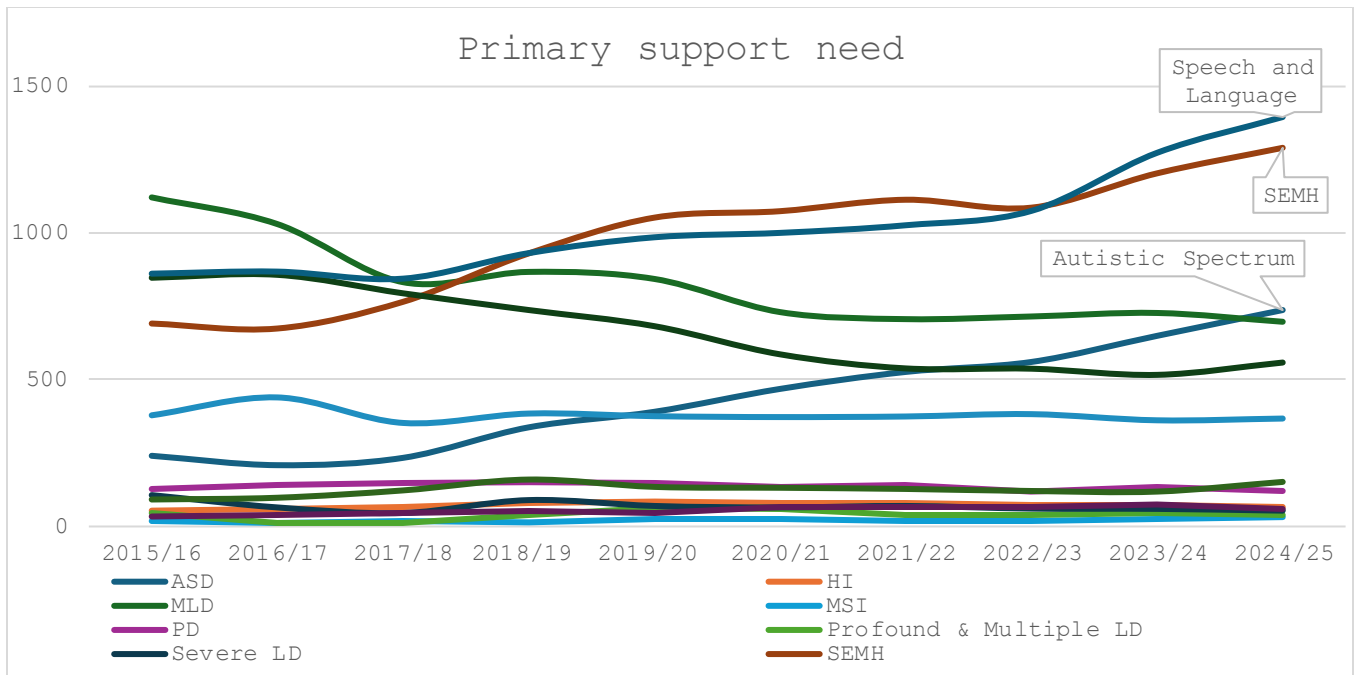
Over the same time period, the total number of pupils in Bury has remained steady – as such, EHCP prevalence has grown from being 3.5% in 2015/16 to 6.4% in 2024/25. This is over 1% point greater than the national average ([DfE 2025](#)). The prevalence of SEN support has remained steady at around 12% of total pupils



