

The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents and parents who are in training which will lead to work. The assessment of childcare supply and demand, known as a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is published on a three year cycle and is updated annually.

Staffordshire's first Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was published in March 2008 and can be viewed together with the annual updates at <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/childcarecounts>

Sufficiency assessments are vitally important because they provide the basis for how local authorities direct their effort and work with partners to shape childcare supply so that it meets the needs of working parents. Childcare is part of the infrastructure that working parents depend upon in order to take up or stay in work. It therefore makes a major contribution to the economic prosperity not only of individual families but communities as a whole and also to achieving national priorities such as supporting lone parents to return to work and the eradication of child poverty.

On line information

The background demographic information and much of the childcare supply data that was contained in the 2008 assessment is not included in this document and can be found on the Staffordshire Observatory web site, including more localised data at Community & Learning partnership level, see opposite for more information

Methodology

Parents were consulted with a questionnaire on the county council website and also face to face through events held throughout July and August. Focus groups were held around the county with parents who had expressed an interest on the questionnaire and who had also been recruited through Children's Centres. Finally major employers and childcare providers were interviewed during September by the Early Years Quality Support Officers.

The questionnaires and interviews have been analysed and the key points included in this document.

The following document is split into the 9 benchmarks of sufficient childcare: Places, Flexibility, Accessibility, Quality, Range, Knowledge & Information, Affordability, Inclusivity, and Sustainability.

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Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

April 2011

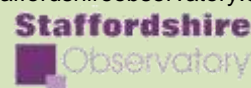
Stafford District

Methodology Summary

1. Parent & Carer Questionnaire:
Undertaken over the summer, responses from 1902 parents countywide and 315 in this district.
 2. Parent focus groups:
Delivered across the county, 1 in the evening, 1 on a Saturday. 36 parents in 9 sessions.
 3. Childcare provider questionnaire:
Completed face to face with 121 providers.
 4. Employers questionnaire:
41 face to face interviews with employers across the county.
- Plus demographic and local information about the childcare market.

Online Information

Background demographic information and more localised childcare supply data can be accessed on the Staffordshire Observatory website: www.staffordshireobservatory.org.uk



Information relating to:

- Demographic data including birth rate
- Household composition
- Child Poverty
- Disability, Child & Working Tax Credits
- Childcare providers & places

If you do require a hard copy, please contact the Family Information Service on 0300 111 8007 or email fis@staffordshire.gov.uk.

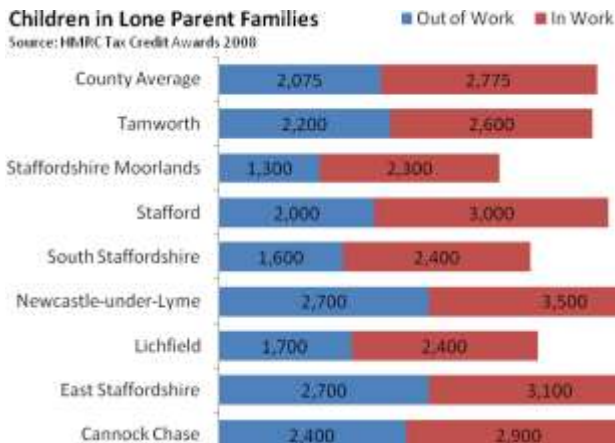


Places

Places is about securing sufficient places determined by population and trends across the county and in each district; that there are sufficient places for one parent families, working families, parents studying or training and to support children in working families up to 14 (17 with a disability)

Children in Lone Parent Families

Source: HMRC Tax Credit Awards 2008



Based on HMRC Tax Credit data (about 80% of families claim tax credits), 40% of lone parent families in Stafford district are currently out of work. Children from lone parent families represent 27.6% of all children, 1 percentage point below the county average.

Ratio of 0-14 Population to Places



A basic measure is that of 0-14 population to childcare places. The district ratio is slightly below the county average. No area is largely different from the district or county average. Rising Brook has a large number of places to the population than other areas, whilst Weston has fewer places per head of population.

Children in Working Families

Source: HMRC Tax Credit Awards 2008



Children will be aged 0 to 19 for those in full time education/training and resident at home.

Population Trends

The latest population estimates (2009, National Statistics) show that there are 20100 children aged 0 to 15 in the district, which is 17.1% of the total population. This proportion is 1 percentage point lower than the county average. The overall birth rate has seen an increase of slightly over 5% between 2004 and 2008.

Rising Brook C&LP area has seen a large increase in the number of births at 20%, whilst Walton has seen a decline in the number of births by 24% over the same period.

From the Parent Survey

In Stafford district and the county as a whole over 50% of parents felt that there enough childcare places to meet their needs. Feedback from the parent focus group reinforced this finding and pre school provision, nurseries and free funded places were considered the most useful countywide.

In the Stafford district 197 (53%) of parents used childcare to enable them to work, this figure is the highest across all the 8 districts. However this maybe due to the higher concentration of consultation that took place in Stafford, at 315 returns. 106 (29%) of parents said they used childcare for their child's development, 52 (14%) of parents said they used childcare for the free funded nursery places and 8 (2%) of parents said they used childcare to give them a break from a child with additional needs. In keeping with the other 7 districts only 7 (3%) of parents used childcare to enable them to attend college or training.

