

Overnight short breaks for people with learning disabilities and/or autism

For consideration by:

Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission

Date: 27 August 2026

Lead director: Kate Galoppi

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Summary

- 1.1** Short breaks are an important part of Leicester's support offer for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism (LDA) and their unpaid carers. They help unpaid carers maintain their wellbeing and continue in their caring role, whilst providing people with opportunities for independence, social inclusion, community participation and meaningful activities.
- 1.2** Short breaks can be delivered in a variety of ways, including overnight stays in residential care, Shared Lives, supported living, day opportunities, domiciliary care and Direct Payments.
- 1.3** People with learning disabilities and/or autism in Leicester already access short breaks through a range of provision. However, engagement with unpaid carers, families, people who draw on support and operational teams identified opportunities to improve the overnight short breaks offer and make information about available support clearer and easier to access.
- 1.4** The recommendations set out in this report are informed by evidence from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and a review of short break activity, utilisation and demand across the city (Appendix A).
- 1.5** Work is already underway to improve information and access to support. A dedicated joint health and social care funded Short Breaks Commissioner will lead the development of an accessible short breaks directory, setting out the available provision, eligibility criteria and routes into support. This work is being delivered in partnership with the Learning Disabilities and Autism Collaborative.
- 1.6** The review found that a range of short break provision is already available and being used, the provider market is relatively stable, and there are opportunities to make better use of existing provision. It also identified the need for improved forecasting, data quality and planning across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care to support future commissioning decisions.
- 1.7** Feedback from unpaid carers and people who draw on support highlighted:
- uncertainty about eligibility and charging arrangements;
 - difficulties finding clear information about available support;
 - the importance of accessible, person-centred and enjoyable short breaks;
 - the importance of maintaining independence and supporting family wellbeing.

1.8 The review also identified a number of areas requiring improvement:

- stronger forecasting and commissioning intelligence between Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care;
- improved understanding of unmet need;
- a wider range of culturally responsive overnight short breaks and options for younger adults;
- provision that can better meet complex environmental, sensory and behavioural support needs;
- improved understanding of future demand from autistic people with complex needs.

1.9 If these issues are not addressed, there is a risk that unpaid carers may be less able to sustain their caring role, increasing the likelihood of crisis support and emergency placements. There is also a risk that future commissioning decisions will be made without a clear understanding of demand, unmet need, market capacity and future service requirements.

1.10 This report presents the findings of the short breaks review and identifies a number of areas that Members may wish to consider. The report invites the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission to review the evidence and provide any recommendations that the Lead Member may wish to take into account before determining future priorities for the development of the Leicester's overnight short breaks offer for people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

1.11 The proposed programme will strengthen Leicester's short breaks offer by improving access to information, supporting unpaid carers, improving commissioning intelligence and ensuring future decisions are informed by a robust understanding of need, demand and market capacity. It will help ensure Leicester's short breaks offer remains accessible, responsive and sustainable for people with learning disabilities and/or autism and their unpaid carers.

2. Matters for Scrutiny Consideration

Scrutiny is asked to:

2.1 Comment on the overall direction of travel for the development of Leicester's short breaks offer for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism.

2.2 Comment on the development of a clearer and more consistent pathway into overnight short breaks for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, including a single referral, brokerage and commissioning approach. The pathway will be developed during 2026-2027 with implementation by March 2027.

2.3 Comment on the publication and promotion of a co-produced Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Adult Short Breaks Directory by Autumn/Winter 2026. The directory will be produced in accessible formats and widely promoted to improve awareness of available support.

2.4 Comment on the implementation of a Short Breaks Improvement Plan to strengthen data quality, forecasting, performance reporting, commissioning intelligence and understanding of unmet need across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care.

2.5 Comment on the development of a joint children's and adults' short breaks options appraisal to improve transition planning and explore how future short break provision can better meet the needs of young people aged 14-25. The options appraisal will be completed in Autumn/Winter 2026 for leadership review by the end of January 2027.

2.6 Support the development of a specialist autism short breaks options appraisal, co-produced with the LDA Collaborative, unpaid carers and people who draw on support, to improve understanding of future demand and potential service requirements for autistic people with complex needs. This work will be led by the jointly funded LLR Short Breaks Commissioner currently in the process of being appointed.

2.7 Provide any additional recommendations that Lead Member may wish to consider before making decisions regarding future commissioning priorities.

3. Background and options with supporting evidence

3.1 Short breaks are recognised as a vitally important way of keeping people safe and well, both unpaid carers and people who draw on the support. They can help unpaid carers sustain caring responsibilities, prevent crisis, improve wellbeing as well as supporting the people who use them to access opportunities that promote independence, wellbeing, socialising and fun activities. Improving the short breaks offer is a key priority for Leicester City Council and forms part of the wider programme of improvement following the 2025 CQC inspection.

