Short Breaks Innovation Fund Year 1 Evaluation

Research report

November 2023

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Glossary

Acronym	Definition
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASC	Autistic Spectrum Condition
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CIN	Children in Need
CLA	Children Looked After
CPP	Child Protection Plan
CYP / YP	Children and Young People / Young People
DBS	Disclosure and Baring Services
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
GP	General Practitioner
HAF	Holiday Activities Fund
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
MI	Management Information
PBS	Positive Behaviour Support
PMLD	Profound and multiple learning difficulties
SBIF	Short Breaks Innovation Fund
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Executive Summary

Short breaks are a Local Authority (LA) provision offered to young people with complex Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Short breaks can include daytime or overnight care in the home or elsewhere, educational or leisure activities outside the home, or services to assist parent/carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. Short breaks are normally funded through local government grants. The Short Breaks Innovation Fund (SBIF) allows DfE to award extra funding to Local Authorities (LAs) to provide additional short break provision, to improve access for under-represented groups, and test innovative models of delivery. Year 1 of the funding (allocating £5 million for the 2022/23 financial year) was originally intended to fund approximately 1,800 placements in 7 LAs although one of these LAs subsequently postponed their involvement until Year 2 (2023/24).

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned IFF Research to conduct a process evaluation of Year 1 of the SBIF, focusing on the implementation and delivery of the Fund across the 6 participating LAs, and exploring early evidence on short-term outcomes for parents/carers, young people and LAs. The evaluation drew on both quantitative and qualitative methods, with data gathered between September 2022 and June 2023:

- Collation of management information (MI) from LAs on a quarterly basis

- Depth interviews with LA programme leads at the start, midpoint and endpoint of Year 1

- Depth interviews with equivalent staff responsible for short break provision in a small number of LAs which either applied and were not funded or which did not apply for Year 1 of the SBIF.

- Depth interviews with LA delivery partners who were providing short break services

- An online survey of parents/carers whose children were participating in SBIF provision

- Depth interviews with parents/carers whose children had participated, supplemented by a small number of interviews with young people, where possible.

Key findings

The application process

Although there were some challenges associated with the SBIF application process, both in terms of the timing and the amount of work required, LA leads said that they were pleased to have had the opportunity to apply for the Fund as it enabled them to address gaps in their short break provision. It also allowed them to address needs which were currently unmet. in particular among young people who did not meet the statutory threshold for short break provision and/or who had yet to be formally identified as having SEND. Most of the LAs who did not receive funding in the first year of the programme said that they would be applying again in the future.

Interviews from LA leads suggested that the amount of work required to complete the SBIF Year 1 application was considerable and LAs had to weigh up what they regarded as the relatively large amount of time involved in submitting a bid with the relatively small (but welcome) amount of funding they would receive if successful. Additionally, some LAs considered that the bid template was restrictive due to the specificity of the information requested, which they suggested meant they were not able to innovate as much as they would have liked. This was because the application asked for very specific information and commitment to meeting Key Performance Indicators in the first year, which some LAs suggested did not offer enough flexibility to develop and 'try out' new approaches.

Evidence collected from LA project leads suggested that tight timescales to submit the Year 1 bid and relatively long time to hear feedback made it difficult for projects to get up and running as quickly as they would have liked. When feedback came, however, LAs regarded it as detailed and fair.

Delivery of activities

Set up, management and recruitment

The evaluation found that LAs generally used similar delivery models to design and model their services, using multidisciplinary teams and steering groups as well as consultation groups. Some had involved parents in co-designing services and how these were marketed, to try to improve take-up.

LAs commented that timelines were short between finding out they had been awarded funding and having to start delivery, which put pressure on them to mobilise quickly and meant that some areas were delayed in starting their provision. This was echoed by delivery partners, who suggested longer lead-in times would have allowed them to optimise delivery. Establishing operational/working groups to help with mobilisation, particularly when troubleshooting, worked well to get the projects up and running.

Some LAs faced difficulties early in the programme in terms of recruiting staff to manage delivery and getting the right delivery partners in place with the required skills and experience to deliver the short breaks. Identifying suitable venues and transportation were also early issues for LAs. Areas mitigated this by working with existing delivery partners where possible. They also used existing premises, offered outreach-based activities which did not require the use of a venue, and used bus passes and minibuses.

The activities offered as part of the short break programmes were designed to provide a break for parents while offering personal development or social opportunities for the young person, to provide young people with life skills to build their independence or to offer support and guidance to the parent/carer. The programmes were generally delivered by existing partners to the LA with good infrastructure in place to facilitate them, something that LAs and delivery partners deemed necessary in the quick timescales.

Referral processes were built around regular multi-disciplinary panel meetings with referrals coming from a widening range of organisations. Schools were the main source but increasingly over the course of delivery, referrals were coming from other support organisations and parents were more commonly starting to self-refer.

Uptake of places built up steadily after a slow start but there were still some barriers to engagement, mainly based around initial perceptions among parents/carers that the provision would not be suitable, or children thinking they would not enjoy it. In the vast majority of cases, both were enthusiastic about the provision once they had more detailed information about it or had tried it. LAs and delivery partners alike raised that it was more difficult to engage older children in their teens, and some parents/carers highlighted that older children liked to have more of a 'say' about the decision to take part and the activities they did.

Reasons for taking part

Around seven-in-ten parents/carers who completed the survey took up short break provision to give their child a positive experience or activities to enjoy, or wanted to improve their child's social skills. In addition, around six-in-ten wanted to improve their child's confidence, their child's independence, or give their child more opportunity to make friends.

Parents/carers were less likely to give reasons relating to themselves or other members of their household. One-third wanted to improve their own general wellbeing, with a similar proportion who wanted to free more time for their non-caring responsibilities. Just over one-quarter wanted to improve their stress levels or the stress levels for other members of their household. Among parents who did cite these reasons, the qualitative interviews usually showed short breaks were very important for the parent/carer's own

wellbeing (in particular where they were single parents, or disabled, or both) and where there were younger siblings.

Suitability of and satisfaction with activities

Based on local needs, the LAs were targeting different age groups and types of need, which meant that they offered a range of different provision.

Depending on who they were targeting, some LAs offered group-based provision while others combined this with one-to-one support that was tailored to the needs of an individual young person. This was especially beneficial in projects aimed at young people with high levels of social anxiety, as it allowed them to build up trust and familiarity with a support worker who spent time getting to know them and could tailor activities and support to their specific needs, rather than expecting them to join a group activity.

Most parents/carers who took part in the research deemed the short breaks provision to be suitable and the majority of parents/carers who completed the survey reported high levels of satisfaction:

- almost nine-in-ten parent/carers were satisfied with the location. The venues tended to be familiar sites for families such as family centres they were familiar with, or transport was available to collect and return the young person.

- over eight-in-ten parents/carers were satisfied with the short break hours. However, the qualitative data identified that some parents/carers felt there could be improvements, most commonly that it would have been useful to have more provision during school holidays or at weekends.

- just over eight-in-ten parents/carers were satisfied with the length of the short break. Some feedback from the qualitative interviews suggested that a few parents/carers thought the duration was not long enough. This was a particular issue for projects with a more specific personal development focus, such as creating independence for adulthood, where some parents thought there would have been more value in longer-term, ongoing provision.

Breaks that were deemed especially suitable were those that built on existing relationships and activities that the young people liked. There were high levels of praise from parents/carers for staff, for their compassion, knowledge and ability to form strong and supportive relationships with their child.

In some cases, short breaks needed to be adapted to ensure that they were suitable. Both the level and uniqueness of young people's needs were a surprise for some LAs and delivery partners. However, they worked flexibly to be able to make adaptations as

required, which sometimes led to them working with smaller groups and providing more one-to-one provision.

Short-term outcomes

Feedback from research participants suggested early indications of improved outcomes from SBIF projects during Year 1. Among the top outcomes for children and young people, mentioned by three-quarters of parents/carers or more, were: increased confidence, reduced anxiety levels, and improved social skills.

Seven-in-ten parents/carers also reported that their child had gained greater independence, which meant young people felt able to go shopping or travel to see friends on their own.

Just under half of parents/carers saw a positive change in their child's behaviour and two-in-five reported an improvement in their child's school attendance. One parent/carer said their child was able to go back to school online after two years of non-attendance.

The majority of parents were satisfied with the short breaks offer, in terms of the activities provided, the quality of support, communications, and feedback provided. However, a small number of parents were not satisfied, because the activities, duration, length or distance of the offer did not suit the parents' or their child's needs.

The majority of parents/carers felt more supported as a result of the short breaks activities and noted that it helped reduce their stress levels and freed up their time to care for other family members or to engage in non-caring activities. Three-quarters of parents/carers reported having more time for non-caring responsibilities, more time to care for other family members, and reduced stress levels. Among other outcomes, two-thirds reported improved general wellbeing of family members.

Overall, four-in-five parents/carers who responded to the survey said they felt more supported as a result of being able to access short breaks provision for their child. Just over one-in-ten said there was no difference; they did not feel more or less supported than before.

A small proportion of families who took part in the research reported no improvements in outcomes for the young person or themselves. Where this was the case, it was because the short breaks offer was not suited to the young person's needs or because any improvement that was observed during activities was short lived and did not sustain once the young person went back to their day-to-day environment.

The additional value of SBIF provision

LA leads designed their SBIF provision around filling gaps in existing short breaks support and meeting unmet needs. Age groups were a common way of identifying a gap in provision – for example, one funded LA focussed on providing short breaks support for children who were of pre-school age, who were not currently covered by their existing offer. Another funded LA focussed on those transitioning from school to college, aged 16-17.

Location was another factor that LAs accounted for when identifying gaps. One funded LA focussed their provision on rural areas where parents/carers had previously struggled to access short break support. Additionally, some LAs based their application on gaps identified in the provision for those who were yet to be formally identify as having SEND. In some cases, LAs identified groups who were already receiving some form of short breaks support, but whose provision could be extended, for example by including more outreach activities during the week, rather than offering support only at weekends.

Almost two-thirds of parents/carers who took part in the survey reported that they had not previously engaged with any other short break offer in the past. Feedback from LA leads suggested that in most cases this was because families did not meet the threshold to be eligible for the existing short breaks offer available outside the SBIF, suggesting that the SBIF provision was reaching groups who were not otherwise served by this type of support.

Introduction

Short breaks are a Local Authority (LA) provision offered to young people with complex Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). Short breaks can include daytime or overnight care in the home or elsewhere, educational or leisure activities outside the home, or services to assist parent/carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. Under the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011, LAs must provide, as appropriate, a range of short breaks for disabled young people. These breaks are for carers of disabled young people, to support them to continue to care for their children.

Some families experience difficulties when caring young people with high level or profound and multiple disabilities, complex health needs or complex behaviour support needs. The impact, particularly on the health and well-being of carers and siblings, can be substantial. Where this is the case, the need for short breaks is often highest. Short breaks can provide young people with opportunities to enjoy different experiences, establish friendships and develop confidence, independence, and social/emotional skills[1].

The Short Breaks Innovation Fund (SBIF) allows DfE to award grants to LAs to provide additional short break provision, to improve access for under-represented groups, and test innovative models of delivery. Year 1 of the funding (£5 million) was originally intended to fund approximately 1,800 placements in seven LAs. The funding covers three years, with LAs applying each year for funding to extend their projects 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The broader aims of the SBIF are:

- To improve health, education and well-being outcomes for young people and their families

- To reduce pressures on High Needs and other budgets (by for example, reducing the need for educational transitions from mainstream into specialist settings)

- To encourage future structural reform and service re-design, supporting the initiatives of the cross government SEND Review[2] – a cross-Government review

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[1] Some related research looking at risk surrounding young people with complex disabilities or learning need, particularly around exclusion, include:
Risk of school exclusion among adolescents receiving social care or special educational needs services: A whole-population administrative data cohort study - ScienceDirect
https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cs-organised-networks.html

[2]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1139561/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf

launched in 2019, resulting in a Green Paper and Improvement Plan with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people; improve experiences for families, reducing the current adversity and frustration they face; and deliver financial sustainability.

The delivery of short breaks programmes was designed to increase the proportion of eligible young people /families that receive this service. This was expected to increase positive outcomes (e.g., preparation for adulthood, attendance), and decrease negative outcomes (e.g. moving into social or in-patient care, or school placement breakdown i.e. leading to requirement for specialist placements for those currently educated in mainstream schools). The funding was expected to increase innovation, joint commissioning and integration of services, workforce development, and lead to better value for money through more integrated early intervention approaches.

Of the seven LAs that were initially awarded funding, six took part in the evaluation[3]. These were:

- Camden

- Walsall

- Plymouth

- Wakefield

- Sunderland

- Gloucestershire

The Gloucestershire project was delayed because they were unable to secure the funding in time for some crucial procurement which was central to the delivery of their project. This meant their timings were slightly behind the other LAs and they had an extension, meaning their 'year' ended at the end of June 2023 rather than the end of March 2023 like the other five LAs.

In 2022, DfE commissioned IFF Research to carry out a process and outcomes evaluation of Year 1 of the SBIF. This evaluation addressed a number of aims and objectives relating to delivery/ implementation (the process element of the evaluation) and the extent to which the design of the project and its underpinning assumptions were leading to the intended outputs and early outcomes (the outcomes element of the evaluation). The key objectives of this Year 1 evaluation were:

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[3] The seventh LA, Cambridgeshire, had their funding deferred to 2023-24, and therefore did not take part in this evaluation.

- To understand what worked well and areas for improvement in relation to grant bidding and allocation of funding

- To collect evidence on what areas did with the funding and understand how they made these decisions

- To review the six different projects offered by each LA – are they being delivered / received as intended?

- To understand the perceived short-term outcomes from LAs, young people, families and other stakeholders (e.g., improved wellbeing, behaviour, reduced stress)

- To compare projects with existing (local government funded) offer in LAs with and without additional funding and establish any added perceived benefits of additional funding / projects

- To identify issues, as well as promising practices and scalability.

- To assess the underlying Theory of Change of the Better Integrated Care Innovation fund

- To begin to explore outputs and early outcomes of the six projects and the project overall

Methodology

The evaluation utilised a mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Further detail of the evaluation methodology is provided in the technical report.

Scoping phase and Theory of Change review

The evaluation conducted a review of each of the successful LAs' applications and a sample of 18 unsuccessful bids, to gain an in-depth understanding of the local context for each LA and the rationale behind their project plans. Findings from this review informed the refinement of the Theory of Change and subsequent research materials.

A draft programme level SBIF Theory of Change was developed by DfE. Key to the model was flexibility and a highly localised approach to delivery, to ensure areas could best respond to the needs of parents/carers and young people with SEND in their own local areas. The evaluation team reviewed the overarching Theory of Change and refined it based on learnings from the document review, initial interviews with LA leads, and in discussion with the DfE project lead and policy leads.

The Theory of Change developed in consultation with the DfE identified short-term outcomes that revolved around supporting young people and their families, leading to mid-term outcomes that involved improved resilience, lowered stress and the ability to manage need, leading to long-term outcomes that were broadly focussed on reducing pressures on services, such as health and social work.

