

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
Date:	19 October 2022
Title:	Outcomes from the Consultation on Social Care Provision for Overnight Short Breaks at Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit
Report From:	Director of Childrens Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services the outcomes of both the public and staff consultations on the future of social care provision at Firvale Residential Respite Unit and to offer recommendations for decision making.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the recommendation to:
Permanently close social care provision at Firvale Residential Respite Unit by 31 March 2023.

Executive Summary

3. In March 2020, during the national lockdown as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the Ofsted registered social care Firvale residential respite unit temporarily closed. Staff were redeployed to other services in the Children's Services Department.
4. At the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services Decision Day on 14th January 2022¹, permission was given to consult on proposals for the future of social care respite provision at Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit.

¹<https://democracy.hants.gov.uk/documents/s89464/Permission%20to%20consult%20on%20proposals%20for%20social%20care%20provision%20for%20overnight%20short%20breaks%20at%20Firvale%20R.pdf>

5. The public consultation exercise was open from 17th January – 28th March 2022, a period of 10 weeks. A staff consultation was also undertaken concurrently.
6. Firvale is operated by Hampshire County Council (HCC) working in partnership with Hampshire Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust (HHFT), who own the building. Of the nine beds within Firvale, HCC used five to meet children's social care overnight respite needs and HHFT using the remaining capacity (four beds) to meet health needs.
7. It should be noted that the cohort of young people supported by health have significantly different needs to those supported by social care. HHFT have continued to use the Firvale site during the pandemic to deliver a range of services and they are exploring the potential future options for the use of the building.
8. In August 2018, a report of essential building and maintenance works needed at Firvale was produced. These works would ensure the building continues to be fit for purpose and provide a safe environment. To re-open HCC's registered respite service at Firvale (the five social care beds), there would be an imminent requirement to contribute funding of at least £400,000 towards these essential works within the building, and its grounds.
9. Since the development of the residential estate which now surrounds Firvale, there have been increasing concerns about the loss of privacy, particularly the fact that some of the bedrooms and all the grounds are now overlooked by other properties. This has brought into question the ongoing suitability of the building to deliver social care residential respite services.
10. HCC have engaged with health partners (Both HHFT and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board (ICB) (formerly the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)) regarding concerns about the building and the need to close it at the beginning of the pandemic. HCC have offered regular discussions since that time. HHFT continue to consider the future use of the building and the range of services which they may wish to provide from it.
11. The public consultation sought the views of services users, stakeholders, Hampshire residents and other care and support providers on the development of suitable alternative options for current and future users, which promote the best outcomes for children and young people and their families and reduce dependencies on services whilst ensuring best value for the use of public funds.
12. A total of 58 responses were received during the consultation period, of whom 33 had used overnight respite at Firvale, 17 were related to, or lived with, someone who has used services at Firvale, four were support workers for families with a child with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and one respondent worked at Firvale.

13. Social workers have continued to work closely with affected families to put in place suitable alternative packages of care that would meet each individual's assessed needs.
14. Prior to the closure (due to Coronavirus), in March 2020, around one third of available overnight respite (ONR) provision capacity was used. Firvale ONR provision was being accessed by 12 children, a further 14 young people were awaiting ONR services. All children and their families have received ongoing support from their Social Workers to identify suitable alternative services to meet their assessed social care needs.
15. The Children's Services Department have continued to work with new and existing external providers to develop a broad range of respite and support services available to children and young people who have disabilities within Hampshire.
16. The factors of low occupancy, high cost per night, combined with recruitment and staffing issues, as well as the wider local authority funding pressures have contributed to the case to consult on whether social care provision at Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit should remain closed. Since the end of March 2020, there has been no access to HCC respite provision at the home, and social workers have worked with families to explore alternative support options, some of which have been taken up.

Contextual information

17. The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 places a duty on local authorities to provide a range of services for children who have a disability and their families which includes, "overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere." The County Council's offer for overnight respite was historically based on residential services, however the County Council have worked to diversify the offer to meet need in the most appropriate way for young people. This has included commissioning support in family homes and increasing the use of Specialist Respite Care (Care in the home of foster carers, recently renamed, 'Home from Home').
18. Firvale is a residential respite unit, located in Basingstoke. Until the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, Firvale provided overnight respite care for children and young people who have a disability. There are nine single children's bedrooms (five are used by HCC social care and four by HHFT), along with dining, sensory and play areas. When fully staffed, the maximum social care respite nights per annum is 1,815. Since 2019, approximately a third of available nights have been accessed.
19. Respite services are provided for eligible children between the ages of 5-18 years who live at home with their parents or carers, and who have been assessed and are approved for overnight respite.

20. In addition to the 12 children who previously accessed social care respite services at Firvale, there was a further cohort of 14 children had been assessed as requiring respite, and where Firvale had been identified as an appropriate option.
21. Work has been ongoing to identify suitable alternative respite for each of these children whilst Firvale has been closed. Disabled Children's Team (DCT) social workers alongside commissioning colleagues have actively worked with affected children and their families to secure appropriate and beneficial longer-term respite provision and/or services.
22. The DCT social work teams have confirmed that since the temporary closure of Firvale, there is one child for whom alternate respite provision is still being sought from the original cohort of 26 children and young people. For some young people who are approaching adulthood, this has been through our supporting their transition to services provided by Adults Health and Care.
23. Should Firvale remain open, HCC would be required to commit to investing at least £400,000 towards funding essential building works needed at Firvale. These works include widening doorways, installing new fire doors and improvements to gates and site drainage.
24. The investment required to fund the works described above does not alter or mitigate the question of the ongoing suitability of Firvale for social care provision, due to issues around loss of privacy resulting from the surrounding housing developments which means that Firvale is now significantly overlooked.
25. When fully operational, Firvale has 20.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) HCC staff. Due to vacancies, there are currently eight members of staff employed to work at the unit. Since the closure of social care provision at Firvale in March 2020, members of staff have been relocated into a range of other roles across HCC's Childrens Services Department.
26. To re-open Firvale, it would be necessary to recruit up to 13.6FTE to fill the current vacancies. Without adequate staffing levels, Firvale could only offer a partial service, which could mean that not all respite allocation could be met, and the service would not be operating at a viable occupancy. In turn this would mean that the service would not be offering good value for money.
27. Currently the assessed needs of children and young people with disabilities are met through a range of services, including overnight respite care, from external providers, and other alternative forms of support for children and young people and their families.
28. The alternative forms of support available to families include:
 - Home from Home care which is provided by registered foster carers to offer families short term respite;
 - Care Support hours which can be offered in the home or in the community;