3.2 The Care Act 2014 places responsibilities on local authorities to assess needs, support unpaid carers and promote wellbeing - overnight short breaks form an important part of this preventative offer. Leicester's population is highly culturally diverse, so for overnight short breaks a "one size fits all" approach is unlikely to meet current and future need - short breaks support will need to be more flexible and responsive. The short breaks that the Council has on offer will need to be person centred, culturally competent, safe and an enjoyable positive experience for the person using it.

3.3 The recently updated chapters for Learning Disabilities and Autism in the Leicester City Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides the strongest evidence base Leicester has had to date regarding the needs of people with learning disabilities and autistic people. This work identifies a number of areas that are relevant to the short breaks and support the thinking for the proposals set out in this report. The main issues identified in the JSNA that impact on the work include:

- ongoing health inequalities;
- barriers to accessing support;
- increasing demand for services;
- unmet need;
- importance of support for unpaid carers;

- a need for accessible and culturally responsive support

3.4 To build on these themes taken from the JSNA, a detailed review of short breaks activity was undertaken covering the period 2023/24 to 2025/26. This review has considered short breaks utilisation, provider activity, Direct Payments, demographics, unpaid carers, complex support needs and future demand indicators. Below is a summary of the review findings to illustrate the need for the proposed work.

3.5 Utilisation of Overnight Short Breaks for people with LD

The table below illustrates that only around 4% of adults with a learning disability receiving Adult Social Care support accessed overnight short breaks. However, utilisation increased year on year and increased by approximately 32% during 2025/26.

Financial Year	Adults receiving ASC support	People accessing overnight short breaks
2023/24	1,189	44
2024/25	1,180	53
2025/26	1,221	70

Whilst utilisation remains relatively low, engagement undertaken as part of the review suggests that this does not necessarily indicate a lack of need. Feedback from unpaid carers and people who draw on support identified uncertainty regarding eligibility, charging arrangements and available provision. The review also found that information is fragmented and access routes are not always clear or consistent. These factors may contribute to lower utilisation and support the rationale for developing a clearer pathway and improving information through the Adult Short Breaks Directory.

3.6 Direct Payments for people with LD

The table below illustrates that approximately 40% of all short breaks activity was delivered through Direct Payments, highlighting the importance of maintaining personalised routes alongside commissioned provision.

Financial Year	Commissioned	Direct Payment
2023/24	28	16
2024/25	30	23
2025/26	43	27

3.7 Complexity of Need

The increasing number of people with learning disabilities and autism requiring enhanced support arrangements indicates growing complexity of need and has implications for future commissioning, workforce planning and provider capacity. The table below illustrates that the number of people who require an enhanced level of support is growing, particularly for people who require additional 1:1 hours.

Support Requirement	23/24	24/25	25/26
1:1 Support	0	7	17
2:1 Support	0	1	4
Other Enhanced Support	24	23	23

While the overall number of people accessing overnight short breaks remains relatively low, the review demonstrates that the complexity of support required is increasing. The number of people requiring additional 1:1 support increased from 7 to 17 between 2024/25 and 2025/26, whilst the number requiring 2:1 support increased from 1 to 4. This suggests that future commissioning requirements may be driven as much by increasing complexity and specialism as by overall numbers of people requiring support.

3.8 The review has highlighted a number of strengths in the way that Adult Social Care is currently providing short breaks:

- commissioned provision is available;
- Direct Payments are being utilised;
- a range of providers are operating in the short breaks market;
- Overnight short breaks are available for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and complex support needs through Mosaic 1898's short breaks provision in Whetstone, and through an SLA with Leicestershire County Council's in house short breaks provision, including a PMLD offer at Carlton Drive in Wigston.
- The soon to be mobilised Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for residential and nursing care providers across LLR has provided an opportunity for us to better quality assure support for people with more complex support needs. There is now a specification in place which sets out clear expectations of person-centred support for people with Learning Disabilities, autism and more complex physical and mental health support needs.

3.9 The table below illustrates the number of residential care providers providing overnight short breaks to people with LDA. The market appears relatively stable, and provider numbers increased during the most recent year. Of the providers that have delivered short breaks across the review period, several are already operating through or progressing through PDPS arrangements.

Financial Year	Residential LD Providers Providing overnight short breaks
2023/2024	19
2024/2025	16
2025/2026	22

3.10 Future demand indicators - data flow to inform adults' commissioning decisions

3.10.1 The review reinforces the need for stronger forecasting arrangements and earlier planning for future short breaks demand, particularly where people's support needs are likely to be complex. This data will also be invaluable in informing demand for other adult's services such as specialist supported living accommodation and support and day opportunities.

