

**Title of Meeting:** Education Decision Meeting

**Decision maker:** Cabinet Member for Education

**Subject:** Targeted Short Breaks

**Date of meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020

**Report from:** Alison Jeffery  
Director Children, Families and Education

**Report by:** Julia Katherine  
Head of Inclusion, Education Service

**Wards affected:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Budget & policy framework decision:** No

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## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member for Education of the feedback from the engagement activity carried out regarding the budget pressures to the Targeted Short Breaks and to recommend a way forward.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Education agrees to the steps below which will ensure that Personal Budgets in the form of Prepaid Cards, can continue to be provided to eligible families within the budget available:
- a) **The value of pre-paid cards is set every year, dependent on the estimated number of applications.**
  - b) **Pre-paid cards are only available to those who are not already accessing a specialist short break package.**
  - c) **Families will have to apply for a pre-paid card annually.**

## 3. Stakeholder Involvement

- 3.1 It was agreed at the Cabinet Meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 that due to budget pressures on the Targeted Short Breaks Budget a consultation

would take place with stakeholders in particular the allocation of the Prepaid Card.

- 3.2 Direct engagement with those families who are currently eligible for a Prepaid Card was undertaken to seek their views on a number of proposals aimed at ensuring this offer can still be provided, within the budget available.

#### 4. Summary of Proposals

- 4.1 These were the proposals that were put forward in the letter to families currently receiving a pre-paid card, on which views were sought:
- 4.2 **The value of pre-paid cards is set every year**, dependent on the number of applications.
- 4.3 **All families eligible for a pre-paid card will also be given the option of a Family Card.** These cards, provided by the **Parenting Network** and worth £15, offer discounts on a range of leisure events and days out in the city.
- 4.4 **Pre-paid cards are only available to those who are not already accessing a specialist short break package, for example at Beechside.** Families who access a package have an allocated social worker, who carries out a full assessment of their needs.
- 4.5 **Families will have to apply for a pre-paid card annually** to ensure that only those families who remain eligible continue to receive this offer.
- 4.6 **Pre-paid cards are topped up every 6 months** (i.e. annual payments are made in 2 instalments).

#### 5. Engagement Activities

- 5.1 A letter/email was sent to 540 cardholders on the 18<sup>th</sup> September with a closing date of 11<sup>th</sup> October.
- 5.2 Following this, a co-production exercise took place at the Shaping Better Futures Together Meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019. The exercise was to discuss the proposals and ways that the current offer might be allocated to ensure the budget did not overspend.

#### 6. Results of responses

- 6.1 A total of 21 (3.88%) responses to the letter were received.

- 6.2 The summary of responses is contained in Appendix 1. Figures show that the majority of the respondents agreed to the proposals.
- 6.3 It should also be considered that the response rate was very low at 3.88%. It is likely that the majority of respondents do not have a strong opinion either way.

## **7. Reasons for recommendations**

- 7.1 The significant increase of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan has subsequently seen an increase in children eligible for a Prepaid Card exerting pressure on the Targeted Short Breaks budget.
- 7.2 The aim of the proposals for changes to the way that the pre-paid cards are provided to families is to ensure that the targeted short breaks offer in its entirety can continue to be provided to families. In addition to pre-paid cards, the targeted short break offer also includes the: Specialist Holiday Playscheme, Inclusive Holiday Playscheme, Teenage Project, Teenage Holiday Scheme, Youth Hub and Gym Club.

## **8. Options considered and recommendations**

- 8.1 A number of options were considered and the feedback has influenced the revised model for delivery of Prepaid Cards.
- 8.2 It is recommended that the proposal to set the value of pre-paid cards each year dependent on the estimated number of applications, is implemented. Applications will need to be received by the end of February each year to ensure that pre-paid cards can be issued in April. A second application date of October will enable consideration of applications from families who become eligible during the year. The value of the cards will be set based on known applications in February and an estimate for October, which will help to ensure that this additional support is delivered within the budget available.
- 8.3 In light of the feedback received from families, it is not recommended that all families eligible for a pre-paid card will also be given the option of a Family Card. Feedback has indicated that families would prefer to have the choice about how to use the funding available themselves.
- 8.4 It is recommended that the proposal that pre-paid cards are only available to those who are not already accessing a specialist short break package, for example at Beechside, is implemented. Families who access a package have an allocated social worker, who carries out a full assessment of their needs. The value of these packages is much greater than the value of the pre-paid card. Avoiding duplication between specialist and targeted short breaks will mean that more families are able to access support overall.