- Support via a Direct Payment worker, also in the home or in the community as required;
 - HCC also provide specialist support via the Sleep Support Service which provides bespoke support, advice and guidance to families where sleep is an issue; and
 - The Technology Enabled Care service provides an assessment to identify if there are any potential technology solutions to support a family to meet their needs. Personal Budgets, where funds are transferred directly from HCC to families to purchase equipment, or services and activities in the community;
 - Family breaks to meet their needs.
 - Short Break activities and the Buddy Scheme are also options available to families to explore.
 - Overnight respite services commissioned from external service providers.
29. Overnight respite is currently provided through arrangements which are in place with external service providers. These contracts offer high quality respite services at a lower cost to in-house provision, and which allow HCC to accommodate fluctuations in demand as HCC only pays for beds that are utilised by its service users rather the total cost of the service irrespective of occupancy levels. At present, overnight respite services are provided by the following organisations:
- The Rose Road Association, The Acorns, Southampton
 - Purple Oak Support (formerly Andover Mencap), Rainbow Corner, Andover
 - Cherry Trees, Guildford, Surrey
 - Treetops, White Lodge Centre, Chertsey, Surrey
 - Shooting Stars, Guildford, Surrey
30. Should the social care provision at Firvale remain closed, appropriate permanent re-deployment opportunities will be sought to minimise potential compulsory redundancies. All appropriate redeployment opportunities will be explored to avoid any potential compulsory redundancies, this would include vacant posts within HCC's other Children's Homes.

Finance

31. Since 2008, HCC has been changing the way it works to respond to continuing pressures on local government funding, whilst demand for many services has continued to increase. This has resulted in over £560 million being removed from the budget in the last 14 years. Over the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24 the County Council faces a further budget shortfall totalling at least £80 million, bringing the cumulative recurring saving to £640 million.
32. Each successive transformation (savings) programme is becoming more challenging to deliver, as the potential to achieve further permanent cost reductions through early intervention, demand management and prevention approaches is reduced. Given the level of savings already achieved and the

shortened timescales for delivery, the Saving Programme to 2023 (SP23) is focused primarily on services that may be reduced or stopped across the Council.

33. Local authorities are required to deliver a balanced budget and it is necessary for the Council to decide what services HCC provides, and how these services are delivered, whilst meeting both assessed needs and statutory obligations. It is now more challenging to maintain the full range of services that residents have previously accessed within the reduced budgets now available.
34. The table below provides a comparison of average cost per bed per night between Firvale and external residential respite providers. Average unit rates are taken from current agreed rates.

Cost of overnight respite (per night, per child)	Care worker to child ratio²	
	1:2	1:1
2022/23 Firvale cost (based on a target of 80% occupancy)	£731.07	£966.37
Current average external provider unit rate (based on contracted costs)	£361.17	£771.26

35. The data in the table above provides the cost per night of delivering respite services at Firvale, based on an 80% occupancy figure and the costs incurred, based on actual use. The most recent data (in the period up to March 2020) confirms that Firvale was operating at approximately one third occupancy. The consequence of this under occupancy was that in 2019/20 overnight respite at Firvale cost an average of £1,486.87 per night.
36. Several factors have contributed to low occupancy at Firvale, including the complex needs of the children and their support requirements limiting the number of children that can be accommodated at any one time. Another factor is the requirement to ensure that children staying at Firvale at the same time are risk assessed and matched appropriately. This ensures they are able to engage with each other, participate in similar activities and have a positive experience.
37. There have also been challenges in maintaining the staffing establishment which has had an impact on the number of children that could be cared for at any one time.
38. The HCC annual budget for Firvale for financial year 2022/23 is £900,000. It is proposed that £500,000 is to be allocated to departmental savings required by March 2023. The remainder of the budget is to be invested into the

² The 1:2 and 1:1 rate compares the average contracted rates per night, per service user for those ratios of care compared to the equivalent in-house rate. This is based on a service user acceding the respite provision for a 24-hour period.

ongoing development and provision of respite services for children with disabilities and their families.

39. In addition to the ongoing annual saving of £500,000, the closure of Firvale will also result in the avoidance of a one-off cost of an estimated £400,000 to fund essential works needed within the building, and its grounds.
40. Should Firvale close the maximum redundancy costs for all staff are estimated to be up to £71,614 (including potential enhanced voluntary redundancy), however, the actual figures are expected to be much lower due to anticipated redeployment of staff.
41. The proposed saving includes provision to support children's transition to alternative respite and to cover potential redundancy costs.

Consultation and Equalities

42. At the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services Decision Day on 14th January 2022, permission was given to consult on proposals for social care capacity at Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit to remain closed.
43. The public consultation exercise ran from 17th January – 28th March 2022, a period of 10 weeks.
44. To support the consultation, an information pack was produced, including a version in an easy-to-read format to ensure that key information about proposals was widely accessible.
45. The consultation was promoted by HCC across a range of media. This included letters to service users, social media posts (Twitter, Facebook, Nextdoor), communications being sent to all special schools, and in collaboration with Hampshire Parent Carer Network, who promoted the consultation to their members. The consultation was also featured on the BBC's South Today local news programme on 18th January 2022.
46. During the consultation, a number of drop-in sessions were organised. These were held in both in person, at several accessible venues across Hampshire, and online, via virtual meetings.