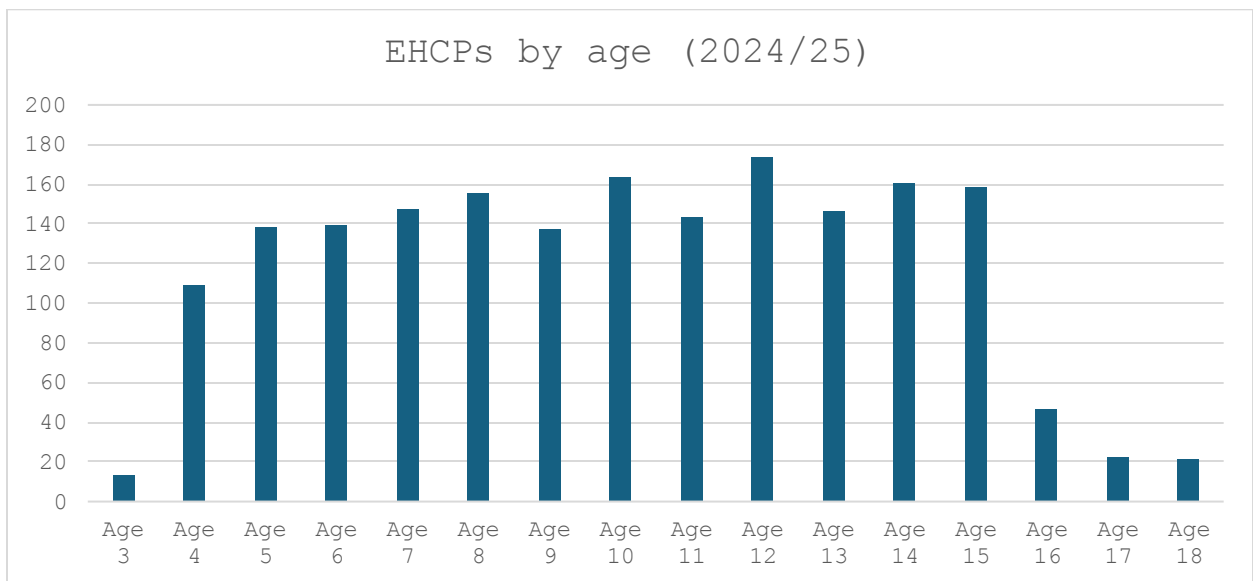
The overall profile of need has remained constant across the borough and broadly follows national patterns. Over 80% of primary needs sit across four categories, Social, Emotional and Mental Health, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Moderate LD and Specific LD (DfE 2025). SEMH and ASD have both driven recent demand increases for EHCPs, which again aligns with national patterns.



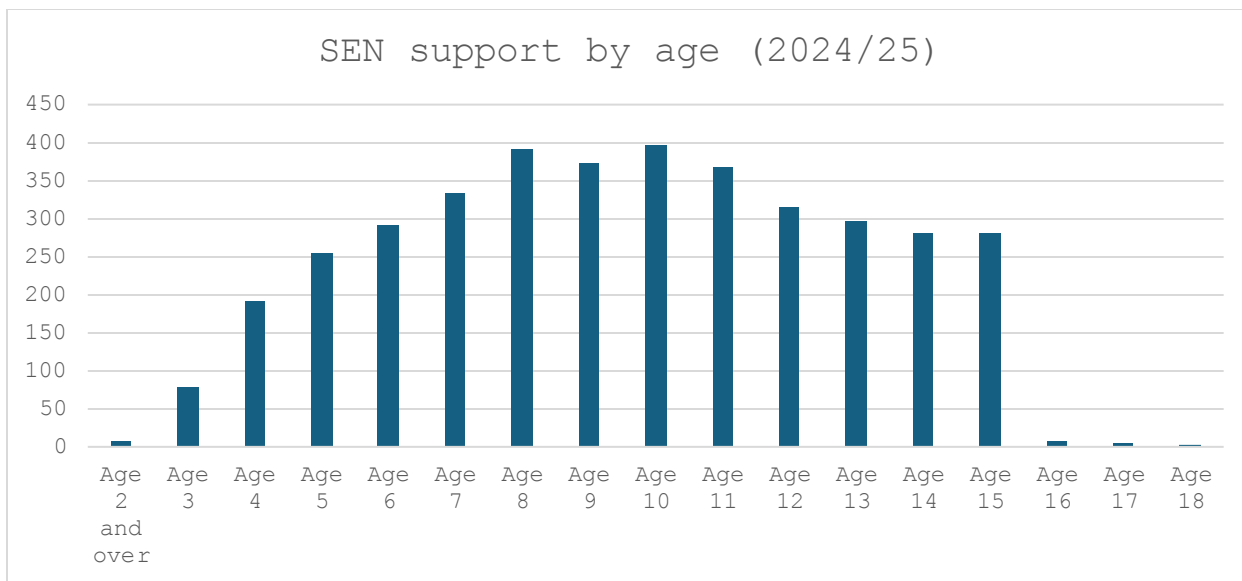
The chart below highlights how this distribution has changes over recent years (DfE 2025):



EHCP demand increase sharply at age 4, the first year of the KS1, and then increased steadily up to KS2 (age 8), and declines sharply in post-16s. Demand is spread evenly between these two phases ([DfE 2025](#)).