- 8.5 It is recommended that families should apply for a pre-paid card annually to ensure that only those families who remain eligible continue to receive this offer.
- 8.6 As a result of the feedback received, it is not recommended that pre-paid cards are topped up every 6 months (i.e. annual payments are made in 2 instalments). A number of respondents expressed the view that the 2 instalments would prevent them from paying for the summer holiday playscheme. There would also be the additional time and resources required to provide the payments twice a year rather than once.

## **9. Summary and conclusion**

- 9.1 As set out above, it is recommended that the recommendations are approved ready for implementation from April 2020.

## **10. Integrated impact assessment**

- 10.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.

## **11. Legal implications**

- 11.1 The Cabinet Member for Education has the power to approve, reject or modify the recommendations in accordance with the authority detailed in the City Council's constitution.

## **12. Finance comments**

- 12.1 Since the procedure for allocating and offering families a pre-paid card has been incorporated into the process of finalising an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) the take up has and will continue to increase. Even with current number of families eligible for a prepaid card the value of the payment needs to reduce in order to remain within the allocated budget. The recommendation that families should apply annually for a prepaid card and that the value of the prepaid card is subsequently set based on the estimated number of applications, will ensure the funding to eligible families is maximised whilst ensuring that the spending remains within the available budget.

Signed by: Alison Jeffery - Director of Children, Families and Education

**Appendices:**

**Responses - grid and summary**

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

## Appendix 1

### Short Breaks Prepaid Card Engagement Activities - Responses

#### Responses from Portsmouth City Council letter

Proposals	1.	2.	3.	4.	5
	Set the value of pre-paid cards every year	All families eligible for a pre-paid card will also be given the option of a Family Card	Card not available to those accessing a specialist short break package	Families will have to apply for a pre-paid card annually	Pre-paid cards are topped up every 6 months
<b>Yes (agree)</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>No (disagree)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>No comments</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

#### Comments from Portsmouth City Council letter

<p>I think most of the changes are fine however, I don't think the instalments will be very helpful. £125 every six months is not enough for a short break, it barely covers a day trip to a theme park. This year my son wasn't due back to school until 9th September, so we were able to go on a summer holiday for £300 and the prepaid card paid for this. If instalments were now enforced, this wouldn't be a possibility.</p>
<p>Those changes make sense to me as long as the goal posts for application do not change each year and remain clear. It is all about transparency - i.e. reminding families that they can apply for the £15 card as opposed to waiting to see if they know and do it off their own back. As a family, this feels as though families 'in the know' get the support. Having the support info buried on the local offer is not enough, it needs to be made explicit.</p> <p>Eg. If you are entitled to x, y and x, you are also entitled to a. Don't forget you can apply for a b card etc etc.</p>
<p>Hi, I am more than happy for the changes to take place as I feel the prep paid card has helped greatly in my circumstances and am grateful to receive any assistance available,</p>
<p>Many thanks for your email. I understand why the pre-paid card has to be lowered from £300 to £250 per year. However this will make the budget tighter for us to access playschemes as this is the money I use to pay for them. It may impact on the amount of support I can access.</p>
<p>Thanks for the email re proposed changes to the short breaks card. We have benefited from this for the last 2 years and use it to pay for social activities with Portsmouth Teenage Project and a weekly badminton court. Plus I think we paid for a session of archery and shooting over the summer at the Peter Ashley centre. It's a great help.</p> <p>Given that it's something we never expected and was just mentioned at a meeting that we'd be eligible, I don't have any comments about the reduction in amount, the payment twice yearly and the applying for it annually. It makes sense that you are trying to save cost where possible and make sure the people who need it are still eligible. The specialised short breaks doesn't affect us. The payment 6 monthly doesn't affect us either as we pay for things weekly or monthly (so we don't use it for one big activity).</p>

I'm just wondering whether the time you'll spend processing applications every year is worth the saving of reducing people no longer being eligible (as EHCPs in our experience hasn't changed over the years in level of support).  
But that was my only thought.

We'd still be very happy if we got £250 a year split into 6 monthly and don't mind re-applying.