Venue	Date
Basingstoke Discovery Centre	03/02/2022
Gosport Discovery Centre	09/02/2022
Online via MS Teams	14/02/2022
Basingstoke Discovery Centre	25/02/2022
Online via MS Teams	01/03/2022
Online via MS Teams (evening)	16/03/2022
Chandlers Ford Library	17/03/2022

47. A total of 58 responses were received during the consultation period. The breakdown of these responses is set out below. Of these, 56 responses were provided via the Response Form, and two 'unstructured' responses via email were also received.

48. Of those who provided a response:

- 33 had used overnight respite at Firvale, 17 were related to, or lived with, someone who has used services at Firvale, four were support workers for families with a child with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and one worked at Firvale.
- 29 lived with children or young people under the age of 26, of whom 25 had Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and 11 use overnight respite services (six at Firvale).

Other information that was shared included that of the respondents to the consultation:

- 33 were female and 12 were male
- 15 had a health problem or disability, and 26 did not have these issues
- Three were from ethnic minority groups and 41 were from White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British groups

49. A copy of the of the consultation headline findings report is included at Annex A.

50. The consultation sought respondents' views on the key issues the County Council would need to consider when making the decision about Firvale. There were 36 responses to this question.

- 25 responses mentioned the reduced opportunities for respite was
- 25 responses mentioned the impact on service using children and their families
- 24 responses mentioned the lack of suitable alternative respite

51. The consultation Information Pack described the alternative services that would be available if a decision were to be taken that the social care overnight respite service at Firvale remain closed. The consultation asked respondents to describe any service user needs that would not be met by these services. In total 48 comments were provided in answer to this question. The top three answers provided focussed on:

- 32 responses mentioned that suitable alternatives are not readily available
- 13 responses mentioned a lack of accessible alternatives in their area
- 9 responses mentioned a lack of support for children with complex needs

52. The consultation Response Form asked respondents to describe any impacts that the proposal for the social care overnight respite service at Firvale to remain closed would have on themselves, other people, or their organisation, group, or business. 50 comments were provided in relation to this:

- 41 responses mentioned the impact on the families of service users
- 30 responses mentioned an inability for service users to access respite
- 14 responses mentioned the impact of increased travel

53. Feedback received during the consultation also made the following points:

- That further consideration should be given to the wellbeing of service users' families, and the suitability of alternatives for service users' needs - particularly following the previous closures of respite the Sunbeams and Merrydale respite units.

The wellbeing of service users and their families is of the utmost importance and is the reason why social workers have worked with families to identify suitable and appropriate alternatives for individual children and young people affected by the proposal, ensuring that their needs are met.

- Concerns were raised that (assessed) needs may not be met by alternative services, and that alternatives may not be local, therefore adding to the complexity and challenge to access suitable respite.

Social Workers are supporting affected families to discuss any concerns they may have regarding the proposal, and to identify agreeable alternative support for their family that meets their assessed needs. Funding has been set aside to ensure that additional transport costs incurred by families as a result of this proposal can be supported.

- That the vulnerable were being disproportionately affected by successive cuts, that services for children and young people with disabilities should be prioritised, and that closing Firvale may lead to additional costs in other services, examples cited included an increased demand for residential care.

Families affected by the proposal are receiving individualised support to ensure that their needs are met.

- There were also suggestions that the County Council should reduce wastage, reduce pay for senior officers/Councillors, increase Council Tax, and find other sources of income such as selling additional land charged for services at Firvale, allowing service users to buy services from Firvale through Direct Payments, and the use of budget reserves to continue to fund respite services at Firvale.

HCC welcomes suggestions for how to secure additional income to support services for our vulnerable children and families. In the particular case of Firvale, the financial assessment within this report demonstrates that in terms of value for money, and therefore best use of public funds, that there are alternative options available both in-house and on the market that will provide better outcomes.

Equality Impact Assessment

54. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is provided at Appendix A.

55. No high negative or medium negative impacts were noted in the Equality Impact Assessment.
56. Low negative impacts were identified for the public in relation to the protected characteristics of age, disability, poverty and rurality. The proposal will impact the services provided for children and young people with disabilities, some of whom may need to access alternate respite provision. The County Council is committed to ensuring that families remain able to access provision that will meet their child's needs. When planning for alternative provision, transport to or from overnight respite has been considered, where appropriate and in some cases travel support/assistance has been provided.
57. Low negative impacts were identified for staff in relation to the protected characteristics of age, disability, sex and poverty. The age profile of the Firvale staff is broadly in line with both the averages for across the County Council, however all staff members are female, a minority of whom have declared a disability, based on a very small number of staff this is higher than organisational averages. It is anticipated that majority of the eight members of staff will be permanently redeployed into alternative roles within Children's Services. Staff who cannot be redeployed would be offered enhanced voluntary redundancy.

Staff consultation

58. Consultation with staff and unions took place alongside the public consultation between 17 January and 28 March 2022. Consultation was undertaken through a staff briefing, individual meetings with affected staff and departmental meetings with trade unions. There were 11 members of staff within scope of consultation at the start of the process, however, three have since been appointed to alternative roles within the department.
59. During consultation, staff shared concerns about the potential impact of the proposals on the children and families who attended Firvale. There was also discussion about the redeployment options available to staff and the support and training which would support a change in role.
60. A small minority of existing staff have been invited to apply for enhanced voluntary redundancy as there are no anticipated suitable alternative roles available. The final date for voluntary redundancy applications is 20 October 2022. If these staff members do not apply for enhanced voluntary redundancy, they will be at risk of compulsory redundancy and will be eligible for redeployment support. Compulsory redundancy would be a last resort.
61. It is anticipated that all other staff affected by the proposals will be redeployed to alternative roles within Children's Services.
62. Should Firvale close, the maximum redundancy costs for all staff are estimated to be up to £71,614 (including potential enhanced voluntary redundancy), however, the actual figures are expected to be much lower due

to anticipated redeployment of staff.