Figure 1: Theory of Change

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes – short-term	Outcomes – mid-term	Impacts
Financial support for LAs	DfE to raise awareness of competition for bid	Delivery of training session(s) for specialist teachers/support etc.	Staff are better equipped at handling level of need among CYP	CYP have improved skills, such as social skills, and are able to integrate into groups better	Reduced pressure on schools: reduced workload and welfare for school pastoral staff with better quality teaching. Financial benefit as schools need fewer resources and staff retention is better
Current evidence for short breaks interventions	LAs to plan and design projects	CYP group-based or 1-2-1 programme and support offer (in holidays and/or after school)	CYP develop supportive relationship with trusted adults	Schools and other services are more aware of different types of support across local authorities	A greater proportion of CYP are able to to maintain their current school placement
LA time and resources to design project, submit bid, deliver projects and complete MI collection	Bidding process	Parent & family support services such as peer support groups and family therapy sessions	CYP gain skills and learning such as improving life skills, social skills and emotional resilience	CYP have improved social confidence. This increases ability to foster supportive relationships with adults and peers, and broaden their social network	Reduced pressure on other services (for instance referrals to NHS services and other LA support services)
Delivery partners time and resources to deliver projects and gather MI	DfE to assess applications and select successful bids	Delivering parent & family training	CYP Increased confidence in socialising and pursuing hobbies	CYP have reduced anxiety/ improved wellbeing	Better integration and communication between different services available, rather improved communication between schools and support services
	LAs to set up projects and collect MI data		CYP and parents/carers have (more) access to and use of short breaks	CYP have increased resilience	Increased involvement in the community
			Parents feel more supported	CYP feel more independent	Young people have improved employment readiness – better communication skills, better social understanding, independent living skills
			Parents increased understanding and informed opinion on short breaks	CYP behaviour improves	Reduced risk of higher-level intervention
			Parents have time and energy to focus on other family responsibilities	Siblings of CYP receiving short breaks get short breaks and better support from parent/carers	Reduced familial breakdown – reduced social care referrals/hours
			Parents have time and energy to focus on other things	Parents feel more confident	
				Parents feel more equipped in supporting CYP in achieving EET outcomes	
				Reduced parental and family stress/ improved mental health and wellbeing	

Interviews with LA project leads

Depth interviews were conducted with the project leads for each LA at the start, midpoint and endpoint of the Year 1 delivery period (totalling in three interviews for most LAs)[4]. Each interview focussed on the relevant stage of the project (set up, progress, outcomes and lessons learned).

Interviews took place in the following timescales:

- First round interviews: August – September 2022

- Second round interviews: January – February 2023

- Third round interviews: May – June 2023

Interviews with delivery partners

Depth interviews were conducted with delivery partners across the LAs to find out how the projects had progressed from their perspectives. The delivery partners included organisations who specialised in delivering activities to local communities, charities, colleges, health organisations such as CAMHS or LA arm's length bodies. These interviews were conducted with individuals who had direct responsibility for delivering the services. The interviews focussed on experience of project specifications and delivery, communication with the LAs, amount of advance information received about the young person and their needs, experience of delivering short break services, and suggestions for improvements.

In total, 13 interviews were conducted between January and March 2023 and included the following areas:

- 4 from Camden

- 1 from Gloucestershire

- 3 from Plymouth

- 4 from Sunderland

- 1 from Walsall

- There were no Delivery Partners from Wakefield available for interview during the fieldwork period.

Survey of parents/carers with children taking part in SBIF activities

An online survey collected feedback from parents/carers about their experiences of SBIF short breaks. The survey was designed to gain an understanding of their experience and

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[4] Gloucestershire did not complete an interview at the first round (due to their delayed start) and one LA did not complete a final round interview.

what they perceived to be the outcomes and benefits of the activities, for them personally, for their child and for their wider household.

A unique survey link was created for each LA to enable the evaluation team to monitor response by LA. Each LA was asked to disseminate their unique link to parents within their area. This was because LAs were unable to share contact information for the parents directly with the evaluation team, because GDPR permissions were not in place. This meant that IFF had no direct access to the sample and were unable to send targeted reminders to non-responders.

The survey was administered at three time points throughout the evaluation period. This was done to ensure parents/carers were not answering about a placement too far in the past, i.e., that they were not responding on their experience of a placement from September in the following March.

- First period: September to October 2022

- Second period: January to February 2023

- Third period: May to July 2023. The survey remained open to allow for Gloucestershire's project running until the end of June 2023.

In total, 86 parents/carers completed the survey. Table 1 shows their distribution by LA. With no direct access to the sample, and because some LAs did not confirm volumes of parents to whom they had sent the survey, it was not possible to calculate an overall response rate.

Table 1: Parent/Carer Survey Completes by LA

Local Authority	Number of completes
Camden	15
Gloucestershire	16
Plymouth	15
Sunderland	10
Wakefield	23
Walsall	7

Source: Parent/carer survey

It is important to note that without clear information on response rates and due to the relatively small number of respondents to the survey, it cannot be assumed that the sample, on which this report is based, is representative of the population of families who took part in activities funded by the SBIF. The survey findings should therefore be regarded as indicative.

Interviews with parents/carers and young people

Qualitative depth interviews were conducted with parent/carers who had completed the survey and agreed to be re-contacted, and, where possible with the young person, to explore in greater depth the themes arising from their survey responses. The interviews focussed on getting feedback from the parents/carers and their children about their experience of the short break activities, and their perceptions of any outcomes for them, their child, and their wider family following their participation in the activities. Sixteen interviews were conducted with parent/carers, thirteen of which were conducted face to face in-home and three conducted via video call on MS Teams[5]. Three interviews were conducted with young people, two face to face and one on MS Teams. The fieldwork period for these interviews ran between December 2022 and July 2023.

Recruitment for these interviews was challenging. The number of parents opting in to be invited for an interview was low: 45 in total, from the 86 who completed the survey. Parents often found it difficult to find time for an interview to fit around their caring and other responsibilities or they were non-contactable after initially opting in to be recontacted. In most cases, parents reported that the young person did not wish to take part in an interview, mainly due to their social anxiety, but IFF were able to conduct short interviews with three young people and gained proxy information from another two, who had given their parent/carer some direct feedback about what they wanted to say about the short break provision.

MI collection

Management information (MI) was collected throughout the year of the evaluation. An online tool was developed to capture data on LAs' progress in delivering their projects. This was a form for LA leads to complete and submit digitally. The aim of collecting MI data from LAs was to assess whether implementation was progressing as intended (in terms of placement volumes offered and taken up, and who was accessing these). The tool was shared via an online link with project leads at three points throughout the year to collect data across the preceding four-month period. The data was then downloaded and analysed.

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[5] The original plan was to conduct all qualitative interviews with families face-to-face. However, three families expressed a preference to conduct the interview remotely. In setting up the interviews we were guided by families' availability and preferences of mode of interview.

The data collection periods were:

- Round One: October 2022 –November 2022. Gloucestershire did not complete during this round due to their delayed start.

- Round Two: January 2023 –February 2023

- Round Three: May 2023 –June 2023

- Feasibility assessment: May 2023 –June 2023

Alongside this evaluation, IFF Research conducted a small-scale feasibility assessment designed to help inform decisions about the potential for conducting an impact evaluation in Year 3 of the SBIF (2024-25).

The feasibility review drew on evidence from across the process evaluation of the SBIF LAs, a review of unsuccessful SBIF bids, together with interviews with nine non-funded LAs. It focused on the availability of data on local needs, short breaks provision and outcomes amongst funded LAs, and the extent to which non-funded LAs held comparable data – or could collect comparable data – which could be used to form a counterfactual. The study also explored whether existing data could be linked to external datasets, such as the National Pupil Database (NPD), and issues in relation to the quality and accessibility of the data for the purposes of research.

Interviews were conducted with a lead equivalent to the SBIF lead in nine non-funded LAs: these were either Early Help Leads or senior commissioning officers.

A short internal report on the feasibility work was provided to DfE in July 2023 to inform decisions about a future impact evaluation. This included some information about the provision in these non-funded LAs we have included in this report for interest. Delivery models in these areas were driven by the local context of the LA. Some had strong commissioning services that worked with social workers to develop and execute good plans. Others had access to resources, such as suitable sites, to be able to offer their own short breaks. Transport was a major issue and had a bearing on reaching need in more remote areas, particularly in smaller and more rural LAs where there were small pockets of isolated need that made it hard to offer group programmes.

The type of provision available was similar across these areas and included groups and one-to-one sessions for young people, family fun days and holiday schemes, weekend programmes and afterschool clubs. Activities are delivered in providers' venues, holiday venues (e.g. holiday resorts, leisure centres and parks) or council-owned properties for example sport centres or youth clubs venues. In a few of the LAs, interviewees mentioned that decisions about what provision and services to commission are made through consultation with families to ensure that the offer met the local needs.

Eligibility for short breaks varied across LAs. This meant that there were different profiles of service users in each locality, in terms of levels of need, types of SEND and eligibility for other services that could be accessed at the same time. This meant, that in some cases, the profile of children and young people that were specifically targeted by SBIF, might not be eligible for short breaks services in non-funded LAs.

About this report

This report draws together evidence from desk research, the quantitative data collected (the MI tool and parent/carer online survey) and qualitative data collected (LA project lead interviews, delivery partner interviews, parent/carer and young person interviews). It is also in part informed by the interviews conducted as part of the feasibility assessment. It focuses on Year 1 delivery of the SBIF.

This is a process evaluation, which also includes some early evidence of outputs and outcomes. It cannot be used to determine the impact of SBIF provision, although it does provide some indication of outcomes in Year 1. The main methodological challenges for this evaluation have been accessing parents/carers and young people, the relatively low response to the survey in some LAs which had implications for the volume of parents/carers available to recruit for the follow-up qualitative research, together with inconsistent management information (MI) from participating LAs.

The report gives some background to the SBIF before looking at the Year 1 bidding process and allocation of the funding. It then details the governance and set up of the projects before covering the activities offered and how they were delivered, including any enablers and challenges to delivery. The report then discusses outcomes from the perspective of parents/carers, young people and LAs before providing overall conclusions and recommendations in light of the evaluation's research objectives.

Local Authorities have been anonymised by referring to them as LA A, LA B, etc, so that specific individuals taking part in the research cannot be identified.

The application process

Chapter summary

Interviews from LA leads suggested that the amount of work required to complete the application was considerable. Additionally, the template provided by the DfE limited the ability for LAs to submit a holistic application. Furthermore, due to the rigidness of the application process, some LAs said that they were not able to innovate as much as they would have liked.

Evidence collected from LA leads (those in charge of applying to the Fund) suggested that tight timescales and long lag times on feedback presented issues to applications. When feedback came, however, it was regarded as detailed and fair.

Although there were many challenges associated with the application process, both in terms of the timing and work required, LA leads said that they were pleased to have had the opportunity to apply for the Fund. Most of the LAs who did not receive funding in the first year of the programme said that they would be applying again in the future.

This chapter focusses on the bidding process and allocation of funding of the SBIF. It is based on interviews with leads from both funded and non-funded LAs and addresses the evaluation objective in relation to understanding what worked well and areas for improvement in relation to bidding and allocation of funding.

Identifying a need or gap in provision

LA leads said that their bidding process began by looking at what their short breaks provision was and if there were any gaps. Age groups were a common way of identifying a gap in provision. LA F focussed on providing short breaks support for children who were of pre-school age, who were not currently covered by their existing offer. LA C focussed on those transitioning from school to college. Location was another factor LAs accounted for when looking for gaps in provision. LA B focussed their provision on rural areas where parents/carers had previously struggled to access short break support. Additionally, some LAs based their application on gaps identified in the provision for those who were yet to yet to be formally identify as having SEND. In some cases, LAs identified groups who were already being reached but whose short breaks provision could be improved, primarily by increasing how much of it there was. They also felt more could be done to specifically work on skills development, often around social skills and improving independence.

LAs took different approaches to designing their offer. The majority of LA leads commented that they were already aware of the areas of need to be addressed and had some idea of what a suitable approach would be to address this prior to the announcement of the SBIF. In these areas, leads noted that the SBIF was a good opportunity to realise their ideas, and that the fund enabled them to plan for better reach and impact.

> We're very much aware that young people in transition towards adulthood needed to be able to develop their skills. And we felt that this was something we'd had in mind for some time, but we've never been able to afford to put it on. So, most of it, we've actually already had in mind, and we thought we could actually look at how we could put this together and make it work. – *LA C Lead*

Whilst LAs welcomed the opportunity to apply for additional funding, there were some LAs who struggled to devise a strategy to deal with the bid. Although a need for more short breaks existed within their area, due to their size, one LA had issues coming up with a plan that reached the minimum amount of spending required to submit a bid. This meant they had to collaborate with other neighbouring LAs to put forward a plan that met the minimum spending threshold, but they were ultimately unsuccessful in their bid.

> The minimum amount of funding is set high for us. It's difficult to understand why that is as a small LA. It forces a focus on LAs which are small but have high level of need, or which cover a larger geographic area. Areas like ours fall between the gaps and there's a danger we get left by the wayside, but we're still working on doing it. – *Non-Funded LA*

Making the Application

Work required

LAs were of the general opinion that the application took a long time to complete and that a lot of information was needed before the bid could be submitted.

One LA official, who submitted a successful bid, said that their application took around 100 hours of work, which was a significant investment of council resource. There was mixed feedback from LA leads as to whether this investment was proportionate to the funding received.

> I think particularly for this pot of money for a one-year project ... there was an awful lot of sunk cost to set up from the bid point of view. – *LA D Lead*

It was suggested that the work required for the application was greater than similar bids that LAs had dealt with. A couple of LAs mentioned that the DfE template used to submit the application was very resource intensive.

One LA that did not receive funding said that they unavoidably left some sections of the template blank as they were not able to gather much of the information needed. The availability of data and ease with which it could be collated was an issue for some LAs. This was often due to difficulties in getting data from delivery partners.

Additionally, some LAs reported that the guidance materials supplied by the DfE did not provide all the answers that applicants were looking for. This meant that the teams making the bids had to contact the DfE to get answers, which put added pressure on the tight timescales.

Application templates

Some LAs who did not receive funding reported that they thought the requirements were too strict and that the template provided by DfE limited their ability to present their ideas well.

This meant that they felt that there was not much room for innovation. Some LAs wanted to provide more information about their bids but felt they had to keep what they wrote to a minimum to stay within the word limits of the application form. This was, however, not the case for all LAs. One non-funded LA highlighted the challenge of combining an emphasis on developing innovation with also needing to provide evidence of value for money and meeting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Some felt that this restricted the scope for 'true' innovation because it did not allow enough room for developing, testing and refining new provision.

> If you ask for innovation, don't put it in a box! – *Non-funded LA*

> I didn't find that it was developed like an innovation project – *Non-funded LA*

In addition to this, there was a feeling amongst some non-funded LAs that as so much information was required upfront in the application, it limited the innovation throughout the delivery. Everything had to be worked out in the bid and in their opinion, there was little room for flexibility.

The amount of detail required in the bid did mean that when delivery began, it was smoother as many LAs had a clear idea of what to do. However, LAs said that choosing to apply for the funding came with significant risk due to the resources required to assemble a team and put a bid together. With so much investment needed, some that

were unsuccessful were left without funding having invested a lot of time and effort into the application process.

Some of the non-funded LAs reported that they learned from the process, and felt that the feedback they received put them in good stead for future applications and saw this as part of the learning process for improving their short break provision.

Timescales

Overall, LAs found the timeframe for the Year 1 application process very challenging and this led to challenges for the full Year 1 delivery.

Multiple LAs, both funded and non-funded, reported that the timeframe allocated for completing the application was not sufficient. Many were very pressed to submit the required materials by the deadline. The programme was announced on 1 February 2022 and applications needed to be made by 6 March 2022.

Some LA leads commented that they were able to mobilise teams quickly as they already had positive multi-agency networks in place. For example, some LAs had relationships with schools and delivery partners, either sitting on panels together or working on other projects. LAs reported that they often contacted delivery partners they had worked with on other projects, rather than going out to an open tender with potentially new partners. Pre-existing relationships meant that teams could quickly be formed to construct a bid and expertise was in place to find out where the need in the area was.