SEN support increases steadily through KS1 and declines at a similar rate through secondary education.



The majority of children and young people with a long-term disability (EHCP or SEN support need) are male. 72% of children and young people with an EHCP are male and 60% of those with SEN support male (NB – does not sum to totals reported above due to data quality issues).

	EHCP	SEN Support	TOTAL
Female	531(28%)	1,543 (40%)	2,074 (36%)
Male	1,347 (72%)	2,336 (60%)	3,683 (64%)

b. Forecasting future needs

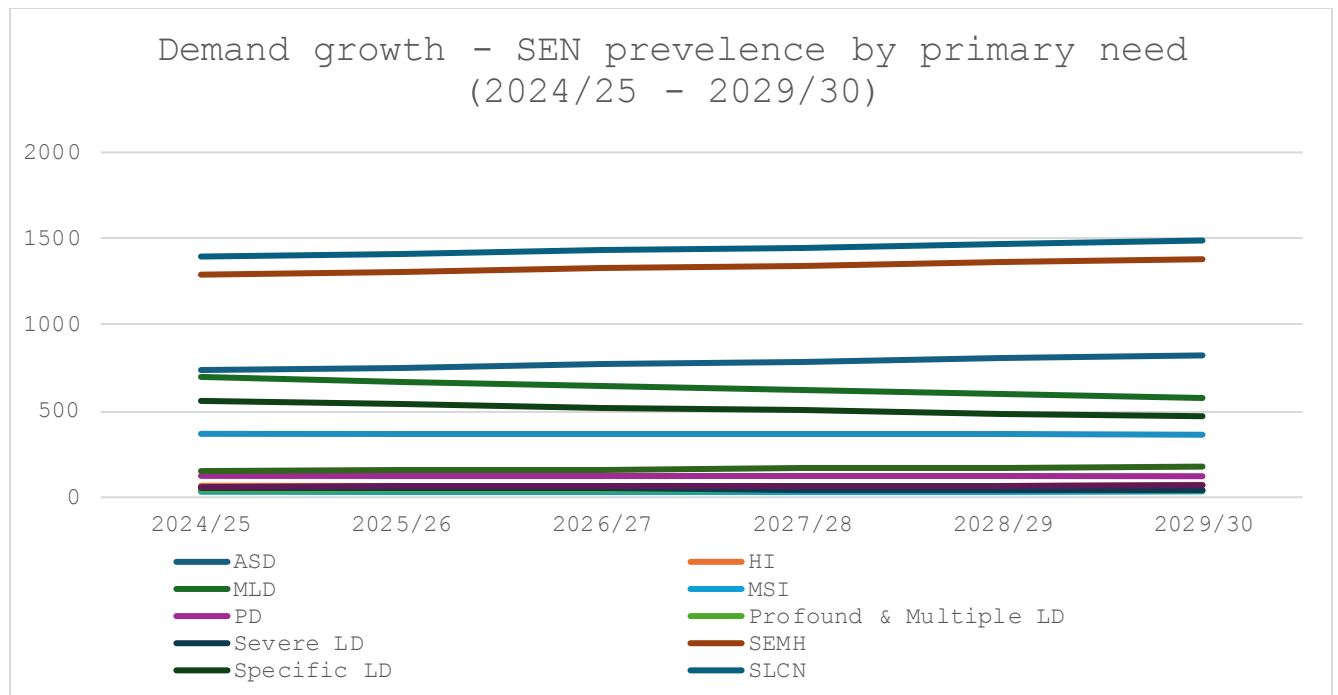
ONS population projections show that the number of children and young people in Bury will increase at a minimal rate over the next decade. The population aged 0 – 25 years will increase by just 1.42%, with sizable declines in some age groups and the majority of the growth driven by people aged 20-25 ([ONS 2023](#)).