Climate Change Impact Assessment

63. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

Climate Change Adaptation

64. The carbon mitigation tool decision tree indicates that this proposal is not suitable for assessment. Therefore, the Climate Change Impact Assessment tool has not been used.

65. A full assessment of climate change vulnerability was not completed as the initial vulnerability assessment showed that the project is at minimal risk from the climate vulnerabilities.

Carbon Mitigation

66. At this stage it is considered that there is no requirement to undertake steps for Carbon Mitigation. Accessing alternative respite provision will alter the length of journeys for some users, but as services will be distributed across Hampshire this could result in a reduction for some, and an increase for others. It is therefore not possible to model these impacts in the long-term as provision is allocated on a basis of need, and not all settings are suitable to meet the needs of all children and young people.

67. The proposals support Hampshire County Councils' strategic priorities:

Strategic Outcome 1: Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity: The proposals will lead to a saving of £500,000 per annum and will ensure that high quality respite provision is delivered whilst achieving good value for Hampshire's residents.

Strategic Outcome 2: People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives as the proposed changes will support children and young people access to a range of residential and strengths-based respite provisions suited to their individual assessed needs.

Conclusion

68. Whilst it is acknowledged that the findings of the consultation indicated that there was opposition to the permanent closure of Firvale, this must be balanced against the financial pressures that are being faced by the County Council, the investment required in continuing to provide respite services at

Firvale, coupled with the high costs and poor value for money offered.

69. With the ongoing development of alternative respite provisions that are being offered, the concerns raised in the consultation can be mitigated whilst ensuring that children and young people, and their families receive appropriate meaningful, high-quality, good value-for-money and strengths-based respite support that meets their assessed needs.
70. Alternative respite provision including Home from Home, Care Support, the Sleep Support Service, Technology Enabled Care, Personal Budgets, Short Break activities and the Buddy Scheme are options available that families can explore alongside residential overnight respite. The broad range of services available means that HCC is able to work with young people and their families to meet assessed needs in a way which can be tailored and adapted as their needs evolve over time.

Recommendations

71. That the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the recommendation to:
Permanently close social care provision at Firvale Residential Respite Unit by 31 March 2023.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	No

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u> Permission to consult on proposals for social care provision for overnight short breaks at Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit to remain closed.	14 January 2022
<u>Title</u> Savings Programme to 2023 - Revenue Savings Proposals Cabinet:	17 September 2021
<u>Title</u> Medium Term Financial Strategy Update and Savings Programme to 2023 Savings Proposals	12 October 2021

Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives

<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Children Act	1989
Local Government Act	1999
Equality Act	2010
Respite: Statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using respite	2010
The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations	2011
Children and Families Act	2014
Best Value Statutory Guidance (revised and updated)	2015

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
2. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
3. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

4. The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
5. Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
6. Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

Appendix B – Summary of Alternative Respite Provision

The Children's Services Procurement and Commissioning team are consolidating and further developing the choice and range of support available to DCT children, young people, and their families. The current support offer includes the following services:

Overview of current services:

Type of provision	Description
a) Overnight respite in a residential setting	A commissioned service provided by external providers within Ofsted registered Children's homes.
b) Personal Budgets	Flexible use of personal budgets to purchase equipment or services to meet the needs identified in the care plan.
c) Home from Home care	Home from Home is a form of respite for families. Specialist respite carers are registered foster carers who are linked to a family to provide overnight respite for children. Home from Home respite carers, with the support of their supervising social worker from the Children's Services Fostering Team and the child's social worker, provide breaks which can be for a few hours at a time or can be overnight, depending on the needs of the family.
d) Care Support hours	Care Support is where a support worker comes to the family home or takes the child or young person into the local community, either for shorter periods during the day or having a carer stay in the home overnight. This could be with or without the parents in the home.
e) Technology Enabled Care	Hampshire's assistive technology partner Argenti will work with DCT social workers and families to recommend and supply a technology-based intervention to support a child's care plan.
f) Specialist Sleep Support Service	A specialist sleep support intervention to families of children with a disability, where non-medical sleep related issues are causing family sleep deprivation and associated issues.

g) Direct Payment worker	Direct payments can be used by a family to employ a Direct Payment workers/ PA in Care.
h) Holiday Activities	Families can refer to Short Break Activities and Holiday Activity Fund schemes.
i) Community Buddy Scheme	The Buddy Scheme provides individual support to children and young people who have additional needs to access the community. A community buddy is a volunteer or a paid member of staff who may go with a young person to their chosen activity, giving them time away from home, help the young person to do things they want to do or provide support for leisure activities.
j) Occupational Therapy support (OT)	Children and Families Occupational Therapy Service is a community social care provision. Children with disabilities are offered assessment, advice and/or interventions following a strength-based approach, to remain in their chosen care setting, (family home, extended family support, fostering, HCC residential placement) to overcome barriers towards independence.

Overnight respite in a residential setting: This is a purchased service provided by the following external providers:

Rose Road (Southampton), The Acorns service is a residential respite service run by the Rose Road Association, for children and young people aged between 4 and 18. The service is available to children and young people who have profound and multiple learning disabilities, physical disabilities and complex health needs. Each room has specialist equipment, with one twin room available if required. This unit is shared between Hampshire and Southampton children and families. There are currently 24 Hampshire children on roll with 10 Hampshire children on the waiting list. As of July 2022, Rose Road have started to assess children on their current waiting list; they have 37 children on their waiting list across both Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council. Rose Road estimates that children could start accessing provision anywhere between 1 – 3 months depending on where they sit on the waiting list.

