

**PaCC collated questions from parent carers regarding Link Up Christmas Sessions and Direct Payments – please see responses from the Local Authority to these questions below:**

**How many expressions of interest were received for Link Up?**

We received 49 expressions of interest for the Christmas Link Up sessions. Of these:

- 3 families expressed an interest in attending both sessions,
- 1 expressed interest in the Monday session,
- 6 expressed interest in the Friday session,
- 39 did not specify a preferred date.

Across the two sessions, there were 7 spaces on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> December, and 8 spaces on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> January. This is with consideration for availability of staff on each day to ensure we could provide the best possible support for the group, across both 1:1 and 2:1 places. Based on feedback from the summer, the Monday session will be for an older group (13-17 years) and the Friday session will be for a younger group (8-13 years).

Historically there has not been a short break offer over Christmas but, we have heard that this is required so will include it within our 2025 developments.

**Use of Direct Payments to fund an agency PA:**

1. *Is this as a one off or for all school holidays until the appropriate provision reaches appropriate levels? (Our children need some consistency and we need to not be lurching from one school holiday to the next with a different plan B every time we reach another school holiday without proper provision)*
2. *Who will be paying the agency fee? If parent/carers pay it from our direct payments then we will have less hours of provision because each hour we purchase will be costing us more than the agreed hourly rate. This will then erode the agreed hours that a family have been assessed as needing.*
3. *Can we use our direct payments surpluses to cover agency costs?*

Parent carers who did not receive a Link Up allocation were offered support to employ an agency PA during the Christmas holidays, funded by their Direct Payments. This option was also offered to parent carers who did not receive allocations in the October half term and will also be an option for February half term. Parents / carers can also use their direct payment surplus' to fund this support. We will work with families to identify which times / dates they would like and liaise with the agency on their behalf to match the young person with a 1:1.

This is an interim option as we continue to develop the PA Register as a long-term, sustainable solution.

We recognise the cost of agency is higher than that allocated by Direct Payments. This is a temporary arrangement designed to provide support for families during the holidays, until the PA Register is established. Once established, the cost of a PA From the PA Register will not incur the agency fees so this will not negatively impact the number of hours of support a family has been allocated. We are also working with the Specialist Community Disability Team to ensure Direct Payments can be used more flexibly for Short Breaks and are not restricted to a specific PA hourly rate.

**4. Can we opt instead of paying an agency to pay our existing PA's a higher hourly rate to entice them to work extra hours and/or recruit new PA's at a higher rate matching an agency rate fee?**

BHCC is aware that the rates of pay for the PA's need to be looked into and reconsidered and this is something that has been raised with the director management team. Currently we cannot pay PA's a higher rate of pay. If a parent / carer is finding it difficult to identify a PA they need to speak to their child's allocated worker to look at what other options may be available.

**5. Are all parent/carers of children with complex needs who need 1:1 or 2:1 support being given the same option of using an agency?**

We recognise that there are families who did not express an interest in the Link Up sessions, but this does not equate to not needing provision. To ensure families of children with complex needs have access to the same opportunities, we included information about this option in our December communications to families, shared on 05/12/2024.

**6. Families are looking at the [Specialist short breaks](#) link and feeding back that this list is limited eg: Amaze aren't running at Christmas, Link Up isn't available for CYP with Down Syndrome etc. Can the commissioning team and SCDS expand on this list any other opportunities?**

We are dedicated to expanding SEND Short Breaks activities for future Christmas holidays, and this will be a key focus as we review the grant agreements for SEND Short Breaks in 2025. The HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme will be running during the 2024 Christmas holidays. These sessions have been developed to include additional support for children with SEND. You can find more details and the full schedule of activities here: <https://eequ.org/brightonhovehaf>.

**7. SCDS staff have said that YP over the age of 18 are not allowed to use their surplus for anything that isn't written in the care plan - this is confusing, as this hasn't been made clear at any meetings. Is this information wrong, as**

**we know SCDS in meetings have retained an attitude of flexibility and one of acceptance in requests coming in re surpluses as finding provision remains a problem.**

Direct payments can be used flexibly, and each situation will be considered individually. If parents / carers want to use their direct payments or surplus for something additional to what is in their son/ daughter's care plan they must discuss this with the allocated worker or the duty social worker. Agreement can only be given to this by the head of service.

We remain committed to developing the short breaks offer moving forward. Providers have been asked to review their provision for 2025 with consideration for longer days, more provision for children with complex needs, and an increase in the availability of 1:1 support.

If you have any further questions or would like to use your Direct Payments to fund an agency PA during the Christmas holidays, please don't hesitate to reach out.

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