



PACA MK will be publishing position statements as and when the need arises for our forum to formally communicate our point of view on any issues or updates that we need to inform our members about.

SHORT BREAKS NEW ONLINE BOOKING SERVICE

In September 2024, PACA MK, the Parent Carer Forum representing families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the Milton Keynes area, raised concerns about the newly implemented Short Break Online System, which replaced the previous physical voucher system.

Our primary concerns were as follows:

1. The new system did not provide children and young people with access to as wide a variety of short breaks as we hoped.
2. It does not offer a complete list of fully inclusive activities (both local and national) that are tailored to meet individual needs.
3. It does not offer the necessary respite for parents and carers.

We appreciate the local authority's commitment to involving children, young people, and families in the development, review, and commissioning of short break services. However, we believe there's a real need for collaboration with service providers and the voluntary sector to improve the range and access to both universal and targeted activities. This will help ensure families have more options to meet their specific needs.

Although PACA MK took part in the first ***Short Breaks Working Group*** meeting in November 2024, our concerns have not been fully addressed and remain unresolved. We are concerned that the local authority may not fully understand the level of need for short breaks among families in the area and are therefore not providing a level of service that is sufficient to meet those needs. This is particularly important in preventing families from reaching crisis point, but more importantly, our children and young people are unable to access the short breaks they need, which in turn denies families the meaningful respite and support they deserve.

We are aware that the short break online voucher funding for this year expires on 31st March 2025, however many families have not been able to use their allocated vouchers fully or at all, despite the ongoing need for support. Unfortunately, the website booking system continues to remain unclear and difficult to navigate, making it challenging for families to book the

short breaks they need further exacerbating the challenges faced by families seeking support. We therefore request that this is taken into consideration in the allocation of the online voucher funding from 1st April 2025

PACA MK continues to urge the local authority to create a more responsive, inclusive, and accessible short break system that better meets the needs of SEND families in Milton Keynes and we remain committed to working together to ensure the system can truly serve its intended purpose and provide the meaningful support families need.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair

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