Purple Oak (Andover), formerly Andover District Mencap, is a six-bed home providing overnight short breaks and day care for children and young people with additional needs, aged 3 to 19 years. Adaptions have been made to meet the needs of the children and young people who attend. The home can care for children and young people who have multiple and/or profound learning disabilities,

including those on the Autistic Spectrum, those with complex medical health needs and physical disabilities. 41 children are accessing overnight respite at Rainbow Corner currently. These include 2 from Wiltshire, and 5 from independent futures (ex-Hampshire children; children who have turned 18 but will continue to access respite until they turn 19). This provider currently has 29 Hampshire children on roll with a further 8 on their waiting list, introduction visits are taking place in September 2022 for these children

Cherry Trees (Surrey) is a charity providing specialist respite for children and young adults aged 0-19 who have a range of complex disabilities including learning, physical and/or sensory impairments. There are 11 single rooms available. This setting has a maximum capacity of 14 children (11 overnights plus 3 day cares). There are no Hampshire children currently placed here although there is 1 referral from Hampshire on the waiting list, it is anticipated that this young person will start accessing this provision in December/ January 2023. The home is accepting new referrals. For weekend and school holiday packages, the waiting list is currently approximately one year depending on the requirement. If a family will consider mid-week term time visits, then the waiting list is shorter.

Tree Tops (Chertsey) short breaks provides respite care for disabled children and young people up to the age of 18 in Surrey. This is a new provider to Hampshire, and they are assessing their first referral, this referral is set to begin respite in September. This provider is accepting new referrals from Hampshire.

Castle Gate (Newbury) is a respite care home for up to 6 children aged 5-18 living with Learning disabilities, Autism, Physical Disabilities and Complex needs. The setting has cared for Hampshire children historically but is currently only accepting referrals from West Berks. Procurement Officers continue to liaise with the provider to maintain the working relationship with a view to future Hampshire placements being a possibility in due course.

Beechside (Portsmouth) is a 6 bed overnight short break service based in Portsmouth for Children with Disabilities aged between 5 and 18 years of age. The setting has cared for Hampshire children historically but is currently only accepting referrals from Portsmouth. Procurement Officers continue to liaise with the provider to maintain the working relationship with a view to future Hampshire placements being a possibility in due course. The Procurement, Commissioning and Placements Team are also working with a new respite provider in the east of the county, to develop additional capacity in the overnight market. It is anticipated that bed nights will be available from Autumn 2022 pending Ofsted registration. Based on a three-bed unit initially, with capacity to increase to six beds once the service is established, this new provision could potentially provide a minimum of 720 nights per annum based on a 5-night opening 48 weeks a year. However, given the full capacity available is likely to be significantly more once the service is operating at optimum capacity of in the region of 75% occupancy.

Personal budgets can be used flexibly to purchase equipment or services to meet the needs identified in a child's care plan. This option has recently

undergone a refresh whereby social workers are being encouraged and supported to be creative and innovative with how best to meet needs via this funding route. It gives families choice and control over their support and is a personalised approach.

Home from Home care is a form of respite for families. Specialist respite carers are registered foster carers who are linked to a family to provide overnight respite for children. Home from Home respite carers, with the support of their supervising social worker from the Children's Services Fostering Team and the child's social worker, provide breaks which can be for a few hours at a time or can be overnight, depending on the needs of the family.

Care Support is a commissioned service whereby an agreed number of hours of support are approved and Care Quality Commission registered providers are provided with referrals for a support worker to come to the family home or take the child or young person into the local community, either for shorter periods during the day or having a carer stay in the home overnight. This could be with or without the parents in the home.

Technology Enabled Care; Argenti is Hampshire's assistive technology partner. Working closely with the Disabled Children's Team social workers and families, Argenti will recommend and supply a technology-based intervention to support the child's care plan. These interventions can offer support in areas such as night-time routines, epilepsy monitors, flooding and fire detectors. Phone applications which can help reduce a child or young person's anxiety and improve their ability to be more independent can also be provided where appropriate. 147 have been referrals received since project start in 2015 and 99 CYP currently receiving TEC. There were 17 referrals received in 2021 and 16 of those are still actively receiving TEC.

Sleep Support Service: The service is in its 4th year of successful delivery and supports an increasing number of families year on year with specialist sleep advice and support. Additional spaces have been secured for year 5 (From September 2022) and will see a further 50 families receiving support. Similar to Care Support the option of a **Direct Payment** worker/PA in Care is another way of commissioning care and support hours. This option sees the family being the direct employer of the support worker; they are responsible for the recruitment and payment of the staff member. There is an additional service in place to support families with this option so they can fully understand their role and responsibilities; Direct Payment Support Service which is delivered to families in receipt of direct payments and is managed via a provider called Enham.

Holiday Activities: Short Break Activities and Holiday Activity Fund schemes which are advertised here: [Family Information and Services Hub \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/family-information-and-services-hub). Short Breaks enable children and young people with disabilities or additional needs to join in with fun activities. They give parents or carers an opportunity to have a short break from caring. Short Breaks include specialist holiday and weekend play and youth club schemes across Hampshire that can be accessed via a Gateway Card+. The Gateway Card+ is for children and young people who;

have a disability and/or additional needs (supporting evidence is required), need support to take part in leisure activities, are between 0 and 17 years old and live in the Hampshire County Council authority area. The card is free and gives access to community activities, play schemes and buddy schemes through the short breaks programme.

The **Community Buddy** scheme provides individual support to children and young people who have additional needs to access the community. A community buddy is a volunteer or a paid member of staff who may go with a young person to their chosen activity, giving them time away from home, help the young person to do things they want to do or provide support for leisure activities.

The Children & Families **Occupational Therapy Team** continues as they always have done to provide aids and adaptations to disabled children and their families to aid mobility and access around the home, and to better enable these children's care needs to be met at home. This can be seen as an early intervention or preventative-type provision which can prevent escalation of needs.

