Introduction

Islington Disabled Children’s Service is committed to working with disabled children and young people and their families to support children to live within their families and communities and achieve their full potential.

For most disabled children the support available from family networks and universal and targeted services via the Local Offer should be sufficient to ensure needs are met.

Providing the right information and advice can help people make informed decisions and build on their strengths. A great deal is available which parents can source for themselves without the need for an assessment.

More information on Local Offer: Local Offer: SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Where the Local Offer is insufficient and additional support is required, a child and family may need support from children’s social care. This support is usually provided via a personal budget.

More information on Personal Budgets: Personal Budgets explained
(http://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/personal-budget-advice)

In order to access additional support, a child must have an assessment by a social worker which identifies unmet needs and which it is appropriate for children’s social care to fund. The assessment will consider a child’s needs and the impact of these on their ability to achieve their potential as well as the ability of parents to support their child in this.

The aim of this guidance is to clarify what children, families and professionals can expect from a social care personal budget and to ensure equity and transparency as far as possible in decision making. The local authority wants to support families to develop their skills and ability to confidently care for their children themselves and to help children to become as independent as possible as they grow older. Personal budgets should therefore be flexible and responsive to changing needs as children’s and family’s circumstances change.

In order to access a personal budget, families should have accessed the local offer first and it must be clear that this is not sufficient to meet the child’s needs.
Support Plans for Children 2 - 18 years

The child in need plan should promote a child and family’s ability to manage independently and support parents to feel confident themselves to manage their child’s needs. It should be focussed on the desired outcomes for the child and family, clearly linked to needs identified in the child’s assessment. There will therefore be a clear link between the child’s needs, the desired outcomes and the intervention or resource chosen to meet the needs. Plans will say why the goals are important and how the plan will achieve them (for example, the plan will explain how a parent/professional/ provision or support worker will help a child to achieve their desired outcomes). Goals should be straightforward and simply stated avoiding jargon.

Outcomes for children and families are likely to fall within the following areas;

- Short breaks for carers and young carers
- Enhancing parents skills to manage a child’s needs
- Supporting a child to access positive activities in the community and the opportunity to make friends
- Developing independent living skills and confidence

The desired results will be measurable so that it is possible to track progress towards meeting goals via the review process. Plans will be personalised so that they reflect the individuality and aspirations of each child.

Support for Children 0 – 2 years

For children under 2 years, the expectation is that needs for support will be met within the provisions of the Early Years offer and universal services.

**Early Years services/information: **[Find Childcare and Early Education](https://www.islington.gov.uk/children-and-families/childcare-and-early-education/find-childcare)

**Reviews**

Reviews should involve the child wherever possible, the parents and the professional network.

Reviews will focus on the progress made towards achieving the goals and outcomes agreed at the last review.

Providers will be asked for an update report for a child’s review to show the progress a child is making against their plan and what they would like to achieve.
Reviews of support plans will take place at least once a year, usually as part of the review of a child’s education, health and care plan. The review of the support plan may lead to changes being agreed to the Personal Budget, dependant on the progress made over the previous period of time. For instance, Personal Budgets may reduce where a child is making progress and achieving their goals, their needs have decreased or the family situation has improved, meaning less support is needed. Where the child is not making expected progress and the needs of the family have increased, the Personal Budget could increase to provide further support to meet the child’s desired outcomes and goals. In this instance, there will need to be evidence submitted by the parents and the professionals identifying a significant change in needs. If the chair of the review is satisfied there is a significant change the child and family will be referred for a re-assessment by a social worker, so that the changes can be properly understood and a new plan developed.

**Budgets**

The ‘indicative budget’ provided by the social work assessment is a guideline only. The actual budget will be confirmed and approved at the Education, Health and Care Management Board [EHCMB] where decisions will be made based on the child’s and family’s needs and what is required to meet those needs. The personal budget agreed will be aligned to the costs incurred in meeting the plan, and should be within the ‘indicative budget’ as detailed in the social work assessment. There may be exceptional occasions where the child’s needs are such that the personal budget agreed exceeds the ‘indicative budget’ limit. This should be clearly evidenced in the assessment and the team manager must provide a clear rationale as to why the proposed plan is over budget. This must be agreed by the Education, Health and Care Management Board. Budgets are agreed for 12 months only then reviewed.

**Short Breaks for Carers**

All child in need plans should provide short breaks for carers to enable them to recharge their batteries, spend quality time with siblings and attend to family life. Short breaks for carers should also provide positive activities for the disabled child. This is included in short break offer or cash alternative.
Activities in support plans

Activities need to have developmental outcomes. They should help a child to develop an interest or skill and should be part of the child’s structured learning plan.

Always consider the possibility of universal services, with support if necessary, rather than specialist services as the default option.

The cost of activities varies and as a general rule it is expected that parents of disabled children also fund children’s activities, as any parent would do. However, there may be additional costs related to specific activities or specialist input for a disabled child which the local authority could support or part support though the provision of the Personal Budget.

All activities / costs should represent good value for money. Funding for any activity agreed as part of the personal Budget should be agreed for a time limited period only so that it can be reviewed against the desired outcomes for the child.