Two successful LAs noted that using outside agencies to help with the actual bid development was very effective. One LA said they used bid writers and the other used a consultant who helped with the bid and consultation process. Both LAs felt that this additional support allowed the bidding process to be more successful.

With the Programme only lasting for one year (initially) if applicants were successful, some LAs found it difficult to get external delivery organisations onboard with the project. To get delivery partners and other resources in place without a guarantee of longer-term funding was difficult and made the application feel like a risk for some LAs. They were under time and financial pressures, and felt they couldn't expend the time on the application if it then bore no end product.

LAs raised issues with the timing of the projects, the parent/carer groups, and recruitment. LA leads commented that timeframes were the key challenge because projects like this take time to get up and running. The key implication of this was that setting up processes for monitoring and evidencing outcomes became lower priority whilst LAs focussed on setting up delivery.

> I think that speaks to the larger overarching challenge for us is that it does take time to get up to full steam with a project like this with the scale and scope and ambition that we have for it. And then we're looking at being able to evidence outcomes, it's going [to] be really difficult to even look at short term outcomes because we haven't had enough time to work intensively with those families. – *LA C Lead*

Monitoring and evidencing outcomes continued to be a challenge throughout year 1. In the final interviews, most LAs still hadn't conducted a full review of the year and were intending to review and address these areas as they progressed into year 2.

Reflections on communication of outcomes

Overall, LAs thought that the feedback received was fair and helpful, however, they were not satisfied with how long it took to find out the outcomes of their application from DfE.

Both funded and non-funded LAs were unhappy with the time between submitting the Year 1 bid and hearing the outcome. One funded LA said that they thought they had been unsuccessful due to the time it took to receive an outcome.

> We thought we must've been unsuccessful and we were really surprised when we did hear [that we were successful] as it was well after the starting date. If there is any slippage in starting timelines the applicant should be informed [for planning and capacity reasons] the more time the DFE can give to bidding, the better" – *LA A Lead*

While LAs praised the accompanying guidance to help with the application, some felt that support or advice after this initial point was lacking and would have helped people be better prepared to mobilise their processes and get their activities underway. It took longer than anticipated to hear back from the DfE, and this was a challenge for those who were successful. These delays were not properly communicated to LAs which caused knock-on effects to the planned project timescales because they did not know the funding was not going to be allocated when they were expecting it.

Most LAs said that when they received feedback, it was detailed and fair. However, some non-funded authorities reported that it took a long time to receive feedback on their unsuccessful application.

Generally, LAs that did not receive funding, said they would apply again in the future as they felt that the feedback they received was good enough to improve a future bid.

Comparisons to other bidding processes

There was a mix of opinions when comparing the bidding process for the SBI to other bids of a similar size. Some LAs said that the requirements for this process were a lot more complicated, time consuming and labour intensive than comparable bids. On the other hand, there were some LAs who said that this was a fairly standard bid.

The prevailing opinion was that a lot of detail was required up front. Compared to other bids and that reducing the need for information would have allowed for greater flexibility and therefore innovation.

Planning and set up

Chapter summary

The evaluation found that LAs generally used similar delivery models to design and manage their services, using multidisciplinary teams and steering groups as well as consultation groups. LAs praised the work of partnership working through operational groups to help with set up and mobilisation, particularly when troubleshooting.

In terms of resourcing, many areas faced difficulty recruiting staff with the required skills and experience to deliver the short breaks. Many provided training, though this did not often align with training needs. Venues and transportation were frequently an issue for LAs, though areas were looking into ways to mitigate these, using things such as bus passes and minibuses.

LAs commented that timelines were short from securing the bid to delivery, which put pressure on them to mobilise quickly. This was echoed by delivery partners, who suggested longer lead in times to ensure best delivery.

The start of this chapter gives an outline of the six programmes. It then focusses on the design and set up stage of the LAs' projects. It discusses findings in relation to the delivery models and governance structures that were put in place, what worked well and what challenges were faced.

The programmes

Local Authority A

The SBIF programme in LA A built on a previous successful programme that was piloted in 2015. The objective of the programme was to provide early and timely intervention, supporting and developing capacity and resilience in children, young people and their families.

LA A utilised a multi-agency approach for the delivery of the programme. The programme was delivered by a consortium consisting of the Local Authority (involving a number of teams including CAMHS, Education Psychologists and Early Help), Integrated Commissioning Service, a local NHS Trust and a local delivery partner working with children and young people. The delivery of the programme was led and monitored by a multi-agency operational group. A partnership board was established with representatives from all partners in the consortium, to oversee the performance of the programme.

The programme was designed to fill in a gap in the short breaks services by targeting a cohort of children and young people whose needs did not meet the current threshold for eligibility to the services. Often these were the most vulnerable and hard to reach families.

The target groups for the programme in LA A were children and young people aged 4 to 18 years with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including learning disabilities (SEND); social, emotional or mental health needs; neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g. ADHD, ASC); or behaviour concerns (challenging behaviours); and who were in a part-time educational placement, disengaged from school, at a risk of exclusion or at a risk of placement breakdown. Children and young people were referred to the programme by schools headteachers and SENCOs, local authority agencies such as the school inclusion team, family workers, CAMHS and people referral units.

The programme offered a range of activities for the children and young people and their parents. These included:

- One-on-one and small group care after school and during holidays offering activities and workshops on a variety of topics.

- One-on-one mentoring during school hours to maintain school placement and/or where the child or young person was out of education to offer respite to family.

- Bespoke parental support, to promote engagement especially with hard-to-reach families.

- Direct intervention from the psychology service to develop Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) plans, to be utilised across all settings for consistency, including the home environment.

The aims of the programme and anticipated outcomes included improved school attendance, improved behaviour, improved mental and general wellbeing of the children, young people and their families, respite for parents and family, parents feel empowered and supported, reduction in acute hospital admittance for mental health crisis, and reduction in use of out of borough services.

Local Authority B

The SBIF programme in LA B aimed to expand early years short breaks services into areas within the county that were difficult to reach. In order to reach these locations, LA B proposed to purchase a double decker bus and adapt it into a soft play and sensory experience bus. They planned to drive the bus to various locations within the county that already had hygiene facilities and a power supply but that were close to families who had struggled to reach existing services.

Locations were selected by observing where need existed far from existing creches or short breaks facilities for children under the age of six. LA B selected four locations in the most remote areas where there was no targeted early years respite response service for children aged under six who were either confirmed or being assessed for ASC and with challenging behaviour.

A provider already operating within LA B with young people with SEND was selected to deliver the sessions. Sessions took place during term time and the school holidays. There were weekly meetings throughout the programme between LA B and the provider to ensure that the project met its objectives. Oversight of the programme within LA B was provided by the Joint Additional Needs Board which met on a bi-monthly basis which was chaired by the Director for Integrated Children and Families Commissioning.

LA B encountered several issues during the setup and delivery phases of the programme (discussed within the report) and this meant that the shape of their delivery changed. Instead of purchasing a bus, LA B opted to rent a soft play bus. Additionally, after discussions with the DfE, the programme was opened up to children up to the age of eight. The programme was also extended until June 2023 to account for time lost at the start.

Eligibility criteria were intentionally left quite wide to encourage inclusion. However, those with a formally identified autistic spectrum condition or who were being assessed were actively informed about the provision. Those who attended were able to use the bus, as well as other activities delivered at the venues. These additional activities included a sensory dome which was specifically targeted to help children with autism.

The programme aimed to connect and support families in rural and remote areas of LA B which did not have existing short breaks care for early years children. Not only did the programme set out to support the children, it also sought to provide parents and carers with a support network. After the conclusion of the funded provision, the vast majority of families continued to use the provider for short breaks care.

Local Authority C

The SBIF programme in LA C filled a gap in the area, focusing on supporting children and young adults with SEND and additional needs to better engage with education opportunities, particularly for those who might not otherwise meet the threshold needed for other support. The objective of the programme was to provide support for children and young people in order to develop confidence and resilience to maintain engagement in education and training.

LA C set up a steering group comprised of parents, children and young people, and professionals to help develop the initial programme. When it came to delivery, LA C used a multiagency approach, which allowed each agency to provide their expertise and

knowledge, ensuring a successful outcome. The agencies involved included the local authority, specialised organisations in the area, professionals, and schools in the area. The programme also utilised an on-going operational group which allowed for troubleshooting and support opportunities.

The programme covered a mix of ages, with particular emphasis on ensuring continuing engagement with education. In order to engage families, the local authority went through special schools and services that offer similar short break opportunities, as well as a direct mailshot with families they thought would be interested. There was no requirement for an EHCP or assessment in order to engage with the programme and it was self-referred.

The programme offered a wide range of activities such as:

- A post-16 **summer programme**. This primarily focused on continuing post-16 education. This was comprised of an in-college weekly session where young people could gather and do activities (cooking, films, games, crafting) in order to feel comfortable at their new college and meet people who would be in their classes, as well as their teachers.
- And informal **youth group**, which had a drop-in style. Offered for a range of ages. Children and young people did activities and trips to offer their parents and carers short breaks, as well as increase young person's confidence, self-esteem, and social skills.
- A **residential offer** where children and young people would organise overnight trips and activities to build responsibility and confidence.
- There was also an additional **parent support group** which allowed parents to meet up with other parents as well as professionals. This aimed to provide support and guidance to parents.

This programme aimed to improve outcomes in terms of education engagement, as well as social and wellbeing outcomes for the children and young people. It also aimed to improve how supported parents felt.

Local Authority D

The SBIF programme in LA D was a whole family model, designed to offer joined-up support and create positive opportunities for families with children who have social, emotional or mental health needs or ASC and who are at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion from school. The short breaks programme is aimed at improving behaviour over the longer term to sustain attendance in education without the need for costly specialist accommodation, care and education placements.

The programme worked with children from Y6-Y11 and offered a tiered menu of targeted, enhanced and specialist short breaks options after school, at weekends and during

holidays from three hubs. These hubs were each designed to target different levels of need.

Teams of skilled workers from across early help, alternative provision and disability services delivered innovative short breaks activities to engage children and improve emotional regulation skills. Parents/carers were offered peer support and training facilitated by early help workers whilst children are engaged in their activities. A PBS specialist worked with the short breaks teams, child's school and family network to develop individual PBS plans for children.

A project group was established, reporting back through existing SEND governance structures, embedding the project in sustainable and long-term partnership arrangements.

The aim was to deliver 472 sessions, ranging from 2 hours to full days totalling over 1400 hours of group activity across 289 places.

In addition to this, the Parent Carer Forum ran sessions for parents and carers where they could talk about their experiences. These initially ran as video calls but then moved to in-person meetings.

Local Authority E

The SBIF programme in LA E was designed to provide critical support to isolated young people aged 12-18 whose social, emotional or mental health needs and/or ASC needs meant they could not easily access support and had been disproportionally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme filled its 68 places across the first year.

The LA's maintained specialist educational provision was at capacity meaning some young people needed to be placed in high-cost independent settings and this programme helped to provide a more cost-effective alternative.

The priority cohort was young people (aged 12+) with:

- Social, Emotional or Mental Health needs
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC)
- Behaviours that challenge
- Emotionally based school avoidance.

Each young person was provided with links between their short breaks care, educational settings and wider services. This involved a range of activities/social events/trips that increased social interaction, improve family/peer relationships and sustain school/college attendance/engagement.

Instead of traditional group sessions, activities were built around developing new skills and experiencing new activities such as taking train journeys and buying tickets, shopping and cooking and other life skills to help build independence.

Young people were picked up in a bus after school or college, taken to the activity for that week, either at a central location or out in the community where appropriate (for example going to a supermarket or the cinema) and returned home.

The aim of this was to reduce the need of at least one young person going into full-time residential care and to enable them to live independently.

They made use of strong and established links with wider LA services and schools to align services and maximise value for money, e.g., integrating with a new independent travel scheme and home to school/college transport provision.

A multi-agency/disciplinary SEND Strategic Partnership Board already existed with the aim of delivering a sustainable, whole system approach to high quality SEND provision. This Board had accountability for this project, reporting to the Children and Young People Partnership Board.

Local Authority F

The SBI programme in LA F was aimed at reducing child exploitation and exclusion from school. LA F Council built upon research that showed children with SEND who were excluded from school were at particular risk of exploitation. Before the SBIF programme, no short breaks provision existed that was focused on reducing exploitation risk.

LA F used a delivery partner that had previous experience dealing with young people in the area and this provided local knowledge. There was a close liaison between the delivery partner, the LA's Early Help Team and other LA services. Additional organisations and agencies were involved in referrals to the programme. These included schools, GPs, other health professionals, Early Help team and other professionals who may have been working with young people and who could identify young people who had SEND and were at risk of exploitation. Oversight was provided by a Project Steering Group comprising the LA programme management team, Holiday Activities Fund (HAF) coordinator, Early Help Group Manager, Children's Commissioning Team and the Help, Protection & Support Service. This group met fortnightly to ensure that the programme stayed on track and that its objectives were met. Regular meetings also took place between the Council's programme management team and the delivery partner.

The programme aimed to reach young people and families who were previously not able to access short breaks through LA-funded routes. The programme focused on reaching young people who were in Year 6 and above with SEND who are showing early signs of potential vulnerabilities to exploitation. Importantly, young people who were below the

Children's social care or Early Help Care Plan (EHCP) threshold were targeted as they were a group not previously receiving Council funding for short breaks.

Young people who were accepted onto the programme had access to:

- One after-school club per week during the term time

- One weekend activity per week during the term time

- One-to-one mentoring from someone who was trained to address risks of exploitation and exclusion.

The programme involved activities such as sports, art, cooking and life skills training as well as other diversionary activities designed to develop positive health, wellbeing and resilience. Weekend activities involved young people going on trips such as bowling and adventure playgrounds.

STAR Outcomes were used throughout the programme to evidence individual journeys. These tied into the overall programme KPIs that included, increasing school attendance, increasing family and teaching staff awareness of the risks of exploitation, a programme attendance of at least 80% and reducing the overall risk of school exclusion by 90%.

Management of the project

The evaluation found that many LAs utilised a similar delivery model for designing and managing their services funded by the SBIF, which involved setting up and utilising multidisciplinary teams and steering groups.

Some LAs conducted consultations with a range of groups such as headteachers, parents/carers, health commissioners and other health delivery partners, all to ensure their offer met the needs of the target population. These conversations were already in place, but once funding was secured, LAs were able to have more targeted discussions with these groups about the SBIF project and how to focus it.

In addition to setting up the governance structures, LA teams worked to engage professionals, secure venues, contract delivery partners, and supply any necessary training to staff.

In the early stages, LAs found success with operational groups to help with the set up and mobilisation. These were often working groups with the LA lead, multiple delivery partners and organisations who could support each other through the delivery period and troubleshoot issues and barriers. This was especially important when LAs were working to deliver a service that was completely new.

In discussions with delivery partners the benefit of the operational groups was highlighted again, with LAs noting how positive the collaborative process had been.

> I think the local authority relationship is really good and I hope it continues. You're here on the same side as everybody. And we're all here to do the same thing, and I think it's got to be element of trust, and I think we've definitely had that. – *Delivery Partner for LA C*

Regular panel meetings between project leads, delivery partners, early health teams, social workers and schools were effective in shaping the activities, assessing referrals and allocating the relevant provision. Having different delivery partners in the same room was said to be especially beneficial in effectively making decisions on referrals of young people to the specific activities available, something that was reported across the LAs.