In addition to the current provision listed in the section above, new ways of meeting respite needs are also being developed such as; **Activity Breaks** where a child/young person accesses an activity centre for a day or overnight and enjoys a range of activities provided by trained instructors and supported by experienced care staff.

Family Breaks are another option that can be commissioned or funded via personal budgets; these can provide a break where the whole family can enjoy time away together in an accessible environment.

Longer term the Procurement, Commissioning and Placements Team are also exploring closer joint working the **Independent Futures Team** who manage the transition of young people from Children's Services into Adult's Services, and also with Adults Health and Care generally to ensure that the relevant teams and services are making the best of the resources available.

Firvale Residential Respite Childrens Unit 2022 consultation headline findings

Background

Firvale is a purpose-built short-stay residential respite unit for children with disabilities. The unit is used by both Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust, part of the NHS, and the County Council.

Social care provision at Firvale has been closed to service users since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. The County Council proposed that social care provision at Firvale remains closed, with alternative provision sought for both existing users and those children and young people who are awaiting provision.

This consultation related only to social care services provided at Firvale by Hampshire County Council. More information, including the consultation Information Pack which explained why the County Council was making this proposal, can be found at www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/Firvale.

The consultation was open from 17 January 2022 and closed at midnight on 28 March 2022. The County Council received 58 responses to the consultation.

Headline findings

Before the County Council makes a decision on the future of the respite service at Firvale, respondents most commonly felt that further consideration should be given to the wellbeing of service users' families, the remaining levels of access to respite services, and the suitability of alternatives for service users' needs - particularly following the previous closures of Sunbeams and Merrydale.

Respondents were most concerned that their needs would not be met by alternative services as these already had limited availability and the closure of Firvale would put further pressure on places. They also noted that the locations of alternative provision would make it harder to reach them, and that they may not cater for more complex needs.

It was perceived that the impact of closure would be felt most amongst people with a disability and those in poverty. Identified impacts included placing additional strain on families - leading to poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, being unable to access services, and the extra financial, time and stress burdens placed on service users and their families by the need to travel further to access respite.

Further comments covered a wide range of subjects, although they indicated common views that the vulnerable were being disproportionately impacted by successive cuts to funding, that services for children and young people with disabilities should be prioritised, and that ceasing funding for Firvale's respite service may lead to additional costs to other services, such as residential care.

Similarly, suggested alternatives to ending the respite service at Firvale addressed a variety of topics. However, there were regular suggestions that the County Council reduces wastage, reduces pay for senior officers and Councillors, increases Council Tax, and finds other sources of income such as selling services at Firvale, allowing service users to buy services from Firvale through Direct Payments, and the use of reserves to continue to pay for the service at Firvale.

Things to consider when deciding whether social care overnight respite service at Firvale remains closed

The consultation Information Pack explained the County Council's reasons for proposing the social care overnight respite service at Firvale to remain closed.

The consultation Response Form asked "What else do you think the Council would need to consider when making this decision?"

36 comments were provided in answer to this question. Of these:

25 mentioned **reduced opportunities for respite**

This often related to issues around supply and demand for the service, the impacts of other changes to services for those with SEND, and decreasing provision of services for those with complex needs

25 mentioned **impacts on, and needs of, service users' families**

These frequently related to the need for parents and carers to have breaks from their caring duties and the service's benefit to the resilience and mental wellbeing of service users' families

24 mentioned a **lack of suitable alternatives**

Comments most commonly related to impacts of previous closures of respite services in Hampshire, the value of consistency to service users, and the highly-valued Firvale staff

- 9 expressed views that Firvale is still a suitable respite location
- 5 mentioned less social interaction for service users
- 5 mentioned issues of eligibility for, and access to, respite
- 4 mentioned the potential impacts on other services
- 2 mentioned increased strain on household finances
- 2 expressed views that the Council should prioritise the budget for respite services
- 2 mentioned risks of increased need for residential placements

16 mentioned a **lack of local service provision**

These comments commonly related to Firvale being the only suitable respite setting in the Basingstoke area, and issues if parents or carers need to travel further to collect the service user in an emergency

12 mentioned **increased travel needs and costs**

These comments often related to the difficulties of travelling with a child or young person who needs respite, the costs of travelling longer distances, and the loss of respite time spent travelling to the setting

11 mentioned that **the Council should invest more in respite**

These comments often shared views that there should be more respite homes in Hampshire, that the burdens are increasing on families, and that respite reduces the Council's costs elsewhere

Examples of comments are shown on the next page

Things to consider when deciding whether social care overnight respite service at Firvale remains closed

There are not enough respite services and children who needs these are not able to access them. The criteria for access is high and many family really struggle without this service. All respite services are going to be expensive

The price to upgrade and keep open will be cheaper in the long run, rather than letting families go into crisis and need children going into care, or residential specialist provision. The alternatives are not good enough and no other local respite place exists for families

As this is the only unit in Hampshire that can accommodate children with challenging behaviour often caused by their disability; it is paramount suitable provisions are sourced

Many more children could be supported at Firvale if the criteria for going there was different. It could be an amazing resource for learning disabled children. The reason so few are accessing it is because it is not offered to enough families



Parents who do not drive will have limited access to respite and will not be within reasonable distance should an emergency situation arise

Overnight respite care helps keep children within their family and communities. For example, just one child placed in a specialist residential setting can cost education, health and social care from £80K to £120K for just one year

Firvale should not be closed as it helps people cope who are already at breaking point. This could be the last straw tipping carers over the edge. This could rebound costing the HCC even more

There are currently only 3 other units being used by Hampshire and the geographical distance of other units would be costly in mileage

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Needs that respondents felt would not be met by alternative services

The consultation Information Pack described the alternative services that would be available if a decision were to be taken that the social care overnight respite service at Firvale remain closed.