Thank you for your email informing us of your plans regarding the prepaid cards. We currently have some respite from Beechside, three nights per month, and we use our prepaid card to help with the cost of playscheme and school trips.

The card was presented to us as a replacement for the sitting service to allow us to choose services we would find most useful to us. The sum of £300 currently covers the cost of summer playscheme and contributes to the costs of school residential trips. If the amount we get is reduced we will have to consider whether we can send our daughter on residential trips with her school, trips which have given her huge benefits.

If the card is withdrawn from us because we already have three nights of respite during the summer holidays we would struggle to pay for playscheme at a cost of £20 a day. When our daughter goes to playscheme it helps her to have some structure to the week during the holidays, she goes two days a week and this also gives us a chance to spend some quality time with our other daughter and to have some time for ourselves to relax or get jobs done which cannot be done while caring for our daughter.

Without playscheme the holidays would be very difficult to manage, the three days at Beechside will not give any kind of structure as they are not regular and are spaced out over the month, if the weather is not good our daughter will be confined to the house as there are very few places we can take her which would not be overcrowded and expensive.

I like the idea of splitting the card payments in two and the £15 off card. I'm also happy with the 250 amount. I don't like the idea of reapplying every year though. It should stay as it automatically gets allocated to the children with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Hi all these changes look great the only thing I can say is that most of the holiday playschemes and holiday clubs are more targeted towards the children that are on the autistic spectrum leaving not much options for those that are physically disabled. We enjoy using the card for family breaks/ activities we can enjoy together and cinema trips which is more suited to our family.

I'm really concerned about these changes you have mentioned. For example my daughter gets 2 nights at Beechside a month which I know costs a lot of money but I never used the pre-paid card for that anyways, I use it for Saturday club, (which is not funded by short breaks) & activities etc., which often cost more due to some children's needs.

I am now through no fault of my own a single parent! Before I had my daughter & before her autism was noticed I worked full time, since I was 16! I have no choice but to be her full time carer as there is very little to none childcare for children with severe needs!

Also how can you justify cutting the £300 our kids received last year on the pre-paid card to £250 if you are leaving out the kids who get Beechside or a carer? How does that even make sense?

You say with the amount "expected to claim" but I personally know of families that never even knew about these cards until another parent told them....& there will be many others still who do not know of them!!? This is caused by incompetent or badly trained professionals??

A lot of us parents would prefer to be able to work but as a majority of us are single parents due to stressful home lives due to our child's difficulties we are unable.

If you spoke to SEN parents more often you would also discover the majority of us are either severely depressed or already on high levels of antidepressants! With more & more cuts of funding for our kids this is only going to make things worse. Parents have to be at breaking point, on the edge of a nervous breakdown to be listened to & referred to a social worker!! This then even takes weeks to months for a first assessment & more months after for support to actually be put in place!! I say this from experience!

If our families fall apart & children have to go in care of some sort while parents recover how much will this cost Portsmouth or our government?? Especially as most of our kids need specialist care??

You do realise that £250 over a WHOLE year is £4.80 A WEEK!?? please do tell me what you can do with a child ( a special needs one at that) for £4.80?? Even a cinema trip is £4.99 per person!

Our children deserve to have happy healthy parents/carers but with the system the way it is & the way it is going this looks to be an impossible outcome?

I look forward to your response to my thoughts & feelings on this issue.

I have read your email about your changes forthcoming for 2020 and I understand that but also you say that there are loads of applications .this is the first time I have ever applied for this as didn't even know about it and just about a year ago lost my partner and we have three children which is two teen girls and one Down syndrome boy of 7yrs.thought this be a good idea for us to do something together as I don't take my kids away as my boy is very hectic and being on my own now too is very hard .bit readying your coming changes made me think that perhaps you should put people in categories of applying for this who has had it before etc. as the funds won't stretch as you say in email. Anyway glad to hear from you guys have a good day .new application mum of three

Either option 1 or 5 I think seems to be good.

Many thanks for the e-mail update in regards to the Short Break Pre-paid Card.

We currently get issued a card to aid additional activities for my daughter, who is 7 years old, Autistic and non-verbal.

First of all, we would just like to say how great the Pre-paid Card scheme is and how much it has benefited our family, especially our daughter. It has meant she has been a lot more socially active, which, for someone of her condition, is extremely important.

In regards to the proposed changes, although we understand the increase in demand and the obvious constraints this will have on budgets, it's very disappointing to read that the credit limit is due to be reduced.