> Partners have been very receptive and I think that's worked really, really well. So I've done lots of other things where you've had partners and it's not really worked well… but we're all coming together to work out the best form of delivery. – *LA C Lead*

Resource management

Staff recruitment

Most LAs faced challenges in recruiting staff with the required skills and experience to manage the short breaks services for the target population, while delivery partners faced challenges in recruiting staff to deliver the projects.

However, each LA identified different reasons for their challenges with recruitment. For example, one LA said that the short-term nature of the Programme did not provide sufficient stability for staff, making the role less attractive and harder to recruit to. Another said that their internal system of staff 'tiers' required them to aim for a relatively high tier staff (highly skilled and experienced) for the short breaks services, which were more difficult to recruit; and a third LA was already facing ongoing recruitment challenges.

> There needs to be consideration of challenges in [the] labour market at the moment and because funding is time limited, the contract associated with that is limited which makes it less attractive to potential applicants – *LA A lead*

Other LAs noted difficulties in recruitment for project support, citing delays in securing Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates to check criminal records, and ensure staff were suitable to work with young people.

To mitigate these issues, LAs highlighted the benefit of having operational/working groups, as they were able to troubleshoot and communicate about problems. For example, where a health partner identified that there needed to be some additional provision for young people with more complex needs, the group were able to discuss that in light of other referrals and adjust provision accordingly i.e. by combining two group sessions where suitable to free up resource to address that more complex need.

> We could not have done this without the operational group and steering group. – *LA C Lead*

Staff training

LAs provided training to delivery staff, although this did not seem to align with training needs.

In terms of training, LA areas offered training for delivery partners on things like facilitating groups and working with young people with disabilities. When delivery partners were asked about recruitment and training, generally they felt they were already sufficiently trained, and staff already had the necessary skills. This was particularly felt amongst some delivery partners who frequently worked with young people with SEND as they already had mandatory regular training.

Overall, there was a positive feeling amongst delivery partners about the comprehensiveness of the training. However, one interviewee thought that some additional training for issues related to older young people might have been beneficial, particularly on issues related to drugs and alcohol.

Other resourcing

LAs raised a number of challenges in relation to the availability of resources (venues and transport in particular) to deliver their activities.

A key issue raised by LAs was finding suitable venues to deliver the activities that were on offer. Some LAs struggled creating connections and links with providers to secure venues to use for the sessions. A particular issue was with securing venues for leisure and social activities, either due to a lack of availability or rental costs being too high. Others noted that even when they had secured a location the accessibility was challenging, for instance, not having automatically powered doors for wheelchair users to access unassisted.

An enabler of successfully launching a project was being able to work in existing locations. For instance, LA D had a central location already and took advantage of in-school facilities (such as gyms and climbing activities) where available. LA E were able to use their operational group to discuss sharing of venues and working collaboratively.

Transport was another challenge raised. Feedback from LA leads suggested that resourcing transport was always expected to be challenging, but in reality it was much harder than they expected. A reliance on taxis was often challenging due to availability and expense. Some LAs have been successful in finding minibuses to use, or issuing bus passes but for others this has not been a viable option, again due to expense or availability. In some cases this would not be suitable due to the different needs of different young people where a universal source of transport was not appropriate.

It was not uncommon for a young person to require an escort, needing extra time from staff at additional expense. Delivery partners reported that for some parents/carers, taking their child to the provision is a time commitment that renders the benefits gained from the project redundant. This could either be because of the distance they needed to travel to the placement was such that there was not enough time to return home, or the journey via public transport was inconvenient and presented the same problem.

Timelines

LA leads commented that the time from securing the bid to delivery was short, putting a considerable pressure on them to mobilise quickly. That said, most felt they managed to get up and running by July/ August 2022.

When delivery partners were asked about the timelines there was a general consensus that the time from securing the bid to delivery was short. They suggested that with longer lead in periods it would result in improved outcomes and better delivery as they would have time to prepare better. However, generally delivery partners felt that whilst more time would have been beneficial they still managed to deliver, because they were using resources (staff and locations) that were already operational in running similar schemes.

> It wasn't [a] disaster, it wasn't bad. It's just that in a perfect world I would have had a slightly better lead in. So, it was manageable. But that's with any case, more time would have been better. – *Delivery Partner for LA D*

Activities delivered

Chapter summary

The activities offered as part of these short break programmes were designed to either provide a break for parents and personal development or social opportunities for the young person, to provide young people with life skills to build their independence or to offer support and guidance to the parent/carer. The programmes were generally delivered by existing partners to the LA with good infrastructure in place to facilitate them, something necessary in the quick mobilised timescales.

With some exceptions the support offered was seen to be suitable and was effective in meeting the parent or carer aims of giving their child a positive experience and helping to give them a social outlet and build their confidence. There was less evidence that it was effective in achieving wider outcomes such as improving school attendance.

LAs saw no large issues with funding, in terms of carrying out their budgets and did not feel restricted. There was a feeling that reporting on funding could be laborious.

Referral processes were built around regular multi-disciplinary panel meetings with referrals coming from a widening range of organisations. Schools were the main source but increasingly referrals were coming from other support organisations and parents were more commonly starting to self-refer.

Uptake of places built up steadily after a slower start but there were still some barriers to engagement, mainly based around perceptions among parents/ carers that the provision will not be suitable, or children think they will not enjoy it. In the vast majority of cases, both were enthusiastic about the provision once they had tried it.

Being able to advertise what is involved in the sessions, providing case studies or testimony would be beneficial to counter any negative perceptions of the offer i.e. that would not be suitable.

This chapter focusses on the activities delivered by the LAs, their referral processes and their outputs. It discussed findings in relation to what worked well, what challenges were faced and how they were mitigated.

Type of activities offered

Activities offered were similar across the six LAs comprising of personal and social development opportunities for young people, sessions designed to help develop life skills and, in some LAs, support groups for parents/carers.

Activities offered by the six LAs were set up to provide three main outcomes:

- to engage young people via personal and social development activities and give their parents/carers a break

- to introduce and develop life skills for young people

- to offer guidance to parents/carers and provide them with support

The activities designed to engage young people and give their parents/carers a break were most commonly afterschool clubs or summer camps. These gave young people the opportunity to meet peers who have similar experiences and play games or take part in arts and crafts. Frequently these took place in community centres, or other council-run buildings, and sometimes in parks or at the coast to give young people access to nature. Sessions sometimes included trips to other venues such as a cinema or a museum or involved a physical aspect such as swimming or rock climbing.

While group activities were the most common form of short break, there were also one-to-one sessions for young people with greater need. These still involved the activities listed above but took place with a single member of staff who typically went to the young person's house and either completed the session there or took the young person to another venue.

In some cases, these one-to-one sessions involved a motivational coach trained in being able to form a connection with the young person and elicit engagement that has previously not been possible. This tended to be a more intensive way of working with young people with more complex needs. As a result, the activities needed to be adaptable to find ones that appealed to the young person, to help bring them out of themselves.

> One young person that we've actually been quite successful with. It's resulted in someone actually going into the house and literally sitting on the floor outside of their bedroom, talking through a closed door to getting them to come and engage and go for a walk around the block.
> – *Delivery Partner for LA A*

Other activities were designed to introduce or develop life skills. These were typically aimed at older young people and took place in community or family centres. In these

activities, young people learned how to cook, do laundry and other domestic duties, or took a trip outside and learned how to travel by train or go shopping.

Some of the activities were geared specifically to some form of transition. This was for older young people who were transitioning into adult services, or people of younger ages who were transitioning into secondary school or from secondary school to college.

For example, one project took young people into their new college or school to meet their teacher. They took a tour of the institution to become more familiar with it and did some very early lessons to help start to build relationships with the staff and get an understanding of what they could expect when they formally started attending.

In general the activities were well-received with parents commented across interviews and the survey that their children enjoyed them. One young person articulated this themselves,

> The activities were the best bit - *Young Person interview LA C*

The activities for parents/carers were designed to offer support, primarily through being able to discuss their experiences with other parents/carers who had been through the same issues and could understand. These included managing school attendance and educational attainment as well as challenging behaviour linked to anxiety or other aspects of the young persons' condition. These sessions were typically run by Parent-Carer Forum volunteers who were themselves parents or carers of young people with SEND. The sessions focussed on getting parents/carers to think about their own needs rather than their child's.

The sessions also offered guidance and advice on how to understand and deal with certain conditions, and they also provided information on resources and other sources of support.

Referral Processes

Referrals predominantly came through schools, although could also come from health professionals, social workers or self-referrals. These were then assessed in multi-partner panels who reviewed each case and allocated places on projects accordingly. While these panels were usually created for this purpose, they built on existing relationships and partnership working.

Referrals came in from different sources, such as social workers, schools, health professionals or any professional from different agencies involved in Early Help. They were then assessed by the panel for eligibility. Panel members decided whether a young

person was eligible for the offer, and if so, which provision would be most suitable for their needs.

Table 2 shows where referrals came from according to the reported data from LAs in the MI tool. The three main sources were from parents or carers themselves, schools or from other LA services. LA leads specified what they meant by 'other' services and these were typically social workers, early help teams or SEN teams and were prevalent in LAs D, E and F. Self-referrals were more common in LAs B and C, while referrals from schools were more common in LAs A, D and E.
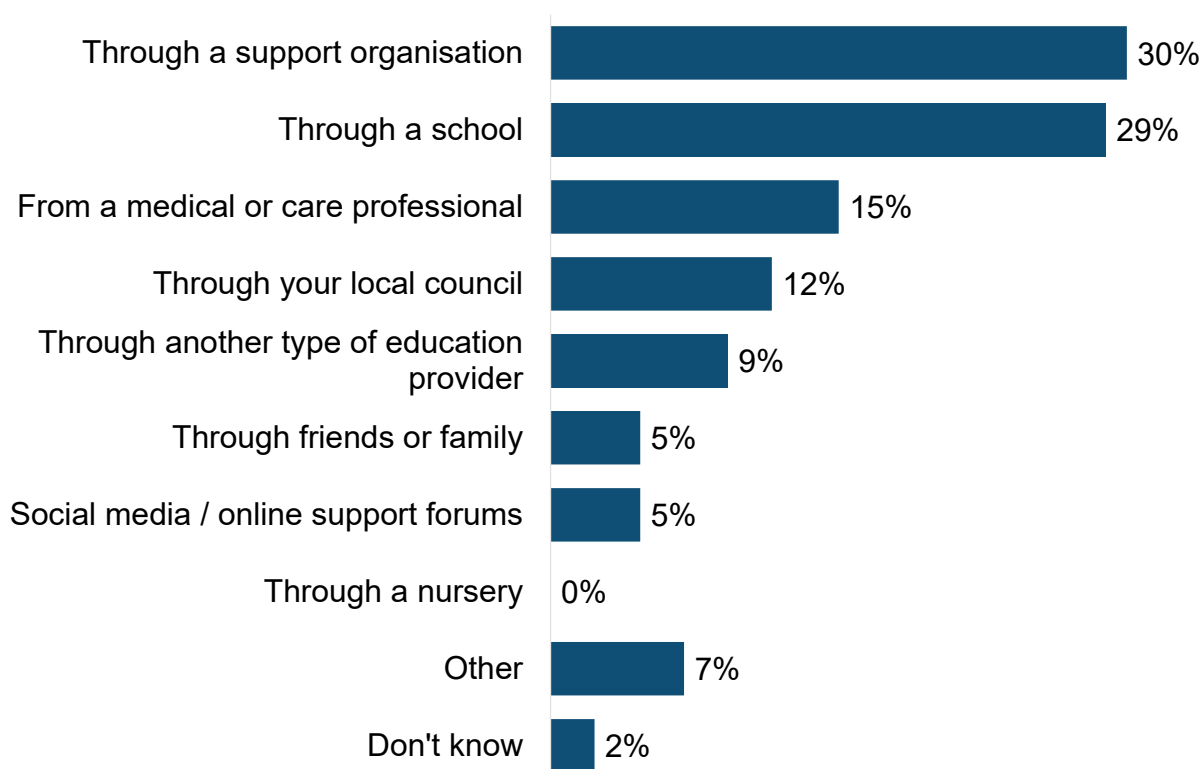
Table 2: Source of referrals

LA	Parent/ carer	Medical/ care professional	School	Nursery	Other education provider	Support org.	Other LA service	Other
LA A	0	4	47	0	0	2	17	0
LA B	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LA C	120	0	0	0	40	0	0	0
LA D	0	0	115	0	0	0	41	39
LA E	0	0	32	0	0	1	99	0
LA F	0	0	1	0	1	0	168	0

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

Project leads mentioned that there was scope for self-referral as seen in the high number above. Figure 2 shows where parents/carers who completed the survey reported hearing about the project. The most common response was through a support organisation (30%), closely followed by through the school (29%), and then through a medical or care professional (15%). Professionals commented that they believed that word of mouth had been an effective tool, probably the most effective, in raising awareness of the project among parents/carers.

Figure 2 Where parents/carers first heard about the short break provision

Source	Percentage
Through a support organisation	30%
Through a school	29%
From a medical or care professional	15%
Through your local council	12%
Through another type of education provider	9%
Through friends or family	5%
Social media / online support forums	5%
Through a nursery	0%
Other	7%
Don't know	2%

Source: Parent/Carer Survey A3: How did you first hear about the short break? All parents/carers (n=86)

Allocation of places happened through a panel, the make-up of which was largely consistent across LAs and comprised of project leads, delivery partners, early help teams, social workers, safeguarding teams and Special Educational Needs Coordinators. These panels have been effective in assessing referrals and allocating to relevant provision for all the LAs. In some LAs, panel meetings initially took place as often as once a week, but as the delivery of the activities progressed, they settled into once a fortnight.

The criteria used in these referral panels varied. The most common approach included a formal process which involved obtaining additional information on the young person from their school and health services and a formal review and discussion of each case to assess levels of need. Decisions were not dependent on whether the child or young person had been formally identified as having SEND, but the process often took longer where evidence needed to be gathered. Some delivery partners reported a more informal process for assessing referrals, but this was less common.

Who delivers and how

Delivery partners primarily delivered the short break places on projects. Delivery was primarily through the use of existing partners who, most commonly used resources (such as locations they owned or had contracts with) they already had access to. Funding was allocated and spent mostly in line with the LAs' plans in their applications.

LAs commissioned delivery partners to deliver the activities and in some cases utilised volunteers. The delivery partners, often charitable organisations, were organisations that LAs already had a working relationship with from other initiatives or ongoing support for young people with additional needs. This was partly because of the short timescales for the application for the fund and the need to quickly mobilise, which meant that the commissioning process was often compacted. It was also because LAs wanted to build on existing relationships and channels that had already been a success and had proven resources for delivery already in place, such as trained, experienced staff and venues.

Other LA teams also provided support in delivery. In most cases the Early Help Service was heavily involved in project provision, either as part of the referral process or by delivering sessions through their family centres.

In terms of successes, LA leads highlighted their partnerships and relationships with delivery partners as a key enabler in successful delivery of the project.

LA leads mentioned the speed that they were able to mobilise groups and get the set up organised as a key success. A further success that was highlighted was the actual knowledge that delivery partners had, which helped with recruitment and ensuring the right families were referred.

> There's groups of people whose job it is to try and help provide education places to children and families. So we use those kind of specialisms and local knowledge to get the right fit. – *LA D Lead*

Funding

LAs reported that funding management had largely been as they had expected, and they were able to deliver their projects within their budgets. There were some unexpected costs, but they all included a flexibility element in their budget to manage this. Examples given were having to replace broken equipment, such as chairs or games, or more money needing to be spent on taxis.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of spending reported by each LA through the MI Tool.