The consultation Response Form asked respondents to describe any service user needs that would not be met by these services.

48 comments were provided in relation to this. Of these:

32 mentioned they felt that **suitable alternatives are not readily available**

This often related to views that alternatives do not exist, or that alternatives do not have the capacity to cater for the expected demand that would be placed on them if Firvale stopped providing respite

Home from Home services in particular were mentioned by 11 respondents as being unsuitable for service users' needs or lacking capacity; while 8 referenced the Buddy Scheme as not being a like-for-like alternative

13 mentioned a **lack of accessible alternatives in their area**

These comments related to concerns about needing to travel to other areas, benefits of local respite to the wellbeing of local families and the familiarity that it provides service users, and the view that parents and carers would struggle to access the respite service in an emergency

9 mentioned a **lack of support for complex needs**

This included needs such as challenging or violent behaviour, severe levels of disability, mental health support (such as distress caused by a change in setting), and those who require 24-hour monitoring

- 6 mentioned a **lack of trained staff** to manage service users' needs.
- 6 mentioned **issues using direct payments**, most commonly that it is difficult finding services on which to spend the budget
- 2 mentioned that the alternate services **would not include adequate social contact** for service users
- 2 mentioned that there was **not enough information** available on the alternate services that can be used

Examples of comments are shown on the next page

Needs that respondents felt would not be met by alternative services

The alternative overnight respite are too far away if you don't drive. Sometimes you just need to sleep in your own bed knowing your child is well cared for

I would like to know where these alternatives are as I haven't been able to access much for my son at all

The above are all good options but in reality are not alternative as they are not available. There is a waiting list for alternate overnight respite facilities, not enough registered people to do buddy scheme or home from home services, and over prescribed short break activities

... alternative facilities are not available and do not accept challenging behaviours



Services purchased by families' Direct Payments or Personal Budget Allowances assumes families have the contacts for people with skills to look after their severely disabled children

All these alternatives fail because of the lack of trained personnel

You can't just say there'll be alternative overnight respite facilities when the reality is that Firvale is the only one in Basingstoke that caters for severely disabled children

Home from Home services - good idea but lack of foster carers who are able to care for children with needs that are difficult to manage

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Anticipated impacts of the proposed changes

The consultation Response Form asked respondents to describe any impacts that the proposal for the social care overnight respite service at Firvale to remain closed would have on themselves, other people, or their organisation, group, or business.

50 comments were provided in relation to this.

41 mentioned impacts on families of service users

These impacts frequently related to stress and mental health, a potential for family breakdown, and concerns that the changes may lead to other children in service users' families having fewer opportunities

7 mentioned a lack of social interaction for service users

These comments commonly related to impacts on relationships that service users have made with each other and that they may be unable to form new relationships in alternate settings

30 mentioned an inability for service users to access respite

This concern related to availability of other respite settings following the proposed closure of Firvale's respite service, and the reduced capacity of other respite services if they picked up users from Firvale

3 mentioned a risk of service users needing permanent care

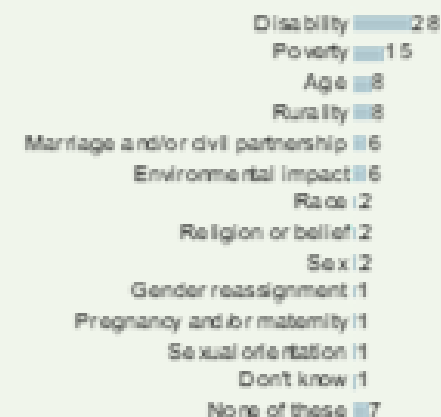
These risks were expressed in relation to the stress service users' families are under, and the perceived increased pressure that service users would be under in the event of Firvale's respite unit closing

14 mentioned a impacts of increased travel needs

These impacts related to the extra time and cost needed to take service users to respite settings, the stress this may cause service users, and the reduced respite time this would allow for parents and carers

Those with disabilities were most commonly identified as being impacted by the proposed changes, with about a third of respondents indicating that those in poverty would be impacted. Age and rurality were also amongst the most commonly identified characteristics which would be impacted by the proposals

Characteristics that respondents felt would be impacted by the proposed changes (base: 42)



Examples of comments are shown on the next page

Anticipated impacts of the proposed changes

It makes it harder to keep severely disabled children in the home setting if the parents can't have any respite

... genuine respite keeps families together, children remain at home and within their local communities

As an alternative overnight respite facility has been suggested closer to the south of the county this will incur transport costs, either paid for by parents or county. It will also be potentially stressful for those children that struggle with travel

Children's seclusion from similar peer group activities



People will feel less supported and demoralised and be less able to cope. Having some respite to look forward helps cares to carry on caring and reduces tension and conflict in the home

The distance to other facilities causing extra concerns especially if something goes wrong or the families don't drive

Families under extreme stress with possible breakdown of the family and children coming into care

The children will lose the social element of being with friends for respite

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Further comments

The consultation Response Form asked respondents to share any further comments on the proposal for the social care overnight respite service at Firvale to remain closed, or suggestions for other ways the County Council could make savings to its Children's Services budget.

40 responses were provided in relation to this, of which 28 provided further comment on the consultation proposals. Examples of these comments are shown below:

"Getting the support right for young people and their families will give them the best chance for when they are adults. Services should be working together more in order to help young people reach their potential. Sometimes this means ensuring parents have a break knowing their children are safe and being well supported in specialist services"

"Consideration of whether the likely outcome of reducing easy accessibility to respite care may result in more children with complex needs being taken into full-time care. Would there be provision for these children close to their homes? Or would they land up being out of area placements? This would quickly become more expensive than continuing running an established unit"

"Families need this respite service badly - upgrade/modernise/expand! The money it will cost, will save further crises further down the line that would be extremely costly"

"Why are we cutting children's services at all?"

