

Gloucestershire Short Breaks Partnership

Call for tenders for an external evaluation partner

Contents

1. Purpose and outcome sought.....	2
2. About the partners.....	3
3. Background context for this brief.....	5
4. Aims of the evaluation project.....	9
5. What are the expected deliverables?	10
6. Tendering process	11
7. Useful links.....	12



1. Purpose and outcome sought

Barnwood Trust, Gloucestershire County Council's Children's Services, and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance have recently formed a new test and learn partnership aimed at enhancing inclusive Short Breaks for families of disabled children and young people. This initiative will run until at least April 2027 and will see the partners working together to co-fund Short Breaks in under-served parts of Gloucestershire.

The partners are committed to using the learning from this pilot to:

- inform how the commissioning of Short Breaks might be reimagined from 2027
- contribute to conversations about better practice in delivering, funding, and commissioning Short Breaks, and how we collectively meet the needs of individuals within the county.

In addition, Barnwood Trust would be interested in learning that will provide it with intelligence and insights to support the development of its influencing strategy.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the Partnership Team with robust and timely evidence to contribute to making strategic decisions about how to reimagine Short Breaks commissioning.

The partnership team have developed a robust evaluation plan around this programme to include frequent quality assurance conversations with each funded organisation; annual evaluation reports from each funded organisation; and a quarterly community of practice to capture learning and promote peer-led problem-solving. Collectively, this plan constitutes a means of quality assurance for the overall investment of around £2.6million that is being made through this partnership.

The partnership team would like the chosen evaluation partner to bring together and triangulate all the data gathered to inform their final assessment (see **Figure 1**).

We are seeking an evaluation partner to start working with us in early-2025 and for the duration of the two-year pilot which will run from April 2025 until April 2027. The role of the external evaluator will be to provide collective insights from the programme as a whole, including – but not limited to:

- demonstrating for Gloucestershire Children’s Services, with whom the statutory duty for commissioning Short Breaks provision resides, the impact of funding and commissioning Short Breaks in different ways; comparing and contrasting with existing models in the county, and with models practiced by commissioners outside Gloucestershire
- summarising the challenges that arise for providers of inclusive Short Breaks activities as a consequence of existing funding and commissioning practices, and identifying solutions that can contribute to a redesign of Short Breaks commissioning in Gloucestershire
- learning more about what constitutes ‘better practice’ in i) commissioning and ii) delivery of inclusive Short Breaks activities
- capturing the learning and ‘telling the story’ of this project to enable it to be shared beyond Gloucestershire Children’s Services

2. About the partners

Barnwood Trust

Barnwood Trust is an independent charitable trust. We get millions of pounds of funding into the county every year. But money is only part of the story.

We join with the people, communities and organisations in Gloucestershire’s disability and mental health movement – creating change so that disabled people and people with mental health conditions have choice of opportunities, access their rights and are included where they live.

What do we do? We investigate the long-term, complex issues and barriers faced by disabled people and people with mental health conditions. We share research, develop projects and run campaigns to influence the change that is needed. We partner with local organisations, involve people with lived experience directly in our work, and look for better ways to fund.

Barnwood Trust was set up over 200 years ago. Today, we are not your typical funder, and we don’t work in isolation. Learning and collaboration run through everything we do. We bring people together for a different conversation and

explore big ideas. We listen and add clout where we can help make changes happen – building belonging and making a difference in the life of the county.

Gloucestershire Children's Services

The Children and Families Hub is an integrated health and social care Commissioning Hub aiming to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Gloucestershire. We work in partnership with the police, education commissioners, our health providers, front line social care staff and voluntary and community organisations to ensure effective services are delivered across the county. We recognise the importance of early intervention in and prevention in improving outcomes and plan to embed an ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) based approach in all our work.

As an integrated hub our remit is wide and there are a number of plans and strategies where we have a key role in the implementation including the NHS Long Term Plan, the Joint Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. However, our top priority is the success of our Sufficiency Strategy – Right Placement First Time which sets out our vision over the next three years across the whole continuum of need. This aligns with our OFSTED improvement journey to improve frontline social care practice, especially in planning for and, where appropriate, preventing children and young people coming into care. The number of children and young people in care has increased and continues to rise. The strategy sets out how we intend to purchase placements for these young people, to achieve the best possible outcomes and use our resources in the most efficient and effective way.