Table 3: LA spending by period, Year 1

LA	Period 1[6]	Period 2	Period 3	Total
LA A	£29,510	£57,754	£57,754	£145,018
LA B	N/A	£40,700	£110,246	£150,946
LA C	£146,681	£187,763	£234,194	£568,638
LA D	£60,626	£168,069	£131,772	£360,467
LA E	£39,671	£129,358	£162,093	£331,122
LA F	£53,489	£413,283	£525,450	£992,222

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

Typically, LAs spent more money as the year progressed. This was due to the time that it took to mobilise the project.

Table 4 shows a breakdown in the funding and what the money was spent on reported by each LA through the MI Tool.

Table 4: LA categories of spending, Year 1

LA	Project management / staffing	Direct delivery	Sub-contracted delivery	Transport	Training	Other set up	Overheads	Other
LA A	£0	£55,594	£87,264	£0	£0	£0	£0	£2,160
LA B	£12,000	£16,000	£0	£3,000	£0	£0	£4,000	£5,700
LA C	£0	£406,004	£159,814	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
LA D	£88,407	£43,954	£68,980	£68,696	£0	£0	£956,214	£0
LA E	£10,355	£64,289	£88,000	£4,585	£0	£1,800	£0	£0
LA F	£69,561	£6,000	£371,229	£3,773	£6,543	£118	£5,047	£4,500

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

As expected, most of the funding was spent on delivery and because most of this was done through delivery partners, the primary use of funding was sub-contracted delivery costs.

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[6] Period 1 ran from May 2022 to August 2022, period 2 was September 2022 to December 2022 and period 3 was January 2023 to April 2023. Gloucestershire operated on a delay so their period 1 ran September 2022 to December 2022, period 2 was January 2023 to April 2023 and period 3 was May 2023 to July 2023.

In line with the decision to use existing relationships and staff where possible, recruitment, marketing, and training costs were generally very low. Project management costs were not covered by the funding for some LAs and some project leads reflected that investing in project management was one area that was lacking.

Management of the budget and reporting on the finances was a larger and more time-consuming job than project leads expected. For example, reporting on funding was more detailed than anticipated, primarily because of DfE's alteration of the reporting template when giving monthly updates. Applying for funding in Year 2 was also a surprise where LA leads had thought they would be able to map Year 1 onto Year 2 but found out that the templates changed and requested some different information.

Because they were prioritising the delivery of the Year 1 programme, some LAs had not allocated sufficient time to reporting during Year 1 and were planning to review this for Year 2 funding applications.

> If I could have gone back, I would have put in for additional resource
> for help on that [managing the finance aspect] – *LA B Lead*

One of the reasons that reporting was more difficult than anticipated was that the granular breakdown of costs requested was at odds with the lump sum grants that the LAs received, making it harder to square these away. There was also a feeling that the level of detail required in reporting was high and a challenge given other commitments.

The projects generated some unexpected costs but these were able to be covered by flexibilities in the budget or, in some cases, absorbed by the delivery partner. An example of this was requiring a sensory tent that was purchased by the delivery partner who was able to put it to wider use. Other unexpected costs included replacing damaged equipment, additional costs for transport, and hiring storage space.

Needs addressed

By and large, LAs sought to address the gap between the high number of young people with SEND needs and the smaller number of families accessing short break services.

Feedback from LA leads indicated that they primarily wished to address the gaps that they identified in their needs assessment, which in most cases was services for young people who are not eligible for the regular short breaks provision, either because they were not yet formally identified as having SEND or did not meet the minimum threshold for eligibility.

Table 5 shows the reasons for referrals as reported by LAs in the MI Tool.

Table 5: Reasons for referrals

LA	Physical benefit to child	Mental/ emotional benefit to child	Activities they can't do independently	Risk of educational displacement	Emotional care causing stress to parent / carer	Physical care causing stress to parent / carer	Other
LA A	0	68	29	22	70	0	0
LA B	40	40	32	21	149	0	0
LA C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LA D	0	0	0	190	0	0	0
LA E	0	21	71	15	0	1	104
LA F	91	160	69	160	0	0	0

According to data from the MI tool, reported reasons for accessing the programme almost always centred around the needs of the child, mostly to mitigate the risk of educational displacement – a key aim for many of the programmes. The other major reasons were physical or mental health benefits to the child or allowing them to do activities they would otherwise be unable to do.

Activities focussed on supporting young people to improve their behaviour and their attendance in school, improve their behaviour at home where parents/carers were struggling to gain control, and, in LA A, provide support in cases of chaotic home life (such as domestic violence, which the young person may bear witness to, suffer from, or be responsible for).

> We know that some of them will always go into social care. But what we're aiming to do by building this independence and keeping them engaged [is that their] need for the social care will be reduced because they'll have more confidence and more independence. So that we should see a reduction in the need as they move forward into adulthood. – *LA C Lead*

Some LAs have commissioned academic research into need and have identified that young people with vulnerabilities around non-school attendance, mental health, challenging behaviours, and undiagnosed/diagnosed SEND were more vulnerable to the risks of exploitation. With low level presenting needs they wanted to respond and reduce the risk of exploitation at the earliest opportunity.

Some of the projects also sought to address parental need to help reduce their anxiety, guide, support and empower them and also build relationships where they felt better placed to trust schools to help.
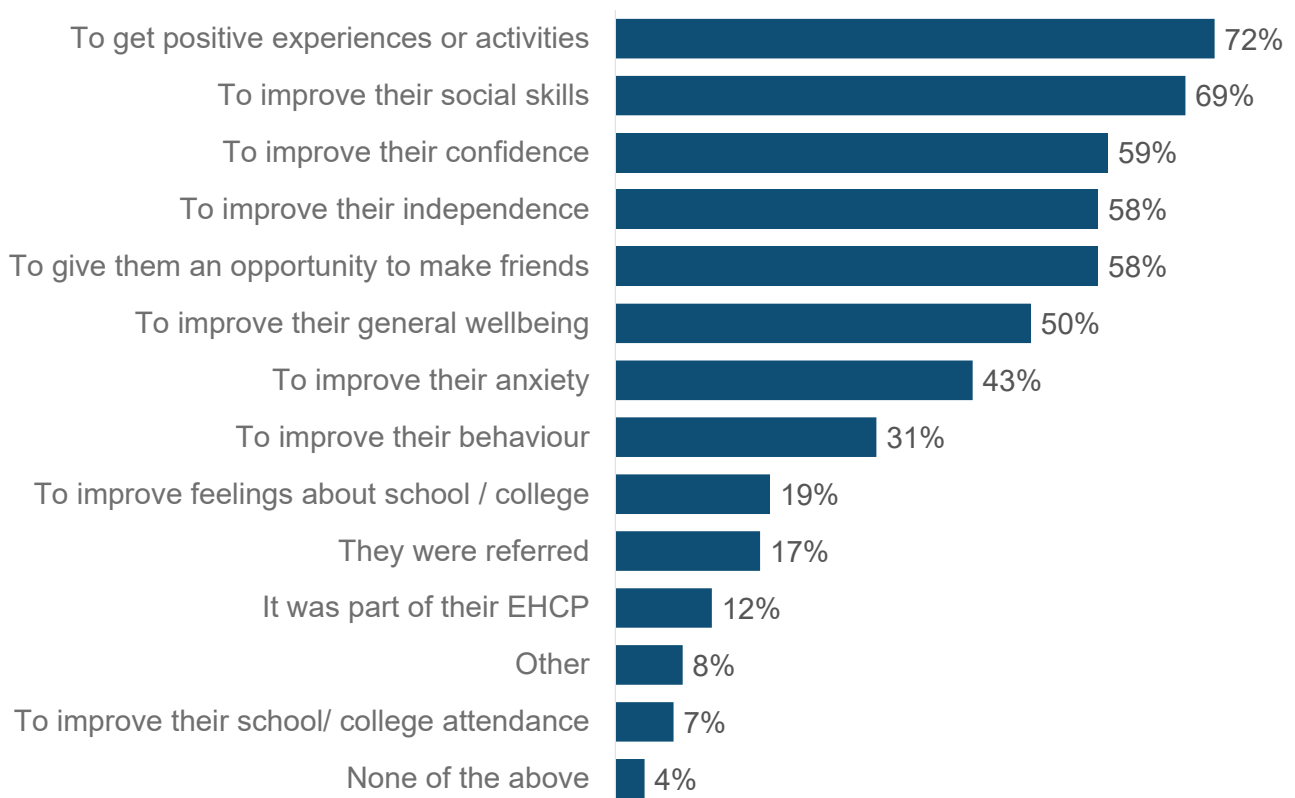
For schools and other services, the need was to reduce strain and dependence on specialist staff and services.

From a parent/carer perspective the aim of the provision was to give their child a positive experience and improve their confidence, independence, and social skills, while the targets for LAs were often more geared around improving school attendance and attainment, and also to provide support for parents/carers and to help reduce parental anxiety. The activities offered matched what parents/carers were hoping for.

Figure 3 shows the reasons parents/carers gave for their child taking part in the project. The most common reason was to give their children a positive experience or activities to enjoy, cited by 72% of parent/carers, closely followed by 69% who wanted to improve their children's social skills. In addition, 59% wanted to improve their children's confidence and 58% respectively wanted to improve their children's independence, or give their children more opportunity to make friends. Only 19% said they wanted to improve how their child felt about school or college.

Figure 3: Parent/carers' child-related motivations for making use of short break provision

Motivation	Percentage
To get positive experiences or activities	72%
To improve their social skills	69%
To improve their confidence	59%
To improve their independence	58%
To give them an opportunity to make friends	58%
To improve their general wellbeing	50%
To improve their anxiety	43%
To improve their behaviour	31%
To improve feelings about school / college	19%
They were referred	17%
It was part of their EHCP	12%
Other	8%
To improve their school/ college attendance	7%
None of the above	4%

Source: Parent/Carer Survey A2a: For which, if any, of the following reasons did your child take part in the short break? All parents/carers (n=86)

This finding was supported by the qualitative interviews with parents/carers, where many interviewees highlighted that their key motivations for taking up the short break provision were about improving their child's social skills and confidence.

> We hoped he will have the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. If the setting will help to overcome his social anxiety issues, he'd settle in better and start attending school regularly. – *Parent/carer interview LA A*

This was particularly the case among parents/carers of teenagers who were mindful of upcoming transitions for their child into college or training, and later to more independent living.

> We hoped this course [learning life skills such as domestic chores of managing finances] would help him develop independence. We're worried for when we can't do what we need to do, or when we're not
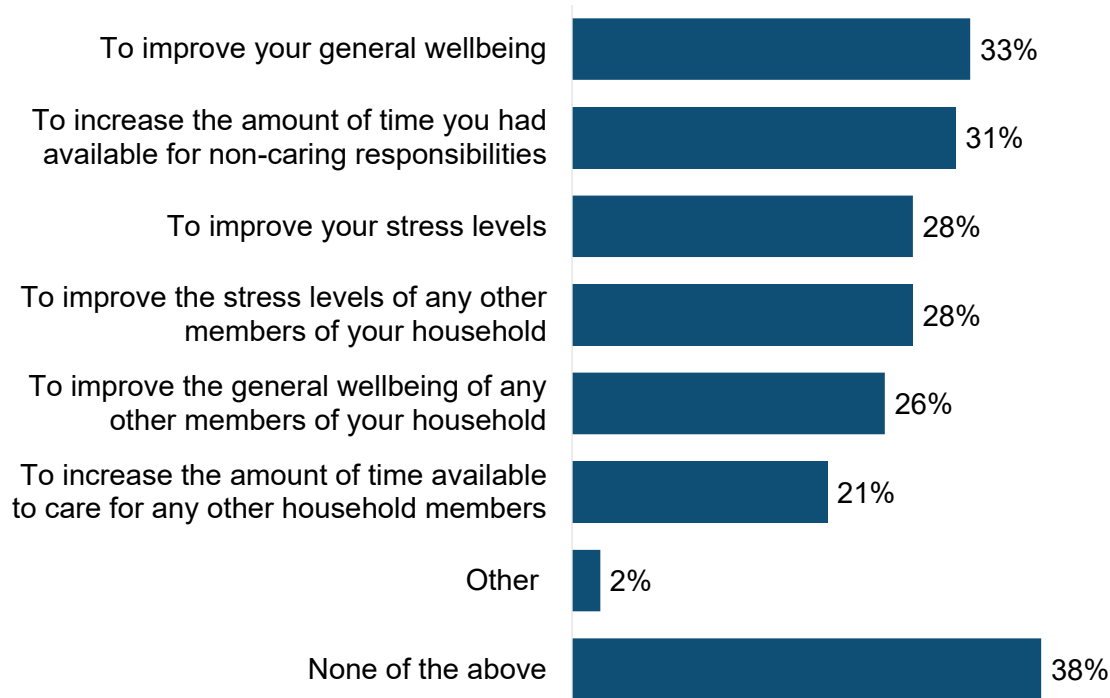
here. He needs more experience which is why we thought this was
going to be brilliant. – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

Parents/carers were less likely to give reasons pertaining to themselves or other members of their household as shown in Figure 4. One-third (33%) wanted to improve their own general wellbeing, 31% wanted to free more time for their non-caring responsibilities and 28% wanted to improve their stress levels. Twenty-eight per cent also wanted to improve the stress levels for other members of their household. Among parents who did cite these reasons, the qualitative interviews usually showed they were very important for the parent/carer's own wellbeing (in particular where they were single parents, or were also disabled) and where there were younger siblings.

[wanted help with] socialisation and anxiety around group activities, but mostly want to help get time off from caring duties and to focus more time on my youngest- Parent/carer interview LA B

Nearly two-in-five (38%) said that none of the suggested reasons relating to themselves or the wider family were why their child took part in the project, implying that the main reasons related to benefits for the child. Feedback from delivery partners confirmed that parents'/carers' motivations were focussed more on their children than on themselves. In the LAs which offered them, uptake for parental sessions was often quite low, and there were reports that it took a long time for parents/carers to be ready to talk about themselves or focus on their own needs.

Figure 4: Parent/carers' personal and family motivations for making use of short break provision

Motivation	Percentage
To improve your general wellbeing	33%
To increase the amount of time you had available for non-caring responsibilities	31%
To improve your stress levels	28%
To improve the stress levels of any other members of your household	28%
To improve the general wellbeing of any other members of your household	26%
To increase the amount of time available to care for any other household members	21%
Other	2%
None of the above	38%

Source: Parent/Carer Survey A2b: And thinking about you and your wider family, did your child take part in the short break for any of the following reasons? All parents/carers (n=86)

Table 6 shows the demographics of those who took up places across the six programmes, where known.

Table 6: Demographics of children and young people taking part in SBIF short breaks in Year 1 (where known)

Characteristic	Category	Number taking part
Gender	Male	390
	Female	174
Age	0-2	0
	3-5	201
	6-11	307
	12-15	350
	16-18	286
	19+	98

Characteristic	Category	Number taking part
Ethnicity	White	263
	Multiple ethic groups	29
	Asian/Asian British	23
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	21
	Another ethnic group	41
Parent/carers in household	One parent household	64
	Two parent household	84
Children in household	One	27
	Two	44
	Three	34
	Four	13
Child status	Children in Need (CIN)	66
	Other status	16

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

Table 7 shows the demographics of the children and young people who took up places across the six LAs by condition type and school type, where known.