From analysis of the Parent Focus group's question on what worked well a small percentage of parents felt that their employment had been compromised, restricted or made impossible by the lack of suitable childcare such as:

- Having to move from full time to part time employment
- Not being able to study
- Being required to work during school term times only
- Taking a reduction in salary
- Having to work shifts, including night shifts

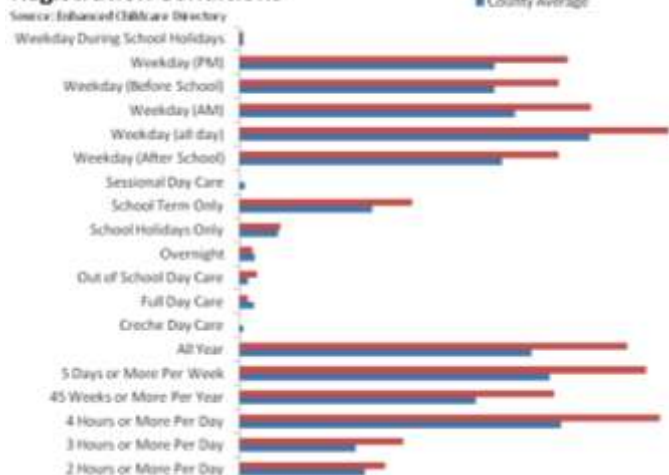
Key Observations

- There are areas of the district where the number of places may be too low e.g. Weston
- Greater proportion of families in work than other districts
- Most families use childcare to support them going to work

Flexibility

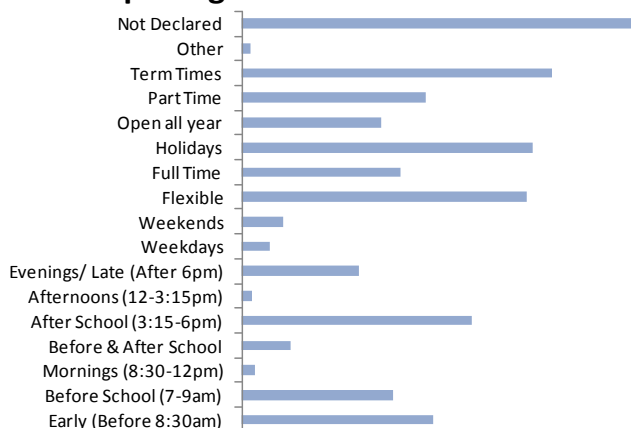
Ensuring places are available at the right times e.g. early morning, supporting irregular patterns of use throughout the day, be available 48 weeks of the year, between 8am and 6pm and support local working patterns.

Registration Conditions



Ofsted registration conditions apply to childcare providers who are registered with Ofsted. The conditions form part of the providers registration and limit the opening periods of a setting. Stafford district has more providers registered for all types of care than the county average. However, overnight care is still low.

Broad Opening Times



Childcare providers may choose not to open for the periods stated on their registration conditions. Information sourced by the Family Information Service about the broad opening times highlights that 13% of providers in the district offer early morning, before school provision and about 9% after school care. A small number of providers (2%) have indicated that they offer weekend care and around 5% of providers are willing to offer evening or late care to support working parents.

School Census

The 2010 annual school census undertaken by the Local Authority revealed that over 70% of schools provided some form of After School childcare and nearly 70% provided before school childcare or activity for school aged children. After school care is 10 percentage points below the county average, whilst before school is at the same level as the county average.

The Parents Survey

The majority of parents in the district and countywide i.e. 85% stated that the opening hours of childcare are adequate to meet their needs. From analysis of parental survey feedback and rating of opening hours the following themes were raised: opening earlier and closing later, more wraparound provision (before and after school), enhanced flexibility e.g. pick up times, choice of Free Childcare Place (NEF) hours, provide holiday provision and childcare to cover working parent's shift patterns. These comments were reinforced in responses from the employer survey in answer to the question 'How do you feel childcare provision could be improved?'

Employers (Countywide result)

Employers also identified a need for more after school and breakfast clubs, more affordable childcare and more information on childcare options. In order to meet the childcare needs of their employees more effectively the following changes were suggested: more provision for shift workers, holiday care at reasonable costs and no financial restrictions placed on out of hour's childcare.

Parent Focus Group (Countywide result)

From analysis of the parent focus group, flexibility was seen to be very important for juggling the demands of work, school, childcare and family life. Many of the focus group parents spoke of the complex arrangements they had in place including different types of childcare, family and friends with grandparents being particularly important. The challenges presented by the school and working day, and the realities of children attending sessions and part time care were clearly described: one parent identified that they had to visit the school 3 times per day to access sessional childcare and the problems this caused with finding suitable employment.

Key Observations

- There are few providers registered to provide overnight care in the district
- Providers have indicated a need for more before and after school provision and this is reflected in the broad opening times
- Although providers are registered to offer more flexible provision this is not currently being offered.

Accessibility

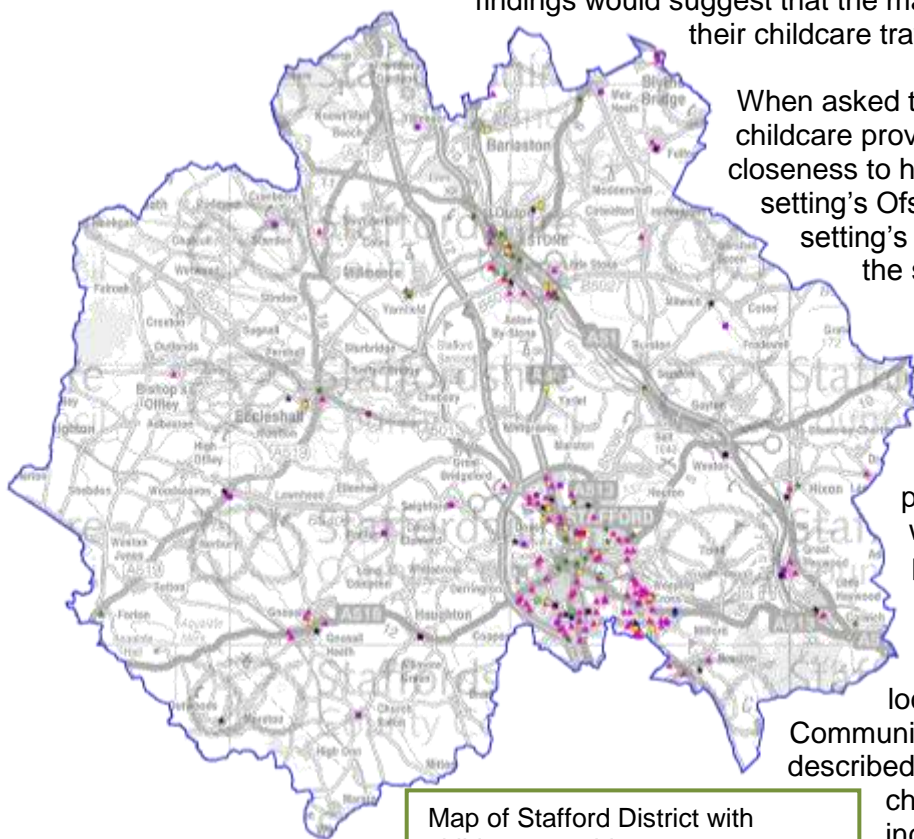
Places are available so that parents do not have travel too far out of their way, they are easy to reach without physical constraints such as motorways or railway lines preventing easy access, meet parents preferences for childcare in familiar locations and that parents take up provision within their perceived cultural community.

