

Respite for carers in Surrey to increase?

The chronic shortage of overnight respite places in Surrey could improve if plans to increase the number of available beds by almost 50 per cent are given the go-ahead.

Surrey County Council has submitted two sets of plans for short-stay centres – one in Woking and the other in **Banstead**.

This week, the county council launched its bids to the respective local authorities as part of the consultation process in order to address a care system that is “under significant strain and is facing long and sustained operational and financial challenges”.

The plans are to build two sets of eight en-suite bedrooms for short-break accommodation together sensory rooms, living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, and supporting staff facilities.

Councillor **Mark Nuti**, Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for adults and health, said: “These two new centres will enable us to increase considerably the number of carers benefiting from short breaks, which help them recharge their batteries and get a bit of break. We value what carers do incredibly highly, so it’s really important we offer our residents these types of facilities. These will be modern places. They will be flexible, adaptable and able to accommodate people with many different disabilities and needs.

“They won’t be institutionalised places. They will be comfortable and fit for purpose, and able to accommodate more people than we can at the moment. This is a scheme we can be very proud of.”

The Woking site will be on the former Lakers youth centre in Goldsworth Park, Denton Way, with the Banstead site replacing The Squirrels, in the Horseshoe, Bolters Lane.

Currently there are seven registered bed-based short breaks services in Surrey but only five are operational, council documents show. At present they provide a maximum of 33 beds – but this can often be lower if needed by people with “increasingly complex needs”, the council said.

Those beds, which are clustered in the centre and east of the county, cover the 1,345 people in Surrey living with family carers.

Council figures show that fewer than 8 per cent of those eligible currently access provision. There is also the problem of increasing demand, with the council predicting a 10 per cent rise in users over the next decade as well as an increasingly “ageing” and “inappropriate service”. Combined, the new sites would offer 16 additional places, bringing the total overnight short-break places available to families from 33 up to 49.

Once they are both built, the council said, “the two centres will meet Surrey’s accommodation needs, Lakers meeting the needs within the west of Surrey, Squirrels continuing to serve the east”.

Image: Short Breaks – Visualisation for the Banstead site (Image Surrey County Council)