The majority of the card allowance is allocated to the 'Enable Ability' play-scheme which is held during all the major school holidays.

The balance usually covers an additional day out, which for us is at Paultons Park, a short car ride away from where we live.



At the new proposed £250 limit, this would only cover a small element of the play-scheme, especially if the plan is to split this total across 2 instalments.

This will obviously cause us issues, not only financially, but could mean we will have to reduce the amount of days our daughter can attend the scheme which she enjoys so much.

As stated above, the importance of her being able to socialise in different surroundings is very beneficial to her development. The fact that this could reduce is a major concern.

Also, as a family, we are currently undertaking the adoption process and have been matched with a 10 month old baby boy. Our daughter will experience quite a lot of change due to this so we were somewhat reliant on the scheme moving forward for her to enjoy days out.

Although we don't have an obvious answer for your budget constraints, if there is anyway the allowance currently received stays the same or, worst case, it gets only a minor reduction, we would urge you to consider it.

If you have any questions, or would like us to explain in more detail any of the points raised, please either reply to this e-mail or contact us on the below mobile number.

Once again, thank you for the e-mail and the time taken to read our response.

Thank you for your email earlier today. I am somewhat stunned and very disappointed that you are proposing to cut the funding amount on the Pre-paid card to families who greatly rely on it to have a much needed short break or family day out.

There has not been an increase in the amount allocated each year in the time that we've received it, so in real terms it's value has gone down every year as it is. The cost of living continues to rise and for those of us with disabled children as soon as you need to buy for "additional needs" etc, the cost will be higher anyway. I don't see my council tax bill being cut by 16% - that's increasing year on year funnily enough!!

There is a crisis in SEN funding nationally and DWP are making us jump through hoops to receive DLA even though my daughters care and mobility needs have not changed. DWP have no scruples in knocking her down a level so that we as a family have to cut back in other areas to ensure that she receives the treatments etc that she needs, as there is also a shortfall in Children's Health Funding in the Community. For instance, we have to fund my daughter to attend the Rainbow Centre on a Saturday ourselves, as appointments with Physios and Occupational Therapists are very hard to come by and this is giving her some much needed help and benefit! We also fund one to one swimming lessons at nearly £21 per half hour as she is very limited to what exercise she can do with her disabilities. I could go on.....

If my child is still in receipt of an EHCP then it is unlikely that her needs will have changed - she has lifelong disabilities! Therefore, it's going to make my life that bit more difficult if I have to reapply to yourselves every year. It's bad enough having to re-apply to Disability Living Allowance etc, while chasing appointments for my child and trying to work. Please don't give me something else to do!

I would like to know why Portsmouth City Council could not make cuts in other areas rather than those affecting disabled children.

I'm sure I won't be the only one who is somewhat dismayed by your proposals however thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond.

Thank you for your email, I am happy with the proposal and would like to ask if I could have some further information please.

I wasn't aware of any of the other facilities available. The shorts breaks card is something I only found out about due to a ehcp follow up meeting and I was asked if I was aware of short breaks.

If you could provide me with any details of the other activities available that would be great. Also how would I apply for the family card please.

Any information would be appreciated.

Although I understand that there are more and more children that are needing support financially from short breaks this has actually come as a blow to us as we do not access any of the groups but the money we receive is invaluable. So essentially we will just be £50 down. I think that the cut should be done on an individual basis depending on whether the young person is using the other services. So overall we are not happy with the decision.

Following your recent letter about proposed changes to the prepaid card, I am writing with my comments. Due to the same reason you are making these proposals the specialist playscheme we access is under pressure and we are already experiencing the effects of that and the increase in costs to the users. I use my prepaid card solely to fund holiday playscheme and Saturday Club and even without the changes being suggested I was thinking our access would be limited for financial reasons. My family would not qualify for a card next year if the changes went ahead as we have a social worker and my daughter uses Beechside. I was just thinking how we managed the long Summer holidays with the support we have in place but I'm not sure I would feel the same in the future if the new proposals are carried out.

I am writing this on behalf of Mrs ... (I am her husband) regarding your notification of the planned changes to the allocation of the Pre-Paid card. We have been asked to provide our 'views' on these 'planned' changes.