Parents Feedback

From analysis of the Parent Survey from a county perspective a high percentage of parents travelled between 0 and 3 miles to their childcare setting. From correlating the type of childcare used and distance travelled day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, before & after school care and family & friends were cited most frequently for travelling less than a mile. With reference to how easy parents felt it was to get to their childcare provision the following themes were identified countywide: Limited choice in immediate area, need to split care across 2 settings to accommodate siblings, busy roads and traffic congestion, poor car facilities and you need to be a car driver.

In the Stafford district 86 parents said they travelled less than a mile to their chosen childcare provision, 64 said they travelled between 1 & 3 miles and 15 parents travelled between 4 & 8 miles. When parents were asked to rate how easy it was to get to their childcare provision, over 130 parents gave a high score. Of the 7 parents who gave a low score to the ease of getting to their childcare provision the following comments were made: “rural”, “no before and after school care at school”, “limited bus route”, “not easy therefore by car, but opening times more than difficult”, “rural location results in having to travel a bit further to a good nursery, “If school bus is missed dad has to collect and he is unwell” and “parking is a problem/terrible!” These findings would suggest that the majority of parents are satisfied with their childcare travel arrangements.

When asked to state what influenced their choice of childcare provision 150 (48%) of parents said closeness to home, 68 (22%) of parents said the setting’s Ofsted inspection, 54 (17%) said the setting’s closeness to work and 40 (13%) said the setting’s opening hours.



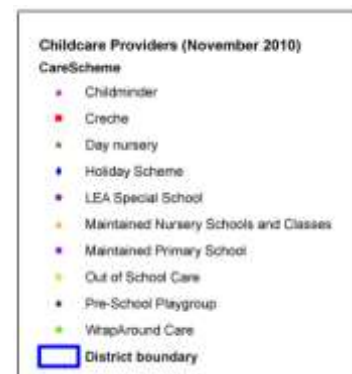
Map of Stafford District with childcare providers.

Parent Focus Group (Countywide)

From analysis of the countywide parent focus group feedback there were many positive examples from parents of childcare being accessible, of high quality and able to meet individual needs. Free nursery places and summer activities delivered by local district councils and the Community & Learning Partnerships were described most positively, together with childminders who could accommodate individual family needs.

Key Observations

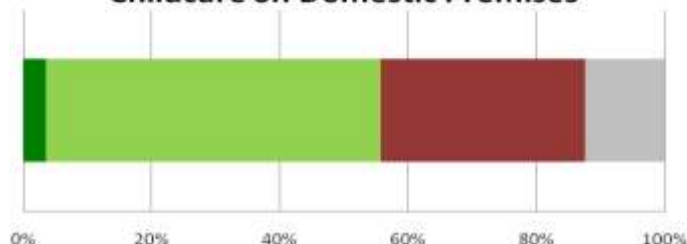
- Most parents have indicated that their childcare is accessible
- Stafford district parents prefer their childcare to be close to home, as demonstrated in the distance travelled and the results of the focus group
- Parents from the rural areas of the district have indicated that a car is needed to get to provision.



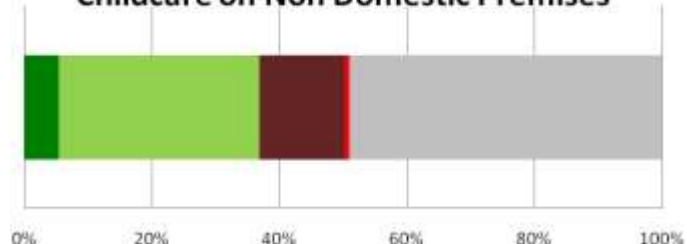
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Places are available with provision that is staffed by well qualified practitioners, a significant proportion achieve good or outstanding Ofsted judgements. Childcare provision is effective in narrowing the gap between those children at risk of the poorest outcome and the rest.

Childcare on Domestic Premises



Childcare on Non Domestic Premises



| % Judgement | Domestic | | Non-Domestic | |
|--------------|----------|--------|--------------|--------|
| | District | County | District | County |
| Outstanding | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Good | 52 | 54 | 31 | 30 |
| Satisfactory | 32 | 24 | 13 | 13 |
| Inadequate | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| N/A | 12 | 17 | 49 | 52 |

Source: Enhanced Childcare Directory, SCC

A setting will be listed as N/A where they have not yet received an Ofsted inspection.

Quality of childcare provision is often based on a settings' Ofsted inspection. Most provision is regulated by Ofsted and providers are inspected on a regular basis. Provision is categorised by Ofsted into Domestic (Childminders, Home Childcarers) and Non-Domestic (Day Nurseries, pre-school play groups).

For childcare on domestic provision, the district is in line with the county average, although more providers are rated satisfactory or better than the county average – 88 compared to 82%

Childcare on non-domestic premises has a pattern similar to the county average, where 36% of providers are good or better compared to the county average.

Narrowing the Gap

The county performance in narrowing the gap at the end of EYFS has seen the % gap decrease by 4 percentage points to 28% between 2008/9 and 2004/5. These figures are not publically available at district level, and it is not possible to easily identify the direct impact childcare has had on improving outcomes for children using this measure.

Source: Communities & Local Government National Indicator Set

Since the 2008 assessment the quality of provision as judged by Ofsted Inspection outcomes has increased. Since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008 there has been an increase in Staffordshire and nationally in the proportion of providers judged as Outstanding or Good.

| % | 2008 | 2010 | National |
|--------------|------|------|----------|
| Outstanding | 2 | 6 | 10 |
| Good | 61 | 64 | 58 |
| Satisfactory | 35 | 28 | 29 |
| Inadequate | 2 | 1 | 3 |

Source of national figures: The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2009/10

The parents' focus groups provided much revealing insights into parents' perspectives of quality, a parent commented that they were dissatisfied as they 'didn't do any arts and craft' or that the staff were not engaging with the children. It was felt that the increase in quality was predominately due to the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Quality Access for All funding which enabled settings to improve their outdoor play areas. Children's centres were also described as excellent in providing holistic care for the whole family, although there were still misconceptions on eligibility e.g. considered to be for disadvantaged families only.

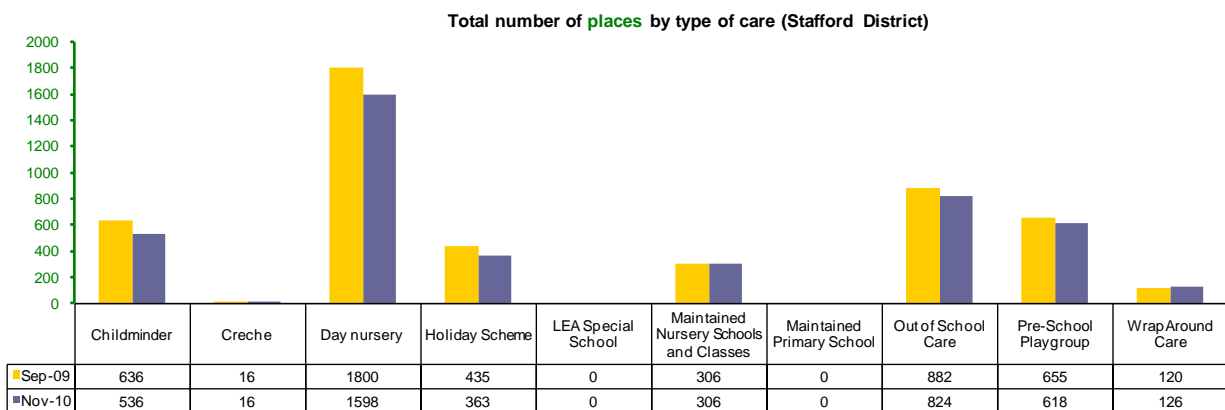
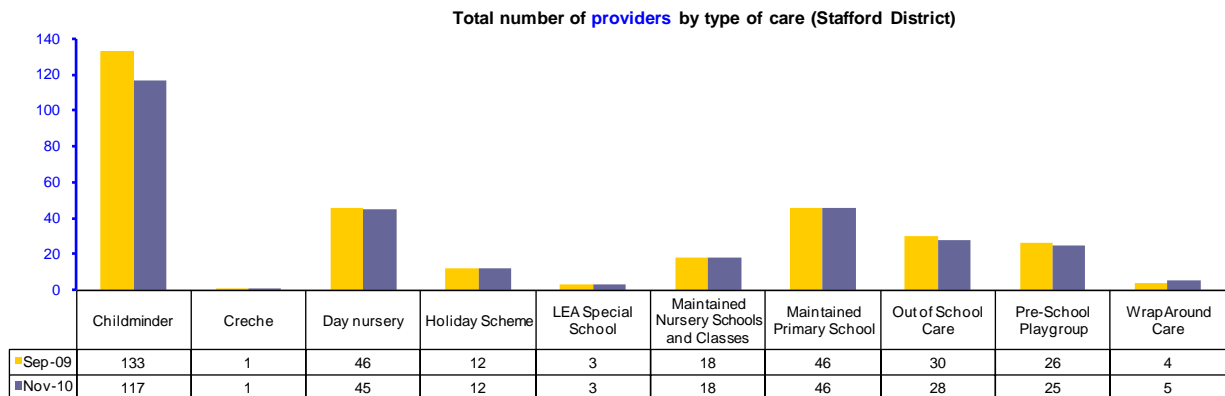
A common perception amongst the focus group participants was that childminders provided lower quality care because they were lone workers and this raised concerns about safeguarding. Non domestic care received criticism in terms of their opening hours and holiday provision received mixed reviews; especially amongst working parents. A key theme was the difficulties faced by families with children of different ages in accessing holiday or after school provision.

Key Observations

- Parents have a different definition of quality to that of the Local Authority and Ofsted and consider evidence, based on their experiences.
- Although parents consider Childminders to offer poor quality provision, over 56% are good or better compared to 36% on non-domestic premises (e.g. Day Nursery). Childminders may need to consider ways to improve their marketing.
- The overall quality of childcare is improving

Range

An appropriate balance of places is available in different types of childcare settings at both county and district level. Sufficient balance of places is available. Places are available in childminding, pre-school, nurseries and out of school.



Source: Enhanced Childcare Directory, SCC

Over the previous 12 months there has been a 6% decline in providers (19) and a decline in places of 10% (463). Childminders have seen the largest decrease over the same period at a 12% decline. Other provision has remained relatively static.

Place information is based on the Ofsted registered maximum. It may not represent the actual number of places offered by settings due to their staffing or local decisions on the number of children they wish to care for. Further to the reduction in providers, there has been a fall in the number of places in the Childminding sector. Although the number of group providers (Day Nursery, Out of School Care, Pre-School Playgroup) have not declined, there is a 16% decline in holiday scheme places and day nurseries a decline of 11% in places.

The Parent's Survey

From analysis of results from the Stafford district 104 (34%) of parents use day nurseries, 58 (19%) of parents used pre-school playgroups, 52 (17%) of parents use before and after school care, 30 (10%) of parents use childminders and 27(9%) of parents used family and friends. However parents in the Stafford district did make the following comments about insufficient childcare within their area: "insufficient childcare for SEN's and what's available is not close to home", "day nursery in village has closed", "nothing for those in secondary education", "had to compromise on before and after school care – difficult to find", "Not as many childminders in the area", "not enough places in nurseries and the children's centre for level of children in the area", "no before or after school care available", "limited choice because of lack of transport", "no holiday provision to meet the needs of working parents", "not catered well for shift workers" and "not enough pre schools".

Key Observations

- There has been a marked decline in the number of Childminders providing care in the last year, confirming parents perceptions
- Although the number of day nurseries and holiday schemes has remained static, the turn-over in providers has reduced the maximum number of places available.

The Parents Survey

Word of mouth was by far the most cited response with over 31% of parents in the district and countywide giving this as the way they find out about childcare a finding which is consistent with the 2008 assessment. The second most used source of information was schools and each of the other answer options; leaflet, health professional, web site, library, children's centre and Family Information Service (FIS) were mentioned by fewer than 10% of parents.

Although this finding appears disappointing for the FIS as its remit is to be an information hub for childcare and related information, the focus of its development strategy over recent years has been to make information widely accessible in venues used by parents so the part it has played is much more significant than is shown by the research.

In the Stafford district when asked to rate the availability of information and advice on childcare; 78 parents gave a high score and 25 parent gave an average to low score. The following comments were made: "If you do not ask it is not offered or available", "no information easily available", "Think health visitors and clinics should do more", "not enough information around, no advertising", "unable to secure after school place in school until next term", "adapted lifestyle to care for kids, work nights", "don't know how to access, would probably ask at school", "more advertising of services FIS offer to general public needed", "health visitor vague, local council signposted" and "have to hunt for it. No employer's crèche. Employers not offering information".

Employer survey

From analysis of the employer survey there was limited awareness of the Family Information service (FIS) and it was suggested that employers are provided with up to date FIS packs together with joint support/visits from the Early Years Quality Support Officers and FIS outreach team. For example drop in sessions on issues such as tax credits & childcare provision.

Provider survey

When childcare providers in Stafford were asked to comment on ways in which the Early Years & Childcare service could help them support parents more effectively the following suggestions were made: "Advisory team could be improved, not visited anymore - used to have regular visits", "Childcare services are more accessible due to emails and only a phone call away + website. We know who to call. "Could do with more business support" and "Not sure as I am happy with the existing service. Anyone I speak to is really helpful".

Parents Focus Groups (Countywide)

The countywide focus groups revealed strong views regarding the need to have good access to good quality, reliable childcare information. There was a perception that there is no central place for childcare information, the FIS was mentioned by some parents although the general level of awareness was low. The Staffordshire People's Panel survey in Spring 2010 found FIS awareness to be 26%. For those parents looking for childcare the process of ringing around for vacancies was a 'soul destroying' and frequently unsuccessful activity.

At the focus groups many parents spoke of the difficulties they had experienced finding the information they required. Parents described the information search as a 'trial and error' process, 'unless you are a terrier like parent'. Searching the internet was also felt to have many short comings being described as 'hit & miss' and very time consuming if a childcare place could be secured at all.

Parents suggested that if you are involved in a voluntary project, regularly attend a children's centre, or know someone who works in services, you get more information. This was thought to disadvantage parents universally, especially working parents that cannot attend in the weekdays during the daytime.

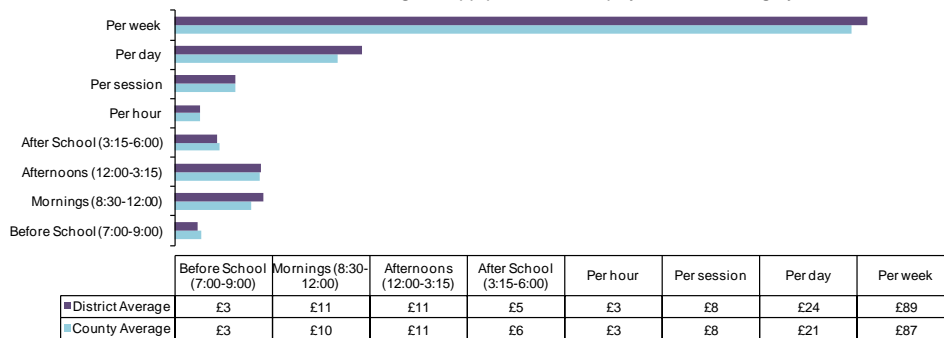
Key Observations

- Some parents find childcare confusing and struggle to access information
- Parents find word of mouth information important and trust information supplied by schools
- The Family Information Service needs to develop ways to effectively maintain its enhanced childcare directory
- Develop clear links with local employers

Affordability

Working parents are able to pay for the childcare provision they need; they are fully informed of the funding or grants they are entitled to. Parents are supported to afford childcare and claim the funding available to them. Settings offer information and support to parents to help them afford fees.

Average cost (£) (where available) by broad cost category



Source: Enhanced Childcare Directory, SCC

Cost information is provided by settings to the Family Information Service. Information is not held about all settings – some childcare providers do not provide information. It is not possible to directly compare the costs in the table above, for example to convert session prices to hourly rates. The hourly, sessional and after school costs are comparable to the county figure. Costs for childcare are broadly in line with the county average, but are not comparable to the results of the parents survey.

The Parents Survey

Parents voiced concerns about the lack of availability of holiday provision and its cost, the daily cost for 6 hours of care at a local authority / school run provision is £16 and rises to £21 in the private sector.

The parents' survey found that the majority of parents' were paying between £50-£100 per week (40%) and between £101-£150 (38%). A total of 126 parents which is 10% of those that supplied the information said they paid over £150 per week with 32 parents

paying over £200 a week for childcare. Overall parents felt that the affordability of childcare was very much dependent upon their own wages and the age of the child receiving care.

The focus group discussion found that childminders were considered to charge reasonable rates and playgroups and pre schools were considered good value as they "do a lot with the children". In contrast day nurseries were thought to be more expensive. The fees charged were not thought to be an indicator of better quality.

Although many parents considered nursery education entitlement to be a significant and useful contribution to a family's childcare fees, others commented that its awareness could be improved. It was said to be instrumental in some families' ability to juggle work and childcare.

The cost of holiday childcare for school aged children was commonly agreed to be the biggest challenge along with fees for pre-school children requiring full time childcare. Parents with more than one child find the affordability of holiday & after school childcare a major and sometimes insurmountable challenge.

The parent survey found that countywide 33% of families were in receipt of childcare tax credit and 48% of families use the employer vouchers to help with their childcare costs. Parents in the focus groups had mixed experiences of using the vouchers and felt that publicity for them was poor.

A theme of the focus groups was the difficulty some parents faced in dealing with the charging policies of childcare providers with the perception being that there is a lack of transparency. Parents gave examples of inconsistencies in relation to levying of fees when child is absent, deposits and retainers.

The restrictive nature of nurseries' contracts were criticised with having to pay a month's deposit and providing a month's notice for changes causing particular difficulty. Generally, bills, payment and statements were thought to lack clarity.

The childcare provider survey explored ways in which early year's practitioners supported families with specific needs; including those on low incomes or out of work. The extent of support offered was dependent upon the type of setting, past experience of provider and the nature of the relationship they had with parents. When asked how the Local Authority could support parents more effectively, providers highlighted the need to offer parents choice in the type of childcare chosen, more up to date leaflets and training/financial funding to help staff support families living in areas of disadvantage or with a SEN child.

Key Observations

- The cost of childcare in the district is in line with the county average
- Parents do not link high fees with better quality provision
- Tax Credits and childcare vouchers are important to parents so that they can afford childcare and stay in employment
- Charges for childcare and invoicing are confusing for parents

Short Break Childcare Sufficiency Report findings (Sept 2010)

Nearly 200,000 children in Staffordshire aged 0 -19 4.2% (8335) have a limiting long term illness or disability (Census 2001). In the Stafford district 1113 (4 %) of children have a limiting long term illnesses.

In April 2010 562 children aged between 0-18 were registered on Staffordshire's voluntary Children with Disabilities Record and 81 in the Stafford district.

The estimated prevalence rates for mild & severe disability show that overall Staffordshire is likely to see the number of 0-19 year olds with mild disabilities remain the same between 2008 and 2028, and a 1.6 % increase in severely disabled 0 -19 year olds

Consultation with parents from across Staffordshire in 2010 identified the following improvements to services for families who have a child with additional needs: more activities, better information, and participation by both parents/carers & children/young people in future service development.

In 2009/2010 Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) consulted with 387 parents/carers of children with additional needs and found an overall rating of 62 out of 100 for services accessed for their child. The survey also found that Staffordshire performed particularly well for health & education information and education assessment when compared to the national average. Staffordshire performed less well for education participation and care/family support assessment.

The Parent Survey

The parent survey identified the numbers of families caring for a child with a Special Educational Need (SEN) and explored parental views on the inclusiveness of their childcare setting. Of the 1652 parents who completed the survey 209 parents said they had a child with a SEN. The type of need ranged from physical, medical to behavioural and emotional.

Other responses were specific rare medical conditions or from parents whose children were still undergoing assessment for SEN.

With regard to the inclusiveness of the childcare settings parents commented positively on their ability to recognise religious & cultural beliefs, foreign languages and support for children with special educational needs whether physical, psychological or medical in nature.

Feedback from the parents in the focus group who were caring for a child with SEN's or additional needs questioned the inclusiveness of childcare. It was either felt to be lacking or when it did exist, it was the result of lengthy, traumatic and all consuming efforts. When provision was achieved, parents had many ideas on how its shortcomings could be improved. It was thought there was a lack of trained staff with skills for working with children with a disability or an additional need.

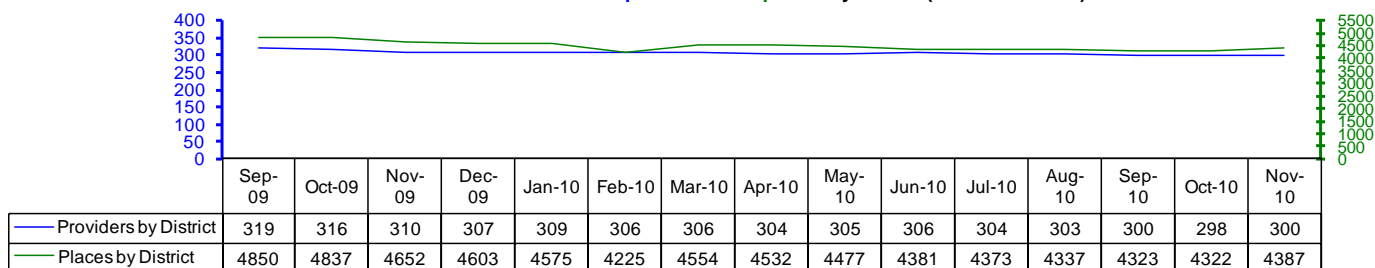
With regard to the inclusiveness of childcare for working parents the employer survey identified a lack of provision for shift workers and to cover school holidays and after school care. This was a particular issue for employees without a close family network who struggled to find affordable childcare to cover their shift patterns. It was suggested that setting's offer reductions for families with two siblings at the same setting.

A recent survey undertaken by the Family Information Service for the Childcare for Disabled Children project ('DCATCH') revealed that the majority of childcare providers felt that their staff required training on specific disabilities, handling or any training that was available. Settings also indicated that they required support relating to adaptations – ramps, toilets. Most settings understood that each special need or disability will be specific to a child and requires additional information and support at the time. The findings of this research were reiterated in the Childcare Provider survey, whereby settings indicated that they required more support and training on ways to support families who have a child with additional needs.

Key Observations

- Both providers and parents have indicated that settings require additional support and training to better cater for children with specialist needs
- Parents of children with specialist needs find it difficult to access provision as there is a lack of trained staff to care for children with special or additional needs.

Total providers and places by month (Stafford District)



Source: Enhanced Childcare Directory, SCC

Over the previous 14 months there has been a 6% decline in providers (19) and a decline in places of 10% (463). This is compared to a county average of 4% for providers and 5% decline in places over the same period.

Childcare providers report that there are several different reasons why they may not be sustainable, ranging from staffing issues, demand and changes in the employment market. Providers were asked a series of questions relating to their sustainability.

Changes in the recruitment and retention of staff

From analysis of results from the childcare provider survey 7 settings said they had seen no changes in the recruitment and retention of staff, 3 settings had increased staff numbers and 1 setting had introduced reductions in staff working hours. No other comments were made. From these findings one could assume that childcare provision in Stafford is not currently experiencing difficulties in staff recruitment and retention.

Changes in parental employment patterns

In the Stafford district 5 settings said that some of their parents were on reduced hours, 3 settings said that some of their parents had been made redundant, 2 settings had not noticed any changes in their parents work patterns, 1 setting said that job changes had not occurred yet but that they were aware of imminent redundancies and job changes in some of their parent's work environments. Other comments included: "last year noticeable".

Impact of future changes to the local employment market to their delivery of childcare services

In the district 4 settings said that in the future they predicted a reduced demand for childcare places, 4 settings said that in the future they would have to increase nursery fees, 3 settings said that they would have to reduce staff numbers, 2 settings said that there would be no changes to how the setting was run and 2 settings said they would have to make changes to the type of services they could offer to families. Despite these predictions only 3 out of the 11 settings had made contingency plans. The following comments were made: "Already identified that parents want flexibility", "extended hours to meet needs" and "contingency fund in bank".

Settings priorities for development over the next 12 months

Development plans for the future were prioritised as follows: 6 settings said staff development, 4 settings said sustainability, 4 settings said filling childcare places, 2 settings said marketing, 2 settings said staff recruitment and 2 settings gave other reasons. These reasons included: "Training" and "Using the mosaic approach, activities will be assessed to see what children actually feel about them."

Key Observations

- Noticeable decline in Childminders operating in the district
- Providers report that staff recruitment is not an issue for their setting
- The main priorities for the next year are staff development, followed by sustainability.
- Need to repeat the provider survey to determine more fully how parents have been affected by the recession

A group of people working in the childcare sector; which included Head Teachers, district council officers, and Children's Centre staff and head teachers met to discuss the initial findings of the Stafford CSA report. The following feedback was collated in relation to each of the 9 benchmarks:

Places:

- There is a lack of childminders in Weston & Woodseaves
- Only one childminder in the Hixon & Great Haywood area but this maybe a reflection of the age range of people living in these rural areas i.e. not young families.
- Childcare settings in the rural villages have more sustainability issues
- In Woodseaves a new pre school setting is very successful indicating high need in area
- Need to breakdown statistics into smaller regions to obtain a more accurate picture of places

Flexibility:

- Parents only willing to pay for out of school provision & holiday childcare that they use
- No holiday provision for mixed age group children therefore difficult for siblings in a family to be together

Accessibility:

- Most parents want out of school provision to be based on a school site
- There may an opportunity for childminders to offer pick up service from schools without out of school provision.
- Families based at the MOD base in Stafford face challenges because of the transient nature of their lives which can make it difficult to take up employment and to take up local services. A feature of the Stafford base is that a Ghurkha regiment is based at the site so there are many families from Nepal that face specific challenges with accessing family support services.

Quality:

- It is positive that parents do not focus on the Ofsted rating as the only judgement of a setting's quality
- Childminders need to promote their service to potential new parents e.g. school playground
- A one off, unannounced visit to setting can be the best indicator of quality
- Need to recognise a setting's progress over time rather than a 3 yearly Ofsted assessment
- Parents give preference to a school nursery place rather than a pre school setting
- Need to link education with childminders and pre schools & tell parents of quality offered

Range:

- Settings need to advertise the days & times they have available
- More partnership working is required between settings to fill vacancies e.g. play day event
- Parents need to be given a choice in childcare provision but only if it is financially viable

Knowledge & Information:

- Website searching tools & Staffordshire County Council web site needs to be improved
- FIS information – needs to be given out at an appropriate time for parents
- It is good that employers seek links with Early Years services, but providers often refuse help

Affordability:

- Childcare costs more like £160 - £190 per week which is significantly higher than survey indicated
- Settings reluctant to give prices over phone
- Charging and invoicing for nurseries very confusing for parents & affects choice
- There will be impact on demand when the income threshold to qualify for tax credits is lowered in April 2011

Inclusivity:

- Childminders & pre schools excluded from SEN funding
- WAM funding is only for provision set up or adaptation of facilities, doesn't include ongoing support on a one to one basis
- SEN out of school provision is costly and difficult to sustain financially; especially in terms of transport costs

Sustainability:

- Quality of new staff applying for jobs considered to be very poor.
- Some out of school clubs have closed due to schools setting up their own provision
- In Tillington one setting has closed and another is struggling financially due to sustainability issues
- Voluntary managed settings require more funding to avoid closure & help with advertising of their service

Action Plan

Implementation of the Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan will be monitored by the Market Management Group. The actions themselves will be delivered by many different parts of the local authority working in partnership with childcare providers and other agencies such as Job Centre+, health and voluntary and community groups.

| Benchmark | Action | Who / When by |
|---------------|--|--|
| All | Establish Childcare Market Management Group | County Commissioner by April 2011 |
| Places | Data Development: Capture data of Provision on School site / Governor Run | FIS / Quality Liaison On-going Review Summer 2011 |
| | FIS Development officers to help fill vacancies with childminders in Weston, Hixon, Great Haywood & Woodseaves | FIS Development Officer – review Sept 2011 |
| | Mini assessments for areas which border with Stafford to look at needs at a local level | Childcare Market Management group March 2012 |
| | Outreach activity in the district to identify childcare needs and to support families | FIS Development On-going March 2012 |
| Flexibility | Establish links with Positive Activities teams and district councils for holiday activities | Market Management Group & district councils |
| Accessibility | Quality Liaison to ensure consideration of parking is part of advice for development of new settings | March 2012 |
| | Families at MOD Stafford are supported by Family Support Workers and there is specific support for Nepalese families, the Family Support Workers are based at HIVE which is an information point on the base and it is important that the FIS Development Officer ensures that family / parenting information is available and maintains good working links with the Family Support Workers. | FIS Development Officer and Parent Support Workers |
| | Childcare in rural villages, FIS to work closer with existing support agencies & share info | FIS Development Officer Ongoing to March 2012 |
| Quality | Consult with parents to further understand perceptions attached to childminding | Research & Evaluation Coordinator Summer 2011 |
| | Work with National Childminding Association (NCMA) & conduct focus groups with childminders and parents | Research & Evaluation Coordinator Summer 2011 |
| | Children's Centres to conduct marketing awareness training with childminders | Children's Centres Aug/Sept 2011 |
| | SEQUIP (Programme to assess quality standards in Early Years settings) – review analysis conducted with childminders on programme | Quality Liaison & Research & Evaluation coordinator /Summer 2011 |
| | To review the quality of Childcare Training & qualifications & make recommendations to improve | Workforce Development & training providers – ongoing |
| | Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework – assess parental awareness & benefits to child through focus groups, write up in code of practice | Research & Evaluation Coordinator Summer 2011 |
| Range | Collect accurate data of number of childminders actually practising | Data development agenda & FIS Information officers |
| | Impact of Single Formula Funding – Pre school Learning Alliance (PLA) reports to be shared with Market Management Group | PLA & Market Management Group |
| | New childminder set up –share record of interest & training uptake | QL Team, CM Admin Officer & FIS Info Officers –Aug/Sept 2011 |

Action Plan

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|-------------------------|---|---|
| | Consult with parents on their understanding of terminology used to describe childcare types & use more parent friendly words as required. | Research & Evaluation coordinator Summer 2011 |
| | Review range of childcare in rural areas & FIS to advertise/monitor uptake | Data development agenda & FIS team |
| | To monitor the impact of the 10% decline in childcare places during 2011 | Data development agenda & FIS team |
| Knowledge & Information | Develop project plan to market childcare & improve communications/ frequency of providers updating records | Data Development agenda, Market Management Group & FIS team - ongoing |
| | Consider how corporate website provides childcare information. | All – ongoing |
| | Establish more effective links with schools to develop them as information points. | FIS Development Officers |
| | To provide employers with FIS updates & info packs so that they can disseminate to employees | FIS Development Officers |
| Affordability | Review impact via consultation of changes to childcare tax credits & vouchers on parents & settings. | Data Development agenda & Research & Evaluation coordinator /Summer 2011 |
| | Set up standardised pricing & invoicing system with settings & monitor impact via consultation + Quality Liaison to support settings to adopt process | Data Development agenda, Research & Evaluation coordinator & Quality Liaison team/Summer 2011 |
| | Set up pilot project with providers to identify a more consistent way to record childcare costs & share info with FIS/data team | Data Development agenda & Research & Evaluation coordinator /Summer 2011 & FIS team |
| Inclusivity | Representative of Aiming High to sit on Market Management Group. | Aiming High & Market Management Group |
| | Data development team to liaise with the (Local Support Team) LST & Early Intervention Project | Data Development agenda & LST – ongoing |
| | To acquire accurate details of setting's special educational needs training requirements & qualifications/skills | Data Development agenda & FIS team |
| | Develop formalised links with the LST re ways EY can support them & identify process for referral | Data Development agenda & FIS team |
| | FIS development officer to be proactive in raising awareness of the FIS with LST & deliver workshops to support providers in caring for a child with additional needs | FIS Development officer |
| Sustainability | To offer support to settings through the 'Staffordshire Means Business' & 'Business Support Fund' | All – ongoing |
| | Record the number of settings opening & closing by district and how many places are being taken up compared to what setting is registered to offer | Data Development agenda & FIS team |
| | To look at reasons why the number of childcare places as declined over the last 12 months | Research & Evaluation Coordinator /Summer 2011 |
| | Encourage partnership working with after school provision to avoid closures | All- ongoing |