Table 7: SEN type and school type of children and young people taking part in SBIF short breaks (where known)

SEN Type	Number taking part
Autism spectrum condition	306
Speech, language and communication needs	15
Visual impairment	<10
Hearing impairment	<10
Multi-sensory impairment	<10
Specific learning difficulty	<10
Moderate learning difficulties	18
Severe learning difficulties	49
Physical disability	26

SEN Type	Number taking part
Social, emotional or mental health issues	272
Profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)	<10
School Type	**Number taking part**
Mainstream state school	272
Special school	112
Independent school	0
Pupil Referral Unit / Alternative Provision	119
Nursery / Pre-school	0
Elective home education	<10
FE college/ specialist post-16 provision	35
No school attended	15
Other	<10

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

Suitability of the offer

Parents/carers were mostly satisfied that the short break provision was suitable for their child's needs. Several mentioned they would like the short breaks to be longer and that they would like them on weekends rather than in the week.

Most parents/carers were satisfied with the short breaks and deemed them to be suitable for their child. Overall, 77% of parents were very satisfied with the short break and 17% were quite satisfied. Only 4% were quite dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Those who reported in the survey they were dissatisfied were so because they thought the short breaks were not long enough, or were not suitable for their child.

> Too short hours, too far away, limited activities, doesn't help with the purpose of a break for other family members, just creates more stress having to get there and costs more for far travel. –
> *Parent/carer survey LA F*

Even those who were satisfied called for longer or more regular breaks.

> These need to be weekly to allow anxious children to build up
> familiarity and rapport with the staff so they are more able to attend
> clubs in the holidays. – *Parent/carer survey LA B*

Eighty-two per cent of parents/carers were satisfied with the length of the short break including 62% who were very satisfied, but feedback from the qualitative interviews suggested that a few parents/carers thought the length of the break was not long enough.

In many cases this was because they wanted more of a break and that by the time they had got used to the new routine with the break, it was taken away.

> It was too short. They did meet up but it was only for 6 weeks and
> then it was over with again. She went back to being a lonely old soul.
> – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

They also felt that travel time ate into the provision meaning that their child did not get to enjoy the activities or break for as long as they would have liked.

Feedback from staff, parents/carers and young people suggested the majority of the young people enjoyed the activities and that they were suitably tailored to their needs and successful in achieving the targeted outcomes.

Breaks that were deemed especially suitable were those that built on existing relationships and activities that the young people liked. There were high levels of praise for parents/carers for staff, for their compassion knowledge and ability to form strong and supportive relationships with their child.

In some cases, short breaks needed to be adapted to ensure that they were suitable for the young person's needs. Both the level and uniqueness of young people's needs were a surprise for some LAs and delivery partners. However, they worked flexibly to make adaptations as required, which in many cases has led to them working with smaller groups and providing more one to one provision than originally planned.

One delivery partner identified the need to improve referrals to ensure a better match between young people's needs and the activities and support they were being offered. There were also issues with age differences that had not been foreseen in LA D. Where groups had been set up based purely on need, there were instances in which disparities in age were a problem because of some language or subject matter being used by older young people, which were unsuitable for people of younger ages, meaning the groups needed to be reassigned.

> We couldn't really mix some of the age groups. We've gone for
> Monday evenings for more of our 12 plus children, and then the

> Thursday evenings have gone... with places for the 12 and below. –
> *Delivery Partner for LA D*

LA D offered support for parents/carers as part of its SBIF provision, and reviewed this over time, to adopt a more targeted approach. This LA initially tried to offer support to parents/carers through casual coffee mornings or meetings, but found that this type of approach was not working as well as they would have liked. While a good 'entry point' for initial welcome sessions, the setting was deemed too public and too 'casual' to allow parents to open up and talk about potentially sensitive issues. Parents/carers would rather have less frequent but more targeted sessions with more focus on outcomes. There was also an appetite for more sessions focussed on single fathers or grandparents who were primary caregivers.

Figure 5 shows the high satisfaction levels of parent/carers with the location, length and the hours of the short breaks. Seventy-one per cent of parent/carers were very satisfied with the location and 17% were quite satisfied. The venues tended to be familiar sites for families such as family centres they were used to using, or transport was available to collect the young person. There was no specific feedback given by the 4% of parents who were either fairly or very dissatisfied with the short break location.
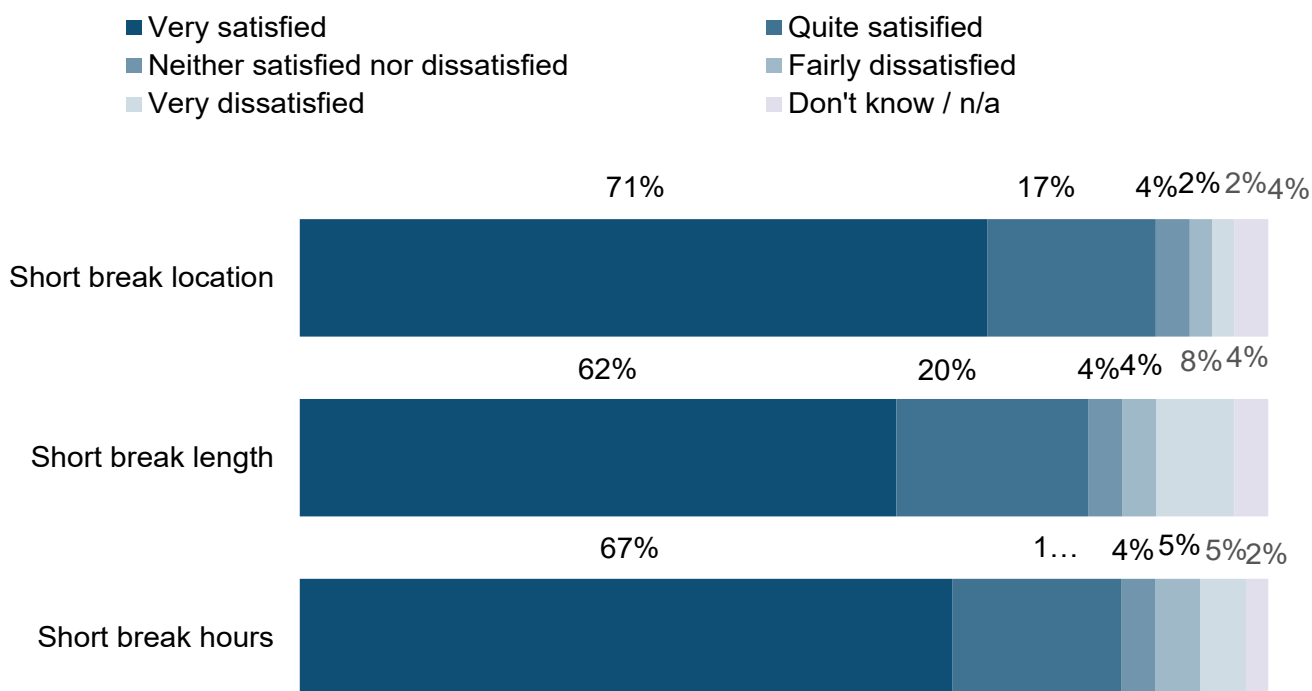
In relation to the projects with a more specific training and development focus, such as creating independence for adulthood, a few parents/carers thought the project was too short. While they saw value in it and improvement in their child's independence and ability to do tasks, they worried that these behaviours would not last because the projects did not have long enough to consolidate the behaviours.

Eighty-four per cent of parents/carers were satisfied with the short break hours including 67% who were very satisfied. However, here too the qualitative data identified that some parents/carers felt there could be improvements. The most common feedback was that it would have been useful to have more provision during school holidays.

> We could really do with it over the school holidays. – *Parent/carer*
> *survey LA D*

Several parents/carers interviewed in the qualitative research mentioned that they would have liked to see weekend provision, partly because they would have liked to have support at the weekends, but also because the weekday provision, which was common, was not always suitable for various reasons such as their child was tired after a full day at school or college, lack of transport, or difficulties fitting activities around parents/carers' work commitments.

Figure 5: Satisfaction with aspects of the short break

Legend:
- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know / n/a

Short break location: 71% | 17% | 4% | 2% | 2% | 4%

Short break length: 62% | 20% | 4% | 4% | 8% | 4%

Short break hours: 67% | 1… | 4% | 5% | 5% | 2%

Source: Parent/Carer Survey B7: How satisfied, or dissatisfied, were you with the following aspects of the short break? All parents/carers (n=86)

Take up of places

Take up of places was slower initially than LAs expected, but grew over the year. Getting parents/carers or young people in their teens to engage in the projects was challenging.

Take up of places was generally slower than LAs expected, which was attributed to the difficulties in launching the projects due to the compressed timescales. However, by the end of the first year, there was a feeling that take up of the offer were picking up and reaching expected levels.

Project leads and delivery partners reported mixed success when it came to the engagement of young people and parents/carers in the project and their subsequent recruitment.

Typically, delivery partners and projects leads reported that engagement was better among younger cohorts than older ones, typically pre-teen rather than teenagers. According to parents, some young people also did not like the activity offered, either because of the timing of the activity or because they were resistant to trying something new. The barriers tended to be around perception and when young people actually

started the project, they were often positive about it and enjoyed it. Engagement with parents/carers, however, was very inconsistent. There were several reasons suggested as to why engagement could sometimes be difficult. These included a lack of transport, sessions not being on a weekend, resistance from parents/carers who did not trust the provision to be suitable or were proud and resistant of help, or that the support was not suitable for their child's needs.

Table 8: Places taken up by month, MI shared by local authorities

LA	Apr 22	May 22	Jun 22	Jul 22	Aug 22	Sep 22	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23
LA A	0	0	11	40	45	36	35	37	35	88	65	109	-
LA B	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	22	51	40	83	140	153	70
LA C	0	234	310	426	1080	22	31	38	32	-	-	-	-
LA D	0	0	0	96	102	78	114	78	114	61	104	61	-
LA E	11	14	16	18	36	26	15	28	24	-	-	-	-
LA F	0	0	0	18	24	280	280	280	280	-	-	-	-

Source: MI returns provided by funded LAs

Overall, parents/carers reported that it was rare for their children to miss any sessions. On the occasions they did, this was due to illness rather than any more deep-rooted issue like accessibility or dislike of the project.

LA F reported that one of their older age groups (12-14) had inconsistent attendance, and they often preferred activities like paintballing or go-karting, which were more unique and tended to be more expensive. Delivery partners reported that they felt older young people's difficult behaviour was more entrenched than people of younger ages and therefore there was more work to be done to engage them, often involving these more expensive activities.

The younger age group (8-11) had a much better and consistent attendance and engagement across all activities.

Family engagement was also noted as a challenge within some programmes, with some families deterred by too much intervention. Generally, this was mitigated with a conversation and providing them with more detail.

Follow-up phone calls were regularly needed to make sure parents were still part of the provision aimed at them. One project lead reported that having a parent/carer on the project board with first hand experience helped to boost parent/carer engagement. They

were able to suggest making adjustments to the programme based on their insight into the pressures and struggles parents/carers face.

Suggestions given for how to do this included: changing the timings of sessions and amending the language used to describe the project. Several parents thought it would be beneficial to make the sessions sound more casual and supportive rather than overly official, perhaps corrective, i.e., making up for insufficiencies in parenting.

Where LAs planned to deliver activities for parents/carers, they also faced challenges in engaging them. In most cases, the activities offered for parents/carers were in the format of group sessions, thinking that parents/carers would find support in a group with other parents/carers with lived experience. These tended to be online calls during the day, although some were held in person, and would be in small groups of four or five. However, this format appeared to have been a less desirable for parents/carers. LA leads reported that take up was low, either because parents/carers were not comfortable discussing their stories with other parent/carers or because the timing was not convenient and parents/carers were struggling to fit activities in their already heavy schedule. LA leads and parents/carers also commented that parents/carers were generally less interested about services for them and were focussing more on ensuring their children find an activity that suits their needs. After realising that take up for parents/carers group was low, some LAs cut down or stopped the offer altogether, and one LA moved the offer online so parents/carers could access the content in their own time.

> Our parent/carer forum decided that they would like to do it themselves and design the courses. And so we funded them to design the course and they put together a program which and I've tried to get our parents support team engaged with them as well, they've continued with it and at the moment it's not working so very low take up mainly because it's 10 sessions. And which we've now brought down into five sessions, but it's still a huge commitment for families. And if you've got a 16 year old, you've done pretty well so far. ... I don't think parents see the need for it. – *LA C Lead*

Another LA moved to offer one-to-one support for parents/carers where this was needed, desirable and where the funding allowed. Parents/carers who were approached for the first time, or those whose child had recently been formally identified as having SEND or were still being assessed were much less likely to engage with the project. One project lead felt that this was why word of mouth was so important. New parents/carers were likely overwhelmed by official sources or somewhat suspicious of them. In other cases though, outreach teams were extremely effective in reaching new parents/carers.

The flexibility of certain projects had advantages and disadvantages. For example, taking a drop-in, flexible approach to attendance could appeal to some families who may not otherwise engage due to the pressures that they were under, but   inconsistent attendance could also have an impact on resourcing and the efficiency of the project.

Delivery partners and project leads felt that most of the barriers to engagement could be cleared by presenting the project in the right way and tackling negative preconceptions. LAs reported that some parents/carers were inherently suspicious of support, either from a place of pride or because they did not think the provision would be suitable for their child. In one case, a parent/carer worried that their child would not be safe in the care of the project team, but staff were able to reassure the parent/carer that they were able to fully handle their child's needs and the parent/carer then fully supported the project.

Similarly, there was initial resistance from some of the young people. Reports from delivery partners were overwhelmingly that the young people would return and enjoy the sessions once they had experienced them, i.e. attended the first session.

> There's often a resistance from the young people initially but they always come back. So …once we get them and they come through the door and they, they're basically I mean again a lot of bravado. Why am I coming here? What am I doing? But they've been back every week. – *Delivery Partner for LA D*

> He wasn't sure about it and we had to talk him in but then every week he comes back just smiling and chatting away. – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

Project leads and delivery partners have made efforts to boost engagement. They attempted to raise awareness through word of mouth by telling schools and support organisations about the projects and their successes to reach and convince a wider range of parents/carers. This saw positive results as evidence showed referrals were coming from an increasingly wide range of organisations and from parents themselves, suggesting they are becoming more engaged.

> We thought that it would be easy enough to get those referrals all through schools. And what we're finding is that referrals are coming through other practitioners like early help workers, social workers, but also we've developed a self-referral project for parents and carers to refer as well. – *LA D Lead*

Other projects looked to make their sessions more accessible. One example was taking after school sessions into schools to remove any transport issues and allowing the

project to target specific schools that were having problems with supporting young people with additional needs or resultant attendance and attainment problems.

Sometimes the barrier was not overcome and this was typical in the instances where parents felt the short break provision was not suitable for their child.

> The only option on offer to my child does not meet their needs well enough for them to engage. – *Parent/carer survey LA C*

In one case, the parent/carer felt that the provision was not suitable for their child's needs and that the staff at the school did not have sufficient knowledge or experience of working with young people with autism. The parent/carer commented that they would like to have attended themselves or have a sibling attend who would be able to support the child's need, with the added benefit of that support coming from a familiar source.

Outcomes of the SBI Fund

Chapter summary

At the time of the interviews (during the first year of the implementation of SBIF) it was too early to measure outcomes robustly. However, feedback from research participants suggested that there were early indications of improved outcomes from the programme. Most of the parents who responded to the survey reported improvements in young people's confidence, anxiety levels, social skills, independence, general wellbeing and friendships. Slightly less than half indicated improvements in their child's behaviour and just over a third indicated improvements in their child's school attendance. However, around half of the parents who responded to the survey did not see any change in their children's behaviour or school attendance.