A personal budget cannot be used to pay for

- Education e.g. maths / English tuition, ABA
- Therapy e.g. speech and language therapy
- Food, meals, drinks
- To clear family debts

Where a child or family needs help with any of the above, the social worker can assist in signposting to the appropriate source of support.

In addition, Personal Budgets will not be made available for any activities where;

- The child would miss school or important appointments [other than in very exceptional circumstances and by agreement at the EHCMB]
- The child does not enjoy the planned activity or it places them at risk
- The activity has already taken place

Surpluses in support plans

Often surpluses accumulate in a family’s personal budget account, where the agreed activities have not taken place and generally this money must be returned to the council. The Local Authority can reclaim any funds in excess of 6 weeks money and this is usually done at least once a year at the time of the annual review.

Sometimes parent choose to use their support flexibly at times when support is most required, for example in school holiday periods. Where possible this should be agreed with the allocated Personalisation Officer when the plan is set up. If a surplus is accrued unexpectedly, for example where there have been delays in recruiting a
worker, any proposals to spend the money must be discussed and agreed in advance with the Personalisation Team. The proposals should still deliver on the agreed outcomes in the plan and should be agreed on the basis of for example the increased stress arising from support not being provided in a timely way.

**Holidays**

The local authority does not routinely fund holidays for families. A child’s allocated worker could consider an application to a charity for funding for a family holiday.

A contribution towards the costs of a holiday by children’s social care will generally only be considered where it clearly supports the delivery of the assessed needs and outcomes for a child as set out in their plan. A separate application form must be completed to request funding for a holiday and submitted along with the EHCMB papers.

The cost of the contribution may not be any higher than it would cost the local authority to deliver these outcomes locally during holiday times through other resources like a play scheme. In other words, if a child being supported to have short breaks during the summer holiday would cost the Local Authority £500 then the amount contributed towards meeting the same outcomes by way of a holiday may not exceed £500.

There are 3 kinds of exceptional circumstances in which social care could agree to offer financial support to a disabled child going on a holiday.

a) **So that the main carer gets a complete break in caring.** This would allow the funding normally used to provide the main carer with a break in caring in school holiday times to pay towards a break in caring through the provision of a holiday, for example if the child would normally have an overnight short break during this time or attend a play scheme the funding for that could go towards the cost of the child going on holiday to be cared for by others.

b) **So that the main carer gets a break and/or support in caring for a child whilst on holiday together.** This would apply where the main carer is also going on the same holiday, so that the child can access activities whilst away from home that would offer the parent a break in caring or share the demand in caring with other relatives or support workers. This would replace support that would have been in place if they had remained at home.

c) **To meet very specific disability related costs of the holiday.** The cost of the holiday for a family may be more expensive because of the complex needs of a disabled child. For example a child uses a wheelchair and the accommodation needs to be accessible or there is a need to hire a much larger vehicle to travel around. The local authority could consider a contribution to the additional costs of the holiday linked to the child’s disability. Evidence will need to be provided of the standard cost
of the holiday and the extra costs incurred in this situation. The additional costs must be considered reasonable and not more than the cost of support at home.

**1:1 support or 2:1 support**

Where individual support is being requested in support plans there must be clear evidence of why this level of support is required, how it will be used and what the desired outcome is. A detailed risk assessment must be included as part of any request. The assessment for levels of support should include evidence from parents, schools and any current providers. If high levels of support are requested due to challenging behaviour, the board would need to consider the severity, frequency and duration of incidents at home, at school, with the current provider and in the community. There would be an expectation that there would be communication and behaviour support plans shared across settings to ensure consistency.

The expectation is that provisions will work towards reducing the need for this level of support. The need for individual support will be monitored either through the team around the child meetings or the child’s annual review.

If a child’s behaviour or needs can be managed at school and other settings but parents are struggling at home, this may indicate that there may be a need for some intensive parenting support to develop the parents’ confidence in managing their child’s behaviour.

**Family Support and Interventions**

There needs to be a balance between the amount of time a child spends at home and being cared for outside the family home in short breaks provisions. It is not ideal for a child to be cared for by multiple carers and in multiple settings. Plans should seek to keep this at a minimum and proportionate to the child’s age and understanding.

Sometimes high levels of short breaks and / or support with personal care can mask the fact a parent is struggling to cope. Parenting interventions which support a parent to develop skills and confidence to manage their child and build family resilience must be explored, for example support with sleep, communication and behaviour management strategies via school, CAMHS, and therapies. The child’s allocated worker should ensure that a child’s behaviour support plan and communication plan are always shared with the parent and settings.

Likewise interventions which support travel training and building independence skills are important to help families to cope.
**Family Group Conferences**

It is important that consideration is given to how to make the best use of all the resources available to a family. This includes the existing and potential contributions of the wider family, neighbours and friends. A family group conference or family meeting can be useful to explore this with families and help families to make better use of their own and other resources.

**Transition**

All assessments and plans must explicitly consider transition needs and outcomes from aged 14+.

All plans where a young person is 17+ must be discussed with adults’ social care prior to presentation at EHCMB to ensure that it dovetails with the likely adults plan post 18.

Doreen Anderson

Service Manager, Islington Disabled Children’s Service