As well as continuing to deliver business as usual the top priorities of the Children and Families Hub this year are to:

- embed commissioning into social care practice
- deliver the Sufficiency Strategy, so that our vulnerable young people get the right placement first time
- develop our offer for care leavers in line with the requirements of the Children and Social Care Act 2017
- improve services around children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and their families including the EHCP process, CAMHS learning disabilities service, positive behaviour support, medical needs in schools, and Personal Health Budgets

- recommission youth support services.

Gloucestershire VCS Alliance

Gloucestershire VCS Alliance is the independent voice that informs, strengthens and develops the local voluntary and community sector in Glos.

We work to achieve this mission by:

- Providing information, training and a range of support services to VCSE organisations
- Promoting equal partnerships between the VCSE, public and private sectors
- Being at the forefront of positive change within the VCSE sector in the county
- Supporting VCSE groups & organisations in Gloucestershire to become more sustainable

We continue to embrace our close working relationship with Gloucestershire County Council, the NHS Gloucestershire ICB and other public sector organisations and funders. Alongside this close working relationship is our commitment and determination to engage with, support and strengthen all VCSE sector groups & organisations in Gloucestershire, promoting partnership working at every level.

One strand of our current work is looking at strategic partnerships and how local VCSE organisations can play a stronger role in the delivery of services and support on behalf of statutory bodies. The Short Breaks initiative is an important opportunity to enable more VCSE organisations to contribute to support to disabled children and their families and in so doing to demonstrate how the potential of local VCSE organisations can best be harnessed.

3. Background context for this brief

The background context provided here is quite long, and will be described in a reasonable level of detail, in order to provide sufficient information to enable potential evaluation partners to decide if they are interested in tendering.

The roots of this work are in the [Our Changing World](#) research published by Barnwood Trust in 2021. The research identified the challenges experienced by disabled children, young people and their parent-carers at a time where formal

and informal support was inaccessible due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. At the same time, services were closing, and Short Breaks were recommissioned.

The Trust felt a financial investment could support this part of the sector. To identify where this could have the most impact, the Trust conducted some primary research involving parent-carers, disabled children and young people, and providers. The findings of this research, [Barriers to Short Breaks](#) were published in 2023.

The research, aspects of which were co-designed with the groups involved, highlighted extensive challenges and barriers around practice, information and communication, accessibility, and availability of these services. A separate research exercise with providers was also conducted by Barnwood Trust, in partnership with Gloucestershire VCS Alliance, looking specifically at the commissioning process.

During the recommissioning of Short Breaks by Gloucestershire Children's Services in 2021, eight lots were tendered for:

- two inclusion lots focusing on increasing access to inclusive community-based arts and leisure activities, physical activity, and sport
- a specialist weekend club and playscheme
- five locality contracts to provide Short Breaks at weekends and in school holidays.

Initially, Gloucestershire Children's Services were only able to commission the two inclusion lots, and two of the locality lots for an initial period of three years, with an option to extend by two years. The remaining four were vacant. These were filled through spot purchasing – with the exception of the specialist lot, and one of the four locality lots (Tewkesbury/ North Cotswold).

The research exercise undertaken by Barnwood Trust and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance highlighted challenges within the commissioning process that were felt to pose a barrier to smaller organisations applying¹.

In early-2023, Barnwood Trust took the findings from these pieces of research and convened parent-carers and disabled young people – many of whom took part in the research – to co-design its own Short Breaks Fund alongside Barnwood

¹ This research is not in the public domain but can be made available to successful applicants.

colleagues. The rationale behind this Fund was in recognition of the unique contribution that Charitable Trusts such as Barnwood can make. We understood the challenges and wanted to test possible solutions. Although the Trust does not usually fund activities that are a statutory duty, it was felt that designing a Fund in this way gave providers the permission and flexibility to innovate – not just perpetuate the way they have always had to deliver activities – generating learning that can be used by the local authority and other Charitable Trusts. The co-design process highlighted priority areas and shaped the outcomes we wanted to see from the funded projects. These included essential criteria that:

- projects should be co-designed with disabled young people and their parent-carers
- projects should explore ways of widening access to disabled children and young people who often miss out on these activities.