The majority of parents were overall satisfied with the short breaks offer, referring to the activities provided, the quality of support provided, the communications and feedback provided, the short breaks location, the short breaks hours and the short breaks length as areas of satisfaction. That said, a small number of parents were not satisfied with the offer, because the activities, duration, length or distance of the offer did not suit theirs or their child's needs.

There were fewer reports of improved outcomes for parents. However, most parents said that the priority was to improve outcomes for their children, not for themselves. Where parents did report improved outcomes for themselves, they referred to having more time for non-caring responsibilities or to care for other family members (than the young person for whom the short break was offered), reduction in their or other members of the family's, stress levels, , and improvements in their own and other members of the family's general wellbeing.

For a small proportion of families who took part in the research, there were no improved outcomes for the young person or themselves. Where this was the case it was because the short breaks offer was not suited to the young person's needs or because any improvement that was observed during activities, was short lived and did not sustain once the young person went back to their day-to-day environment.

How were outcomes measured?

LAs used different approaches to monitoring and measuring the outcomes of the activities funded under the SBI.

Approaches to measuring outcomes included utilising validated tools for measuring outcomes (such as Parent Self-Efficacy Survey[7], Me and My Feelings[8], Outcomes Star[9]), monitoring school attendance and exclusion data and collecting feedback from participants (both formally through surveys and feedback forms and informally through conversations with families). In addition, LAs outlined different sets of outcomes that they were working towards, which included:

- Fund level outcomes - engagement and take up of the offer
- Various outcomes for the young people
    - improvement in school attendance
    - improved confidence
    - reduced anxiety
    - improved general wellbeing
- Various outcomes for the family as a whole
    - respite for parents/carers
    - improved confidence of parents/carers
    - improved general wellbeing of members of the family

The interviews with SBIF project leads suggested that data on outcomes were collected and held by different bodies (schools, delivery partners, practitioner teams such as Educational Psychologists), which meant that access to these data was not straightforward in all cases. In some of the LAs, project leads needed to arrange data sharing agreements and permissions to be able to get access to data that were held by other organisations. This caused delays in getting a full picture on progress and outcomes for the young people and families.

The issue with access to data was also raised in the interviews with non-funded LAs. It appears that it was quite common for data on service users to be held in different places by different providers. While this helped to ensure the information security of personal data, this also posed a challenge for LAs to coordinate services (and avoid duplication or imbalance in resource allocation where some families accessed multiple services and others were not able to access any) and to monitor and measure outcomes for participants.

Information on outcomes is vital to inform any assessment of the effectiveness and success of the short breaks services and provide information on questions such as:

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[7] https://www.topse.org.uk/site/what-is-topse/
[8] https://www.corc.uk.net/media/2258/me-my-feelings-questionnaire.pdf
[9] https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/

- Do activities meet young people's needs?

- Are young people's objectives, as per their Child Action Plan, being achieved?

- What improved outcomes are observed?

- What unintended outcomes are observed?

Limited information on effectiveness might mean that LAs miss opportunities to inform improvements in the offer where these are needed. This is a particular risk for the four LAs that are continuing implementation in Year 2 of the SBIF.
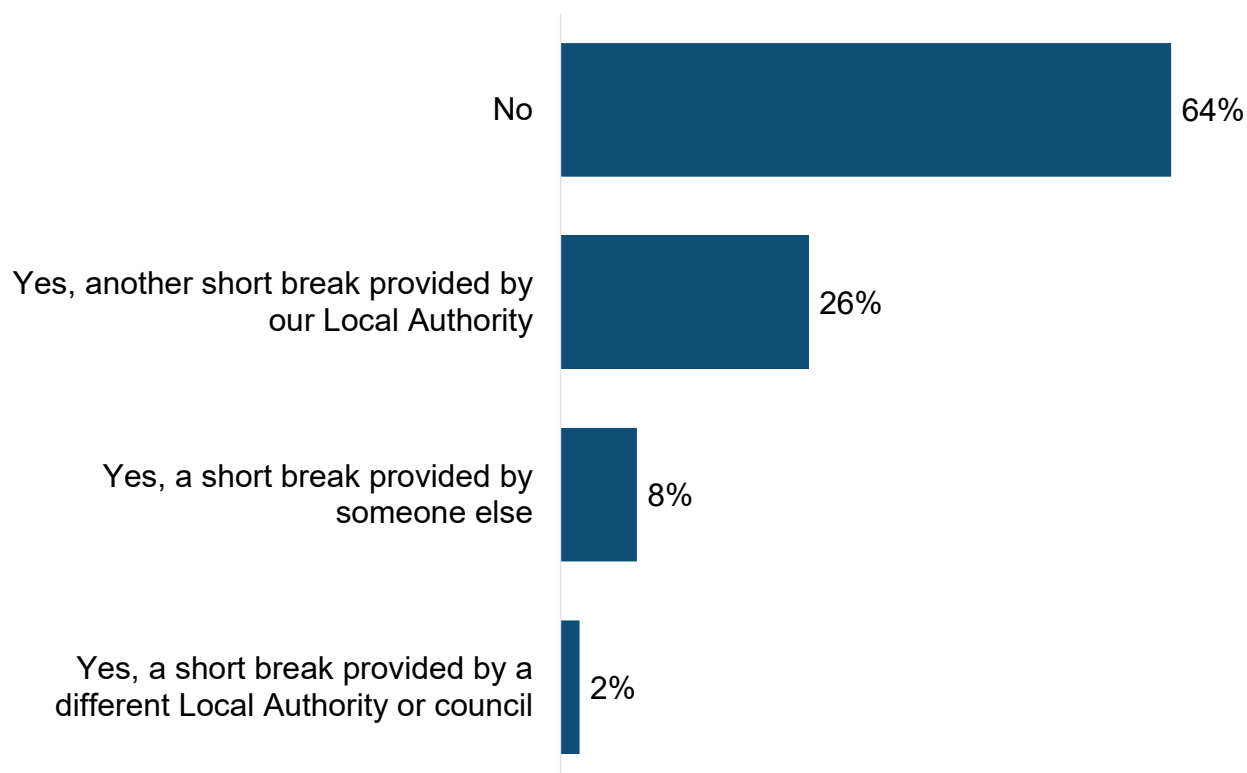
Indeed, **at the time of the interviews LAs did not have complete datasets or detailed data on outcomes of the short breaks activities**. Stakeholders also commented that it was too early in the implementation of their services to measure outcomes robustly, resulting in relatively partial data on outcomes across the board.

What are the self-reported outcomes for participants?

LAs wanted to be part of the SBIF to be able to support under-represented groups and to test innovative models of delivery. For nearly two thirds of families who took part in a project, it was their first engagement with a short break offer.

Survey data showed that for most of the families who were engaged in activities funded by the SBIF this was their first experience with short breaks services. Over two-thirds of families had not previously engaged with any other short break offer in the past (64%). Feedback from LA leads suggested that in most cases this was because families did not meet the threshold to be eligible for the short breaks offer available outside the SBIF. This indicates that LAs generally met the first aim of the SBIF - to improve access for under-represented groups.

Figure 6: Whether families had previously made use of short breaks, before taking part in SBIF provision

Category	Percentage
No	64%
Yes, another short break provided by our Local Authority	26%
Yes, a short break provided by someone else	8%
Yes, a short break provided by a different Local Authority or council	2%

Source: Parent/Carer Survey A4: Has your child taken part in any other short breaks in the past? All parents/carers (n=86)

Overall, parents/carers and young people report improved outcomes following participation in SBIF short beaks activities.

The feedback from SBIF project leads, delivery partners and families indicated that there were improved outcomes for the majority of young people following their participation in short breaks activities funded by the SBIF.

Most parents/carers, who participated in the interviews, said that their children enjoyed the activities very much. While initially some children were anxious about going to the activities, after they experienced the activities their anxiety levels reduced and most continued to attend activities regularly and were enthusiastic about going. The interviews suggested that where activities were particularly successful for the young people, there was often a member of staff with whom the young person formed a strong rapport. The downside of this was that when the trusted and preferred member of staff was not around, the young people who depended on that relationship tended to shut down and after a while refuse to continue attending the activities.

Parents/carers noted a range of improved outcomes for their children. Data from the survey for parents/carers showed that the majority of parents/carers felt that participating in short breaks activities has had improved outcomes for their children in terms of their social skills, mental health and general wellbeing. Figure 7 summarises the outcomes that parents/carers reported (excluding outcomes which parents/carers cited as 'not applicable').

Figure 7: Outcomes for young people (reported by parents/carers, %)
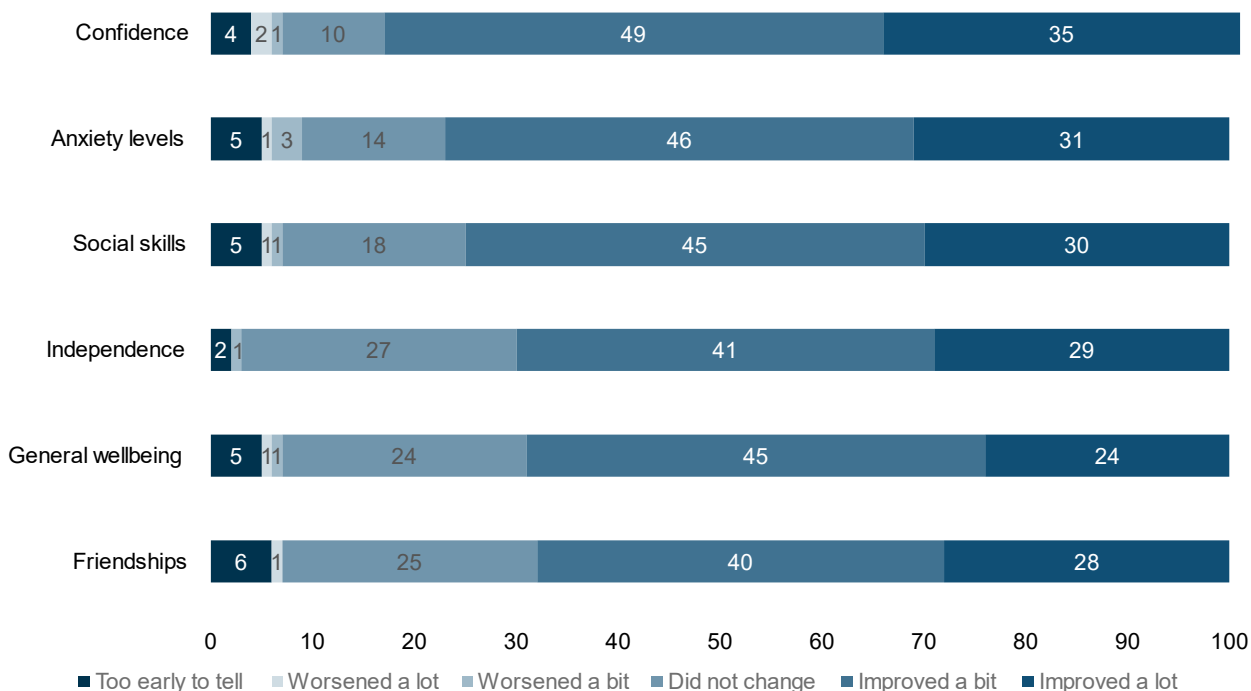
Source: Parent/Carer Survey C1: Thinking about the impact of the short break on your child, to what extent has it made a difference to any of the following…? Parents/carers for whom the outcome was relevant (n=78-84)

Increased confidence of young people following their participation in the short break activities was the outcome cited most by parents (83% of parents said their child's confidence improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'). Other outcomes cited by most parents were reduced anxiety levels (77% of parents saying anxiety levels improved 'a bit' or 'a lot') and improved social skills (75% of parents saying social skills improved 'a bit' or 'a lot').

> Huge [benefits]. The confidence and self-esteem and the attitude, stronger personality – *Parent/carer interview LA A*

> He's enjoying doing activities with other children. They gain friendships by sharing these experiences together, which means a lot for someone with ASD – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

> I would go every day if I could – *Young person interview LA E*

Parents/carers and young people also talked about gaining greater independence (70% of parents said their child's independence improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'), which meant young people felt able to go to the shops on their own or travel to see friends on their own. Parents/carers also reported that this has increased their trust in their children, as they'd seen that they can manage on their own. One parent in LA C said that their child learned to behave better while travelling on the bus. They added that their child's behaviour improved considerably and they could go and eat outside in a restaurant as a family, something they could not have done before.

One parent in LA E said that they have seen their child's confidence increase over their time receiving short breaks support, and within a few months they were able to engage in volunteering activities. Other parents/carers spoke about life skills that their children acquired, such as cooking, doing the washing up and budgeting.

> My son's confidence has grown and he is becoming ever more independent – *Parent/carer survey LA C*

> It gave my daughter opportunities to socialise with other young people independently from us but still safe and supervised – *Parent/carer survey LA C*

While many improved outcomes have been reported, the short breaks had more mixed success in improving outcomes in school attendance and young people's behaviour.

The survey data indicated that around half (49%) of parents/carers did not see a change in their child's behaviour and 57% did not see a change in their child's school attendance[10]. That said, a substantial proportion of parents/carers did see a positive change in these areas (45% of parents/carers reported an improvement in their child's behaviour and 38% reported an improvement in their child's school attendance). One parent/carer in LA A said their child was able to go back to school online after two years of non-attendance.

> He's proper come out of his comfort zone and learned to trust someone else. I remember when he refused to even leave his bedroom and wouldn't talk to someone he didn't know without a blanket over his head. Now he's going to family parties, trying to work on his eye contact. " – *Parent/Carer interview LA E*

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[10] Like the data on other outcomes, these figures exclude parents/carers who cited 'not applicable'.

"[young person] still has difficulties, that's for sure, but we have seen a difference in his schooling and in playing" – *Parent/Carer interview LA A*

However, not all participants experienced improved outcomes. One parent/carer in LA B said that the activities were not well suited to their child's needs which resulted in more frustration and stress for them and their child.

My child has found it too difficult to engage with what is on offer, it does not meet their needs well enough and this means that nothing is on offer – *Parent/carer survey LA B*

Another parent/carer in LA E said that any improvements in outcomes were short-lived, and their child reverted back to their previous behaviour once back in their regular environment. The same parent/carer said that the behaviour outbursts had deteriorated at home after their child attended the short breaks activities, as though they needed to 'release steam' after having to be well behaved during the activities.

I didn't know what was going to come so it was a struggle every time - *Young person interview LA E*

A few parents/carers commented that engaging their children with the activities was so difficult and stressful, that it actually had a negative effect on their general wellbeing. This was often happening with young people who experienced high levels of social anxiety. Parents/carers of these young people noted that it would have helped to get detailed information about the sessions structure and content ahead of each one, so that the young people would feel better informed and know what to expect, and in turn their anxiety levels about participating in the activity would reduce.

In some cases, young people became more confident as they got more familiar with the staff and the sessions.

When I met [my support worker] I was very nervous, when I did my travel training. But that's better now and I like it – *Young person interview LA C*

Some parents who had more positive experiences described how their child was able to meet staff on a one-to-one basis before they started the activities, to help familiarise them with what to expect, or take part on a more flexible basis at first (without committing to attending a full-length session) to help them get used to the provision gradually. Parents/carers and children alike appreciated being offered this type of gradual introduction.

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Parents/carers felt more supported as a result of the short breaks activities and noted that it helped reduce their stress levels and freed up their time to care for other family members or to engage in non-caring activities.