1. Your communication states that these are 'planned' changes and you want a view on them and yet the way that you have couched your email makes it appear that these changes are already going to go ahead. If this is the case it does not appear that our 'views' will carry any weight. Please confirm if these changes are going ahead or not.
2. As you have pointed out in your mail the Pre-Paid card was to allow people to access much needed services which they may not be otherwise able afford. If you take this card away then people will not be able to access these services which means that these will then be liable for closure due to poor attendance thereby saving more money from the budget. Whilst this would appear to be a cynical point of view it cannot be helped bearing in mind your comments on 'budget'.
3. Please could you confirm that this is a budget driven change due to less resources coming from central Govt.
4. It should be note that the council has certain statutory commitments that it should undertake and this gradual erosion of these services will warrant looking into from a legal standpoint.

Lastly we would like to point out that this pre-paid card can be a lifeline for the service it can buy purely from a 'giving the parent some much needed respite' viewpoint. It is disappointing that you are saying that you cannot have it and any other service to enjoy, such as Saturday club, as well. This is just cutting the provision of services to the very community that so desperately needs it.

We like the option below as there are families that aren't entitled to specialist short break packages and having the prepaid card really helps. And as the packages are greater in value than the card surely that should be enough and make it fairer for families that don't get that.

**3. Pre-paid cards are only available to those who are not already accessing a specialist short break package, for example at Beechside.** Families who access a package have an allocated social worker, who carries out a full assessment of their needs. The value of these packages is much greater than the value of the pre-paid card

I have been asked for views on possible changes to the pre-paid card system. My son has had the benefit of this service for the past year (something we were totally unaware of before this).

We have used this service for family days out. My child would not attend play schemes etc as he can find it difficult to interact with children he doesn't know or settings that are unfamiliar. This service has been of great benefit to our son. We have taken him to venues and activities that we otherwise may not of been able to.

We feel that the first option the council are looking at would seem to be the most fair for my child and the other children that this service helps. Reducing the allocation to each child would seem the fairest option.

My child access' no other council run programmes and we claim no other benefits. It seems unfair to reduce such a service to some of the most vulnerable children.

Many thanks for the info of proposed changes to the Short Breaks initiative that my daughter currently receives.

I understand just how costly this service must be to run, it is indeed a wonderful benefit to allow families with children with Special Educational Needs to make some lovely memories together or try new things.

My only point of concern with the proposed changes would be having to apply every year for it.

At present the family unit is under constant strain in the hope that today will be "a good day." But the prospect of more timely form filling is not really a welcome one for myself.

With appointments, consultations, school issues, EHCP Reviews and anything else which can arise, it feels a little unfair that families, such as ours, will have another thing to complete on time.

I'm sure I am not alone in spending literally hours and hours on a yearly basis, completing forms. Time which I think is much better spent with my family and I am especially mindful of the extra needs of the children who deserve these Short Breaks cards can require.

Would the EHCP provide enough information necessary to determine whether it is likely that the child's condition will not improve in the next 2 years, therefore eliminating the need for yearly applications? After all, it is a comprehensive guide to the child's needs and outlines all the support needed.

Please know I am grateful for the service, but am concerned that it will be another job to "slip through the net."

I hope my comments are useful.

Thank you very much for your email.  
I sincerely apologise for my late response.  
I have no views and no questions about the proposal.  
I appreciate the financial assistance of the Short Breaks Card.

**Comments from Portsmouth Parent Voice Survey**

Numbers have not been included as explained in 5.2 of the report.

This contributes to the wellbeing of the family, siblings in particular. Short breaks should be proportionate to the needs of the family, not the number of people applying. As children get older their needs may increase.
The family card is not of much use as those activities can already be accessed at a cheaper rate by asking for a concession (and providing the right evidence). Keeping it at one instalment will help families to book a proper weekend short break instead of just being able to pay for smaller activities.
It is a significant reduction
We desperately need to look at the eligibility criteria for families who don't meet criteria of having a full ehcp or specialist provision as there are disabled parents with siblings who are at crisis point as have no support from friends and family and families who have children in Mary Rose provision who are inundated with support. We need some way of supporting applications with supporting evidence from professionals when this is the case.

**Comments from Shaping Better Futures Together Meeting discussion**

Family card not useful to cardholders as activity providers offering a subsidy mainly aimed at under 5s.

Agreed with the annual allocation.

Balance of those who agreed and disagreed with the reduction in the amount.