3.10.2 Current forecasting arrangements do not provide a single view of future short break demand across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care. Whilst available transition data identifies annual cohorts entering adulthood, it does not currently enable the Council to understand likely future demand for overnight short breaks, levels of complexity, autism-specific requirements, geographical demand or cultural requirements. Strengthening forecasting arrangements is therefore a key priority of the improvement programme.

3.11 Complex Autism and Overnight Short Breaks

3.11.1 An emerging area of need relates to autistic people with complex support requirements. Evidence from the JSNA, Preparing for Adulthood activity, Autism and Neurodiversity engagement work, and operational intelligence suggests that some autistic people require support arrangements that differ from traditional learning disability short breaks services. While there is currently insufficient evidence to quantify demand, there is sufficient intelligence to indicate that this area requires further investigation.

3.11.2 The review highlights that future demand is not solely determined by the number of people requiring support. Increasing complexity of need, alongside intelligence from operational teams indicates a need to better understand the support requirements of autistic people with complex needs and the implications for future commissioning.

3.11.3 This report is not proposing the development of a specialist autism short breaks service at this stage. Instead, the review identifies an opportunity to undertake a joint health and social care options appraisal to better understand future demand and potential service requires. Members are invited to comment on whether this would be a helpful next step. The appraisal will bring together JSNA evidence, engagement findings, Preparing for Adulthood data, operational intelligence and market intelligence to determine whether future specialist provision is required and, if so, what form it should take. This appraisal will also provide useful commissioning intelligence for other support services such as Day Opportunities and Supported Living provision that specialise in supporting autistic people.

3.11.4 The options appraisal will consider how the current short breaks offer can better meet the needs of autistic people with complex support requirements and reduce the risk of crisis, placement breakdown and avoidable hospital admissions. Areas for consideration may include:

- sensory-friendly environments;
- specialist staffing models;
- autism-specific community opportunities;
- positive behaviour support approaches; and
- highly personalised support arrangements.



3.12 Summary of Areas Requiring Improvement

3.12.1 The review does not conclude that Leicester lacks short break provision. A range of short break options are available, and the provider market is relatively stable. However, the review identifies opportunities to strengthen the overall short breaks system to ensure it remains accessible, sustainable and responsive to future demand. The key issues identified are:

- information about short breaks is fragmented and difficult for people to navigate;
- access routes and eligibility arrangements are not always consistent;
- current recording and reporting arrangements do not provide a complete understanding of unmet need or outcomes;
- information held across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care is not brought together in a way that supports effective forecasting and future planning; and

- further work is required to understand future demand, particularly for people with complex support needs and autistic people who may require different support arrangements.

Taken together, these findings indicate a need to strengthen information, pathways, data quality, forecasting and commissioning intelligence before future decisions are made regarding the sufficiency or expansion of provision.

4.0 Commissioning Intentions and Next Steps

4.1 This review does not identify a clear requirement for additional overnight short break provision at this time. Leicester already has a range of short break options available and a relatively stable provider market. However, the review highlights opportunities to strengthen information, access, forecasting and commissioning intelligence to ensure the short breaks offer continues to meet current and future need.

The Council's ambition is to develop a coordinated short breaks system that:

- provides clear information and advice;
- offers a consistent and accessible route into support;
- supports unpaid carers and promotes independence;
- makes effective use of existing provision and Direct Payments;
- plans effectively for future demand; and
- supports future service development where evidence demonstrates a need.

4.2 Proposed Improvement Programme and Milestones

The Commission is invited to consider whether it wishes to recommend that the Lead Member gives further consideration to the following improvement programme:

Improvement Area	Key Deliverable	Target Date
Information and awareness	Publish and promote the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Adult Short Breaks Directory	Autumn/Winter 2026
Access and pathways	Develop and implement a clearer and more consistent overnight short breaks pathway	March 2027
Data quality and forecasting	Establish a Short Breaks Improvement Plan and introduce routine reporting and forecasting arrangements	March 2027

Understanding unmet need	Develop baseline reporting and improve understanding of unmet need and future demand	March 2027
Autism and complex needs	Complete a specialist autism short breaks options appraisal	March 2027
Transition planning	Complete a joint children's and adults' short breaks options appraisal for young people aged 14-25	January 2027

The Improvement Plan will support:

- improved recording arrangements for short breaks and unpaid carer support;
- stronger data quality and performance reporting;
- a joint forecasting approach across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care;
- improved understanding of unmet need;
- stronger intelligence relating to autism and complex needs; and
- regular reporting through existing governance arrangements and the Learning Disabilities and Autism Collaborative.

4.4 Local Government Reorganisation presents both opportunities and risks for the future development of short breaks provision. Potential benefits include access to a larger provider market, increased market intelligence, shared learning and opportunities for greater collaboration across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Leicester already has a range of short break provision available for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism. This review provides an opportunity to strengthen the systems that sit around that provision, including information, access arrangements, planning and commissioning intelligence.