The survey data indicated that the majority of parents/carers felt that the short breaks activities had improved outcomes for themselves or their families, as summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Outcomes for parents/carers (reported by parents/carers, %)
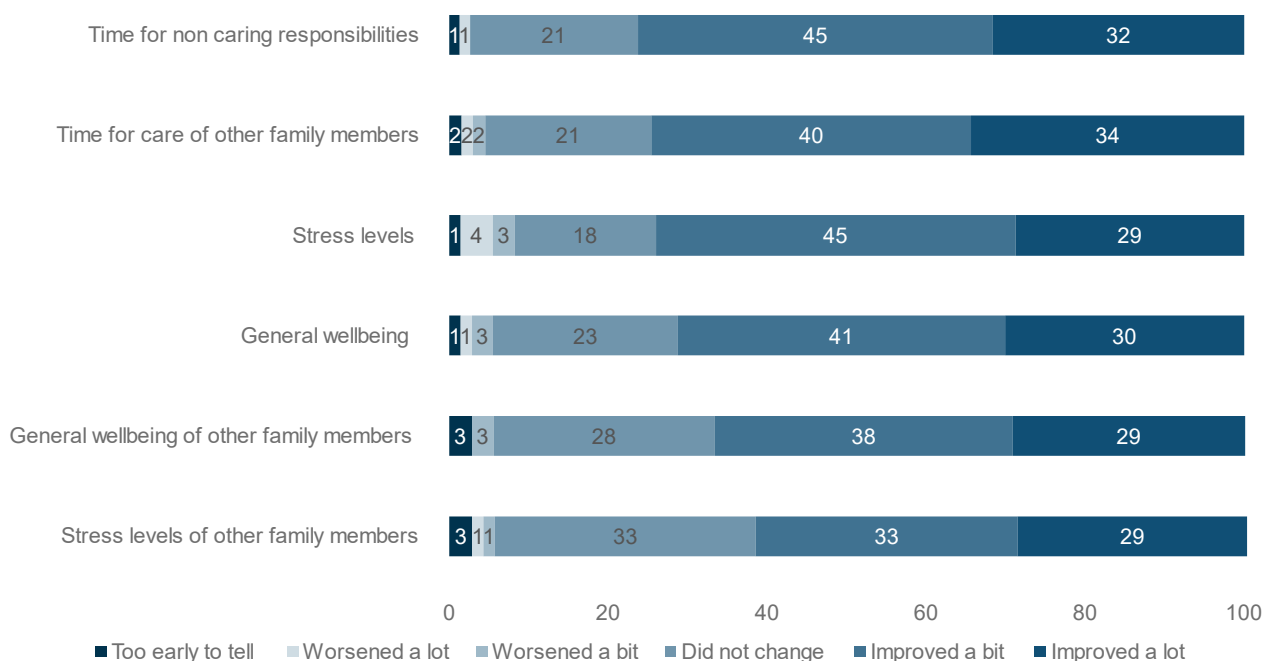
Source: Parent/Carer Survey C2: Now, thinking about the impact of this short break on you and the rest of your household, to what extent has it made any difference to the following…? Parents/carers for whom the outcome was relevant (n=67-73)

The most common outcomes for parents/carers were having more time for non-caring responsibilities (cited by 76% of parents/carers – noting this has improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'), having more time to care for other family members (cited by 75% of the parents/carers – improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'), and reduced stress levels (cited by 74% of parents/carers – improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'). Other improved outcomes, which were cited by a lower proportion of parents but still a large majority, were: improved general wellbeing (71% improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'), improved general wellbeing of family members (67% improved 'a bit' or 'a lot'), and improved stress levels of other family members (61% improved 'a bit' or 'a lot').

> I don't feel as anxious now about him doing things like going to the
> shop, because I know he knows what he's doing. Last time he went

out on his own was in Year 7 and he's in Year 12 now. It's really nice to see the change in him. – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

Parents/carers talked about having 'recharge time' and knowing that their child is being well looked after and safe as improved outcomes for themselves.

Even just a few hours of peace, even just to go for a walk, means I can recharge – *Parent/carer interview LA A*

Because it did really help me mentally, be able to work and knew my son was in safe hands and was able to learn and play – *Parent/carer interview LA A*

Some parent/carers talked about have more time to spend with their other children, which was very valuable to them.

Me and my [other child] can have a couple of hours trouble free and we'll go for a coffee somewhere and it's nice to have that time cause, obviously, [young person's name], he does take quite a lot of our times, which is understandable. So it is nice to have that couple of hours [days of activity] at tea time where it's just me and my [other child] to literally breathe – *Parent/Carer interview LA F*

It allows us to focus on our other son, like we recently took him to [name of attraction] - it's too noisy there for [name of son taking part in short breaks], he wouldn't be able to deal with it. It means we can treat him and he has a break as well. It give us time with him as a family unit and gives him a different perception on things – *Parent/carer interview LA E*

In addition, around 80% of parents/carers, who responded to the survey, said they felt more supported (either a bit or a lot). Thirteen per cent said there was no difference (they did not feel more or less supported than before).

That said, the data indicated that fewer parents/carers felt that there were improved outcomes for themselves (between 61% and 76%), compared with the proportion who felt that there were improved outcomes for their children (between 68% and 83%). In interviews with parents/carers, they indicated that their priority was to see improved outcomes for their children, rather than for themselves, so not having direct improved outcomes for themselves did not affect their overall satisfaction with the provision.

He's enjoyed himself and that's the main thing at the end of the day – *Parent/Carer interview LA C*

Conclusions and learning points

This section draws conclusions and learning points from the Year 1 evaluation mapped against its objectives.

To understand what worked well and areas for improvement in relation to bidding and allocation of funding

LAs wanted to be part of the SBIF to be able to support under-represented groups and to test innovative models of delivery.

LAs were of the general opinion that the application took a long time to complete and that a lot of information was needed before the bid could be submitted. Some LAs who did not receive funding reported that they thought the requirements were too strict and that the template provided by DfE limited their ability to present their ideas well. Furthermore, due to the rigidness of the application process, some LAs said that they were not able to innovate as much as they would have liked and suggested that a more developmental, 'test and learn' approach to the Year 1 application would have helped with this.

Evidence from LA project leads suggested that tight timescales and long lag times on feedback presented issues to applications. When feedback came, however, it was viewed as detailed and fair.

LAs commented that timelines were short from securing the bid to delivery, which put pressure on them to mobilise quickly, which was echoed by delivery partners, who suggested longer lead in times to ensure best delivery.

To collect data on what areas did with the funding and understand how they made these decisions

The Theory of Change developed in consultation with DfE identified short-term outcomes LAs wanted to achieve that revolved around supporting young people and their families, leading the mid-term outcomes that involved improves resilience, lowered stress and the ability to manage need, leading to long-term outcomes that were broadly focussed on reducing pressures on services, such as health and social work.

The evaluation found that many LAs utilised a similar delivery model to designing and managing their services funded by the SBI, which involved setting up and utilising multidisciplinary teams and steering groups.

The activities offered as part of these projects were designed to provide a break for parents/carers and entertainment or social opportunities for the child, to provide children with life skills to build their independence or to offer support and guidance to the parent/carer. The projects were generally delivered by existing partners to the LA, which

was partly driven by the relatively tight timeframes to set up the project once the funding was awarded.

Referral processes were built around regular multi-disciplinary panel meetings with referrals coming from a widening range of organisations. Schools were the main referral source but increasingly they were coming from other support organisations and parents/carers were more commonly starting to self-refer over the course of the delivery.

To review the projects offered across each LA and whether they are being delivered / received as intended

A key learning has been that there was overall a substantive appetite for short breaks projects, but these take time to implement and get right. LAs reported that they feel in a much better place than they did at the start of the project and most are ready to deliver much improved offers in the second year. A lot of time in Year 1 was taken up by recruitment, planning and other aspects of set up, and LAs funded into Year 2 consider that there will likely be more staff time available then for consolidating and improving delivery.

LAs raised a number of early challenges in relation to the availability of resources (venues and transport in particular) to deliver their activities, but were able to address these as the project progressed. In terms of resourcing, many areas faced difficulty recruiting staff with the required skills and experience to deliver the short breaks. The short-term nature of the funding complicated this to some extent, and some LAs would have appreciated longer-term funding rather than having to bid on an annual basis.

Take up of places was slower initially than LAs expected, but grew over the year. Getting parents/carers or older young people to engage in the projects was challenging. The most common barrier was around perception. Either parents/carers thought the provision would not be suitable or young people thought they would not enjoy it. In the vast majority of cases, both were enthusiastic about the provision once they had tried it, suggesting that better upfront information and use of taster sessions might help to overcome preconceptions.

To understand the perceived short-term outcomes / issues from LAs, young people, families and other stakeholders (e.g. improved wellbeing, behaviour, reduced stress)

Feedback from research participants suggested that there were early indications of improved outcomes from the project. These included improvements in young people's confidence, anxiety levels, social skills, independence, general wellbeing and friendships. With some exceptions the support offered was seen to be suitable and was effective in meeting the parent or carer aims of giving their child a positive experience and helping to give them a social outlet and build their confidence. Perceived impacts on school attendance and young people's behaviour were also apparent, but less strong.

To compare projects with existing (local government funded) offer in LAs with and without additional funding and establish any added perceived benefits of additional funding / projects

LA leads designed their SBIF provision around filling gaps in existing short breaks support and meeting unmet needs. Age groups were a common way of identifying a gap in provision – for example, one funded LA focussed on providing short breaks support for children who were of pre-school age, who were not currently covered by their existing offer. Another funded LA focussed on those transitioning from school to college, aged 16-17. Location was another factor that LAs accounted for when identifying gaps. One funded LA focussed their provision on rural areas where parents/carers had previously struggled to access short break support. Additionally, some LAs based their application on gaps identified in the provision for those who were yet to yet to be formally identified as having SEND. In some cases, LAs identified groups who were already receiving some form of short breaks support, but whose provision could be extended, for example by including more outreach activities during the week, rather than offering support only at weekends.

Almost two-thirds of parents/carers who took part in the survey reported that they had not previously engaged with any other short break offer in the past (64%). Feedback from LA leads suggested that in most cases this was because families did not meet the threshold to be eligible for the existing short breaks offer available outside the SBIF, suggesting that the SBIF provision was reaching groups who were not otherwise served by this type of support.

To identify promising practices and scalability

Four of the six funded LAs were successful in securing funding for Year 2 of the SBIF, which commenced in April 2023. In the closing interviews, Project Leads in some of these areas said that they have made changes in the governance model, based on learning from Year 1. One LA, for example, ringfenced some of the funding to employ a specialist Project Lead. Another LA reported plans to place more focus on formal evidence gathering from delivery partners through setting up new KPIs. This had been a challenge during Year 1 that they were addressing in Year 2.

There were a few wider learning points that LA Leads felt would be beneficial for other LAs to be aware of if they were to implement similar programmes.

One was that one-to-one support was particularly useful for young people with more complex needs and high levels of social anxiety, who found it more difficult to engage in group activities.

Another was the importance of tailoring activities to the needs and interests of young people to both help them to take part in the programme initially and then remain engaged and have a better chance of achieving the desired outcomes.

LA leads found that reporting and managing the administrative side of the programme could be time-consuming and those continuing into Year 2 had planned in more resource to manage this.

Engaging parents or carers was challenging, but clear communication about what the programme involves can help to manage potential mistrust. Where provision was aimed at parents or carers, they responded more positively to more formal sessions with clear aims, finding that more casual sessions such as coffee mornings were not the right environment to talk candidly about their experiences or support needs.

Begin to explore outputs and early outcomes

Overall, parents and young people report improved outcomes following participation in SBIF short beaks activities. The majority of parents were satisfied with the short breaks offer, in terms of the activities provided, the quality of support, the communications and feedback provided, the short breaks' location, hours and duration. That said, a small number of parents were not satisfied with the offer, because the activities, duration, length or location of the provision did not suit theirs or their child's needs. Increased tailoring of support would help to address this.

Parents felt more supported as a result of the short breaks activities and noted that it helped reduce their stress levels and freed up their time to care for other family members or to engage in non-caring activities. However, most parents said that the priority was to improve outcomes for their children, not for themselves.

Technical Annex

LA Programme Lead Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the programme leads for each LA in three points in time throughout the year. Each interview focussed on the relevant stages of the project (set up, progress, outcomes and lessons). More detail on this can be found in the technical report.

Interviews took place in the following timescales:

- First round interviews: August – September 2022

(Gloucestershire did not complete during this round due to their delayed start)

- Second round interviews: January – February 2023

- Third round interviews: May – June 2023

(Wakefield did complete the third-round interview)

Delivery Partner Interviews

Depth interviews were conducted with delivery partners across the LAs to find out how the projects had progressed from their perspectives. These interviews were conducted with individuals who had direct responsibility on delivering the services. The interviews focussed on experience of project specifications and delivery, communication with LA, amount of information received about young person and their needs prior to meeting the young person, experience of short break service users, and suggestions for improvements.

A copy of the topic guide used for these discussions can be seen as part of the technical report. In total, 13 interviews were conducted between January and March 2023 and included the following areas:

- 4 from Camden

- 1 from Gloucestershire

- 3 from Plymouth

- 4 from Sunderland

- 1 from Walsall

- There were no Delivery Partners from Wakefield available for interview during the fieldwork period.

Parent/Carer Survey

An online survey was drafted to collect feedback from parents/carers about their experiences of SBIF short breaks/respite care to gain an on their experience and what they perceived to be the short-term outcomes and benefits of the activities, both for them personally and for their child and wider household. The survey was administered in three time points throughout the year. This was done to ensure parents/carers weren't answering about a placement too far in the past, i.e., that they weren't responding to a placement from September in the following March.

- First period: September to October 2022

- Second period: January to February 2023

- Third period: May to July 2023

The survey remained open to allow for Gloucestershire's programme running until the end of June 2023.

In total, 86 parents/carers completed the online survey. Their distribution by LA is shown in Table A1.

Table A1: Parent/ carer survey completes by Local Authority

Local Authority	Number of survey completes
Walsall	7
Plymouth	15
Camden	15
Sunderland	10
Wakefield	23
Gloucestershire	16

Source: Parent/carer survey

Parent/Carer/Child Interviews

Qualitative depth interviews were conducted with parent/carers and, where possible with the young person, to explore in greater depth the themes that arise from their survey responses. The interviews focussed on getting feedback from the parents/carers and their children about their experience of the short breaks activities, and their perceptions of any outcomes for them following their participation in the activities. Sixteen interviews were conducted with parent/carers, thirteen of which were face to face and three

conducted via MS Teams. Three interviews were conducted with young people, two face to face and one on MS Teams. The fieldwork period for these interviews ran between December 2022 and July 2023.

Theory of change/ logic model review

A draft programme level SBIF Logic Model was developed by DfE. Key to the model was flexibility and a highly localised approach to delivery, to ensure areas can best respond to the needs of parents/carers and young people with SEND in their own local areas. The evaluation team reviewed the overarching programme Logic Model and refined it based on learnings from the document review, initial interviews with LA leads, and in discussion with the DfE project manager and policy leads.

MI specification and collection

Management information (MI) was collected throughout the year of the evaluation. An online tool was developed to capture data on LAs progress in delivering their projects. The aim of collecting MI data from LAs was to assess whether implementation was progressed as intended (in terms of volumes, frequency etc). The tool was shared via an online link with programme leads at three points throughout the year to collect data across a four-month period. The data was then downloaded and analysed.

The MI data collection periods were:
- Round One: October 2022 –November 2022 (Gloucestershire did not complete during this round due to their delayed start)

- Round Two: January 2023 –February 2023

- Round Three: May 2023 –June 2023