	2023	2033	Number	% change
0-4 years	11,242	11,646	404	3.59%
5-9 years	12,335	11,801	-534	-4.33%
10-14 years	13,018	11,885	-1,133	-8.70%
15-19 years	11,230	11,731	501	4.46%
20-25 years	11,713	13,322	1,609	13.74%
Total	59,538	60,385	847	1.42%

Given that the majority of SEN demand comes from the school age population, it is possible that demand for short-breaks (and support for disabled children and young people) will decline over the next decade.

Additionally, it is likely that future national policy changes, as well as the councils continued focus on a graduated approach to promoting prevention and early intervention will lessen total demand/demand growth in future years.

As we such, we are forecasting that total demand (EHCP and SEN support) will increase at a rate of 1.4% over the next five years, and patterns in primary support type will become entrenched.

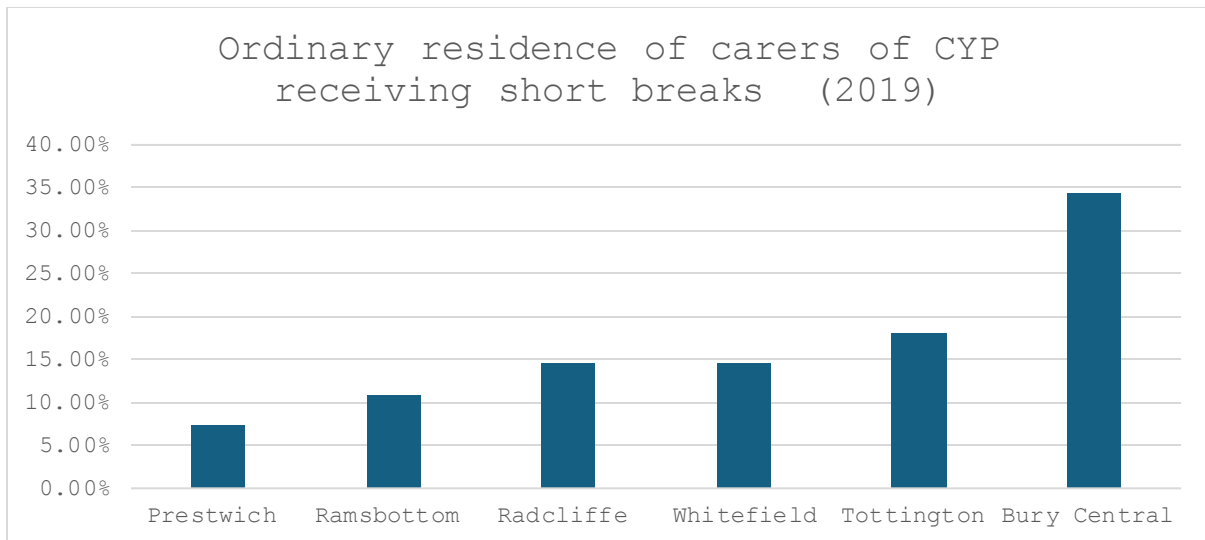


Current Service Provision

There are currently four short break providers working in Bury (Action for Children, Together Trust, Carers Trust 4all and the New Kershaw Centre) – we also award direct payments to help promote self-directed support.

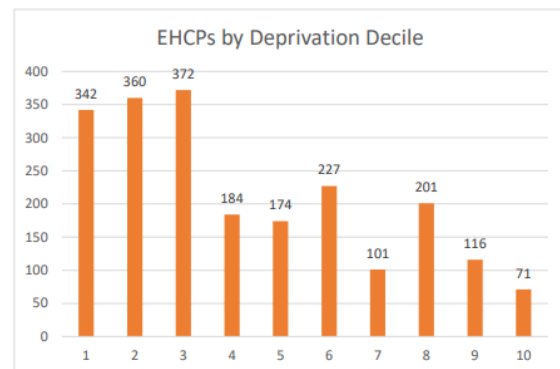
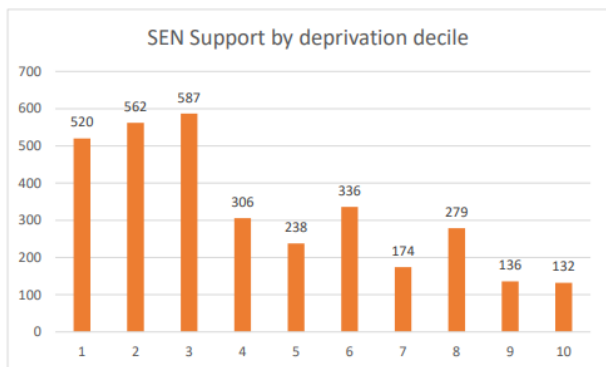
a. Demand distribution

The majority of Children and Young People who use short breaks services across the borough of Bury live in Bury Central, which is the main population hub in the borough. There five other main population centres in Bury, that account for two-thirds of Short Breaks demand. The prevalences set out in the chart below do not reflect population distribution, though it is likely that this is a reflection of survey completion rates rather than distribution of demand.