"I don't know how HCC can save money. Maybe this tier of local authority service is too expensive to maintain and these services should be paid for by central government... It seems that county councils must stand up for their local services"

"Stop running a county council that only exists by the contributions of the population of Hampshire as a business and then pleading poverty"

"If proper offsite respite isn't available, disabled children end up in care because decent families that love them dearly simply can't cope any longer"

"We do not need this passive aggressive question to underline that you are required to make savings. We and other parents recognise this will be the impact of inadequate funding from central government. However your default position seems always to cut services to the most vulnerable"

"I was moved from Firvale to an open home. The waste I see working at these services are huge. Things get totally destroyed by the children, then the money is available to replace all of it, then it happens again, and so on. How can this be cost effective or sustainable?"

"If you are able to provide respite the child and family will not have to go down the route of long term residential - this will provide you with a saving"

"The Council is not prioritising the Children's Services budget - on the basis that it has to make savings to the same extent as other budgets. There needs to be a re-balancing of priorities"

"I understand this is only a tick box exercise, the decision has been made to the detriment of this already marginalised group of children"

"The government needs to allow more funding for disability services"

"Why always penalise the disabled????? This makes our community so angry and feel like we are worthless"

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Suggestions for other ways to make budget savings

The consultation Response Form asked respondents to share any further comments on the proposal for the social care overnight respite service at Firvale to remain closed, or suggestions for other ways the County Council could make savings to its Children's Services budget.

40 responses were provided in relation to this, of which 23 provided suggestions on ways to make savings. Examples of these suggestions are shown below:

"Could schools provide after school/weekend/holiday respite? The buildings are accessible and suitable, the staff have access to training and a stable career structure plus for children and parents it offers familiarity and security."

"Stop wasting money on non-maintained special schools"

"By providing in-house services instead of having to use costly outside agencies"

"I would suggest that the HCC site in Winchester is sold to generate funds, and all HCC employees should work remotely from home"

"Less swingeing cuts to services affecting a greater number of non disabled children, but to a lesser extent would be a more imaginative response"

"Use the centre better - hold after school clubs, day respite session which we could fund with our direct payments"

"Cut from other services and not children's services"

"...not make it so hard to get support when needed"

"Use the County Reserves to help pay for it"

"Put up council tax"

"Early intervention so more care is not required later on"

"Stop overpaying your staff and stop wasting money"

"Have a better system/punishment for those who make false claims out of spite. It wastes your time and money and causes untold stress to families"

"...stop doing unnecessary roundabout design changes when its not needed"

"...this is a discussion you need to be having with government to secure better funding"

"Children Services budget is probably the area that should be defended above all others perhaps other services should be reduced to support it"

"Families to pay for respite centres out of direct payment allowance or self funded"

"HCC doesn't need to reduce the amount it spends on children's services, just cut the pay and bonuses of your hierarchy"

Unstructured responses

The consultation received 2 'unstructured' responses via email, in lieu of using the Response Form. These are included below in their entirety:

"Sorry this is not a consultation. This is you saying what you are going to do. There is no way for us to vote and if we did you would only ignore it like you did with the Library Consultation which shut a library in one of the poorest areas of Basingstoke. These children do not have a voice so you think you can ignore them. Their parents are on their knees after 2 years of the pandemic where they have been more severely affected than any other group of children because so many services were suddenly cancelled, and least able to continue to learn or have fun with friends over Zoom and Teams.

Please please listen to the families of these children and reinstate Firvale a local facility for local children so that parents can get some local respite care."

"I hope respite don't get cancelled my daughter doesn't attend Firvale, however she does attend Rainbow Corner and they struggle to have enough places.

Without respite our children can't have a break away from other siblings that can cause them stress, it's also a major help for us parents to get a break. Without these breaks, I get two nights a month. I'm not sure how we could survive, to know our children are safe and well do we can have some free calming time if not getting hurt or emotionally hurt. Please reconsider as this will be so unsettling for the community."

Methodology

- The consultation was open from 17 January until 28 March 2022; it was an open consultation, so respondents were self-selecting
- An online Response Form was provided through which respondents could respond as an individual, in an official capacity on behalf of an organisation, business or group, or in their capacity as a democratically Elected Representative
- Respondents were also able to submit responses via email, letter, or telephone, which are referred to as 'unstructured responses'
- The consultation was communicated through a range of channels, including:
 - letters to individual service users, who were also directly engaged by their social workers
 - emails and messages to stakeholders, including engagement with the Hampshire Parent and Carer Network (HPCN), and schools;
 - social media posts;
 - media briefing work that was picked up by news organisations;
 - internal communications at Hampshire County Council; and
 - four consultation information sessions held in locations around Hampshire, and three online sessions, which received approximately 20 attendees overall
- Open-ended responses were analysed using an inductive process to draw out and quantify key themes; all verbatim comments have been provided to the project team

Who responded?

Of the 56 responses provided via the Response Form:

- 1 was from an organisation (a school)
- 3 responses were received from Councillors in Hampshire
- 52 were from individuals. Of those who specified*:
 - 33 had used overnight respite at Firvale, 17 were related to, or lived with, someone who has used services at Firvale, 4 were support workers for families with a child with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and 1 worked at Firvale
 - 29 lived with children or young people under the age of 26, of whom 25 had Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and 11 use overnight respite services (6 at Firvale)
 - 2 were aged under 25, 17 were aged 25-44, 21 were aged 45 to 64, and 4 were aged over 65
 - 33 were female and 12 were male
 - 15 had a health problem or disability, and 26 did not have these issues
 - 10 had a household income of up to £30,000 per year, 11 had a household oncome of £30,001 to £60,000 per year, and 1 had a household income of over £60,000 per year
 - 3 were from ethnic minority groups and 41 were from White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British groups

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**Please note that all questions were optional and some were multiple choice; as such, totals do not add up to 52*