In addition, providers were asked to demonstrate how their project tested innovative ways to overcome at least one of three barriers that were highlighted in the research and whether it was identified that funding could help. These were:

- Transport
- Training
- Provision/ demand

The panel who co-designed the Fund also scored the applications that were received and six projects received funding for one year. Details of these projects can be found [here](#).

A condition of the funding for all six projects has been regular attendance at a Community of Practice, facilitated by Barnwood. These sessions have provided a regular space for problem-solving, peer-learning, and capturing learning about better practice in the delivery of inclusive Short Breaks and commissioning.

The Trust has been engaging Gloucestershire Children’s Services throughout its work to date. In March 2024, commissioners accepted an invitation to attend one of the Community of Practice sessions. This session was an opportunity to share the learning that had been captured from the six projects so far and for commissioners to hear directly from the funded partners at a time where decisions were needing to be taken about whether or not to extend the existing commissioned services.

This session has proven to be a catalyst in the formation of this partnership. Barnwood, Gloucestershire Children’s Services, and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance have been meeting regularly since March 2024 to explore the possibilities of this work. In June 2024, Gloucestershire Children’s Services made a formal approach to

Barnwood to partner with the Trust to test a new way of commissioning Short Breaks using one of the unfilled Short Breaks contracts, this offer has since been extended to include another of the lots.

Barnwood Trust and Gloucestershire Children's Services will both contribute financial resources to this partnership – totalling around £2.6 million over the two years. However, both organisations were also keen that the wider VCSE sector be represented – as the sector that will be asked to deliver the new commissioning that emerges. Consequently, the role of Gloucestershire VCS Alliance in this partnership is to advocate for the voluntary sector; ensuring engagement with the sector and working with Barnwood Trust and Gloucestershire Children's Services to ensure the new process works for all.

If successful, the learning from this pilot, alongside the evidence gathered through the Trust's research and its Short Breaks Fund would be used to develop a blueprint for a redesigned commissioning process.

The Pilot (2025-7)

Barnwood Trust, Gloucestershire Children's Services, and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance will work in partnership to deliver a two-year test and learn if a grant-funded model in two areas of the county (a combined Tewkesbury/ North Cotswold locality, and Gloucester City).

This includes Barnwood Trust match-funding the value of these contracts and extending the funding of the six existing projects for the full two-years. The Trust is doing this for three reasons:

- to ensure there is a sufficient fund available in each of the vacant lots to allow for multiple projects to be funded in each locality – increasing the reach of any learning that can be captured.
- to continue the learning of the six existing projects – seeing what might be possible after a longer period of delivery
- to provide two contrasting countywide samples: projects that are delivered through a traditional commissioning model, and those which are delivered through a grant-funded model.

Barnwood's funding is time-limited and will not be able to be extended beyond the length of this partnership. The Trust's contribution, as set out above, is to enable a new approach to commissioning to be tested and to enhance the evidence that can be captured to inform the redesign.

In turn, Gloucestershire Children’s Services have triggered the optional two-year extension for all its commissioned services and launched a procurement process for the specialist lot which has remained vacant. Together, all projects funded through commissioning, this pilot, and Barnwood’s grant funding, will be co-terminus.

In the spirit of ‘test and learn’, the process of awarding the funding will be led by Barnwood – taking the framework it used to fund the initial six projects.

Barnwood will also act as fiscal host for the pilot localities – ensuring reporting and distribution of the fund is uniform and equitable across all services.

It is a condition of both the new and existing funding that organisations attend a regular Community of Practice alongside colleagues from Barnwood, Gloucestershire Children’s Services, and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance. This will be facilitated by Barnwood and form part of an ongoing commitment to capture learning and promote collaboration between providers to improve practice. These sessions will take place quarterly from April 2025.