As is the case nationally and regionally, SEN and EHCP prevalence aligns with relative deprivation.

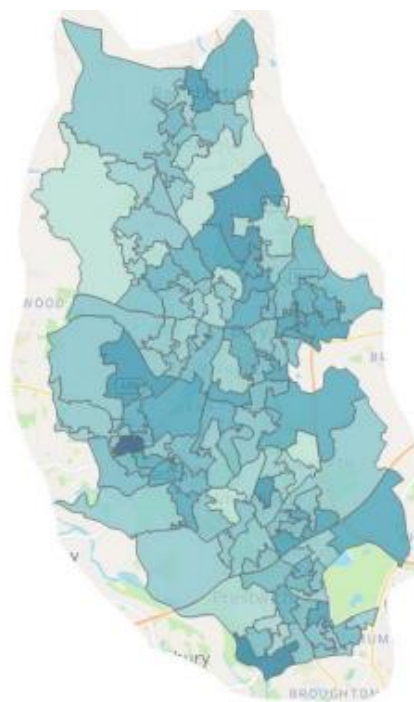
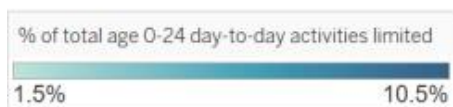
The majority of demand (~50%) is located within the three most deprived deciles ([Bury SEND JSNA](#)):



This is reflected in the overall distribution of disability across the borough. The map below shows the % of people aged 0 -24 with a self-reported Limiting Long-Term Illness (LLTI) by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA).

The census question regarding disability changed in 2021 to collect data that aligns more closely with the definition of disability in the Equality Act (2010). The Equality Act defines an individual as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

This change in definition between the years 2011 and 2021, may have had an impact on the number of people identified as disabled in Census 2021. The prevalence of LLTI in 0 to 25 year olds in Bury ranges by LSOA from 1.5% to 10.5%. Whilst there are some areas of correlation with our deprived areas there is still evidence of higher concentrations of LLTI prevalence across most LSOAs.



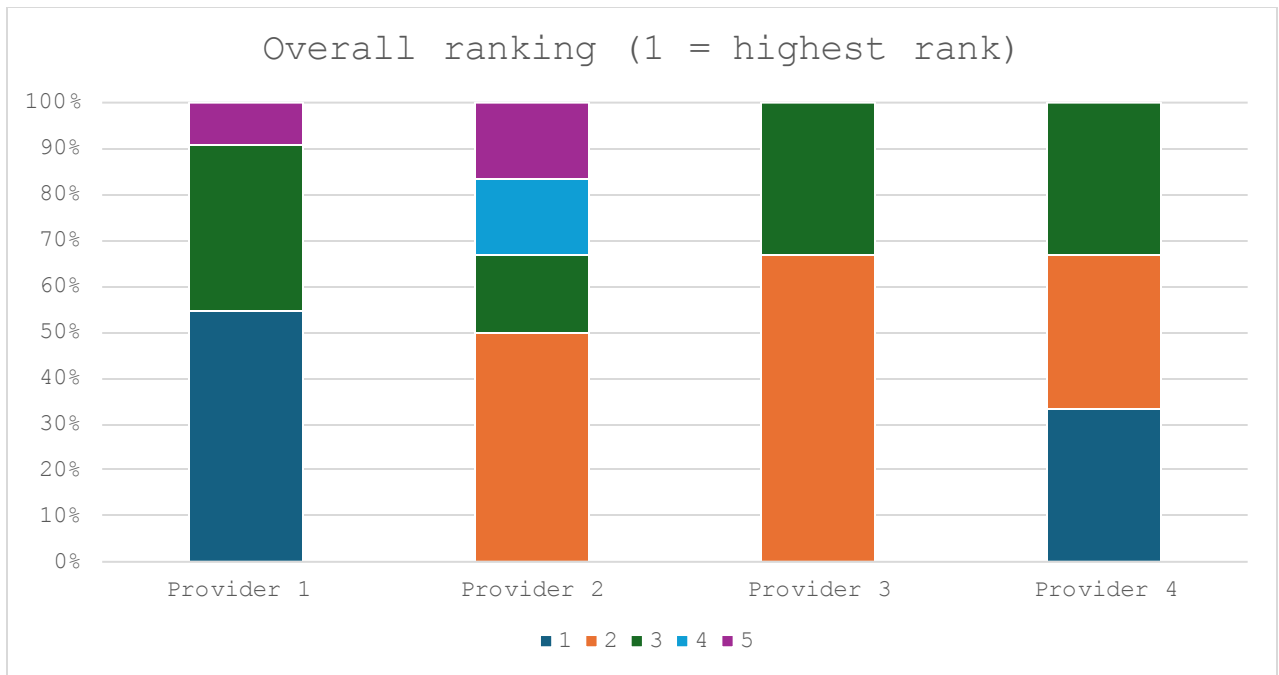
b. Provider performance and feedback

Parents and carers were surveyed about their experiences and views of four short breaks providers and direct payments.

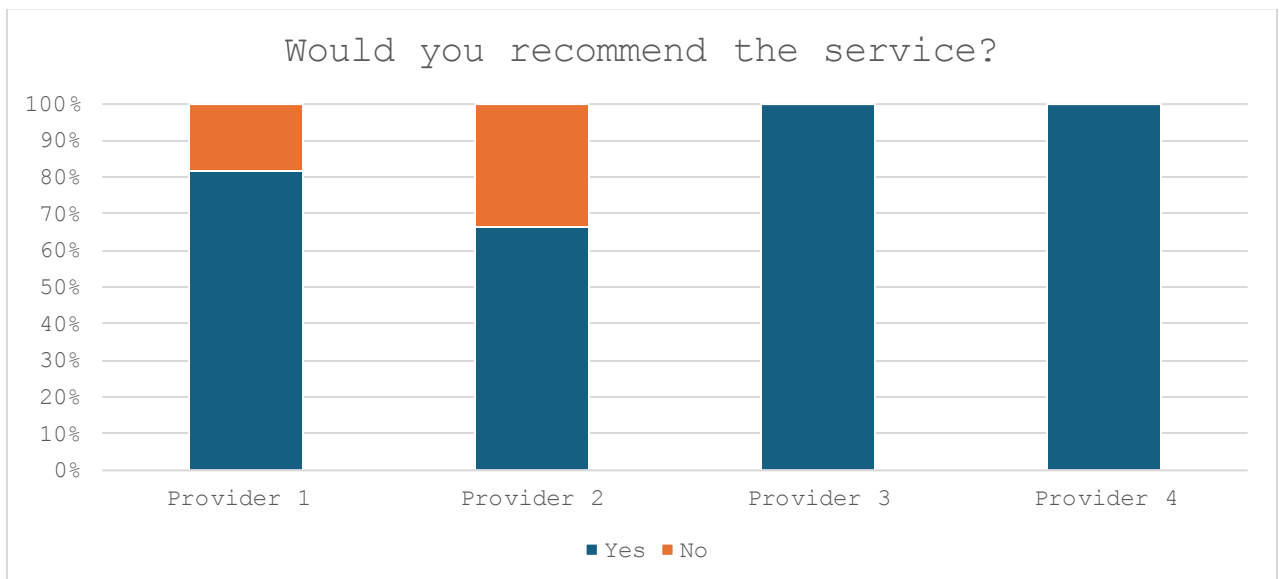
Overall, feedback received from parents and carers has been positive, though there is some clear variation between providers. The charts and commentary on the following pages sets this out in more detail.

On the key metric of overall satisfaction with services, we asked (on a sliding scale of 1-5 where 1 = highest satisfaction) the extent to which parents and carers were satisfied with their provider.

Over 50% of parents and carers using Provider 1 gave it the highest rating – across the borough and all providers, almost 1 in 5 gave their provider the highest rating. However, there is a small but substantial group who are clearly dissatisfied with the provision they have received.



The majority of respondents (87%) said they would recommend the short breaks provider they had used. A relatively small proportion of those who had used Provider 1 and 2 said they would not recommend the service – this is reflected in data about the proportion of parents who would recommend different providers.



Gap Analysis

a. Service Coverage Gaps

The geographical analysis shows that the majority of children and young people accessing Short Breaks live in Bury Central and the other main population centres in the borough. The distribution of demand does not fully reflect overall population distribution, though it is noted that this may be influenced by survey completion rates.

The prevalence of limiting long-term illness (LLTI) amongst 0–25 year olds varies significantly by Lower Super Output Area, ranging from 1.5% to 10.5%. There is evidence of higher concentrations of LLTI across many LSOAs, including but not limited to areas of deprivation.

This indicates variation in levels of disability across the borough alongside variation in where current Short Breaks demand is recorded.

b. Service Design Gaps

The Short Breaks model in Bury is structured around a graduated pathway from universal access through to specialist and complex provision, with an emphasis on enabling children and young people to access community activities wherever possible. This is delivered through a combination of commissioned services and Direct Payments.

The needs profile of children and young people with SEND in Bury shows that over 80% of primary needs are accounted for by SEMH, ASD, Moderate LD and Specific LD. EHCP prevalence has increased significantly over recent years and is now above the national average.

This highlights the importance of ensuring that the Short Breaks offer continues to operate in a way that aligns with the current profile of need across the borough.

c. Capacity and Workforce Gaps

There are currently four commissioned Short Breaks providers operating in Bury alongside the use of Direct Payments. Parent and carer feedback shows variation in satisfaction between providers, with a small but notable group of families reporting dissatisfaction.

Financial analysis shows substantial variation in unit cost between providers and Direct Payments. The overall budget position for 2025/26 indicates a small projected overspend.

This demonstrates variation in delivery costs and performance across the current provider market.

d. Equity Gaps

Analysis shows that SEN and EHCP prevalence aligns with relative deprivation and that approximately half of Short Breaks demand is located within the three most deprived deciles.

The distribution of LLTI prevalence across LSOAs also shows that disability is present across the borough with varying levels of concentration.

This indicates that demand for Short Breaks exists across different parts of the borough and across communities with differing levels of deprivation.

e. Systemic Issues

The Short Breaks service operates within a complex legislative and policy framework and is delivered through a combination of commissioned provision and Direct Payments, authorised through Disability Resource Management (DRM) and, where required, the Complex Case Panel (CCP).

The model relies on enabling access to universal and community provision where appropriate, alongside targeted and specialist support. The needs assessment shows a changing profile of SEND demand and increasing EHCP prevalence over time.

This context highlights the importance of ensuring that commissioning arrangements continue to support the graduated model and statutory responsibilities set out in this document.

Market Analysis

Financial Overview

This year (2025/26) the agreed budget for short breaks is £2.4 million. We are estimating a small overspend of £28,000.

	Budget 2025/2026	Estimate	Health Contribution	Total	Under / (Overspend)
Direct Payments	£450,000	646,655	£53,930	£533,047	(£83,047)
Commissioned Services	£2,009,300	2,156,528	£202,221	£1,954,308	£54,992
TOTAL	£2,459,300	2,803,183	£256,151	£2,487,355	(£28,055)

There is a substantial variation in unit cost between providers and direct payments:

	Unit Cost
Direct Payments	£6,764
Provider 1	£7,720
Provider 2	£21,378

Stakeholder Engagement

There is an active Parent Carer Forum and multiple consultation events will be held as part of the commissioning process.

Conclusions

The Short Breaks service in Bury is an established and valued offer that supports disabled children, young people and their families and contributes to the council's statutory responsibilities.

This needs assessment demonstrates significant growth in EHCP prevalence, a clear profile of SEND need, positive but varied feedback from families, geographical patterns of demand, and financial considerations that must inform future commissioning.

The recommissioning of the service provides an opportunity to ensure that the Short Breaks offer in Bury continues to meet local need, operates within available resources, and supports families in line with statutory guidance and the council's strategic approach.