5.2 The review has identified opportunities to improve information for unpaid carers and people drawing on support, strengthen pathways into overnight short breaks, improve understanding of unmet need and develop a more robust approach to forecasting future demand. A more joined-up approach across Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care will support better planning and improve confidence in future commissioning decisions.

5.3 Without these improvements there is a risk that unmet need remains hidden, future demand is not identified early enough and opportunities to support unpaid carers and plan services effectively are missed.

5.4 Progress against the improvement programme set out in Section 4.2 will be monitored through existing governance arrangements. By March 2027 the programme aims to demonstrate:

- improved access to information;
- a clearer pathway into short breaks;
- improved understanding of unmet need and future demand;
- stronger commissioning intelligence; and
- completion of agreed options appraisals.

5.5 The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Commission Members with the evidence gathered through the review and seek their views on the issues identified. Any recommendations arising from Scrutiny will be considered alongside the evidence in the report and may inform future decisions taken by the Lead Member regarding the development of Leicester's short breaks offer for people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

6 Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

A range of engagement undertaken in Spring-Summer 2025 as follows:

6.1 Commissioners have engaged with unpaid carers at the Age UK Unpaid carers Support Service - they shared their concerns about lack of information on eligibility and charging for short breaks for their loved ones. They shared their worry about their loved ones going into respite and becoming anxious and confused which can then have a negative impact on them when they get home.

6.2 We visited the We Think group on several occasions – this group shared with us the importance of having short breaks that are fun, person centred, focused on their interests are preferably at the same places as their friends go to.

6.4 We visited to the Big Mouth Forum where the group shared with us that they really would really like to have short breaks somewhere with a nice bedroom that has their home comforts, play station and other activities they like, preferably be near a park and offering lots of fun activities.

6.5 We met with a couple who have an autistic son. They emphasised the importance of short breaks being enabling and promoting independence. Also, they emphasised the need for short breaks to be accessible in terms of location and that it is commissioned in a way that allows them to actually have a break rather than having to drive a long way to get to and from the service.

6.6 We worked with the Manager at Barnes Heath House to create a comprehensive visual guide to “what good looks like” for providers interested in providing short breaks for autistic young people and young people with more complex needs – this will be shared at the market engagement session planned in July this year.

7. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

7.1 Financial implications

There are no current financial implications from the content of this report at this time. The 2-year fixed term joint funded Commissioner post (0.6 FTE) to lead on the completion of the work on the LLR Short Breaks Directory and information offer is to be primarily funded from Health (0.4 FTE) with ASC contributing to the 0.2 FTE balance of cost for this post. As a result of that work, future demand in the form of a complex autism and overnight specialist short breaks offer, and take-up of overnight short breaks opportunities in general, may result in additional costs to the Adult Social Care package costs budget. This will need to be quantified in due course and future planning of costs will benefit from the proposed work to strengthen forecasting, data sharing and transition planning between Children's Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Adult Social Care.

Signed: Matt Cooper, Business Manager (Finance)

Dated: 14 July 2026

7.2 Legal implications

There are no apparent legal implications from the content of this report at this stage.

In terms of the recommendations, support may be needed from legal teams going forward. The proposed Adult Short Breaks Directory is to be co-produced with other authorities, and this may require a joint working agreement to be put in place to facilitate those arrangements.

Similarly, the relationship with and joint funding by the of the LDA Collaborative to provide a LLR Short Breaks commissioner may need to be documented/formalised.

Signed: **Emma Young, Senior Lawyer**

Dated: **14 July 2026**

7.3 Equalities implications

Our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires us to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, age) and those who do not. The Council also has an obligation to treat people in accordance with their Convention rights under The Human Rights Act, 1998. The proposal asks for the endorsement of the overall direction of travel for the development of Leicester's short breaks offer for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism. The report identifies that current information is fragmented, pathways are unclear, and there may be unmet need, particularly for people with complex support needs, autistic people, younger adults and people from culturally diverse communities. This proposal is likely to have a positive impact on adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, and on their unpaid carers, by improving access to information, strengthening pathways and developing a more coordinated and person-centred short breaks offer. The planned co-production, market engagement and focus on culturally competent support should help reduce barriers and improve equitable access across different communities. Given the nature of the changes proposed and in order to demonstrate that the consideration of equalities impacts is taken into account, as an integral part of the process of reviewing or amending existing services, it is recommended that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) be undertaken on the agreed option. The EIA process can support the Council to predict possible issues and take appropriate action such as removing or mitigating any negative impacts, where possible, and maximising any potential for positive impact. The EIA is an iterative process and should be revisited as part of the decision-making process.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148
Dated: 16 July 2026

7.5 Climate Emergency implications

There are no direct climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 14 th July 2026

7.6 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

8.0 Background information and other papers:

9.0 Summary of appendices:

10 Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

11 Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?