It is intended for the learning generated through this pilot to be used to inform the redesign of the Short Breaks commissioning process and specifications. This process will begin in 2025 and run through 2026. The learning we have captured so far from the projects Barnwood has funded has also signalled potential implications beyond Short Breaks – including to other areas of Children’s Services, transferability to other sectors, and a potential ripple effect to wider civil society and, potentially, outside of the county altogether.

4. Aims of the evaluation project

We are looking to appoint an evaluation partner to work with us from early-2025 until April 2027 to steer and contribute to the evaluation programme being developed around this partnership (see **Figure 1** at the end of this brief).

The programme has three aims that we wish to achieve:

- 1. Build an evidence base that can be used:**
 - a. to redesign Short Breaks commissioning in 2027
 - b. to identify how to cost good service provision and identify the funding gap (if there is one) between what is provided by Gloucestershire Children’s Services meeting its ‘statutory duty’ and what it costs to deliver good services meeting need equitably across the county.
- 2. To learn more about what constitutes ‘better practice’ in:**
 - a. commissioning

b. the delivery of inclusive Short Breaks activities

3. To capture the learning and 'tell the story' of this project to enable it to be shared beyond Gloucestershire Children's Services, for example:

- a. the assumptions underpinning commissioning and service provision
- b. the challenges for service providers and commissioners alike
- c. the immediate and wider impacts of good service provision
- d. how service providers and commissioners can learn together
- e. how statutory commissioning could be co-designed

We also have a fourth, desirable aim, to understand the cost benefit and/or social return of delivering inclusive Short Breaks across the county.

In addition, Barnwood Trust would be interested in any learning that could be captured to provide it with intelligence and insights that support the development of its influencing strategy. The Trust is resourcing this evaluation, not only to get all the above insight, but also to enable its own learning.

The evaluation partner will work with a project group comprising colleagues from the three partner organisations, led by Barnwood Trust's Social Change Manager, Dan Jacques, with whom the evaluation partner will also have regular engagement. With regards to the input into Barnwood's evaluation strategy, the partner will also have regular engagement with the Trust's Leadership Team.

5. What are the expected deliverables?

We are keen that the evaluation partner can deliver robust findings in a timely way to contribute to milestones in the recommissioning process. These are:

- **September 2025** – recommissioning needs assessment starts
- **January 2026** – the proposed approach for recommissioning needs to be ready for approval by full Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet.

We would like an evaluation partner to deliver a synthesis of all the learning captured to date by **early September 2025**.

In addition, the partnership would like to see:

- an evaluation methodology that has been co-designed with the funded and commissioned partners and sought the views of parent-carers and disabled young people.
- a final output (report or slide deck) summarising the data and key findings around each of the areas highlighted in **Section 4** by **June 2027**.
- Regular progress updates to the partnership's oversight group.

The Trust has set aside a total budget of 100,000 for this evaluation, to be spent between January 2025 and December 2027.

6. Tendering process

We seek proposals that set out:

- i) how you would approach achieving the aims set out above
- ii) your track record for undertaking this kind of work
- iii) how you would work with us to achieve those aims
- iv) the challenges you envisage in both the work itself and working with us, how you would seek to meet them, and what you need from us to support you
- v) how you will deliver this work in relation to the values and principles set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (see below).
- vi) the timescale – when you would be available to start this work and how long you envisage the project taking
- vii) how the budget would be allocated, including VAT if applicable.

The closing date for proposals is **5pm on Friday 14th February 2025**.

Shortlisting will take place on **Tuesday 18th February 2025**.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview with members of the project team on **Monday 24th and Tuesday 25th February 2025**.

We would welcome conversations prior to tendering and invite you to contact Dan Jacques, Social Change Manager (Barnwood Trust):
dan.jacques@barnwoodtrust.org ; 07701 281933

7. Useful links

[Barriers to Short Breaks Research](#)

[Funding Pack for 2025-7 Funding Round](#)

Partnership MoU (to be finalised in early 2025, please contact for more information)

[One Plan for Children and Young People](#)

[ICM Paper – Gloucestershire County Council \(November 2024\)](#)

Figure 1:

