

Participation of parents, children and young people in commissioning short breaks

Interface, Redbridge: <http://www.interface-parentforumredbridge.org.uk/>

Step 1: Consulting with parents, children and young people

There is an active parent carer forum in Redbridge called Interface. They ran a series of meetings to get feedback from parents covering a wide range of disabilities about the types of short breaks they wanted. Feedback was also sought from children in a range of settings, such as special schools, youth clubs, etc, by the Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) Strategy Officer.

Step 2: Providing feedback to potential providers

There were a number of information events held for organisations interested in providing short breaks to explain the applications procedure. The parents and young people's feedback was given to providers, and representatives from Interface spoke at these meetings to help potential providers understand parents' views.

Each organisation applying to receive money from the local authority (LA) to provide short breaks was asked to provide a child-friendly summary of their bid to be presented to a children's panel and a young persons' panel. This child friendly summary was a good indication of the providers' understanding of the children they would be working with.

Step 3: Children's panel consider proposals

A separate children's panel (aged 8-13) and a young persons' panel (aged 14+) was set up to consider the proposals submitted by providers. Each child taking part did need to have an understanding of what was being presented, though not necessarily need to have verbal skills in order to participate. A simple voting system of pictures was used depicting good, bad and unsure and notes made of children's comments in regards to the proposals. The feedback from the children and young people was surprisingly insightful!

Some bids submitted appeared very good on paper and had high quality policies and procedures. However the children and young people felt these services were boring and could not meet their needs. The children had very strong opinions as to what they wanted from a service and whilst they enjoyed the current clubs and schemes they attended, they were keen for new and different services to start up. The children's scores and comments were then passed onto the adult panel

Step 4: Selecting parent representatives for commissioning panel

There were two places for parent representatives to sit on the commissioning panel and Interface felt it important that the parents' representatives had a broad understanding of issues faced by children with a range of disabilities. The two parents selected to sit on the commissioning panel had children with different needs, including one being in an Out of Borough school as it had emerged that these children are particularly isolated. The parents had to follow strict rules on confidentiality before and during commissioning. This did not pose a problem as the parents had been told about this in advance by Interface.

Step 5: Deciding which services to commission

The commissioning panel was made up of two local council representatives, one Primary Care Trust (PCT) representative and two parents. The panel members were expected to score each bid against a range of objective measures including value for money, safeguarding procedures, whether the project met AHDC objectives and criteria. Council finance officers and social workers gave feedback on aspects of the bidding organisations such as accounts and policies. Panel members read each bid before the panel meetings and could ask council officers to get answers to questions if necessary. Each bid was discussed and then each member scored the bid independently. One parent withdrew from discussions for two of the bids due to a conflict of interest (she was a Governor at one of the special schools bidding to provide a service and a user of the services of another provider). The scores, including the children's, were then collated and averaged out.

The scoring immediately eliminated a lot of the bids and left the panel with a number of higher quality bids. However some were for very similar befriending services so a more detailed discussion was had comparing and choosing one of these bids, otherwise there was a risk that most of the funding would be allocated to one type of short break. There were difficult decisions to be made due to the limited funding. Some of the short breaks offered by providers would be costly and reach a few children whereas others cost less but would reach a greater number. The panel sought to ensure the successful bids would between them reach a range of children with different needs, including areas where there was a known shortage of service.

The council members felt that the short breaks selected would have been very different without the input from both children, young people and parents and valued their input.

Step 6: Following on

The council decided to provide training for a group of parents so when the next commissioning round comes up different parents could participate.

There was a separate panel for capital commissioning which took place a number of months after the revenue panels. As the nature of the capital bids were primarily for children with profound physical disabilities, different parents were chosen who represented those children